

Literature.

"ON TRIAL."

She was one of these girls who are perhaps more attractive than strictly pretty, because certainly her features had their faults. Her skin, however, was like satin—creamy, delicious, with a little soft flush running through it; and over her low, broad brow her chestnut hair fell in a soft, natural wave. No maid had ever cut it, it was in fact "born so," and it blew from side to side as the wind listed, and was touched with gold here and there, and had a good deal to do with her many conquests.

Her first season had pronounced her an undeniable success; which meant that to her brother Lord Hartley, she became at once a decided anxiety. She was never now without one, or rather two, young men dangling after her wherever she went, not only to balls and at homes in town, but to Tyrol or the Highlands afterwards, or wherever the Hartleys might chance to go. It was indeed Lady Hartley's private opinion that had they elected to go to Hudson's Bay for the winter, there these young men who have appeared up to time, and ready as ever to fall down and worship her sister-in-law.

And they weren't always the same two young men, either; that added to the grievance. Miss Charteris had many little ways, but the cleverest of all was the little way in which she used to get rid of a suitor when he grew importunate. This cleverness was hardly appreciated by Lady Hartley, upon whom fell, as a rule, the task of consoling and soothing down the discarded one. She was thus compelled to think a good deal about Sophy, off and on, and just now she was particularly anxious about her, because she feared she was going to decline the best match of the year. Lady Hartley was young herself, and was not without sympathy and affection for her sister-in-law, but she certainly thought her very foolish, and she didn't in the least know how to manage her. She was a very nice woman, if a trifle plaintive and given to looking at the unwearable side of most things. She was a good woman too, intensely devoted to her nursery, as a good woman should be, but she was, perhaps, a trifle dull.

Just now she was worrying over two things; the baby's teething, which exercised her mind quite as much as though she had not seen three other babies get through the same obnoxious process, and her fear that Sophy would at last refuse Lord Elston's hand—and very handsome rent roll. She was divided between these two anxieties, when the door opened and Sophy herself entered the room.

"Anything the matter, Molly?" she asked, after a cursory glance at Lady Hartley's inexpressive features. The latter had been christened a decorous Mary by an Archbishop, but Miss Charteris insisted on calling her Molly, which of course was a trial. She came across the room now with her usual light, swift step, and leaned on Lady Hartley's chair.

"Are the children all right?" she asked. "Baby's tooth through yet? You look as if someone had been giving you a severe scolding."

"I have many things to worry me," said Lady Hartley, with a sigh. "And of course I can't help feeling anxious about baby."

"That big, fat baby!" said Miss Charteris, laughing. "Dear Molly, how silly! It is merely his teething—I hope—that induces him to give way to those wild fits of diabolical temper."

"Oh, no; He is not ill-tempered. He has the temper of a very angel" interrupted the mother, reproachfully. "It is all, I am convinced, the fault of that coral his grandmother sent him."

"Then why let him have it? Why not get him a proper ring? Edith never has any others. A thick, soft India-rubber ring. It is not pretty, but babies like it, which, of course, is everything."

"And how am I to get one in this out-of-the-way place?" returned Lady Hartley, helplessly.

"I'll write to George. He is coming down for these theatricals, you know, the day after tomorrow, and he shall bring it."

"George!" Lady Hartley repeated, regarding her anxiously. "Do you mean to tell me you write to George?"

"Now and then."

"After all that passed between you last spring? Do you think Lord Elston would like it, if he heard of it?"

"I don't know, so I can't say."

"Sophy!" said Lady Hartley, in a solemn tone, "I do hope you are not going to do anything foolish with regards to Elston."

"I hope not, indeed," said Miss Charteris with a solemnity that put her sister's in the shade, but she rather spoiled it by laughing afterwards.

"It is distinctly wrong of you to encourage George. And you must know," waxing a little warm, "that even one line from you in his present state of mind will be sufficient to waken the old regret. Now, Sophy, tell me one thing, do you or do you not like Lord Elston?"

Miss Charteris employed herself for a moment or two in looking deeply into the fire. Then she said with the most indifferent air in the world:—

"I'm not sure."

