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SOILED GOODS

White Supremacy,
Sex Slavery in New
South.

By CORA BALL MOTEN

Melanie Bruce told it to me in the dim confessional twilight of my book-lined study. When she came to the end she laid her slender, camellia-white hand, upon mine and said, quite simply and earnestly, "You may tell it, you know. That way it may serve to help. Otherwise there could be no purpose in sin and suffering."

So—I give it as nearly as possible in her own words, the words of a woman before whom life still stretches in a dreary monotony of meaningless triumphs and listless moods.

"I was fifteen when Tazewell Craig first saw me," she began, softly, and it seemed to me that her voice came from far distant places. The flickering firelight made rosy shadows upon the ivory whiteness of her heart-shaped face.

The heavy cloud of her dark hair flared like an aureole against the dull gold of the great chair upon which she pressed it. I turned my eyes away. The poignant beauty of the face against the listless tragedy of that voice and pose was more than I cared to carry into the land of memory where I knew it would often and often return to me.

She went on—
"I was coming home from the little one-room colored school set like some secret disfigurement in the hollow just outside the small southern town and on the edge of the Negro district."

"In that little town of my birth as we are told of the women of Siam who are all the common property of their king, every woman, or girl, in whom was a trace of African blood, was the potential property, in body, at least, of any white man who branded her with his lustful claim."

"Tazewell Craig was just home from college and he claimed me. There was no appeal from that claim, for me, anyway. I, who was myself the fruit of a white youth's unbridled lust satiating itself upon the violated helplessness and ignorance of my beautiful blue-eyed brown mother. To her there seemed no other destiny for me as, perhaps, in that environment and under those customs there was not."

"So—in the soft-scented summer nights Tazewell Craig would come in his long, low-hung roadster and take his will of me."

"Discreetly, when she heard the powerful purr of his motor my mother would fade from the scene. Masterfully and arrogantly he would fling the door wide and stride into the small room that for his delight he had furnished with soft silken draperies and fine linens, as he had decked me in scented silks and soft cloudy transparencies for his pleasure."

"Never was harem slave more luxuriously apparelled for her dark lord's delight than I for the wild bacchanalian orgies of sheer animal passion and unbridled lust that this pale-faced, sleek-haired, son of the state senator, took as his right. I did not rebel. Why should I? I knew no other way but this. Submission to white supremacy was the law by which, and in which, we lived and moved and had our being. I was only what circumstances made me."

"When Tazewell Craig went back to college he left money with my mother and promised more to take me through the trying time when I should bear his child, another bit of indiscriminate flotsam on the sea of a topsy turvy racial life."

"The baby came, a fragile white flower, premature fruitage from an immature tree too soon and too fiercely forced into bloom. For a few days it lingered and twined its small helplessness about my heart before it drooped and faded into a blessed oblivion. Even then a thread of gladness ran through the somber grey-ness of my grief like a filament of gold. I knew that my baby was safe from the nameless and half-sensed fears that forever beset the paths of such as she and I—and I was glad."

There was no break in Melanie Bruce's voice but it seemed to me that I sensed a brittle hardness in a softer tones as she went on. Like a steel sheathed in velvet.

"Tazewell Craig, home from his junior year, married the fragile, anaemic blonde daughter of the town's banker. At the back of the new bungalow that was their wedding present from his father a smaller but picturesque little house was built, a doll-like replica of the larger one—the servant's quarters. In this I was established to minister to the comfort of the bride with the labor of my hands and to satisfy the groom with the soft delights of my body."

"For a year I served them both and then—Alec came."

"Alec had never been in the South before. He knew nothing of the actual facts. Like so many people who read and hear but cannot conceive the muddy depths of some facts of life he did not understand when I refused to let him come to see me."

"Alec was a chauffeur for the visiting capitalist upon whose report the eagerly hoped for expansion of the town's one bank depended. It was during the dinner party in his employer's honor that I met him. Sent around to the kitchen by Tazewell's wife to eat with the extra servants imported for the occasion it was my duty to attend to that service after the guests were cared for."

"The moment our eyes met I knew how fate had tricked me. The warm thrill of the electric message of Alec's love for me and mine for him flashed between us as it was intended it should from the birth of time. Only in my breast was the tragic knowledge that mine had been deflowered leaving only the dragged remnants of a befouled purity to offer this clean-souled, clear-eyed brown godling of my dreams."

"With the impetuosity of the true lover who knows no time nor waits assurance, Alec wooed me with glance and gesture from the moment of our meeting."

"With magnificent effrontery he covered my hand with his own as I set a filled plate before him and at the apprehensive gasp of the other custom-wise helpers he followed it up by slipping his arm playfully around my waist when I leaned over to give Benny his."

