

THE STAR.

THE HUSBAND OF THE PERIOD.

While sitting in the nursery, where I spend much of my time, I thought to write a few lines—perhaps you'll call it rhyme: But baby seems uneasy and Frank is full of fight— In fact 'tis all confusion when papa tries to write.

He sits off in the corner with eye-brows knitted close. And darkly frowns upon me, saying, "Wife, it is no use: Those children must keep quiet. Why don't you hush them up? I wish I'd ne'er got married, confound the pesky luck!"

Now our nursery is our sitting-room, our dining-room likewise; And all our meals are served there, where baby frets and cries: Yet husband cannot see why we have such boisterous times— Such squeaking shoes as servant wears (I guess they're number nines).

Occasionally he glances across the room at me, Through tobacco-smoke that's rising like fog up from the sea: And he wonders if I'll ever get done stirring up the dirt That is choking up his windpipe, and soiling hat and shirt.

"Why can't the bed be let alone, the table, service stand, The broom left in its proper place, and wife look meek and bland? Do stop the baby's hiccoughing—it grates on papa's ear— With peppermint or camphor, or anything that's near.

"There, too, is Frankie, sneezing—that child is taking cold; And nothing but wife's carelessness would make a deacon scold. The man is blest who married ten or twenty years ago; Who got a wife like mother was—one to cook and spin and sew."

Once more the room is quiet—free from baby's dust and screams: Papa's gone off to his office, and the sun which brightly gleams Shone down upon his polished boots, and hair brushed up in style. But not a stick of wood is split upon the scanty pile.

I wish he had a wife just like his mother was of old; She'd sharpen up his appetite, and teach him how to scold. The cow is neither milked nor fed, the pigs are squealing loud; But the husband of the period has gone off in a cloud (of smoke).

ROSE FANE'S TRIAL.

CHAPTER I.

There was a look of thought and perplexity on Rose Ashleigh's face. She was generally smiling and bright as a May morning, but this evening she stood by the window, apparently watching the dancing shadows on the green grass: her eyes wore a far-off look, telling plainly that her thoughts were far away.

Rose was not beautiful; she had a sweet fair face, dark blue eyes and a wealth of bonny brown hair. Her figure was tall and graceful; her hands were white and shapely. A gay innocent, light-hearted English girl, with a voice sweet and thrilling as the voice of a bird, a smile as light as a sunbeam, and a heart full of kindness for everything created, a good, clear, sensible mind, sound judgement, and high principles. Rose was no great heroine, no tragedy queen, no heroine of romance, gifted with dazzling beauty, and endowed with every accomplishment. She was, as many, nay most, of our English girls are, fair and blooming, sensible, modest, and good, contented and cheerful, thinking more of others than of herself.

On this evening Rose looked perplexed; she was alone in the pretty little parlour, and her thoughts were not very pleasant ones. She loved Charley Fane; but this very day she had heard him give utterance to words that did not please her.

Rose was an only child. Her mother, Mrs. Ashleigh, had been for many years a widow; she resided in the pretty little town of Burton, standing on the River Twane.

Mrs. Ashleigh was not wealthy; her husband, after a lifetime of hard work, died, leaving her a small fortune, and on this she had lived herself and had educated her daughter. No one in Burton was more respected than the gentle widow lady, who was ever ready to do a kindly action and speak a kindly word.

Rose was a general favourite; her sweet disposition and sunny temper endeared her to everyone. Her bright face seemed to bring happiness with it. She had many lovers, but the only two Rose ever thought much about were Charley Fane and Paul Ashton. For some time she wavered between the two. Some girls, charmed by Charley Fane's handsome face and gay, easy manner, would have chosen at once; but Rose was thoughtful.

No two men could be more unlike than Rose Ashleigh's lovers. They shared but one thing in common,—that was a true, devoted, passionate love for the gentle young girl. Both lived in Burton. Paul Ashton was one of the best lawyers far or near; Charley Fane was a manager of a large business establishment. Every one liked Charley at first sight, he was so handsome, so gay and light-hearted,—recklessly generous, but not always just. Those who had known Paul longest, esteemed him most. He did not win liking, as his rival did, at once; but as one grew to understand him better, the noble and grand qualities of his nature became apparent. The one was dazzling and superficial; the other thoughtful, and somewhat difficult to understand.

Rose Ashleigh was not the only one who hesitated which of the two to admire most. It was strange that the two most eligible gentlemen of the town should be in love with her; but that fair, modest, blooming face had a great charm of its own.