"That terrible sentence!" cried Lady Hartley, impatiently "I'm tired of it,

Invent another, I beseech you. No, don't stand there. Come round here where I can see you. Do you know that chronic state of yours of not being sure is causing you to be rather too freely discussed by your friends? And for a girl to be talked about—that, you will admit, is undesirable. And you know, too, that when people once begin to talk they never know where to stop."

"I do, indeed," returned Miss Charteris, with a comical glance at her.

"You mean that for me, of course. But I don't know. I shall do my duty whatever comes of it. And now, what fault do you see in Lord Elston?"

"He is too rich and too jealous."

"His jealousy proves his love. And if riches stand in his way, why, it is the first time I ever knew them regarded as an objection. And you should be the last to say that. You know you said last year you refused George because he was too poor."

"That only shows how I hate extremes. George is too poor; Lord Elston too rich."

"Nonsense. I begin to think you have still a secret kindness for George."

"I hope you are wrong. As, in spite of the passion you think he still entertains for me, I hear he has fallen a victim to beaux yeux of the youngest Miss Wolvertop. Ah! Molly, I fear my swains are not so faithful as yours were."

"I trust that what you tell me is true. If, indeed, you do not think of George, what can't you make up your mind to Elston?"

"I have told you. Never mind what I said about his money—if you will have my real reason—it is his jealous disposition that I dread. How can I expect happiness with a man who suspects me of—all sorts of things the moment I am out of his sight?"

"Of flirting with other men, you mean. You cannot deny, Sophy, that you have given him cause."

"Well, not for a long time now. Not lately, yet he is as suspicious as ever."

"Once married, that would be all at an end."

"So you think. No I should be afraid to venture."

"Is that your only reason for hesitating?"

Miss Charteris blushed and then laughed lightly.

"You think a good thing," she said. Well, even if I do confess to it being an only one, surely it is as strong as twenty smaller ones. There! I shan't submit to any further cross examination. I shall go and give George directions about that ring."

She moved toward the door. Lady Hartley called after her.

"Don't be too hard on him," she said. "You know you wouldn't like it were he utterly devoid of jealousy. Give him a chance. Why not find some way of putting him on trial to test him?"

"But I know of no plan," returned Sophy, carelessly.

As she crossed the hall, the door of the library opened and a young man came toward her. He was tall and well made and about twenty-nine. He was dressed in tennis flannel and held a racket in his hand. He had very dark, earnest eyes, and these lit up as he saw Miss Charteris.

"I was just going to look for you, Sophy. Come out and let me give you a beating."

"I like that," said she, contemptuously. Put it the other way round and I may be able to understand you. No, I can't go yet. I should like a game, but there is something I must do first."

"There always is," answered he, in an aggrieved tone. "As a rule I always come off second best."

"And quite right too," she laughed saucily.

"I wonder if you care for me at all?" said Elston in a gloomy sort of way.

"Yes, I do," returned she, "sometimes."

"Which means that I annoy you sometimes. Is that it? Why are you silent, Sophy? Tell me my sin."

"Would you really have me tell you?" asked she gravely, lifting her eyes to his.

"I would, indeed."

"Why, then," said she, softly. "Beware, my lord, of jealousy."

"Jealous! You think me jealous!" exclaimed he. "Why, I believe I am the least jealous man on earth. Were it otherwise, you—" He stopped abruptly.

"Go on," said she, a little haughtily. "Were it otherwise you think I would give you food for it; but you forget there is no reason why I should study your wishes. You have no claim on me."

This was a little cruel of her, but she was angry.

"I know that," he said humbly. He regarded her with a keen reproach. "Sophy, will you never give me that claim?"

"I tell you I should be afraid," said Miss Charteris, softened in a degree by that submissive glance, but still rather impatiently. "A jealous man is a terrible thing."

"I think you misjudge me. Of course, very naturally, I should like all your smiles to be my own, but I do not really believe I am the irrational creature you would portray me. Try me, Sophy. Give yourself to me and I do not think you will repent it."

