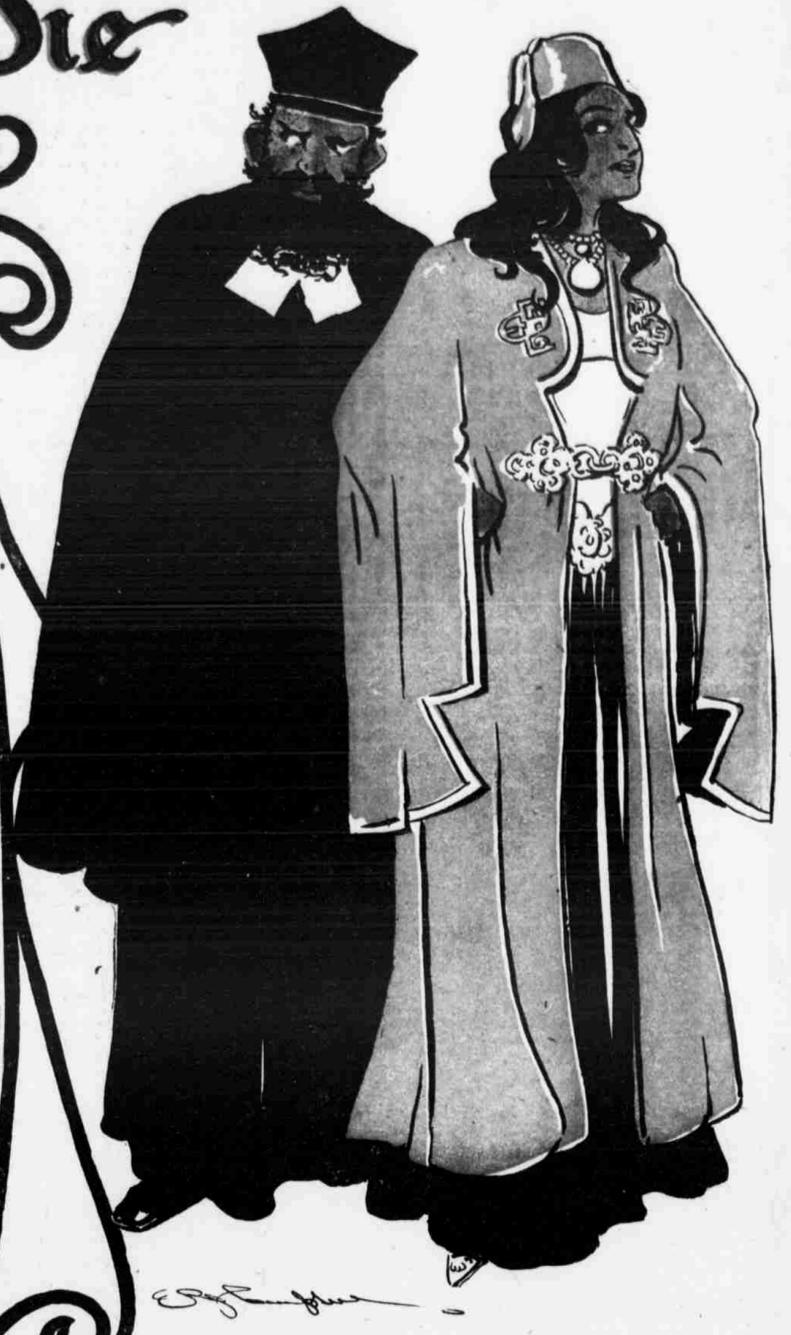


Because Two Men Love Her and neither Will Give Her up She Must Die



THE British embassy at Vienna has been asked by Hector Darwin, a British subject, to save the life of a beautiful Bosnian girl, who has been condemned to die simply because two men love her, and neither will give her up. Rather than break their friendship these two men, who took the oath of perpetual brotherhood before a priest in the wooden church of Ibrod, have resolved to kill the girl. They would have executed their sentence upon her ere this had it not been for the interference of Hector Darwin.

This statement of facts reads strangely enough in the light of twentieth century civilization, but in many out of the way corners of Europe tradition rules with a firmer hand than law.

