



# THE WITCH OF PRAGUE

BY E. MARION CRAWFORD

CHAPTER II—CONTINUED.

To pause now, and to enter into an explanation with a servant would have been to reject an opportunity which might never return. In such an establishment he was sure of finding himself before long in the presence of some more or less intelligent person of his own class, of whom he could make such inquiries as might enlighten him, and to whom he could present such excuses for his intrusion as might seem most fitting in so difficult a case. He let his sables fall into the hands of the servant and followed the latter along a short passage.

The man introduced him into a spacious hall and closed the door, leaving him to his own reflections. The place was very wide and high and without windows, but the broad daylight descended abundantly from above through the glazed roof and illuminated every corner. He would have taken the room for a conservatory, for it contained a forest of tropical trees and plants and whole gardens of rare southern flowers. Tall letonias, date palms, mimosas and rubber trees of many varieties stretched their fantastic spikes and heavy leaves half-way up to the crystal ceiling, giant ferns swept the polished marble floor with their soft embroideries and dark green laces. Indian creepers, full of bright blossoms, made screens and curtains of their intertwining foliage; orchids of every hue and of every exotic species bloomed in thick banks along the walls. Flowers less rare, violets and lilies of the valley, closely set and luxuriant, grew in beds edged with moss around the roots of the larger plants and in many open spaces. The air was very soft and warm, moist and full of heavy odors as the still atmosphere of an island in southern seas, and the silence was broken only by the light plash of softly falling water.

Having advanced a few steps from the door, the Wanderer stood still and waited, supposing that the owner of the dwelling would be made aware of a visitor's presence and would soon appear. But no one came. Then a gentle voice spoke from amid the verdure, apparently from no great distance.

"I am here," it said.

He moved forward amid the ferns and tall plants until he found himself on the farther side of a thick network of creepers. Then he paused, for he was in the presence of a woman, of her own dwell among the flowers. She was sitting before him, motionless and upright in a high, carved chair, and so placed that the pointed leaves of the palm which rose above her cast sharp, star-shaped shadows over the broad folds of her white dress. One hand, as white, as cold, as heavily perfect as the sculpture of a Praxiteles or a Phidias, rested with drooping fingers on the arm of the chair. The other pressed the pages of a great book which lay open on the lady's knee. Her face was turned toward the visitor and her eyes examined his face calmly and with no surprise in them, but not without a look of interest. Their expression was at once so unusual, so disquieting and yet so inexplicably attractive as to fascinate the Wanderer's gaze. He did not remember that he had ever seen a pair of eyes of distinctly different colors, the one of a clear, cold gray, the other of a deep, warm brown, so dark as to seem almost black, and he would not have believed that nature could so far transgress the canons of her own art and yet preserve the appearance of beauty. For the lady was beautiful from the diadem of her red, gold hair to the proud curve of her fresh, young lips; from her broad, pale forehead, prominent and boldly modelled at the angles of the brows, to the strong mouldings of the well-balanced chin which gave evidence of strength and resolution wherewith to carry out the promise of the high aquiline features and of the wide, sensitive nostrils.

"Madam," said he, bending his head courteously and advancing another step. "I can neither frame excuses for having entered your house unbidden, nor hope to obtain indulgence for my intrusion, unless you are willing in the first place to hear my short story. May I expect so much kindness?"

He paused, and the lady looked at him fixedly and curiously. Without taking her eyes from his face and without speaking, she closed the book she had held on her knee and laid it beside her on a low table. The Wanderer did not avoid her gaze, for he had nothing to conceal, nor any sense of timidity. He was an intruder upon the privacy of one whom he did not know, but he was ready to explain his presence and to make such amends as courtesy required, if he had given offence.

The heavy odors of the flowers filled his nostrils with an unknown, luxurious delight as he stood there gazing into the lady's eyes. He fancied that a gentle breath of perfumed air was blowing softly over his hair and face out of the motionless palms

and the faint splashing of the hidden fountain was like an exquisite melody in his ears. It was good to be in such a place, to look upon such a woman, to breathe such odors and to hear such tuneful music. A dream-like, half-mysterious satisfaction of the senses dulled the keen self-knowledge of body and soul for one short moment. In the stormy play of his troubled life there was a brief interlude of peace. He tasted the fruit of the Lotus, his lips were moistened in the sweet waters of forgetfulness.

