

Marriage Scales

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and a penchant for garlic. Just because he makes up like a dashing cavalier and sings well, doesn't argue that the man himself isn't impossible. If it wasn't for his voice, I wouldn't have this wretched errand wished on me—I'm going to try to get him to sing in the Greek tableaux in our pageant."

"Ah!" breathed at least five awestruck voices to the accompaniment of uprolled eyes. "Just imagine Craig Cullam in Greek costume!"

Doris had to laugh, but she shrugged whimsically.

"Any one of you can have my job this afternoon. I loathe the stage people, and it always humiliates me to have to ask favors of them. If it wasn't in a really needy cause, wild horses couldn't drag me to that theatre this afternoon."

"But of course you've seen Craig Cullam on the stage, Doris?" a girl called Isobel put in crisply.

"Indeed I haven't, and I think she gave them her charming, half-ironical smile. 'I think I won't jeopardize my peace of mind by going to see the play. It's well there is one same woman left in town.'"

With a careless nod, she sauntered off, but not before she heard the girl with the jade cigarette holder say viciously:

"Just for that I hope she falls for him good and hard, and he gives her the air."

The absurdity of the thing brought an amused smile to Doris' pretty lips. Fancy anybody's getting a crush on a good-looking matinee idol!

At the theatre an obsequious manager met her and conducted her backstage. He had not only the theatrical man's appreciation for feminine beauty, but he realized that this big forthcoming charity pageant with its fashionable and influential patrons would be capital advertising for his star and the play itself.

He led her through a small doorway at the back of a tier of boxes, through another door that clanged behind them admitting them to a dingy passageway which eventually widened into the right wing of the stage itself. Scene shifters were busy setting the stage for the first act. Doris caught glimpses of a stately "marble" hall in the process of construction. A winding staircase ended abruptly at the top of a ladder-like platform. Doris judged that the great Cullam made his entrance down that staircase. Handsome carved chairs, like miniature thrones, were being carried in, and bits of really sumptuous tapestries and broadsides were hung across simulated doorways.

Doris was frankly interested. She had never been on this side of the footlights before. It was a new and curiously interesting world to her. She almost wished she knew more of it, could conquer that inborn aversion to the profession, an aversion which was based on a frank abhorrence of the conceit and affectation which she had always attributed to actors. She had known few stage people—not representative ones, either, she had to admit truthfully, but the few she had known had always disagreeably impressed her by their gesturing, their posturing, their inability to cease dramatising themselves, their repellent efforts to be constantly the center of attraction.

To the manager she remarked, with a humorous smile, as he led her up a winding iron staircase:

"From all I hear of your Mr. Cullam, I dare say I am expected to touch my forehead to the ground three times on entering his presence."

The manager laughed.

"Don't you believe it! Women haven't spoiled Craig. He's one of the dearest chaps I've ever met. No affectation and a darned hard worker. You'll like him."

"The question is: Will he like me? Remember I'm going to ask a big favor of him."

The manager gave her a glance which somehow adroitly took in all her charms from the fadish little hat framing her exquisite face to the tip of her slim, pretty foot.

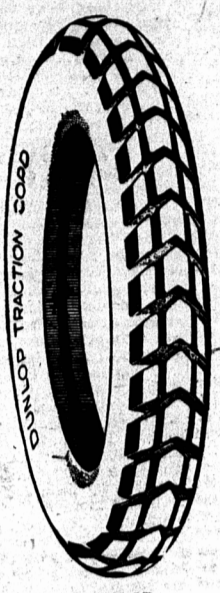
"If he doesn't," he commented dryly, "it'll be the first time Craig was ever guilty of bad taste."

They had reached the top of the steep stairway and the manager was puffing a bit. A door with a star painted on it confronted them.

"Only theatre I ever was in where the decent dressing rooms were upstairs," he panted. "Craig doesn't go on until 3 o'clock, so you'll have plenty of time to talk to him. Just a minute till I see if he's finished dressing."

He rapped at the door with the

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star decoration, opened it, poked his head in and said a word or two.

Then he motioned Doris. With a queer little breathless feeling which she couldn't control or analyze, she stepped into Craig Cullam's presence.

Doris' first impression, on stepping into Craig Cullam's dressing room, was of a bewildering array of reflections coming from the enormous, half a dozen Dorises, slim and modish in dark frock with a corsage of violets nestling against silver fox furs, confronted her from various angles. The manager seemed to have as many images as the hydra-headed monster of fable.

She blinked a little in the full glare of powerful electric lights. And then a tall young man rose from the makeup-shelf at the end of the room, around the corner of an up-ended wardrobe trunk, and came toward them, silently.

Doris' heart gave a queer, unexpected flop. She caught her breath involuntarily.

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