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THE LOVE RIDDLE THAT DROVE HIM TO DEATH

"He gazed into three pairs of beautiful eyes! The imp of indecision in his brain developed into a monster! How was it possible for him to decide? Each seemed to him more beautiful than the other! And so he shot himself!"

Vienna, Aug. 11. THE suicide of the handsome, the rich, the noble Lieutenant Adolph von Hoffschneider has ceased to be an enigma. The mystery that puzzled smart society in Vienna and Paris is no longer a mystery. It is solved by friends of the three beautiful originals of the three photographs which stood on the mantelpiece in the sitting room of the unfortunate young army officer, before which he was standing—as developed at the Coroner's inquest—when he blew out his brains.

These three photographs are reproduced on this page—they serve to illuminate the story which accompanies them. The originals are: Mlle. Renouardt, one of the chief beauties of the European stage; Mlle. Lorraine, another Paris stage beauty of hardly less celebrity; Countess Irma Potacka, the charming member of an old Polish family whose beauty has only recently brought itself to the notice of Vienna society.

Lieutenant Hoffschneider was one of the very first of the eligible bachelors in the Vienna army set to fall before the fascinations of the little Countess. This was nearly a year ago, before he had met either Renouardt or Mlle. Lorraine. She was in every way suited to the position in which the Lieutenant was able to place a wife. If she had yielded promptly to his wooing there would have been no suicide—and no story.

"Comtesse," he pleaded, "have the common humanity to end this suspense. Can't you see that it is killing me by inches?" "Ha, ha," she laughed. "For a dying man you look very healthy—and so fine, so handsome, so brave!"

He could not see that the vivacious little woman loved him, was merely prolonging the delight of keeping him in ignorance of the thoroughness of his conquest. He imagined that she was laughing at him, and demanded, almost roughly:

"Will you marry me? It is the third time that I have placed my heart, my fortune at your feet. I crave your answer."

Lovingly, but implacably, she made a little face at him—in which he could see only the impishness. Before she could utter a word, the foolish young man had rushed angrily from the room, from the house. On the following day, believing himself to be a deeply injured person, he was off to Paris, swearing to forget perfidious Polish beauties in a whirl of gaiety that would astonish even the Parisians.

His very first evening of mild amusement led him to the theatre, where Renouardt was playing. Ah, here was some one who could make him forget the little dark sirens of Poland! He got himself presented to the actress. He showed his metal. Who were small fry French noblemen to stand in the way of the head of the ancient and most noble house of the von Hoffschneiders! He elbowed them out of the presence of Renouardt. He even challenged the prerogative of an exiled Russian Prince—and got away with it. Renouardt found herself amused by the fiery young Austrian. Besides, he had the price of many little jeweled trinkets which she had long desired to add to her collection of such trophies. She did not even mind the impetuosity of the Lieutenant's love-making—so unlike the unceremonious French way. Also, it was so refreshing, his desire to make her his wife!

"Mlle. Renouardt," he would say several times every night, after the play, "you say that you like me. Is it not possible for you to love me enough to marry me? Otherwise I feel that I am not long for this world."

For a week or so Renouardt would laugh heartily, only half believing that the young officer was serious.

"But look how foolish," she would say. "Foolish—foolish to become the wife of Lieutenant Adolph von Hoffschneider!"—and there the youth would choke with indignation.

"Oh, no, no, no—but no, no! You do not understand. I mean how foolish to marry one man who will drive away all the others. If I give myself to one man, the others are hopeless; if I give myself to nobody, then every man who loves me still has hope—and when they hope, they can be so thoughtful, so nice!"

"But I love you," at length the Lieutenant said with finality. "Love like that is more than all else in the world. Madam, please, is it not possible for you to love me enough to marry me?"

Understanding now that he was absolutely serious, and would make her undisputed mistress of his life, of his estates, in

short, his wife, she confessed that he was very dear to her—well, she would consider the matter. In the meantime, he must not for one instant, cease to hope! In the meantime Mlle. Renouardt had to go away for a week to visit friends in the south of France.

For twenty-four hours the Lieutenant was disconsolate. Then he chanced to meet Mlle. Lorraine. It was a supper party, and the surroundings and the atmospheres were conducive to rapid acquaintance. There was something about Mlle. Lorraine that touched a chord in the young officer's bosom which had failed to vibrate in the presence of Renouardt—just as Renouardt had given him palpitations which he had never experienced when gazing into the melting orbs of the Countess Irma Potacka.

Charmed with this fresh experience of the possibilities of love's uncharted emotions, is it any wonder that the little Countess Irma and Renouardt were, for the moment, swept from the consciousness of the impressionable Lieutenant? It was not three days after the date of that little supper that the young officer found himself on his knees at the feet of Mlle. Lorraine, imploring her:

"Mlle. Lorraine, most beautiful, most enchanting of your sex, behold me at your feet. Unless you bid me rise to the level



Mlle. Lorraine, the Paris Stage Beauty and Third of the Fatally Charming Trio.

of your heart, life for me henceforth will be a desert waste."

"Oh, Monsieur," exclaimed the actress—who had liked the impetuous youth immensely from the start, and knew all about his rank and his fortune. "Oh, Monsieur, quel honneur! I—I am overwhelmed. You must rise from your knees immediately."

"To the level of your heart? Do you like and esteem me—it is yet too soon to expect you to acknowledge love—well enough to become my promised wife?"

