

THE DIVA'S RUBY

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SYNOPSIS.

Baraka, a Tartar girl, became enamored of a golden-headed 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.

CHAPTER I.—Continued.

It was a long time since she had heard any sound from the cave; she went to the entrance and listened, but all was quite still. Perhaps the traveler had fallen asleep from exhaustion, too tired even to drag himself out into the air when he could work no longer. She sat down in the entrance and waited.

An hour passed. Perhaps he was dead. At the mere inward suggestion Baraka sprang to her feet, and her heart beat frantically, and stood still an instant, and then beat again as if it would burst, and she could hardly breathe. She steadied herself against the rock, and then went in to know the truth, feeling her way, and instinctively shading her eyes as many people do in the dark.

A breath of cool air made her open them, and to her amazement there was light before her. She thought she must have turned quite round while she was walking, and that she was going back to the entrance, so she turned again. But in a few seconds there was light before her once more, and soon she saw the dry sand, full of her footprints and the traveler's, and then the hollow where the mine was came in sight.

She retraced her steps a second time, saw the light as before, ran forward on the smooth sand and stumbled upon a heap of earth and stones, just as she saw the sky through an irregular opening on the level of her face. Scarcely believing her senses she thrust out her hand towards the hole. It was real, and she was not dreaming; the traveler had got out and was gone, recking little of what might happen to her, since he was free with his treasure.

Baraka crept up the slope of earth as quickly as she could and got out; if she had hoped to find him waiting for her she was disappointed, for he was nowhere to be seen. He had got clear away, with his camel-bag full of rubies. A moment later she was lying on the ground, with her face in the stream, drinking her fill, and forgetful even of the man she loved. In order to deprive them of water the men had dug a channel by which it ran down directly from the spring to the ravine on that side; then they had blocked up the entrance with stones and earth, believing that one man's strength could never suffice to break through, and they had gone away. They had probably buried or burnt Baraka's clothes, for she did not see them anywhere.

She ate some of the dates from the dead man's wallet, and a bit of the dry black bread, and felt revived, since her greatest need had been for water, and that was satisfied. But when she had eaten and drunk, and had washed herself in the stream and twisted up her hair, she sat down upon a rock; and she felt so tired that she would have fallen asleep if the pain in her heart had not kept her awake. She clasped her hands together on her knees and bent over them, rocking herself.

When nearly an hour had passed she looked up and saw that the sun was sinking, for the shadows were turning purple in the deep gorge, and there was a golden light on the peaks above. She listened then, holding her breath; but there was no sound except the tinkling of the tiny stream as it fell over a ledge at some distance below her, following its new way down into the valley.

She rose at last, looked upward, and seemed about to go away when a thought occurred to her, which afterwards led to very singular consequences. Instead of going down the valley or climbing up out of it, she went back to the entrance of the cave, taking the wallet with her, dragged herself in once more over the loose stones and earth, reached the secret hollow where the pool had been, and made straight for the little mine of precious stones. The traveler had broken out many more than he had been able to carry, but she did not try to collect them all. She was not altogether ignorant of the trade carried on by the men of her family for generations, and though she had not the least idea of the real value of the finest of the rubies, she knew very well that it would be wise to take many small ones which she could exchange for clothing and necessities with the first women she met in the hills, while hiding the rest of the supply she would be able to carry in the wallet.

When she had made her wise selection, she looked once more towards the quicksand, and left the place for ever. Once outside she began to climb the rocks as fast as she could, for very soon it would be night and she would have to lie down and wait many hours for the day, since there

was no moon, and the way was very dangerous, even for a Tartar girl who could almost tread on air.

High up on the mountain, over the dry well where Baraka and the stranger had been imprisoned, the vulture perched alone with empty claw and drooping wings. But it was of no use for him to wait; the living, who might have died of hunger and thirst, were gone, and the body of dead Saad lay fathoms deep in the quicksand, in the very maw of the mountain.