The lady spoke at last, and the spell left him, not broken, as by a sudden shock, but losing its power by quick degrees, until it was wholly gone.

"I will answer your question by another," said the lady. "Let your reply be the plain truth. It will be better so."

"Ask what you will. I have nothing to conceal."

"Do you know who and what I am? Do you come here out of curiosity—the vain hope of knowing me, having heard of me from others?"

"Assuredly not." A pale flush rose in the man's pale and noble face. "You have my word," he said, in the tone of one who is sure of being believed, "that I have never, to my knowledge, heard of your existence; that I am ignorant even of your name—forgive my ignorance—and that I entered this house not knowing whose it might be, seeking and following after one for whom I have searched the world, one dearly loved, long lost, long sought."

"It is enough. Be seated. I am Unorna."

"Unorna?" repeated the Wanderer, with an unconscious question in his voice, although the name recalled some half forgotten association.

"Unorna—yes. I have another name," she added, with a shade of bitterness, "but it is hardly mine. Tell me your story. You loved—you lost—you seek—so much I know. What else?"

The Wanderer sighed.

"You have told in those few words the story of my life—the unfinished story. A wanderer I was born, a wanderer I must ever be, until at last I find her whom I seek. I knew her in a strange land, far from my birthplace, in a city where I was known but to a few, and I loved her. She loved me too, and that against her father's will. He would not have his daughter wed with one not of her race; for he himself had taken a wife among strangers, and while she was yet alive he had repented of what he had done. But I would have overcome his reasons and his arguments—she and I could have overcome them together, for he did not hate me, he bore me no ill-will. We were almost friends when I last took his hand. Then the hour of destiny came upon me. The air of that city was treacherous and deadly. I had left her with her father, and my heart was full of many things, and of words both spoken and unspoken. I lingered upon an ancient bridge that spanned the river, and the sun went down. Then the evil fever of the south laid hold upon me and poisoned the blood in my veins, and stole the consciousness from my understanding. Weeks passed away, and memory returned, with the strength to speak. I learned that she I loved, and her father, were gone, and none knew whither. I rose and left the accursed city, being at that time scarcely able to stand upright on my feet. Finding no trace of those I sought, I journeyed to their own country, for I knew where her father held his lands. I had been ill many weeks and much time had passed, from the day on which I had left her, until I was able to move from my bed. When I reached the gates of her home, I was told that all had been lately sold, and that others now dwelt within the walls. I inquired of these new owners of the land, but neither they, nor any of all those whom I questioned, could tell me whither I should direct my search. The father was a strange man, loving travel to find change and movement, restless and unsatisfied with the world, rich and free to make his own caprice his guide through life; reticent he was, moreover, and thoughtful, not given to speaking out his intentions. Those who administered his affairs in his absence were honorable men, bound by his special injunction not to reveal his ever-varying plans. Many times in my ceaseless search I met persons who had lately seen him and his daughter and spoke with them. I was ever on their track, from hemisphere to hemisphere, from continent to continent, from country to country, from city to city, often believing myself close upon them, often learning suddenly that an ocean lay between them and me. Was he eluding me, purposely resolute, or was he unconscious of my desperate pursuit, being so busy with his own life and by his own caprice? I do not know. He had lately seen me, I was sure, for she was so much like him, and I, not knowing his name, had called to him who had been so much like him."

Unorna exchanged a few indifferent words with Axnela and dismissed her. "You have seen her," she said, when the young girl was gone. "Was it she who entered the house just now?"

"Yes, I was misled by a mere resemblance. Forgive me for my importunity—let me thank you most sincerely for your great kindness." He rose as he spoke.

"Do not go," said Unorna, looking at him earnestly.

