

# Cupid Tries Again

"Are you sure it is impossible?" asked Mrs. Bayley, sharply.

"Quite sure. I never intend to see Colonel Fane again, if I can help it! Why did not Sir Frederic warn me before? I don't want to quarrel with Colonel Carrington, but had I known his connection with my husband—"

"You would have had nothing to do with him, and quite right, to believe me, my dear, you will come round to my opinion, and the opinion of your friends in general. You owe it to yourself to sue for a divorce. As to poor Sir Frederic, he never thought of mentioning this man's intimacy with your husband, until he was going away; and then he was so full of you that he mentioned it to me."

"There is no harm done at all events, in any direction," said Mrs. Fane, coldly; "but I think it will be as well if I let Colonel Carrington know I am aware of his friendship with my husband, and more, that his intervention will be useless."

"Certainly," returned Mrs. Bayley, with emphasis. "You would be quite right."

The day after this conversation was dull and wet; but Carrington was not sorry to spend an hour, perhaps two, in the pleasant, quiet atmosphere of Mrs. Fane's drawing-room, perfumed as it usually was by household flowers. To-day a bright fire glowed in the grate, and Mrs. Fane had established herself and a piece of high-art needlework on a sofa near it. She was alone. Miss Onslow had some visitors, and Mrs. Bayley was indemnifying herself for a bad night by a long afternoon sleep.

At first the conversation flagged. Mrs. Fane was occupied with Carrington, who had drawn a low chair near her, watched the motion of her deft fingers in silence.

"Is it true," she said, suddenly looking up, "that you know my husband?"

"It is," he returned.

"Do you know him intimately?"

"I think I may say I do."

"You have known him since he was in India?"

"And before."

"And dropping her work in her lap, she looked at him, then, perhaps he has spoken to you of me?"

"Yes; often."

"I presume you did not receive a favorable impression of me?"

"Not very," taking up a skein of silk, and beginning to entangle it. Mrs. Fane's color faded and a smile played over her lips.

"You did not come here, then, prepared to make friends with me?"

"I came here," said Carrington, "utterly unprepared for what awaited me."

His expression struck Mrs. Fane as peculiar.

"You did not expect to find your friend's wife?"

"Certainly not. I should never have sought her."

"Ah! I understand!" A pause. "Colonel Carrington, may I ask you a few questions about my husband? A little curiosity on my part is excusable; is it not?"

"I may answer any question you would ask," returned Carrington.

"Tell me," hesitatingly, "is he well and happy? I mean contented with his life?"

On the whole, I believe he is now. He has had lots of work, and is steadily enough. At first he was a little reckless. Of course he is not as young as he used to be."

"He is not old," said Mrs. Fane, very thoughtfully.

"About my age, I suppose," replied Carrington, looking keenly at her.

"Oh! I imagine he must be younger," returning his gaze calmly, critically.

"I look older than I am," said Carrington, smiling.

"Pray excuse me! I do not want to pry into Colonel Fane's life. I do not feel I have any right to do so. Nor am I disposed to be harsh or unfriendly towards him; but our position is peculiarly unfortunate and difficult. Nor do I see any way out of it."

"That," returned Carrington, speaking emphatically, "depends on the view you take of certain questions. A divorce is by no means impossible."

"I strongly object to being dragged through the mire," she said, with some hauteur, which became her very well. "May I tell you my story?" she continued. "It is well to know both sides."

"I shall feel honored by your confidence," said Carrington, with much feeling.

Mrs. Fane, leaning her elbow on the end of the sofa, and her cheek on her hand, turned slightly towards him, a dreamy, far-away look in her eyes.

"You have probably heard the outline of the history. I was very young, an orphan, rich, ignorant, I fear arrogant. My aunt, under whose care I was brought up, spoiled me, yet worried me with small restraints and perpetual espionage. She was very pleased to marry me to Mr. Fane; he was a lieutenant in the Guards then, especially as he was to be Earl of Milford when his uncle died. As to my own ideas, I can hardly tell what they were. I must be a totally different creature now from what I was then. I liked the notion of being mistress of my own house and

free from my aunt's rule. I don't think I cared for Mr. Fane, though I was rather proud of him. He was not at all good-looking, but tall and distinguished and haughty. I took it for granted that he would love me, for I fancied myself charming. The lawyers squabbled over the settlements, and it was finally arranged that the original Fane estates should be cleared of encumbrances, and handed over to Mr. Fane, and the rest of my fortune settled strictly on myself. Well! We were married! My husband was no indulgent lover; but he was polite and condescending, and tried to do me good manners. Oh! yes," in reply to a murmur from Carrington, "I was dreadfully bad style; loud in dress, hoydenish, everything I ought not to be. Yet, a soft blush rose in her cheek, a sweet, half-mocking smile parted her lips, "I believe I could have loved him if he had not disdained me. Ah! how cruel it was to let two such young creatures as we rush into certain misery! Clifford—my husband, I mean—was only three-and-twenty, and I was seventeen and a half. How could we bear with each other, untrained, undeveloped as we were? I imagine the contrast between myself and the clever, high-bred women of the world he was accustomed to, must have been trying; but he might have had a little patience. "I am afraid he acted like a brute!" ejaculated Carrington.

