

THE DIVA'S RUBY

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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 mine by the girl's relatives, who blocked up the entrance, and drew off the water supply, leaving the couple to die. Baraka's cousin saved her by blowing up the mine, but the traveler shot him. The stranger was revived from a water jar and carried to a cliff overlooking the mine; but he died before he could carry it. Baraka gathered all the gems she could carry, and started in pursuit. Margaret Donne (Margaret da 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 \$50,000 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.

CHAPTER V.—Continued.

Mr. Van Torp was fond of music, quite apart from his admiration for the greatest living lyric soprano, and since it was his fancy to go to Bayreuth in the hope of seeing her, he meant to hear Wagner's masterpiece, and supposed that there would not be any difficulty about such a simple matter, nor about obtaining the sort of rooms he was accustomed to, in the sort of hotel he expected to find where so many rich people went every other year. Any one who has been to the holy place of the Wagnerians can imagine his surprise when, after infinite difficulty, he found himself, his belongings and his man deposited in one small attic room of a Bavarian tanner's house, with one feather-bed, one basin and one towel for furniture.

"Stemp," said Mr. Van Torp, "this is a heathen town."

"Yes, sir."

"I suppose I'm thought close about money," continued the millionaire, thinking aloud, "but I call \$5 a day dear for this room, don't you?"

"Yes, sir, I do indeed! I call it downright robbery. That's what I call it, sir."

"Well, I suppose they call it business here, and quite a good business, too. But I'd like to buy the whole thing and show 'em how to run it. They'd make more in the end."

"Yes, sir. I hope you will, sir. Beg pardon, sir, but do you think it would cost a great deal?"

"They'd ask a great deal, anyway," answered the millionaire thoughtfully. "Stemp, suppose you get me out some things and then take a look around, while I try to get a wash in that—that tea-service there."

Mr. Van Torp eyed the exiguous basin and jug with some curiosity and much contempt. Stemp, impassive and correct under all circumstances, unstrapped a valise, laid out on the bed what his master might need, and inquired if he wished anything else.

"There isn't anything else," answered Mr. Van Torp, gloomily.

"When shall I come back, sir?"

"In 25 minutes. There isn't half an hour's wash in that soup-plate, anyway."

He eyed the wretched basin with a glance that might almost have cracked it. When his man had gone, he proceeded to his toilet, such as it was, and solaced himself by softly whistling as much of the "Good Friday" music as he remembered, little dreaming what it was, or that his performance was followed with nervous and almost feverish interest by the occupant of the next room in the attic, a poor musician who had saved and scraped for years to sit at the musical feast during three days.

"E sharp!" cried an agonized voice on the other side of the closed door, in a strong German accent. "I know it is E sharp! I know it!"

Mr. Van Torp stopped whistling at once, lowered his razor, and turned a mask of soap-suds in the direction whence the sound came.

"Do you mean me?" he inquired in a displeased tone.

"I mean who whistles the 'Good Friday' music," answered the voice. "I tell you, I know it is E sharp in that place. I have the score. I shall show you if you believe not."

"He's mad," observed Mr. Van Torp, beginning to shave again. "Are you a lunatic?" he asked, pausing after a moment. "What's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"Shall I? Well, now, that's a funny sort of a rule for a hotel, isn't it?"

"I go complain of you," retorted the other, and Mr. Van Torp heard a door opened and shut again.

In a few minutes he had done all that the conditions would permit in the way of making himself presentable, and just as he left the room he was met by Stemp, the 25 minutes being just over.

"I am a musician, I tell you! I am a pianist!"

"It's the same thing," said Mr. Van Torp, working carefully on his upper lip, under F's right nostril.

"I shall tell you that you are a barbarian!" retorted the voice.

"Well, that doesn't hurt," answered Mr. Van Torp.

He heard a snort of scorn on the other side and there was silence again. But before long, as he got away from his upper lip with the razor, he unconsciously began to whistle again, and he must have made the same mistake as before, for he was interrupted by a deep groan of pain from the next room.

"Not feeling very well?" he inquired in a tone of dry jocularity. "Stomach upset?"

"E sharp!" screamed the wretched pianist.

Van Torp could hear him dancing with rage or pain.

"See here, whoever you are, don't call names! I don't like it. See? I've paid for this room and I'm going on whistling if I like, and just as long as I like."

