

Why I Believe In Trial Engagements

By Princess Troubetzkoy
(Amelie Rives)

Author of "The Fear Market," "The Quick or the Dead," etc., etc.
(In an interview)

"WILL you marry me?" asked Mr. O. Abbot Burton, of Evansville, Indiana, of Miss Olive Owen, of Brooklyn, some weeks ago.

Miss Owen is a poetess of ability. She was inclined to say, "Yes." But, as a poetess, she knew this word of consent has been fraught with much disillusion and disappointment. She was in love with the young man, perhaps; she really wanted to marry him, perhaps. But would she continue to love him? Would the glamor last after marriage? Miss Owen, being a real poetess, was prudent, cautious and far-seeing.

"Perhaps," she replied.
"Perhaps? Don't you love me?" The young man was surprised and hurt. "Why, perhaps?"

Then Miss Owen made a proposition which is perhaps unprecedented in the history of romance.

"If I were sure I should continue to love you, if I were certain you are all that you seem, and which I believe you to be, I would marry you. But"—

"But?" asked the startled suitor.

"I am not sure," the wise maiden replied. "No girl can be. Marriage is one of the most risky gambling games in the world. How can we tell if we really love one another, or if it isn't only a romantic glamor—a Spring fever of the mind? How do we know we actually know each other? And if we don't actually know each other, what is it we love? Answer: an illusion. I'm not sure about it; no human being can be unless it's tested. If you are willing to let me test it, and I find it lasts, I will marry you."

"But how will you test it?" The young man was confident of himself, but the proposition was disconcerting.

"I'll come and live with you for a month, right in your home," the girl proposed. "If, after a month, I think I could live with you for life I will marry you."

What happened? The young woman went to live in the young man's home and at the end of the month the trial engagement was broken.

If every young woman, instead of rashly accepting a suitor's proposal, undertook the same test; if she went to live in her suitor's house, saw how he treated his mother, sisters, the dogs and cats; how he acted at the table and how he spoke to servants—how many do you think would decide to go to the altar?

Ten out of a hundred? Or one?

At least we know a great number wouldn't.

And, vice versa, not five men in a hundred, granted the same opportunity, would give up bachelorhood.

But many unhappy marriages would be prevented; there would be less disillusion and unhappiness and fewer divorces than there are to-day. The charming Brooklyn poetess was wise, and has set an example which it would be well for many to follow.

Why not have a trial engagement instead of what many people advocate, trial marriage? A marriage that ends in divorce is virtually only a trial marriage, but before divorce there is often much distress, heart-burning and unhappiness. All that might be saved by the experiment so bravely undertaken by the enterprising poetess of Brooklyn.

When is love actually love? There are few things people so deceive themselves about as this supreme emotion. But facts are facts, and it is indubitably true that the majority of young people who think they are in love are not in love. People delude themselves about being in love. What they believe to be the great passion is a thing so more fundamental, so more spiritual, so more lasting than hot fever. When they wait for the best thing for them to do is to learn what is wrong with them before they plunge into a life of unhappiness by applying for a marriage license. How can love be tested? How can a young woman ascertain whether her admirer is actually noble and brave? How can a young man test the texture of his lady's dream? Well—just the way Miss Owen did, and let me say that is what all should do.



"The most trying moment is breakfast. With a mental pencil and a note book the trial engagement bride-to-be might well observe her fiancé. Does he take the morning paper furtively or seize it boldly with selfish indifference to others?"

Most marriages are unhappy because the rosy illusion does not last. Under the test of daily association, of eating at the same table, of engaging in the sordid details of household life, the texture of the golden dream becomes plain burlap, and very coarse gray burlap at that. All is not gold that glitters; all is not romance that blooms in Springtime.

And so I think it a good plan for a young woman to test out companionship with the man she contemplates marrying in his home as the Brooklyn poetess did. I think it would be excellent also for a young man to make a test on his side, if the girl's proves satisfactory, in the home of the young woman.

If Desdemona, for instance, had anticipated the Brooklyn poetess and had gone into Othello's family she would have discovered his jealousy. Ophelia did live in Hamlet's house, and certainly she found him to be mad. Would Lady Caroline Lamb have become frantically enamored with Lord Byron if she had seen how he acted at home toward Lady Byron? If people who tell in love, or imagined they had fallen in love, undertook this unique test they could certainly ascertain whether they got tired with each other or more and more interested; they would certainly know whether intimate contact tended to excite antagonism and aversion or a closer and more congenial companionship. Under that test they would find if love is love or merely the glamor of youth and sex.

In such a trial visiting engagement, the young person would be like Saul going out to find wild asses; some, like Saul, might find a kingdom, others less than what they set out to find.

How would a girl, going into the home of her intended husband, be able to test his character? You would presume that the young man, knowing he was under surveillance, would be on his good behavior. He would be. But in a period of from one to three months he would inevitably disclose his real nature. One cannot be on good behavior in the home all the time. A girl possessing a sense of drama could find much interest and excitement in this experience. She could see how the man she idealizes treats his mother and sisters. If he treated them roughly she would know what to expect as a wife.

Does the young man try to "boast" a happy marriage is a companionship wherein both have equal rights, and neither tries to dominate and rule the other. A girl would probably find the most illuminating index to a man's character in the small things of life. She might ask him to read to his mother in the evening. A man who reads to his mother shows a quality of consideration and usefulness.

Perhaps the most trying moment of the two-hour visit is breakfast time. There are good psychological reasons why this is so, and it seems to be equally true for both man and woman. No woman looks her best at the breakfast table, and most men are likely to be rather irritable until they have had their cup of coffee. This is the moment when a man who is not thoroughly amiable and truly unselfish is likely to be caught off his guard and leave the door ajar for a peek into his real soul.