He had taken her hand, and now, holding it fast, sought to read her eyes. But she kept them religiously lowered. Still

she did not draw her hand away. It was evident that she hesitated. She seemed to him by the yield of her head that she was almost on speech that would declare her love. Suddenly she moved back, and shook her charming head. There was a new light in her eyes as she looked up, as though she had come to some strange resolution.

"I shall put you on trial first," she said, gayly. Lady Hartley's last words, though still so fresh in her mind, were bearing fruit. "Do not look so frightened," she went on, smiling. "Your probation shall not be too prolonged. Just one small week! If during those seven days you prove yourself three times unreasonably jealous of any act of mine, you will—"

"Three times! Oh, absurd!" he said, hastily. "You cannot really imagine me so senseless as that."

"I am generous, you see," said she calmly. "As for yourself admit, I give you a large margin. Perhaps," with a slight but charming blush, "I do not wish you to fail. Well!—No! Stay just there and listen. If you should chance to sin thus three times, you will give me your word to relinquish forever all hope of—well, of—oh, you know!" she said. "On the other hand, if you do not sin thrice, I for my part will promise to—"

"Yes, go on," entreated he, eagerly. "You will give yourself to me as my reward. Is that it?"

"Let it be so," said she, smiling prettily, whilst her blush deepened. He bent over her hands and kissed them with a fond and tender passion.

"I did not think this morning that midday would see me so happy a man," he said, with glad triumph, his dark eyes alight.

"Do not boast," said she, warningly. But she smiled as she warned, and he heeded only the smile.

"This is Thursday. This day week I shall envy no man."

She ran away from him, up two or three steps of the staircase, but his voice compelled her to stop.

"Don't be long," he entreated; and there was hope and joy and new life in his tone.

"About ten minutes. If you don't mind waiting about for a bit, I'll join you then."

He did "wait about," for such a considerable longer "bit" than the ten minutes named, that he was a trifle restless and impatient when at last she did appear. She tripped down as unconcernedly as possible, however, with a letter in her hand.

"Oh! it was that kept you," said he, casting a wrathful glance at the letter. "To whom were you writing?"

Miss Charteris raised her brows, and then looked amused.

"What a singularly rude question," she said.

He colored.

"Was it rude? Why?"

"For the simple reason that I might not care to tell you."

"Why should you not care?"

To this she made no answer beyond a little swift glance as she moved towards the post bag that lay on a side table. By some accident her hand brushed against the heavy fronds of a large fern, and the letter fell to the ground, address uppermost.

It was quite impossible that he could prevent himself from seeing it. The writing was singularly large and legible for a woman, and

The Hon. George Markham,
The Albany,
London,

was so clear that it might have been print of a good type. His face was as dark as night as he picked it up and returned it to Miss Charteris.

"It wasn't my fault," he said.

"Certainly not. It was my awkwardness. Still, as you know, it is an ill-wind that blows nobody good, and—you have had your curiosity gratified."

She was a little flushed as she spoke—a fact that Elston saw and dwelt upon.

"I have seen what I had no desire to see," he answered, stiffly.

"Well, why shouldn't I write to George?" she asked, a touch of defiance in her tone. "He is a very old friend. She was a little put out by the whole affair."

"Why, indeed? I am bound, of course, to remember that he was first in the field."

"Oh! if you put it in that way!" she said. She turned sharply away, and then as suddenly stopped. "I suppose," indignantly, "you think I ought to open the letter and show you the contents?"

"I do," returned he, boldly.

"You suspect me, then?"

"I should certainly like to see what you have written to Markham. You call him an old friend, but you must acknowledge he was rather more than that to you a year ago."

"Not more to me—whatever I may have been to him." She paused, and then throwing up her head, regarded him fixedly. "You remember our compact of a while since?" she asked. "Such a little while. A bare half-hour, I think. You remember it?"

He paled perceptibly.

"Is this jealousy?" she said.

"You spoke of jealousy without reason. Am I now unreasonable? Have you proved me so?"

