

MY GREAT EXPERIENCE

This Week's
True Story

IN ALL my life there has been but one great desire of my heart. I've hoped and yearned for the chance to tell to the world something about my early life. Since I am only a woman, my soul has its own secret corridors hung with pictures that only memory can unveil. In time, the drab ones fade. But those that represent my life's most vivid moments, pulse with stronger colors year by year.

Now, I am old. I have neither children nor relatives, so I feel free to relate to you the liveliest and most exciting recollection of my young life. In my life I have been much loved; I have often, myself, loved. I was very beautiful—I may say this to-day when my beauty has practically faded. But in those days love to me was a necessary thing. As air was the life of the body, so was love the light of my soul. Without its warmth I could not carry on.

I would have preferred death to a life without somebody to always care for me. Many women pretend to love but once with all the strength of their hearts and souls; while for me it has often happened so violent-

called the Maw-ray, and at the extreme end was a rustic pond full of weeds and floating grass.

Far out on the edge of the woods near the stream my husband owned a small hut in which he camped during the hunting season.

Aside from the ordinary line of servants, I had a chambermaid who I considered more than a servant. She was passionately attached to me. I had brought her back from the West several years before. There she was a deserted child. At first glance one would mistake her for a gypsy with her dusky skin, her black eyes, and her thick hair, always tightly clustered to her forehead. She was at that time fifteen years old,

After showing an amount of impatience, he rejoined:

"Oh! only scatter-shot; don't worry about yourself! That will be enough for me."

Then, in a peculiar tone he added: "You may boast of having splendid coolness."

I laughed loudly:

"If? Why? Coolness because I go to kill some animal that has entered our farm? What are you thinking of anyway?"

He seemed restless and did not answer but turned around, and looked up and down like one searching a house for a precious jewel which he believes undiscoverable.

I sat on the chair and watched his actions. All the while, I kept my eye upon him and, not my eye alone, but I watched with my heart also. I had always been very sympathetic with his childishness. To me men are but overgrown babies ever depending upon someone to idolize them as conquerors.

Well, we quickly made our way

To Every Married Woman Comes a Time When her Husband Becomes Indifferent. This is a Dangerous Period. In the Life of these two People it Resulted in a Tragedy. Here is a True Story that will be a Warning to Every Man and Wife.

queer to-night, Charles."

He murmured:

"As you wish."

And we remained silent and immovable.

At the end of approximately half an hour, I said in a low tone:

"Are you sure the animal will pass this way?"

Charles winced as if I had bitten him, and, with his mouth close to my ear he said:

"Make no mistake! I am positive!"

And once more there was silence.

I believed I was about drowsy when my husband pressed my arm and his voice changed to a hiss, said:

"Do you see him there under the tree?"

Honestly, I looked long but in vain. I could distinguish nothing save the tree in the distance. Slowly Charles was cocking the trigger of his gun.

I, too, was making ready to fire when I saw something as it made its way in our direction. I looked and beheld in the full light of the moon a man who came in rapid strides in our direction, his body bent as if he were trying to escape.

I was afraid. He continued to advance, I became stupefied, and uttered a cry. As I turned there was a flash before my eyes, a deafening report and a man rolled on the ground like a deer struck by a keen arrow.

Overcome with fear, I screamed. Then a heavy hand—it was Charles's—caught me by my throat. I was thrown around, then carried away by his strong arm. If I remember rightly, he ran, holding me up, till he reached the dead body lying in the leaves; he threw me on top of it violently, as if he wanted to break my neck. I believed he intended to kill me. He had just put his foot upon my forehead when, in his turn, he was caught gripped, and knocked

from his feet before I could realize what had really happened.

Finally, I managed to recover my senses. I stood abruptly and saw kneeling on top of him my maid, clinging like a fox with desperate energy, tearing his mustache and the skin of his face.

Then, as if another idea had taken hold of her, she got up and, flinging herself on the corpse, she threw her arms around the head of the dead man, kissing his eyes and his mouth; opening his dead lips with her own, like she was trying to find in them breath and to recall the long, long kiss which lovers alone can know.

Charles, getting up as carelessly as usual, gazed at me, as if he understood. Falling on his knees he said:

