

# What She Learned as Grand Opera Prima Donna Saved Her

## How Mme. Lipkowska, the Metropolitan Soprano, Escaped from the Russian Bolsheviki Wearing Disguises and Playing the Parts in Real Life Which She Had Acted on the Stage

Madame Lipkowska in Her Native Russian Costume.



**A**UDIENCES at the Metropolitan Opera House before the war remember well the attractive coloratura soprano prima donna, Mme. Lipkowska. Not only did this singer possess a memorable voice, but she was rather exceptional as one of the few prima donnas who was really pretty, for nature unfortunately does not always endow a singer with a grand opera voice and great personal beauty.

The war is over and this distinguished musical artist is again in America. But in the time which has elapsed since the grand opera lovers of America last saw her she has lived through quite as remarkable a series of dramatic events as any of the characters in the various operas whose imaginary joys and sorrows she has interpreted on the stage. And as the leading role in every opera usually ends with a happy romance, so, too, Mme. Lipkowska has lived through a multitude of tragic situations and emerged from it all as the real life heroine of just as charming a love affair as any of the various heroines she has impersonated on the operatic stage.

Mme. Lipkowska was in Paris filling an engagement at the Paris Opera House when the world war broke out. In the course of developments it became desirable for the President of France to make an official visit to the Czar of Russia in Petrograd for reasons of state. At the Russian court in those days things were done on a magnificent scale, and the Russian Government bestirred itself to prepare a welcome and a series of entertainments in honor of the French President which befitted the representative of Russia's firm friend and ally, France.

Among other things a special gala performance at the Imperial Opera House in Petrograd was arranged, and by command of the Czar Mme. Lipkowska, the great soprano, was telegraphed to come back from Paris and sing the title role of the opera that night.

Things were unsettled in Paris and the managers of the Imperial Opera House persuaded her to remain in Russia. Then came the overthrow of the Czar's Government, and this was followed by the Kerensky revolution, and then came the overthrow of the Kerensky regime by the Bolsheviks. With the entrance of the Bolsheviks into national affairs Mme. Lipkowska found herself in the midst of troubles. The Bolshevik officials hated her because she was a reminder of the glittering days of the Czar. Furthermore, she wore French gowns and had wealth and jewels.

Sneers, threats and small indignities became daily more menacing. One day a bearded peasant soldier, emboldened with vodka and unaccustomed authority, flung his arms around the soprano on the street and tried to kiss her through his bristling whiskers.

Mme. Lipkowska had played romantic roles on the operatic stage, although in

those instances, the impassioned lover was a well-washed, cleanly clothed tenor or basso, but her experience in her roles stood her in good stead, and with the graceful agility learned from many rehearsals under the greatest stage managers of the world, and with the help of her maid Mme. Lipkowska eluded the drunken soldier and slipped from his clumsy embrace.

If this was the way things were going in the Bolsheviki capital Mme. Lipkowska decided that the time had come to leave Petrograd. But the news of her resistance to Lenin and Trotsky authority, as represented by the peasant soldier, spread, and an effort was made to hunt down and seize the singer. Her maid was threatened and compelled to leave her. Her former friends were watched and warned not to help her. Her bank account was seized and her famous collection of china was put under guard.

Alone, with only such money as she happened to have in her pocketbook, the prima donna crept out of Petrograd in the night, wearing the rough clothes of a peasant girl and seeking work along the way as a chambermaid.

But in spite of her disheveled hair and uncomely clothes there was something about her which did not fit her pretended vocation. Everybody was spying on everybody else and in terror of their lives. Hardly did she secure employment in a home or little hotel before she found she was being watched and suspected, and was soon notified to move on.

Again and again her beauty attracted the leering familiarities of the newly made Bolsheviki officials, and it required the utmost patience and adroitness to escape from their hungry attentions. Slowly and cautiously, with unbrushed hair and dirty face and hands and ragged clothes, Mme. Lipkowska picked her way by a tortuous journey to Tiflis in Trans-Caucasia.

But here the city was swarming with Bolsheviki civil authorities, military officers and spies and undisciplined soldiers. She must move on. Again taking the highway and traveling mostly at night and often through the fields, the singer finally made her way to the city of Odessa, on the Black Sea, which the Ukrainian forces had been able to hold against the Bolsheviks.

