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THE ONLY GIRL WHO EVER BROKE D'ANNUNZIO'S HEART

Interviewed for the First Time--By Alan Dale

An Intimate Picture of the
Woman "With a Riddle
for a Face," Who May Be
a Greater Bernhardt

IDA RUBENSTEIN probably is the most interesting theatrical personality in Europe. Paris knew her first, only a few years ago, as a dancer, from Russia, and was captivated. But she presently justified her boundless ambition by exhibiting dramatic talent of the highest order.

D'Annunzio, greatest of modern literary geniuses of the decadent school—spendthrift and dandy, who had broken many feminine hearts, including that of Eleanor Duse, and cynically wrote a novel about it—saw Ida Rubenstein and threw himself at her feet. For her he wrote his tragic masterpiece, "St. Sebastien," while attacking the citadel of her heart with all his acquired skill. She produced his tragedy, brilliantly, and then coldly turned her back upon him—the only woman who had successfully resisted D'Annunzio—the first to break his heart.

By ALAN DALE.

VERSAILLES, that once sheltered poor Marie Antoinette before she lost her head, now shelters the enigmatic, mysterious actress-dancer known as Ida Rubenstein, who is never likely to lose her head. Versailles, full of memories of the past, leaps into the immediate present as the home of the much discussed Russian, who has blossomed forth into a full-fledged Parisienne. And it is at the Trianon Palace that Mile. Ida Rubenstein abides. (I may add that it is a hotel, because if I didn't, you would probably discover it.)

But, like most Parisian ladies—even of Russian birth—Mlle. Rubenstein has what they call a *pieds-a-terre* (a foothold) in Paris. She may lose herself at Versailles whenever she chooses, but she has a nook here, at No. 82 Rue Vanneau, which she calls her atelier (workshop). You see, I'm translating everything I can for you, out of sheer goodness of heart. Thank goodness, I didn't have to trip out to Versailles, where all the tourists go. I was not obliged to chat to Mile. Ida amid the atmospheric souvenirs of Marie Antoinette. There is a fitness in everything. She bade me to her atelier at No. 82 Rue Vanneau, and thither went I, filled with curiosity.

Mlle. Rubenstein had just closed an engagement at the Chatelet Theatre in "Helene of Sparta," that ran for six nights only—probably owing to its stupendous success. However, know that she was no poor little struggler-ess, cast down by the non-run of a colossal production. What cared she? More—the king is dead; Long live the King! Mlle. Rubenstein is billed to appear in Oscar Wilde's "Salome," in a few weeks to come, with special music, special costumes (or non-costumes?) and specially special scenic effects.

I had never seen Ida Rubenstein. "All Paris" has spoken to me of her, and I know her, of course. She is always doing things. Last

year when I was in Paris she produced an enormous affair called "The Martyr of St. Sebastien," by D'Annunzio, with music by Debussy, and that, too, seemed too big even for Paris. In fact, Ida Rubenstein is a power here, as women can be when they are odd, or beautiful, or fantastic, or energetic. She produces the best of everything, and if it fails, is she cast down? Not on your life. *Jamais*, which means never!

They put me in a little elevator, at No. 82 Rue Vanneau, and told me that it would stop all by itself at Mlle. Rubenstein's atelier on the sixth floor. I hate those elevators minus elevator boy. They move as though they never wanted to get anywhere—or intended to get anywhere—and there you are, locked in, and powerless. As I was enclosed in this personal ascenseur I said goodbye to myself and shut my eyes. When I awoke—it seemed an hour after—I was at the sixth floor, at the open door of Mlle. Rubenstein's atelier.

There she stood, in a narrow gray satin skirt, so tight that it showed every line of her figure. A hat with one of those backward feathers that look like the rudders of boats added to her height, and she wore a veil, well over her face. It was a curious riddle of a face. She was livid—almost green. The whiteness of her skin gleamed strangely. Her lips, scarlet, like a wound, gave one an odd sensation of mingled fascination and repulsion. Two dark eyes pierced the veil. Mlle. Rubenstein looked pensive, *distracted*, and exceedingly sad. Her hands, with the long, tapering fingers, were unadorned by a single jewel. A single diamond glistened among the laces on her unemotional breast. She was a remarkable figure, and the sight of her oppressed me vaguely. I felt I should never be able to "make conversation." Words failed me—which is unusual.

She stood there in her immense studio, lighted from above (the studio, not Mlle. Rubenstein). It was a colossal apartment, with a slippery floor. At one end was a raised platform, red-carpeted and railed. A few books, yellow-bound, graced a shelf. It was all very cold and systematic. A few minutes (probably seconds) later, she smiled. If the Sphinx could smile, it would smile exactly as Mlle. Ida Rubenstein did.