"To the thrilling sense of that firm muscled touch I felt my own hot passion pulse in a throbbing flood along every nerve and fiber of my being. Under its pressure all the fierce longing for the mate that Nature meant for me washed over me and drowned out caution and inbred fear for a swift delicious moment."

"I smiled down at him, letting my whole tremulous body rest, relaxed for a single instant in that heaven of his arms."

"At sight of that smile on my face and that brown arm around my waist the faces of those watching, fearful, dark serfs, went ashen with apprehension. They knew to the last individual, whose property I was. They knew by the bitter knowledge that comes from brute power of gun and faggot that until the white man's brand was blurred out by his own loss of desire or his voluntary repudiation of such as I there was death in the cup for the dark lips that sought to quaff the nectar of my love."

"But Alec thought only of love and a quick wooing of one of his own."

"At Benny's involuntary low-voiced warning, 'You bettah let dat gal alone, boy.' He only laughed and drew me forcibly down to his side, reaching eager lips to my own for a swift caress. Brief and casual as the quick brushing of his lips against mine was, it set the fire in my blood into a sudden devastating flame. I lost my head, and gave him kiss for kiss."

"When the guests were all gone and I was alone, I took stock, calmly and with reason once more enthroned. I knew that I must not expose this stranger whom I knew for the lover Destiny meant for me, to the fiendish vengeance that the man, who claimed for his own lust the body I longed to offer, would exact."

"So, when a few minutes before I closed the kitchen door to go to my soft little prison in the shadows beyond, I heard a light knock I opened it wide and met the eager eyed face there with a cold stare."

"For a breath my look shocked Alec into hesitant uncertainty, but only for an instant."

"Come on beautiful. Why the icy stare? I only want to be friendly. Are you brushing for the evening? My

"Please go away," she whispered desperately. "I—I will lose my place if you are seen with me here."

boss has given me time off. I told him I had met my Fate. He was laughing as he talked, holding his hat in his hand, waiting."

"I-I-I am not allowed to have company on the grounds. I stammered, unable to see that happy look of friendly good-will fade into staring incomprehension."

"That's O.K. with me, pretty baby. Just get on your old grey bonnet and we'll mosey along to wherever the folks mosey in this burg. I'll wait outside. My boss is a good scout, he doesn't mind my using the bus when he isn't needing it. My heart sank at the easy expectancy and matter-of-factness of the deep voice."

"I can't go out, either!" the words rushed out breathlessly. I thought I heard the stealthy tread of rubber heels coming into the kitchen from beyond the closed doors of the dining room. I did not dare to let Tazewell Craig find me talking to a man of my own people in that darkness. Quickly and quietly I closed the door behind me and stepped out into the velvet darkness."

"Sensing the seriousness of my action and tone, Alec pressed closely to my side and lowered his voice to a discreeter softness but there was uncomprehending wonder in his half flippant question, 'For the love of Pete. Why?'"

"Please," I whispered, desperation adding urgency to the plea, "go away. at once. I-I will lose my place if you are seen with me here."

"He could understand a plea like that. His chivalry immediately answered it."

"Oh, that's the way the land lays, eh? O.K. Kid, I'll vanish, but I've got to see you—later."

"Yes—yes," I acquiesced lastly, glad of any respite from the tense situation of the moment and foreseeing nothing of the peril in that quick affirmative answer of mine."

"Once in the sheltering darkness of my own rooms I undressed and threw myself wearily across my too-luxurious bed. I knew from long experience that with the wine of the elaborate dinner warming his blood, Tazewell would come to cool his heated passion with the ardor of my forced kisses. No matter that my young strength was tired and worn in the service of the bloodless creature he had married I must nevertheless find energy to meet his arrogant demands upon it."

"Only for a breathing space did I rest. I must deck myself for the sacrifice demanded of me."

"I bathed in a scented water and drew from its tissue folds the wisp of transparency that Tazewell had sent out to me from the store that morning. Draping it about my slenderness I stood for a moment before the long glass of my dresser. Through the misty veil-like substance my naked body gleamed softly white, revealed in every line and curve."

"I raised my arms and removed the confining pins from the heavy-masses of my cloud of glossy black hair. It fell about me like a cloudy mist. I heard the outer door creak softly and sighed, stiffening for what was to come. Always that door of mine was left unlocked save when Tazewell Craig turned its key from within."

"Light steps tip-toed quietly across the outer room. I snapped off the light. Only the moonlight flooded the silken nest wherein I stood an immobile statue of living, pulsing flesh



waiting to go again through my ever recurring Gethsemane of the soul."

"Then—I gasped in startled terror-ridden joy. Standing in the doorway was—not the debauch-splashed, bestial pale-faced mask of the suave mannered, sleek gentleman of his own world that greeted me after his lesser masquerade of the day was done—No—my heart leaped into my throat with the surge of feeling—Alec stood in the doorway."

