

THE DIVA'S RUBY

By F. MARION CRAWFORD
 AUTHOR OF "SARACINESE," "ARETHUSA" ETC., ETC.
 ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. WEIL
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Mr. Van Torp's Solid Arms Slipped Into the Sleeves.

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 sound Saad carried, dug his way out of the tunnel, and departed, deserting the girl and carrying a bag of rubies. Baraka gathered all the guns she could carry, and started in pursuit. Margaret Donne (Margaret de 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 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 \$5,000 for her pet charity if she would aid him in winning the singer from Logotheti. Baraka approached Logotheti at Versailles with rubies to sell. He presented a ruby to Margaret. Van Torp bought a yacht and sent it to Venice. He was visited by Baraka in male attire. She gave him a ruby after the American had told her of having seen in the United States a man answering the description of the one she loved. The American followed Margaret to the Bayreuth "Parsifal" festival. Margaret took a liking to Van Torp, who presented her with the ruby Baraka had given him.

CHAPTER VI.—Continued.

"Stemp," he asked, as he threw off his coat and kicked off his dusty shoes, "were you ever sea-sick?"

"Yes, sir," answered the admirable valet, but he offered no more information on the subject.

During the silence that followed, neither wasted a second. It is no joke to wash and get into evening dress in six minutes, even with the help of a body-servant trained to do his work at high speed.

"I mean," said Van Torp, when he was already fastening his collar, "are you sea-sick nowadays?"

"No, sir," replied Stemp, in precisely the same tone as before.

"I don't mean on a 20,000-ton liner. Black cravat. Yes. I mean on a yacht. Fix it behind. Right. Would you be sea-sick on a steam yacht?"

"No, sir."

"Sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then I'll take you. Tuxedo."

"Thank you, sir."

Stemp held up the dinner-jacket; Mr. Van Torp's solid arms slipped into the sleeves, he shook his sturdy shoulders, and pulled the jacket down in front while the valet "settled" the back. Then he faced round suddenly, like a soldier at drill.

"All right," he inquired.

Stemp looked him over carefully from head to foot in the glare of the electric light.

"Yes, sir."

Van Torp left the room at once. He found Mrs. Rushmore slowly moving about the supper-table, more imposing than ever in a perfectly new black tea-gown and an extremely smart widow's cap. Mr. Van Torp thought she

was a very fine old lady indeed. Margaret had not entered yet; a waiter with smooth yellow hair stood by a portable sideboard on which there were covered dishes. There were poppies and corn-flowers in a plain white jar on the table. Mrs. Rushmore smiled at the financier; it would hardly be an exaggeration to say that she beamed upon him. They had not met alone since his first visit on the previous afternoon.

"Miss Donne is a little late," she said, as if the fact were very pleasing. "You brought her back, of course."

"Why, certainly," said Mr. Van Torp with an amiable smile.

"You can hardly have come straight from the theater," continued the lady, "for I heard the other people in the hotel coming in fully 20 minutes before you did."

"We walked home very slowly," said Mr. Van Torp, still smiling amiably.

"Ah, I see! You went for a little walk to get some air!" She seemed delighted.

"We walked home very slowly in order to breathe the air," said Mr. Van Torp—"to breathe the air, as you say. I have to thank you very much for giving me your seat, Mrs. Rushmore."

"To tell the truth," replied the good lady, "I was very glad to let you take my place. I cannot say I enjoy that sort of music myself. It gives me a headache."

Margaret entered at this point in a marvelous "creation" of Chinese crepe, of the most delicate shade of heliotrope. Her dressmaker called it a tea-gown, but Mr. Van Torp would have thought it "quite appropriate" for a "dinner-dance" at Bar Harbor.

"My dear child," said Mrs. Rushmore, "how long you were in getting back from the theater! I began to fear that something had happened!"

"We walked home very slowly," said Margaret, with a pleasant smile.

"Ah? You went for a little walk to get some air?"

"We just walked home very slowly, in order to breathe the air," Margaret answered innocently.

It dawned on Mr. Van Torp that the dignified Mrs. Rushmore was not quite devoid of a sense of humor. It also occurred to him that her repetition of the question to Margaret, and the latter's answer, must have revealed to her the fact that the two had agreed upon what they would say, since they used identically the same words, and that they therefore had an understanding about something they preferred to conceal from her. Nothing could have given Mrs. Rushmore such profound satisfaction as this, and it revealed itself in her bright smiles and her anxiety that both Margaret and Van Torp should, if possible, over-eat themselves with the excellent things she had been at pains to provide for them and for herself. For she was something of an epicure and her dinners in Versailles were of good fame, even in Paris.

