

THE PROFESSOR'S ROMANCE

BY DANIEL WILSON.

"Mary, I am astonished!" Of course, the grave, elder sister was astonished. In truth and in fact she lived in a chronic state of astonishment, for Mary was always doing something to astonish her friends and relatives.

Miss Ruth could scarcely credit the evidence of her own senses in the hazy glow of the August morning, when she came out of the shades of the little south porch and discovered that the younger moving object, half way up the branches of the huge old pear tree, was not a spray of leaves, nor a cluster of sun-checked pears, swinging in the blue empyrean, but Miss Mary Thorne, comfortably perched in the crook of the old tree, her curls all flecked with the sifted ray of sunshine that came down through the shifting canopy of leaves, and a book in her hand.

"What a lovely scene!" said the little dame, laughing in a way that was almost hysterical. "It's the nicest place in the world up here. I feel just like a bird, with the leaves fluttering against my face and the wind blowing so softly, and I intend to stay here. Wouldn't you like to come up here, Ruthy? It's really done. Just put your foot on that knot, and then—"

"But you are 30 and weighed 100 pounds, bridled up with amusements. 'What a lovely scene!' you say? 'I feel just like a bird, with the leaves fluttering against my face and the wind blowing so softly, and I intend to stay here. Wouldn't you like to come up here, Ruthy? It's really done. Just put your foot on that knot, and then—'"

"Indeed I shan't!" said naughty Mary, tossing the silky shower of hair away from her forehead, and glancing down with eyes that shone and sparkled like two blue jewels.

"But we are all going—" "Yes, I understand; you are all going in triumphal procession to the depot to render an ovation to the great Professor La Place, the wisest, sagest and grandest of mankind, whom the Thorne family have the unutterable honor of being second cousins, and to escort him solemnly to a month's sojourn at Thorne Hall. Oh, dear, dear, dear! I wish I could run away somewhere and hide. I hate this paragon of prim precision. I shan't marry him if he asks, and I mean to have my own way."

"You told me that you were Cousin Tom." "That is my name, and I believe I am a distant cousin by relationship. My father, the black eyes sparkled, 'don't be angry because I don't take snuff nor wear spectacles. I beg that you will not wear spectacles, who ever he is, but you're very glad he isn't here. Mary, be just, and don't hate Cousin Tom because his other name happens to be La Place. But don't doubt I was a very perplexing thing to have two cousin Toms; and so, about six months subsequently, Mary, in contrast to the inconvenience of allowing one of them to assume a nearer relationship; and, in spite of all her assertions to the contrary, she is Mrs. Professor."

"For its solemn fact in this world, that whenever a girl says she never, never will do a thing, it is pretty sure to do it the first chance she gets; and Mary is no exception to the general rule."

before they could think of a decent follow-up. "No!" said Mary, shaking her head and biting her cherry lips firmly. "I hate him beforehand."

"What a spiteful little puss you are!" said her companion laughing. "No, Tom, I'm not. And the blue eyes became misty. I love papa and Ruth dearly, and I love almost everybody, I like you, Tom; but I hate Professor La Place. And I want you to promise, Tom, that you'll be my friend, and not allow him to tease me into walks, or rides, or tea-tetes of any kind. Will you?"

"Would he? If she had asked him to precipitate himself out of the pear tree fixed on his head, he'd have done it; any man of taste would."

"I promise!" he said, and they shook hands on it. "What a cozy place for a chat that gnarled old tree was. And when they had talked over everything they could think of, it was the most natural thing in the world that Tom should recover the book which had slipped down into the network of tiny boughs, and read, in a low voice, the pretty little story, and the long, black lashes almost touching his olive cheeks; and she thought how very handsome Cousin Tom how very, very handsome Cousin Tom was, how much he had changed in the last ten years that had elapsed since she had met him, and she wondered whether Tom was engaged to any pretty girl; somehow she hoped not. Now, why couldn't Tom have been rich, like that horrid Professor La Place, instead of a poor medical student, and—"

"And when the large black eyes were suddenly lifted to hers, Mary felt as though she had read every thought in her mind, and blushed scarlet. "Come Tom," she chattered, to hide her confusion, "we've been here long enough. Help me down and I will show you the old sun-dial that we used to heap with butter-cups when we were children."

"A rumbling of wheels; it was the returning of the carriage, and Mary clung to Tom's arm. "The awful professor, she whispered. "Now, Cousin Tom, be sure you whisked me through everything."

"To my life's end!" was the whispered answer. "But there was no one in the carriage save Mr. Thorne and Ruth. I wish you were to see Mr. Thorne on the grand sweep beside the two cousins."

"Where's the professor?" said Ruth, and— "He was not at the depot," said Ruth, and— "But Mr. Thorne had sprung from the carriage and clasped both the strangers' hands in his. "La Place, is it possible? Why, we have in fact been looking for you at Hill station. I am sorry to have inconvenienced you, sir," was the reply; "but I came by the way of Wharton, and walked over this morning."

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