He stood still, silent as though his attitude should explain itself, and yet expecting that she would say something further. He felt that her eyes were upon him, and he raised his own to meet the look frankly, as was his wont. For the first time he had entered her presence he felt that there was more than a mere disquieting attraction in her steady gaze; there was a strong, restless fascination, from which he had no power to withdraw himself.

from another, who had received it on hearsay from a third. None knew in what place her spirit had parted; none knew by what manner of sickness she had died. Since then I have heard others say that she is not dead, that they have heard in their turn from others that she yet lives. An hour ago I knew not what to think. To-day I saw her in a crowded church. I heard her voice, though I could not reach her in the throng, struggle how I would. I followed her in haste, I lost her at one turning, I saw her before me at the next. At last a figure, clothed as she had been clothed, entered your house. Whether it was she I know not certainly, but I do know that in the church I saw her. She cannot be within your dwelling without your knowledge; if she be here—then I have found her, my journey is ended, my wanderings have led me home at last. If she be not here, if I have been mistaken, I entreat you to let me set eyes on that other whom I mistook for her, to forgive then my mannerless intrusion and to let me go."

Unorna had listened with half-closed eyes, but with unflinching attention, watching the speaker's face from beneath her drooping lids, making no effort to read his thoughts, but weighing his words and impressing every detail of his story upon her mind. When he had done there was silence for a time, broken only by the plash and ripple of the falling water.

"She is not here," said Unorna at last. "You shall see for yourself. There is, indeed, in this house a young girl to whom I am deeply attached, who has grown up at my side, and has always lived under my roof. She is very pale and dark, and is dressed always in black."

"Like her I saw," said the Wanderer. "You shall see her again. I will send for her." Unorna pressed an ivory key in the silver ball which lay beside her, attached to a thick cord of white silk. "Ask Sletchna Axnela to come to me," she said to the servant who opened the door in the distance, out of sight behind the forest of plants.

Amid less unusual surroundings the Wanderer would have rejected with contempt the last remnants of his belief in the identity of Unorna's companion with Beatrice. But, being where he was, he felt unable to decide between the possible and the impossible, between what he might reasonably expect and what lay beyond the bounds of reason itself. The air he breathed was so loaded with rich exotic perfumes, the woman before him was so little like other women, her strangely mismatched eyes had for his own such a disquieting attraction, all that he saw and felt and heard was so far removed from the commonplace of daily life as to make him feel that he himself was becoming a part of some other person's existence, that he was being gradually drawn away from his identity, and was losing the power of thinking his own thoughts. He reasoned as the shadows reason in dream-land, the boundaries of common probability receded to an immeasurable distance, and he almost ceased to know where reality ended and where imagination took up the sequence of events.

Who was this woman who called herself Unorna? He tried to consider the question and to bring his intelligence to bear upon it. Was she a great lady of Prague, rich, capricious, creating a mysterious existence for herself, merely for her own good pleasure? Her language, her voice, her evident refinement gave color to the idea, which was in itself attractive to a man who had long ceased to expect novelty in this working-day world. He glanced at her face, musing and wondering, inhaling the sweets, intoxicating odors of the flowers and listening to the tinkling of the hidden fountain. Her eyes were gazing into his, and again, as if by magic, the curtain of life's stage was drawn together in misty folds, shutting out the past, the present and the future—in fact, the doubt and the hope—in an interval of perfect peace.

He was roused by the sound of a light footfall upon the marble pavement. Unorna's eyes were turned from his, and with something like a movement of surprise he himself looked toward the new comer. A young girl was standing under the shadow of a great letonia at a short distance from him. She was very pale indeed, but not with that death-like waxen pallor which had chilled him when he had looked upon that other face. There was a faint resemblance in the delicate aquiline features, the dress was black, and the figure of the girl before him was assuredly neither much taller nor much shorter than that of the woman he loved and sought. But the likeness went no further, and he knew that he had been utterly mistaken.

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CHAPTER III.

He had been deceived in supposing that he must inevitably find the names of those he sought upon the ordinary registers which chronicle the arrival and departure of travelers. He lost no time, he spared no effort, driving from place to place as fast as two sturdy Hungarian horses could take him, hurrying from one office to another, and again and again searching endless pages and columns which seemed full of all the names of earth, but in which he never found the one of all others which he longed to read.

