

THE DIVA'S RUBY

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Mr. Van Torp Was Puzzled.

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. The stranger, who was really the traveler, returned 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, dug 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, Donna Margarita de Cordova, a famous prima donna, became engaged in London to Konstantin Logotheti, a wealthy Greek financier. Her intimate friend was Countess Evelyn, 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 \$5,000,000 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.

CHAPTER IV.—Continued.

But Barak now understood what he was going to do, and ran before him, and stood before the door in an attitude which expressed entreaty so clearly that Mr. Van Torp was puzzled.

"Well," he said, standing still and looking into the beautiful imploring eyes, "what on earth do you want now, Miss Barrack? Try and explain yourself."

A very singular conversation by signs now began.

Barak pointed to the waistcoat pocket into which he had put the stone. The matter concerned that, of course, and Van Torp nodded. Next, though after considerable difficulty, she made him understand that she was asking how he had got it, and when this was clear, he answered by pretending to count out coins with his right hand on the palm of his left to explain that he had bought it. There was no mistaking this, and Barak nodded quickly and went on to her next question. She wanted to know what kind of a man had sold him the ruby. She improvised a pretty little dumb show in which she represented the seller and Mr. Van Torp the buyer of the ruby, and then by gestures she asked if the man who sold it was tall.

Van Torp raised his hand several inches higher than his own head. He had bought the ruby from a very tall man. Putting both hands to her chin and then drawing them down as if stroking a long beard, she inquired if the man had one, and again the answer was affirmative. She nodded excitedly and pointed first to Van Torp's sandy hair and then to her own short black locks. The American pointed to his own, and then touched his watch-chain and smiled. The man's hair was fair, and even golden. By a similar process she ascertained that his eyes were blue and not black, and her excitement grew. Last of all she tried

to ask where the man was, but it was some time before she could make Mr. Van Torp understand what she meant. As if to help her out of her difficulty, the sun shone through the clouds at that moment and streamed into the room; she pointed to it at once, turned her back to it, and then held out her right hand to indicate the east, and her left to the west.

"Oh, yes," said Van Torp, who had seen Indians do the same thing. "It was west of here that I bought it of him, a good way west."

He pointed in that direction, and thrust out his arm as if he would make it reach much further if he could. At this Barak looked deeply disappointed. Several times, to show that she meant London, or at least England, she pointed to the floor at her feet and looked inquiringly at Van Torp, but he shook his head and pointed to the west again, and made a gesture that meant crossing something. He spoke to her as if she could understand.

"I've got your meaning," he said. "You're after the big man with the yellow beard, who is selling rubies from the same place, and has very likely gone off with yours. He looked like a bad egg in spite of his handsome face."

He turned his eyes thoughtfully to the window. Barak plucked gently at his sleeve and pretended to write in the palm of her left hand, and then went through all the descriptive gestures again, and then once more pretended to write, and coaxingly pushed him towards a little table on which she saw writing materials.

"You'd like to have his address, would you, Miss Barrack? I wonder why you don't call in your interpreter and tell me so. It would be much simpler than all this dumb crambo."

Once more he made a step towards the door, but she caught at his sleeve and entreated him in her own language not to call any one; and her voice was so deliciously soft and beseeching that he yielded, and sat down at the small table and wrote out an address from memory. He handed her the half-sheet of paper when he had dried the writing and had looked over it carefully.

"Poor little thing!" he said in a tone of pity. "If you ever find him he'll eat you."

Barak again showed signs of great emotion when she put the address into an inside pocket of her man's coat, but it was not of the same kind as before. She took Van Torp's big hand to both her own, and, bending down, she laid it on her head, meaning that he might dispose of her alive ever afterwards. But he did not understand.

"You want my blessing, do you, Miss Barrack? Some people don't think Brassy Van Torp's blessing worth much, young lady, but you're welcome to it, such as it is."

He patted her thick hair and smiled as she looked up, and her eyes were dewy with tears.

"That's all right, my dear," he said. "Don't cry!"

