

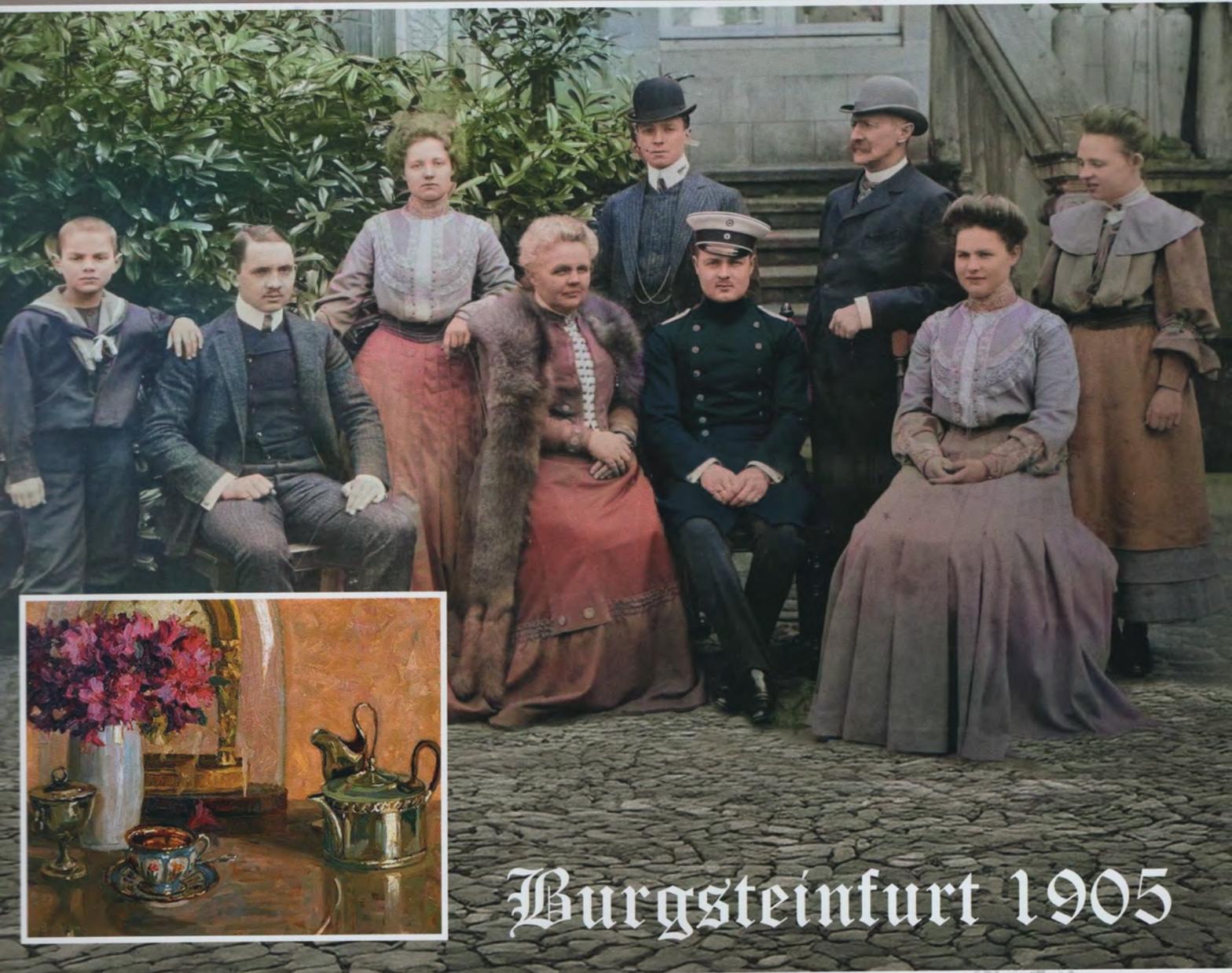


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Burgsteinfurt 1905

QUEEN MARIE
Of Bavaria

BENTHEIM
A Family Album

MEDICI
The Last One



The Last Medici

by Richard Jay Hutto

“He was tall and large and lean and he had the long flowing lines from the tips of his fingers to his shoulders, from his smooth curly head to his slender feet, that are seen in the early Italian paintings. His full name was Bindo Peruzzi di Medici; his title, Marchese; and he was of the last generation of his family... The last of the Medici!”