The Wanderer stood in deep thought under the shadow of the ancient Powder Tower. Haste had no further object now, since he had made every inquiry within his power, and it was a relief to feel the pavement beneath his feet, and to breathe the misty, frozen air after having been so long in the closeness of his carriage. He hesitated as to what he should do, unwilling to return to Unorna and acknowledge himself vanquished, yet finding it hard to resist his desire to try every means, no matter how little reasonable, how evidently useless, how puerile and revolting to his sounder sense. The street behind led toward Unorna's house. Had he found himself in a more remote quarter he might have come to another and wiser conclusion. Being so near to the house of which he was thinking he yielded to the temptation. He left the street almost immediately, passing under a low, arched way that opened on the right-hand side, and a moment later he was within the walls of the Teyn Kirche.

The vast building was less gloomy than it had been in the morning. It was not yet the hour of vespers. The funeral torches had been extinguished, as well as most of the lights upon the high altar; there were not a dozen persons in the church. The Wanderer went to the monument of Brahe and sat down in the corner of the blackened pew. His hands trembled a little as he clasped them upon his knees and his head sank slowly toward his breast.

He thought of all that might have been if he had risked everything that morning. He could have used his strength to force a way for himself through the multitude to the right and left, and he could have reached her side. Perhaps he had been weak, indolent, timid, and he accused himself of his own failure. But then, again, he seemed to see about him the closely packed crowd, the sea of faces, the thick, black mass of humanity, and he knew the tremendous power that lay in the inert, passive resistance of a vast gathering such as had been present. Had it been anywhere else, in a street, in a theatre, anywhere except in a church, all would have been well.

He was aware that some one was standing very near to him. He looked up and saw a very short, gray-headed man engaged in a minute examination of the dark red marble face on the astronomer's tomb. The man's bald head, encircled at the base by a fringe of short, gray hair, was half buried between his high, broad shoulders, in an immense collar of fur, but the shape of the skull was so singular as to distinguish its possessor, when hatless, from all other men. No one who knew the man could mistake his head, when even the least portion of it could be seen. The wanderer recognized him at once.

As though he were conscious of being watched, the little man turned sharply.

The wanderer rose to his feet.

"Keyork Arabian!" he exclaimed, extending his hand.

"Still wandering?" asked the little man, with a slightly sarcastic intonation. He spoke in a deep, caressing bass, not loud, but rich in quality.

"You must have wandered, too, since we last met," replied the taller man.

"I never wander," said Keyork. "When a man knows what he wants, knows where it is to be found, and goes thither to take it, he is not wandering. Moreover, I have no thought of removing myself or my goods from Prague. I live here. It is a city for old men. It is saturnine."

"Is that an advantage?" inquired the Wanderer.

"To my mind, would say to my son, if I had one—my thanks to a blind but intelligent destiny for preserving me from such a calamity!—I would say to him: 'Spend thy youth among the flowers in the land where they are brightest and sweetest; pass thy manhood in all lands where man strives with man, thought for thought, blow for blow; choose for thine old age that spot in which, all things being old, thou mayest for the longest time consider thyself young in comparison with thy surroundings. Moreover, the imperishable can preserve the perishable.'"

"It was not your habit to talk of death when we were together."

"I have found it interesting of late years. The subject is connected with one of my inventions. Did you ever embalm a body? No? I could tell you something singular about the newest process."

"What is the connection?"

"I am embalming myself, body and mind. It is but an experiment, and unless it succeeds it must be the last. Embalming, as it is now understood, means substituting one thing for another. Very good. I am trying to purge from my mind its old circulating medium; the new thoughts must all be selected from a class which ad-

mits of no decay. Nothing could be simpler."

"It seems to me that nothing could be more vague."

"You were not formerly so slow to understand me," said the strange little man with some impatience.

"Do you know a lady of Prague who calls herself Unorna?" the Wanderer asked, paying no attention to his friend's last remark.

"I do. What of her?" Keyork Arabian glanced keenly at his companion.