"You say you make noises you like?" cried the infuriated musician. "Oh, no! You shall not! There are rules! We are not in London, sir. We are in Bayreuth! If you make noises, you shall be thrown out of the house."

"Very good, sir. I'll do what I can."

sented themselves side by side on the hard green sofa. "I don't suppose I can explain, so that you'll understand, but I'll try. Different kinds of things brought me. I heard you were here from Lady Maud, and I thought perhaps I might have an opportunity for a little talk. And then—oh, I don't know. I've seen everything worth seeing except a battle and 'Parsifal,' and as it seemed so easy, and you were here, I thought I'd have a look at the opera, since I can't see the fight."

Margaret laughed a little. "I hope you will like it," she said. "Have you a good seat?"

"I haven't got a ticket yet," answered Mr. Van Torp, in blissful ignorance.

"No seat!" The prima donna's surprise was almost dramatic. "But how in the world do you expect to get one now? Don't you know that the seats for 'Parsifal' are all taken months before-hand?"

"Are they really?" He was very calm about it. "Then I suppose I shall have to get a ticket from a speculator. I don't see anything hard about that."

"My dear friend, there are no speculators here, and there are no tickets to be had. You might as well ask for the moon!"

"I can stand, then. I'm not afraid of getting tired."

"There are no standing-places at all! No one is allowed to go in who has not a seat. A week ago you might

sicians really suffer if one does that. But it must have been something rather complicated, to have an E sharp in it! It wasn't 'Suzanne Rivier,' nor the 'Washington Post,' either! Indeed, I should rather like to know what it was."

"Old tunes I picked up when I was cow-punching, years ago," answered Mr. Van Torp. "I don't know where they came from, for I never asked, but they're not like other tunes, that's certain, and I like them. They remind me of the old days out west, when I had no money and nothing to worry about."

"I'm very fond of whistling, too," Margaret said. "I study all my parts by whistling them, so as to save my voice."

"Really! I had no idea that was possible."

"Quite. Perhaps you whistle very well. Won't you let me hear the tune that irritated your neighbor, the pianist? Perhaps I know it, too."

"Well," said Mr. Van Torp, "I suppose I could. I should be a little shy before you," he added, quite naturally. "If you'll excuse me, I'll just go and stand before the window so that I can't see you. Perhaps I can manage it that way."

Margaret, who was bored to the verge of collapse on the off-days, thought him much nicer than he had formerly been, and she liked his perfect simplicity.

"Stand anywhere you like," she said, "but let me hear the tune."

Van Torp rose and went to the window and she looked quietly at his square figure and his massive, sandy head and his strong neck. Presently he began to whistle, very softly and perfectly in tune. Many a street-boy could do as well, no doubt, and Mrs. Rushmore would have called it a vulgar accomplishment, but the magnificent prima donna was too true a musician, as well as a singer, not to take pleasure in a sweet sound, even if it were produced by a street-boy.

But as Mr. Van Torp went on, she opened her eyes very wide and held her breath. There was no mistake about it; he was whistling long pieces from "Parsifal," as far as it was possible to convey an idea of such music by such means. Margaret had studied it before coming to Bayreuth, in order to understand it better; she had now already heard it once, and had felt the greatest musical emotion of her life—one that had stirred other emotions, too, strange ones quite new to her.

She held her breath and listened, and her eyes that had been wide open in astonishment, slowly closed again



"Thank you," he said, in a low voice.

Margaret smiled and passed her hand over her eyes quickly, as if to dispel a vision she had seen. Then she spoke.

"Do you really not know what that music is?" she asked. "Really, really?"

"Oh, quite honestly I don't!"

"You're not joking? You're not laughing at me?"

"I? He could not understand. 'I shouldn't dare!' he said.

"You've been whistling some of 'Parsifal,' some of the most beautiful music that ever was written—and you whistle inavellously, for it's anything but easy! Where in the world did you learn it? Don't tell me that those are 'old tunes' you picked up on a California ranch!"

"It's true, all the same," Van Torp answered.

He told her of the two foreigners who used to whistle together in the evenings, and how one was supposed to have been shot and the other had disappeared, no one had known whether, nor had cared.

