

# My Life With Europe's Royal

Surprising Revelations of the Extravagances and Dissipations  
Scapegraces, Many of Whom the World War Wiped Out,  
Told by an American Girl Who Married Into the

The Crown Prince  
Rudolph  
of Austria,  
Whose Sudden Death,  
Together with the  
Baroness  
Marie Vetsera,  
Has Always Been  
the Greatest  
Mystery of Modern  
Royalty.

Mrs. Alma Vetsera  
Stearns,  
of New York and  
London,  
Who Believed She  
Was the  
Daughter of  
Crown Prince  
Rudolph,  
and Recently  
Killed Herself in  
London Under  
Very Strange and  
Mysterious  
Circumstances.

## CHAPTER VIII.

(Continued from Last Sunday)

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WHEN I first entered European society the mystery of the death of Crown Prince Rudolph of Austria and his young companion, Baroness Marie Vetsera, was still fresh in everybody's mind.

Naturally I was keenly anxious to learn all I could about this tragedy. Who would not have been? It was the profoundest, the most baffling, the most tragic mystery of our time. The heir to a great empire and his sweetheart, a beautiful young woman of noble family, died suddenly in a hunting lodge at Meyerling, near Vienna.

All the power of the Emperor was exerted to suppress the facts of the tragedy. The newspapers were only permitted to state that the Crown Prince had died of illness and his body was shown lying in state in Vienna to prove this assertion. No reference to the death of the Baroness was permitted. Everybody of inferior rank who could possibly have had any knowledge of the facts was exiled or disappeared from the face of the earth in some way.

And yet everybody knew that some great tragedy lay behind the death of the Prince. Perhaps half a dozen versions were whispered about and continued to be at the time of my entry into society. One version said that the infuriated fiancé of the Baroness broke into the lodge and killed both the Prince and his companion. Another version had it that the Prince,

forced to separate from his sweetheart by his father, killed her and himself. One story even described horrible mutilations which had been inflicted on the Prince by his enemies.

What was the truth in all this cloud of mystery and confusion that surrounded this notorious tragedy, when I entered the society of those who had known many of the persons concerned? During the first year of my married life I made the acquaintance of Princess Pauline Metternich, member of a family that enjoyed the highest position at the Austrian Court and possessed rights of equality with reigning houses.

The Princess had many relations in France and was allied by marriage to my first husband, Count Bernard de Pourtales. She was a niece of the famous Princess Metternich, who had been one of the most brilliant figures in Parisian society during Napoleon III's reign. The Metternichs were one of the proudest families of an Empire that was noted above all others for its ancient blue-blooded aristocracy, and they had figured in court life for centuries. They had always held such high offices as chancellor, grand chamberlain and grand marshal of the court and few secrets of Hapsburg history could have been concealed from them.

The Princess Pauline Metternich, whom I met, was a frequent visitor to Cannes, and in the season of which I write we became quite intimate. Now, I felt, was my opportunity to obtain some light on the darkest enigma of our time, and one evening, when the Princess was in a confiding

mood, I approached the subject. From her and other sources I have pieced together the statement that follows.

To my amazement the Princess informed me that the Crown Prince had not been shot and had not committed suicide, but that his head had been crushed in by a full champagne bottle. She declared that she had the information from one who was present at the affray, but that she could not tell and no one would ever tell who threw the fatal bottle. Crown Prince Rudolph's death, she insisted, would remain a mystery forever.

While she gave me much unknown information concerning the Crown Prince's life, she also told me many other secrets of the imperial Hapsburg family—a glimpse into a chamber of horrors that has no parallel in the modern world. No wonder that the Hapsburg empire crumbled into ruin during the great war and that the ancient imperial family, the heirs of centuries of crime and madness, were humbled to the dust!

The Crown Prince Rudolph, only son of Emperor Francis Joseph and the ill-fated Empress Elizabeth, was the most dissipated member of his family. All the hereditary evils had set their mark on him. Of frail physique, a neurotic, his eyes blinked and his hands trembled constantly. Drinking and other excesses had increased his natural defects. Yet many persons thought him very charming.

"Rudolph's greatest misfortune," said my informant, "was his marriage to Stephanie, daughter of Leopold, King of the Belgians. They never knew a mo-

FIFTY crowned heads have lost their royal dominions since the great war—princes, princesses, spendthrift grand dukes have perished or are in exile and in debt. To me this is the most astounding development of the World War.

I HAVE LIVED my life among the royal races and spendthrifts of Europe.

I HAVE ENJOYED many a tête-à-tête with that prince of high livers, the Prince of Wales, afterward King Edward VII.

I HAVE SEEN the incredible extravagances and dissipations of the Russian Grand Dukes, which have recently caused their expulsion from France.

I HAVE BEEN the honored guest at the most decollete fête ever given by that imperial scapegrace, Grand Duke Boris.

