

‘This Gem-Studded Crown: A dramatic sketch’

By Sarah Munro and Sofie Geschier

Notes on character: In 1926 when this meeting happens, Queen Marie was 51 years old. Martha Root was 54. Queen Marie was an elegant woman, effusive and demonstrative. Martha, although less emotional, had expressive physical gestures and would often sit in her chair eagerly leaning forward. The actresses should try to capture these characteristics.

Notes on costumes: Martha is dressed in a white dress with a sash tied round (like a rope); hat and coat. Marie is dressed in a dark blue dress, long string of pearls; headgear made of soft material with pearls.

Beautiful piano music plays as both women enter the stage and stand at opposite sides, each in a spotlight.

MARTHA: (*looking out*) Dear Shoghi Effendi, I am planning to go to Bucharest after my month’s visit to Budapest. I will arrive at the end of January. The American minister has told me I am not able to see Queen Marie of Rumania, but I wrote her a personal letter and sent her ‘Abdul-Baha’s picture and Dr. Esslemont’s book. And I prayed. (*She smiles*) I expect a reply soon and to be able to meet her to give her the Message.

QUEEN MARIE: 29th of January 1926: The day began drearily – the snow had thawed, making everything look dull and grey. Oh, what is this life?! How hard it is. The ills of the world would be so much less, if only people would never put them into words. Situations would not turn to bad if people around the young would not fan these thoughts. No one wishes to be bad. The bad is so much more frequently emphasized, the good often goes under. All work, all thought, all words should be constructive instead of destroying.

MARTHA: Meanwhile, I prepared my gifts ... the Greatest Name, a copy of the Seven Valleys, 2 Esperanto books, a little bottle of perfume, a little box of candy, a branch of white lilies, and a report of the education congress recently held in Edinburgh.

QUEEN MARIE: We went to the English church this morning, but it was what I would call a poor service. How can we possibly feel strengthened by this kind of worship? What does it matter what building you worship in, or what name you ascribe to your worship – worship is

worship, we can only be judged by God on how sincere it is, surely? (*she sighs*) What a waste of love ...

MARTHA: Dear Shoghi Effendi, no word has yet come from the palace, but I am not sitting idly waiting! I have approached the Minister for Foreign Affairs and offered myself to give a talk. He may arrange for me to speak at Foundation Carol University. I'm busy now preparing it. I speak to the Esperantists tomorrow evening.

QUEEN MARIE: I recently received a letter and a very interesting book. It came from an American lady, who seems to travel all around the world, spreading a message of good will and peace. I wonder at her life. A wonderful life to have! And this book ... I stayed up 'til 3 am reading it. And a picture ... of an old bearded man ... I just couldn't take my eyes off it ... a feeling of curiosity overwhelmed me.

Music plays – like entering a fairyland.

MARTHA: The invitation came that she would see me at 12 noon the next day, at Cotroceni Palace. The palace wasn't the one in the city used more for state functions, but the other one further out, about half an hour by carriage. I set out early. No need to ask if I was on the right road! Hundreds of diplomats in automobiles, military officers on horses, tradesmen in ox-carts formed two colourful lines going to and fro, flowing like the great Danube river! From a distance, one can see the lushly wooded grounds of the palace, like a winter fairyland, a light dusting of snow and icicles hanging from trees. And this visit was just like a fairytale! As one approaches the gates, officers in fine uniforms stand to attention. But their eyes are kindly. My coachman is stopped at intervals, each time the invitation letter is read, checked and then we are motioned forward. No need to ring a bell to enter a queen's home! One can feel the regal atmosphere ... and an inner something indescribably extraordinary as well as gorgeous externally. The butler with such perfection of manners shows the way up a wide circular stairway to a drawing room. A lady-in-waiting ...

The lady-in-waiting appears.

MARTHA: ... comes at once.

The lady-in-waiting takes Martha's hat and coat, smiling a loving welcome. She also takes the lilies, the perfume, and the candy.

LADY-IN-WAITING: Her Majesty, the Queen, will receive you now.

MARTHA: She leads me down a wide hallway hung with art treasures into an immense music room where flowers and tapestries vibrantly decorate the space. But one hardly sees them, for one feels a presence and sees a beautiful woman emerging from behind the door curtain.

Queen Marie turns and enters the space.

LADY-IN-WAITING: *(whispering)* Her Majesty ...

