

# THE DIVA'S RUBY

By F. MARION CRAWFORD  
 AUTHOR OF "SARACINESEA," "ARETHUSA" ETC.  
 ILLUSTRATIONS BY A. WEIL  
 COPYRIGHT 1907 BY F. MARION CRAWFORD

## 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 resolved to him. When he left, she made 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 dried up the water supply, leaving a couple of days. Baraka's lover, 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 in his way, and of the time, and departed, taking the girl and carrying a bag of rubies. Baraka gathered all the gems she could carry, and started in pursuit. Margaret Donne (Margarita da Cofrada), a famous prima donna, became engaged to London. 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. Margaret's friend was the American 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 to help her get 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 paid a sum less than it to Venetia. 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 man she loved. The American followed Margaret to the Bayreuth "Parfai" festival. Margaret took a liking to Van Torp, who presented her with the ruby Baraka had given him. Count Kralinsky, a Russian, arrived at Bayreuth. Van Torp believed him to be the one Baraka was pursuing. Baraka was arrested in London on the charge of stealing from Pinney, a jeweler, the ruby she had sold to Logotheti. Two strangers were the thieves. Lady Maud realized that Logotheti's associations with Baraka were open to suspicion, and so informed Margaret. Van Torp believed that Kralinsky was the cowboy he had known in his young manhood. Logotheti sent for Baraka's release, and they went to sea on his yacht. Baraka explains her plans for revenge on the man who had deserted her and left her to die. Logotheti succeeds in moderating her rage. Margaret arrived at Bayreuth. Margaret and Van Torp entered into an agreement to build a tremendous opera house in New York. The thief who stole the ruby from Mr. Pinney was arrested in New York and the stones recovered. Lady Maud returned to Van Torp, that she believed Kralinsky to be the husband she had believed dead. Van Torp promised his help to unravel the mystery.

## CHAPTER XIII.—Continued.

Neither Margaret nor Mrs. Rushmore had ever seen Leven, and they had not the least idea of what was really going on under their eyes. They only saw that Lady Maud was making a dead set at the count, and if Margaret wondered whether she had misjudged her friend's character, the elder lady had no doubt as to what was happening.

"My dear child," she said to Margaret, "your friend is going to console herself. Widows of that age generally do, my dear. I myself could never understand how one could marry again. I should always feel that dear Mr. Rushmore was in the room. It quite makes me blush to think of it! Yet it is an undeniable fact that many young widows marry again. Mark my words, Margaret, your friend is going to console herself before long. If it is not this one, it will be another. My dear, I am quite positive about it."

When the sun went down that evening the yacht had passed Otranto and the cape, and her course had been changed to head her for Cape Spartivento and the Straits of Messina, having done in 24 hours as much as the little Italian mail steamers do in 48, and nearly half as much again as the *Erienna* could have done at her highest speed. As Mr. Van Torp had predicted, his engines had "warmed up," and were beating their own record. The gale made by the vessel's way was stronger than a woman could stand in with any regard to her appearance, but as the weather continued to be calm it was from dead ahead, and there was plenty of shelter on the promenade deck abeam the wheelhouse, on condition of not going too near the rail.

After dinner Kralinsky and Mrs. Rushmore walked a little, as on the previous evening, and Lady Maud sat with Margaret and Van Torp. But before the two walkers went off to sit down in the quiet corner they had found yesterday, Lady Maud rose, went half way aft, and deliberately placed herself where they were obliged to pass close to her at each turn, standing and leaning against the bright white side of the engine skylight, which was as high as the wheelhouse itself, and broke in aft, where the big ventilating fans were situated, making a square corner inward.

She stood there, and as it was not very dark in the clear starlight, Kralinsky saw in passing that she followed his face with her eyes, turning her head to look at him when he was coming towards her, and turning it very slowly back again as he came near and went by. It was impossible to convey more clearly an invitation to get rid of his companion and join her, and he was the last man in the world to misunderstand it.

But Mrs. Rushmore saw it too, and as she considered him a lion, and therefore entitled to have his own way, she made it easy for him. "My dear count," she said blandly, after passing Lady Maud twice. "I have really had enough now, and if you will promise to finish your walk alone, I think I will go and sit with the others."

He left her with Margaret and Van Torp and went back to Lady Maud, who moved as he came up to her, made two steps beside him, and then suddenly slipped into the recess where the fanhouse joined the engine skylight. She stood still, and he instantly ranged himself beside her. They were quite out of sight of the others, and of the bridge, and even if it had been daylight they could not have been seen except by some one coming from ast.

"I want to speak to you," she said, in a low, steady voice. "Please listen quite quietly, for some of them may begin to walk again."

Kralinsky bent his head twice, and then inclined it towards her, to hear better what she was going to say.

"It has pleased you to keep up this comedy for 24 hours," she began.