Charley Fane was an almost irresistible lover. His handsome face and winning words, his devoted attention, and gay, chivalrous wooing, were altogether unlike the diffident, unobtrusive manner of his rival.

Whatever Charley Fane went he was a leading spirit; at balls, parties, or picnics, no one could equal him. His gay, wonderful flow of spirits was enough to amuse any number of people. Rumour did say Charley was not so amiable or attractive at home. Paul, on the contrary, did not shine much in public: he looked somewhat out of place in those brilliant scenes where his rival appeared to such great advantage. He shone best at home; his highest and most amiable qualities came out there. He was almost worshipped in his own home, a devoted son, a kindly and indulgent brother, a true friend.

Both had loved Rose long and dearly. Charley Fane told her so over and over again. He laid his heart, his love, his life at her feet, wrote verses full of flames and darts, talked everywhere of her beauty, grace, and perfection, until everyone knew and was interested in his love. Paul never mentioned his love save once; then it was told in simple manly words, and Rose promised she would think about it.

The young girl was slightly bewildered between the two; she felt Paul was the superior, she felt rather than understood his proud nature; but—ah, that little but!—she liked Charley best. She was so coquette, no false-hearted vain flirt. She was a thoughtful, truthful girl, anxious to do right in everything and in every way. But she did not all at once see what was best in this case. She had two lovers; one she felt to be a better, nobler man than the other, but she loved the weaker man best.

If she had refused Charley Fane he would have taken his disappointment grievously to heart; he would have written pathetic verses, spoken of his despair, vowed he could never love again, and in all probability would have forgotten the whole matter in a year or two.

She refused Paul Ashton, and he never could look upon a woman's face again. It was the only love of his life, and no other could take its place.

When Paul told Rose of his love she promised to think about it. He went to her in three weeks time and asked her for her answer. It so happened on that very morning Charley Fane had asked her to be his wife.

Rose, said the young man, gently, I have come for my answer. My fate and future lie in your hands. Will you tell me if it be death or life?

Perhaps no keener pang ever shot through Rose Ashleigh's heart than the one she felt when she looked on his kindly face and knew she had words to say that would sadden it, perhaps for ever. She was not much given to eloquence; she lost sight of herself in thinking of the man whose fate lay with her. She did not act according to the regulation standard of most young ladies in refusing an offer. She held out her hand to him while tears stood in her eyes.

Paul, she said, simply, I am very sorry; I esteem you, but I love Charley Fane best.

He sat for a few minutes in perfect silence.

His face grew deadly pale and his lips trembled. In those few minutes he saw his future life before him—blank and dreary—a future without Rose.

You are very truthful, Rose, he said at length. I would have given my life for your love; but it can never be mine, I must learn to be content. You have been true and good—above all coquetry; you have neither deceived nor misled me; my own heart has done both.

We shall always be friends, said Rose, touched beyond all words by the sight of his pale face.

In the years to come, he replied; but, for my sake not just now. I have loved you too well to look on with indifference, while another wins you. We must be as strangers for some time, Rose; then, when my wound is healed, and I have learned to think of you only as a friend, I will come to you and ask for your friendship. Do not think I do not suffer because I seem to complain.

Perhaps you are right, said Rose, gently; I will do as you wish.

He rose to take his leave, and then she saw better how sharp and keen the blow had been. His hands trembled, and he half leant against the wall, as though for support.

I wish you all happiness, Rose, he said; and if the time should ever arrive that you want a friend, think of me. I would come from the farthest end of the earth to serve you.

Thank you, she replied, simply; you are very good to me; but I shall never want a friend while Charley lives, you know.

She repented the words as soon as they were uttered. They seemed so ungracious. A half wistful look came into Paul's face, as though he would like to warn her, but he remained silent.

I shall find my happiness, he said, in the thought of yours. You are going to marry a man you love. Your love will influence him, and make him all you heart can wish. Good-bye, Rose. Remember, if you want a friend, none love you so deeply or truly as I. God bless you, dear. I shall look upon your face again when I have learned to care less for it.

CHAPTER II.

Two reports started Burton from its usual monotonous quiet: one was that handsome, popular Charley Fane was to marry Miss Ashleigh; the other, that Paul Ashton was leaving the town and going to reside at Sleaford. Both were true. Charley had, as he termed it, won the day. He was to marry Rose when the Spring flowers bloomed again, and already he had commenced preparations for the event.

