

# SOPHIA LOREN'S struggle for respectability



SOPHIA LOREN handed me a clipping from an Italian newspaper while we were having tea in her overstuffed Victorian apartment in Vienna, where "A Breath of Scandal" was being filmed. "This will spoil everything," she said.

The clipping reported that the Rome attorney general had ordered formal bigamy proceedings against Sophia and her husband, producer Carlo Ponti, because Italy didn't recognize Ponti's Mexican divorce from his first wife.

"Would it mean a fine or a jail sentence?" I asked the voluptuous, green-eyed young woman who had risen from the slums of Naples to become a film star of international repute.

Sophia tried hard to suppress her tears. "I don't care what they do to me!" she replied. "All I want is to be recognized as Mrs. Carlo Ponti. All my life I've fought to be respectable, and I never seem to make the grade!"

Sophia's fight for respectability dates back to her childhood in Pozzuoli, a village near Naples. She remembers how other children used to call her ugly names that she didn't understand. All she knew was that her father was never around.

Sophia has only seen her father three times—twice as a youngster, the last time in 1955. And then only because his wife tried to have Sophia's sister denied the use of their father's name.

The constant teasing by other children made Sophia shy and unsure of herself. "Most of the time I just wanted to hide," she recalls.

When Sophia was seven and Italy

joined Germany in the war against the Allies, her own lot became easier. For once she had something in common with others—even if it was hardships, bombing attacks, and malnutrition.

She was a hungry 10-year-old when Gen. Mark Clark's forces entered Naples. She remembers how eagerly she grabbed the chocolate bars and C-rations of friendly GIs. But while Sophia was grateful for the food, she hated having to accept charity.

It soon became an obsession with her to find a job that would make her independent. "My only real friend was my science teacher; I wanted to follow in her footsteps and become a teacher, too."

INDIRECTLY, the teacher was responsible for Sophia's career. "I always thought of myself as an ugly girl," she admits. Her friend's insistence that she was beautiful encouraged her to enter a Naples beauty contest when she was 15. She won second prize, and sufficient confidence to give up her teaching ambitions and move to Rome to try for a career as an actress.

Sophia made the rounds of the movie studios every day, taking on modeling jobs to support herself and her mother and pay for drama lessons.

It was Carlo Ponti who discovered Sophia when she entered another beauty contest in which he was a judge. He introduced her to a director-friend who gave her a bit part in a movie.

"Carlo instinctively sensed what I wanted most," she told me. "Naturally I wanted financial security. But most of all, I wanted to be accepted socially."

Sophia's first aim was comparatively easy to achieve. With Ponti master-minding her career, her third year as an actress, 1955, was known in Italy as "The Year of Sophia." Since then he has managed to make her an international star and to increase their joint fortune to a reported \$10,000,000 safely stored away in Swiss banks. Her other objective—to be accepted socially—was a little harder to accomplish.

"All the odds were against me," she insists. "I didn't speak properly, not even Italian. I didn't know how to dress, eat, or carry on a conversation."

Ponti set out to correct the situation. One noon they were lunching in one of Rome's better restaurants when he

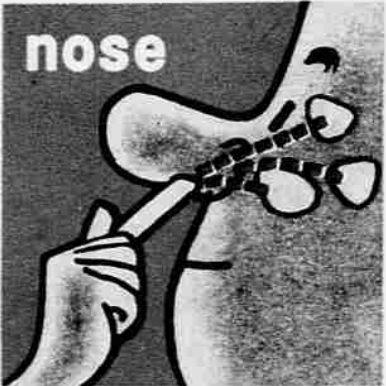


Peasant-girl Sophia Loren, shown on the set of "A Breath of Scandal," was made a star by her balding husband, Carlo Ponti. He couldn't make her a lady, though.

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