

THE MOTHER OF ED COOKE

By FANNIE HURST

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THE paradox of Ed Cooke's position was one that amused the town folk over a long period of time.

At thirty-five Ed Cooke was undoubtedly the community's outstanding figure. At thirty-five, this boy, whom they had seen grow from a tow-headed youngster to a bizarre, poetic-looking fellow, was anything but what he appeared to be. In spite of his shock of blond-gray hair, his tendency to loose clothing and flowing ties, his rather rolling gait and easy air of nonchalance, he was a self-made millionaire. And the paradox was that this up-and-coming fellow, whose widowed mother had kept a notion there, and whose success was entirely a matter of his own aggressiveness, was at thirty-five as much under the thumb of his parent as he had been at fifteen.

The town looked on and rollicked with laughter. Ed Cooke and his mother now occupied a fine six-room suite in the small city's best hotel. As a matter of fact, Ed Cooke was a silent partner in the ownership of this hotel. As a matter of further fact, Ed Cooke was the sometime silent and the sometime articulate partner in pretty nearly every enterprise in that up-and-coming oil community.

He had his finger in practically every financial pie in the district, was president of two banks, on the board of directors of every local corporation worthy of the name, owned real estate that had grown in value from a cost price of thousands to a selling price of hundreds of thousands, was the largest share-holder in the city's newest skyscraper and owned outright the two largest motion picture theaters in the state.

He was a local figure. He was more than that. New York capital reckoned with the operations of Ed Cooke. And he was more than that. The largest institute for the blind in the Middle West was the result of his direct endowment. At thirty-five he was an important philanthropist. Some said that his mother directed entirely this aspect of his activities. That was true. But so did she direct pretty nearly every other aspect.

When Ed Cooke came home to his mother, after a day of high finance or big business, he was just any small boy, and Mrs. Cooke, who at sixty looked like a large, lean, calculating eagle, reigned with a free, bold hand.

It was, "Ed, I won't be kept waiting for dinner." "Ed, you're to take me to the movies tonight." "But mother, I have a directors' meeting." "The directors meeting will keep. We are going to the movies."

And to the movies they did go. There certainly was no exaggeration to the local interpretation of Ed and his mother. He was a henpecked son.

"Mother, may I go out to the country club this Sunday with some of the boys for golf?"

"No, I promised the old ladies at my deaf institution to bring you out there."

"Mother, how would you like to take a trip to Hawaii with me? I need a rest."

"I'd hate it. We'll go to Cedar Springs for your rest."

And to Cedar Springs they would go.

People said that Ed Cooke had never dared contemplate marriage. They were forced to admit further, however, that so far as anyone knew, the hem of romance had never brushed by Ed's way. That is, until he was once seen out with a telephone girl in one of his banks. A little, demure, brown-eyed girl named Betty Simmons.

At that, gossip ran high. A chambermaid in his hotel reported to another chambermaid that Ed kept a journal under lock and key, and that in this journal there was pasted a picture of Betty Simmons. That, too, spread like wildfire through the town and then died down again. Nothing happened.

Ed had a little system which he employed with his mother, a psychological device. Let Ed so much as say to his mother, "I don't feel like going downstairs in the big dining room tonight. Let's have dinner in our rooms," and sure as fate, Mrs. Cooke, whose vitality at sixty was amazing, would up and prepare for a descent into the dining room.

Through long years Ed had come to learn this streak in his mother. Her unconscious expression of her strong self-will. She loved him with a passion that was ruthless. She tried to kill the thing she loved. And for years on end Ed, who was by nature an executive, an aggressor, a success-person, lived under the blight of her; thrived in spite of her; achieved, where a lesser man would have gone down to his defeat.

With every inch of the pressure of her passionate love for him, the mother of Ed Cooke, unconsciously, of course, tried to destroy him. And yet the boy, with ineffable sweetness; with an inextinguishable fortitude, struggled on against the odds of the

mother from whom he had inherited so much of that fortitude.

And then, to the stupefaction of all, when Ed was not yet even in his fortieth year, this fellow, so perennially good-natured, so tolerant and indulgent of his mother, so successful in his enterprises, so outstanding in his community, suffered what is technically known in the phraseology of bewildered doctors as a "nervous breakdown."

Ed Cooke went to pieces. His resistance seemed suddenly to snap. The sound of a person entering the room was enough to send him into tears. He took on a melancholia. The mere sight of his mother would induce a hysteria which his doctors regarded as most acutely serious. Ed Cooke was in a bad way.

Forbidden to enter her son's apartment, deprived of what she considered her divine right to succor this child who was begot of her very being, Mrs. Cooke felt abject terror lay hold of her heart. She was frightened into a new kind of submission. She was catapulted into a new kind of silence. It was nothing for her to crouch outside the closed apartment of her son for six, eight, and even ten hours at a time, until doctors and nurses dragged her away by force. She took to pattering among his belongings. She took to sitting for hours with one of his neckties, or one of his kerchiefs, spread in her lap. She took to fumbling among his drawers for this and that, searching for objects which might give her solace, even venturing, in her frenzy, to pry open locks that she might browse further.