This would be the moment for very close observation of a prospective life partner. With a mental pencil and note book the trial engagement bride-to-be might well observe and note whether the breakfast greeting is more than a perfunctory piece of acting, is the man's



Princess Troubetzkoy (Amelie Rives) Explains that Close Personal Study in a Man's Own Home Is the Best Insurance a Girl Can Have Against Disillusionment After Marriage

"good morning, mother, dear," really hollow? Does he take the morning paper and read it furtively, keeping in view the fact that he is trying to act the part of an amiable lover, or does he seize the paper boldly with selfish indifference to the others at the breakfast table? Is he silent, even sullen? And if he does make an effort to brighten the breakfast table is he playing a part to impress the girl who is watching him?

The girl may have some plain unattractive friend, perhaps a maiden aunt, whom she might ask to call. A young man is generally inclined to slight an unattractive female, especially if she has lost her youth. If the girl asks him to take her maiden aunt out, and to go about with her in public, she can learn much about him in the way he accepts or disents from her proposal. A man who is really nice is nice all through, and I have been pretty well able to judge men according to their manners toward unattractive women.

Marriage too often means a lowering of the bars of personal intimacy. Marriage should mean a maintaining of the barriers. Living in a man's home, a girl would find whether, as the daily intimacy increases, he observes the courtesies that are necessary for respect. I consider it an affront to a wife for a husband to rush into her own room unannounced—an ideal husband would always knock at his wife's bedroom door. If a young man continues to treat the girl in his home with deference and takes no liberties, it speaks well for his behaviour after marriage.

After she has been in a man's home for several weeks a girl could tell whether her possible fiancé continues observing the reserves shown in calling. The physical care of ourselves should be a matter of privacy. A woman may go to bed with cold cream on her face, but if she wishes to retain her charm for him she should never appear before her husband with a greasy face. Likewise, a young man shows his qualities of punctiliousness and cleanliness in his family life. Does he appear unshaven in the morning before his mother and sisters?

Once knew a young couple who imagined they were much in love, but who, living in intimate contact in a boarding-house after marriage, became more and more estranged. The woman never knew what offended her husband. He came to her, however, and in complaining about her and his unfortunate lot unconsciously dropped a remark that explained it all to her.

"Heaven," he said with impatience, "she hangs her wash rag on the gasket." The man was not conscious of the profane aversion this hoodlum act of his wife created, but it was this very lack of reserve and decency on the part of the woman that dispelled the romantic glamor. A young woman going into the home of her contemplated husband would do well to see whether he observes the niceties of personal reserve in his manners, habits, clothes and appearance. If a close family intimacy breaks these reserves, she had better drop the thought of marriage.

By his tender and good a young woman can learn much about the character of a young man. Are his bits of tenderness real? Are his bits of



"If Desdemona had gone into Othello's family for a trial engagement she would have discovered his jealousy," says Princess Troubetzkoy—and Shakespeare would have had no such scene as this to immortalize.

per sudden, spontaneous, and quick to subside, or sullen, moody and long-lasting? If a man becomes peevish, moody and sullen, he is hopeless as a husband. A girl can safely marry a man given to sudden tempers, but let her beware of the one who, in answer to her question, "What's the matter?" sullenly replies, "Oh, nothing," and continues to fret and moan.

Is the young man jealous? Many women consider it flattering if men are jealous of them. Jealousy is an insult to a woman. If a girl finds a man is jealous of her, let her ask what this jealousy means. No girl can afford to marry a man who does not trust her. I knew a man who married an actress. She was a great artist, and the man was wildly in love with her. He went to the theatre to see the opening performance of the first production in which she appeared after her marriage. He left the box after the first act. "I couldn't stand it," he said. "I couldn't stand seeing people going on." The man was sick with jealousy, and his wife was proud of it. "Your attitude is odious," I said to him. "If your wife were a mere dancer and her appeal were the appeal of sex, in Great Britain Rights Reserved



The Charming Profile of Amelie Rives—the Princess Troubetzkoy.

tell how he will be in his own home after marriage." If it could be done, a girl could learn even more about her suitor by entering his home disguised as a servant. Think what she might learn! She would find out whether she could love him as he is, or if, after all, she has not fallen in love, like Narcissus, with a projection of her own ideals.

Love is love only if it is big enough to develop into friendship and companionship, if it trusts and is not corroded by jealousy, and if it allows perfect freedom. Young people who wander out in Springtime and gather flowers are only under an enchantment. It is foolish for them to marry before ascertaining whether the emotion goes deeper or not. Young people at eighteen or twenty-five are not entirely different people. Will those two who imagine they are so fondly in love at eighteen continue to love after ten years of companionship, when they will have changed and a different character will have been moulded?

I often think it would be better for most of them to separate instead of marrying. Of course, if you do separate a youthful couple they ever thereafter go about imagining their lives are brightened. But after all the memory of a charming romance is better than disillusionment in marriage. For all these young people a testing out period would be excellent. Indeed, so volatile is youthful character and so uncertain the emotions of the young heart, that I think a test period of at least a year would be even better than a month or three months.

Man, during courtship, is at his best, and a girl is generally inclined to think he is the most perfect thing in the universe. His engaging and charming demeanor is unconscious. For a man would have to be a cold-blooded villain to act a part in order to deceive a girl.

But if a man's manners at breakfast with his mother and sisters are as engaging and charming as when he makes his evening call, if he is as polite, as gentlemanly, as reserved in his home as when he takes his girl to a ball, the girl may feel she is not merely in love with an ideal invented about an unconsciously deceiving male.

And if, after a test, the two can sincerely say to one another "You are my beloved and my friend," then let them marry.

But they should not hurry through the test or try to phase false balances on the scales in which character is measured and love weighed.