CHAPTER II.

There was good copy for the newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic in the news that the famous lyric soprano, Margarita da Cordova, whose real name was Miss Margaret Donne, was engaged to Mons. Konstantin Logotheti, a Greek financier of large fortune established in Paris, and almost as well known to art collectors as to needy governments, would be promoters, and mothers of marriageable daughters.

The engagement was made known during the height of the London season, not long after they had both been at a week-end party at Craythorpe, Lord Creedmore's place in Derbyshire, where they had apparently come to a final understanding after knowing each other more than two years. Margaret was engaged to sing at Covent Garden that summer, and the first mention of the match was coupled with the information that she intended to cancel all her engagements and never appear in public again. The result was that the next time she came down the stage to sing the Waltz Song in "Roméo and Juliet" she received a tremendous ovation before she opened her handsome lips, and another when she had finished the air; and she spent one of the happiest evenings she remembered.

Though she was at heart a nice English girl, not much over 24 years of age, the orphan daughter of an Oxford don who had married an American, she had developed, or fallen, to the point at which very popular and successful artists cannot live at all without applause, and are not happy unless they receive a certain amount of adulation. Even the envy they excite in their rivals is delicious, if not almost necessary to them.

Margaret's real nature had not been changed by a success that had been altogether phenomenal and had probably not been approached by any soprano since Mme. Bonanni; but a second nature had grown upon it and threatened to hide it from all but those who knew her very well indeed. The inward Margaret was honest and brave, rather sensitive, and still generous; the outward woman, the prima donna whom most people saw, was self-possessed to a fault, imperious when contradicted, and coolly ruthless when her artistic fame was at stake. The two natures did not agree well together, and made her wretched when they quarreled, but Logotheti, who was going to take her for better, for worse, professed to like them both, and was the only man she had ever known who did. That was one reason why she was going to marry him, after having refused him about a dozen times.

She had loved another man as much as she was capable of loving, and at one time he had loved her, but a misunderstanding and her devotion to her art had temporarily separated them; and later, when she had almost told him that she would have him if he asked her, he had answered her quite frankly that she was no longer the girl he had cared for, and he had suddenly disappeared from her life altogether. So Logotheti, brilliant, very rich, gifted, gay, and rather exotic in appearance and manner, but tenacious as a bloodhound, had won the prize after a struggle that had lasted two years. She had accepted him without much enthusiasm at the last, and without any great show of feeling.

"Let's try it," she had said, and he had been more than satisfied.

After a time, therefore, they told their friends that they were going to "try it."

The only woman with whom the great singer was at all intimate was the Countess Leven, Lord Creedmore's daughter, generally called "Lady Maud," whose husband had been in the diplomacy, and after vainly trying to divorce her, had been killed in St. Petersburg by a bomb meant for a minister. The explosion had been so terrific that the dead man's identity had only been established by means of his pocket-book, which somehow escaped destruction. So Lady Maud was a childless widow of eight-and-twenty. Her father, when he had no prospect of ever succeeding to the title, had been a successful barrister, and then a hard-working member of parliament, and he had been from boyhood the close friend of Margaret's father. Hence the intimacy that grew up quickly between the two women when they at last met, though they had not known each other as children, because the lawyer had lived in town and his friend in Oxford.

"So you're going to try it, my dear!" said Lady Maud, when she heard the news.

She had a sweet low voice, and when she spoke now it was a little sad; for she had "tried it," and it had failed miserably. But she knew that the trial had not been a fair one; the only man she had ever cared for had been killed in South Africa, and as she had not even the excuse of having been engaged to him, she had married with indifference the first handsome man with a good name and a fair fortune who offered himself. He chanced to be a Russian diplomatist, and he turned out a spendthrift and an unfaithful husband. She was too kind-hearted to be glad that he had been blown to atoms by dynamite, but she was much too natural not to enjoy the liberty restored to her by his destruction; and she had not the least intention of ever "trying it" again.

