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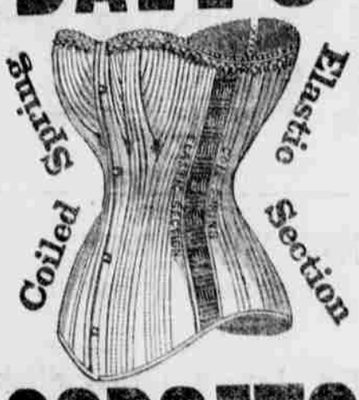
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MONA SCULLY;

OR,

The Irish Bride of an Englishman.

A STORY OF THESE TIMES.

[*Continued.*]

A pause.

"Yes, I shall say——" anxiously.

"You—will—say——" Here he breaks down ignominiously, and confesses by his inability to proceed that he doesn't in the least know what it is she can say.

"I know," says Mona, brightening, and putting on an air so different from her own usual unaffected one as to strike her listener with awe. "I shall say, 'Oh! thanks, quite too awfully much, don't you know? but Geoffrey and I didn't find it a bit long, and we were warm as wool all the time.'"

At this appalling speech Geoffrey's calculations fall through, and he gives himself up to undisguised mirth.

"If you say all that," he says, "there will be wigs on the green; that's Irish, isn't it? or something like it, and very well applied, too. The first part of your speech sounded like Toole or Brough, I'm not sure which."

"Well, it *was* in a theatre I heard it," confesses Mona, meekly; "it was a great lord who said it on the stage, so I thought it would be all right."

"Great lords are not necessarily faultlessly correct either on or off the stage," says Geoffrey. "But, just for choice, I prefer them off of it. No, that will not do at all. When my mother addresses you, you are to answer her back again in tones even colder than her own, and say——"

"But, Geoffrey, why should I be cold to your mother? Sure you wouldn't have me be uncivil to her, of all people?"

"Not uncivil, but cool. You will say to her, 'It was rather better than I anticipated, thank you.' And then, if you manage to look bored, it will be quite correct, so far, and you may tell yourself you have scored one."

"I may say that horrid speech, but I certainly can't pretend I was bored during our drive, because I am not," says Mona.

"I know that. If I was not utterly sure of it I should instantly commit suicide by precipitating myself under the carriage-wheels," says Geoffrey. "Still—'let us dissemble.' Now say what I told you."

So Mrs. Rodney says, "It was rather better than I anticipated, thank you," in a tone so icy that his is warm beside it.

"But suppose she doesn't say a word about the drive?" says Mona, thoughtfully. "How will it be then?"

"She is safe to say something about it and that will do for anything," says Rodney out of the foolishness of his heart.

And now the horses draw up before a brilliantly-lighted hall, the doors of which are thrown wide open as though in hospitable expectation of their coming.

Geoffrey, leading his wife into the hall, pauses beneath a central swinging lamp, to examine her critically. The footman who is in attendance on them has gone on before to announce their coming; they are therefore for the moment alone.

Mona is looking lovely, a little pale, perhaps from some natural agitation, but her pallor only adds to the luster of her great blue eyes and lends an additional sweetness to the ripeness of her lips. Her hair is a little loose, but eminently becoming, and altogether she looks as like an exquisite painting as one can conceive.

"Take off your hat," says Geoffrey, in a tone that gladdens her heart, so full it is of love and admiration; and, having removed her hat, she follows him through halls and one or two anterooms until they reach the library, into which the man ushers them.

It is a very pretty room filled with a subdued light, and with a blazing fire at one end. All bespeaks home, and warmth, and comfort, but to Mona in her present state it is desolation itself. The three occupants of the room rise as she enters, and Mona's heart dies within her, as a very tall statuesque woman, drawing herself up languidly from a lounging-chair, comes leisurely up to her. There is no welcoming haste in her movements, no gracious smile, for which her guest is thirsting, upon her thin lips.

She is dressed in black velvet, and has a cap of richest old lace upon her head. To the quick sensibilities of the Irish girl it becomes known without a word that she is not to look for love from this stately woman, with her keen, scrutinizing glance and cold, unsmiling lips.

