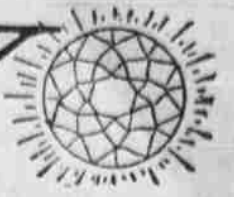


THE DIVA'S RUBY



By F. MARION CRAWFORD
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SYNOPSIS.

Baraka, a Tartar girl, became enamored of a golden bearded stranger who was prospecting and studying herbs in the vicinity of her home in central Asia, and revealed to him the location of a mine of rubies. Hoping that the stranger would love her in return for her disclosure, they were followed to the cave by the girl's relatives, who blocked up the entrance, and drew off the water supply, leaving the couple to die. Baraka's cousin Saad, her betrothed, attempted to climb down a cliff overlooking the mine; but the traveler shot him. The stranger was revived from a water gourd Saad carried, due his way out of the tunnel, and departed, deserting the girl and carrying a bag of rubies. Baraka gathered all the gems she could carry, and started in pursuit. Margaret Donne (Margaretus da Cordova), a famous prima donna, became engaged in London to Konstantin Logotheti, a wealthy Greek financier. Her intimate friend was Countess Leven, known as Lady Maud, whose husband had been killed by a bomb in St. Petersburg; and Lady Maud's most intimate friend was Rufus Van Torp, an American, who had been a cowboy in early life, but had become one of the richest men in the world. Van Torp was in love with Margaret, and rushed to London as soon as he heard of her betrothal. He offered Lady Maud \$50,000 for her pet charity if she would allow him in winning the singer from Logotheti.

CHAPTER III.—Continued.

"I said I was a wicked woman," Margaret answered, rising; "and what's more, I believe I am. But I quite forgot you were there, Potts, or I probably should not have said it aloud."

"Yes, ma'am," answered Potts meekly, and she went back to her unpacking.

Margaret had two maids, who were oddly suited to her two natures. She had inherited Alphonsine from her friend the famous retired soprano, Mme. Bonanni, and the cadaverous, clever, ill-tempered, garrulous drosser was as necessary to Cordova's theatrical existence as paint, limelight, wigs and an orchestra. The English Potts, the meek, silent, busy and intensely respectable maid, continually made it clear that her mistress was Miss Donne, an English lady, and that Mme. Cordova, the celebrated singer, was what Mr. Van Torp would have called "only a side-show."

The letter that had been torn up before it was finished was to have gone to Lady Maud, but Margaret herself had been almost sure that she would not send it, even while she was writing.

She had written that she had done very wrong in engaging herself to Logotheti; that was the "wickedness" she accused herself of, repeating the self-accusation to her astonished maid, because it was a sort of relief to say the words to somebody. She had written that she did not really care for him in that way; that when he was near she could not resist a sort of natural attraction he had for her, but that as soon as he was gone she felt it no longer and she wished he would not come back; that her ideal of a husband was so and so, and this and that—and here fiction had begun, and she had put a stop to it by destroying the whole letter instead of crossing out a few lines—which was a pity; for if Lady Maud had received it, she would have told Mr. Van Torp that she needed no help from her since Margaret herself asked no better than to be freed from the engagement.

Logotheti did not come out to Versailles that afternoon, because he was plentifully endowed with tact where women were concerned, and he applied all the knowledge and skill he had to the single purpose of pleasing Margaret. But before dinner he telephoned and asked to speak with her, and this she could not possibly refuse. Besides, the day had seemed long, and though she did not wish for his presence she wanted something—that indescribable, mysterious something which disturbed her and made her feel uncomfortable when she felt it, but which she missed when she did not see him for a day or two.

"How are you?" asked his voice, and he ran on without waiting for an answer. "I hope you are not very tired after crossing yesterday. I came by Boulogne—decent of me, wasn't it? You must be sick of seeing me all the time, so I shall give you a rest for a day or two. Telephone whenever you think you can bear the sight of me again, and I'll be with you in 35 minutes. I shall not stir from home in this baking weather. If you think I'm in mischief you're quite mistaken, dear lady, for I'm up to my chin in work!"

"I envy you," Margaret said, when he paused at last. "I've nothing on earth to do, and the piano here is out of tune. But you're quite right, I don't want to see you a little bit, and I'm not jealous, nor suspicious, nor anything disagreeable. So there!"