Few royal or noble family names evoke such opulence as de Medici. Among their vast contributions to the arts world, they lay claim to the invention of the piano and arguably opera as well.² Their family bank was the largest in Europe in the 15th century allowing them to fuel their rise to power. They gave four popes to the church – Leo X, Clement VII, Pius IV, and Leo XI – as well as two queens of France – Marie (second wife of King Henri IV and Regent of France during the minority of her son, Louis XIII) and Catherine (consort of Henri II and mother of French Kings Francis II, Charles IX, and Henry III). Catherine de Medici is now enjoying newly-found fame as the subject of a successful television series, *The Serpent Queen*.



Anna Maria Luise

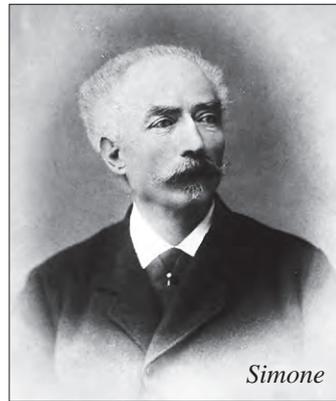
The de Medicis in 1531 became the hereditary Dukes of Florence. They were the ruling house of the Duchy of Florence until 1569 and then ruling house of the Grand Duchy of Tuscany from 1569 to 1737. By the last decade of the 18th century, however, the direct legitimate Medici line was in danger of ending. Anna Maria Luisa de Medici (1667–1743) was the childless Dowager Electress Palatine and daughter of Grand Duke Cosimo III. Thus she was the last lineal descendant of the main branch of Medici family at the death of her childless, crude, and openly homosexual brother, Gian Gastone (whose handsome titular valet, Giuliano Dami, exercised a “magnetic influence” on him). She was determined to protect the family’s artistic legacy as well as the family name. Although there are differing opinions, she possibly contracted syphilis from her husband.³ What is certain is that they had no children.

Anna, “was a woman of remarkable ability, great energy and determined character.”⁴ Cosimo III relied heavily upon her wisdom and experience and in 1713 tried to alter the succession laws to allow her to inherit his throne after her brother’s death. In his last years he sought to convince his fellow monarchs to agree. But the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles VI, considered Tuscany to be an imperial fief and thought only he could alter the succession laws.⁵ He instead appointed Francis Stephen I, Duke of Lorraine, later Holy Roman Emperor Francis I and founder with his wife, Maria Theresa of Austria, of the Habsburg-Lorraine dynasty (they were the parents of Marie Antoinette, Queen Consort of France).

Anna Maria’s most lasting legacy was the “Family Pact” signed in 1737 which willed all the personal property of the Medicis to the Tuscan state and specified that none could ever be removed from Florence.⁶ It gave the Medici’s vast art collection, including the contents of the Uffizi, Palazzo Pitti, and Medici villas, to the Tuscan state. She deserves credit for making Florence a center of the artistic world and is still celebrated there in an annual event to honor her legacy. Her death in 1743 ended the direct royal line of the House of Medici.

In 1742, shortly before her death, she commissioned official family genealogical studies to determine who was the closest living member in a cadet line of her family. Pietro Paolo dei Medici was declared her nearest kin as “the closest of her agnates” in order to inherit her honors at her death.⁷ He left a son, Averardo, who never married, and a daughter, Anna Maria Luisa. Averardo inherited the 600 year-old sumptuous Tuscan Villa I Busini. The villa, 30 minutes outside Florence, would pass through him and remain in the family until it was sold in 1935. It is now a luxurious rental villa (villaiusini.com). In 1783 Anna Maria Luisa married Cavaliere Bindo Simone Peruzzi from a prominent banking family in Florence, although not nearly so successful as the de Medicis).

Anna’s husband, the Cavaliere, served at the time as chamberlain to King Umberto I who encouraged him to agree to add the family name of Medici to his own. Believing that the Peruzzi name was equal if not more powerful than the Medici one, he did not originally intend to use the Medici name until King Umberto made the name hereditary in his line. Thus Umberto’s chamberlain became Cavaliere Bindo Peruzzi de Medici. They were also given a small portion of the vast Medici wealth. He and his wife in turn had three children, the eldest of whom, Bindo Battista Peruzzi de Medici (1784–1825), married Anna Maria Rodriguez and they had two sons. On July 14, 1895, King Umberto I created the elder son, Ridolfo (1831–1905), “Marquis de Medici” with a new coat of arms, a title to be inherited in the male line. At Ridolfo’s death in 1905 the title passed to his younger brother, Simone.



Simone

Simone Perruzi de Medici (1832–1900) would bring to the family many literary and academic connections by his marriage in Rome in 1875 to Edith Marion Story (1844–1907), who was born in Boston to prominent American parents and grew up largely in Rome where her family

moved when she was only six years old.⁸ Her grandfather, Joseph Story (1779–1845), a distinguished attorney, served as Associate Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court from 1812 until his death in 1845. Appointed at the age of 32, he was the youngest person to date appointed to the Supreme Court. His opinions and treatises are considered “a cornerstone of early American jurisprudence.”