"Have you proved that you are not so? How do you know what this letter con-

looked at him and threw down upon a ball chair.

"A week!" she said, bitterly should have made it a day! Alas! though but a few minutes have passed you have trespassed once."

She cast one reproachful glance at him, which betrayed the fact of her eyes being full of tears, and then left him.

Although totally unconvinced and inwardly raging against George Markham, fear of Sophy's displeasure had such a hold on Lord Elston, that he determined to subdue himself and give her no further cause for anger. Whatever happened, whatever she might choose to do, he would be blind and deaf to it until this momentous week was at an end. Once his, he thought, all would be right. During the evening, therefore, he so managed to conduct himself that Miss Charteris, outwardly at least, forgave him.

The next day brought an influx of visitors for the private theatricals impending, and in which Sophy was to bear a principal part. Elston, having no talent that way, was, of course, shut out from the frequent rehearsal that, after the arrival of the last contingent, went on morning, noon and night. He certainly objected to the absorption of Sophy's time, but he was still so careful to avoid a second offense, that he pretended a deep interest in the play, which secretly was a thing of detestation to him.

Amongst the actors there was a tall angular young man, with a glowing eye, a Roman nose and a tragic expression. This latter was perhaps born of a belief in his own histrionic powers, and the opinion of a few friends of his that he was the very image of Mr. Irving. He was, at all events, the leading spirit of the theatricals that just then possessed the guests at Hartley Court. His manner was impressive, and he had acquired a trick of taking people aside into corners and recesses, behind screens and palms, and there whispering to them in a solemn earnest fashion that precluded the idea of frivolity.

By degrees it became noticeable that it was generally Miss Charteris who was drawn by him behind the Japanese screens and branching palms. But as the mysterious conferences were presumably about the play in which she was to take the principle role, and as she seemed to bear up wonderfully under the infliction of these repeated interviews, no one felt called upon to go to her rescue. Lord Elston writhed behind it all, yet made no sign. For two whole days indeed he suffered torments, betraying no temper, and putting in rather mechanical smiles in the right places; but on the third day an event occurred that destroyed his newly-formed resolves to endure all things, rather than again show himself distrustful of his lady-love.

On the top of the small hill at the very end of the fruit garden a glass house had been built that was specially dedicated to pelargoniums. It was rather far from the house and, therefore, seldom visited by any people staying at Hartley; but Elston, who was fond of this particular flower, strolled up sometimes to look at them, although it was growing towards the end of July, and their first loveliness was almost at an end. It was the Monday following that eventful Thursday, on which Miss Charteris had put him on his trial, and he went up to the pelargonium house to try and while away the time until he could hope again to see Sophy. Ever since these wretched amateurs had descended upon the house, she had been conspicuous by her absence from eleven to lunch—studying her part in her own room, as Lord Elston fondly, if erroneously believed.

At some distance from it, but on a line with the eastern end of the glass house, ran a hedge of laurel sufficiently thick to conceal the approach of any one coming from that side. Elston, walking leisurely towards it, became all at once conscious that a voice—the voice indeed in all the world for him—was sounding somewhere near. He looked through a large hole in the hedge and discovered that Miss Charteris was in the house—the door of which was open—and that she was not alone. The tragic young man was with her!

With her? Inadequate explanation! Her was on his knees to her!

(To Be Continued.)

The Bacon Pig.

What the English call bacon pigs are so greatly wanted that they bring a very high price for export. The bacon pig proper is one that weighs from 100 to 200 pounds. A diet of rye, peas, barley and shorts will produce the lean meat now demanded by eaters of pork at home and abroad.

Cattle have differentiated into beef and dairy types. Swine will in like manner presently be differentiated into the lard and bacon types. For lard the Poland China and breeds resembling it will continue to be required. For hogs whose flesh is to be eaten, however, a separate type, one that makes much lean meat, will be called for. Systematic feeding and breeding will produce the bacon pig or the one to be eaten. Its flesh will be more palatable and healthier than that of the purely lard hog. The Yorkshires and the Tamworth cross, so far as experiments have been made promise to give the lean meat hog.

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