"How nice of you!"

"I'm very nice," Margaret answered with laughing emphasis. "I know it. What sort of work are you doing? It's only idle curiosity, so don't tell me if you would rather not! Have you got a new railway in Brazil, or an overland route to the other side of beyond?"

"Nothing so easy! I'm brushing up my Tartar."

"Brushing up what? I didn't hear."

"Tartar—the Tartar language—Tartar—he began to spell the word."

"Yes, I hear now," interrupted Margaret. "But what in the world is the

use of knowing it? You must be awfully hard up for something to do!"

"You can be understood from Constantinople to the Pacific ocean if you can speak Tartar," Logotheti answered in a matter-of-fact tone.

"I daresay! But you're not going to travel from Constantinople to the Pacific ocean—"

"I might. One never can tell what one may like to do."

"Oh, if it's because Tartar is useful against the bites of sharks," answered Margaret, quoting Alice, "learn it by all means!"

"Besides, there are all sorts of people in Paris. I'm sure there must be some Tartars. I might meet one, and it would be amusing to be able to talk to him."

"Nonsense! Why should you ever meet a Tartar? How absurd you are!"

"There's one with me now—close beside me, at my elbow."

"Don't be silly, or I'll ring off."

"If you don't believe me, listen!"

He said something in a language Margaret did not understand, and another voice answered him at once in the same tongue. Margaret started slightly and bent her brows with a puzzled and displeased look.

"Is that your teacher?" she asked with more interest in her tone than she had yet betrayed.

"Yes."

"I begin to understand. Do you mind telling me how old she is?"

"It's not 'she,' it's a young man. I don't know how old he is. I'll ask him if you like."

Again she heard him speak a few incomprehensible words, which were answered very briefly in the same tongue.

"He tells me he is 20," Logotheti said. "He's a good-looking young fellow. How is Mrs. Rushmore? I forgot to ask."

"She's quite well, thank you. But I should like to know—"

"Will you be so very kind as to remember me to her, and to say that I hope to find her at home the day after to-morrow?"

"Certainly. Come to-morrow if you like. But please tell me how you happened to pick up that young Tartar. It sounds so interesting! He has such a sweet voice."

There was no reply to this question, and Margaret could not get another word from Logotheti. The communication was apparently cut off. She rang up the central office and asked for his number again, but the young woman soon said that she could get no answer to the call, and that something was probably wrong with the instrument of number one-hundred-and-sixty-three.

Margaret was not pleased, and she was silent and absent-minded at dinner and in the evening.

"It's the reaction after London," she said with a smile, when Mrs. Rushmore asked if anything was the matter. "I find I am more tired than I knew, now that it's all over."

Mrs. Rushmore was quite of the same opinion, and it was still early when she declared that she herself was sleepy and that Margaret had much better go to bed and get a good night's rest.

But when the prima donna was sitting before the glass and her maid was brushing out her soft brown hair, she was not at all drowsy, and though her eyes looked steadily at their own reflection in the mirror, she was not aware that she saw anything.

"Potts," she said suddenly, and stopped.

"Yes, ma'am?" answered the maid with meek interrogation, and without checking the regular movement of the big brush.

"Potts," she began again, "you are not very imaginative, are you?"

"No, ma'am," the maid answered, because it seemed to be expected of her, though she had never thought of the matter.

"Do you think you could possibly be mistaken about a voice, if you didn't see the person who was speaking?"

"In what way, ma'am?"

"I mean, do you think you could take a man's voice for a woman's at a distance?"

"Oh, I see!" Potts exclaimed. "As it might be, at the telephone?"

"Well—at the telephone, if you like, or anywhere else. Do you think you might?"

"It would depend on the voice, ma'am," observed Potts, with caution.

"Of course it would," assented Margaret rather impatiently.

"Well, ma'am, I'll say this, since you ask me. When I was last at home I was mistaken in that way about my own brother, for I heard him calling to me from downstairs, and I took him for my sister Milly."

"Oh! That's interesting!" Margaret smiled. "What sort of voice has your brother? How old is he?"

"He's eight-and-twenty, ma'am; and as for his voice, he has a sweet counter tenor, and sings nicely. He's a song-man at the cathedral, ma'am."

