

Matrimonial Adventures

Driftwood

COURTNEY RYLEY COOPER

Author of "The Cross-Cut," "The White Desert," "Dear Folks at Home," "The Eagle's Eye," etc.

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Courtney Ryley Cooper, author, lecturer, circus man and expert on jungle animals, began life as a clown in a small circus. Mr. Cooper says that he ran away from home for the first time to join the Buffalo Bill Wild West show at the age of five, and that after that, regularly two or three times a year, the rest of the Cooper family spent most of its time dragging him home whenever a circus came to his town, Kansas City. When he was fifteen he made the final breakaway, becoming a clown at the magnificent salary of five dollars a week. After about five years of this he began to mix the circus business with that of the newspaper and left the "white tops" to become a reporter for the Kansas City Star. He then successively was a special writer for the Star, the Chicago Tribune, the New York World and the Denver Post, when he again went back to the circus to become press agent of the Sells-Floto circus, and personal representative for Col. William F. Cody, "Buffalo Bill." Later still he became general manager of the Sells-Floto circus.

Following this he turned his attention to telling the rest of the world what he had learned of the land of the savant, ring and his stories and articles began to appear in all the large magazines of the United States. MARY STEWART CUTTING, JR.

It was six-fifteen o'clock. In the kitchen the last touches had been given a meal which was a bit more extravagant than was customary in the household of Mr. and Mrs. John Carrington. The silver candlesticks were on the dining room table instead of the usual glass ones; the service had been polished with extra care that morning. At the side of each of the two plates was a sprig of orange blossoms, which had arrived, special delivery, from California, that morning. Just beyond the French doors leading to the living room was a large basket of roses. It was thus every year.

In the fireplace of the living room, the flames leaped in blue and green and violet colorings, the offgivings of driftwood, sending their colorations into the big, comfortable shadowy room and upon the woman who sat, just within the range of warmth, gazing into the flames. Mrs. John Carrington was waiting for her husband to come home to dinner in honor of their tenth anniversary.

Not that there was any doubt as to the time or manner of his arrival. Mr. and Mrs. John Carrington had a reputation—they were known as the happiest married couple of all their set—a set, incidentally, which included every worth-while name in the directory. In five minutes, Mrs. Carrington knew, there would sound the throbbing of a familiar engine from down the street and the squeaking of brakebands which always announced the homecoming of the best husband in town. John never failed, just as he never failed to telephone her precisely at eleven o'clock each morning, just as he never failed to remember her birthday, or to send the biggest basket of roses which he could afford, on their anniversary. Just as he never failed to take her to the theater on Thursday night, to the Country club for the Friday night dances, or—but the list is too long. John was the ideal husband. He never failed in anything.

Nor did she. For Medaine Carrington also had her place in the matrimonial sun. Even her enemies admitted that she was a perfect wife. The serenity of the Carrington home was something which could not be denied. Everyone knew of it, everyone spoke of it. John Carrington and his wife never had even quarreled!

Yet, as Mrs. Carrington watched the fire, it seemed that an expression, almost of utter fear, was in her eyes; the tapping of a shoe upon the soft rug gave evidence of nervousness, the quick knitting of her hands emphasized it. Now and then she turned her head toward the window—as though fearful of his coming, yet anxious that he be here. Then she would resume her former position, her eyes fraught with presentment, gazing into the big fireplace where the driftwood crackled and the flames leaped and scurried in vagrant colorings. The minutes passed.

"Yes—driftwood. I've been sitting here watching it, while I waited for you." For a moment he, too, looked into the blaze. "Beautiful. Driftwood, eh? Rather hard to get isn't it?" She smiled. "Yes—but then, this is our anniversary."

