

The Woman Who Wrecked the World

The Tragic Romance of Sophie Chotek---She Dreamed of a Throne and Unleashed the War of 1914-18

By H. De WISSEN

PEERING at history, one sees through the red mists of war the faces of women—delicate faces framed in castle windows, or heavier featured maids in peasant skirts warming old taverns with coarser beauty. A smile or a slight, an ambition or a whim, whispered searing words from some cozened charmer, and then, rumbling as summer thunder, the great catastrophe—war. Charming women, their dainty hands have ever unleashed the passions of combat, from Helen of Troy down through time to the Little Lady of Bohemia. Was not Venus enamored of Mars?

The French, they know these things to be true, they are very old and they are very wise, so they say: "Cherchez la femme." From the English there came to us the thought, "The Woman in the Case." But in the sterner lands of Central Europe such things could not be; for there men ruled and women were but "hausfrauen." So they thought.

But the hand that rocks a cradle can also rock a throne. And through the assassin's smoke of Sarajevo, on that awful summer day five years ago when first leapt the flames of war, one discerns the face of a dainty, petite, high-cheeked woman with rounded chin and fragile nose, intangibly attractive, yet not unlike many of the women of Bohemia. She possessed wondrous eyes, demure, yet deep, vague, yet welling with ambition, a vast ambition, that was to bring her and the man she loved to Sarajevo—to their doom—and the world to war.

You have never heard of the Little Lady of Bohemia, Sophie Chotek?

She, an obscure little countess of Bohemia, daughter of an impoverished household, a mere lady-in-waiting at the court of Vienna, won the heart of Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austrian throne. And, in her persuasive way, she awakened in him a desire to do justice to those dragooned people of Hapsburg domains, conspicuous among them the Czechs of Bohemia, the land she loved. So did the oppressors at Vienna come to fear the ascension of her husband to the throne. So came it that they struck him down, and she with him. So from that assassination war burst over Europe.

NOT far from the Imperial Palace in Vienna can be seen a distant house that crests green terraces and shows through the trees in a shimmer of white. It stands solitary, aloof; its back to the pretty countryside, its face to the dawn—and to the Emperor. In that white house lived Isabella, Archduchess of Austria, favoured of Franz Joseph, the solemn mentor of his court. It was an austere house, one in which a royal chaperone should dwell.

In the train of the great Isabella was an ambitious woman, small and prettily made. Her face was round and delicately coloured; her eyes, large and blue, could be at times as innocent as a baby's—a gift she did not despise. But it was her hair that had attracted the majestic Isabella, and made others glance more than passing at the obscure little lady-in-waiting. Blue-black, she wore it coiled and braided, an aureole of swarthy bands, a tiara of sable, glossy, abundant and fragrant. The ambitious little woman was Sophie Chotek.

Not strikingly beautiful, but possessing that magnetism so superior to mere regularity of features, she was admired regretfully by visitors to the white house of Isabella. In Vienna the law of caste was then the highest law in the land, and the dainty Sophie had not been bred to the purple. Impoverished and of low title, merely a Bohemian countess, her rôle in the establishment of Isabella was only a little more elevated than that of a servant. Men called her the "Little Lady of Bohemia," and sought to make love to her, always to the vast indignation of the royal chaperone, Isabella. Nor would Sophie have any of them. There was another.

One morning, a slim figure of a girl, dressed all in white, her abundant hair uncoiled and tumbling about her shoulders. She opened one of the tall windows that faced the garden and after cautiously glancing about waved a tiny handkerchief. Excitedly it fluttered in her hand until, in answer, there came through the trees a voice she knew, softened in song. He sang a Viennese love-song as he came down the path, a thousand patches of gold running over him as he walked—the sunshine draining through the trees. A thousand happy voices stirred about him—the voice of the Little Lady of Bohemia in greeting.

The man was Franz Ferdinand, whom the world then expected would some day be Emperor and King of Austria-Hungary. He believed that the little Sophie would some day sit at his side in the throne room of Vienna. Fate wrote it otherwise. They would love and be wed? Yes. They would rule? No. For there were men and women in high places in Vienna, Budapest and Berlin who plotted.