Bosnia is one of these queer corners; and in Bosnia, when two men, joined by the oath of friendship, love the same girl they kill her rather than quarrel over her.

Chain of Circumstances Starts Complications.

If Hector Darwin had not missed the oriental express one day last summer and thus been compelled to remain in Belgrade for thirty-six hours, he would not have met John Lapham, a brother Englishman, and also a globe trotter; and if Darwin had not met Lapham he would not have changed his plans and traveled overland through Bosnia and Herzegovina to the Adriatic; and if he had not visited Bosnia he would not have met with the strange adventure in the mountains that led him to seek in marriage a girl in order to save her life.

It was this chain of circumstances that led to the strangest diplomatic complication that has happened in Europe for a score of years.

One afternoon in August Darwin and Lapham found themselves in a wayside inn in an old mountain village in Bosnia, waiting while clumsy artisans worked tediously to repair the old wooden hooded coach in which they were traveling and which had jotted well nigh to pieces over the rough roads. A diurnal rain was falling steadily and the travelers were compelled to remain inside the dirty, ill smelling living room of the inn. There were only two rooms. One part was occupied by the women. In the other part the men remained, and around their feet swarmed a collection of ducks, chickens, and children. A couple of goats and a pig or two shared the room and fought over such scraps of food as they could find in the dirt of the floor.

Suitors Typical Bosnian Brigands.

By the window sat two Bosnians in earnest, muttered conversation. They wore wide flowing trousers of deep red, with gaiters of white, and a brown vest braided with black. One had on a leather girdle and the other a silken sash, which held a sheath knife, a tobacco pouch, and a long stemmed cherry wood pipe.

Apart from them, but regarding them seriously, sat a priest, in a black robe, his long, bushy, curly hair surmounted by the queer box shaped cap of the orthodox clergy. A brown curly beard covered his broad chest.

The priest could speak enough Russian to enable Darwin, who had traveled in every land and knew a smattering of every tongue, to converse with him. The priest revealed to Darwin a story that reads like a chapter from the history of the middle ages.

The two Bosnians in the picturesque garb, said the priest, were Tesanj Touzla and Bihac Ulema. Both were of good families, in spite of the strain of gipsy blood in their veins, and they had grown up from boyhood together. When 22 years of age they went before the priest of the Orthodox Greek church and took the oath of friendship. For four years that oath was kept without difficulty.

Duplicity in Love Revealed.

Then there came a girl—a Croato-Servian. She was undeniably beautiful, as Croato-Servian girls go. She was tall and fair, soft eyed and soft spoken—just the girl to fire the heart of a man who was half gipsy. But like many a

girl in other lands, she could not resist the temptation to flirt—just a little.

Tesanj Touzla and Bihac Ulema both fell in love with Dolnja Banjalouka—each without the knowledge of the other. Dolnja accepted the attentions of each—and kept them in ignorance.

One day Tesanj and Bihac returned to their home after a hunting expedition into the mountains. At their door stood a swarthy gipsy messenger holding a bright colored handkerchief knotted in a peculiar fashion and inclosing a golden chain. The gipsy looked at the two friends, hesitated, and then said:

"It's from Dolnja Banjalouka."

"It's for me," said Tesanj, holding out his hand for the handkerchief token.

"No! It's for me," interposed Bihac.

The two friends regarded each other long and suspiciously. Finally, Tesanj spoke:

"Very well, take it, then."

"No, Tesanj; you take the token," replied his friend.

Jealousy Clouds Their Friendship.

Tesanj took the token and departed in search of Dolnja Banjalouka. For three days the friends did not speak. It was the first time their friendship had ever been clouded. When at the end of three days Tesanj suggested another hunting trip to the mountains Bihac refused to go.

One evening a week later Tesanj announced that he was going to Mostar and would not return for a month.

"How strange," said Bihac, "for I was just going to tell you that business calls me to Sarajevo, and I cannot return for five weeks."

Dolnja Banjalouka



"Good-by, then—in five weeks," said Tesanj.

That evening Tesanj, who was supposed to be on his way to Mostar, met Bihac, whom he thought was on the road to Sarajevo, at the home of Dolnja Banjalouka. Both showed their surprise, but each kept his own counsel, and they departed together. On the lonely road homeward the friends faced each other.

