

## DILYS CARRINGTON - THE KIND DRAGON LADY

It can't have been easy keeping the House of Carrington on the road. There were the war years when you couldn't be sure when, or if, your husband would return. How would you feed the children? However, it was a situation Dilys accepted as her duty - which she once told us she thought was what this life was for. She was a bit scary that way, apt to squelch your silly-nonsense dreams. But then there wasn't much room for aspiration in the domesticity that fell to wives in her day. Peeling veg and moulding suet pastry were not tasks that heralded interesting prospects.

Come the 1960s, when she'd shed the burden of laundry output for four large men, she naturally took on another of those massive low-recognition jobs. While training to become a teacher of the Alexander Technique herself, she also managed the administration that her husband's now burgeoning training course demanded; and she kept the house in good repair; and she continued turning out breakfast, lunch and dinner - albeit now for just the two.

Sometimes she wasn't in class but could be seen around the place, discussing with a workman what to do about the stresses caused to nineteenth-century plumbing by the disposable menstruation stopper. Or you'd see her in the garden, secateurs snipping, laying flowerheads in her flat-bottomed basket while feeding escaped strands of silver hair back into the elegant french knot where they belonged. You could almost hear her telling the wayward wisps to stop being silly. The imperious tone that commonly belies shyness was often to the fore in our exchanges. Had she asked us to take our coats off and relax on the sunbed, it might have felt more like a command from the headmistress.

But then, in matters anatomical, she was indeed the authority. Sitting quietly, apparently contemplative, during Walter's lectures, you'd imagine she was planning dinner when she'd suddenly interrupt him: "No, I don't think that's quite right!"

"Yes, it is, my dear," he would reply placidly.

"No, it isn't," she'd come back firmly, while we sat electrified, anticipating the excitement of a scrap amongst the adults. But then she'd calmly launch into an explanation of her point, drawing on mechanics, physics, physiology and anatomy, and flattening us all with her knowledge and understanding of human movement. The submerged rocket scientist had sprung forth and was come among us.

"Quite so, my dear," Walter with his perfect manners would acknowledge her. But might he have been just ever so slightly another husband not really listening to his wife?

After their offspring had flown the coop, many women of her generation made significant marks in a post-domestic flowering. Dilys moved naturally from Household Manager and School Administrator into the role of Training Course Director. There she commanded her own section of the family enterprise, developing her distinctive contribution to teaching the Alexander Technique, and in the process acquiring a substantial following of her method.

Perhaps she never quite believed in a post-war world. Long after cheap and cheerful clothing could be bought off the peg, Dilys still made her own elegant outfits. She drove us bonkers with her irrational mix of generosity and scrimping. When I asked her to consider what they expected to be paid for their Australian visit, she replied: "Oh, we shan't want any money, we have plenty." You didn't feel you could argue. The training course fees remained as set by F M Alexander in the 1930s. The couple made no profit whatsoever from the hours they spent training us. But then she was like Scrooge with winter heating. The pre-war tiny gas jet that was designed not to warm us exactly but rather to take the chill off a large room, never got a chance to do so while I was there. She seemed always to be turning the flame down and opening the window. The centrally-heated Americans took to visiting during the summer months.

Nor did she ever quite accept the Alexander Technique as a suitable occupation for males. She didn't like to see a boy lying on a table. Feminism was all very well, but muscle could be put to better use.

But it was her humility that made you give way and love her. I was taken aback when she asked me to stay on after I'd graduated: "We need people like you. Me, I've always had to get things done with my hands, so they're not very sensitive," - while I thought she found me a nuisance.

Like a sudden bloom revealed on the forest floor, its fiery perfume hanging among giant trees and wielding a stealthy power, Dilys was a woman who made special marks.