"All sorts of young fellows used to drift out there," he said, "and one couldn't tell where they came from, though I can give a guess at where some of them must have been, since I've seen the world. There were younger sons of English gentlemen, fellows whose fathers were genuine lords, maybe, who had not brains enough to get into the army or the church. There were cashiersed Prussian officers, and Frenchmen who had most likely killed women out of jealousy, and Sicilian bandits, and broken society men from New York. There were all sorts. And there was me. And we all spoke different kinds of English and had different kinds of tastes, good and bad—mostly bad. There was only one thing we could all do alike, and that was to ride."

"I never thought of you as riding," Margaret said.

"Well, why should you? But I can, because I was just a common cow-boy and had to, for a living."

"It's intensely interesting—what a strange life you have had! Tell me more about yourself, won't you?"

"There's not much to tell, it seems to me," said Van Torp. "From being a cow-boy I turned into miner, and

those two men were, and what became of the one who disappeared."

"I've a strong impression that I saw him in New York the other day," Van Torp answered. "If I'm right, he's made money—doing quite well, I should think. It would surprise me to hear he'd got together a million or so."

"Really? What is he doing? Your stories grow more and more interesting."

"If he's the fellow we used to call Levi Longlegs on the ranch, he's a Russian now. I'm not perfectly sure, for he had no hair on his face then, and now he has a beard like a French sapper. But the eyes and the nose and the voice and the accent are the same, and the age would about correspond. Handsome man, I suppose you'd call him. His name is Kralsinsky just at present, and he's found a whole mine of rubies somewhere."

"Really? I love rubies. They are my favorite stones."

"Are they? That's funny. I've got an uncut one in my pocket now, if you'd like to see it. I believe it comes from Kralsinsky's mine, too, though I got it through a friend of yours, two or three days ago."

"A friend of mine?"

He was poking his large fingers into one of the pockets of his waistcoat in search of the stone.

"Mr. Logotheti," he said, just as he found it. "He's discovered a handsome young woman from Tartary, or somewhere, who has a few rubies to sell that look very much like Kralsinsky's. This is one of them."

He had unwrapped the stone now and he offered it to her, holding it out in the palm of his hand. She took it delicately and laid it in her own, which was so white that the gem shed a delicate pomegranate-colored light on the skin all round it. She admired it, turned it over with one finger, held it up towards the window, and laid it in her palm again.

But Van Torp had set her thinking about Logotheti and the Tartar girl. She put out her hand to give back the ruby.

"I should like you to keep it, if you will," he said. "I shan't forget the pleasure I've had in seeing you like this, but you'll forget all about our meeting here—the stone may just make you remember it sometimes."

He spoke so quietly, so gently, that she was taken off her guard, and was touched, and very much surprised to feel that she was. She looked into his eyes rather cautiously, remembering well how she had formerly seen something terrifying in them if she looked an instant too long; but now they made her think of the eyes of a large affectionate bulldog.

"You're very kind to want to give it to me," she answered after a moment's hesitation, "but I don't like to accept anything so valuable, now that I'm engaged to be married. Konstantin might not like it. But you're so kind; give me any little thing of no value that you have in your pocket, for I mean to remember this day, indeed I do!"

"I gave nothing for the ruby," said Van Torp, still not taking it from her, "so it has no value for me. I wouldn't offer you anything that cost me money, now, unless it was a theater for your own. Perhaps the thing's glass, after all; I've not shown it to any jeweler. The girl made me take it, because I helped her in a sort of way. When I wanted to pay for it she tried to throw it out of the window. So I had to accept it to calm her down, and she went off and left no address, and I thought I'd like you to have it, if you would."

"Are you quite, quite sure you did not pay for it?" Margaret asked. "If we are going to be friends, you must please always be very accurate."

"I've told you exactly what happened," said Van Torp. "Won't you take it now?"

"Yes, I will, and thank you very much indeed. I love rubies, and this is a beauty, and not preposterously big. I think I shall have it set as it is, uncut, and only polished, so that it will always be itself, just as you gave it to me. I shall think of the 'Good Friday' music and the chimes, and this hideous little room, and your clever whistling, whenever I look at it."

"You're kind to-day," said Mr. Van Torp, after a moment's debate as to whether he should say anything at all.

"Am I? You mean that I used to be very disagreeable, don't you?" She smiled as she glanced at him. "I must have been, I'm sure, for you used to frighten me ever so much. But I'm not in the least afraid of you now!"