Mlle. Lorraine was deeply touched. She admitted it. "Give me three days for—to consider," she said. But she said it in tones, accompanied by the softest glances from her lovely eyes, that satisfied Lieutenant von Hoffschneider he need not worry during the next three days. She gave him a fine, large photograph of herself—almost the mate to the one which he had



Mlle. Renouardt, the Fascinating Young Paris Actress—No. 2 of Lieut. von Hoffschneider's Fatal Love-Trinity.



The Countess Irma Potacka, Who Was the Beginning of the Austrian Army Officer's Fatal Love-Enigma.

received from Mlle. Renouardt.

Back in his apartment at the hotel the Lieutenant placed the two photographs side by side. In the smiling faces of both he read the same promise—the promise to make him, soon, unutterably happy. And right there and then was born in his brain that imp of indecision which was to become the master of his destiny. How would it be possible to choose between two such types of incredible loveliness?

Coincident with the birth of this disquieting thought, entered a hotel servant with a letter bearing the Vienna postmark, and the superscription in the familiar handwriting of the brother officer who was his closest friend and confidant. He tore open the envelope and read:

"Lieber Adolph—You were wrong to run away to Paris—as I told you at the time. The little Potacka is inconsolable. She locks herself in her room, refusing to see any one. My man has it from her maid that she sits all day looking at the photograph you gave her, and sighing in the most piteous manner.

"Lieber Adolph, must I say it? But it is true, and I say it for your own good—to sting you into action. Lieber Adolph, du bist ein dummkopf! Come home at once—to your languishing little Potacka."

"The Countess Irma loves me. Her heart is mine! Fool, fool that I am, to be shilly-shallying here in Paris!" And, summoning his valet, the Lieutenant packed up in such haste, in such feverish eagerness to throw himself again at the feet of the Countess Irma, that the midnight train started him whirling toward Vienna.

The Lieutenant reached Vienna without accident. Being in the ordinary details of life, an orderly person, he drove directly to his apartment to unpack, to attend to pressing business affairs, and to plan the details of his appropriate re-entree into Vienna society. Considering the circumstances of his departure for Paris, he could be guilty of nothing so gauche as rushing unannounced to the Countess Potacka.

In this case it was the fatal mistake of a super-fashionable young man. Because of that mistake the Countess Irma never

Charmed Equally by Three Famous Beauties, Each Ready to Be His Bride--Un- able to Choose Between Them, and Crazy by Indecision, the Lieutenant Had to Blow Out His Brains

again saw Lieutenant von Hoffschneider among the living. He was not seen that evening by any of his friends. After unpacking his trunks and rearranging his wardrobe, his valet was dismissed for the night.

Next morning the Lieutenant's lifeless body was discovered lying full length on the Persian rug before the mantel in his sitting room. Near it had fallen the revolver with which he had blown out his brains. As mentioned at the beginning of this account, the photographs of the Countess Irma, of Mlle. Renouardt, and of Mlle. Lorraine, stood side by side on the mantelpiece.

A quantity of cigarette ash littered the mantelpiece, and was trodden into the Persian rug. The Lieutenant was an inveterate smoker of cigarettes. It was plain, by these signs, how he had spent the evening, after unpacking and restoring to the mantelpiece his photograph of the Countess Irma, now flanked by those of Renouardt and Mlle. Lorraine—the three most beautiful women in the world, each of whom he loved to the point of madness—and each ready to become his wife!

As he gazed into the three pairs of pictured eyes—smoking furiously and dropping cigarette ash on the mantel—the imp of indecision in his brain developed into a monster. How was it possible for him to decide? He loved them all equally, each was ready to give herself to him. How could he renounce the other two? He paced backward and forward, treading cigarette ash into the Persian rug.

When the Lieutenant realized fully that a decision was impossible, the one possible solution of his difficulty occurred to him. His revolver was handy, and he did not hesitate to use it.

For some reason best known to themselves, the relatives of the unfortunate young man have not favored the publication in Vienna newspapers of the above details of the cause of the suicide. The official explanation, "while temporarily deranged," has sufficed.

The Countess Potacka left Vienna immediately, going to her country estate in the neighborhood of Warsaw, where she denies herself to all visitors. It is whispered in Vienna society that she is broken-hearted—but that her pride will eventually come to her rescue, for she is one of those who cannot deny the evidences furnished by the suicide chamber that either one of two famous Paris actresses might have become her successful rival. And that is a reflection which would hardly permit a spirited Polish noblewoman to languish very long.

There is no doubt that Mlle. Renouardt and the charming Lorraine were sincerely shocked by the news of the tragedy—though they have since endeavored to create the impression that they never seriously considered the impetuous matrimonial propositions of the young officer. They are consistent in this; otherwise they would naturally resent his unceremonious departure without waiting to learn their decisions.

Students of psychology, both in Paris and Vienna, who have the outline of the story as told here, agree that any perfectly sane young man of the temperament of Lieutenant Hoffschneider, in similar circumstances, would logically be expected to solve his problem in the same tragic manner. A prominent biologist, in this connection, is quoted as observing a fresh and emphatic suggestion of modern physical decadence among the leisured class, due to the exaggerated importance given nowadays to the subtleties of the tender passion. Over-trained minds and nerves sap the physical bulwarks possessed by savages and by those who lead the simple life, and leave sensitive organizations open to just such tragic episodes as ended the career of Lieutenant von Hoffschneider.