Paul said nothing of his sorrow. Few knew the secret of his love or his rejection. He bore the pain in silence, but his resolve was taken. He knew how much he could bear. He could not remain in Burton to see the girl he loved so well married to another. If it cost him his whole fortune and marred the whole of his prospects, he must leave the place where she dwelt, and begin life over again where he might learn to forget her.

With a mother's true instinct Mrs. Ashton guessed the reason of her son's resolve. She offered no opposition; she redoubled her tender, loving care, and would have given her life itself, if by its sacrifice she could have taken the shadow from her son's face and the sorrow from his heart.

Paul Ashton did not see Rose again until long after she was married. He mistrusted himself, doubted his own thoughts. He had his fears for her. Handsome, clever, and gay as Charley Fane was, Paul would not have given his own sister willingly to him. There had been times when he had noticed a weakness, a vacillation, an easy yielding to temptation in his rival, that caused him to fear. He was easily led—led by good people to be good, by evil ones to be the opposite. He was one of those men who want some one to direct them and take care of them as long as they live, and Paul Ashton doubted whether sweet and gentle Rose Ashleigh was the one best fitted for the purpose. She had chosen between them, and preferred Charley. There was no more for him to say. He could do nothing save try to forget her; so Paul Ashton bade adieu to the town where his life had been spent, and went to live in Sleaford, where he could begin that life over again.

Fortune favoured him, as it does the brave. There was only one lawyer at Sleaford, and he was about retiring from business. Paul Ashton had not been there long before he had attained ease and competency.

Rose and Charley were married one morning in May,—a beautiful, warm, bright day, bright as the hopes and dreams of the fair young bride. The little church standing on

the brow of a hill, was crowded with spectators; no fairer bride had ever been seen in Burton than fair and gentle Rose Ashleigh.

As they stood before the altar,—he so handsome, so manly, and brave, she so fair and sweet,—people said the sun had never shown upon a more beautiful sight than their wedding. The warm May sunbeams shone through the large arched windows, and fell like a golden blessing upon the bowed head of the young bride. She forgot all the lookers-on, and thought only of how she could best keep the vows that seemed to her so solemn and so sweet.

It was a beautiful home to which Charley Fane took his fair young wife,—a charming little villa on the outskirts of the town. It contained nothing very expensive or luxurious, but everything was new and pretty, and arranged with the greatest taste. Pictures and flowers gave a bright, cheerful look to "The Laurels," as their home was called. A large garden lay at the back of the house, whence a broad expanse of green meadow land could be seen. In the front appeared the purple hills of Lashmere. A row of beautiful, shivering, graceful aspen trees stood between the house and the high road that led to Burton.

Perhaps if the facts were philosophically examined, it would be known that every one, once in life at least, enjoys the height of happiness and suffers the deepest woe.

To Rose Fane the bright warm Summer months that followed her marriage were one long golden dream. She looked back to them in after years, and wondered that she could ever have been so perfectly happy.

Charley was the most attentive, the most devoted of husbands. He anticipated her every wish—seemed to live only in the sunlight of her presence. Rose thought of Paul sometimes, and the remembrance of his great love and his great sorrow saddened her. Charley rarely mentioned him. He did not like to think that any one had loved Rose but himself.

In this life, so full of care and pain, it is something to be entirely and perfectly happy for only six months; and that Rose Fane certainly was. Then she began to perceive spots on the sun. Once or twice Charley stayed out very late, and came home, what he called considerably worse for it. The first time the poor young wife nearly died of fright; the second time the same; then she began to dread the approach of evening, least the same thing should happen again.

Charley's sorrow and repentance the following morning knew no bounds. He poured out whole volumes of contrition and love to his wife, protesting it was not his fault; he was coming straight home when he met Harry Gray, who persuaded him to join a wine party at the "Royal George."

At first Rose listened and believed implicitly, blaming Harry Gray and every one else. But one morning, when Charley, who had stayed out until after one, told his usual story, she turned to him with a grave, sad look over her young face.

Charley, she said, according to your own words, you never stay out from your own wish.

No, said Charley, I generally meet some one or other who leads me off.

Has it never struck you, said Rose, that you must be a miserably weak man? Any one can lead you; any one can tempt you: the strongest resolution you make in the morning is upset at night by a few persuasive words. What will become of you if you cannot learn to be your own master?

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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