Lady-in-waiting disappears. Queen Marie comes forward quickly, warmly, smiling, taking Martha's hands.

QUEEN MARIE: Dear Miss Root. I am very happy to receive you. You've come a long way.

She leads Martha to a table, where they sit. The lady-in-waiting brings in tea on a tray, with the candies in a little bowl, and the lilies in a vase, which she places on the table.

QUEEN MARIE: I must express my appreciation for the wonderful book that you sent me. I believe these Teachings are the solution to the world's problems today. And I was thrilled to learn that Bahá'u'lláh ... (is that how you say His name?) He sent a letter to my grandmother!

MARTHA: It is, your Majesty. And yes, He did send a Tablet to Queen Victoria!

QUEEN MARIE: I am reading the book with deep interest. This "new era" ... what will it be? What will it bring?! How truly exciting!

MARTHA: I'm delighted your Majesty has found it interesting. Many others have done so. May I venture to ask what especially struck you about what you read?

QUEEN MARIE: Well, these principles! There is no doubt that this is what the world needs today, more than ever before. Principles such as unfettered search for truth, the oneness of mankind and of religion. Oh, I couldn't agree with them more!

Martha pauses to marvel at the Queen's openness. Queen Marie looks inquisitively at her guest.

(pause)

MARTHA: May I ask if you and your family practice a particular religion?

QUEEN MARIE: Religion! As you can imagine, it's not been a straightforward thing in my family, being an Englishwoman married to a German living in Eastern Europe! I myself am a Protestant, my husband is Catholic, and my children have been baptized as Orthodox. But we have always respected each others' choice. No one ever tried to make me anything else. I have never been able to understand this attitude of intolerance. I witnessed it in the Catholic church when my son was christened in the Orthodox – as a punishment, my husband was refused communion for 20 years. Absurd!

MARTHA: I couldn't agree more. And I'm sorry to hear of your struggles.

Pause.

MARTHA *(smiles)*: I brought you something! *(offering the Greatest Name)*

QUEEN MARIE: Oh! How beautiful! A picture?

MARTHA: No, your Majesty. It's a calligraphy by the great Persian calligrapher Mishkín-Qalam, in Arabic. It reads "Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá",

QUEEN MARIE: Yá Bahá'u'l-Abhá. But what does it mean in English?

MARTHA: "O Thou the Glory of the Most Glorious!"—"The Most Glorious" is the Greatest Name of God. "Bahá'u'lláh" means "Glory of God".

QUEEN MARIE: *(intently looking at it)*: Thank you. *(pause)* God is indeed most Glorious!

Pause. Marie holds onto the Greatest Name for the rest of the interview.

QUEEN MARIE: I see you have an Esperanto pin. May I see it? Tell me, are you an Esperantist?

MARTHA: I am.

QUEEN MARIE: I've always thought Esperanto to be a particularly powerful way to unite people. How is the movement progressing in the various lands around the world?

MARTHA: Wonderfully, your Majesty. Growing day by day.

Martha unpins it and hands it to Marie.

QUEEN MARIE: What does the green and white stand for?

MARTHA: The 5-pointed star stands for light to the 5 continents. The white background is the color of peace; the green is the Esperanto color of hope. The word 'Esperanto' means 'one who hopes'. I would like to gift you this pin.

QUEEN MARIE: How kind! I accept it with gratitude. I myself am "one who hopes".

MARIE pins it on herself.

MARTHA: Before coming to visit you, I had the honor of addressing the Esperantists of Bucharest. They are a small but active band. A new clubhouse has just been presented to the group by a Mr. Henry Fisher, one of the great promoters of Esperanto in Europe.

QUEEN MARIE: Esperanto has my greatest sympathy. I am so busy, yes, but I sincerely hope I can take some time to study it.

MARTHA: I have brought these books for you, with the hope that one day, you will be able to read them.

MARTHA gives her the two Esperanto books.

QUEEN MARIE (smiling): Yes ... maybe ... one day!

MARTHA: I believe you were the Princess of Edinburgh before you moved to Rumania?

QUEEN MARIE: I was indeed.

MARTHA: You may be interested to hear that the 18th Universal Esperanto Congress is to be held in Edinburgh this year in August.

QUEEN MARIE: Oh! Wonderful news! I'm delighted to hear that. Will you be attending?