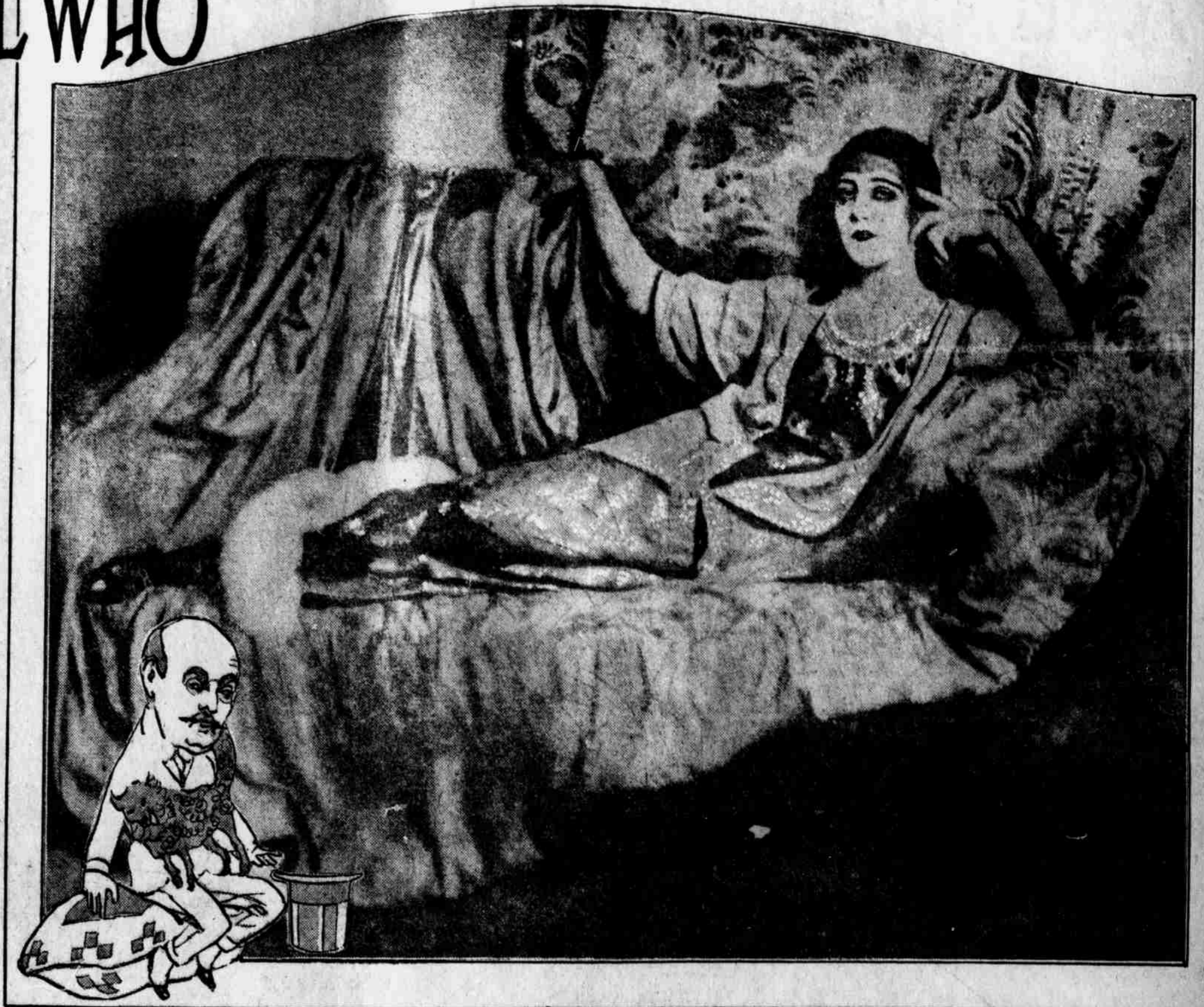
"I practise the dance here," she said apologetically, in perfect English—almost the English of an Englishwoman—"although I live at Versailles."

Her voice, though low and well modulated, echoed through the room. I could not imagine her practising dancing anywhere. She seemed so languid. Presently she sank upon a sofa and looked at me through her veil and half-closed eyes. A tiny little dog, the cutest, tiniest spaniel I have ever seen, dashed into the room and, doggily, begged me to take him on my lap. The little dog broke the ice. Mlle. Rubenstein broke into a human smile as I fondled the dog.

"That is Cora," she said, with a semblance of animation. "Isn't she a dear? I have fifty dogs at my home in Versailles, and, above all, I have a leopard, that I acquired in Africa. I love my leopard better than anything, but I cannot bring it to Paris, because it is savage. Cora is the only pet I have here."

At any rate, I had made a hit with Cora. She nestled in my arms and never even looked at Mlle. Rubenstein, who still lay on the sofa in apparent fatigue.