Toward noon on the day that Franz Ferdinand had clandestinely met the Little Lady of Bohemia below her window, the mighty Isabella took the air in

her garden. As she proceeded majestically along the walk something metallic crunched against her slipper. It was a gold chain and locket. She picked it up, and, recognizing it instantly, fingered it thoughtfully.

"Yes," she mused, "it belongs to Franz Ferdinand. What could he have been doing here—in my garden?"

Isabella frowned, the way a chaperone should. Her suspicions were aroused; she regarded the locket that hung from the chain. Isabella was but an Archduchess, but she possessed feminine curiosity which

To An Old Oak

(Removed from Smith's Lawn, Windsor Great Park, to make way for an Aeroplane landing place.)

A sturdy British Oak, with gnarled trunk
And knotted limbs, I saw thee; and anon
I glanced thy way and like a galleon sunk
There was no sign to show where thou hadst gone.
For mortals who have run th' allotted span
There is some sign erected, thus to say:
"Here lieth such and such an worthy man,
"Who, in his prime of life was called away;"
But thou, whose birth was e'en before the time
Of Human memory, twice, yea! thrice removed,
Art felled by axemen, charging thee no crime
Except that staunch and sturdy thou hast proved.
Some wondrous bird alights where thou hast stood,
A winged monster, roaring in its might,
Whose pilot thought on thee as so much wood—
An obstacle to modern means of flight.
Didst thou not from the tiny Acorn's shell,
A green and slender shoot put forth to Heaven?
That God might see thy birth and say—"Tis well!"
"To thee, brave Oak, will life and strength be given."
Didst thou not grow apace with passing years
That foiled the schemes of Statesmen and of Kings?
Hast thou not stood a Sentinel that hears
And learns the great futility of things?
Canst thou forget the first sweet mating birds
That made thy branches tranquil home of love?
Or, wilt thou e'er dismiss the tender words
Th' impassioned swain spoke whilst thou sighed above?
.....Methinks 'tis most unjust that thou shouldst fall
A victim to th' exigencies of Strife,
And yet, the Patriot gives at Britain's call,
Like thee, his World's inheritance, his life!

HECTOR MACKNIGHT,

C.F.C., Sunningdale, Berks.

21st August

knows no rank. She snapped the locket open and regarded the image she saw there with startled eyes. Gathering up her skirts quite gingerly, she proceeded back to the house.

A few moments, and Sophie Chotek ceased to be lady-in-waiting to the Imperial chaperone. Nor was she allowed time to pack her belongings; for in the eyes of Isabella she had committed grievous sins—risen out of her class, blinded the heir to the Austrian throne, and made of Isabella's very proper abode a trivial trysting place for ladies-in-waiting. Weren't there enough actresses in Vienna making trouble for the Hapsburgs without a little countess increasing the holy Emperor's worries? Pandora's box contained harmless mysteries compared to what the locket held—it was Sophie Chotek's picture that had smiled out at the enraged Isabella.

Franz Ferdinand went into a royal rage when he heard that the Countess Sophie had been dismissed, but he was powerless. He knew that she came from an old but obscure Bohemian family, the house of Chotek, Chotkowa and Wognin. They owned a little debt-ridden castle in Bohemia, and there Countess Sophie took refuge from the wrath of Isabella, the Imperial chaperone. Five years passed, Sophie remained in seclusion in Bohemia, and, whenever he could escape from his duties in Vienna, Franz Ferdinand went north to his castle in Bohemia and met her clandestinely.

Our October Cover A Work Of Art

IT has never been the privilege of any Canadian magazine to present to the public a piece of art more striking, more beautiful, or more distinctive than the Halloween subject, "The Masque," which Mr. T. V. McCarthy has prepared for the October Issue of Everywoman's World. The story behind the painting is linked with the two-part serial "A Paris Incident," by Frederick Gordon Hawes, the first instalment of which appears in this issue and which terminates next month. This fact, in itself, makes the cover doubly interesting, and we mention it that our readers may expect a really worthwhile conclusion to a good story, additionally enhanced by Mr. McCarthy's interpretation of one of the most gripping incidents in the tale. You will want to frame the October cover. Don't by any chance miss the issue. A coupon for your convenience and that of your friends always appears on page one of every issue.

—THE EDITORS.