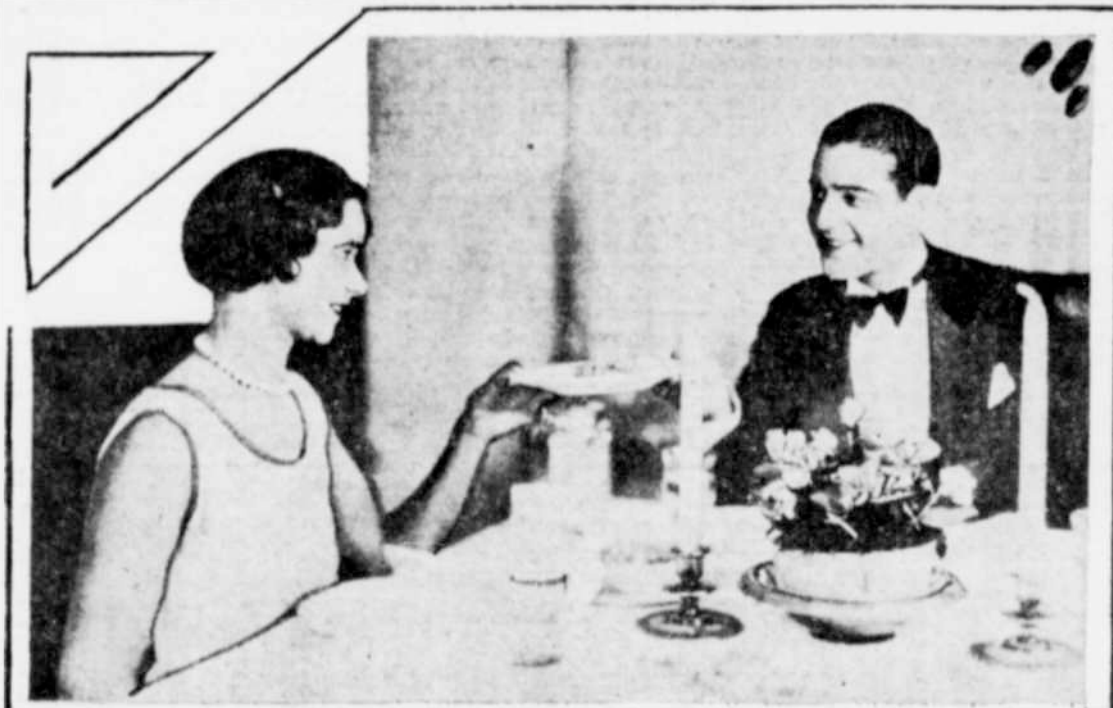
"Dear, please forgive me; I did not understand. I had been thinking he was your lover. I had suspected you and I have killed this girl's lover. It was she who deceived me and not you."

Of course it was wonderful to have him understand, but this did not soothe the anguish of my maid. As I stood leaning helplessly against the large oak I could not help looking at the dead lover. No one would have conceived of such a deep love, so free and faithful and so much stronger than death. To me, her sobs and kisses were secret expressions of that soul-grief of a stricken heart.

My husband became a new man. He became more interested in me in every way.

This experience has colored my entire life. It was a mere turn of fate that I, as innocent as I was and always have been, did not suffer the tragic consequences of the unfaithful wife.

THE END



"One evening, just after dinner, my husband, Charles, who appeared too extraordinarily happy . . . said to me: 'Would you like to spend about two hours out with the guns?'"

ly that I thought it would last forever; however, like a fire without fuel, it slowly died away, leaving no mark of its presence.

Now I shall tell you of my first great experience—in which I was indeed very innocent, but which, in a very human way led to misunderstanding.

Many years ago when I lived in Fredericksburg, the very quaint and home-loving settlement of Maryland, I was married to a man whom I did not love. True love needs, at any rate, freedom and impediment at the same time. Some people say that love which is imposed, sanctioned by law and blessed by the Divine is the only thing. And yet a legal kiss is never as good as a stolen one.

My husband, a tall man with the manners of a gentleman, was elegant. But he lacked intelligence. He always spoke in a blatant inelegant fashion. It was his greatest delight to utter a foolhardy opinion that cut like the blade of a knife.

He tried to create the impression that he had a mind filled full of ready-made views which had come to him through the natural channel of generations, from his mother and father who had themselves received them from their noble ancestors. When in conversation he never hesitated to make one of his narrow-minded suggestions without showing any embarrassment and without realizing that there might be other ways of looking at things. To hear him register his narrow views was to set one to thinking how sad it must be when a man can live in as great a century as this and yet fail to adopt a single new idea.

We lived in a cottage out in the rural section of the city in an almost isolated tract of country called Riley Ridge. There were many enormous melancholy trees with tufts of moss about them resembling the white beard of an old man. Just over the way the woods, a typical forest, which some referred to as a grove, was enclosed in a deep trench

but appeared to be twenty.

The fall came and we began hunting, sometimes on neighboring estates and sometimes on our own. Early in the season I had noticed a strange young man, coming around the place in the morning as well as at night. His visits were very frequent, especially at night. Then he ceased to come. I thought no further about it, but I perceived that my husband completely changed in his demeanor toward me.

He seemed rather pre-occupied and taciturn; he refused to kiss me and ceased to come to my room. I had insisted on separate rooms so I could live a little alone, but in the quiet hours of the night I could hear footsteps drawing near my room door and then withdrawing a few minutes later. And, my window being near the ground floor, I could easily hear someone prowling about in the darkness, stumbling over things at the side of the house. I asked my husband about it, and he, after looking at me intensely for a while, answered:

"It's nothing. Nobody's going to disturb you."

Now one evening, just after dinner, my husband, Charles, who appeared to be extraordinarily happy, with a sort of sly gaiety, said to me:

"Would you like to spend about two hours out with the guns? Something is stealing our hens."

I was surprised. I hesitated, but as he continued staring at me with much persistence, I replied:

"Why, certainly, my friend."

