

The Doctor of Sarajevo

Sarajevo, 28 June 1914

Countess Sophie Chotek was relieved. The assassination attempt on her husband, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, had failed. A grenade thrown at them earlier had clattered over the roof of their car and damaged the vehicle behind them, causing casualties.

Her husband had a premonition of trouble, and it came true. He was thinking of creating a new province within the Austro-Hungarian Empire, encompassing Croatia-Slavonia, Dalmatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, with the city of Zagreb likely being its capital. She remembered him discussing it with her. His ideas not gone down well in Serbia and with various radicals, and this attempt on his life had clearly been a response to it. Still, they managed to get to City Hall for a speech by the mayor, in which her husband interrupted with a sarcastic remark about his welcome to the city. She was proud that he later gave a speech in which he thanked the people of the city for the failure of the assassination attempt.

They were now on their way, by car, to the hospital to see the casualties. They were accompanied by Oscar Potiorek, Governor of Bosnia-Herzegovina. Suddenly, she heard him exclaim:

“This is the wrong way! We are supposed to take the Appel Quay!”

She sensed danger immediately and saw a man on the street, with a pistol aimed right at them. She heard two shots ring out. She felt pain in her stomach. She turned and saw blood ooze from her husband’s neck. She fell sideways, her head coming to rest on the Archduke’s knees. The last thing she heard was the heir to the throne pleading with her not to die, for the sake of their children.

The Serb assassin was tackled to the ground by the crowd that had come to see the Archduke. The gendarmerie took charge of him. He was delighted. He was sure that he had just assassinated the man who would have prevented the union of Slav lands under the control of Belgrade by carrying through reforms.

It was unfortunate that so many people in these lands—including those who had restrained him—were not convinced of this, preferring the Empire over union with Serbia. Only a few Croats and Muslims were radicalized. *They did not know what was good for them*, he thought.

The gendarmerie had his pistol—a 9mm Browning, supplied by the Serbian Black Hand organization. They had trained him to shoot in the Topčider forest, in Serbia. He was grateful, the training had worked well. Now, he would face a trial. He cared only for his cause, and soon everyone would know his name: Gavrilo Princip.

Berne, Switzerland, August 1914

Dr. Cornelius Kramm warily regarded the man who had summoned him to what was referred to as the British Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary to the Swiss Confederation at 50 Thunstrasse. This Percy Phelps was clearly not interested in a medical consultation with the man now known as “Dr. Malbrough.” At least, not on medical matters.

“Perhaps I had better come to the point, Dr. Kramm,” Phelps said. “His Majesty’s Government would like to employ you to obtain a certain item from the General Philippovich barracks in Sarajevo. You would be well compensated,”

Dr. Cornelius responded, deciding to affect ignorance of his name.

“I fear you are mistaken; there is no Dr. Kramm at my practice. I, Dr. Malbrough, am the sole practitioner there, along with my staff. And we certainly do not work as couriers—if that is what you are asking. However, we do some facial surgery,” he waved gently at Phelps’s face, “and certainly, I think I could help you in that respect.”

Phelps was affronted. How dare this man—a criminal—be so insulting to him? He would put on his cross face and put this damnable fellow in his place.

“Now, look here. You are the criminal known as Cornelius Kramm, one of the former leaders of the Red Hand organization. After its destruction, you fled to Australia where you worked as Dr.

Malbrough, before leaving to set up a branch of your practice here in Europe, which is a front for your criminal-for-hire activities.”

Phelps sat back, most satisfied.

Dr. Cornelius said nothing, leaving an awkward pause.

“You were recommended to us by your fellow criminal, Professor Moriarty, Dr. Kramm,” an exasperated Phelps continued. “But we can make life difficult if you do not cooperate.”

Dr. Cornelius was pleased. Not by the threat, but by how easily he had drawn the man out. Now he knew that the British were not entirely trustworthy, but also that they were serious about their offer. He also knew that he was not in a position to antagonize them in any serious way. He put his hands up in a placatory gesture.

“My dear Mr. Phelps, you don’t expect me to admit to such things, do you? It is clear you are well informed, and your mentioning my colleague, Professor Moriarty, gives me great confidence. Please, give me further details about your proposal.”