MARTHA: I certainly intend to, God willing.

QUEEN MARIE: I do hope that one day this type of congress can be held here in Bucharest. When that happens, I will do my utmost to attend it.

MARTHA: Meanwhile, if I am permitted, I'd like to share this report with you on an education congress recently held in that city. Edinburgh is proving itself to be somewhat of a centre for progressive thought in Western Europe. No doubt, your Majesty remains proudly associated with it.

QUEEN MARIE: I miss it terribly, and keep in touch with friends there when I can.

MARTHA: I believe that you have penned several works yourself on subjects of reform and forward-looking movements?

QUEEN MARIE: I try. I love to write. And I will write to promote any worthy, universal cause that brings understanding to the peoples of the world.

MARTHA: You may be aware that some of your books have been translated into Esperanto, and are now being read around the world.

QUEEN MARIE: It gives me great pleasure to learn of this.

Pause.

QUEEN MARIE: (*gazing at Martha, wonderingly*) How people's lives differ! Some, like you, travel all over the world to spread Divine Teachings. Others have the responsibility to raise up a country and its people.

Pause.

MARTHA: It mustn't be easy being a queen.

Pause.

QUEEN MARIE: A queen must be an ear that is always listening to her people, a hand that always gives, and a heart that continuously pardons. A queen must be always awake, always watchful, always ready. I can never show that I am tired, never admit that I am at the end of my tether.

Pause. The Queen sighs and looks very tired.

QUEEN MARIE: Miss Root, do you have children?

MARTHA: Oh, I never married, your Majesty.

QUEEN MARIE: You are so free. My children have been a great light in my life, yes, of course, but also brought great challenges.

MARTHA (*tentatively*): I have read something about your son's recent abdication ...

The queen rises, emotionally stirred.

QUEEN MARIE: Oh! How will it all end? We've been through so much ... the war, the attacks, the suffering, and now this. How can I begin to tell you? I *am* at the end of my tether. My people ... how can I guide them? They are restless and scared. My family ... how can I save them, from themselves?!

She starts to weep. Martha rises to comfort her.

QUEEN MARIE: I didn't expect to share this with you. I'm sorry, Miss Root, to become emotional like this.

MARTHA: Think nothing of it.

QUEEN MARIE: But for some reason, you are someone with whom I feel I can share my true feelings. And the Message you've brought me has touched me so deeply, and been just what I needed.

MARTHA: “While a man is happy he may forget God, but when grief comes and sorrows overwhelm him, then will he remember his Father who is in Heaven.” Those who do not suffer, attain no perfection.

QUEEN MARIE: How true. These words are a great comfort.

Pause. They sit.

MARTHA: Would it help for you to explain what troubles you?

QUEEN MARIE: (*sighs*) I don’t know. Would it even make sense to you? I don’t wish to burden you.

MARTHA: Not at all.

QUEEN MARIE: You are so kindly, and understanding. So pure-hearted.

Pause.

QUEEN MARIE: I love my children. All six of them ... well, five now, one died in infancy.

MARTHA: I’m very sorry for your loss.

QUEEN MARIE: Oh, thank you, yes. I love them all dearly, with my whole heart. But it hasn’t always been easy. When I first came to this country, we were forbidden to associate with any local people at all. Our life was very closed and narrow. There was a lot of distrust. I was so young. In a foreign culture, and I lacked confidence and certainty. My uncle-in-law, King Carol and his wife, Queen Elisabeth, took care of every detail of life. When my first son was born, well, they even took care of that. I hardly saw the child. They arranged for his nursing, his daily care, his education. Queen Elisabeth said once that I was “too English” to be a good mother. I’m still not sure what she meant, but I know one thing, I certainly don’t feel “too English” now. This is my home, Romania. England is but a fond, distant memory.

Of all the things in my life, it is this child that has caused me the greatest grief. From a young age, he was given to fits of rage. A tutor appointed by my husband’s uncle and aunt ended up turning dear Carol against me, and by the time he matured, violence had come to be part of his character. Now, he has chosen to pursue love with a Romanian, something for which he is

willing to give up his family responsibilities, his wife and child, as well as his most precious inheritance, the throne of this country.