A choking sensation, rising from her heart, almost stops Mona's breath; her mouth feels parched and dry; her eyes widen. A sudden fear oppresses her. How is it going to be in all the future? Is Geoffrey's—her own husband's—mother to be her enemy?

Lady Rodney holds out her hand, and Mona lays hers within it.

"So glad you have come," says Lady Rodney, in a tone that belies her words, and in a sweet silvery voice that chills the heart of the listener. "We hardly thought we should see you so soon, the trains here are so unpunctual. I hope the carriage was in time."

"It was rather better than I anticipated, thank you," not in the haughty tone adopted by her half an hour ago, but in an unnerved and frightened whisper.

At this remarkable answer to a very ordinary and polite question, Lady Rodney stares at Mona for a moment, and then turns abruptly away to greet Geoffrey. Whereupon Captain Rodney, coming forward, tells Mona he is glad to see her, kindly but carelessly; and then a young man, who has been standing up to this silently upon the hearthrug, advances, and takes Mona's hand in a warm clasp, and looks down upon her with very friendly eyes.

At his touch, at his glance, the first sense of comfort Mona has felt since her entry into the room falls upon her. This man, at least, is surely of the same kith and kin as Geoffrey, and to him her heart opens gladly, gratefully.

He has heard the remarkable speech made to his mother, and has drawn his own conclusions therefrom. "Geoffrey has been coaching the poor little soul, and putting absurd words into her mouth, with—as is usual in all such cases—a very brilliant result." So he tells himself, and is, as we know, close to the truth.

He tells Mona she is very welcome, and, still holding her hand, draws her over to the fire, and moves a big armchair in front of it, in which he ensconces her, bidding her warm herself, and make herself (as he says with a kindly smile that has still kinder meaning in it) "quite at home."

Then he stoops and unfastens her sealskin jacket, and takes it off her, and in fact pays her all the little attentions that lie in his power.

"You are Sir Nicholas?" questions she at last, gaining courage to speak, and raising her eyes to his full of entreaty, and just a touch of that pathos that seems of right to belong to the eyes of all Irish women.

"Yes," returns he, with a smile. "I am Nicholas." He ignores the former title. "Geoffrey, I expect, spoke to you of me as 'old Nick;' he has never called me anything else since we were boys."

"He has often called you that; but," —shyly—"now that I have seen you, I don't think the name suits you a bit."

Sir Nicholas is quite pleased. There is a sort of unconscious flattery in the gravity of her tone and expression that amuses almost as much as it pleases him. What a funny child she is! and how unspeakably lovely! Will Doatie like her?

But there is yet another introduction to be gone through. From the doorway Violet Mansergh comes up to Geoffrey, clad in some soft pale shimmering stuff, and holds out to him her hand.

"What a time you have been away!" she says, with a pretty, slow smile, that has not a particle of embarrassment or consciousness in it, though she is quite aware that Jack Rodney is watching her closely. Perhaps, indeed, she is secretly amused at his severe scrutiny.

"You will introduce me to your wife?" she asks, after a few minutes, in her even, *traînante* voice, and is then taken up to the big arm-chair before the fire, and introduced to Mona.

"Dinner will be ready in a few minutes; of course we shall excuse your dressing to-night," says Lady Rodney, addressing her son far more than Mona, though the words presumably are meant for her. Whereupon Mona, rising from her chair with a sigh of relief, follows Geoffrey out of the room and up-stairs.

"Well?" says Sir Nicholas, as a deadly silence continues for some time after their departure, "what do you think of her?"

"She is painfully deficient; positively without brains," says Lady Rodney, with conviction. "What was the answer she made me when I asked about the carriage? Something utterly outside the mark."

"She is not brainless; she was only frightened. It certainly was an ordeal coming to a house for the first time to be, in effect, stared at. And she is very young."

"And perhaps unused to society," puts in Violet, mildly. As she speaks she picks up a tiny feather that has clung to her gown, and lightly blows it away from her into the air.

"She looked awfully cut up, poor little thing," says Jack, kindly. "You were the only one she opened her mind to, Nick. What did she say? Did she betray the ravings of a lunatic or the inanities of a fool?"

"Neither."

"Then, no doubt, she heaped upon you priceless gems of Irish wit in her mother-tongue?"