She smiled, too, because his tone was kind, and, standing up, she took out her little leathern bag again quickly, emptied the twists of paper into her hand, selected one by touch, and slipped the rest back. She unwrapped a large stone and held it up to the light, turning it a little as she did so. Van Torp watched her with curiosity, and with an amused suspicion that she had perhaps played the whole scene in order to mollify him and induce him to buy something. So many people had played much more elaborate tricks in the hope of getting money from him, and the stones might be imitations after all, in recompense of Logotheti's penciled line of recommendation.

But Barak's next action took Van Torp by surprise. To his amazement, she pressed the ruby lightly to her heart, then to her lips, and last of all to her forehead, and before he knew what she was doing she had placed it in his right hand and closed his fingers upon it. It was a thank-offering. "Nonsense!" objected the millionaire, smiling, but holding out the stone to her. "It's very sweet of you, but you don't mean it, and I don't take presents like that. Why, it's worth a thousand pounds in Bond street any day!"

But she put her hands behind her back and shook her head, to show that she would not take it back. Then with her empty hand she again touched her heart, her lips and forehead, and turned towards the door.

"Here, stop!" said Mr. Van Torp, going after her. "I can't take this thing! See here, I say! Put it back into your pocket!"

She turned and met him, and made a gesture of protest and entreaty, as if earnestly begging him to keep the gem. He looked at her keenly, and he was a judge of humanity, and saw that she was hurt by his refusal. As a last resource, he took out his pocket-book and showed her a quantity of folded bank notes.

"Well," he said, "since you insist, Miss Barrack, I'll buy the stone of you, but I'll be everlastingly jiggored if I'll take it for nothing."

Barak's eyes suddenly flashed in a most surprising way, her lower lip pouted, and her cheek faintly changed color, as a drop of scarlet pomegranate juice will tinge a bowl of cream.

She made one step forwards, plucked the stone from his fingers, rather than took it, and with a quick, but girlishly awkward movement, threw it towards the window as hard as she could, stamping angrily with her little foot at the same moment. Mr. Van Torp was extremely disconcerted, as he sometimes was by the sudden actions of the sex he did not understand. Fortunately the stone hit the wall instead of going out of the window.

"I'm really sorry, Miss Barrack," he said in a tone of humble apology, and he went quickly and picked up the gem. "I hadn't quite understood, you see."

She watched him, and drew back instinctively towards the door, as if expecting that he would again try to give it back to her. But he shook his head now, bowed with all the grace he could affect, which was little, and by way of making her feel that he accepted the gift, he pressed it to his heart, as she had done, and to his lips, but not to his forehead, because he was afraid that might cause some new mistake, as he did not know what the gesture meant.

Barak's face changed instantly; she smiled, nodded, and waved her hand to him, to say that it was all right, and that she was quite satisfied. Then she made a sort of salute that he thought very graceful indeed, as if she were taking something from near the floor and laying it on her forehead, and she laughed softly and was out of the room and had shut the door before he could call her back again.

He stood still in the middle of the room, looking at the gem in his hand with an expression of grave doubt.

"Well," he said to himself, and his lips formed the words, though no sound articulated them, "that's a queer sort of a morning's work, anyway."

He reflected that the very last thing he had ever expected was a present of a fine ruby from a pretty heathen girl in man's clothes, recommended to him by Logotheti. Though he almost laughed at the thought when it occurred to him, he did not like the idea of keeping the stone; yet he did not know what to do with it, for it was more than probable that he was never to see Barak again, and if he ever did, it was at least likely that she would refuse to take back her gift, and as energetically as on the first occasion.

At that moment it occurred to him that he might sell it to a dealer and give the proceeds to Lady Maud for her good work, and taking his hat and gloves he went out immediately, without even telling Stemp that he was going.

He walked up at a leisurely pace from his hotel by the river to Piccadilly and Bond street, and entered a jeweler's shop of modest appearance but ancient reputation, which had been in the same place for nearly a century, and had previously been on the other side of the street.

Outside, two well-dressed men were looking at the things in the window; within, a broad-shouldered, smart-looking man with black hair and dressed in perfectly new blue serge was sitting by the counter with his

back to the door, talking with the old jeweler himself. He turned on the chair when he heard the new-comer's step, and Mr. Van Torp found himself face to face with Konstantin Logotheti, whom he had supposed to be in Paris.

"Well," he said, without betraying the surprise he felt, "this is what I call a very pleasant accident, Mr. Logotheti."