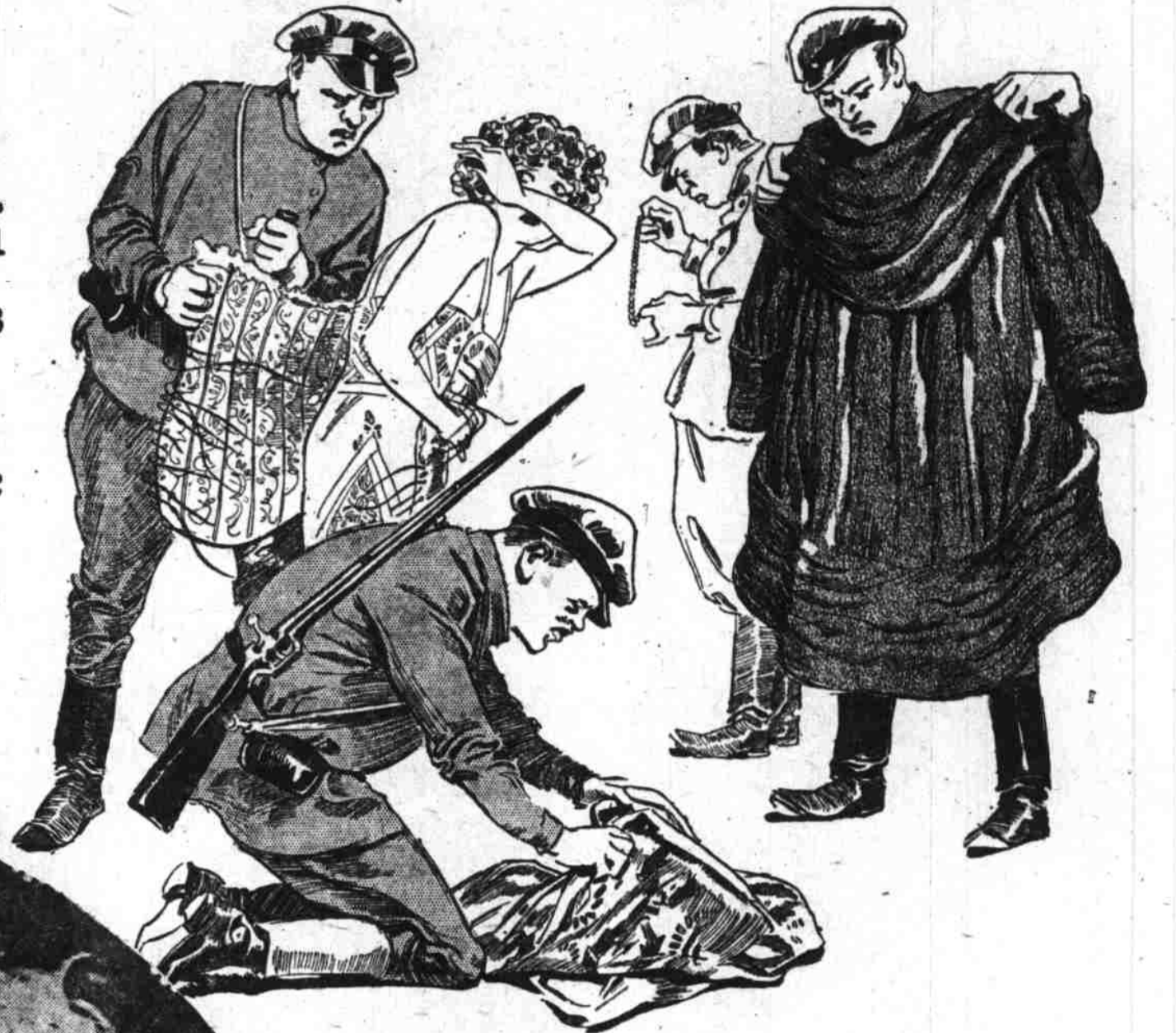
In Odessa Mme. Lipkowska at last was

able to draw a safe breath. There were French there and some Americans, and she threw off her chambermaid rags and sang in concerts. Still greater was her joy at now being near her little thirteen-year-old daughter Aldenna, who was living at the singer's native city of Nicolaief, not far from Odessa, on the Black Sea.

But Mme. Lipkowska was not long to be left in peace. The onward sweep of the Bolshevik army finally enveloped Odessa, and the old horrors of her Petrograd experiences again faced her. Suddenly confronted on the street by a party of Bolsheviki soldiers on her return from a concert, the leader stripped the wrap from her shoulders, and with a grin of joy cried: "Give me those diamonds! My wife can wear jewels just as well as you!"

Assuming a perfectly cool air Mme. Lipkowska tried to reason with him. "I am an opera singer and these jewels are my tools of trade. I need them quite as much as you need your rifles."

Without any reply the leader tore the jewels from her throat and ears and fingers, and while he held them to the light to examine his prize others of the party took possession of her and explored her clothes and person for their share in the booty. One ruffian stripped her fur coat off, while another slipped his knife under her waistband and her skirt slipped to the



"The Bolsheviki leader tore the jewels from her throat, ears and fingers, while others explored her clothes and person. One ruffian stripped off her fur coat and another loosened her corset and tucked it under his arm."

hoff, in the costume of Mephistopheles tried to escape, but the guards brought him back. His character of Satan pleased the mob; they cheered him. He sang to Faust, the dead body lying on the stage in a pool of blood.

Lipkowska sang her own role and that of the dead Faust. The kerfess scene excited the mob and they swarmed over the footlights and raided the chorus of pretty girls. Then they made Lipkowska sing the Marseillaise twelve times, without even piano accompaniment. A giant of a man leaped on the stage.

"Stay here," he whispered; "wait until the rest go. Then you and I—we shall have refreshments, and I will be your protector."