"That's right. That's right. I suppose the dinner's waiting?" It was a useless question—asked merely for the sound of it. John knew that dinner was ready. It always was ready. The home of Mr. and Mrs. John Carrington was one in which nothing ever was hasty. He went on: "Yes, of course, it's waiting. Just a moment, Sweetheart, until I tidy up a bit and I'll be with you. Only a moment—"

He hurried up the stairs, while again the gaze of Medaine Carrington sought the flames, the gaze of one whose mind is peopled with anguish. But in a moment more, it had vanished. John was beside her, bowing in mock overpoliteness, and offering his arm in an extravagant invitation to the table. "Many congratulations today," he said as they seated themselves. "Four or five of the boys dropped in to tell me your troubles, and incidentally to say how much they envied us. Strange what a few little numbers will do, isn't it?"

"Marvelous." Her self-possession had returned; with him before her she was again the usual Medaine Carrington. "This is the tenth year, without a quarrel." John laughed. "And our idea may spread. Bentley's married you know—just last week. Came into the office today. Told him all about our system, and how it's worked out. 'All that you need for happiness, Ben,' I said, 'is to learn to count to a hundred.' Then, I went on and told how it had worked with us, how we simply schooled ourselves into the habit of counting to a hundred before we said an unkind word, how, if one of us was nervous or irritable, it became the duty of the other to hold in, and the wonderful result that we've attained. After all, dearest, it's all very simple, isn't it?"

"Extremely so." For just an instant her eyes clouded—only to brighten again. "I've never seen prettier roses than the ones you sent today, John." "That's what you're always good enough to say. By the way, this roast is done to a turn. I never tasted better."

The meal progressed to a perfect conclusion—as it always did. Once more, they were before the driftwood flame. She took his hand in hers. "After all, it's remarkable that two persons could go through ten years of married life without a quarrel, isn't it, John?" He nodded. Then: "Yes—in a way. Then again, all that is necessary is common sense."

"I suppose so. But haven't there been times when I have tried you terribly, when I've made you so angry that you couldn't hold your temper?" "No, not once, dearest. One simply couldn't lose his temper with you."

"There—you mustn't say that. Besides, the main point, I suppose, is the fact that it's been accomplished. Ten years of married life, without even a quarrel!" She rose then, and moved slowly into the shadows. Again her hands knitted unconsciously. An expression, as of acute pain came into her eyes. John did not see—he was gazing into the flames and watching the colorings as they came and went.

"Ten years without a quarrel! It's something to be proud of, something to boast about to your friends and—"

remedy it. Nothing in the world that can't be remedied, you know—" "Except this. I'm tired of you, John. Sick of you." "Sick? Tired?" He again faced her. "Sick of—?" Then for a long time he was silent again. "There, sweetheart, don't mind me. Of course you're tired. Ill, too. We'll talk it over in the morning—"

"There isn't going to be any morning, John. At least, not with you." She laughed. "Ten years is enough. I want someone else now."

"You?" He was on his feet in an instant, his fingers stretching wide, his brow working convulsively. "You—Medaine?" "Exactly what I said."

"A man?" "You don't suppose it would be anyone else?" "But Medaine—" "And I have your permission to go?" It seemed that there was a little sarcasm in her tone. "Of course, you know, I'd do nothing without your permission. I want to be frank with you, you know. You've supported me for ten years. You've given me everything in the world I could ask for, you've supplied me with all the money that anyone in my circumstances could wish for, and you've really made it possible for me to have the money to do what I wanted to do when the time came, and so I really should ask your permission. Especially when another man is involved."

"Do you mean—" coldness had come into his voice, "that you're going to take the money that you've saved as my wife to go to some other man?" "I've said nothing like that, John. Merely frankness and fairness to let you know."

"Who is he?" "A friend of yours. We needn't mention names."

"No?" There were no long pauses between John Carrington's words now. The whiteness of his cheeks, the lack of color in his lips, turning them ghastly blue in the light of the driftwood, the glazed yet flaming appearance of his eyes all gave evidence that temper had gone beyond control. "No? We needn't mention names. That's what you say, Mrs. John Carrington, but I've a different idea!"

"Your privilege! But the information won't come from me."

