

POOR DOCUMENT

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QUEENS COUNTY GAZETTE, GAGETOWN, N. B. WEDNESDAY, JUNE 1, 1898.

Literature.

"ON TRIAL."

(Concluded.)

Elston felt his color forsake him; his breath came and went with difficulty; his limbs trembled beneath him as he took in the fatal scene. "Yes," there he was, kneeling before her, a whole world of despairing love in his eloquent eyes, now more aglow than ever. He was holding her hand in both of his; quite a frenzied fashion, and, even as Elston gazed, spell-bound, he proceeded to devour it with kisses!

Ah, she! perfidious girl! How did she receive his insolent advances! With the withering scorn they deserved! With a gesture of hatred and aversion! No! She turned her head coolly to one side and permitted him without rebuke to press the lovely hand upon which he—Elston—only a minute since had been tenderly dwelling, as upon a priceless treasure that yet some day might be his. There was a curious expression, too, upon his false face, as though she were waiting with a girlish bashfulness for a word from him that should decide her fate.

It came at last. Not one, but many words in a very torrent of wild entreaty.

"My beloved! My most adored one!" cried he, in tones loud and clear; remarkably so indeed—no doubt on account of the intensity of his emotion. "Do not consign me to despair—and an early grave. A single word of hope is all I dare demand. Grant it, ere I perish. To-morrow will see me over the border; let me take with me into my enforced exile one smile, one blessed assurance that you are not altogether indifferent to me!"

He waited her reply in apparently breathless suspense. So did Elston. Slowly—very slowly, she pressed her handkerchief to her averted face.

"If I only dared believe you would be true," she faltered, very distinctly. Elston stayed to hear no more. Stricken, crushed by this perfidy, in one he had esteemed so highly, he turned his steps backward and went blindly down the path by which he had ascended—to his doom. He scarcely knew whither he went. On and on he walked through the shady garden, until at last he came to a high stone wall—only recognizing that, indeed, when his nose came nearly in contact with it. He could not go through it and it was impossible to climb it, so perforce he pulled himself up and began to retrace his steps. This he did, still in a blind fury of rage and grief, that burst into open flame as a turn in a path brought him suddenly face to face with Sophy.

She was coming towards him and was singing—actually singing—in a blithe, sweet, careless way, a new ballad that had taken her fancy of late. With one hand she was holding up her gown, in the other was a big red rose that she was swinging lightly to and fro. She looked like one who was without a care in the world—or a regret—or a remorse. One could see her dainty feet in their Persian shoes and hear the click clack of the high heels, as she tripped down the little hilly pathway. She seemed indeed at the moment the very incarnation of all sweetness and light. When she saw Elston she stopped singing and smiled instead.

"You here! And at this hour!" cried she. "Traitor! Have you found me out then?" Such harshness! Such effrontery!

"Yes. And in time," returned he, standing still and gazing at her with concentrated wrath on his pale face. Then his anger burst all bounds. "How do you dare to speak to me?" he said in a low but terrible tone. Miss Charteris drew back.

"What on earth has happened? Are you mad?" she said.

"Sane rather—at last. This morning I was mad indeed. Then, I believed in you. Now—" He threw out his hand with a gesture that would have done credit to the tragic young man himself. "Now—I know all."

"It seems to be a good deal," remarked Miss Charteris composedly, though her face had lost its color. "It is also evidently of much interest. May I hear it?"

"This persistent deception is unworthy—nay, rather, worthy of you," cried he, bitterly. "Learn then that just now I saw you and—and that mountebank in the glass house above."

"I don't know any mountebank. I am therefore more at sea than ever." As she said this in her iciest tones, his lordship regarded her with undisguised disdain.

"You know one, at all events," he said. "His name is Pelham." Then his rage broke forth again. "I tell you I saw him on his knees to you—swearing, protesting how he loved you; whilst you—you—listened to him, you encouraged him. I did not wait for the end, but your manner left me no doubt that you accepted him."

Miss Charteris struggled with herself a moment and then burst out laughing. There was a good deal of irrepressible amusement in this laughter, but there was more anger.