"Really! How nice! Have you a voice, too? Do you sing at all?"

"Oh, no, ma'am!" answered Potts in a deprecating tone. "One in the family is quite enough!"

Margaret vaguely wondered why, but did not inquire.



"Potts," She Said Suddenly, and Then Stopped.

"You are quite sure that it was your brother who was speaking, I suppose," she said.

"Oh, yes, ma'am! I looked down over the banisters, and there he was!"

Margaret had the solid health of a great singer, and it would have been a serious trouble indeed that could have interfered with her unbroken and dreamless sleep during at least eight hours; but when she closed her eyes that night she was quite sure that she could not have slept at all but for Potts' comforting little story about the brother with the "counter-tenor" voice. Yet even so, at the moment before waking in the morning, she dreamt that she was at the telephone again, and that words in a strange language came to her along the wire in a soft and caressing tone that could only be a woman's, and that for the first time in all her life she knew what it was to be jealous. The sensation was not an agreeable one.

The dream-voice was silent as soon as she opened her eyes, but she had not been awake long without realizing that she wished very much to see Logotheti at once, and was profoundly thankful that she had torn up her letter to Lady Maud. She was not prepared to admit, even now, that Konstantin was the ideal she should have chosen for a husband, and whom she had been describing from imagination when she had suddenly stopped writing. But, on the other hand, the mere thought that he had perhaps been amusing himself in the society of another woman all yesterday afternoon made her so angry that she took refuge in trying to believe that he had spoken the truth and that she had really been mistaken about the voice.

It was all very well to talk about learning Tartar! How could she be sure that it was not modern Greek, or Turkish? She could not have known the difference. Was it so very unlikely that some charming compatriot of his should have come from Constantinople to spend a few weeks in Paris? She remembered the mysterious house in the Boulevard Pereire where he lived, the beautiful upper hall where the statue of Aphrodite stood, the doors that would not open like other doors, the strangely-disturbing encaustic painting of Cleopatra in the drawing room—many things which she distrusted.

Besides, supposing that the language was really Tartar—were there not Russians who spoke it? She thought there must be, because she had a vague idea that all Russians were more or less Tartars. There was a proverb about it. Moreover, to the English as well as to the French, Russians represent romance and wickedness.

She would not go to the telephone herself, but she sent a message to Logotheti, and he came out in the cool time of the afternoon. She thought he had never looked so handsome and so little exotic since she had known him.

He was received by Mrs. Rushmore and Margaret together, and he took noticeable pains to make himself agreeable to the mistress of the house. At first Margaret was pleased at this; but when she saw that he was doing his best to keep Mrs. Rushmore from



He Became Very Gloomy and Thoughtful.

leaving the room, as she probably would have done, Margaret did not like it. She was dying to ask him questions about his lessons in Tartar, and especially about his teacher, and she probably meant to cast her inquiries in such a form as would make it preferable to examine him alone rather than before Mrs. Rushmore; but he talked on and on, only pausing an instant for the good lady's expressions of interest or approval.

He was telling her what a prime minister had told an ambassador about the pope, when Margaret rose rather abruptly.

"I'm awfully sorry," she said to Mrs. Rushmore, by way of apology, "but I really must have a little air. I've not been out of the house all day."

Mrs. Rushmore understood, and was not hurt, though she was sorry not to hear more. The "dear child" should go out, by all means. Would Mons. Logotheti stay to dinner? No? She was sorry. She had forgotten that she had a letter to write in time for the afternoon post. So she went off and left the two together.

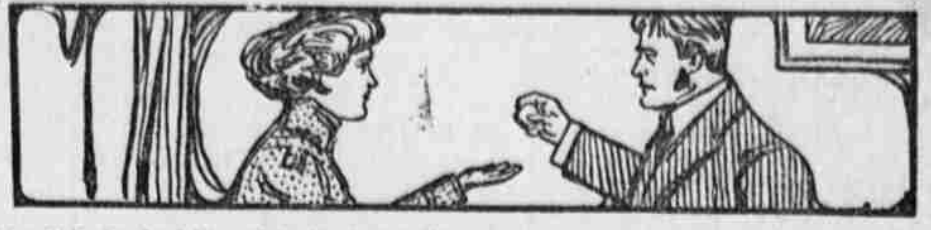
Margaret led the way out upon the lawn, and they sat down on garden chairs under a big elm tree. She said nothing while she settled herself very deliberately, avoiding her companion's eyes till she was quite ready, and then she suddenly looked at him with a sort of blank stare that would have disconcerted any one less superlatively self-possessed than he was. It was most distinctly Mme. de Cordova, the offended prima donna, that spoke at last, and not Miss Margaret Donne, the "nice English girl."