I HAVE BEEN one of the elect of royal Cannes, the world's most luxurious, delightful and aristocratic centre of gaiety.

I HAVE BEEN held in the Sultan of Morocco's harem until the European powers rescued me.

I HAVE BEEN entertained by the superb Maharajah of Kapurthala, who gave me some of his priceless rubies.

I HAVE SEEN the harem of the dreadful Sultan Abdul

Hamid of Turkey and learned its secrets.

I HAVE SEEN a duke, a grandson of Spain, climb at midnight to the window of my palace on Venice's Grand Canal and threaten to kill himself for love of me.

My first husband was a nobleman of historic French family and an ambassador in the diplomatic service. My second husband was a nobleman of even more ancient family and great social connections. My American aunt, the Baroness de Charette, who introduced me to French society, was married to a kinsman of the royal Bourbons.

Hence my opportunities to see all that was most alluring and extravagant in the intimate royal life of Europe. The war sent me to America, and now that it is over I look back upon the old era of sensuality, self-indulgence, intemperance and prodigality and I can understand why it helped to bring on the great catastrophe, and why so many shining lights of that period have been condemned to ruin and oblivion.

I shall describe more fully in these columns the exciting episodes to which I have referred and many others besides, so that American readers may have a clear view of a most interesting, recently closed chapter in the world's history.

ment's happiness. She did everything imaginable to infuriate her sickle husband, and he in return deceived her shamefully."

The worst villain, I was told, in the tragedy of Meyerling, was Prince Philip of Saxe-Coburg. He was married to Princess Louise, sister of the Crown Princess Stephanie. Philip had indulged immoderately in all the joys of life. He was a toper and a sensualist to a positively shocking degree. I am sure he would never have been tolerated even in the reckless royal circle in which I moved at Cannes.

Prince Philip ill-treated his wife so outrageously that she nearly lost her reason, and then he took advantage of this to put her in an insane asylum. From this she escaped after several years' imprisonment and eloped with a young Hungarian officer.

Prince Philip lived in Vienna and aided and encouraged Crown Prince Rudolph in his wickedness and dissipations. The Crown Prince had an exhaustible wealth at his command and was beyond the reach of law. From his youth he had been noted in Vienna for his shameless pursuit of virtue in high or low position and his entire disregard for the rights of husbands.

His marriage made no difference in his conduct, and within a week he was engaged in a new affair. The Crown Prince was unattractive and Rudolph made no secret of his contempt for her. Her failure to produce a male heir to the throne added to the miserable situation into which she fell at the Austrian Court.

Prince Philip of Coburg acted as an intermediary for Crown Prince Rudolph in his affairs and appeared to find it an enjoyable occupation.

The Crown Prince employed an army of creatures to minister to his desires, from princes down to that strange being, Bratfish, his private cabdriver. It was Bratfish's mission to convey women to the secret entrance which led to the Crown Prince's apartments in the imperial palace. Rudolph trusted this man more than any of his followers.

Behind the vast old imperial palace in Vienna—the Hofburg—was a narrow lane separating it from the palace of the Archduke Albert. In the wall of the imperial palace, in this lane, there was a small iron door.

Many a fair friend of the Crown Prince was driven to that little door. At a signal the door opened and the expected person was conducted down a long corridor, up to the roof of the palace, then over the roof and down again to the Prince's apartments in front of the building. Nobody could have followed a missing daughter or wife in there.

It was in the year before her death that the Crown Prince cast his fatal eye on the Baroness Marie Vetsera. She was only eighteen years old, as lovely and exquisite a creature I believe as the world had ever seen. Her father, Baron Vetsera, belonged

to the Hungarian nobility and her mother was a member of a Greek family named Baltazzi, that had acquired great wealth in Constantinople.

The Vetseras were known at court, and the Crown Prince's attention was first attracted to the little Baroness Marie at a fashionable race meeting. He sent messages to her and arranged a secret meeting. The poor little girl was completely fascinated by her imperial lover and fell deeply in love with him. There were many secret rendezvous.

The affair became known at court and caused more excitement than any of the Crown Prince's numerous intrigues. The girl was unmarried, very young and of high position. Her family demanded that the Emperor Francis Joseph should intervene and call his son to account. On the other hand, there was ground for suspecting that Rudolph intended to obtain a divorce from his wife and marry the Baroness Marie Vetsera.

My informants told me that Rudolph, who was a reckless man and on bad terms with his father, intended to accept the throne of Hungary, which was eager to separate from Austria. Such a project was, of course, treason to the Emperor of Austria and might have been punished by death, even though the offender were Crown Prince.