"She said very little; but she looks good and true. After all, Geoffrey might have done worse."

"Worse!" repeats his mother, in a withering tone. In this mood she is not nice, and a very little of her suffices.

"She is decidedly good to look at, at all events," says Nicholas, shifting ground. "Don't you think so, Violet?"

"I think she is the loveliest woman I ever saw," returns Miss Mansergh, decision. If cold, she is just, and above the pettiness of disliking a woman because she may be counted more worthy of admiration than herself.

"I am glad you are all pleased," says Lady Rodney, in a peculiar tone; and then the gong sounds, and they all rise, as Geoffrey and Mona once more make their appearance. Sir Nicholas gives his arm to Mona, and so begins her first evening at the Towers.

CHAPTER XVI.

All through the night Mona scarcely shuts her eyes, so full is her mind of trouble and perplexing thoughts. At last her brain grows so tired that she cannot pursue any subject to its end, so she lies silently awake, watching for the coming of the tardy dawn.

At last as she grows weary for wishing for it,—

"Morning fair
Comes forth with pilgrim steps in amice gray."

Naturally an early riser, Mona slips noiselessly from her bed, lest she shall wake Geoffrey, and having accomplished her toilet without the assistance of a maid, she leaves her room, and, softly descending the stairs, sallies forth into the gray and early morning.

But which way to go? To Mona all round is an undiscovered country, and for that reason possesses an indescribable charm. Finally, she goes up the avenue, beneath the gaunt and leafless elms, and midway, seeing a small path that leads she knows not whither, she turns aside and follows it, until she loses herself in the lonely wood.

Mona is happy; the walk has done her good, and warmed her blood, and brought a color, soft and rich as carmine, to her cheeks. She has followed the winding path for about an hour, briskly, and with a sense of *bien-etre* that only the young and godly can know, when suddenly she becomes aware that some one is following her.

She turns slowly, and finds her fellow-pedestrian is a young man clad in a suit of impossible tweed. The stranger is advancing slowly; he is swarthy, and certainly not prepossessing. His hair is of that shade and texture that suggests unpleasantly the negro. His lips are a trifle thick, his eyes like sloes. There is, too, an expression of low cunning in these latter features that breeds distrust in the beholder.

The stranger, having come quite near, raises his head, and, seeing her, starts naturally, and comes to a stand-still. For a full half-minute he stares unpardonably, and then lifts his hat. Mona—who, as we have seen, is not great in emergencies—fails to notice the rudeness, in her own embarrassment, and therefore bows politely in return to his salutation.

She is wondering who he can be, when he breaks the silence.

"It is an early hour to be astir," he says, awkwardly; then, finding she makes no response, he goes on, still more awkwardly, "Can you tell me if this path will lead me to the road to Plumston?"

"I am sorry I can tell you nothing," says Mona, shaking her head. "I was never in this wood before; I know nothing of it."

"*I* should know all about it," says the stranger, with a curious contraction of the muscles of his face, which it may be he means for a smile. "In time I shall no doubt, but at present it is a sealed book to me. But the future will break all seals as far at least as Rodney Towers is concerned."

Then she knows she is speaking to "the Australian" (as she has heard him called), and, lifting her head, examines his face with renewed interest. Not a pleasant face, by any means, yet not altogether bad, as she tells herself in the generosity of her heart.

"I am a stranger, I know nothing," she says, again, hardly knowing what to say, and moving a little as though she would depart.

"I suppose I am speaking to Mrs. Rodney," he says, guessing wildly, yet correctly, as it turns out, having heard, as all the country has besides, that the bride is expected at the Towers during the week. He has never all this time removed his black eyes from the perfect face before him with its crimson head-gear. He is as one fascinated, who cannot yet explain where the fascination lies.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Rodney," says Mona, feeling some pride in her wedded name, in spite of the fact that two whole months have gone by since first she heard it.

"You haven't asked me who I am," says the stranger, as though eager to detain her at any cost, still without a smile, and always with his eyes fixed upon her face. It seems as though he positively cannot remove them, so riveted are they.

"No;" she might in all truth have added, "because I did not care to know," but what she does say (for incivility to an enemy would be impossible to Mona) is, "I thought perhaps you would not like it."