"A broad band of moonlight lit his dark eyes with the shining luster of water in a woodland pool. His strong brown face was eager with love and longing. For a long wordless space we stood speechless but for the first gasp of surprise. Then he spoke. It was only three words but in them was all speech, all life—'Oh, you beautiful!' he said and his voice was a caress and a benediction."

"I could not move. I could not speak. Love held me silent, in a vise of poignant longing that drowned fear, submerged thought, overwhelmed sense. I had never known love of my kind—only the bestial lust of the conqueror."

"Only for a moment Alec stood in the door. In one swift stride I was in his arms. The hard strength of his young muscles thrilling through the thin mist of the clinging draperies that were the only defense of my passionate body against his throbbing nearness."

"I threw caution to the winds and surrendered my lips to his for a long delicious kiss in which the whole world was lost. His lips still crushed on mine, Alec lifted me in his strong arms and carried me across to the great silken sheeted bed."

"The world was blotted out."

"The band of moonlight had faded from the room when I awoke to the horror of reality again. Instead, the white glare of the unshaded electric light played on the dreadful scene before me."

"Like a picture of Dante's inferno flashed on the screen of that small room, I saw the two men struggling for the moment."

"Alec, just as he had sprung into the fray, his magnificent torso with its rippling muscles playing freely and easily under the bronze skin, the while he shook and battered the pitifully sordid pale-faced thing that Tazewell Craig had become in the hands of a man."

"Tazewell, flailed the air with arms and legs while he struggled and gurgled for the breath that Alec was slowly choking out of his vile throat."

"As I looked out of love-drugged eyes the terrible import of that struggle leaped out at me like some monstrous unknown beast of the nether worlds. I sprang up and tried to fling myself between the struggling pair. I might as well have attempted to stem Niagara. With a grim smile, Alec nudged me aside and continued to shake and work the now limp

figure of the man that had dared to dispute his right of possession."

"I crouched against the inner wall and pled in breathless whispers for the man I loved to stop before the irrevocable happened. At last my terrified whispers seemed to reach his consciousness. With a snoring laugh he dropped the cringing, gasping thing on the floor and strode across to me."

"His face was stern."

"So that's the explanation!" he bit off the words. There was the bitterness of disillusionment in his voice. 'And I was fool enough to be planning to marry you and take you back with me today. I even told the boss. He was giving me the car as a wedding present to take my honeymoon back home ni. He said he'd go on the train.' The hard laughter of his lips was suddenly checked by the widening horror in my eyes that had swept past him to the man on the floor."

"Tazewell Craig, his little piggy blue eyes glittering with insane rage, had slipped his hand into the open drawer of my dresser from where he lay half sprawled under it and found the loaded revolver he kept there."

"Returning consciousness had come quickly and clearly in that space while Alec had stood arraigning me with look and word."

"Seeing the look of wide-eyed fear Alec wheeled suddenly just as the explosion of the shot reverberated through the room. In that same instant I felt a jolting shock as if someone had struck me a terrific blow and then everything was blotted out."

"God and Benny guided Alec after that moment when I lost consciousness from the shot that had missed him and found me. We were in Ohio, speeding through green countryside when I awoke to clear, understanding consciousness."

"The colored doctor in the little city a hundred miles from the small town where my tragic life had begun, had cared for my wound at Alec's urgent plea. Benny had told him how to get there and what to do."

"Benny, expecting trouble had been hanging around the back of the premises to try to help Alec whom he knew did not understand, and for whom he had taken a sudden warm liking. He heard the shot and rushed in just as Alec dropped the limp body that would never retrieve a consciousness choked and driven out into the black void of nothingness to roam forever in the hell of its own lustful making."

"Together they waited for any evidence that others had heard the shot. Only the soft noises of the summer night came into the disheveled room of tragedy and death."

"Benny knew that daylight would bring pursuit and the rope and faggot. So—he had told Alec how to put those things far behind him. 'You must take her, too,' Benny had counseled wisely. 'Dr. Black over at C— will fix her up if she is alive when you get there.'"

"Roaring through the night we had traveled beyond the confines of that slow-witted, savage territory when the morning light broke. All through the day I lay in a stupor in the tonneau of the great car. Alec only paused long enough from time to time to give me the quick attentions that the kindly, loyal black doctor had ordered."

Melanie Bruce paused. The firelight flickered on her closed white eye-lids. From the shadowed corner where I sat I looked at her and a great pity welled up in me for both her and the man, Alec, my friend, who had brought her there to me that day over a month past now and left her with the heavy look in his eyes and the hopeless disillusion in his tones."

"Keep her here, Aunt Clarice," he said, 'until the hue and cry is over. I am off for South America. My boss is financing me. He understands conditions down there and is with me. Maybe—some day—when I can forget—that she is—soiled goods, I may—'"

He broke off and left me there and last night in the dim confessional twilight, Melanie Bruce told me her story.

THE END