Two days before the tragedy of Meyerling the Crown Prince had a long interview with the Emperor. What passed was kept secret, but it is certain that the old monarch absolutely commanded his son to cease his affair with the Baroness Marie Vetsera. There was a dreadful rumor in Vienna that the Baroness was really the old Emperor's daughter and that he used this fact to make sure that his son would obey his command, but I am informed that there was no basis for the rumor.

The Crown Prince planned another meeting with his sweetheart. Did he intend to say good-by to her forever or did he intend to defy his father and live with her? No one will ever know, for the answer was buried in the grave with the couple.

On that fatal January day Rudolph asked an accomplice, a countess, to help the Baroness Marie to get away from the Vetsera palace. This woman asked Marie, with the permission of her mother, to go out for a drive. In the presence of the servants this woman told the coachman to drive to a certain jewelry store in Vienna. The obliging countess went into the store when she came out the Baroness Marie Vetsera had left—to enter the imperial palace by the secret door.

On the same afternoon Crown Prince Rudolph, with his sweetheart, set out in a great landau, loaded with all sorts of comforts, for his luxurious hunting estate at Meyerling.

He had invited a party of gay friends and bon vivants to join him. There were archdukes and princes of his family and several lively members of the nobility.

Prince Philip of Coburg, I was told, had just been commissioned by his father-in-law, King Leopold of Belgium, to persuade Rudolph to separate from the Baroness and cease to humiliate the King's daughter. On the other hand, the Baltazzis, cousins of the Baroness Marie, acting on behalf of the Vetsera family, wished Rudolph to make some arrangement less degrading to their family.

The evening was spent in feasting and copious drinking. Rudolph became wildly excited and offensive. The Baroness retired to her room. The quarrelling was renewed among the men and a violent scuffle took place.

Suddenly a full champagne bottle was hurled across the room and struck the Crown Prince in the side of the head. He fell to the floor with his head completely beaten in, great fragments of glass sticking deep into his brain.

who would surely denounce them to the world.

A revolver was raised and she fell dead with a bullet through her head.

This version of the tragedy, which was told so long ago, has recently been publicly confirmed by the former Archduke Leopold Ferdinand, a cousin of the Emperor. Leopold was an original character, who abandoned his imperial rank long before the fall of the Empire and married an actress.

Some of the highly placed persons involved in the tragedy told the Emperor what had happened. He was so overwhelmed with horror and grief that he simply gave orders to suppress the details of the affair as far as possible because of the disgrace it would bring on his imperial house. That is why it has always been involved in mystery, and probably always will be.

The church bells of Vienna began to toll when the Crown Prince's death was announced. Then the rumor spread that he had committed suicide, and they stopped ringing. The Emperor sent word that there was no truth in the rumor and they tolled again.

In order to conceal the horrible affray in which he had died the Crown Prince's skull was restored to a natural shape by means of wax and hair. This work was done by a well-known court sculptor, long in the confidence of the Emperor. Thus prepared, the body looked presentable as it lay in state for the customary period.

The body was buried in the crypt of the Capuchin Church, where the Hapsburgs have been laid to rest for eight hundred years. Before the body could be placed there the Emperor had to answer a strange old mediaeval list of questions concerning the dead. One question was: "Did he die by his own hand?" The Emperor answered "No" and followed the coffin alone into the vault.

Then came another problem for the cynical court officials in Vienna—to hide the fate of Baroness Marie, so that the court fiction might be upheld that there had been no scandal and that Rudolph had died accidentally. The Baroness's mother, Baroness Helen Vetsera, was ordered by the Emperor, on the day the tragedy was known, to go immediately to Venice and there give out a report of her daughter's death by drowning.

The details of the secret burial of Marie Vetsera have been given correctly, I believe, by Countess Marie Larisch, who was a first cousin of Crown Prince Rudolph. She was a daughter by amorganatic marriage of Duke Ludwig of Bavaria, brother of the Empress Elizabeth of Austria. The Countess Larisch acted as an intermediary between Rudolph and Marie Vetsera, and she had a better opportunity than any other person of learning certain details of their tragedy.

On the day following Marie's death Count Stockau and Alexander Bahndt, both uncles of Marie, received orders from the Emperor to proceed to Meyerling in the evening. They were taken there by a large closed carriage. The chief of the secret police sat beside the coachman.

The uncles were taken into the room, where Marie's body had been hidden in a basket. They were informed that the corpse of the Baroness was to be fully dressed and prepared to look as though she was still living, and then her body was to be taken to the carriage.

"You are to support the body," said the functionary significantly, "in such a way as to make it appear that the Baroness still lives."

The poor uncles were forced to take part in dressing up the dead. They smoothed her heavy hair and pinned it up in a great twist. They washed away the blood stains from her face. Dr. Wiederhofer, the court physician, had bound up the shattered skull with a lawn bandage. This broke and Count Stockau bound up the wound with his black silk cravat.

They dressed her in her dainty under-

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