One day she found the journal about which the chambermaid had tattled, and for hours she sat with it open on her lap, reading, crying the great retching tears of those who have scanty tears to shed, moaning into her hands and beating in a curious fashion, with her long, strong hands, against her breast.

After that, there was some talk among the physicians and nurses of sending Mrs. Cooke away. But there were limits to her submissions. She defeated them one and all. Planting her big body firmly in the room adjoining that occupied by her son, she refused to move. She defied them. She snapped her fingers at their insistings. She rose in all the curious power that was hers, and she won. Mrs. Cooke would not leave her rooms adjoining those occupied by her stricken boy.

In the weeks and weeks of his struggle with the adverse health that had overtaken him, she waited and watched and in her peculiar way, she prayed. It was horrible to see her pray. Submission came so hauntingly to Mrs. Cooke. Pleading was not part of her make-up.

Then one day, no one was ever to know how, the mother of Ed Cooke forced her way into his bedroom. He was seated there alone in a chair beside a window, looking with unseeing, lusterless eyes upon the scene below.

"Ed," said his mother, and approached him without preamble, "what is this I hear about you and a girl called Betty Simmons?"

It was as if she had struck him in his already stricken face. It was as if the pallor that was already there had receded into a still more devastating kind of pallor. It was as if hearing his mother's words the very heart of Ed Cooke had turned in the grave of his body.

And then automatically this sick man, her son, employed with his poor tired brain, the formula of psychology he had so often employed before. "I don't care a thing for Betty Simmons," he said, the lie fluttering from his lips like so many dead leaves, "I never want to see her again."

And true to precedent the figure of the mother of Ed Cooke straightened, and out came her dominating voice. "I want you to marry her," she said. "She is the only girl I have ever known whom I want you to marry. That is that."

After an incredible half hour with his mother, playing his game as he had never played it before, Ed Cooke appeared reluctantly to acquiesce to the demands of his parent.

That was the beginning of his consistent and complete convalescence.

The marriage of Ed Cooke and Betty Simmons is in its tenth year of fine fruition.

People say, of course, that the mother of Ed Cooke managed his marriage.

Ammonia Ends Slumber
Upon entering a street car at Philadelphia at midnight, a young man told the conductor he desired to leave the car at Queen lane in Germantown, whereupon he sat down and promptly went asleep. As the car neared Queen lane the conductor shouted lustily. Getting no response he shook the sleeper by the shoulder. Still no results. He then produced a small phial and held it under the slumberer's nose, and instantly he awoke and hurried off the car. Then the few other passengers were told that the phial contained a solution of ammonia and that "it wakes 'em up when nothing else will."

Unlikely Contingency
When Robert Underwood Johnson attended Earlham college, in Indiana, he had two favorites among the lecturers there—Henry Vincent, an Englishman, and Wendell Phillips, the orator and abolitionist. Johnson asked them to write in his autograph book. Vincent wrote his name first, and added the words: "Let justice be done though the heavens fall." When it came to Phillips' turn he wrote on the opposite page: "If justice be done the heavens will not fall."
—Kansas City Star.

Recalling a Case of Doughboy Nerve

I was attendant in a hospital in France and a doctor who had just been relieved from front line duty was dressing a patient who had lost both legs, and recognized him as a man he had attended at the front. The doctor turned to me and stated: "Delaney, this fellow has more nerve than any man I've ever seen. I crawled to him one night on the Meuse-Argonne front and found him sitting in the mud with one leg underneath him and one dangling on the side. I gave him an antitetanus and found both legs so near amputated by a shell fragment that there was nothing holding them but the tendons. I opened my instrument bag and severed the tendons from the left leg and started bandaging the stub. When about half through the man asked me to hurry, as several of his buddies were laying around calling for help. He had picked up my scalpel and severed the few tendons and remaining flesh that held his other leg on, and asked me if there was anything else that he could do to hurry my work so that some of his comrades could be relieved. That's what I call nerve." The patient only smiled as the doctor talked on to me, and then remarked: "It hurts worse now than it did then, doctor."—Rudlel Delaney, Five Hundred and Forty-third Engineers, V. W. F.

Bird Choked by Ring

While hiking over the Burgoyne trail, Peter Sage of Lee, Mass., says the Boston Globe, came across a young crow in the path which made several efforts to fly without success and appeared exhausted. Sage took it home, but it died in two days. Examination revealed a gold ring around its neck, which had choked it to death. The ring was completely covered by the feathers. After it had been removed and cleaned the lettering "M. G. H. to L. S. W." was found inside. It is supposed the mother bird picked up the ring after it had been lost and when the older bird attempted to feed its young the ring slipped over the head, eventually causing death by starvation.

Dara Careless

Beggar Woman—Spare me a copper or my children will have nothing to eat today.


Young Housewife—But it is only Monday. Have you spent your house-keeping money already?—Lustige Kolner Zeitung.

Right the First Time

"I won't marry you, and do you know why?"
"No. I can't think."
"That's why."

"My Husband Laughed

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