

BEHIND EVERY GREAT FORTUNE™

A NOVEL

THE OHEKA CHRONICLES
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Foreword

RECENTLY, I ATTENDED A CATERED affair at Oheka Castle in Huntington, New York on the fabled Gold Coast of Long Island. The magnificence of this facility prompted me to ask the host about its origins. He advised me that it was built by Otto Kahn in the early twentieth century. Beyond that simple fact, Mr. Kahn was a complete mystery. Curious about what I imagined was an interesting life, I began researching the life and times of Otto Kahn. Although Kahn's greatest claim to fame is his immortalization as the Monopoly® guy in the eponymous board game, Otto Kahn knew and interacted with many of the most famous and powerful people of his time. Luminaries like Teddy Roosevelt, Enrico Caruso, and Charlie Chaplin graced lavish affairs hosted by Kahn at Oheka.

I suppose that somewhere in the great beyond, the spirit of Otto Kahn sensed a disturbance in his repose. Perhaps Mr. Kahn followed the advice of Yannick Murphy, the author of *Signed, Mata Hari* who wrote:

If you want to be a good ghost, stay quiet for almost a century. Then, on the anniversary of your death, begin to haunt the dreams of a writer so that the writer tells your story the way it should be told.¹

Behind Every Great Fortune™ is a novel of historical fiction that tells the story of Otto Kahn and Oheka Castle the way it should be told.

Most of the characters and events are based in fact. Throughout the book I have used the actual words of historical characters in order to provide verisimilitude. Statements of this sort have been italicized. The sources are

compiled in end notes. *Behind Every Great Fortune*[™] is based in what I call tenable fiction. The interaction between and among the characters provides a compelling story and answers many of the mysteries surrounding Otto Kahn and Oheka Castle. Kahn was one of many partners of venerable banking houses in the early twentieth century. Yet, he alone built a castle. Thus, the most compelling mystery surrounding Otto Kahn is: how did he amass his fortune? Add to this, rumors of blood, mayhem and unimaginable treasure that swirled around Oheka and you have the makings of an intriguing story.

It is generally recognized that the winners write history. Historical fiction, using creative, plausible alternatives, is the writer's antidote to that truism. As Gore Vidal, the noted writer of historical fiction, observed, "*History is nothing but gossip about the past, with the hope that it might be true.*"²

Before entering the labyrinth of our protagonist's life, the reader should know that prior to writing this book I received a literary license to imagine, speculate and create scenarios that may or may not have occurred, but that are within the realm of possibility. Some of the characters are fictitious; others are used fictitiously. Lest anyone take offense, I reiterate that *Behind Every Great Fortune*[™] is a work of historical fiction, with emphasis on the word fiction. The goal of any imagination, speculation or conjecture in this work is to entertain, titillate and provoke the reader.

With that said, enjoy this novel,
Frank Amoroso

1916

St. Petersburg, Russia

A THIN LAYER OF SNOW covered the rutted ice in the courtyard of the Yusopov Palace. Dim silver light from the crescent moon illuminated his path. The vision in his left eye faltered as he stumbled toward the exit that was his only hope to escape and survive. Stay upright, keep moving, he exhorted himself. A sticky clot congealed over his left eye and cheek, blood from the wounds inflicted by his assailants. He slipped again, his throbbing wrists breaking his fall.

Voices behind him hurled curses. Panic surged in his chest. The murderous princes were pounding the door to the courtyard. In a matter of seconds, they would break through the barrier he had toppled to block their pursuit. His only hope was to make it to the street. With his good eye he fixed on the street lamp ahead that stood like a beacon holding back the grave-like darkness that enveloped the courtyard.

His chest ached from the bullet lodged between his ribs. He felt his lifeblood flowing down his side, pasting his silk shirt to his skin. A wave of nausea swept over him. Bile and vomit hurled from his throat and splashed onto his boots. He suppressed the terror rising in his brain.

At last, he reached the gate. He threw his weight against it, and miraculously, it gave way. Behind him, splintering wood signaled the demise of his barricade. Loud voices and rapid footsteps crunching across the courtyard ice followed in hot pursuit. In moments they would be on him like wolves on a wounded bear. There was no doubt that they would finish their murderous

task. Then, he saw his salvation in the form of headlights approaching. He staggered into the frozen street, waving like a drowning man.

The car stopped. He grinned madly and reached toward it. His head throbbed from the vicious beating he had endured. If he could only hang onto the side of the vehicle until he got away, he would survive. His assassins were at the gate. He had to get to the car. It was his last hope. He slipped and fell. He crawled until he reached the fender and lurched onto the running board. With his breath coming in short rasps, he steadied himself. The passenger window was opening. A sense of hope filled him.

He reached in and pulled himself up, straining to lift his weight even with the edge of the door. His eyes reached the level of the window opening. As he focused, he blinked uncomprehendingly at the barrel of a gun. He recognized the eyes of his enemy. The dim light of the moon reflected off the barrel of the Browning aimed at his forehead. Like a mortally wounded bear, trapped in a pit back in the forests of his native Siberia, he recognized the inevitability of his fate. With a moan, he whispered, "Lord help me." A dull chill radiated through his core, just as a flash erupted from the pistol and an ear-splitting crack thundered in the confined space of the vehicle. The smell of burnt powder and singed flesh filled the air. Then, blackness.