"What in the world has got into you?" she inquired in a chilly tone.

He opened his almond-shaped eyes a little wider with an excellent affectation of astonishment at her words and manner.

"Have I done anything you don't like?" he asked in a tone of anxiety and concern. "Was I rude to Mrs. Rushmore?"

Margaret looked at him a moment longer, and then turned her head away in silence, as if scornful to answer such a silly question. The look of surprise disappeared from his face, and he became very gloomy and thoughtful but said nothing more.



Possibly he had brought about exactly what he wished, and was satisfied to await the inevitable result. It came before long.

"I don't understand you at all," Margaret said less jolly, but with the sad little air of a woman who believes herself misunderstood. "It was very odd yesterday, at the telephone, you know—very odd indeed. I suppose you didn't realize it. And now, this afternoon, you have evidently been doing your best to keep Mrs. Rushmore from leaving us together. You would still be telling her stories about people if I hadn't obliged you to come out!"

"Yes," Logotheti asserted with exasperating calm and meekness, "we should still be there."

"You did not want to be alone with me, I suppose. There's no other explanation, and it's not a very flattering one, is it?"

"I never flatter you, dear lady," said Logotheti gravely.

"But you do! How can you deny it? You often tell me that I make you think of the Victory in the Louvre—"

"It's quite true. If the statue had a head it would be a portrait of you."

"Nonsense! And in your moments of enthusiasm you say that I sing better than Mme. Bonanni in her best days—"

"Yes. You know quite as much as she ever did, you are a much better musician, and you began with a better voice. Therefore you sing better. I maintain it."

"You often maintain things you don't believe," Margaret retorted, though her manner momentarily relaxed a little.

"Only in matters of business," answered the Greek with imperturbable calm.

"Pray, is 'learning Tartar' a matter of business?" Her eyes sparkled angrily as she asked the question.

Logotheti smiled; she had reached the point to which he knew she must come before long.

"Oh, yes!" he replied with alacrity. "Of course it is."

"That accounts for everything, since you are admitting that I need not even try to believe it was a man whom I heard speaking."

"To tell the truth, I have some suspicions about that myself," answered Logotheti.

"I have a great many," Margaret laughed rather harshly. "And you behave as if you wanted me to have more. Who is this eastern woman? Come, be frank. She is some one from Constantinople, isn't she? A Fanariote like yourself, I dare say—an old friend who is in Paris for a few days, and would not pass through without seeing you. Say so, for heaven's sake, and don't make such a mystery about it!"

"How very ingenious women are!" observed the Greek. "If I had thought of it I might have told you that story through the telephone yesterday. But I didn't."

Margaret was rapidly becoming exasperated, her eyes flashed, her firm young cheeks reddened handsomely, and her generous lips made scornful curves.

"Are you trying to quarrel with me?"

The words had a fierce ring; he glanced at her quickly and saw how well her look agreed with her tone. She was very angry.

"If I were not afraid of boring you," he said with quiet gravity, "I would tell you the whole story, but—" he pretended to hesitate.

He heard her harsh little laugh at once.

"Your worst enemy could not accuse you of being a bore!" she retorted. "Oh, no! It's something quite different from boredom that I feel, I assure you!"

"I wish I thought that you cared for me enough to be jealous," Logotheti said earnestly.

"Jealous!"

"No one can describe the tone of indignant contempt in which a thoroughly jealous woman disclaims the least thought of jealousy with a single word; a man must have heard it to remember what it is like, and most men have. Logotheti knew it well, and at the sound he put on an expression of meek innocence which would have done credit to a cat that had just eaten a canary."

"I'm so sorry," he cried in a voice like a child's. "I didn't mean to make you angry. I was only wishing aloud. Please forgive me!"