"Paris is so frivolous," she said presently,



The Newest "Art" Photograph of Ida Rubenstein—"She was Livid—almost Green. Her Lips, Scarlet Like a Wound, Gave One an Odd Sensation of Mingled Fascination and Repulsion," Says Alan Dale, Who is Seen Sitting in a corner with Her Dog

after I had lured her from a veritable jungle of monosyllables. She had said "Yes" and "No" so often that I had begun to despair of her, and had nearly given her up, when, somehow or other, she seemed to spring into life. She lifted up her veil, and her white face looked whiter, her red lips redder, and her dark eyes darker.

"Paris is so frivolous," she repeated, "that sometimes I think it is above its head. My beautiful production of 'Helene of Sparta'—quite magnificent, and I was Helene—has closed. The same thing happened with 'The Martyr of St. Sebastien.' Do you know why? Paris was jealous of D'Annunzio. It was the first time he had ever written in French, and they were afraid. He prefers to be his own master. In the future, I think, he will write plays instead of novels. He has acquired a taste for it. But Paris is so light!"

She looked at me cynically. Her face now seemed drab in the fading light. The little warm body of Cora was a comfort to me.

"You know that they won't have Ibsen in Paris," she went on. "They simply will not tolerate him. Oh, yes, 'Nora' they don't mind, because it is so easy. The other plays they will not tolerate. And Strindberg—they do not know him here. I once saw 'The Father' in St. Petersburg. It is very dreadful—too dreadful for Paris. Paris wants to laugh all the time. Then Paris must dine, and Paris must sup, and the theatres must not interfere with that. I am going to produce 'Salome,' the one-act play, and it will be good for an entire evening."

She was getting a bit less languorous, but with the best of intentions one could not have called her a merry soul.

"They will dine before they come to see 'Salome,'" she said, "and it will begin very late, and they will sup when they have seen 'Salome,' and it will end very early. They like that. One dares not to make a serious appeal, for they are not serious in Paris."

"What do you wear as Salome?" I asked rather stammeringly.

"I have not yet seen my costume," she said carelessly (and I wondered!). "but it will be very beautiful. It is specially designed for me. Yes, I dance the Dance of the Seven Veils, and I try to do something new. You know we have not finished with 'Salome' in Paris. It is all so beautiful! I consider myself an actress and dancer. I think the dance is a part of the drama. It is an expression of drama. The real dancer must be dramatic. She cannot dance unless she has drama in her soul. I love to combine dancing and drama. Yet I love serious plays. My nature is serious. I cannot laugh at the Boulevard theatres in Paris. They oppress me."

Was it a pose? If so, it was well done. She had not budged from the sofa. Her veil was still lifted, but she had ceased to smile.

"They want me to go to America," she said softly. "They want me to act in America, but—it is so far! I have never been there."

I was silent. It is not wise to contradict a lady. Rumor saith that once, a decade ago, Mlle. Ida Rubenstein was in America. Rumor, forsooth! Prate not to me of rumor. If Mlle. Rubenstein wants me to believe that she has never been in America, I'll believe it. That did seem to be her insinuation.

"If I ever go to America," she said, "I want to play drama there in English. I want to play Hedda Gabler, which I love. That is my

ambition. Another of my ambitions is to play 'Helene of Sparta' in German in Berlin. Perhaps I shall do it. Then I dance always. If I ever come to America, I shall dance as well. But, you see, I speak English. When I was a little girl I had an English governess in Russia, and I spoke even better than I do now. We are all linguists in Russia."

"Do you know your fellow-countrywoman, Nazimova, who has made a hit in America, playing in English?"

She looked at me inquiringly. "I never heard of her," she said. "She could not have been famous in Russia. Once a famous Russian actress, now dead, went to New York and played there in Russian, but she was not a success. No, I do not know Nazimova. Do they like Ibsen in America?"

I gave her a brief—frantically brief—history of Ibsen in the United States. She listened with closed eyes, or at least I fancied that she listened. Perhaps she didn't. In any case, I do not think that a career in U. S. A. is of vast importance to her. She makes her magnificent productions here in Paris, and if they fall she does not worry. Her look of profound melancholy is merely habitual.

Cora barked and jumped from my lap. I felt that I could not stay in that oppressive studio any longer without Cora. Mlle. Ida Rubenstein sat up and addressed some endearing epithets to Cora. Yet this little dog did not go to her. It capered round and round the room. Mlle. Ida laughed aloud for the first time. The dog amused her. I certainly did not.

She showed me pictures of "The Martyr of St. Sebastien" around the walls of the atelier. She had five hundred of them by which to remember that most costly of experiments. She pointed to them rather listlessly, trailing her gray satin skirt on the polished floor. The little dog barked itself away. I shivered slightly. She put down her veil and moved toward the door.

Alone, in the little self-working elevator, I breathed again. I could not understand Mlle. Ida Rubenstein, though, and perhaps because her English was so perfect.



Mlle. Rubenstein, as she appeared in the Principal Part of Her Ballet, "Sheherazade."



One of Ida Rubenstein's Poses in "Helene of Sparta."

From a Paris Poster of Mlle. Rubenstein as Helene of Sparta.