Even this is a small, if unconscious, cut, considering what objectionable curiosity he evinced about her name. But the Australian is above small cuts, for the good reason that he seldom sees them.

"I am Paul Rodney," he now volunteers,—"your husband's cousin, you know. I suppose," with a darkening of his whole face, "now I have told you who I am, it will not sweeten your liking for me."

"I have heard of you," says Mona, quietly. Then, pointing to that part of the wood whither he would go, she says, coldly, "I regret that I cannot tell you where this path leads to. Good-morning."

With this she inclines her head, and without another word goes back by the way she has come.

When she is quite gone, he pulls himself together with a jerk, draws a heavy sigh, and, thrusting his hands deep into his pockets, continues his walk.

At breakfast Mona betrays the fact that she has met Paul Rodney during her morning ramble, and tells all that has passed between him and her,—on being closely questioned,—which news has the effect of bringing a cloud to the brow of Sir Nicholas and a frown to that of his mother.

"Such presumption, walking in our wood without permission," she says, haughtily.

"My dear mother, you forget the path leading from the southern gate to Plumston road has been open to the public for generations. He was at perfect liberty to walk there."

"Nevertheless, it is very bad taste his taking advantage of that absurd permission, considering how he is circumstanced with regard to us," says Lady Rodney. "You wouldn't do it yourself, Nicholas, though you find excuses for him."

"Oh, no, I shouldn't," he says, gently; and then the subject drops.

And here perhaps it will be as well to explain the trouble that at this time weighs heavily upon the Rodney family.

* * * * * * * * *

Old Sir George Rodney, grandfather of the present baronet, had two sons, trey and hated George. The entail having been broken during the last generation, he made a will disinheriting the elder son. But before this George, unable to bear longer the ignominy of his position, left home. None knew where he had gone, save Elspeth, the old nurse, who had loved Sir Launcelot, the grandfather of Geoffrey and George, when she herself was a young, rosy-cheeked lass.

When the dark, wayward, handsome young man went away, the heart of Elspeth went with him, and she alone perhaps knew anything of his departure. To his father his absence was a relief, and the old man made his will, leaving all he possessed—save the title and some outside property which he did not possess—to his younger son.

But when, after his death, they came to look for the will, lo! it was nowhere to be found. Each drawer and desk and cabinet was searched to no avail, and when there came, one morning, news of the lost George's demise in Australia, the search grew languid and the will was forgotten, and Nicholas, accepting the rightful heir's death as a happy fact, ascended the throne and reigned peacefully for many years.

But again news came from Australia that the former tidings had been false. George Rodney had died only a twelve month since, and his son was coming to dispute Sir Nicholas's right to house and home and title.

And now where was the missing will? Old Elspeth was dead—and none of the old servants were alive—only the second nephew of old Elspeth, who had lived with her for many years, who had gone to Australia on her death and had not been heard from since.

And now the young man had come and they saw that he was very dark, and very morose, and very objectionable. But he seemed to have plenty of money, and when he took a shooting-box near the Towers their indignation knew no bounds.

Sir Nicholas declared his intention of being civil to him. He was his father's brother's child, and as he had committed no sin, and was only trying to reclaim his own, he would have him recognized at least with common politeness.

And so matters stood when Mona came to the Towers.

CHAPTER XVII.

To gain Lady Rodney's friendship is a more difficult thing than Mona in her ignorance had imagined, and she is determined to be ice itself to her poor little guest. As for her love, when first Mona's eyes lit upon her she abandoned all hope of ever gaining that.

With Captain Rodney and Sir Nicholas she makes way at once, though she is a little nervous and depressed, and not altogether like her usual gay *insouciant* self. She is thrown back upon herself, and, like a timid snail, recoils sadly into her shell.

Yet Nature, sooner or later, must assert itself; and after a day or two a ringing laugh breaks from her, or a merry jest, that does Geoffrey's heart good, and brings an answering laugh and jest to the lips of her new brothers.

Of Violet Mansergh—who is still at the Towers, her father being abroad and Lady Rodney being very desirous of having her with her—she knows little. Violet is cold, but quite civil, as Englishwomen will be until they know you. She is, besides, somewhat prejudiced against Mona, because—being honest herself—she has believed all the false tales told her of the Irish girl.