By Justice Joseph Story’s wife, Sarah Waldo Wetmore, he had two children who lived to adulthood, Mary Oliver Story (1817-1849) and William Wetmore Story (1819–1895). Justice Story’s son, renowned sculptor William W. Story, married Emelyn Bartlett Eldredge. In addition to their eldest daughter, Edith Marion, who would become the Marchesa Simone Peruzzi de Medici and the mother of Bindo, Edith had two brothers who reached maturity. Portrait artist Julian Russell Story (1857-1919) married the international opera star Emma Eames, and sculptor T. Waldo Story (1854-1915) married as his second wife opera singer Bessie Pickens Abbott having abandoned his first



Edith Marion Story



Bindo



Mabel Dodge Luhan

wife, Maud Broadwood, and their two daughters. Abott sang in a production of *Carmen* with Enrico Caruso in San Francisco's Grand Opera House the night before the 1906 San Francisco earthquake.

Thus Bindo was born into a wealthy international family of artists and musicians. Described as the "glamorous godson of King Umberto," and "widely considered the most eligible Florentine bachelor of the time," Bindo would have three women associated with his name: Princess Luisa of Tuscany (who became the Crown Princess of Saxony), who gave him hope of holding onto a noble life; American heiress Mabel Dodge Luhan who understood him, gave him loyal support and encouragement and ignored his faults; and a mysterious, "jealous aristocrat rejected by Bindo," referred to as, "Lady S.," who caused his complete downfall and death.

Princess Luisa of Tuscany married in 1891 Frederick Augustus, Crown Prince of Saxony. She gave birth to six children in eleven years, five of whom survived to maturity, which increased her popularity among her husband's Saxon subjects. She despised rigid court life and indulged in affairs; her father-in-law, the king, threatened to lock her away in an asylum. When pregnant with her seventh child, she fled Dresden to Lake Geneva where her brother (who was in love with a prostitute) joined her. The resulting scandal was very damaging to the Saxon royal family who were devout Catholics. She then had an affair with her children's French tutor, André Giron, who was substantially younger than she and may have been the father of her youngest daughter.

As Baroness Hildegard von Spitzemberg noted in her diary,



Luisa and her brother Joseph

"They were all met as we of the horrific scandals at the Saxon court, which were of unparalleled repulsiveness! Five children, a husband, a throne: leave all that at the age of 32 years to elope being expecting by the tutor of these children – it's downright dreadful!... Thus, when royal women forget themselves and all else considered decent, noble, and catholic, they then forfeit the very right of existence."

Although Luisa eventually left Giron, she later married Enrico Toselli and was stripped of all her titles, financial support, and family recognition. Evidently she cared for Bindo as a friend but did not entertain his hopes. As her friend, the writer William LeQueux recalled, "It was ten thousand pities that Luisa did not fall in love with him, as at least she might then have stood a reasonable chance of happiness. But she told Bindo that she did not care for him and forbade him to see her again after a final interview which she agreed to grant the unhappy young man."¹⁰

The second woman was American heiress and arts patron, Mabel Dodge (later Luhan), one of the founders of the Taos, New Mexico, art colony. She and her second husband, Edwin Dodge, lived near Florence at her Medici home, Villa Curonia, where she entertained Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas (Mabel was openly bisexual) as well as André Gide and Carl Van Vechten. After a convoluted affair with her chauffeur, she twice tried suicide in 1912 – once by eating figs containing shards of glass, and the second time by laudanum.¹¹ Both attempts were unsuccessful.

When Mabel first saw Bindo riding out of the Palazzo Peruzzi at 28 via Maggio, “He should have been dressed in a slashed velvet doublet and silken hose with feathered velvet cap upon his head...Instead, he was impeccably turned out by the best Italian imitators of English tailors – a little too perfect, a trifle baroque, very smart.”¹² She befriended the handsome young man, finding that his Medici blood, “...mingled curiously with the New England blood of his mother...From the very earliest time, it seems, Bindo’s life was that of one of the greatly favored few. The handsome boy was full of spirit and charm, everyone loved him and all paths were open to him.”¹³

Mabel valued their friendship and was fascinated by him. “He grew very intimate, for he loved me – I knew that - but it was without any need in it save for friendship, sympathy, understanding. These I gave him. I loved him too immensely, I think. He was so dear, so appealing, so magnetic in some almost unnatural way.”¹⁴

Alas, “He had all things save one – money. The family had palaces, villas, and old family retainers, but the sign of the three balls [The Medici crest] had become for them the last hope of their desperate efforts to raise money... Bindo was extravagant. He had to have all the extreme paraphernalia of a fashionable, sporting young officer, and one heard gruesome stories of the visits his redoubtable mother made to the pawnbroker to sell the old silver, laces, jewels.”¹⁵

Bindo’s downfall would be at the hands of the older third woman, referred to as “Lady S.”