The people of Romania do not deserve this uncertainty. I feel for them. How much they have been through! I have struggled to learn Romanian and have always tried my best to connect to the people here. But this has only been possible since my uncle and aunt passed away. Then we could have relative freedom. My dear Miss Root, it wasn't until I and my daughter, Ileana, offered ourselves as nurses in the hospitals during the second Balkan war that I felt like I truly understood who the Romanians are. What strong, what spiritual, what wonderful people! I fell in love with every one of them I met.

So, you can only imagine what pain I felt when the attacks from Germany began. How terrible a choice we had been given! My husband being German, and with my own family background, of course there was an option to ally ourselves with that country. But, oh! how could we have?! Our conscience simply could not allow it. But that choice brought such suffering, such suffering to the people of Romania.

She weeps.

How unprepared we were when the wrath of war came upon us!? How many died?! The innocent, the poor ... the children ...

She weeps.

So you see, Miss Root, if there is anything that can bring peace to the world, so we don't have to make these horrific choices again, I will take it. I will grab it with both hands, and I will promote it with every breath in my body, until my breath is no more.

It is in this moment that you have come to me and brought me this Message of hope and peace. Forgive me pouring out my woes to you, but I must make you understand how grateful I am to you. For having the courage to approach me.

MARTHA: I understand. There is some divine trial in all this, which will ultimately turn out for the good of all of us, even your son. If you permit me, I will pray for him, for you, for your family and, of course, the whole country. Trust me when I say you will never be out of my prayers. And I will ask Shoghi Effendi to pray too.

QUEEN MARIE: Who is that?

Martha takes out a little picture and hands it to Marie, who looks at it intently, then holds onto it throughout the rest of the interview.

MARTHA: He is the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, who guides me in all I do. He is the great-grandson of the Founder, Bahá'u'lláh.

QUEEN MARIE: He is alive now?

MARTHA: Oh yes, he lives in Palestine, near to where Bahá'u'lláh, and Bahá'u'lláh's Son, 'Abdu'l-Bahá, are buried in two Holy Shrines.

QUEEN MARIE: ... 'Abdu'l-Bahá (*saying the name tentatively*) ... that is the name written on the back of the little picture you gave me. Of the elderly gentleman, such a kind face He has.

MARTHA: I carry His picture always. It comforts and strengthens me. Both Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá endured intense and prolonged sufferings to bring Their Light into the world.

QUEEN MARIE: Light and suffering are always connected, it seems.

MARTHA: Indeed. And what you have given to the Romanian people will never be forgotten. May I tell your Majesty about what I have learned of your contribution to the people of this country?

QUEEN MARIE: I have hurt them so much more than I ever gave.

MARTHA: With your permission ... when your cousin Czar Nicholas of Russia abdicated the throne, the government that took over plotted to imprison both you and your husband. I know you were offered asylum by your English cousins, which you refused.

QUEEN MARIE: I had made a commitment as sovereign to this people, how could I leave?

MARTHA: I have read about your advocacy in the peace negotiations in Paris after the war ended. Germany had taken three quarters of this country's land. The Romanian delegation sent to fight for the country's territory was too weak to gain back what was rightfully theirs. They needed your help. So you went to strengthen them. Thanks be to God, Romania came out of

that with a significant expansion, and the country more than doubled in size, the population too. Without you there, who knows where Romania would be now.

QUEEN MARIE: I was only helping to right a wrong that I had been part of creating in the first place.

MARTHA: I am sure God sees that your soul only ever wanted to do what was *right*.

Long pause.

QUEEN MARIE: Tell me about the soul, Miss Root. What do the Bahá'í Teachings say about it?

MARTHA: Many, many beautiful things. Bahá'u'lláh teaches that the soul is a sign of God, the first among all created things to recognize the excellence of its Creator, an eternal entity that travels through all the Worlds of God until it reaches a state of perfection and closeness to its Lord. The purpose of our life in this dark world is to develop our human spirit, so that, as a child released from the limited state of its mother's womb, it can thrive and grow healthy and strong once released from this world.

QUEEN MARIE: I yearn for it. Such purity and simplicity.

Pause.

QUEEN MARIE: No matter how hard hit I am, I always take it as something necessary to help me become a completely unselfish self.

MARTHA: The plant most pruned by the gardeners is that one which when the summer comes will have the most beautiful blossoms and the most abundant fruit. The farmer cuts up the earth with his plough and from that earth comes a rich, plentiful harvest. A soldier is no good General until he has been in the front of the fiercest battle and has received the deepest wounds.