He made a slight movement, which was natural under the circumstances. "I do not understand," he said, in his oily voice. "What comedy? I really have no—"

"Don't go on," she answered, interrupting him sharply. "Listen to what I am going to tell you, and then decide what you will do. I don't think your decision will make very much difference to me, but it will make a difference to the world and to yourself. I saw you from a window when you brought Mr. Van Torp to the hotel in Bayreuth, and I recognized you at once. Since this afternoon I have no doubt left."

"I never saw you till last night," said Kralinsky, with some little surprise in his tone, and with perfect assurance.

"Do you really think you can deceive me any longer?" she asked. "I told you this afternoon that if you could come back from the dead, and know the truth, we should probably forgive each other, though we had many differences. Shall we?" She paused a moment, and by his quick change of position she saw that he was much moved. "I don't mean that we should ever go back to the old life, for we were not suited to each other from the first, you and I. You wanted to marry me because I was pretty and smart, and I married you because I wanted to be married, and you were better looking than most men, and seemed to have what I thought was necessary—fortune and a decent position. No, don't interrupt me. We soon found out that we did not care for each other. You went your way, and I went mine. I don't mean to reproach you, for when I say you were beginning to be tired of me I did nothing to keep you. I myself was tired of it already. But whatever you may have thought, I was a faithful wife. Mr. Van Torp had given me a great deal of money for my charity, and does still. I can account for it. I never used a penny of it for myself, and never shall; and he never was, and never will be, any more than a trusted friend. I don't know why you chose to disappear when the man who had your pocket-book was killed and you were said to be dead. It's not my business, and if you choose to go on living under another name, now that you are rich again, I shall not betray you, and few people will recognize you, at least in England, so long as you wear that beard. But you had it when we were married, and I knew you at once, and when I heard you were to be of the party here, I made up my mind at once that I would accept the invitation and come too, and speak to you as I'm speaking now. When I believed you were dead I forgave you everything, though I was glad you were gone; frankly, I did not wish you alive again, but since you are, God forbid that I should wish you dead. You owe me two things in exchange for my forgiveness: First, yours, if I treated you ungenerously or unkindly; and, secondly, you ought to take back every word you ever said to me about Mr. Van Torp, for there was not a shadow of truth in what you thought. Will you do that? I ask nothing else."

"Indeed I will, my dear Maud," said Count Kralinsky, in a voice full of emotion.

Lady Maud drew a long breath, that trembled a little as it left her heated lips again. She had done what she believed most firmly to be right, and it had not been easy. She had not been surprised by his patient silence while she had been talking; for she had felt that it was hers to speak and his to listen.

"Thank you," she said now. "I shall never go back to what I have said, and neither of us need ever allude to old times again during this trip. It will not last long, for I shall probably go home by land from the first port we touch, and it is not likely that we shall ever meet again. If we do, I shall behave as if you were Count Kralinsky, whom I have met abroad, neither more nor less. I suppose you will have conscience enough not to marry. Perhaps, if I thought another woman's happiness depended on it, I would consent to divorce you, but you shall never divorce me."

"No power could make me wish to," Kralinsky answered, still deeply moved. "I was mad in those days, Maud; I was beside myself, between

my debts and my entanglements with women not fit to touch your shoes. I've seen it all since. That is the chief reason why I chose to disappear from society when I had the chance, and become some one else! I swear to you, on my mother's soul in heaven, that I thought of nothing but that—to set you free and begin life over again as another man. No thought of marrying has ever crossed my mind! Do you think I could be as bad as that? But I'm not defending myself—how could I? All the right is on your side, and all the wrong on mine. And now—I would give heaven and earth to undo it all and to come back to you!"

"I want to speak to you," she said, in a low, steady voice. "Please listen quite quietly, for some of them may begin to walk again."

He made a slight movement, which was natural under the circumstances. "I do not understand," he said, in his oily voice. "What comedy? I really have no—"

"Don't go on," she answered, interrupting him sharply. "Listen to what I am going to tell you, and then decide what you will do. I don't think your decision will make very much difference to me, but it will make a difference to the world and to yourself. I saw you from a window when you brought Mr. Van Torp to the hotel in Bayreuth, and I recognized you at once. Since this afternoon I have no doubt left."

"I never saw you till last night," said Kralinsky, with some little surprise in his tone, and with perfect assurance.