"I see," she said. "And so you think you surprised Captain Pelham making love to me? Now listen—" she dropped her rose, and drawing a little paper volume from her pocket, opened it with much deliberation at a certain page, and began to read aloud:—

"My beloved! My most adored one! Do not consign me to despair—" and so on to the end of what he had heard behind the laurel hedge.

As she proceeded, his face changed. First it grew blank, then crimson. Then a wild hope sprang into it that had to do battle with a great shame. When Miss Charteris had finished the last word, she paused, folded the play with irritating precision, and returned it to her pocket.

"You have done me and Captain Pelham much honor," she said, coolly. "It is certain that in your eyes at least, we shall pass muster as very tolerable actors."

She swept by him as she spoke and went on her way to the gate beyond, cruelly unconcerned in manner. She even took up and continued the song she had been singing, from the very part where she had broken off. She was in no wise disconcerted or put out. This indifference was terrible.

"He hurried after her and caught her up just under the hanging ivy of the gateway."

"One word," he entreated miserably. "You gave me three chances. You remember that?"

"Yes. I also remember that two of them are at an end."

"Oh, no. That first one, it has not been proved unreasonable."

"I told you not to depend too much on that. On Thursday next you shall see that objectionable letter." She would barely look at him, and his heart sank. If she could show him that letter there must indeed have been nothing in it to justify his jealousy! Still there was one more chance left him. He took courage.

"You blame me," he said, in a low voice. "But you might know that if I did not love you as I do, you would not have to blame me. I pray you to remember that."

She made him no answer to this, beyond a swift glance he found it difficult to translate; and a moment later she had passed through the little ivied gate into the little flower garden beyond, and he had not then the courage to follow her.

He stayed behind, therefore and upbraided himself fiercely. He took himself to task in a shower of genuine abuse. He absented himself from luncheon, and at dinner it took him quite a little while to make up his mind about even glancing at her when he found her on his other side. He did manage it, however, and looked so long, that she was at length obliged to notice him. After that, touched perhaps by the unhappiness of his eyes, she softened towards him, and to his intense surprise and gratitude was considerably kinder than he deserved.

The next day went smoothly, without a single hitch; and if at eleven o'clock he winced inwardly as he thought of the two who were then in all probability amongst the pelargoniums, he was very careful not to betray it. He was happier, too, in spite of all this than he had been for some time. Miss Charteris towards evening grew very nearly her old sweet self again. Nay, more than that. It seemed to Elston that she was softer, tenderer in her manner to him than she had ever been before; that her eyes rested on his with a more lingering regard; and once, when he unexpectedly turned his glance in her direction, he caught her looking at him, and surprised the vivid blush with which she turned aside.

His hopes rose high, and he came down stairs next morning, Wednesday, happy in the knowledge that only one more day lay between him and the fulfilment of his fondest desire. Certainly that third sin should not find him out, for the simple reason that he would not commit it. He would be calm, circumspect. It was, indeed, impossible that he should ever feel jealousy about her again.

It was perhaps a little shock to him to find George Markham at breakfast when he got down. He had arrived by an early train, and as Elston entered the room, was just saying "How d'ye do" to Miss Charteris. She was a girl who spoke very distinctly, and Elston could hear what she was saying. She was smiling very friendly wise at Markham, though her manner was suspiciously reproachful.

"I thought you were never coming," she said. "How you put it off from day to day. And when you knew why I wanted you." After that, she and Markham entered into, and were apparently lost in, an engrossing discussion that lasted until breakfast, a rather prolonged meal at Hartley, was at an end.

Lord Elston could not forget that once this man had been Sophy's avowed lover. He had, indeed, according to all accounts, been her devoted slave. He looked uncommonly like a slave still—following her about and giving himself up to her, as it were, for the entire morning. Pelham in spite of his expression and tragic powers, was nowhere. Markham monopolized her all through, getting her to show him the new fish pond and tennis court and otherwise making himself specially disagreeable.

Miss Charteris, however, did not seem to find him disagreeable at all. She seemed, on the whole, very glad to be with him. She introduced him to Elston with quite a little flow of pleasure in her manner, and said very ecstatically that it was "very nice to see two old friends of hers with each other." This was putting Markham in the same category with himself—when surely he, El-

ston, was more than a friend.