"You don't sound very enthusiastic," laughed Margaret, who had no misgivings to speak of, and was generally a cheerful person. "If you don't encourage me I may not go on."

"There are two kinds of ruined gamblers," answered Lady Maud; "there are those that still like to watch other people play, and those who cannot bear the sight of a roulette table. I'm one of the second kind, but I'll come to the wedding all the same, and cheer like mad, if you ask me."

"That's nice of you. I really think I mean to marry him, and I wish you would help me with my wedding gown, dear. It would be dreadful if I looked

Then he suggests going to Constantinople and getting it done by the patriarch, who is his uncle. Really, that would be rather smart, wouldn't it?"

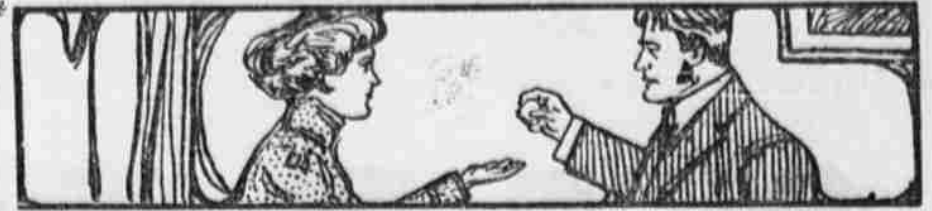
"Distinctly," assented Lady Maud. "But if you do that, I'm afraid I cannot help you with the wedding gown. I don't know anything about the dress of a Fanariote bride."

"Konstantin says they dress very well," Margaret said. "But of course it is out of the question to do anything so ridiculous. It will end in the chapel-of-ease, I'm sure. He always has his own way. That's probably why I'm going to marry him, just because he insists on it. I don't see any other very convincing reason."

Lady Maud could not think of anything to say in answer to this; but as she really liked the singer she thought it was a pity.

Paul Griggs, the veteran man of letters, smiled rather sadly when she met him shopping in New Bond street, and told him of Margaret's engagement. He said that most great singers married because the only way to the divorce court led up the steps of the altar. Though he knew the world he was not a cynic, and Lady Maud herself wondered how long it would be before Logotheti and his wife separated.

"But they are not married yet," Griggs added, looking at her with the quietly ready expression of a man



groundless gossip about him and Lady Maud, which had very nearly become a scandal. The truth was that they were the best friends in the world, and nothing more; the millionaire had for some time been interested in an unusual sort of charity which almost filled the lonely woman's life, and he had given considerable sums of money to help it. During the months preceding the beginning of this tale, he had also been the object of one of those dastardly attacks to which very rich and important financiers are more exposed than other men, and he had actually been accused of having done away with his partner's daughter, who had come to her end mysteriously during a panic in a New York theater. But his innocence had been proved in the clearest manner, and he had returned to the United States to look after the interests of the Trust.

When Griggs heard the news of Margaret's engagement to Logotheti, he immediately began to wonder how Mr. Van Torp would receive the intelligence; and if it had not already occurred to Lady Maud that the millionaire might make a final effort to rout his rival and marry the prima donna himself, the old author's observation suggested such a possibility. Van Torp was a man who had fought up to success and fortune with little regard for the obstacles he found in his way; he had worked as a cowboy in his early youth, and was apt to look on his adversaries and rivals in life either as refractory cattle or as dangerous wild beasts; and though he had some of the old-fashioned ranchero's sense of fair play in a fight, he had much of the reckless daring and ruthless savagery that characterize the fast-disappearing western desperado.

Logotheti, on the other hand, was in many respects a true oriental, supremely astute and superlatively calm, but imbued, at heart, with a truly eastern contempt for any law that chanced to oppose his wish.