"If your idea of caring for a woman is to make her jealous—"

This was such an obvious misinterpretation of his words that she stopped short and bit her lip. He sighed audibly, as if he were very sorry that he could do nothing to appease her, but this only made her feel more injured. She made an effort to speak coldly.

"You seem to forget that so long as we are supposed to be engaged I have some little claim to know how you spend your time!"

"I make no secret of what I do. That is why you were angry just now. Nothing could have been easier than for me to say that I was busy with

one of the matters you suggested."

"Oh, of course! Nothing could be easier than to tell me an untruth!"

This certainly looked like the feminine retort-triumphant, and Margaret delivered it in a cutting tone.

"That is precisely what you seem to imply that I did," Logotheti objected. "But if what I told you was untrue your argument goes to pieces. There was no Tartar lesson, there was no Tartar teacher, and it was all a fabrication of my own!"

"Just what I think!" returned Margaret. "It was not Tartar you spoke, and there was no teacher!"

"You have me there," answered the Greek mildly, "unless you would like me to produce my young friend and talk to him before you in the presence of witnesses who know his language."

"I wish you would! I would like to see 'him'! I should like to see the color of his eyes and hair!"

"Black as ink," said Logotheti.

"And you'll tell me that 'his' complexion is black, too, no doubt?"

"Not at all; a sort of creamy complexion, I think, though I did not pay much attention to his skin. He is a smallish chap, good-looking, with hands and feet like a woman's. I noticed that. As I told you, a doubt occurred to me at once, and I will not positively swear that it is not a girl after all. He, or she, is really a Tartar from central Asia, and I know enough of the language to say what was necessary."

"Necessary!"

"Yes. He—or she—came on a matter of business. What I said about a teacher was mere nonsense. Now you know the whole thing."

"Excepting what the business was," Margaret said incredulously.

"The business was an uncut stone," answered Logotheti with indifference. He had one to sell, and he bought it. "He was recommended to me by a man in Constantinople. He came to Marseilles on a French steamer with two Greek merchants who were coming to Paris, and they brought him to my door. That is the whole story. And here is the ruby. I bought it for you, because you like those things. Will you take it?"

He held out what looked like a little ball of white tissue paper, but Margaret turned her face from him.

"You treat me like a child!" she said.

To her own great surprise and indignation, her voice was unsteady and she felt something burning in her eyes. She was almost frightened at the thought that she might be going to cry, out of sheer mortification.

Logotheti said nothing for a moment. He began to unroll the paper from the precious stone, but changed his mind, wrapped it up again, and put it back into his watch-pocket before he spoke.

"I did not mean it as you think," he said softly.

She turned her eyes without moving her head, till she could just see that he was leaning forward, resting his wrists on his knees, bending his head and apparently looking down at his loosely hanging hands. His attitude expressed dejection and disappointment. She was glad of it. He had no right to think that he could make her as angry as she still was, angry even to tears, and then bribe her to smile again when he was tired of teasing her. Her eyes turned away again, and she did not answer him.

"I make mistakes sometimes," he said, speaking still lower, "I know I do. When I am with you I cannot be always thinking of what I say. It's too much to ask, when a man is as far gone as I am!"

"I should like to believe that," Margaret said, without looking at him.

"Is it hard to believe?" he asked so gently that she only just heard the words.

"You don't make it easy, you know," said she with a little defiance, for she felt that she was going to yield before long.

"I don't know how to. You're not in the least capricious—and yet—"

"You're mistaken," Margaret answered, turning to him suddenly. "I'm the most capricious woman in the world! Yesterday I wrote a long letter to a friend, and then I suddenly tore it up—there were ever so many pages! I daresay that if I had written just the same letter this morning I should have sent it. If that is not caprice, what is it?"

"It may have been wisdom to tear it up," Logotheti suggested.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Decline of Ancient English Fair.

After being held annually for 800 years Stow Green pleasure fair has practically ceased to exist.

Established by charter of Henry III, it ranked as one of the largest fairs in England for merchandise and lasted three weeks. All the large traveling shows in the country used to attend and they covered nearly four acres of ground. The fair is now limited to two days and when it commenced it only consisted of a few catchpenny devices.

This year the magistrates curtailed the hours for drinking and it is expected the fair will soon collapse altogether.—London Standard.