QUEEN MARIE: And a General I must be.

MARTHA: Something that can help you on this journey you may find in this little book.

She hands it to MARIE.

QUEEN MARIE: ‘The Seven Valleys’.

MARTHA: It is a wonderful little book that shows how the spirit can progress through seven stages to perfect freedom.

QUEEN MARIE: I will read and study it carefully, both myself and my daughter Ileana. She’s also interested in these spiritual ideas.

MARTHA: If convenient for your Majesty, I would love to keep in touch with you and hear of your responses once you’ve had time to look through it.

QUEEN MARIE: I would like that very much.

The lady-in-waiting appears and whispers in the ear of the Queen. The Queen turns awkwardly to Martha (clearly something else is requiring her attention).

MARTHA: I have taken too much of your time already. I should take my leave.

QUEEN MARIE: I have enjoyed your visit immensely, Miss Root. Please do let me know when you plan to visit Bucharest in the future, and we shall meet again.

MARTHA: I will most certainly.

MARIE indicates to the lady-in-waiting, who exits and appears with Martha’s coat and hat.

QUEEN MARIE: Perhaps the time of afterwards has come. Though one can scarcely envision it with earthly eyes, those thousand years of peace foretold in the Bibles of the world perhaps are to begin in this century.

MARTHA: I have no doubt this is true. It *is* true!

QUEEN MARIE: Please write to me soon, Miss Root. I hope your onward journey is a safe and pleasant one. Goodbye.

MARTHA: Goodbye.

The two women move back into their spotlight on either side of the stage.

QUEEN MARIE: *(to the audience)* A kind, modest, American, a Miss Root, came to visit me today. She is utterly convinced of Truth. It is this proud conviction that enables her, a woman of no wealth or social prestige, plain, dowdily dressed and neither a scholar nor an outstanding intellectual, to meet kings, queens, princes and princesses, presidents, men and women of fame, and tell them about the Bahá'í Faith. How grateful I am! How so, so grateful!

MARTHA: Dear Shoghi Effendi, everything went just like a miracle ... I love her and felt more at home with her than many people who aren't queens. I learned a great deal from her too – she was so sweet and gracious.

QUEEN MARIE: I begin every morning now with reading some of 'Abdu'l-Bahá and Bahá'u'lláh's wisdom. It does me a great deal of good, consoles me and makes me think. It gives me new hope, destroying nothing, but clearing away what disturbed me in other spiritual teaching. It has at last brought God quite near. For the first time I have *felt* religion. All my yearning for *real* religion has been satisfied. All my hazy desires and thoughts have been suddenly made concrete by this Teaching. My soul answers and *feels* it. These books have strengthened me beyond belief. And now I am ready to die, full of hope. But I pray God not to take me away yet, for I still have a lot of work to do.

MARTHA: Dear Shoghi Effendi ... The queen has written an article for an American syndicate about the Bahá'í Cause only four short months after she learned about the Faith! This article appeared on the same day in more than 200 newspapers in the US and Canada. Of course in the very best newspapers, in New York, Boston, Chicago, California. It has been copied by many other papers in many parts of the world. It has been broadcast by radio and many Bahá'ís, just as I did, had several hundred mimeographed to give out. It's a universal message addressed not just to the United States, but to the whole world.

QUEEN MARIE: Dear Shoghi Effendi ... I was deeply moved on reception of your letter. Indeed a great Light came to me with the message of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá. It came as all great messages come, at an hour of dire grief and inner conflict and distress, so the seed sank deeply. We pass on the Message from mouth to mouth, and all those we give it to see a Light suddenly lighting before them. That my open letter was a balm to those suffering for the Cause is indeed a great happiness to me, and I take it as a sign that God accepted my humble tribute. With bowed head I recognize that I too am but an instrument in Greater Hands.

MARTHA (*looking at Queen Marie*): “From amongst all mankind, hath he chosen you, and your eyes have been opened to the light of guidance, and your ears attuned to the music of the Company above and blessed by abounding grace.”

MARTHA (*looking at the audience*): “Your hearts and souls have been born into new life. Thank ye and praise ye God that the Hand of infinite bestowals hath set upon your heads this gem-studded crown. This crown whose lustrous jewels will forever flash and sparkle down all the reaches of time.”