Both men had practically inexhaustible resources at their command, and both were determined to marry the prima donna. It occurred to Paul Griggs that a real struggle between such a pair of adversaries would be worth watching. There was unlimited money on both sides, and equal courage and determination. The Greek was the more cunning of the two, by great odds, and had now the considerable advantage of having been accepted by the lady; but the American was far more regardless of consequences to himself or to others in the pursuit of what he wanted, and, short of committing a crime, would put at least as broad an interpretation on the law.

Logotheti had always lived in a highly civilized society, even in Constantinople, for it is the greatest mistake to imagine that the upper classes of Greeks, in Greece or Turkey, are at all deficient in cultivation. Van Torp, on the contrary, had run away from civilization when a half-educated boy, he had grown to manhood in a community of men who had little respect for anything and feared nothing at all, and he had won success in a field where those who compete for it buy it at any price, from a lie to a life.

Lady Maud was thinking of these things as she disappeared from Griggs' sight, for she was a little afraid that she had made trouble. Ten days had passed since she had last written to Rufus Van Torp, and she had told him, amongst other things, that Mme. de Cordova and Logotheti were engaged to be married, adding that it seemed to her one of the most ill-assorted matches of the season, and that her friend the singer was sure to be miserable herself and to make her husband perfectly wretched, though he was a very good sort in his way and she liked him. There had been no reason why she should not write the news to Mr. Van Torp, even though it was not public property yet, for he was her intimate friend, and she knew him to be as resolute as all doctors ought to be and as some solicitors' clerks are. She had asked him not to tell any one till he heard of the engagement from some one else.

He had not spoken of it, but something else had happened. He had cabled to Lady Maud that he was coming back to England by the next steamer. He often came out and went back suddenly two or three times at short intervals, and then stayed away for many months, but Lady Maud thought there could not be much doubt as to his reason for coming now. She knew well enough that he had tried to persuade the prima donna to marry him during the previous winter, and that if his passion for her had not shown itself much of late, this was due to other causes, chiefly to the persecution of which he had rid himself just before he went to America, but to some extent also to the fact that Margaret had not seemed inclined to accept any one else.

Lady Maud, who knew the man better than he knew himself, inwardly compared him to a volcano, quiescent just now, so far as Margaret was concerned, but ready to break out at any moment with unexpected and destructive energy.

Margaret herself, who had known Logotheti for years, and had seen

him in his most dangerous moods as well as in his best moments, would have thought a similar comparison with an elemental force quite as truly descriptive of him, if it had occurred to her. The enterprising Greek had really attempted to carry her off by force on the night of the final rehearsal before her first appearance on the stage, and had only been thwarted because a royal rival had caused him to be locked up, as if by mistake, in order to carry her off himself; in which he also had failed most ridiculously, thanks to the young singer's friend, the celebrated Mme. Bonanni. That was a very amusing story. But on another occasion Margaret had found herself shut up with her oriental adorer in a room from which she could not escape, and he had quite lost his head; and if she had not been the woman she was, she would have fared ill. After that he had behaved more like an ordinary human being, and she had allowed the natural attraction he had for her to draw her gradually to a promise of marriage; and now she talked to Lady Maud about her gown, but she still put off naming a day for the wedding, in spite of Logotheti's growing impatience.

This was the situation when the London season broke up and Mr. Van Torp landed at Southampton from an ocean greyhound that had covered the distance from New York in 5 days 12 hours and 37 minutes, which will doubtless seem very slow traveling if any one takes the trouble to read this tale 20 years hence, though the passengers were pleased because it was not much under the record time for steamers coming east.

Five hours after he landed Van Torp entered Lady Maud's drawing room in the little house in Charles street, Berkeley Square, where she had lived with the departed Leven from the time when he had been attached to the Russian embassy till he had last gone away. She was giving it up now, and it was already half dismantled. It was to see Van Torp that she was in town in the middle of August, instead of with her father at Craythorpe or with friends in Scotland.