“As I have said,” replied Phelps, placated, “we are in need of a certain liquid, for scientific purposes, you understand.”

Indeed, Dr. Cornelius did. This was something of military value that the British did not want their Austro-Hungarian foes to retain.

“A phial of this liquid is kept securely in the General Philippovich barracks in Sarajevo,” Phelps continued. “It is well guarded in a special section. We want you to steal it, and hand it over to our agent who will verify it is real. This will be done in Sarajevo. At that point, you will be paid £20,000 into your Swiss bank account.”

“Hmm. Yes, it can be done,” responded the Doctor. “I have one question, however. You clearly know me. Therefore, you must be aware that one of your countrymen, Lord Burydan, is an enemy of mine. I can’t imagine he would approve of your hiring me.”

“We know all about that,” replied Phelps, waving that away. “The good news is that, on the declaration of hostilities, Lord Burydan swiftly enlisted and is an infantry Major—he was in the army previously. He’s in France. He will not get in your way, Dr. Kramm.”

“Good,” said the Doctor, nodding. “Before we discuss further details, firstly I am usually referred to as ‘Dr. Cornelius.’ In my specialized field, people seem to prefer my Christian name. It’s become something of a trademark, shall we say. Secondly, there is the matter of my compensation. Your offer is derisory to be frank...”

They eventually came to an agreement and Dr. Cornelius left. Phelps was pleased with the result. Certainly, the Doctor had upped the fee somewhat, but it would be worth it. With Professor Moriarty refusing the job—the unpatriotic swine!—this sinister doctor was the only option. Physically, the Doctor had looked thin, indeed almost emaciated – did he not eat? However, if he was successful, Allied possession of this liquid would be the last part of a weapon that would end this war before it had barely begun.

Evidenzbureau¹ facility, Vienna, September 1914

“My dear Countess, how wonderful it is to see you,” said the man who headed this particular *Evidenzbureau* department. “I have a new mission for you. I have made some preparations.”

Countess Irina Petrovska sat opposite him. She was unimpressed by his tone.

“Your Serene Highness Prince Wilhelm, please remember that I do not work for you; I carry out some of your missions for the good of Poland and the Empire.”

The Prince realized that he had been presumptuous.

“Of course, I do recognize your independence,” he rushed to add. “However, this is a mission of great importance; one that could decide the outcome of the war. Please, you may call me Prince Wilhelm.”

The Countess nodded and gestured for him to continue.

“We are concerned over the General Philippovich barracks in Sarajevo. It has been reported to us that questions are being asked about them and, in particular, their security. These questions are being

¹ The Habsburg Empire’s military intelligence service. Formed in 1850, it was the world’s first such organization.

asked at all levels of society, not merely the lower classes. This is of concern to us. We would like to find out who is behind them.”

“Surely,” the Countess replied, “that is the sort of thing that happens in war? Why do these particular barracks concern you so?”

“The barracks have a special significance. There are a number of special items kept there that could be of great value to our enemies. We are giving thought to moving them elsewhere, but for all we know, that would tip the advantage the other side. We want to find out who in Sarajevo is making inquiries before any decision is made on relocation.

“Discreet inquiries on the ground have produced no results and we can hardly arrest leading members of society or pull them in for interrogation—that could cause any number of problems. Essentially, we would like you to visit Sarajevo and mix with the higher echelons of society and find out what is going on. Naturally, we will provide appropriate recompense. I know you would prefer to be operating against the Russians at the moment, but believe me, you will be serving the war effort better in Sarajevo.”

“Very well,” said the Countess, nodding. “It would be interesting to see Sarajevo at the very least. Certainly, I would wish to pray at the Catholic Cathedral there for the soul of Archduke Ferdinand, a man who promised much for the Empire when he took over. I will leave at once.”

“Excellent!” exclaimed the Prince. “You remind me of a fine woman I once knew...” he looked wistfully out of a window.