Of Lady Rodney's studied dislike Mona's sensitive nature could not long remain in ignorance; yet, having a clear conscience, and not knowing in what she has offended,—save in cleaving to the man she loved, even to the extent of marrying him,—she keeps a calm countenance, and bravely waits what time may bring.

One day, speaking of Sir Nicholas to Lady Rodney, she had—as was most natural—called him "Nicholas." But she had been cast back upon herself and humiliated to the earth by his mother's look of cold disapproval and the emphasis she had laid upon the "Sir" Nicholas when next speaking of him.

This had widened the breach more than all the rest, though Nicholas himself, being quite fascinated by her, tries earnestly to make her happy and at home with him.

About a week after her arrival—she having expressed her admiration of ferns the night before—he draws her hand through his arm and takes her to his own private sanctum,—off which a fernery has been thrown, he being an enthusiastic grower of that lovely weed.

Mona is enchanted with the many varieties she sees that are unknown to her, and, being very much not of the world, is not ashamed to express her delight. Looking carefully through all, she yet notices that a tiny one, dear to her, because common to her sweet Killarney, is not among his collection.

She tells him of it, and he is deeply interested; and when she proposes to write and get him one from her native soil, he is as glad as a school-boy promised a new bat, and her conquest of Sir Nicholas is complete.

And indeed the thought of this distant fern is as dear to Mona as to him. For to her comes a rush of tender joy, as she tells herself she may soon be growing in this alien earth a green plant torn from her fatherland.

"But I hope you will not be disappointed when you see it," she says, gently. "You have the real Killarney fern, Sir Nicholas, I can see; the other I speak of, though to me almost as lovely, is not a bit like it."

She is very careful to give him his title ever since that encounter with his mother.

"I shall not be disappointed. I have read all about it," returns he, enthusiastically. Then, as though the thought has just struck him, he says,—

"Why don't you call me Nicholas, as Geoffrey does?"

Mona hesitates, then says, shyly, with downcast eyes,—

"Perhaps Lady Rodney would not like it."

Her face betrays more than she knows.

"It doesn't matter in the least what any one thinks on this subject," says Nicholas, with a slight frown. "I shall esteem it a very great honor if you will call me by my Christian name. And, besides, Mona, I want you to try to care for me,—to love me, as I am your brother."

The ready tears spring into Mona's eyes. She is more deeply, passionately grateful to him for this small speech than he will ever know.

"Now that is very kind of you," she says, lifting her eyes, humid with tears, to his. "And I think it will take only a very little time to love you!"

After this, she and Sir Nicholas are even better friends than they have been before,—a silent bond of sympathy seeming to exist between them.

Of course everybody that is anybody has called on the new Mrs. Rodney.—The Duchess of Lauderdale, who is an old friend of Lady Rodney's, and try house to please her son the young duke, who is entertaining a houseful of friends, is almost the first to come.—And Lady Lalias Eaton, the serious and earnest-minded young æsthetic,—than whom nothing can be more artistically correct according to her own school,—is perhaps the second, but to both, unfortunately, Mona is "not at home."

And very honestly, too, because at the time of their visits, when Lady Rodney was entertaining them in the big drawing-room and uttering platitudes and pretty lies by the score, she was deep in the recesses of the bare brown wood, roaming hither and thither in search of such few flowers as braved the wintry blasts.

For all this Lady Rodney is devoutly thankful. She is glad of the girl's absence. She has no desire to exhibit her, prejudice making Mona's few small defects look monstrous in her eyes. Yet these same defects might perhaps be counted on the fingers of one hand.

And by degrees, beneath her influence, Mona grows pale and *distrait*, and in many respects unlike her old joyous self. Each cold reproving glance and sneering word—however carefully concealed—falls like a touch of ice upon her heart, chilling and withering her glad youth. Up to this she has led a bird's life, gay, *insouciant*, free, and careless. Now her song seems checked, her sweetest notes are dying fast away through lack of sympathy. She is "cribbed, cabined, and confined," through no fault of her own, and grows listless and dispirited in her captivity.