"No; he was always gentlemanlike! That first year was miserable enough. My aunt took great offence at some trifling neglect which Mr. Fane was guilty of, and did her best to set me against him. He insisted on living in the country, so I fancied he was ashamed of being seen with me in town. I began to dislike and defy him. Then his uncle suddenly acknowledged a private marriage and a son and heir. This finished the measure of Mr. Fane's iniquities in my aunt's eyes; she never ceased complaining and fretting about him. But I will not weary you with lips. I believe I could have loved him if I was very wretched, not without reason. When one day driving with my aunt, I saw Mr. Fane standing by the door of a carriage, which was waiting at the entrance of a pretty little house in one of the side streets. He was talking and laughing, as I had never seen him talk and laugh, with a very handsome, dark-eyed woman. My aunt exclaimed, and told me she was—oh! a well known actress—adding much that was most painful—perhaps absurd. Then she gave me from time to time unpleasant morsels of information as to the past and present. Ultimately, Mr. Fane one evening brought about a crisis. He chose to lecture me because I laughed too loud, and made myself remarkable by dancing too often with one of his brother officers, and some of cold scorn was maddening—all my pent-up indignation overflowed. I had borne a good deal, and now I let myself go. I told him I fully returned his contempt, and with better reason, for whatever my faults might be, I did not, like him, flourish on the fortune of another man's disdained, and repay with faithfulness or ingratitude the benefits frankly and willingly bestowed, winding up by expressing my determination live with him no more."

Her eyes lit up, her delicate brows contracted and she spoke. She seemed to feel again the fire of that moment's passion. Carrington gazed at her, entranced by this glimpse of the real woman, which shrouded with such strong vitality under the softness and languor of her exterior.

"Do you know," she resumed, with a laugh, and slightly raising her shoulders, "I am still surprised at my own courage, for I was rather afraid of my husband; but the burst of anger, which may have been righteous wrath, carried me over the rubicon. I have never been afraid of anything since!" She clasped her hands, and, resting them on her knees, went on: "Mr. Fane was greatly astonished, but intensely indignant. He said our marriage had been a fatal mistake; that he would do his best to further my wishes or a separate, which was my only chance of tranquility, and so we parted. I never saw him again. His pride was so hurt that he sold his whole estate and replaced every son of the money my trustees had expended in clearing it. He exchanged into an Indian regiment, as the last noisy mode of separation, and since then I have not been exactly unhappy—indeed, I have enjoyed myself a good deal; but I have always felt a worm of mortification gnawing the fair outside of my existence. My position was doubtful, difficult, or might have been. There was always a stir on a separate wife, and it is impossible to carry the true version of the cause printed on one's sleeve, that those who run may read! Yet I doubt if I should have been better off had I dragged on with Mr. Fane. Still, I do not like to think I have spoiled his life."

"He ought to have understood you better," said Carrington, huskily, after a moment's silence.

"Perhaps he could not," she returned.

"You see there was no love between us to pour its balm upon the bruises we inflicted on each other. No; the blame lies on those who hurried us into that terrible, indissoluble marriage. But

have been prosy over my early troubles."

"If you knew the deep interest every syllable you have uttered possesses," said Carrington, huskily, and stopped short.

"You are very good to sympathize with me so kindly," returned Mrs. Fane, looking at him with suspiciously moist eyes. "There is my side of the story. I am no angel, nor was my husband a monster; but it has been our misfortune to spoil each other's lives."

"By heaven!" exclaimed Carrington, starting up and pacing once or twice to and fro. "There never was so unfortunate a devil as Fane to lose you, and without an effort to save himself!" He resumed his seat, and pressing his hand upon his brow, sheltered his face for a moment as if to hide his emotion. Mrs. Fane, greatly touched, looked at him in surprise. What a warm heart must be hidden under his stern, cold manner! Her own best quickly with an emotion more thrilling, delightful, disturbing, than she had ever felt before.

"I don't suppose Colonel Fane takes your view of the subject," she said, with a slight smile; "and do not suppose I have any wish for reunion with him. I bear him no malice, but I never desire to see him again."