Great appetites are generally silent, like the sincerest affections. Margaret was very hungry, and Mr. Van Torp was both hungry and very much in love. Mrs. Rushmore was neither, and she talked pleasantly while tasting each delicacy with critical satisfaction.

"By the by," she said at last, when she saw that the millionaire was backing his foretopsal to come to anchor, as Capt. Brown might have expressed it, "I hope you have not had any trouble about your rooms, Mr. Van Torp."

"None at all, that I know of," answered the latter. "My man told me nothing."

"The Russian prince arrived this evening while you were at the theater, and threatened the director with all sorts of legal consequences because the rooms he had ordered were occupied. He turns out to be only a count after all."

"You don't say so," observed Mr. Van Torp, in an encouraging tone.

"What became of him?" Margaret asked, without much interest.

"Did Potts not tell you, my dear? Why, Justine assisted at the whole interview and came and told me at once."

Justine was Mrs. Rushmore's Parisian maid, who always knew everything.

"What happened?" inquired Margaret, still not much interested.

"He arrived in an automobile," answered Mrs. Rushmore, and she paused.

"What old Griggs calls a sudden-death-cart," Mr. Van Torp put in.

"What a shocking name for it!" cried Mrs. Rushmore. "And you are always in them, my dear child!" She looked at Margaret. "A sudden-death-cart! It quite makes me shiver."

"Griggs says that all his friends either kill or get killed in them," explained the American.

"My throat-doctor says motoring is very bad for the voice, so I've given it up," Margaret said.

"Really? Thank goodness your profession has been of some use to you at last, my dear!"

Margaret laughed.

"Tell us about the Russian count," she said. "Has he found lodgings, or is he going to sleep in his motor?"

"My dear, he's the most original man you ever heard of! First, he wanted to buy the hotel and turn us all out, and offered any price for it, but the director said it was owned by a company in Munich. Then he sent his secretary about trying to buy a house, while he dined, but that didn't succeed either. He must be very wealthy or else quite mad."

"Mad, I should say," observed Mr. Van Torp, slowly peeling a peach. "Did you happen to catch his name, Mrs. Rushmore?"

"Oh, yes! We heard nothing else all the afternoon. His name is Kralinsky—Count Kralinsky."

Mr. Van Torp continued to peel his peach scientifically and economically, though he was aware that Margaret was looking at him with sudden curiosity.

"Kralinsky," he said slowly, keeping his eyes on the silver blade of the knife as he finished what he was doing. "It's not an uncommon name, I believe. I've heard it before. Sounds Polish, doesn't it?"

He looked up suddenly and showed Margaret the peeled peach on his fork. He smiled as he met her eyes, and she nodded so slightly that Mrs. Rushmore did not notice the movement.

"Did you ever see that done better?" he asked with an air of triumph.

"Ripping!" Margaret answered.

"You're a dandy dab at it!"

"My dear child, what terrible slang!"

"I'm sorry," said Margaret. "I'm catching all sorts of American expressions from Mr. Van Torp, and when they get mixed up with my English ones the result is Babel, I suppose!"

"I've not heard Mr. Van Torp use any slang expressions yet, my dear," said Mrs. Rushmore, almost severely.

"You will," Margaret retorted with a laugh. "What became of Count Kralinsky? I didn't mean to spoil your story."

"My dear, he's got the pastor to give up his house, by offering him a hundred pounds for the poor here."

Van Torp left them soon after supper, and gave himself up to Stemp, pondering over what he had accomplished in two days, and also about another question which had lately presented itself. When he was ready to send his valet to bed he sat down at his table and wrote a telegram:

"If you can find Barak, please explain that I was mistaken. Kralinsky is not in New York, but here in Bayreuth for some days, lodging at the pastor's house."

This message was addressed to Logotheti at his lodgings in London, and Van Torp signed it and gave it to Stemp to be sent at once. Logotheti never went to bed before two o'clock, as he knew, and might very possibly get the telegram the same night.

When his man was gone, Van Torp drew his chair to the open window and sat up a long time thinking about what he had just done; for though he held that all was fair in such a contest, he did not mean to do anything which he himself thought "low down."

One proof of this odd sort of integrity was that the telegram itself was a fair warning of his presence in Bayreuth, where Logotheti knew that Margaret was still stopping.