The Greek rose and shook hands, and the American did not fail to observe on the counter a small piece of tissue paper on which lay an uncut stone, much larger than the one he had in his pocket.

"If you are in any hurry," said Logotheti politely, "I don't mind waiting in the least. Mr. Pinney and I are in the midst of a discussion that may never end, and I believe neither of us has anything in the world to do."

Mr. Pinney smiled benignly and put in a word in the mercantile plural, which differs from that of royalty in being used every day.

"The truth is, we are not very busy just at this time of the year," he said.

"That's very kind of you, Mr. Logotheti," said Van Torp, answering the latter, "but I'm not really in a hurry, thank you."

The stress he laid on the word "really" might have led one to the conclusion that he was pretending to be, but was not. He sat down deliberately at a little distance, took off his hat, and looked at the gem on the counter.

"I don't know anything about such things, of course," he said in a tone of reflection, "but I should think that was quite a nice ruby."

Again Mr. Pinney smiled benignly, for Mr. Van Torp had dealt with him for years.

"It's a very fine stone, indeed, sir," he said, and then turned to Logotheti again. "I think we can undertake to cut it for you in London," he said. "I will weigh it and give you a careful estimate."

As a matter of fact, before Van Torp entered, Logotheti had got so far as the question of setting the gem for a lady's ring, but Mr. Pinney, like all the great jewelers, was as discreet and tactful as a professional diplomatist. How could he be sure that one customer might like another to know about a ring ordered for a lady? If Logotheti preferred secrecy, he would only have to assent and go away, as if leaving the ruby to be cut, and he could look in again when it was convenient; and this was what he at once decided to do.

"I think you're right, Mr. Pinney," he said. "I shall leave it in your hands. That's really all," he added, turning to Mr. Van Torp.

"Really? My business won't take long either, and we'll go together, if you like, and have a little chat. I only came to get another of those extra large collar studs you make for me, Mr. Pinney. Have you got another?"

"We always keep them in stock for your convenience, sir," answered the famous jeweler, opening a special little drawer behind the counter and producing a very small morocco case.

Mr. Van Torp did not even open it, and had already laid down the money, for he knew precisely what it cost.

"Thanks," he said. "You're always so obliging about little things, Mr. Pinney."

"Thank you, sir. We do our best. Good-morning, sir, good-morning."

The two millionaires went out together. Two well-dressed men stood aside to let them pass and then entered the shop.

"Which way?" asked Logotheti.

"Your way," answered the American. "I've nothing to do."

"Nor have I," laughed the Greek. "Nothing in the world! What can anybody find to do in London at this time of year?"

"I'm sure I don't know," echoed Van Torp, pleasantly. "I supposed you were on the continent somewhere."

"And I thought you were in America, and so, of course, we meet at old Pinney's in London!"

"Really? Did you think I was in America? Your friend, the heathen girl in boy's clothes, brought me your card this morning. I supposed you knew I was here."

"No, but I thought you might be, within six months, and I gave her several cards for people I know. So she found you out! She's a born ferret—she would find anything. Did you buy anything of her?"

"No. I'm not buying rubies to-day. Much obliged for sending her, all the same. You take an interest in her, I suppose, Mr. Logotheti? Is that so?"

"I?" Logotheti laughed a little. "No, indeed! Those days were long ago. I'm engaged to be married."

"By the bye, yes. I'd heard that, and I meant to congratulate you. I do now, anyway. When is it to be? Settled that yet?"

"Some time in October, I think. So you guessed that Barak is a girl."

"Yes, that's right. I guessed she was. Do you know anything about her?"

Logotheti told his companion the story of the ruby mine, substantially as it was narrated at the beginning of this tale, not dreaming that Van Torp had perhaps met and talked with the man who had played so large a part in it, and to find whom Barak had traversed many dangers and overcome many difficulties.

"It sounds like the 'Arabian Nights,'" said Mr. Van Torp, as if he found it hard to believe.



"Where's She Hiding from You?"

