

## Cupid and the Lady Contributor

It was not Christmas, or anything like it; but the year had attained that maturity when editors begin to "make up," at least mentally, their Christmas numbers; and the Lady Contributor, whose wares were most in demand at that season, felt conscious of an indefeasible right to be just as tired as ever she had a mind to be.

A flickering light from the natural gas that burned in her asbestos-lined fire-place filled the room; from the carved mantel shelf a gypsy kettle of brilliant copper hung low before the flames, and exhaled a grateful and refreshing moisture into the dry air; the manuscript which the Lady Contributor had just taken from the typewriter was all about lovers, and the home-coming of absent sons to Christmas-trees and snap-dragons and all the rest of it. The love-story, she felt, as she held the closely written sheets upon her knee, revising them with the aid of a fountain pen, was especially effective; she smiled a little, as she re-read its tragedy, with the necessary Christmas *dénouement* of light comedy.

"It sounds quite like the real thing," said the Lady Contributor.

A knock on the door made her start, just a little; when she had opened it, hastily shuffling her manuscript into the drawer of her machine, she saw that her visitor was Cupid, in correct evening clothes, and wearing in his buttonhole a specimen of the flower which at that time chanced to be fashionable.

"Ah! good-afternoon," said Cupid, in whose speech the English "A" was quite perceptible; "I thought perhaps you would give me shelter for a few moments. I've been to dine, and had a most wearing experience, I assure you."

"Do tell me about it," said the Lady Contributor, pushing a wide arm-chair nearer to the hearth-rug; for she had sufficient acquaintance with Cupid to know that he liked his ease.

"Well," he said, contorting his countenance ruefully over the bitter remembrance; "the whole dinner table got upon the subject of Love; Love in the abstract, you understand; and I assure you my sufferings were intense."

"Very ill-bred of them to be personal," she answered.

"Ah! but you see, I was incognito," said Cupid.

"You frequently are," she replied, with a little irrepressible sigh. Cupid did not hear her sigh; he was thinking about himself. Presently he said, in a wheedling tone:

"Come now, you don't think I'm such a bad sort of fellow, I am sure; that manuscript, for instance, of which I see a corner sticking out of the drawer yonder; confess that you could not have produced it without my help! Is n't it all about me? Come now!"

"As to that," said the Lady Contributor, calmly, "you are under the same delusion as the rest of the world. Everybody fancies that we who write about Love draw sight drafts upon our own interest-

bearing experiences; whereas the truth is directly the opposite. The subject has been exploited for so many centuries that the sometime fresh poison berry has been distilled, as it were, into a kind of ink—if they do distil ink, which I forget—into which each poet and fictionist can dip his pen, with just the same result as if he had felt it all himself."

"In other words, you don't suffer worth a cent, and you make a living just the same," said Cupid, suggestively.

"Quite so," returned the Lady Contributor.

Cupid was silent for a long time; he seemed depressed. "Well," he said at last, "maybe it's a good thing. You don't draw things as they are, of course; but people like the things that you draw. And you preserve the ancient ideals. Now I read a story the other day about a woman who died for love; Love? pshaw! unless it was love of a new bonnet."

"That," said the Lady Contributor, who had written the story in question, "is a criticism which only serves to demonstrate the ignorance of the critic. That story was dated purposely away behind the times; besides, it was cut on the 'Prisoner of Zenda' pattern, and all one had to do to the characters was to draw them of heroic size, and lay on the color with a whitewash brush. In the novel of modern times the only heroine worth her salt is the new woman; and she invariably prefers friendship and disdains love."

"Well, not when it's illicit," said Cupid, musingly.

The Lady Contributor scorned to reply.

Presently Cupid said: "But do you know, that in that case, you—you personally—really do draw upon your own experience after all; I have noticed for some years that that is the sort of a woman you are."

"What sort?" she asked. There was a shade upon her brow, but it was probably cast by a bust of Pallas on the chimney-piece, to which she moved nearer as she spoke. For we know that a bust of Pallas always casts its irresponsible shadow *through* the light.

"The sort that prefers friendship in real life, and looks at love from a purely professional standpoint," he said, smiling so delightfully that it was evident he believed himself to have been clever. "Pray, did you ever flirt in all your life?"

"If I had, I should have despised myself too much to live any longer," she said, still more in shadow.

"Just so! And are n't you the frankest, most comrade-like friend a fellow could have?"

"I trust I am not either double-faced or misanthropical."

"Precisely! And I've heard lots of fellows say the same thing. You see, that's why you are such a favorite; men feel they can ask your advice, you know, and tell you,—well, just anything; and I really believe you do them lots of good."

"I should be sorry to do them harm," said the Lady Contributor.

"Oh! you could n't! a woman like you!" said Cupid, eagerly.

"After all, there 's a restfulness in a friendship with a woman of your age—you don't mind me speaking of age, I know—"

"I 'm not a fool," she said as he paused.

"A woman," he said, too absorbed in his subject to notice how closely she clung to the shadow, "who, so far from expecting one to be forever paying compliments, would feel herself justly aggrieved if one did;—"

"As an insult to my common sense," she interposed drily.

"Or rather because you care for truth and not for yourself," he answered.

"There! I feel myself justly aggrieved," she said, rising. "Besides, it is growing late, and that manuscript must be revised, done up, and dropped into the box, before I—" she paused infinitesimally, and then added—"sleep," in a tone which, despite herself, had an echo of incredulity. "I have written hard all day," she continued, explanatorily, "and that usually means insomnia."

"Could n't I wait and save you the trouble of mailing your stuff?" asked Cupid. It seemed to him that something had gone wrong somewhere; but he could not seem to locate it.

"As if I did not know how quiet you can be upon occasion," she smiled derisively. "Good-night." "Oh! good-night," said Cupid.

It was true that she was pledged to produce her tale of "Love and Santa Claus," in a certain editorial sanctum, dead or alive, by nine o'clock the following morning; nevertheless, she lingered, after Cupid had left her, for some time, within the flicker of the natural gas, before she drew forth the sheets from their retirement. She was not so well pleased with them, either, on this reading; it seemed for a while as if she would rend either them or herself in pieces; but the cathedral chime of the clock which Cupid had given her at Christmas, nearly a year before, brought her to a better mind.

"When I am pledged to the editor for a story, and when I have written the sort of story he wants," she said aloud, "what does it matter whether or no it is true to life? What is life, after all—modern life—but faithfulness to one's business engagements?"

She lit her study lamp, and seated herself at her desk. Until the work of revision had been fully completed, she gave no further attention to Cupid and all his works than was required by the manuscript before her. It was only in assuming her hat and wraps for the purpose of conveying her package to the mail box, that her eye was caught by the face reflected in the glass. She scrutinized it closely.

"I had positively failed to realize how very old I am growing," said the Lady Contributor. "I—I believe I will not wear this hat; the other is more becoming."

When she had suited her action to her words, she went out alone into the silent and solitary night.

KATHARINE PEARSON WOODS.