

Written for "THE JURY."

**Dottrell's Dilemma.**

A ROMANCE OF THE TWENTY-FOURTH.

BY NINEBUS, ST. JOHN, N. B.

"Is it such a very large amount, Tom?"

"Two hundred dollars, but it might just as well be, for I haven't the money to pay it. The worst of it is that I know it has been paid, but hang it all I can't find the receipt. If old man Merwin gets wind of it I won't get my salary raised this year. It is a hobby of his that no fellow starting in life should ever get in debt. I have heard him hold forth on it for hours. He will be sure to hear of it, for he and my creditor are great friends. And if I don't get my salary raised I won't be able to marry Kitty in the spring."

Mr. Thomas Shaw groaned and hid his face in his hands, and his sister, pretty little Mrs. Richardson, sighed sympathetically. Never had her big brother come to her in a worse dilemma than now. He was in debt, which was bad; and in love, which was worse. Truly a hard and puzzling case.

"I don't know what is to be done, Tom," she said dubiously, at length, "unless you marry Miss Miller."

"Who the deuce is she?"

"She is not the deuce, but a most estimable lady. She is a near neighbor of mine and a great friend. As she is going to dine with us to-day you will have a capital opportunity of making love to her. Like Dame Marjorie in the song, she is 'not very handsome and not very young'; but those disadvantages count for nothing when you remember that she has three thousand a year."

"Bosh!" growled Mr. Shaw, ungratefully. "Well, I must confess you are very fastidious. Turning up your nose at three thousand dollars a year, indeed. Well, I suppose that all commercial travellers are cheeky; it seems to be a peculiarity of the craft. Well, I suppose—"

"Oh, stop your fooling," interposed her brother, wearily. "Say, Josie, do you suppose it would be possible to get a loan from Ralph?"

"Tom, he would if he could, but I know that he can't. We are desperately in need of a little ready money ourselves, for we got terribly in debt during Ralph's illness last winter. He was saying only this morning that he wished we had another boarder; the one we have pays so little and gives so much trouble. But he has been of assistance to Ralph, so he feels bound to keep him. I know two or three we could have who would be much nicer than Mr. Dottrell."

"Dottrell! By George, is that your lodger?"

"Yes; a horrid, grumpy old bachelor, who has a glass eye, dyes his moustache, wears a wig and false teeth. Do you know him?"

"Know him? Know A. C. Dottrell? I should think I did. Why he is my creditor; the very man who is going to make things hot for me if I don't pay him two hundred dollars at the end of the week. And he means it, too, the old skin-tint."

"Hateful old miser," added Josie, emphatically.

"But, Tom, try and forget him for a little while. I saw Kitty Merwin on the street yesterday. What is she doing down in this part of the world? I suppose you will be out with her this afternoon."

"She is visiting an aunt or some kind of relation, I believe, and intends to stay for the summer. No, in my present state of mind I think it best to keep away from her. Guess I'll go out and take a stroll. Don't expect me in to dinner; I don't care to meet old Dottrell."

"Oh, but Tom you must. Ralph would never forgive me if I let you take dinner elsewhere. Promise me now that you will be back in an hour."

"All right, perhaps I will. Give me my hat, Jo, and let me go; I feel out of sorts."

He strode out of the house, looking the personification of melancholy. Josie looked after him with a dark shade of anxiety clouding her pretty face.

"Poor, dear old Tom; I'm awfully sorry for him," she said sorrowfully to herself. "I wish I could help him, but I don't see how on earth I am to do it. If Providence would be merciful enough to remove old Dottrell to some remote sphere of usefulness, what a blessing it would be."

She sighed deeply and turned into the house at the conclusion of this soliloquy, only to be summoned again to the door as the bell rang sharply.

It was Miss Miller who entered, dressed in holiday attire, which with her was the height of fashion. But it was not her wonderful toilette that filled Josie with so much surprise as the sight of her. It was the aspect of her face, which was radiant with smiles and blushes, and her manner, which was remarkable for a sprightliness and "skittishness" such as she had never seen displayed by the elderly spinster before.