The Countess felt weary suddenly. Surely, he was not going to bore her with the tale of Irene Adler once again? She had come across the woman and considered her a bit dull. How she had managed to confound the famous Sherlock Holmes was beyond her. It amused the Countess that this Adler had caused the Prince any problem at all—a woman in his past that he thought could trouble his ludicrous claim to be the King of Bohemia. Well, Emperor Franz Joseph, the actual King of Bohemia—amongst much else—dealt with the “Grand Duke” most firmly. He was fortunate that the Emperor had given him this job with the title of Prince. The Adler thing was meaningless in the end.

To the Countess’s great relief, the Prince reverted back to the mission.

“We must make arrangements. We have already set up a social occasion for you to attend...”

After the Countess had left, an aide came into the office.

“The Countess has accepted the mission. She will soon be leaving for Sarajevo,” the Prince told him.

The aide, a young army officer, responded, “Your Serene Highness, I understand that the Countess has done many services for the Empire.”

The Prince bade him to sit. “Yes,” he replied. “As you know, this department deals with matters of an unusual scientific nature. The Countess is well suited to such things. She was involved in an incident on the Trans-Siberian Express in 1906 in which a creature from beyond our world was running amok.”

The officer looked startled.

“Ah, I see, you have not been fully briefed. I will see to it that you will be. Since that incident, in which her husband died, the Countess has had a number of adventures. She is motivated by Polish patriotism. She wishes to see the parts of her homeland ruled by Russia liberated and unified with our Galicia within the Empire. There is heavy fighting there with the Russians at the moment.

“She was born in Galicia, and thus is our citizen, and married the Count Petrovski, who was resident in the Polish lands occupied by Russia.” Here, the Prince paused. “You have been with us for only a couple of weeks? Seconded from the 96th Karlovac Infantry Regiment?”

“Yes, sir” the aide replied.

“Ah!” said the Prince with a pleased look. “I must tell you all about another remarkable woman, one named Irene Adler...”

September 1914, Sarajevo

Dr. Cornelius was most satisfied. In only a few weeks of opening his new practice in Sarajevo, he had attracted some wealthy clients from the city, Croats, Muslims and Serbs, and the rest of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and beyond. He recalled with amusement one dignitary’s comment:

“How good of you to set up here, Dr. Malbrough, in order to promote our city after the assassination.”

The “sculptor of human flesh” cackled. What a naive fool that man was! He had even referred some customers to him. And it was not long before some of them were revealed to not have the money to pay for his services...

One such person now knocked on the door of the practice. The Doctor let him in, and they went silently to his consulting room, where they sat down.

“Now, Baron von Kuffner,” said the Doctor, what have you for me?”

Baron von Kuffner, a thin tall man in his fifties, looked nervous as he answered:

“What is this information for, Doctor? We are at war... The information you seek could be used by my Emperor’s enemies.”

Dr. Cornelius drew breath. “That is hardly your concern,” he replied. “I have completely healed those scars on your face, and you failed to pay me, due to your unfortunate debts. If you prefer, I could simply start proceedings to recover my fee, which would disgrace you. No doubt, someone will offer you a pistol and a bottle of whisky...” Then, he added menacingly, “Perhaps me.”

Baron Von Kuffner there and then that told him everything he had gleaned from his contacts in the General. It was good information, but not enough.

“I need more, Baron,” said Dr. Cornelius.

The Baron looked concerned. “That is all I know. What else can I do?”

“I advise you to think harder.”

The Doctor beckoned to someone, seemingly behind him. Suddenly there was a knife at the Baron’s neck. He had not even realized that there was anyone else in the room. So he did as instructed and said:

“There is a reception in three days’ time, being held by the mayor in honor of the military. There will be some officers there. I could perhaps talk to them?”

The Doctor waved the man with the knife away.

“More than talk. You will gain the precise location of the item I want. And passwords. And you will help me to make their acquaintance.”

The Countess was pleased with the reception at City Hall, known as Vijećnica. Ostensibly, it was being held to honor the Austro-Hungarian armed forces. In reality, it was an opportunity to observe those who had been asking questions about the General Philippovich barracks. Aside from the military officers, the elite of the Sarajevo society was there: civic dignitaries, members of the local cultural societies, and leading members of the religious communities of the city. There was a small orchestra playing *Die Bosniaken Kommen*² always popular with the troops. She had received many admiring looks from men interested in this elegantly dressed, auburn-haired, beautiful woman.