*“She came to live in Rome, and Bindo quickly became a victim to her. From a few broken phrases of his one day, I gathered that she surfeited him with her heavy, insistent passion until she drove him back in recoil, back and away from the natural path of love. So that he – to whom all paths had been open before he encountered her – found the central path of emotion closed to him forever. When he was lost to her, she became a fury. She swore she would ruin him and, with all her thwarted feeling turned to poison in her, she schemed until she was able to produce some [love] letters Bindo had written to a young soldier. These she sent to his general – an old friend of his father’s, who had known the boy since he was born. Court-martial and a trial were inevitable.”*¹⁶

Bindo, the great favorite, was then publicly shamed. “The whole of Italy, the army, and the intricately interwoven social groups seemed to heave with surprise at the horror of the shocking event. He faced the music, smiling through it all, calm and graceful and contained – and that redoubtable, white-haired mother, in recent mourning for her husband, came from her Florentine palace to Rome and sat through the affair, apparently unshaken.”¹⁷

Bindo was victorious when the letters were found to be forgeries. It seemed his ruin had been averted. “But still that unappeasable woman, Lady S., plotted until the day

came when, a year later, she sent other letters to Bindo’s general. Once more he was summoned to appear before a court-martial – but this time he refused to come and, instead, sent his resignation, together with his sword, to the old soldier. He returned his beautiful Arabian mare to the King and left Rome immediately to join his mother in Florence.”¹⁸ He later explained to Mabel, “Yes, the first time when they declared me innocent, I was guilty. But the second time I was perfectly guiltless and I could have proved it very simply. But what was the use? It was all the same...And I would not go through that again.”¹⁹

Afterwards his public humiliation was even worse.

*“Bindo was ostracized from society and even by his own family. Returning from Rome to Florence, Bindo was relegated to the upstairs of the Palazzo Peruzzi in Via Maggio. Once at the center of aristocratic society, Bindo was now an outcast, and even shunned by his aunt, Julian’s wife the opera diva Emma Eames, who welcomed Bindo to her performances and sang for him in Vallombrosa where Julian’s house bordered Edith’s.”*²⁰

His only loyal friends were Mabel Dodge, whose husband eventually ordered her to have nothing to do with Bindo (an order she disobeyed until her husband forced their extended trip to the U.S.), and Pen Browning, the only child of poets Elizabeth Barrett Browning and Robert Browning.²¹ Pen’s marriage to an American heiress eased the necessity for money and they separated but never divorced. Browning was so loyal that he bought Bindo’s mother’s villa at Antella



Mabel

and then allowed her to continue living there, helping her escape poverty. Pen “continued to visit Edith and Bindo at the Peruzzi residence at No. 28 via Maggio, furtively entering Bindo’s downstairs rooms when all other friends deserted them and refused to communicate with or be seen with Bindo.”²²

Bindo’s mother hoped her son’s friendship with Mabel would inspire rumors of their supposed liaison, thus ending both the whispers of his sexual preference as well as his financial worries. As Mabel wrote, “I didn’t care for the old marchesa much. Who could – with her bundle of debts, her ashen skin, and her perpetual concern about her son?” At one point while they still saw one another, Bindo was in anguish, relating to her, “Mama has to pay a note in three days and we’ve not a thing to raise it with so far as I can see.”²³ Mabel pressed into his hand her double strand of pearls that had been a wedding present from her grandfather and urged him to sell them in order to pay the debt.

In April of 1907 the elegant Bindo took his own life, shooting himself in the heart in the ground-floor rooms at number 28, Via Maggio, with last rites at Santa Felicità. His funeral on April 4, 1907, was attended by the nobility of Florence and Bindo was buried in the Peruzzi de Medici chapel at Villa I Busini. Learning of Bindo's death from Howard Sturgis, writer Henry James replied, "You talk of sad and fearful things— Bindo P's suicide was a horror I had yet to learn..."²⁴ James wrote to another friend, "Rome and Florence all ghosts & ruins. Maud Story tragic, pathetic, in utter poverty; the Peruzzi house (in Florence) dishonored, desolate, & sinister, & Edith now all but on the straw: I never want to see either place again."²⁵ Finally, James wrote to Bindo's aunt, "What tragedies upon tragedies, and what a dark vision of poor Edith [Story] alone and embittered and uncomfortable in her dark, black, corner of Florence today—with only the ghosts of the Medici to console her!"²⁶ One can only conjecture whether Mabel Dodge's continued presence and support might have averted disaster for Bindo who was, "the graceful, aristocratic homosexual whom she thought heroic, but who shot himself when at Edwin's [Mabel's husband] insistence she cut him dead."