As for the rest, he was quite convinced that it was Kralinsky himself, the ruby merchant, who had suddenly appeared at Bayreuth, and that this man was no other than the youth he had met long ago as a cow-boy in the west, who used to whistle "Parsifal" with his companion in exile, and who, having grown rich, had lost no time in coming to Europe for the very purpose of hearing the music he had always loved so well. And that this man had robbed the poor Tartar girl, Mr. Van Torp had no manner of doubt; and he believed that he had probably promised her marriage and abandoned her; and if this were true, to help her to find Kralinsky was in itself a good action.

CHAPTER VII.

When Van Torp and Logotheti left Mr. Pinney's shop, the old jeweler meant to have a good look at the ruby the Greek had brought him, and was going to weigh it, not merely as a matter of business, for he weighed every stone that passed through his hands from crown diamonds to sparks, but with genuine curiosity, because in a long experience he had not seen very many rubies of such a size, which were also of such fine quality, and he wondered where this one had been found.

Just then, however, two well-dressed young men entered the shop and came up to him. He had never seen either of them before, but their looks inspired him with confidence; and when they spoke, their tone was that of English gentlemen, which all other Englishmen find it practically impossible to imitate, and which had been extremely familiar to Mr. Pinney from his youth. Though he was the great jeweler himself, the wealthy descendant of five of his name in succession, and much better off than half his customers, he was alone in his shop that morning. The truth was that his only son, the sixth Pinney and the apple of his eye, had just been married and was gone abroad for a honeymoon trip, and the head shopman, who was Scotch, was having his month's holiday at Ayrshire, and the second man had been sent for, to clean and restring the duchess of Barchester's pearls at her grace's house in Cadogan Gardens, as was always done after the season, and a couple of skilled workmen for whom Mr. Pinney found occupation all the year round were in the workshop at their tables; wherefore, out of four responsible and worthy men who usually were about, only the great Mr. Pinney himself was at his post.

One of the two well-dressed customers asked to see some pins, and the other gave him advice. The first bought a pin with a small sapphire set in sparks, for ten guineas, and gave only ten pounds for it because he paid cash. Mr. Pinney put the pin into its little morocco case, wrapped it up neatly and handed it to the purchaser. The latter and his friend said good-morning in a civil and leisurely manner, sauntered out, took a hansom a few steps farther down the street, and drove away.

The little paper twist containing Logotheti's ruby was still exactly where Mr. Pinney had placed it on the counter, and he was going to examine the stone and weigh it at last, when two more customers entered the shop, evidently foreigners, and moreover of a sort unfamiliar to the good jeweler, and especially suspicious.

The two were Baraka and her interpreter and servant, whom Logotheti had called a Turk, and who was really a Turkish subject and a Mohammedan, though as to race, he was a half-bred Greek and Dalmatian. Now Dalmatians are generally honest, truthful, and trustworthy, and the low-class Greek of Constantinople is usually extremely sharp, if he is nothing more definitely reprehensible; and Baraka's man was a cross between the two, as I have said, and had been brought up as a Muslim in a rich Turkish family, and recommended to Baraka by the Persian merchant in whose house she had lived. He had been originally baptized a Christian under the name of Spiro, and had been subsequently renamed Salim when he was made a real Moslem at 12 years old, so he used whichever name suited the circumstances in which he was placed. At present he was Spiro.

The interpreter spoke broken but intelligible English. He called Baraka his master and explained that the latter wished to see some rubies, if Mr. Pinney had any, cut or uncut. The young gentleman, he said, did not speak English, but was a good judge of stones.

For one moment the jeweler forgot the little paper twist as he turned towards his safe, pulling out his keys at the same time. To reach the safe he had to walk the whole length of the shop, behind the counter, and before he had gone half way he remembered the stone, turned, came back and slipped it into his waistcoat pocket. Then he went and got the little japanned strong-box with a patent lock, in which he kept loose stones, some wrapped up in little pieces of paper, and some in pill boxes. He brought it to his customers, and opened it before them.

They stayed a long time, and Spiro asked many questions for Baraka, chiefly relating to the sliding scale of prices which is regulated by the weight of the stones where their quality is equally good, and Baraka made



"Merciful Providence!" Cried Mr. Pinney.

notes of some sort in a little English memorandum book, as if she had done it all her life; but Mr. Pinney could not see what she wrote. He was careful, and watched the stones when she took them in her fingers and held them up against the light, or laid them on a sheet of white paper to look at them critically.