She turned respectfully to the man she was with.

“Your Excellency, I must thank you again for your hospitality,”

“It is my pleasure. The Emperor himself wrote to me. I understand that your work is of importance. I am of course also pleased that you have attended church, and your grasp of my language is impressive.”

The Countess was pleased that she had his favor. This was the Catholic Archbishop of Vrhbosna³, the Croat Josip Stadler. She was staying at an apartment arranged for by the Church. Her cover was that of a journalist writing for a Catholic newspaper—being a Countess gave her work a certain celebrity value. It was an invaluable cover for much of her work. And the Archbishop, who had dabbled in politics with his own Croatian political party, was well known as being loyal to Vienna.

“Yes, I know a number of languages. The example of our multi-lingual Emperor is a great example. It certainly helps with my article on the Church here. I was very impressed by your Sacred Heart Cathedral. I felt at great peace praying there.”

“I am pleased to hear it,” the Archbishop said.

He looked over to a small group of men. There was Baron von Kuffner, talking to two military officers.

“Countess,” he said, “I believe one of the gentlemen you wish to meet, Baron Von Kuffner, is in discussion with two military officers. Should I introduce you?”

The Archbishop was aware that the Countess had a special mission, although he was unaware of the precise details.

² *The Bosniaks are Coming*, a military march composed in 1895 by Austrian composer Eduard Wagnes.

³ The Roman Catholic diocese of a large part of Bosnia-Herzegovina, including Sarajevo.

“Yes, now would be an excellent time,” replied the Countess.

Baron Von Kuffner was one of those identified by the secret police as having asked indiscreet questions.

The Archbishop guided her toward the group. The two officers were members of the Bosnian-Herzegovinian infantry, in dress uniform complete with cutlasses. The Archbishop made the introductions, then moved away, to let the Countess do her work.

“I’m sorry to interrupt your conversation, but I was curious to meet some of our gallant soldiers, and yourself Baron—I have heard so many good things about you.”

“You flatter me, Countess,” the Baron replied. “I wholeheartedly support our soldiers; I only wish I could fight alongside them. I am a reserve officer, but despite my protestations, due to an old liver complaint, the doctors will not let me return to active duty.”

“How devastating for you,” the Countess replied, knowing full well that her information was that it was *his* protestations over his ‘liver complaint’ that had prevented his return to the military.

“Yes, however, I do give the troops some moral support!” the Baron said. “Now, I must take my leave to pay my respects to the Mayor, but I shall see you gentlemen later.”

“Well...” said the Countess.

She was not used to someone just walking off from her. Clearly, there was something wrong with him. Not least as he walked straight past Mayor Čurčić.

“We shall not be leaving you, Countess!” exclaimed the young officer who had been introduced to her as Lieutenant Novotný.

“I should hope not,” she replied with a winning smile. “He clearly is more impressed by you two than me. Are you seeing him again later?”

“Yes,” responded the other officer, a Captain Hodžić. “He is very interested in discussing the war and politics. He has invited us both to an excellent establishment in the city where we can discuss such matters further.”

“Over drinks no doubt?” teased the Countess.

They all laughed. However, she was concerned. She had no doubt now that the Baron was a little too interested in the personnel from the General Philippovich barracks. A number of officers had been briefed about anyone asking questions, but some had not, including these two. However, it would be important to see what happened next. They were not likely to believe her if she told them of her true purpose, and to brief them now may tip off the Baron or anyone working with him, if they were being observant, which she was wise enough to assume.

She continued to talk animatedly with the officers about her work on her article. However, she managed to slip word to a waiter—in reality a member of the secret police branch of the local gendarmerie—about what to do next.

The evening wore on, with a few dignitaries starting to leave. The Countess had met many people, and many more were keen to meet her.

“What was the situation here after the assassination?” she asked Mayor Čurčić.

The Mayor was well acquainted with what had happened.

“There was great anger,” he replied. “Regrettably, there were some attacks on the Serbs and their property. The Croats and Muslims are loyal to the monarchy, and there was some over-reaction. However, we have taken action against Serb organizations.”