London was as hot as it could be, which means that a New Yorker would have found it chilly and an Italian delightfully cool; but the Londoners were sweltering when Van Torp arrived, and were talking of the oppressive atmosphere and the smell of the pavement, not at all realizing how blessed they were.

The American entered and stood still a moment to have a good look at Lady Maud. He was a middle-sized, rather thick-set man, with rude hands, sandy hair, an over-developed jaw, and sharp blue eyes that sometimes fixed themselves in a disagreeable way when he was speaking—eyes that had looked into the barrel of another man's revolver once or twice without wavering, hands that had caught and saddled and bridled many an unriden colt in the plains, a mouth like a carpet-bag when it opened, like a closed vice when it was shut. It was not a handsome man, Mr. Rufus Van Torp, nor one with whom any one short of a prize-fighter would meddle, nor one to haunt the dreams of sweet 16. It was not for his face that Lady Maud, good and beautiful, liked him better than any one in the world, except her own father, and believed in him and trusted him, and it was assuredly not for his money. The beggar did not live who would dare to ask him for a penny after one look at his face, and there were not many men on either side of the Atlantic who would have looked forward to any sort of contest with him without grave misgivings.

"Well," he said, advancing the last step after that momentary pause, and taking the white hand in both his own, "how have you been? Fair to middling? About that? Well—I'm glad to see you, gladder than a sitting hen at sunrise!"

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Ruskin on Railways.
One can imagine perhaps the feelings with which Ruskin, had he been alive, would have heard the news that a new Alpine railway is now in course of construction. His most withering sarcasms were directed against those "travelers through the Alps by tunnels" who "go to balls in Rome, or hells at Monaco." And he was vehemently opposed to all attempts to beautify the railway station. "The railroad," he writes, "The Seven Lamps of Architecture," "is in all its relations of earnest business, to be got through as soon as possible. It transmutes a man from a traveler into a living parcel. For the time he has parted with the nobler characteristics of his humanity for the sake of a planetary power of locomotion. Do not ask him to admire anything. You might as well ask the wind. Carry him safely, dismiss him soon—he will thank you for nothing else."

Real "Home Body."
Miss Harriet Nicklin, whose funeral took place at Folkehill, England, recently, had never, during the 62 years of her life, passed a night out of the house in which she was born, and slept for 14,000 nights in the same bedroom.



Went to the Entrance and Listened.

like Juliet, or Elsa, or Lucia! Every body would laugh, especially as Konstantin is rather of the Romeo type, with his almond-shaped eyes and his little black mustache? I suppose he really is, isn't he?"

"Perhaps—just a little. But he is a very handsome fellow."

Lady Maud's lips quivered, but Margaret did not see.

"Oh, I know!" she cried, laughing and shaking her head. "You once called him 'exotic,' and he is—but I'm awfully fond of him all the same. Isn't that enough to marry on when there's everything else? You really will help me with my gown, won't you? You're such an angel!"

"Oh, yes, I'll do anything you like. Are you going to have a regular knock-down-and-drag-out smash at St. George's? The usual thing?"

Lady Maud did not despise slang, but she made it sound like music.

"No," answered Margaret, rather regretfully. "We cannot possibly be married till the season's quite over, or perhaps in the autumn, and then there will be nobody here. I'm not sure when I shall feel like it! Besides, Konstantin hates that sort of thing."

"Do you mean to say that you would like a show wedding in Hanover Square?" inquired Lady Maud.

"I've never done anything in a church," said the prima donna, rather enigmatically, but as if she would like to.

"Anything in a church?" repeated her friend, vaguely thoughtful, and with the slightest possible interrogation. "That's a funny way of looking at it!"

Margaret was a little ashamed of what she had said so naturally.

"I think Konstantin would like to have it in a chapel-of-ease in the Old Kent Road!" she said, laughing. "He sometimes talks of being married in tweeds and driving off in a hansom!