

The Shah's remarriage last month freed this beautiful but tragic woman who now seeks to erase the past and build a new life; what are her chances?



Soraya exchanges glances with Prince Orsini, whom she met on a skiing trip.

Queen and the handsome Italian nobleman met again in Munich and attended a *Fasching* (German mardi gras) together. What had started as a flirtation on both sides was ripening into something more important. Orsini begged Soraya to cancel her much-heralded trip to the U.S., but she went anyway on the advice of her family.

As early as last May, however, Soraya quietly visited a priest, Father Francesco Sardi, in Rome. Friends openly speculated that she wanted to receive instruction in the Catholic faith so that she could marry her prince. She told her mother then: "I don't think I've ever been so in love with anyone."

When the rumors of marriage began to circulate, however, the Shah, Orsini's parents, and the Catholic Church threw up what appeared to be insurmountable obstacles. The Shah claimed that Orsini was more noble than prosperous and couldn't support a former queen; Orsini's parents pointed out that Soraya was a Moslem and of common birth; and when the couple appealed to the Church, the verdict was: no marriage.

FOR A TIME, it seemed as if the Vatican edict published in the official Church paper, *Osservatore Romano*, would end their idyll. They saw less of each other. Soraya, visibly unnerved by the setback, was placed under a doctor's care in a Cologne, Germany, clinic. European papers reported that she even attempted suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills. She denied the report, but not to the satisfaction of Italian newspapermen.

By last November, however, Orsini and Soraya were together again and there was speculation that they would marry despite the family and religious barriers. It was said that they had quietly ironed out their difficulties with the Church (the Vatican purportedly had ruled that once she becomes a Roman Catholic her past Moslem marriage and

divorce from the Shah would be nonexistent as far as the Church is concerned) and hence they were free to marry.

So when the Shah announced his engagement to Farah Diba, it meant that Soraya's last obstacle to remarriage was behind her. If she doesn't wed Orsini, which seems likely, it's possible that Harold Krupp, scion of the wealthy German industrialist family, may win her.

Now, at last, it seems as if Soraya can forget the heartbreak of the past two years. Where, a short time ago, there was only the pain of being an ex-queen on public display, today she has the chance for a happy marriage and even a career.

Soraya's friends always thought that if she hadn't been a queen, she would have gone into the theater. And for a time after her divorce, it looked as if she might become an actress. But she finally turned down a Hollywood offer because of pressure from the Shah, who still actively influenced her life.

At one of Orsini's parties (given so that Soraya and her mother could meet the prince's parents), Soraya was introduced to Ralph Bendix, a leading European singer. She told him that she had been interested in music ever since she was a child taking piano lessons in Isfahan, Iran, where she was born. She confessed to an interest in jazz and popular singing.

The result of this chance meeting was that Soraya started to take voice lessons from Bendix. "Why not a singing career?" she wondered. Bendix assured her that she had the talent to be successful, and just recently she signed a recording contract with a German company.

SORAYA won't be singing for her supper out of necessity—although there are those who claim that she would have to support Orsini. The Shah gave her \$300,000 outright upon their separation and will continue to send her a gener-

ous monthly allowance. And her German ancestry (she's half German, half Persian) has imbued her with a sense of thriftiness. "She never was a girl to want 365 dresses a year," a former courtier says. "Even when she was queen, she didn't mind wearing the same dress more than once. She can still easily afford Paris *haute couture*, of course, but she is just as likely to find a \$9 dress that pleases her in a small shop as one worth 100 times that much in the most swank salon."

Soraya has finally closed the book on a painful chapter in her life. For a time, her future looked bleak indeed. Then suddenly the Shah's remarriage freed her for a new career and marriage.

So for Soraya, life begins anew, the slate wiped clean. For the first time in two long years, she hopes to find love and contentment. True, she hasn't found them yet, but now, at least, it will be her own decisions that will decide her future happiness.

When Shah of Iran married Farah Diba (below), he cut all ties with Soraya.



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