"You told me you were going to Mostar," said Bihac, with indignation. "and I told you I was going to Sarajevo. Well?"

"Well, it seems that we both have lied," said Tesanj, gloomily.

"Tesanj, my friend; she's not worth it. Remember our oath. See, here is the knife you gave me after we had sworn before the priest."

Sentenced to Death by Suitors.

"There is only one thing to do," said Tesanj, after awhile. "You know what our fathers and their fathers before them would have done?"

Bihac nodded.

"So be it," said Tesanj. "By your hand or mine?"

"By both together," said Bihac.

It was the sentence of death that the two young men sealed by an embrace and a clasp of the hand there on the mountain road.

"I have done what I could," said the priest, as he finished the story to Hector Darwin. "The girl, Dolnja Banjalouka, is here, and so are Tesanj and Bihac. I have pleaded with them, any they reply only with silence. They do not say anything, but I am afraid they will carry out their oath."

Hector Darwin walked to the door of the other room.

Dolnja Banjalouka sat by the little window, and Darwin saw that she was really a beautiful girl. He went within and spoke to her, the priest acting as his interpreter.

"It's a beastly shame, don't you know," said Darwin to John Lapham. "The girl's in a deuced bad scrape."

"We might try a rescue," suggested Lapham.

"Yes," retorted Darwin, "we might, but we couldn't go half a mile in these mountains, and those brigands, who know every foot of the country, would have our throats cut in an hour after we tried it."

Englishman Offers Marriage to Save Girl.

Finally Darwin talked to the priest again. He offered to marry the girl then and there and take her out of the country; so that her pretty face could no longer come between Tesanj Touzla and Bihac Ulema.

The priest thought it might be done. He talked it over with Tesanj and Bihac, and after an hour or two of expostulation and pleading gained their consent. The priest offered to act as the intermediary between Darwin and the girl's parents.

There are three forms of marriage in Bosnia. The only one available to Darwin under the circumstances was by direct purchase of the bride. Under this form of marriage all details are arranged by a priest acting as an intermediary between the suitor and the girl's parents. He agrees to pay so much money. If the parents accept, they hand over the girl to the suitor. But until the money is paid the suitor is not permitted to look upon the girl's face. This rule is inexorable and has never been broken in Bosnia.

Anxiety for Her Spoils Plan.

Darwin's own zeal in his anxiety to save the life of the girl thwarted the only plan he could devise. He had seen her and talked to her. The priest had to tell the girl's parents of this fact. The old man, with Spartan firmness, refused the price offered for the girl, declaring he would rather see her in her grave and that bad luck would attend him and his all his days if he violated the customs that had prevailed in Bosnia for 400 years.

The only thing Darwin and the priest could do was to induce Tesanj Touzla and Bihac Ulema to grant the girl a respite of six weeks. In that time Darwin was to go to Vienna and induce the British ambassador to enlist the sympathies of the Austrian government.

To Vienna Darwin and Lapham went with all speed. Their names and influence at home gave them the willing assistance of the British embassy, and the matter was laid before the Austrian minister of finance, who is at the head of the bureau charged with the administration of the affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Diplomats Refuse to Jeopardize Nation's Peace.

Then an unexpected difficulty arose. Austria governs Bosnia only as a guardian, under the treaty of Berlin. She exercises a strong military control, keeps order, protects life and property, collects the taxes, and distributes them with the strictest honesty. The Bosnians are independent and jealous of their liberty. They recognize Austria's rule, but not Austria's sovereignty. Austria is scrupulous to an extreme degree in recognizing all of the Bosnian laws, rights, privileges, and traditions.

The minister of foreign affairs pointed out to the British ambassador that any attempt to interfere with the marriage customs and the brotherhood of friendship in Bosnia might be followed by a popular uprising that would cause endless bloodshed and overturn all the work accomplished for the peace and good government of the provinces under the treaty of Berlin.

So the matter rests. The ambassador and the minister of foreign affairs are holding many consultations and writing many diplomatic notes; but the fate of Dolnja Banjalouka is still in doubt.