Feeling rather dissipated after luncheon, he broke away from one or two of the other guests, who wanted him to join them in a long drive to some distant abbey, and lighting a cigarette, wandered into one of the conservatories. Sophy, he had discovered, was not going to this abbey, neither was Markham—a fact in itself suspicious. He was feeling distinctly gloomy as he stepped into the region of flowers, and, without giving a thought to their beauty, paced slowly up and down. It was at his second turn that his eyes moodily lowered to the ground, fell upon an object that instantly riveted all his attention.

A letter wide open, and written in a large, sprawling hand. The beginning was at the other side, of course, but what now caught his eye was enough.

"A moment sooner. Hurried my best. But those lawyer fellows are impossible to move. I will bring the ring, but only hope it isn't too large. It looks enormous. However, as it is my first purchase of the kind, you must forgive me if I have erred in any way. Ever, dear Sophy, yours, G. Markham."

The writing was so large that he read it from where he stood. He read it unconsciously. His eyes had fallen upon it and, before he was aware of it, the sense of the words had entered into his brain. What was he to do now? He was a little frightened at the strange feeling that took possession of him. It was not rage, or grief, or disappointment. It was something far worse than all. He hardly realized at first that he was despairing.

"Lawyers." He wondered dimly if it were her marriage settlement they were so slow about. "His first purchase of the kind." Very natural. It isn't every day a man buys a wedding ring. He hadn't a doubt in his mind but that it was a wedding ring to be placed on Sophy's finger by Markham.

He was not angry this time. He was only cold and stunned. For the first time in his life he was entirely without hope. He wondered in a dull sort of way that he had never until now discovered how much Sophy was to him.

He was still staring at the cruel letter, though with eyes that saw not, when Sophy herself entered the conservatory. Of course she saw the letter and instantly stooped to pick it up.

"I seem to be dropping my possessions all over the place," she said. "My Syrian bangle in the garden half an hour—Good gracious! What is the matter now?" She had caught a glimpse of Elston's face and it electrified her. Indeed it made a picture.

"Don't let us go into it, Sophy," he said, brokenly. "Why should I distress you? It was all my own folly from first to last, I dare say. I should have seen—have known—"

"But what?" demanded she, as she paused; he felt indeed unequal to going on, and looked so altogether strange and down-hearted that Miss Charteris was unnerved. "What is it? Tell," she said. He pointed to the letter she still held in her hand.

"If you had only told me," he cried. "Was it then so great an amusement to break my heart?"

"To break—" She gazed at him, lost in perplexity. Vaguely her eyes wandered to the letter, the word "ring" caught her eye; in a moment the whole truth flashed upon her. A warm crimson sprang to her cheek, and I regret to say she so far forgot herself as to stamp her pretty shoe upon the tessellated pavement.

"You are really maddening!" she cried. "You are beyond reason." She might and in all probability would, have said a great deal more, had not the sound of approaching footsteps checked her. She turned her head to see George Markham.

"George," she said, sweetly, with a change of tone and expression. "Would you mind bringing me that—that little message I wrote to you about last Thursday. Bring it here. Lady Hartley has it I think. Get it from her."

"Oh, the ring," said Mr. Markham; and he went back again the way he had come, whistling as he went. Miss Charteris, in his absence, employed herself thumping in a rather vicious manner upon the pane nearest to her. She did not look at Elston, who was deadly silent, with an awful growing fear full upon him that he had been for the third, the fatal time, mistaken!

Presently Markham returned and laid something in her hand.

"I had a battle royal to get it," he said laughing. "It appears baby lives by it alone. It is a huge success, Lady Hartley says, 'an you love her, don't keep it long.'"

Still laughing, he lounged away, through the outer door, down the steps and into the garden. When he was quite gone, Sophy advanced on Lord Elston. She then opened her pretty pink palm and held it out to him.

"There is the ring!" she said in a voice untranslatable.

It was a terrible thing. A hateful worn sort of thing, made of gutta-percha; but if hideous, at least innocent—innocent, no doubt, because hideous. It was black and soft and bendable, and big enough to fit a giant's thumb. Elston gazed at it as if fascinated, and at last, in spite of the pride that would have held him silent, was constrained to speak.