"Did you think I was never coming, Josie dear?" she inquired archly. "Oh, I wouldn't have stayed away to-day on any account. Come in, dear, in the room where we can talk comfortably, for I have a wonderful, such a sweetly wonderful piece of news to tell you."

Josie sighed over the thousand and one little items of household work which would have to be seen to before dinner. But she knew her visitor well enough to be aware that it was useless to complain or attempt to excuse herself. So she allowed herself to be led into the parlor, where she sank wearily into an armchair, while her visitor seated herself on a footstool at the feet of her hostess, nestling close to her side in an innocent, childish way that was surprising to see in one of her mature age.

And then, with much bashfulness and many blushes, the timid faltering maiden told her story: How a certain gentleman, who was rich enough himself to find it unnecessary to woo her for her fortune, had repeatedly walked with her when he met her on the street; how he had once lent her his umbrella when it rained; how he had paid her many compliments; and finally how he had asked her to drive with him that very afternoon—a drive which she felt sure would decide everything. When she arrived at this point in her narrative, Miss Miller bashfully gave the name of her adorer—the name was Dottrell.

"Gracious!" was all the astounded confidante could ejaculate; but the start she gave nearly upset the shy creature at her feet.

"I hope you will be happy," said Josie, somewhat nervously, after a lengthy pause. "You ought to be, for he is very—well, very rich."

For once in her life she felt thankful that Dottrell was wealthy. It was the only pleasant fact she could think of in connection with him.

"Oh, yes; but that doesn't make any difference to me," said Miss Miller quickly; he—

She was interrupted by a smart tap at the door. Josie opened it and was confronted by the frightened face of her servant, who beckoned her silently into the hall.

"Oh, Mrs. Richardson, will you please go up and see to Mr. Dottrell," she said in an earnest whisper. "I think he must be possessed of a devil."

"What!"

"Yes ma'am. He ain't been up; he ain't had no breakfast; he don't seem to start to go out, and I can hear him in his room talkin' to himself and cussin' and swearin' awful."

"I will go to him at once," said Josie decisively. "Miss Miller," she continued, turning back into the parlor, "will you kindly excuse me for a few minutes; I have something important to see about."

"Certainly, dear," said the effusive one, readily. "Don't mind me; I will practice a little during your absence."

And as Josie wearily ascended the stairs the introduction to the "Maiden's Prayer" echoed sharply through the house, and the melody was played in a style so thumpy and energetic that one instinctively knew that the fingers that played it were boney and long and were possessed of large knuckles.

"Dottrell grows interesting," soliloquized Josie on the staircase. "Everybody seems greatly excited over him and I have heard him described in three different characters: Dottrell as Shylock, Dottrell as Romeo, and now Dottrell as Mephistopheles. I wonder which is his natural character. Gracious, he does seem rather loquacious in there; I'm half afraid to venture."

"Come in," called out a quavering but excited voice in answer to her knock; "but be careful—careful; you might tread upon my eye, and it is very expensive you know."

If this extraordinary greeting did not startle her, certainly the person who uttered it might have by his appearance shaken the strongest nerves. He was standing but upright in the centre of the room, and upon his face there was a look of agony sad to behold. The fact of him being bald headed and toothless was bad enough, but the "aching void" caused by the absence of one eye added a peculiarity to his aspect that made him revolting to look upon.

"Oh, Mr. Dottrell!" cried Josie in a voice of horror. "What on earth is the matter with you; are you ill?"

"I am in deep trouble, Mrs. Richardson," he returned dolefully; "perhaps you may have noticed that I have had the misfortune to lose one of my eyes."

She had, indeed, noticed it. Just then it seemed to her as if the image of his distorted face would never fade from her horror-stricken mind.

"Whilst performing my ablutions this morning I was unlucky enough to mislay both my artificial eye and my artificial teeth. I dare not move about much for fear of treading upon the eye, which may have fallen to the floor. It was very expensive, and it would grieve me greatly to lose it. My defective vision is another barrier to me in my search. Would you be so kind as to have a look round for it?"

[Concluded on page 7.]

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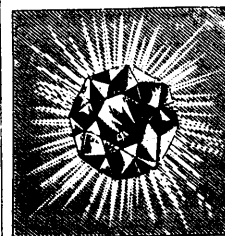
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