

# **A ROSE OF YESTERDAY**

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A rose of yesterday by F. Marion Crawford

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**F. MARION CRAWFORD**

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#13142

# A ROSE OF YESTERDAY

BY

E. MARION CRAWFORD

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LAUDERDALE," "THE RALSTONS," ETC., ETC.

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### CHAPTER I

"I WONDER what he meant by it," said Sylvia, turning again in her chair, so that the summer light, softened and tinted by the drawn blinds, might fall upon the etching she held.

"My dear," answered Colonel Wimpole, stretching out his still graceful legs, leaning back in his chair, and slowly joining his nervous but handsome hands, "nobody knows."

He did not move again for some time, and his ward continued to scrutinize Dürer's Knight. It was the one known as 'The Knight, Death, and the Devil,' and she had just received it from her guardian as a birthday present.

"But people must have thought a great deal about it," said Sylvia, at last. "There must be stories about what it means. Do tell me. I'm sure you know."

She laid the unframed print upon her knees, still holding it by the edges, lest the fitful breeze

that came in through the blinds should blow it to the floor. At the same time she raised her eyes till they met the colonel's.

Her earnest young face expressed something like veneration as she gazed at him, and perhaps he thought that it was undeserved, for he soon looked away, with a faint sigh. She sighed, too, but more audibly, as though she were not ashamed of it. Possibly she knew that he could not guess what the sigh meant, and the knowledge added a little pain to what she felt just then, and had felt daily of late. She began to study the etching again.

"To me," she said softly, "the Knight is a hero. He is making Death show him the way, and he has made the Devil his squire and servant. He will reach the city on the hill in time, for there is still sand enough in the hour-glass. Do you see?" She held out the print to the colonel. "There is still sand enough," she repeated. "Don't you think so?"

Again, as she asked the question, she looked at him; but he was bending over the etching, and she could only see his clear profile against the shadows of the room.

"He may be just in time," he answered quietly.

"I wonder which house they lived in, of those one can see," said Sylvia.



“Who are ‘they’? Death, the Devil, and the Knight?”

“No. The Knight and the lady, of course, —the lady who is waiting to see whether he will come in time.”

The colonel laughed a little at her fancy, and looked at her as the breeze stirred her brown hair. He did not understand her, and she knew that he did not. His glance took in her brown hair, her violet eyes, her delicately shaded cheek, and the fresh young mouth with its strange little half-weary smile that should not have been there, and that left the weariness behind whenever it faded for a time. He wondered what was the matter with the girl.

She was not ill. That was clear enough, for they had travelled far, and Sylvia had never once seemed tired. The colonel and Miss Wimpole, his elderly maiden sister, had taken Sylvia out to Japan to meet her father, Admiral Strahan, who had been stationed some time with a small squadron in the waters of the far East. He had been ordered home rather suddenly, and the Wimpoles were bringing the girl back by way of Europe. Sylvia’s mother had been dead three years, and had left her a little fortune. Mrs. Strahan had been a step-sister, and no blood relation, of the Wimpoles; but they had been as a real brother and a real sister to her,

and she had left her only child to their care during such times as her husband's service should keep him away from home. The girl was now just eighteen.

Colonel Wimpole wondered whether she could be destined for suffering, as some women are, and the thought linked itself to the chain of another life, and drew it out of his heart that he might see it and be hurt, for he had known pain in himself and through one he loved. He could not believe that Sylvia was forefated to sorrow, and the silent weariness that of late was always in her face meant something which he feared to learn, but for which he felt himself vaguely responsible, as though he were not doing his duty by her.

He was a man of heart, of honour, and of conscience. Long ago, in his early youth, he had fought bravely in a long and cruel war, and had remained a soldier for many years afterwards, with an old-fashioned attachment for arms that was dashed with chivalry, till at last he had hung up his sword, accepting peace as a profession. Indeed he had never loved anything of war, except its danger and its honour; and he had loved one woman more than either, but not against honour nor in danger, though without any hope.

He had lived simply, as some men can and

as a few do live, in the midst of the modern world, parting with an illusion now and then, and fostering some new taste in its place, in a sort of innocent and simple consciousness that it was artificial, but in the certainty that it was harmless. He was gentle in his ways, with the quiet and unaffected feeling for other people which not seldom softens those who have fought with their hands in the conviction of right, and have dealt and received real wounds. War either brutalizes or refines a man; it never leaves him unchanged. Colonel Wimpole had travelled from time to time, more for the sake of going to some one place which he wished to see, than of passing through many places for the sake of travelling. There is a great difference between the two methods. Wherever he went, he took with him his own character and his slightly formal courtesy of manner, not leaving himself at home, as some people do, nor assuming a separate personality for Europe, like a disguise; for, such as he was, he was incapable of affectation, and he was sure that the manners which had been good enough for his mother were good enough for any woman in the world, as indeed they were, because he was a gentleman, that is, a man, and gentle at all points, excepting for his honour. But no one had ever touched that.