"What is it?"

"Baby's teething ring," returned she,

slowly. When she had proved to him his guilt, she did not try to leave him, but stood erect, her beautiful figure drawn up to its fullest height, a strange gravity upon her beautiful lips.

"This is the third time," she said, at last, in a low tone, as though speaking to herself. He started violently. Noticing this, she let her eyes rest more fully on him and went on slowly. "Your probation, my lord, is at an end."

"So is my life," said he.

"As for this first chance—that letter of mine—you shall see it now as I promised."

"Oh, no, no," he said, entreating her by a gesture not to go into that. "I understand. I submit. I am surely unfortunate enough."

She hesitated for a moment and then lost.

"Everything?"

"All is over, then, between us?"

"All!"

She made a little impetuous movement, and he, interpreting it, moved to the door and flung it wide for her to pass through. With her would go all his hopes, his desires. Nothing would remain save the saddest of all things, memory.

He stood, his eyes downcast, waiting for her to go. He felt numb, stupid, but presently it did dawn upon him that it was strange that she should keep him so long in attendance on her. While he thus mused a voice, soft, sweet, unsteady, fell upon his ears.

"Arthur!" it said.

He let the door go and looked at her. She had covered her face with her hands and was crying quietly but bitterly. In a second she was in his arms.

"My darling! my darling!" whispered he. "Has it hurt you so much? Has it grieved you? Oh, Sophy, do not cry like that! In time you will forget all this and—me."

"All that is just it," sobbed Miss Charteris, indignantly. "I can't forget you. And to think you would have let me go forever, without another word—another glance—oh, I would not have believed it of you!"

"Sophy, do you know what you are saying? After all, is there a chance for me?"

He was very pale as he looked at her. "Yes, a fourth," said she, smiling through her tears. "And then, oh, no!" she cried nervously, "we won't have any more trials; I hate them. But—but you will try to be good now, won't you?"

"I don't think I shall ever offend you again, Sophy; I don't intend."

"Very well," said she. "That is a promise, mind; and now I must run away and give back this ring to Lady Hartley."

"Ah! talking about rings," said he, a little awkwardly; there—there is something I want to say to you. On Thursday last I was so sure I should not fall into disgrace that I telegraphed to town, and, fumbling in his pocket, "got you this. You shall wear it now, Sophy!"

"This," was a very exquisite ring, altogether different from that horrid black thing which had wrought such mischief. "Oh! how lovely!" cried Miss Charteris, who was not above raptures where diamonds were concerned. "Oh, Arthur, thank you!"

He slipped it on her finger—the finger—and she regarded it with most satisfactory delight.

"It is I who should thank you," said he, tenderly, "for deigning to accept it. But—but if I were to thank a person, Sophy, I should do it more warmly than you."

She cast a little, swift, shy glance at him and blushed crimson. She hesitated, then moved a step nearer to him, and lifted her face slightly.

It was their first kiss, but not their last.

The End.

Rat Portage in Flames.

RAT PORTAGE, Ont., May 20.—Shortly after the dispersion of the audience which attended the Farley Opera Company's performance of "She" in the Hilliard Opera House last night, the building was discovered to be in flames, the fire bursting forth from the theatre auditorium. Those having rooms in the front of the building barely escaped with their lives, losing all their effects. The opera company lost all their baggage and costumes. The fire extended to the building occupied by D. H. Currie, insurance and town tax collector; also to Gardiner & Co.'s and Geo. Dewey's warehouses, Rogers & Ray's dry goods and other stores, completely destroying some of the best blocks in town, including Dewey's handsome brick buildings. The Rat Portage High School was also completely destroyed. The loss will be very heavy. It is reported that one of the boards in the opera house building has been buried in the ruins.

Teacher—How do you spell "weather?" Little Bill—W-e-o-t-h-e-r.

Teacher—That's the worst spell of weather we have had for some time.

"What is that?" asked the condemned murderer, pointing to the death warrant in the warler's hand.

"That? That's a noosepaper."

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