"That is only natural," returned Carrington, in his usual tone. "Am I discreet," he continued, "in asking how life has gone with you since—since you and Fane parted?"

"Oh, smoothly enough on the whole. At first I was feverishly fond of peace and somewhat imprudent, so got into scrapes. My aunt died not long after Colonel Fane left me, and I had two or three failures in the shape of lady companions; but I was fortunate in making a few steady, solid friends, who found a chaparrone for me, one of the best and most light-toned women. She did me a world of good. I owe her an enormous, never-to-be-repaid debt; but she married an old lover and left me."

"It has been a trying position for such a woman as you are," said Carrington, his brows knitting as he looked keenly at her.

"It has its worries," she said, coloring at the meaning she well understood, and, with a frank laugh, added "it would amuse you if you knew the tremendous declarations that have been made to me by all sorts and conditions of men. The amount of sage advice I have received as to the best way of setting myself free—of revenging myself on that heartless villain, my husband! At first I believed every man to be in earnest, and used to be frightfully troubled about the pain I inflicted; but gradually I perceived how largely the love offered to me was compounded of vanity, selfishness, and greed. There were one or two exceptions, of course—more gravely, and in a sense, repudiated, I resolved never to bring the shadow of disgrace on the name I bore—never to give my husband the right to say, 'This woman is the commonplace, low-toned creature I thought.'"

"Then you never held any communication with Fane since?"

"Yes," coloring quickly, and looking down. "Once word came to us that he had been dangerously wounded in some obscure fighting on the northwest frontier, and was about to come home in a bad health. I wrote, offering to nurse him. In truth I feared that he had deprived himself of the means necessary to make ill-health bearable, and that I might be useful financially. However—with a slight gesture of resignation, I was accepted. He wrote a civil letter of thanks declining my offer, and stating that he was better, and entertained no idea of returning to England! I can't tell you how infinitely ashamed I felt of having tried to force myself upon him. That finished everything on that score."

Carrington muttered something inarticulate between his teeth, and then remained silent for a moment. "You are a wonderful woman," he said, at length, "to have so little bitterness against the man who has ruined your life."

"We are, I fear, tolerably equal in the matter of blame," she replied.

"The man has the best of it, though! Do you know when I found out who you were, my first thought was to ascertain if there was any chance of smoothing matters between you and Fane? Morton confessed puzzled me. I could not quite make out your relations."

"You understand now?" with a calm, superior smile.

"I understand more than you think—more than Morton does."

"How do you mean?"

"He wants to be more than your friend; he is playing a despicable game on you. I don't think you have any right to think that," returned Mrs. Fane, gravely. "I have known Sir Frederic Morton now for nearly two years, and I think I may say he is only a pleasant friend."

"I am probably too much a stranger to have ventured to speak as I did," said Carrington, turning to look at her with the frank, sunny expression, which at times gave such a charm to her face. "I never felt you were quite different from what you are. You must have lived a great deal with Colonel Fane, for you have caught some tones of his voice. Not the most musical intonations," and she laughed.

Carrington looked sharply at her, then a smile relaxed his face. "The resemblance is no recommendation, I fear."

"Well, perhaps not, when I remember the occasion on which I last heard him speak." There was a pause.

Carrington leant his elbow on his knee, and his brow on his hand. "Yes," he said, at length, "life must have been difficult to you, and it has not been smooth for Fane. He is a man of a felloe, and makes few friends; he has had little hope, and is, I know, oppressed with a sense of having been guilty of injustice. Poor and proud, existence has not had too many pleasures for him. Until lately, he had no idea that you were a woman who cared for home or

the beginning of the wooded uplands, in deep thought. "It is a curious position," he mused. "How shall I extricate myself? I might well say Fane was an unlucky devil, to lose, to throw away such a woman, who was inclined to love her husband! God! how sweet, and arch, and shy, she looked when she admitted it! If that husband had not been blinded and stupefied by an idiotic entanglement, he might have perceived her real value. She is not quite happy. How does she regard that designing rascal, Morton?"

"She hardly knows herself. She shall never get free to bestow herself on him; but, would it be right to hold her still to so irksome a marriage, if freedom was really essential to her happiness? She shall yet know that Fane can be generous. A sometimes dream there is a spark of hope in the curious understanding that has sprung up between us. By Heaven, if I could believe that, I would forgo the fetters again so strongly, that she would never even wish to break them! Boldness and caution may carry one, a sometimes dream there is a spark of hope in the curious understanding that has sprung up between us. By Heaven, if I could believe that, I would forgo the fetters again so strongly, that she would never even wish to break them! Boldness and caution may carry one, a sometimes dream there is a spark of hope in the curious understanding that has sprung up between us. 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