

Bulgarians

Respectfully dedicated to my godfather, H.R.H. Ferdinand, Czar of Bulgaria.

Written for The Western Home Monthly by Ferdinando De Foras.

THE sun was slowly setting in the hills surrounding the house of little Xenia, but the girl in the doorway heeded it not. Her eyes were fixed on the narrow road, the only path leading up from the village to the small cottage where her grandmother and she had lived alone for many years.

Every evening, his work finished, Danilo would come up for supper with the old Bulgarian woman and the young girl, barely seventeen, who in but two short months would be his bride. To-day for the first time he was late, and the girl wondered.

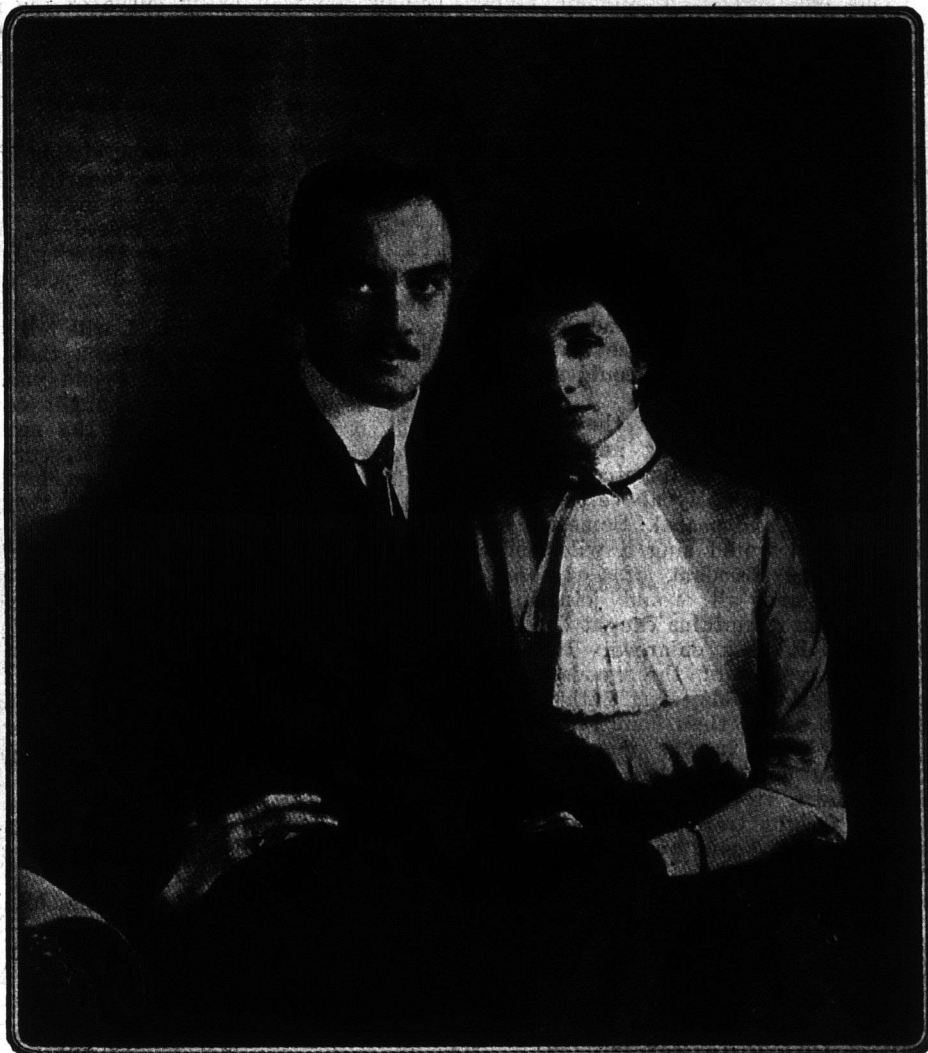
"Xenia, my love bird," called the cracked old voice, "Come, the soup is getting cold." The girl only raised her hands to her brow and stood thus, deep in thought, never answering. In the faint rosy light of a Bulgarian sunset she made a charming picture, characteristic of her country. Her linen sleeves

The old woman crossed herself, "long life to our Czar, and may God help his children."

A silence fell. On the sky far off the sunset was slowly dying, and the shadows crept darkly under the trees near by.

Suddenly from the darkness below, the figure of a man emerged, running towards the cottage. Xenia knew him at once, and as she ran eagerly forward to meet him a smile came to her face. "Danillo, sweetheart, mine, you come at last," she panted, stopping short as she noted the anxiety written on his face. "Danillo," she urged, taking one of his hands, "is the war?" The eyes of the man, bloodshot as they were, never left her face. "My own—my own little girl," he said hoarsely.

"Danillo," she pleaded. "Tell me quickly."



The German Emperor's only daughter, Princess Victoria Louise, married to Prince Ernest Augustus, son of the Duke of Cumberland, May 24th

and shirt showed white against the dark blue of her dress, quite plain except for its tiny garlands of purple flowers. Thus standing she looked slim indeed, and strangely beautiful with heavy braids of black hair falling to her knees. The only touch of color was the red handkerchief tied loosely on her head, and the crimson of her brown cheeks. Her face had the expression of silent watching. Somehow she looked appealing, perhaps because the face was only the face of a child, or rather, because, oddly enough, in that child's face one could discover the eyes of the woman, dark deep like pools of sleeping water.

"Xenia," called the old voice again, "Danillo will not come to-night; maybe he has gone to Varna!"

The suggestion aroused the girl. She turned slowly to her grandmother. "I have been thinking," she said wearily, "Danillo would not have left for Varna without letting us know."

The old woman shook her head. "Xenia girl—Bulgaria must come first—maybe Danillo went to see what was the truth about these rumors of war—"

"Grandmother, dear, it can't be the trip to Varna that keeps him—but bad news down there in the village. War, perhaps, I feel it is war."

The man's voice dropped. "It is harder than I thought," he muttered as if to himself, and before she realized what he was about to do he took her in his arms roughly, crushing the red lips to his.

In the trees near by a bird was singing, the light breeze moved the leaves, all the night seemed hushed as if to hide Danillo kissing passionately Xenia's eyes, her cheeks—even the little curls on her forehead.

A moment thus, and then the man stepped back as if from a blow. He was near, and yet Xenia felt as though he were far away.

"Sweetheart mine—the voice shook—" "I must leave you. It is war, dear, and I must join the others who are going to-night—now."

She could see him, or rather his shadow, coming nearer again, and something shook in her throat as he bent over her hands, kissing the palms reverently.

"I love you—you and Bulgaria—he said slowly, "and pray the God Almighty that our country shall be victorious, and that I may come back."

He was going, but the girl caught his coat. "Danillo," she pleaded, her voice steadying itself as she whispered, "Where you go, I shall go too."



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