

LEGEND

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Legend by Clemence Dane

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CLEMENCE DANE

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LEGEND

BY

CLEMENCE DANE

Author of "Regiment of Women" and
"First the Blade"

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Messrs. Mitchell and Bent will shortly issue 'The Life of Madala Grey' by Anita Serle: a critical biography based largely on private correspondence and intimate personal knowledge.

That was in *The Times* a fortnight ago. And now the reviews are beginning —

The Cult of Madala Grey. . . .

The Problem of Madala Grey. . . .

The Secret of Madala Grey. . . .

I wish they wouldn't. Oh, I wish they wouldn't.

No admirer of the late Madala Grey's arresting art can fail to be absorbed by these intimate and unexpected revelations . . .

Delicately, unerringly, Miss Serle traces to its source the inspiration of that remarkable writer. . . . And — this will please Anita most of all —

We ourselves have never joined in the chorus of praise that, a decade ago, greeted the appearance of 'Eden Walls' and its successors, and in our opinion Miss Serle, in her biographical enthusiasm, uses the word genius a little too often and too easily. Madala Grey has yet to be tried by that subtlest of literary critics, the Man with the Scythe. But whether or not we agree with Miss Serle's estimate of her heroine, there can be no

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two questions as to the literary value of the 'Life' itself. It definitely places Miss Serle among the Boswells, and as we close its fascinating pages we find ourselves wondering whether our grandchildren will remember Miss Serle as the biographer of Madala Grey, or Madala Grey as the subject matter merely, of a chronicle that has become a classic.

That is to say — *La reine est morte. Vive la reine!* Anita will certainly be pleased. Well, I suppose she's got what she wants, what she's always wanted. She isn't a woman to change. The new portrait in the *Bookman* might have been taken when I knew her: the mouth's a trifle harder, the hair a trifle greyer; but no real change. But it amuses me that there should be her portrait in all the papers, and none of Madala Grey; not even in the *Life* itself. I can hear Anita's regretful explanations in her soft, convincing voice. She will make a useful little paragraph out of it —

Miss Serle, whose 'Life of Madala Grey' is causing no small stir in literary circles, tells us that the brilliant novelist had so great a dislike of being photographed that there is no record of her features in existence. An odd foible in one who, in our own recollection, was not only a popular writer but a strikingly beautiful woman.

And yet, from her heavy, solitary frame (we have no other pictures in our den) that 'beautiful woman,' with her flowered scarf and her handful of cowslips, is looking down at this moment at

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me — at me, and the press cuttings, and *The Times*, and Anita's hateful book. And she says, unmistakably — 'Does it matter? What does it matter?' laughing a little as she says it.

Then I laugh too, because Anita knows all about the portrait.

After all, does it matter? Does it matter what Anita says and does and writes? And why should I of all people grudge Anita her success? Honestly, I don't. And I don't doubt that the book is well written: not that I shall read it. There's no need: I know exactly what she will have written: I know how convincing it will be. But it won't be true. It won't be Madala Grey.

Of course Anita would say — 'My dear Jenny, what do you know about it? You never even met her. You heard us, her friends, her intimates, talking about her for — how long? An hour? Two hours? And on the strength of that — that eaves-dropping five years ago' (I can hear the nip in her voice still) 'you are so amusing as to challenge my personal knowledge of my dearest friend. Possibly you contemplate writing the story of Madala Grey yourself? If so, pray send me a copy.' And then the swish of her skirt. She always wore trains in those days, and she always glided away before one could answer.

But I could answer. I remember that evening so well. I don't believe I've forgotten a word or a movement, and if I could only write it down,