"Do you really think you can deceive me any longer?" she asked. "I told you this afternoon that if you could come back from the dead, and know the truth, we should probably forgive each other, though we had many differences. Shall we?" She paused a moment, and by his quick change of position she saw that he was much moved. "I don't mean that we should ever go back to the old life, for we were not suited to each other from the first, you and I. You wanted to marry me because I was pretty and smart, and I married you because I wanted to be married, and you were better looking than most men, and seemed to have what I thought was necessary—fortune and a decent position. No, don't interrupt me. We soon found out that we did not care for each other. You went your way, and I went mine. I don't mean to reproach you, for when I say you were beginning to be tired of me I did nothing to keep you. I myself was tired of it already. But whatever you may have thought, I was a faithful wife. Mr. Van Torp had given me a great deal of money for my charity, and does still. I can account for it. I never used a penny of it for myself, and never shall; and he never was, and never will be, any more than a trusted friend. I don't know why you chose to disappear when the man who had your pocket-book was killed and you were said to be dead. It's not my business, and if you choose to go on living under another name, now that you are rich again, I shall not betray you, and few people will recognize you, at least in England, so long as you wear that beard. But you had it when we were married, and I knew you at once, and when I heard you were to be of the party here, I made up my mind at once that I would accept the invitation and come too, and speak to you as I'm speaking now. When I believed you were dead I forgave you everything, though I was glad you were gone; frankly, I did not wish you alive again, but since you are, God forbid that I should wish you dead. You owe me two things in exchange for my forgiveness: First, yours, if I treated you ungenerously or unkindly; and, secondly, you ought to take back every word you ever said to me about Mr. Van Torp, for there was not a shadow of truth in what you thought. Will you do that? I ask nothing else."

"Indeed I will, my dear Maud," said Count Kralinsky, in a voice full of emotion.

Lady Maud drew a long breath, that trembled a little as it left her heated lips again. She had done what she believed most firmly to be right, and it had not been easy. She had not been surprised by his patient silence while she had been talking; for she had felt that it was hers to speak and his to listen.

"Don't be afraid of me!" he cried, in a low and pleading tone. "Not that! Oh, please not that! I will not come nearer; I will not put out my hand to touch yours, I swear it to you! But I love you as I never loved you before; I never knew how beautiful you were till I had lost you, and now that I have found you again you are a thousand times more beautiful than in my dreams! No, I ask nothing! I have no right to ask for what I have thrown away! You do not even pity me, I think! Why should you? You were free when you thought me dead, and I have come back to be a burden and a weight on your life. Forgive me, forgive me, my lost darling, for the sake of all that might have been, but don't fear me! Pity me, if you can, but don't be afraid of me! Say that you pity me a little, and I shall be satisfied, and grateful, too!"

Lady Maud was silent for a few seconds, while he stood turned towards her, his hands clasped in a dramatic gesture, as if hands clasped imploring her comiseration.

"I do pity you," she said at last, quite steadily, for just then she did not fear that he would try to touch even her hand. "I pity you, if you are really in love with me again. I pity you still more if this is a passing thing that has taken hold of you merely because you still think me handsome. But I will never take you back to be my husband again. Never. That is finished, for good and all."

"Ah, Maud, listen to me!"

But she had already slipped out of the corner and was walking slowly away from him, not towards the others, but aft, so that he might join her quietly before going back to them. He was a man of the world and understood her, and did what was expected

of him. Almost as soon as he was beside her, she turned to go forward with her leisurely, careless grace.

"We've been standing a long time," she said, as if the conversation had been about the weather. "I want to sit down."

"I am in earnest," he said, very low.

"So am I," answered Lady Maud.

They went on towards the wheelhouse side by side, without haste, and not very near together, like two ordinary acquaintances.

## CHAPTER XIV.

While the Lancashire Lass was racing down to the Straits of Messina the *Erienna* was heading for the same point from the opposite direction, no longer dawdling along at half-speed, but going her full 16 knots, after coaling at Naples, and any navigator who knew the positions and respective speeds of the two yachts could have calculated with approximate precision the point at which they would probably sight each other.

Logotheti had given up the idea of taking Baraka to Paris, if he had ever really entertained it at all. He assured her that Naples was a great city, too, and that there was a first-class French dress-making establishment there, and that the Ville de Lyon would turn her out almost as smartly as the Rue de la Paix itself.

another niece, who spoke only French; but that was none of her business. When would the young lady try on the things? On any day Mme. Anna chose to name; but in the meantime her uncle would take her down to Sicily, as the weather was so wonderfully fine and it was still so hot.

Mme. Anna therefore named a day, and promised, moreover, to see the best linen-drapers and seamstresses herself, and to provide the young lady with as complete an outfit as if she were going to be married. She should have all things visible and invisible on the shortest possible time. Logotheti, who considered himself a stranger, insisted on putting down a thousand franc note merely as a guarantee of good faith. The dressmaker protested almost furiously and took the money, still protesting. So that was settled, and Baraka was to be outwardly changed into a beautiful Feringhi lady without delay. To tell the truth, the establishment is really a smart one, and she was favorably impressed by the many pretty frocks and gowns that were tried on several pretty young women in order that she might make her choice.