She bought nothing, and when she had seen all he had to show her, she thanked him very much through Spiro, said she would come back another day, and went out with a leisurely, oriental gait, as if nothing in the world could hurry her. Mr. Pinney counted the stones again, and was going to lock the box, when his second man came in, having finished stringing the duchess's pearls. At the same moment, it occurred to Mr. Pinney that he might as well go to luncheon, and that he had better put Logotheti's ruby into the little strong-box and lock it up in the safe until he at last had a chance to weigh it. He accordingly took the screw of paper from his waistcoat pocket, and as a matter of formality he undid it once more.

"Merciful Providence!" cried Mr. Pinney, for he was a religious man.

The screw of paper contained a bit of broken green glass. He threw his keys to his shopman without another word, and rushed out into the street without his hat, his keen old face deadly pale, and his beautiful frock-coat flying in his wake.

He almost hurled himself upon a quiet policeman.

"Thief!" he cried. "Two foreigners in gray clothes—ruby worth ten thousand pounds just gone—I'm Pinney the Jeweler!"

You cannot astonish a London policeman. The one Pinney had caught looked quietly up and down the street, and then glanced at his interlocutor to be sure that it was he, for he knew him by sight.

"All right," he said quickly, but very quietly. "I'll have them in a minute, sir, for they're in sight still. Better go in while I take them, sir."

He caught them in less than a minute without the slightest difficulty, and by some odd coincidence two other policemen suddenly appeared quite close to him. There was a little stir in the street, but Baraka and Spiro were too sensible and too sure of themselves to offer any useless resistance, and supposing there was some misunderstanding they walked back quietly to Mr. Pinney's shop between two of the policemen, while the third went for a four-wheeler at the nearest stand, which happened to be the corner of Brook street and New Bond street.

Mr. Pinney recognized his late customers without hesitation, and went with them to the police station, where he told his story and showed the piece of green glass. Spiro tried to speak, but was ordered to hold his tongue, and as no rubies were found in their pockets he and Baraka were led away to be more thoroughly searched.

But now, at last, Baraka resisted, and with such tremendous energy that there would have been serious trouble if Spiro had not called out something which at once changed the aspect of matters.

"Master is lady!" he yelled. "Lady, man clothes!"

"That makes a pretty bad case," observed the sergeant, who was superintending. "Send for Mrs. Mowle."

Baraka did not resist when she saw the matron, and went quietly with her to a cell at the back of the station. In less than ten minutes Mrs. Mowle came out and locked the door after her. She was a cheery little person, very neatly dressed, and she had restless bright eyes like a ferret. She brought a little bag of soft deerskin in her hand, and a steel bodkin with a wrought silver handle, such as southern Italian women used to wear in their hair before such weapons were prohibited. Mrs. Mowle gave both objects to the officer without comment.

"Any scars or tattoo-marks, Mrs. Mowle?" he inquired in his business-like way.

"Not a one," answered Mrs. Mowle, who had formerly taken in washing at home and was the widow of a brave policeman, killed in doing his duty.

In the bag there were several screws of paper, which were found to contain uncut rubies of different sizes to a large value. But there was one, much larger than the others, which Mr. Van Torp had not seen that morning. Mr. Pinney looked at it very carefully, held it to the light, laid it on a sheet of paper, and examined it long in every aspect. He was a conscientious man.

"To the best of my belief," he deposited, "this is the stone that was on my counter half an hour ago, and for which this piece of green glass was substituted. It is the property of a customer of mine, Mons. Konstantin Logotheti of Paris, who brought it to me this morning to be cut. I think it may be worth between nine and ten thousand pounds. I can say nothing as to the identity of the paper, for tissue paper is very much alike everywhere."

"The woman," observed the officer in charge of the station, "appears to steal nothing but rubies. It looks like a queer case. We'll lock up the two, Mr. Pinney, and if you will be kind enough to look in to-morrow morning, I'm sure the magistrate won't keep you waiting for the case."

Vastly relieved and comforted, Mr. Pinney returned to his shop. Formally required that the ruby itself, with the others in the bag, should remain in the keeping of the police till the magistrate ordered it to be returned to its rightful owner, the next morning; but Mr. Pinney felt quite as sure of its safety as if it were in the japanned strong-box in his own safe, and possibly even a little more sure, for nobody could steal it from the police station.

(TO BE CONTINUED)