Of course I had always hunted like a man. It was quite natural that he should suggest that to me. But his appearance had now changed from the gay and frivolous to the curiously nervous. All the evening he seemed feverish, standing around like someone intensely agitated. That night at eleven he said:

"Are you ready?"

I arose, and, seeing that he had fetched my gun, I asked:

"Are you to load with bullet or scatter-shot?"

through the strip of woods to the edge of the forest. It was far into the night when half of the world was in slumber. Looking back at the house it was impossible to see a human form or to hear the slightest sound. The little cottage appeared most beautiful from the distance; the full moon gave it a lovely yellow tint. It made the old rusty roof sparkle in the light of the night. But, it was a cool night, and a sad melancholy numbness lay heavy all around.

The night was so suggestive it reminded one of the fall when all about is slowly ebbing, giving up its life to the sum of matter.

My husband and I walked on.

As we stood under a tree, in the large open space, a sense of freshness came over me. I could smell the rustic odor of fallen leaves. My husband said nothing at first, he was simply browsing about in the shadows; starting in one direction like someone possessed with the passion for a chase. I thought he was going to wait for someone, but when he decided to move on I gave up the thought.

When we reached the edge of the pond, it was fully one o'clock. I had begun to wonder why he should go so far away; my nerves were strained. I looked around me, everything was still. Not a breath of air caressed the tufts of rushes, save the slow movements which were scarcely perceptible upon the water. Frequently its surface was stirred and light circles gathered around like luminous wrinkles enlarging indefinitely.

When we reached the hunting cabin, my husband bade me go in first; then he slowly loaded his gun, and the dry crackling of powder produced a strange effect on me. He saw that I was shuddering and asked:

"Does this trial happen to be too much for you? If so, go back."

I was quite surprised but replied coolly:

"Not at all; surely we did not come here to return without accomplishing our purpose. You seem very

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that she had been wearing like a strait-jacket. She laughed heartily her eyes looking into the old woman's and sparkling mischievously.

"I bet you were a gay one yourself once," she said. "I'll bet you know what it was like to hit the ceiling on a big night—eh, Mauma?"

Lissa was shocked. Mamba had taught her to treat age with great respect. But to her amazement she saw that Mamba was pleased.

She answered with her surprising young, vital laugh:

"Things was different in dem days, an' if Ah is broke loose den dere ain't nobody libin' to tell on me now. But nowadays gals gots to behave."

"Sure," Gardinia agreed, as she took a seat and let her admiring gaze take in the cozy and tastefully furnished room, with the sunny garden showing beyond the window. "Sure, and don't you worry about Lissa. If she'll just listen to me she'll have a good time and she won't get into no trouble."

She looked around for her friend, but Lissa had gone into the next room to change from her Sunday dress. At the same moment Mamba also noticed that they were alone and immediately took advantage of the opportunity.

"Tell me," she begged in a lowered voice, "who dis yaller 'nigger' Lissa goin' roun' wid? She won't tell me nuttin' 'bout um, but Ah seen um 'tother day when he come by for she, an' Ah wouldn't trus' um far as Ah could 'trow um."

Gardinia said, "Prince aint so bad. He's too smashed on himself to last long with anybody else. But he flings the long green high and far, and he'll show her a good time."

Mamba leaned forward and said confidentially, "Ah 'fraid for my gal. She ain't like yo' an' me, Sistuh—she ain't seen nuttin' ob mens, an' dat yaller 'nigger' gots woman-chaser wrote all ober um."

"Don't you worry, Mauma," Gardinia said reassuringly, "the first

thing I did was to put Lissa wise, and besides, she's one of them cool sisters. Ain't no danger of her losing her head."

"Well, all Ah asks is dat yo' keep an eye on she for me, an' ef trouble breaks any time let me know. Ah is ole but Ah ain't no fool at takin' care ob my chillun."

"That's right, old lady, I just bet you aint no fool. But there ain't goin' to be no trouble."

Lissa came in then, and the three chatted for a few moments. Then Gardinia took her departure.

"Dat's a good gal yo' gots fuh friend," Mamba said when the girl had gone. And Lissa stood wondering just what the definition for good could be in Mamba's lexicon.

Labor Day—steaming and hot, with an opaque sky and a red sun burning through it. Underfoot the pavements streaming with condensed moisture and flinging back reflections of houses, shop windows, sky, in colours soft and wonderful to see. Summer's flag end, with its spent ardours behind it, and autumn around the next corner. And for to-day nothing for the Negroes to do but to be glad, to leave the wharves, the bakeries, the building of the houses, the stoking of furnaces, and tell the world how good a thing it is to be alive, to have laboured, and now to claim a respite.

September weather. Down in the white residential streets, block after block of closed mansions sleeping away the hot hours in gardens where Nature spent her beauty with open hands, and still had more each day, to fling over deserted piazzas in a foam of climbing roses, to pour in pools of oleander bloom between moss-hung live oaks. On King Street the fashionable stores dozing behind their drawn blinds. Here was a town that the winter tourists would not recognise, a town claimed for the day by its darker half. Its pavements swarming with

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