Baraka would have liked a blue satin skirt with a yellow train and a bright green silk body, but in her travels she had noticed that the taste of Feringhi ladies was for very sober or gentle colors, compared with the fashionable standards of Samarkand, Tiflis, and Constantinople, and she meekly acquiesced to everything that Logotheti and Mme. Anna proposed, after putting their heads together. Logotheti seemed to know a great deal about it.

It was nearly dark when the naphtha launch took them out to the yacht, which lay under the mole where the big English and German passenger steamers and the men-of-war are moored.

Logotheti had at last received Margaret's telegram asking him to meet her at once. It had failed to reach him in Gibraltar, and had been telegraphed on thence to Naples, and when he read it he was considerably disturbed. He wrote a long message of explanations and excuses, and sent it to the prima donna at Bayreuth, tripling the number of words she had prepared for his answer. But no reply came, for Margaret was herself at sea and nothing could reach her. He sent one of his own men from the yacht to spend the day at the telegraph office, with instructions for finding him if any message came. The man found him three times, and brought three telegrams; and each time as he tore open the little folded brown paper he felt more uncomfortable, but he was relieved to find each time that the message was only a business one from London or Paris, giving him the latest confidential news about a government loan in which he was largely interested. When he reached the yacht he sent another man to wait till midnight at the office.

The diva was angry, he thought; that was clear, and perhaps she had some right to be. The tone of her telegram had been peremptory in the extreme, and now that he had answered it after a delay of several days, she refused to take any notice of him. It was not possible that such a personage as she was should have left Bayreuth without leaving clear instructions for sending on any telegrams that might come after she left. At this time of year, as he knew, she was beset with offers of engagements to sing, and they had to be answered. From eight o'clock in the morning to midnight there were 16 hours, ample time for a retransmitted message to reach her anywhere in Europe and to be answered. Logotheti felt a sensation of deep relief when the man came aboard at a quarter-past midnight and reported himself empty handed; but he resolved to wait till the following evening before definitely leaving Naples for the ten days which must elapse before Baraka could try on her beautiful Feringhi clothes.

"Moreover," she said, as they watched Vesuvius receding when they left Naples, "your mountains are not mountains, but ant-hills, and I do not care for them. But your sea has the colors of many sherbets, rose-leaf and violet, and lemon and orange, and sometimes even pale yellow peach-sherbet, which is good. Let me always see the sea till the fine dresses are ready to be tried on."

"This sea," answered Logotheti, "is always most beautiful near land and amongst islands, and the big fire-mountains of Sicily looks as tall as Kasbek, because it rises from the water's edge to the sky."

"Then take me to it, and I will tell you, for my eyes have looked on the Altai, and I wish to see a real mountain again. After that we will go back and get the fine dresses. Will Gula know how to fasten the fine dresses at the back, do you think?"

"You shall have a woman who does, and who can talk with Gula, and the two will fasten the fine dresses for you." Logotheti spoke with becoming gravity.

"Yes," Baraka answered. "Spend money for me, that I may be good to see. Also, I wish to have many servants. My father has a hundred, perhaps a thousand, but now I have only two, Gula and Spiro. The man I seek will think I am poor, and that will be a shame. While I was searching for him, it was different; and besides, you are teaching me how the rich Franks live in their world. It is not like ours. You know, for you are more like us, though you are a king here."

She spoke slowly and lazily, pausing between her phrases, and turning her eyes to him now and then without moving her head; and her talk amused him much more than that of European women, though it was so very simple, like that of a gifted child brought suddenly to a new country, or to see a fairy pantomime.

"Tell me," he said after a time, "if it were the portion of Kralinsky to be gathered to his fathers before you saw him, what would you do?"

Baraka now turned not only her eyes to him but her face.

"Why do you ask me this? Is it because he is dead, and you are afraid to tell me?"

judge whether he had done well to despise her love, and to leave her to be done to death by her own people and her body left to the vulture that had waited so long on a jutting point of rock over her head three years ago.

It was a dreamy and sense-compelling life that she led on the yacht, surrounded with every luxury she had ever heard of, and constantly waited on by the only clever man she had ever really talked with, excepting the old Persian merchant in Stamboul. The vision of the golden-bearded giant who had left her to her fate after treating her with stony indifference was still before her, but the reality was nearer in the shape of a visible "greatman," who could do anything he chose, who caused her to be treated like a queen, and who was undeniably handsome.

She wondered whether he had a wife. Judging marriage from her point of view, there probably had been one put away in that beautiful house in Paris. He was an oriental, she told herself, and he would not parade his wife as the Feringhi did. But she was one, too, and she considered that it would be an insult to ask him about such things. Spiro knew, no doubt, but she could not demean herself to inquire of a servant. Perhaps Gula had found out already, for the girl had a way of finding out whatever she wanted to know, apparently by explaining things to the second mate. Possibly Gula could be made to tell what