"I don't expect it. I can find out for myself, without the necessity of running down any lies which you might tell me. I'll find out—" "I expect you to."

at her, his arms flat at his sides, his lips open, his expression one of combined anger, dismay and wonderment. The soft arms tightened still more about his neck. "Kiss me, John—please!" "Hardly."

"But don't you understand? I was just trying to make you say the things you did say—it was the only way I could think to do it. Don't you see? I didn't know any other way in the world to make you quarrel with me, to forget that eternal counting to a hundred before you'd ever answer, to—to—"

"John, please—won't you kiss me? I don't love anyone in the world but you. I swear it—nobody in the world, John. Don't you see? I—"

Then the tears came—"I just couldn't stand it any—more."

"Stand it—stand what?" "Why—why, everything, John. You just can't endure things forever without salt and pepper. It isn't natural. It—it just got on my nerves until I thought I'd go crazy. I—"

"What's the—" Frank amazement was his now. "I don't understand you—can't make you out, Medaine. Salt and pepper—"

"Just what I mean, John. Put your arms around me, won't you please? Please, John?" She caught a hand and raised it to her shoulder, where it hung a moment, then dropped limply. But he did not resist her now, as he had done a moment before. "Tell me, John—is this the first time you've ever thought me spineless?"

He shook his head, saying silently what he would not say in words. It seemed to please her. She kissed him. "And haven't you wondered often how on earth you ever married me? Haven't you wondered if I really had enough spirit to even have a quarrel with a tradesman? Haven't you, John? I've thought that about you—wondered how on earth you managed to transact your business, how you ever got the backbone even to discharge an employee. You've never shown it at home. I've tried to nuzzle you, anger you—and all you did was count to a hundred."

"That was our bargain." He said it somewhat grudgingly. "Just the trouble—just what hurt me, that you'd stay by a silly bargain like that. John," she looked at him quickly, "during the time we've been married, have you really been happy?" "I" he paused. His lips pressed tight for an instant. Then: "If you want the frank truth—I haven't."

The Cotton Outlook. Birmingham Age-Herald. According to an official statement of the department of agriculture the cotton market will be able to absorb at fair prices a cotton crop of thirteen million bales. It is not likely that the South will produce thirteen million bales this year. It is certain though, that it will pay every planter to take most excellent care of his crop. This means not only that he fight the boll weevil in accordance with the most approved methods, but that he pay especial attention to thorough and regular cultivation. The farmer who makes money on cotton is the farmer who raises the most cotton to the acre. There is many a farmer, who with proper methods, could raise as much on fifteen acres as he now raises on twenty. It is such an excellent chance of rearing

incident that the cost of caring for fifteen acres will be less than the cost of caring for twenty. There is no plan for a reduction in acreage for the purpose of reducing the yield, but rather such a reduction in acreage as will give opportunity for better care of the crop and for the production of more pounds to the acre. There is a stimulus to planters this season, not only in the prospect of a good demand for cotton, but also in the fact that organized ginning grades, storing and marketing will bring a higher average price to the grower than he would otherwise be able to obtain. There may be seasonal and other drawbacks, but the farmer is accustomed to and not unmoved by them. Such obstacles he has to meet in one form or another every year. But not until recently has he stood the full value of his product.

Children Walk From Hickory to Ten Johnson City, Tenn., April 25.—Charles and Leon Hale, 11 and 13 years of age, reached here today after a tramp of 185 miles across the Appalachian mountains, following the death of their father, their only relative, at Hickory, N. C. They state they have been on the trip three weeks, sleeping outside every night, but were furnished ample food by people living along the route, and claim to be en route to an aunt living in Lynchburg, Va. They reached Johnson City tired and ragged and applied for direction at police headquarters. Police officers heard of a subscription which citizens quickly increased to an amount sufficient for new shoes and clothing, railroad ticket to Lynchburg, a hair cut, substantial pocket change and two big boxes of food.

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