"Exactly," assented Logotheti. "And, oddly enough, the first of those stories is about Samarkand, which is not so far from Barak's native village. It seems to have taken the girl about a year to find her way to Constantinople, and when she got there she naturally supposed that it was the capital of the world, and that her man, being very great and very rich, thanks to her, must of course live there. So she searched Stamboul and Pera for him, during seven or eight months. She lived in the house of a good old Persian merchant, under the protection of his wife, and learned that there was a world called Europe where her man might be living, and cities called Paris and London, where people pay fabulous prices for precious stones. Persian merchants are generally well-educated men, you know. At last she made up her mind to dress like a man, she picked up an honest Turkish manservant who had been all over Europe with a diplomatist and could speak some French and English as well as Tartar, she got a letter of recommendation to me from a Greek banker, through the Persian who did business with him, joined some Greeks who were coming to Marseilles by sea, and here she is. Now you know as much as I do. She is perfectly fearless, and as much more sure of herself than any man ever was, as some young women can be in this queer world. Of course, she'll never find the brute who thought he was leaving her to be murdered by her relations, but if she ever did, she would either marry him or cut his throat."

"Nice, amiable kind of girl," remarked Mr. Van Torp, who remembered her behaviour when he had refused her proffered gift. "That's very interesting, Mr. Logotheti. How long do you count on being in London this time? Three or four days, maybe?"

"I dare say. No longer, I fancy."

"Why don't you come and take dinner with me some night?" asked the American. "Day after to-morrow, perhaps. I'd be pleased to have you."

"Thank you very much," Logotheti answered. "Since you ask me, I see no reason why I should not dine with you, if you want me."

They agreed upon the place and hour, and each suddenly remembered an engagement.

"By the way," said Mr. Van Torp, without apparent interest, "I hope Mme. Cordova is quite well? Where's she hiding from you?"

"Just now the hiding-place is Bayreuth. She's gone there with Mrs. Rushmore to hear 'Parsifal.' I believe I'm not musical enough for that, so I'm roving till it's over. That's my personal history at this moment! And Miss Donnie is quite well, I believe, thank you."

"I notice you call her 'Miss Donnie' when you speak of her," said Van Torp. "Excuse me if I made a mistake just now. I've always called her Mme. Cordova."

"It doesn't matter at all," answered Logotheti carelessly, "but I believe she prefers to be called by her own

name amongst friends. Good-by till day after to-morrow, then."

"At half after eight."

"All right—half-past—I shall remember."

But at two o'clock, on the next day but one, Logotheti received a note brought by hand, in which Mr. Van Torp said that to his great regret he had been called away suddenly, and hoped that Logotheti would forgive him, as the matter was of such urgent importance that he would have already left London when the note was received.

This was more than true, if possible, for the writer had left town two days earlier, very soon after he had parted from Logotheti in Pall Mall, although the note had not been delivered till 48 hours later.

CHAPTER V.

Mr. Van Torp knew no more about Bayreuth than about Samarkand, beyond the fact that at certain stated times performances of Wagner's operas were given there with as much solemnity as great religious festivals, and that musical people spoke of the Bayreuth season in a curiously reverent manner. He would have been much surprised if any one had told him that he often whistled fragments of "Parsifal" to himself and liked the sound of them; for he had a natural ear and a good memory, and had whistled remarkably well when he was a boy.

The truth about this seemingly impossible circumstance was really very simple. In what he called his co-punching days, he had been for six months in company with two young men who used to whistle softly together by the hour beside the camp fire, and none of the other "boys" had ever heard the strange tunes they seemed to like best, but Van Torp had caught and remembered many fragments, almost unconsciously, and he whistled them to himself because they gave him a sensation which no "real music" ever did. Extraordinary natures, like his, are often endowed with unnoticed gifts and tastes quite unlike those of most people. No one knew anything about the young men who whistled Wagner; the "Lost Legion" hides many secrets, and the two were not popular with the rest, though they knew their business and did their work fairly well. One of them was afterwards said to have been killed in a shooting affray and the other had disappeared about the same time, no one knew how, or cared, though Mr. Van Torp thought he had recognized him once many years later. They were neither American nor Englishmen, though they both spoke English well, and never were heard to use any other language.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Just Sued Him.

The Landlady—"At our table, Mr. Bjinks, it is the custom to return thanks at each meal." The New Boarder—"That's fine! I like it lots better than paying cash."