From her home of seclusion, Sophie finally went one day to the Bohemian castle of Franz Ferdinand at Konopischt. There came, the same day, to his Marie Annunciat, Abbess of the Hradraschin, and Ferdinand had taken them into his confidence. Franz had told them that he and the Countess Sophie were

to be married, and had pledged them to secrecy. They were the only witnesses of the ceremony, and they kept their pledge. Franz Ferdinand was called back to his duties in Vienna and Sophie remained at the Castle of Konopischt, a lonely place in the Bohemian forests where the old Emperor never visited. Her oldest child, Sophie, was born to her there; and still the Emperor never knew. Years passed, Sophie lived in the castle, and Franz Ferdinand remarked more frequently that he was going up to Bohemia for a rest.

It was during those days that she remained in seclusion at Konopischt that the Little Lady of Bohemia played at being Queen, poising an imaginary royal train, fancying the weight of a crown on her pretty brow. She transported her future to the palace at Vienna. To her life became a nursery playroom, her ambitions toys. She played with fancied policies. She realized that when her marriage became known a storm would break, but she was confident of the love of her husband. "I will renounce my throne rather than sanction a dissolution of our marriage," he had told her.

During those days when she was alone in the castle in Bohemia, Sophie reflected that the Austrian law would not allow one of her rank to ascend the throne; nor could children born of her union be in the line of succession. Another woman might have surrendered, but Sophie determined to change the inevitable.

There burned in her that fierce patriotism common to the suppressed little nationality of Central Europe. Through her girlhood in the little poverty-stricken castle of the Choteks she had heard of the wrongs done the Bohemians. She knew that they were numerically a power. Once Bohemia was placed upon the same political footing in the empire as Hungary they would be a decided political power. She thought if she could induce Franz Ferdinand, when he came to the throne, to revive the old kingdom of Bohemia, and, in the south, to form a "Triune" kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia-Dalmatia, this would make him extremely popular with the Slavish elements in the monarchy. It would strengthen her position, and that of their heir, whom she was determined to put upon the throne. And she knew that, secure in her husband's love, she could appeal to his sense of justice which was their due. She knew that in Vienna "Warranted without vice, will stand unhitched, can be driven by a lady."

She knew also, what Vienna did not know, that she was the lady to do the driving. Yet, she was not a schemer who had married him merely to make him the instrument for her ambitions. A clever, far-seeing woman, she was looking into the future, and she knew that unless justice were done the small "crazy-quiet Empire" would be torn apart and the castle of Konopischt she dreamed and bided her time.

There came a day when she was only half happy; it was not in her heart to be unhappy. Her Franz Ferdinand was sent to the tropics. He was gone on Imperial business, many, many months; indeed so long was he away that Sophie began to grow uneasy. Had the old Emperor learned of their love? What if something had happened to Franz Ferdinand? She felt that only disaster could keep her from him. She was confident of that. Then from over the seas came letters, wonderful letters, the thoughts in them softened by the tropics where he worked. And he followed the letters home.

He went first to his distant home at Konopischt, to Sophie and his baby girl; then to his official home, the palace of the Emperor. Franz Ferdinand had worked strenuously on his foreign mission, and so delighted was old Franz Joseph that he named him Inspector General of the Army and hailed him as the father, the swollen spider, Karl Ludwig, "Blue Beard of the Hapsburgs," was first heir. The spider, though, had not long to live; nor did the old Emperor wish him to live. Franz Ferdinand was his choice. The young man was high in favour. He had been in Vienna but a few days when the Emperor made known a wish. He wanted Franz Ferdinand to marry. He wanted to see an Emperor and Empress in embryo ready to ascend his throne. Old Franz Joseph knew the Hapsburg blood. He wanted Franz Ferdinand out of trouble, happily, "safely" married.

Meanwhile, Sophie remained in the forest castle of her husband. Even the little Bohemian village nearby had heard the rumours drifting up from Vienna. "The Crown Prince has returned from the tropics," it was said; "the old Emperor is fore- ing wives upon him."

A less clever woman would have gone straight to that Franz Ferdinand in the aged ear of the Emperor was his wife, the mother of his children—for other children had been born in the castle at Konopischt. But Sophie had more sense

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