

May Yohe Dies in Poverty at 72

TWO ERAS IN THE LIFE OF MAY YOHE

Toast of Gay 90's,
'Darling' to a King,
Flung Big Fortune
Away for Love.

Ex-Owner of Hope
Diamond Winds Up
Her Mad Career as
\$16 W. P. A. Clerk.

By United Press

BOSTON, Aug. 28. — May Yohe, gay nineties madcap and once owner of the superstitiously feared but treasured Hope diamond, died of a heart attack today in her Back Bay apartment, where she lived the frugal existence of a \$16.50-a-week W. P. A. clerk.

In the ill-lighted flat, near the deathbed of the 72-year-old woman, who once said her life was like a roller-coaster, rested the choicest possession of her late years of obscurity. It was a photograph of a bearded man who inscribed it "To May, 1898," and signed it "Edward."

He Became King.

King Edward VII, who entertained May at dinner when he was Prince of Wales and she was the musical comedy favorite of London, Paris and New York, gave it to her.

Then May was Lady Hope, bride of Lord Francis Hope, wearer of the 44-karat Hope diamond, vivaciously beautiful and unconventional, toasted in all the pleasure spots of two continents for her wit, charm and daring.

Soon afterward, society was scandalized. Lady Hope eloped with the handsome, dashing Captain Putnam Bradley Strong, and in 10 years she threw away a fortune in jewels in a vain effort to hold his love. People talked of retribution of the Hope diamond, according to their lights.

Married Third Time.

May married Captain Strong in 1902, divorced him in 1912, and in 1914 married her third and last husband, Captain John A. Smuts, British veteran of the Boer war and nephew of the famed General Jan Christian Smuts, of the Boer army. Smuts announced his wife's death. He said she arose yesterday "feeling fine," but was taken ill during the morning. She died early today.

The couple's last years were spent in poverty. Smuts was bedridden with arthritis for months at a time, while his wife worked as a scrub-woman or at other menial tasks to find food and shelter.

Citizenship Lost.

This spring, Smuts was stricken once more, and May applied for a W. P. A. job. She learned then that, although she had been born in Bethlehem, Pa., of English, Indian and Pennsylvania Dutch ancestry, she had lost her citizenship through marriage to the Briton.

In April, the aging woman was restored to the citizenship of her native land and was assigned to a W. P. A. project in which vital statistics of the city were transferred from ancient ledgers to card catalogues.

"It's fascinating work and I'm glorying in it," she said. "I'm happier than ever before and proud as Lucifer of my job."

Something of her old gaiety was reflected in her eyes and voice as she announced proudly she could "hold my own" with younger co-workers.



... just before she died in poverty.

... at the height of her fame in '91.

"Life of the Party."

"In fact," she said with a laugh, "they call me the life of the party. I love the work and I'll keep on doing it as long as they let me."

So she spent the last months of her life poring over musty records of other lives, but none of them as amazing as the career of the Pennsylvania Dutch girl with Menonite forebears who married an English lord, ran away from him and her chances at the coronet of a duchess, divorced and married again, tried comebacks on the stage, worked as a waitress, opened tea rooms and entered a final decline which age made hopelessly permanent.

Life of Tragedy.

The tragedies of her swift-moving life were ascribed from time to time to the voodooed Hope diamond which she wore only twice, but the reckless, headlong spirit which led England to nickname her "Mapcap May" could have accounted for them.

She was 25 when she dropped her role of stage favorite to marry, in 1894, Lord Francis Hope, heir to the dukedom of Newcastle. This caused furore in the halls of Deepdene, ancestral English home presided over traditionally by ladies born to title, but was only a taste of the uproar that May brought to British society with her escapades of the heart.

"Darling" to Edward.

Edward, then Prince of Wales and a prototype of the later Wales who forsook his crown as May was to forsake her title, called her "Maizie, Darling," in a close friendship which dithered the gossips of England and America.

Seven years of marriage to Lord Francis ended with her scandalous elopement with Captain Strong, son of a former Mayor of New York, with whom May had been carrying on a tumultuous romance for weeks.

Years later, when she found out her mistake and regretted it lightly, May expressed her feelings with a typical witticism:

"At first there was hope; after that there was a strong chance of misery."

He Spent Recklessly.

Her captain husband was as reckless as she, a big spender, and May did not know how to apply brakes.

"I've been around the world four times since I ran away from Lord Francis," she recounted, "and let me tell you the adventures of that fellow Jules Verne aren't in it with the things I've been through."

"He never landed dead broke in Buenos Aires; He never went hungry in Yokohama; he never had to sing in cafes on San Francisco's Barbary Coast to keep body

and soul together; he never had to work as a waitress in a Barbary Coast lunchroom; or get down on his knees and scrub as I did up in the shipyards at Seattle."

Divorced—With \$2.30.

Divorced by Lord Francis and married to "Putty," May sought peace once more in divorce, her jewels gone, her beauty fading. When "Putty" finally left her, May's fortune was \$2.30. In Portland, Ore., in 1910, she divorced him and for a time there was speculation she might remarry Lord Francis, whose second Lady Hope had died.

But the unpredictable May married Captain Smuts in what appeared to be the one great love match of her career. Poverty,

hard manual work and illness were unable to shake them apart.

They lived in a cheap Boston lodging house, and in 1924 there was a shooting episode to lift May from more and more welcome obscurity.

Captain Smuts was found shot and wounded in their rooms. Police questioned May, but Smuts insisted it was an accident which occurred while he was cleaning his gun.

Tried Comeback in Vain.

None of May's efforts at returning to the stage were successful. She was plump and in her fifties and not even the cheaper houses cared to present her mature charms or the voice that once rocked high-priced audiences with

her favorites—"That Old Girl of Mine," "Goodby, Dearie" and "Dear Old Virginia."

Her successes were such productions as "The Arabian Nights" and "The Crystal Slipper."

In her years of poverty she sold most of her old mementoes and trinkets for food, but she kept one and died with it near her bedside, the picture of Edward, whom she met at a dinner given by Sir Arthur Sullivan, the composer.

She had her memories, too, and sometimes, for old time's sake, she would sing for her fellow workers, in a voice still low and rich, one of her songs, like "Many and Many a Weary Mile," from "The Magic Opal."

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Bethlehem - Biography - Yohe, M.

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