"What is she? she has an odd name."

"As for her name, it is easily accounted for. She was born on the 29th day of February, the year of her birth being bisextile. Unor means February; Unorna, derivative adjective, 'belonging to February.' Some one gave her the name to commemorate the circumstance."

"Her parents, I suppose."

"Most probably—whoever they may have been."

"And what is she?" the Wanderer asked.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

The Retreat on Bolivar.

In the National Tribune, Comrade Barron, of Co. A, 32d Ill., writing of the expedition from Bolivar, Tenn., to Grand Junction, Sept. 20 to 22, 1862, by the First Brigade of Gen. Harburn's Division, under command of Lauman, is mistaken in saying the expedition took place in 1863. He is, however, correct in stating that some of the 2d Ill. Cav. furnished Gen. Lauman with the information that the enemy were in force near Grand Junction, whereupon the brigade hurriedly counter-marched back to Bolivar, and it was none too quick about it either. If the expedition was intended to prevent Von Dorn joining forces with Gen. Price, it was a stupid maneuver, as Van Dorn and Price were very nearly together at that time, and within a few days afterward fought together at the battle of the Hatchie, where they were beaten and compelled to retreat in an unseemly hurry, more precipitate than the counter-march of the First Brigade. Comrade Palmer, of the 53d Ill., is correct as to the narrow escape from capture of the First Brigade on the occasion referred to. But for the timely information furnished by cavalry it certainly would have been completely "gobbed up."

—David H. Porter, Co. E, 2d Ill. Cav.

Fiddled Through the War.

Nearly everybody in Cambria and Indiana counties, Pennsylvania, is acquainted with Thompson Carney, the veteran violinist, who for the past forty years has furnished music for country dances in Western Pennsylvania. At the breaking out of the late civil war Thompson Carney enlisted with the old Cambria Guards. Before leaving Ebensburg with his company, C. T. Roberts presented him with a violin and box, knowing that Mr. Carney would not feel at home even in the army without a violin. He received it with thanks, and promised to bring the violin home with him at the close of the war. Thirty years have expired since then, but on a recent evening, Thompson, with the identical violin under his arm, stepped into Mr. Roberts' store and said: "How d'ye do, Mr. Roberts?" During the war Thompson lost his violin several times, but always managed to find it. At the close of the war the violin was missing and he failed to find it until recently, when the old sutler sent it to him, having found it in the south.—Pennsylvania Grit.

Making a Husband Remember.

A young wife in Brooklyn recently gave her husband a sealed letter, begging him not to open it until he got to his place of business. When he did so he read:

"I am forced to tell you something that I know will trouble you, but it is my duty to do so. I am determined you shall know, let the result be what it may. I have known for a week that it was coming, but kept it to myself until to-day, when it has reached a crisis, and I cannot keep it any longer. You must not censure me too harshly, for you must reap the results as well as myself. I do hope it won't crush you."

By this time the cold perspiration stood on his forehead with the fear of some terrible, unknown calamity. He turned the page, his hair slowly rising, and read:

"The coal is all used up! Please call and ask for some to be sent this afternoon. I thought by this method you would not forget it."

He didn't.—N. Y. Weekly.

The Giant of the German Army.

Until late Capt. Pluskow, of the First Regiment of Guards, had been considered the biggest man in the German Army. He measured over 80 inches in height. But a short time since a young Rindlander joined the First Regiment of Foot Guards as a "one-year-volunteer" who attains the colossal height of over seven feet four and a half inches. Since 1850 the First Regiment of Guards has not had so tall a man. At that time they had a man who was so tall that everything, even his bedstead, had to be made specially for him. His accoutrements are preserved still among the curios of the regiment.—London Tidbits.

Journalistic Royalty.

Lucy (indignantly)—"To think of our names appearing in the paper—your paper—as being engaged! And there's not (sob) a word of truth in it!"

Van Faber (calmly)—"Then, as a royal scribe, let us make it true. Will you be my wife?"

Lucy (faintly)—"Well, for the dreadful paper's sake—yes."—Pittsburg Bulletin.