“The Archduke was a great man, with views on reforming the monarchy that would have benefited the people of the Empire, including my own,” she observed. “Now we have a war. Belgrade must be held fully to account. It is unfortunate that this man Princip is too young to be hung.”

Čurčić nodded. He had heard that the Countess was a woman with firm views. Like many, he found her highly intriguing. She was a woman who seemed not to recognize any second place to men, and appeared to lead a highly adventurous lifestyle.

One of the staff came up to the Countess and said something. The Mayor recognized the man—a member of the local secret police. He had been informed that they would be here, but knew not why; however, it seemed that the Countess was somehow involved. Before he could say anything, she turned back to him and said:

“My dear Mayor, I fear I must take my leave. However, I hope we shall meet again before I depart this city.”

And before he could respond, she was heading to the exit.

The gendarme who had spoken to her earlier, was waiting at the exit of hall.

“Countess, the two officers are leaving with the Baron,” he said. “We must move swiftly. We shall follow and report back to you.”

“No Inspector Lovrić,” replied the Countess, “I shall come with you.”

The Inspector could see that she brooked no argument; he was also mindful of his superior’s order to do whatever she asked. They left swiftly.

Outside, the Countess and Inspector Lovrić were met by another member of the secret police, Sergeant Ahmić. He simply pointed at the spot where the two officers were walking with Baron von Kuffner on the Appel Quay, by the Miljacka river.

The Countess and the officers had little choice but to follow. A horse and cart came up from behind and stopped by the three men. The two officers suddenly reacted as if they had been hit by something.

‘Halt! Gendarmerie!’ shouted the Inspector.

A shot rang out. Baron von Kuffner collapsed. Two men from the cart leaped out and bundled the now groggy officers in.

The Countess and the gendarmes dashed forward, but the cart was already moving off.

The driver was Dr. Cornelius. He put his gun back within the coat. Von Kuffner had been followed and was now a liability. It was much easier to simply kill him. He had shot the two officers with drugged darts. The Doctor was wearing a hat and some bandages around his face, in order to prevent anyone from recognizing him. He had wanted to make sure that he was present at this vital moment in the plan.

The Countess motioned to the gendarmerie and they followed her to her vehicle—a yellow roadster. She jumped into the driving seat, with the secret policemen getting in behind her. She drove off, headlights glaring in the night, and, within seconds, was behind her quarry.

Another horse and cart rolled up to the body of the Baron, men from the cart picked it up and rode away, much to the puzzlement of onlookers.

In her car, the Countess exclaimed:

“Prepare to fire, officers! I have no doubt that they’re about to attack us!”

She was not wrong, as two thugs appeared from under the coverings of the cart. Before they could fire on the car, however, a metal slab slammed up from under the hood, covering the windscreen, with only a small slot for visibility.

The Countess prayed that the bullets would not get through the slots. The two gendarmes behind her were standing up, trying to fire over her, but not getting their aim due to the constant movement of the vehicle and the bullets firing back at them. The thugs fired at the car, but the bullets simply bounced off. Even the wheels seemed impervious.

Both vehicles ceased firing at each other; a momentary stalemate with the Countess only yards away, but unable to overtake, her car being vulnerable on the sides.

One of the thugs informed Dr. Cornelius of the situation. He nodded. He saw that they were approaching a fork in the road. He unhooked the horses and ensured they went along the other road, with the cart barreling along the Appel Quay straight ahead.

The Countess did not know what had happened, but she sensed victory. Then, suddenly, the cart somehow accelerated away, going at a faster pace than her own vehicle. The covering of the cart flew back onto the road. The Countess stopped her car just in time before it hit it.

She and the gendarmes watched what seemed to be a moving platform with wheels, with sheets of metal moving up to enclose the riders, turning off onto another road and disappearing.

The Countess was less than pleased.

“Why didn’t they throw out the covering at us in the first place?” Inspector Lovrić said.

The Countess glared at him, but then softened.

“Yes, yes. a good question, Inspector. Our foes have advanced cars, but it appears perhaps not much in the way of common sense? To your headquarters! The city must be searched.”