

## Story of Alexander and Draga.

The reign of Alexander I., king of Serbia, began in a coup d'état at midnight, March 6, 1889, and ended in assassination at midnight, June 10, 1903.

How Milan came to lose his throne and how his son Alexander came to lose it is told in the events of one of the most disgraceful chapters in the history of modern Europe.

In the year 1900 King Alexander started on a tour of Europe in search of a bride. He visited all the courts of Europe. His experiences were highly discouraging. He saw the king of the Belgians and was coldly but politely informed that he need not look for a wife there.

The king even attempted to secure a rich American bride, but his efforts in this direction were as futile as they had been everywhere else.

It is at this point in the reign of Alexander that the woman Draga Maschin entered the history of Serbia and began the career of petty intrigue that ended with her assassination.

Draga Maschin years before had made Alexander her slave. She was a voluptuary and a degenerate. She ruled his life absolutely, and he was only too willing to make her queen of Serbia.

Alexander assembled his ministers and announced that he proposed to marry Draga Maschin. He printed the announcement in the official gazette. It raised a storm in the country. The cabinet ministers protested violently. They told the king the consequences of his act might ruin the dynasty.

"I am the king," said Alexander.

proudly, "and I can marry whom I please. Attend to your duties and do not meddle with my private affairs."

With that he dismissed them. They went away and resigned in a body.

Ex-King Milan, who was then a general in the Serbian army, was at Carlsbad taking the waters for his hopeless liver, when he heard of his son's determination. He immediately started for Serbia, swearing that he would prevent his son from marrying at all costs. He had a large following in the army and might have caused trouble. King Alexander ordered him to be stopped at the frontier. Ex-King Milan resigned his command in the Serbian army. At the same time his mother, Queen Natalie, cut Alexander out of her will and left her large fortune to the church.

From the day of his marriage to Queen Draga, King Alexander rapidly fell in the estimation of his people. The door of every royal house in Europe was closed in his face.

Alexander was the last of the Obrenovitch family and his union with Queen Draga was childless. Draga attempted to secure the succession of the throne to her brother. That was the beginning of the end. Alexander's life, that of his queen, his ministers and his household went out in the final tragedy in the palace of Belgrade, and the dynasty of the Obrenovitch was extinct forever.

Draga was at Biarritz with Queen Natalie when King Alexander first saw her. That was seven years ago; he was 17, and she was well into her 30's, a widow, and an experienced woman of the world, of whom the gos-

sips had much to say. When he entered the room to greet his mother, he encountered the flashing dark eyes of the fascinating lady-in-waiting staring boldly and steadily at him. He saw nothing in the room but those eyes, paid attention to no one but Draga and upon that day he became her willing slave forever after.

When she returned to Belgrade from Biarritz a few months later, her power over the boy king was already recognized. Queen Natalie allowed it, mindful of Russia. Milan fostered it, delighted at the prospect of knowing his son's movements through such a trusty source and influencing his mind for Austria. And Mme. Maschin quietly and skillfully maneuvered, not for Natalie or Milan, neither for Russia nor Serbia, but always for herself.

In less than a year her hand was shown in Alexander's first coup d'état. He had not yet attained his majority, and his kingdom was governed by three regents. These dignitaries were feasting one night with him when the room was suddenly barricaded, the king announced that the authority of the regents was ended, and they were kept prisoners until he had been formally proclaimed before the army. After that no one dared ignore the existence of Draga Maschin in political affairs.

Alexander established Draga in a palace which was as splendid as any in Belgrade. There the court flocked for gaiety; there the Russian and Austrian diplomats held secret conferences in turn, each trying to pay more than the other. There the king often mingled with the guests, speaking to no one but Draga, dancing all the evening with no one but Draga, throwing confetti to no one else, and frowning darkly upon anyone who attempted a word with her.

The court did not wonder at her sway over the king, who had inherited the vices of his father and the weaknesses of his mother, without the military bravery of the former or the personal goodness of the latter. Mme. Maschin was never counted a beauty, she was dark enough to be almost swarthy, and in repose her face was cunning and treacherous. But her fascination could not be doubted; she was a bewitching talker, and while talking became a beauty. She was tall and slender, and beautifully formed, of the oriental type, with masses of soft black hair and liquid eyes full of subtle flattery. Before she assayed the role of queen she was frequently seen in the Paris salons, where she was known for her perfect taste in etiquette, as well as for her wit and social diplomacy.

The Serbian people and court wanted their king to marry. After his mother and father had unsuccessfully begged the hand of many a pretty princess, they were willing for him to marry a commoner. But they never thought of

his marrying Mme. Maschin—they would have opposed that. Alexander, however, did not consult them, nor even his own ministers or his council of state. One fine morning in July, 1900, the people of Belgrade awoke to discover that the king's second coup d'état had taken place during the night. Upon the walls of the city was a long proclamation signed by the royal hand, in which he made known his betrothal to Draga Maschin, a daughter of the Serbian people, whose home would be a pattern to all Serbian homes, and who would bring happiness to the country, as did the wife of his grandfather, also from the people.

Absolutely no Serbian official seems to have known of the proclamation beforehand. The capital was in a turmoil of excitement, cabinet ministers gathered in agitated meeting, the council of state assembled to declare

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