"Why should any one be afraid of me?" asked Van Torp, whose smile had been known to terrify Wall Street when a "drop" was expected.

Margaret laughed a little, without looking at him.

"Tell me all about the Tartar girl," she said, instead of answering his question.

Van Torp told her Baraka's history, as far as he knew it from Logotheti.



"I Tell You, I Know It Is E Sharp."

sir," said the excellent man, as Mr. Van Torp pointed to the things that lay about.

As he went out, he recognized the voice of his neighbor, who was talking excitedly in voluble German, somewhere at the back of the house.

"He's complaining now," thought Mr. Van Torp, with something like a smile.

He had already been to the best hotel, in the hope of obtaining rooms, and he had no difficulty in finding it again. He asked for Mme. da Cordova. She was at home, for it was an off-day; he sent in his card, and was presently led to her sitting room. Times had changed. Six months earlier he would have been told that there had been a mistake and that she had gone out.

She was alone; a letter she had been writing lay unfinished on the queer little desk near the shaded window, and her pen had fallen across the paper. On the round table in the middle of the small bare room there stood a plain white vase full of corn-flowers and poppies, and Margaret was standing there, rearranging them, or pretending to do so.

She was looking her very best, and as she raised her eyes and greeted him with a friendly smile, Mr. Van Torp thought she had never been so handsome before.

Margaret held out her hand and he took it; and though its touch and her friendly smile were like a taste of heaven just then, he pressed her fingers neither too much nor too little, and his face betrayed no emotion.

"It's very kind of you to receive me, Miss Donne," he said quietly.

"I think it's very kind of you to come and see me," Margaret answered. "Come and sit down and tell me how you got here—and why!"

"Well," he answered slowly, as they

possibly have picked up one in Munich, given up by some one at the last moment, but such chances are jumped at! I wonder that you even got a place to sleep!"

"Well, it's not much of a place," said Mr. Van Torp, thoughtfully. "There's one room the size of a horse-box, one bed, one basin, one pitcher and one towel, and I've brought my valet with me. I've concluded to let him sleep while I'm at the opera, and he'll sit up when I want to go to bed. Box and Cox. I don't know what he'll sit on, for there's no chair, but he's got to sit."

Margaret laughed, for he amused her.

"I suppose you're exaggerating a little bit," she said. "It's not really quite so bad as that, is it?"

"It's worse. There's a lunatic in the next room who calls me E. Sharp through the door, and has lodged a complaint already because I whistled while I was shaving. It's not a very good hotel. Who is E. Sharp, anyway? Maybe that was the name of the last man who occupied that room. I don't know, but I don't like the idea of having a mad German pianist for a neighbor. He may get in while I'm asleep and think I'm the piano, and hammer the life out of me, the way they do. I've seen a perfectly new piano wrecked in a single concert by a fellow who didn't look as if he had the strength to kick a mosquito. They're so deceptive, pianists! Nervous men are often like that, and most pianists are nothing but nerves and hair."

He amused her, for she had never seen him in his present mood.

"E sharp is a note," she said. "On the piano it's the same as F natural. You must have been whistling something your neighbor knew, and you made a mistake, and nervous mu-



"If He's the Fellow We Used to Call Levi Longlegs on the Ranch."

in pleasure, and presently, when he reached the "Good Friday" music, her own matchless voice floated out with her unconscious breath, in such perfect octaves with his high whistling that at first he did not understand; but when he did, the rough hard man shivered suddenly and steadied himself against the window-sill, and Margaret's voice went on alone, with faintly breathed words and then without them, following the instrumentation to the end of the scene, beyond what he had ever heard.

Then there was silence in the room, and neither of the two moved for some moments, but at last Van Torp turned, and came back.

struck a little silver, and I sold that and got into nickel, and I made the Nickel Trust what it is, more by financing it than anything else, and I got almost all of it. And now I've sold the whole thing."

"Sold the Nickel Trust?" Margaret was quite as much surprised as Lady Maud had been.

"Yes, I wasn't made to do one thing long, I suppose. If I were, I should still be a cow-boy. Just now, I'm here to go to 'Parsifal,' and since you say those tunes are out of that opera, I dare say I'm going to like it very much."

"It's all very uncanny," Margaret said thoughtfully. "I wonder what

(TO BE CONTINUED.)