Princess Luisa insisted her rejection of Bindo caused his death. If she is to be believed,

"One day," said Louise, "I had rejected Bindo for the third time. That evening, while I was dressing for dinner, the telephone rang. I answered it." 'It is I, Bindo,' came over the wire." 'Well, what's the matter now? Are you ill? You talk strangely.'

"Yes, Louise. I am a dying man.'

"Dying,' I shrieked. 'Why, you were all right, this morning. Have you had an accident?'

"Listen, Louise,' said the mournful voice. 'I cannot live without you. I bid you farewell, love of my heart. This is good-bye.'

"What do you mean?' I gasped. "There was a tense silence. I waited for Bindo to speak. I still held the receiver. Then, horror of horrors, came a nerve-shattering explosion. Bindo had blown out his brains!"²⁷

Her interest did not end there. She later consulted a medium/psychic who, in a reading, proclaimed, "the earth-bound spirit of her ill-fated lover, Bindo Peruzzi di Medici, had informed her that he was suffering torments of punishment for his act of self-destruction, as his spirit was forced to remain in company with his decaying body and to witness all the attendant horrors of corruption."²⁸

Bindo's brother had only a daughter and the Medici line petered out yet again. He rests in the chapel of the lavishly-restored Peruzzi-Medici Chapel at Villa I Busini surrounded by the trappings of power and wealth that were taken from him as a young man.

- 1 Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Intimate Memories: The Autobiography of Mabel Dodge Luhan*, University of New Mexico Press, 2014; p 69.
- 2 <https://web.archive.org/web/20230123143004/https://www.medicini.org/music-and-the-medicini/>
- 3 <https://www.nature.com/articles/nature.2013.12435>
- 4 Eldridge-Story and Allied Families, *States Historical Company*, 1943, Hartford, CT.
- 5 Harold Acton, *The Last Medici*, Macmillan, p 255.
- 6 G.F. Young, *The Medici: Volume II*, John Murray; pp 502-503.
- 7 Peruzzi de' Medici, su siosa.archivi.beniculturali.it URL consultato il 17 Nov 2016.
- 8 *New York Sun*, 27 Apr 1913.
- 9 Diary entry of 27 November 1902 (ed. Rudolf Vierhaus), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 1960, p 424.
- 10 Robert W. Chambers, "The Sign of the Silver Skull," *Young Man in a Hurry*, Harper & Brothers, 1904.
- 11 Byrne, Janet (1995), *A Genius for Living: A Biography of Frieda Lawrence*, Bloomsbury,
- 12 Mabel Dodge Luhan, *European Experiences*, Harcourt Brace, 1935; p 112.
- 13 Luhan, pp 111-112.
- 14 Mabel Dodge Luhan, *Intimate Memories*, p 70.
- 15 Luhan, 112-113, *European Experiences*.
- 16 Luhan, p 113.
- 17 Luhan, pp 113-114.
- 18 Luhan, p 114.
- 19 Luhan, p 120.
- 20 Luhan, p 120.
- 21 "Pen risked social ostracism by continuing to associate with Bindo Peruzzi...long after Bindo had been disgraced by charges of homosexuality." Luhan, *European Experiences*, New York, 1935; pp 113-115.
- 22 <https://www.florin.ms/CBVd.html>; "The Significance of Florence in the Life of William Wetmore Story and his Family," Kathleen Lawrence, George Washington University; 2008.
- 23 Luhan, p. 121.
- 24 Henry James to Howard Sturgis, April 13, 1907, *Edel*, IV, 442
- 25 Henry James to Isabella Stewart Gardner, May 11th, 1909
- 26 Henry James to Maud Broadwood Story, April 5, 1914
- 27 *The World's News*, Sydney (Australia), 14 Aug 1943, "Tragic End to Penance of Priest-Prince;" p. 7.
- 28 Kathleen Lawrence, "The Significance of Florence in the Life of William Wetmore Story and his family," <https://www.florin.ms/CBVd.html#:~:text=28%20via%20Maggio%2C%20furtively%20entering,the%20Medici%20to%20console%20her!%E2%80%9D>.