And Geoffrey, who is blind to nothing that concerns her, notices all this, and secretly determines on taking her away from all this foolish persecution, to London or elsewhere, until such time as their own home will be ready to receive them.

But at this break in my history, almost as he forms this resolution, an event occurs that brings friends to Mona, and changes *in toto* the aspect of affairs.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"I hope you have had a nice walk?" says Violet, politely, drawing her skirts aside to make room for Mona, who has just come in.

It is quite half-past six; and though there is no light in the room, save the glorious flames given forth by the pine logs that lie on the top of the coals, still one can see that the occupants of the apartment are dressed for dinner.

Miss Darling—Sir Nicholas's *fiancée* —and her brother are expected to-night; and so the household generally has dressed itself earlier than usual to be in full readiness to receive them.

"Very nice," she says, in answer to Violet's question, sinking into the chair that Miss Mansergh, by a small gesture, half languid, half kindly, has pushed towards her, and which is close to Violet's own. "I went up the avenue, and then out upon the road for about a half a mile."

"It is a very late hour for any one to be on a public road," says Lady Rodney, unpleasantly, quite forgetting that people, as a rule, do not go abroad in pale blue satin gowns, and that therefore some time must have elapsed between Mona's return from her walk and the donning of her present attire. And so she over-reaches herself, as clever people will do sometimes.

"It was two hours ago," says M— gently. "And then it was quite light, or at least,"—truthfully—"the beginning of dusk."

"I think the days are lengthening," says Violet, quietly, defending M— unconsciously, and almost without knowing why. Yet in her heart—again her will as if were—she is making re— for this Irish girl, who, with her g— appealing eyes and tender ways, is— to be resisted.

"I had a small adventure," says M— presently, with suppressed gayety, her gayety of late has been suppres— "Just as I came back to the gate h— some one came riding by, and I tur— to see who it was, at which his hor— as though frightened by my sud— movement—shied viciously, and t— reared so near me as to almost str— me with his fore-paws. I was fri— ened rather, because it was all so s— den, and sprang to one side. Then— gentleman got down, and, coming— me, begged my pardon. I said it di— matter, because I was really uninju— and it was all my fault. But he see— very sorry, and it was dusk as I— you, and I believe he is short-sigh— stared at me a great deal."

"Well?" says Violet, who is smiling, and seems to see a joke where Mona fails to see anything amusing.

"When he was tired of staring, he said, 'I suppose I am speaking to——' and then he stopped. 'Mrs. Rodney,' replied I; and then he raised his hat, and bowed, and gave me his card. After that he mounted again, and rode away."

"But who was this gentleman?" says Lady Rodney, superciliously. "No doubt some draper from the town."

"No; he was not a draper," says Mona, gently, and without haste.

"Whoever he was, he hardly excelled in breeding," says Lady Rodney; "to ask your name without an introduction! I never heard of such a thing. Very execrable form, indeed. In your place I should not have given it. And to manage his horse so badly that he nearly ran you down. He could hardly be any one we know. Some petty squire, no doubt."

"No; not a petty squire," says Mona; "and I think you do know him. And why should I be ashamed to tell my name to any one?"

"The question was strictly in bad taste," says Lady Rodney, again. "No well-bred man would ask it. I can hardly believe I know him. He must have been some impossible person."

"He was the Duke of Lauderdale," says Mona, simply. "Here is his card."

[*To be Continued.*]

Historians generally agree that General Washington's death was caused by a cold contracted by exposure while riding on horseback on a cold December day. Mrs. Young, the last surviving child of Washington's steward, Anderson, herself just deceased, related recently how Washington's death might have been averted. It is true that he caught the cold referred to and returned home; but he was then summoned to give instructions about the completion of a boat, and while standing without hat or overcoat on the banks of the Potomac, the chilling blasts increased the cold, which proved fatal.

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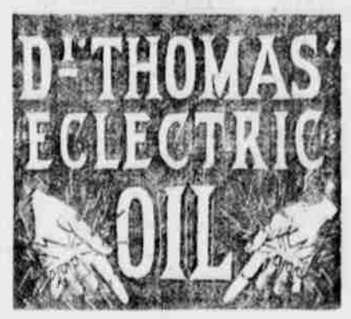

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