

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

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 sawdust 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.

"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 awry. 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 their 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, Bent,' 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—"

"Yes, I suppose so."

There was something in her tone which caused him to look up quickly, to glance toward her as though she had uttered a desecration. The flickering of the fireplace caught her features, to display them as singularly pale, singularly drawn and indicative of suffering. He half rose—but she motioned him back.

"Please sit there, John, I've—something to tell you."

"Why, dearest? You seem so—"

"Don't—please." She gripped the back of a chair as though for support. "I want to say it as quickly as possible. I'm going away, John." The voice was faint.

He was silent for a moment. At last: "Well, if you feel that you should—of course, it would be better from a financial point if you waited a while, but if you really want to—"

"I don't mean that way, John. I'm not coming back."

"Not—?" He stared at her in non-plussed fashion for a long time before he rose. "Why Medaine—I don't—"

"I didn't think you'd understand."

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