Lipkowska knew what that meant. She and Koznetzoff locked themselves in a dressing room. Kotchanovsky—a gentle, much-beloved man—came to their door and whispered, "Try to get away. Cover your heads with shawls and creep out quietly."

Even as he whispered the giant and his comrades came up. They ordered the door opened. Kotchanovsky placed himself before it and defied them. There was a short struggle. The basso fell, stabbed and shot in a dozen places. In the confusion the two girls escaped. In the early morning hours Mme. Lipkowska left Odessa in an automobile in peasant costume.

Mme. Lipkowska avoided the main thoroughfares and traveled by the less-frequented roads to Nicolaief, hoping to pick up her little daughter and escape from Russia.

The Bolsheviki were already in possession of Nicolaief and the singer dared not go to the house where her child lived. Dismissing the automobile in the suburbs of the town the singer sought work as a chambermaid in a house half a mile away from her own residence. At night she crept through the shadows of her own home and prepared for her young daughter to join her as soon as she could complete her plans for a safe escape for them both.

But the next night on reaching her home she found the child gone and the house empty. A pair of drunken Bolsheviki stopped her and were about to force their attentions upon her when a young French officer, hearing her cries, came to her rescue and put her assailants to flight. The singer recognized that there was not a moment to lose. In despair she condescended to him the desperate situation. He explained that he was Lieutenant Pierre Bodin, of the French Cavalry, and she afterward found that he was a man of wealth and a poet of considerable distinction in France.

While the distracted singer and the gallant French cavalryman were pondering what to do the two Bolsheviki ruffians returned with reinforcements. Lieutenant Bodin felt equal at any time to two or perhaps a dozen Bolsheviki, but with a woman to protect he did not dare risk taking on a whole company of Trotsky troops single handed. Seizing the trembling soprano by the arm he rushed her to

a spot nearby where six of the French officer's comrades were in hiding.

With a word of explanation he left them to hold the oncoming Bolsheviki while he and the singer made their way down the street and into a rowboat which had been hidden underneath a wharf. Rowing out to a steamer which was just getting under way, Lieutenant Bodin hailed the captain and put his charge on board. Not satisfied with the conduct of the captain of the ship, Bodin decided that he would see Mme. Lipkowska safely through to Constantinople lest some unforeseen disaster should overtake her in the strange, disorderly, motley assemblage which he found swarming the ship's decks.

But the end was not yet. Poor little Aldenna had been of necessity left behind. The mother could not rest contented in safety in Constantinople while the little thirteen-year-old dear one remained at the mercy of the Bolsheviki.

Lieutenant Bodin paced the floor and twisted his mustache with perplexity. Willingly he would go back and face the turmoil in Nicolaief, but he did not know little Aldenna by sight and might not be able to trace her.

Mme. Lipkowska insisted that she herself must return and search for the little one. Lieutenant Bodin finally matured their plans, and enlisting the help of half a dozen other brother officers bought a fishing boat in Constantinople, and the entire party disguised themselves as Black Sea fishermen. They slipped out of the harbor, sailed along the Black Sea, and arrived off the port of Nicolaief, but dared not enter until nightfall. In the darkness they sailed the little craft in and anchored it, and Bodin and Lipkowska, with the guard of chivalrous French officers, went swinging up the street, carrying fish baskets and crying fish for sale.

The singer's house was still deserted and the problem was to trace the whereabouts of little Aldenna without risking either the child or the rescue party. For more than a week the distracted mother and her protectors fished by day and dressed their catch on the beach, and at night Lipkowska and her protectors walked up and down the streets plying their wares.

Where was the child? How was the mother to find her?

Of all Mme. Lipkowska's many operatic roles the Bell Song from "Lakme," that most difficult of coloratura parts, was the favorite bit of music of little Aldenna. Again and again from earliest babyhood the child had loved to hear her mother sing to her this bit of composition.

In the opera beautiful Lakme sings the Bell Song in the market-place to attract the ear of her lover and bring him to her side. Could the singer make use of the same song for the same purpose and bring her little one to her?

If Aldenna could hear it now, with all the feeling and expression of the mother's distracted heart, she knew the child would recognize it. And so, from time to time the prima donna would cease her cries to buy her fish and would glide into a bit of the Bell Song from "Lakme."

At last Aldenna heard it. The old nurse made her way out cautiously from a cottage gate and peered suspiciously into the darkness. Mme. Lipkowska instantly recognized the faithful old nurse, and in another moment mother and child were in each other's arms. They crept down to the beach, found their way to the fishing boat, and sailed away to Constantinople before the sun rose on Nicolaief.

It is scarcely surprising that the passenger list of an incoming ship, as it swung into its dock in New York recently, bore the words "Lieutenant and Mrs. Bodin." Mme. Lipkowska's first husband she had divorced several years ago. How could she better repay her debt of gratitude to the chivalrous French officer than to accept his plea to become his wife?

Madame Lipkowska, Who Outwitted the Bolsheviki Spies By Her Convincing Acting and Disguise.