

THE DIVA'S RUBY

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"You Will Never Understand," She Said.

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 disclosures. 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 rescued 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 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 net 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. Margaret took a liking to Van Torp, who presented her with the ruby. Baraka had given him. Count Kralsky, a Russian, arrived at Bayreuth. Van Torp believed him to be the one Baraka was pursuing. Baraka was arrested in London on a charge of stealing from Pinney, a jeweler, the ruby she had sold to Logotheti. Two strangers were the thieves. Lady Maud believed that Kralsky's adventures with Baraka were open to suspicion, and so informed Margaret. Van Torp believed that Kralsky was the cowboy he had known in his young manhood. Logotheti secured Baraka's release, and then, with her as his guest, went to sea on his yacht *Erinna*.

CHAPTER X.—Continued.

He had been on deck a long time that day, but Baraka had only been established in her chair a few minutes. As yet he had hardly talked with her of anything but the necessary preparations for the journey, and she had trusted him entirely, being so worn out with fatigue and bodily discomfort that she was already half asleep when he had at last brought her aboard, late on the previous night. Before the yacht had sailed he had received Van Torp's telegram informing him that Kralsky was at Bayreuth; for his secretary had sat up till two in the morning to telegraph him the latest news and forward any message that came, and Van Torp's had been amongst the number.

"I have something of importance to tell you," Logotheti said.

Baraka prepared herself against betraying surprise by letting her lids droop a little, but that was all.

"Speak," she answered. "I desire knowledge more than gold."

"You are wise," said the Greek gravely. "No doubt you remember the rich man Van Torp, for whom I gave you a letter, and whom you had seen on the day you were arrested."

"Van Torp," Baraka pronounced the name distinctly, and nodded. "Yes, I remember him well. He knows where the man is whom I seek, and

have brought for me would understand me better, though she has been taught for six years by Christians. She is a good girl. She says that in all that time she has never once forgotten to say the *Fatihah* three times a day, and to say 'el hamdu illah' to herself after she has eaten! She would understand. I know she would. But you, never!"

The exquisite little aquiline features wore a look of unutterable contempt.

"If I were you," said Logotheti, "I would not tell her what you are going to do."

"You see!" cried Baraka, almost angrily. "You do not understand. A servant! Shall I tell my heart to my handmaid, and my secret thoughts to a hired man? I tell you, because you are a friend, though you have no understanding of us. My father feeds many flocks, and has many bondmen and bondwomen, whom he beats when it pleases him, and can put to death if he likes. He also knows the mine of rubies, as his father did before him, and when he desires gold he takes one to Tashkent, or even to Samarkand, a long journey, and sells it to the Russians. He is a great man. If he would bring a camel bag full of precious stones to Europe he could be one of the greatest men in the world. And you think that my father's daughter would open her heart to one of her servants? I said well that you do not understand!"

Logotheti looked quietly at the slim young thing in a ready-made blue serge frock, who said such things as a Lady Clara Vere de Vere would scarcely dare to say above her breath in these democratic days; and he watched the noble little features, and the small white hands, that had come down to her through generations of chieftains, since the days when the primeval shepherds of the world counted the stars in the plains of Kaf.

He himself, with his long Greek descent, was an aristocrat to the marrow, and smiled at the claims of men who traced their families back to the Crusaders. With the help of a legend or two and half a myth, he could almost make himself a far descendant of the Tyndaridae. But what was that compared with the pedigree of the little thing in a blue serge frock? Her race went back to a time before Hesiod, before Homer, to a date that might be found in the annals of Egypt, but nowhere else in all the dim traditions of human history.

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"No," he said, after a long pause. "I begin to understand. You had not told me that your father was a great man, and that his sires before him had joined hand to hand, from the hand of Adam himself."

This polite speech, delivered in his best Tartar, though with sundry Turkish terminations and accents, somewhat mollified Baraka, and she pushed her little head backwards and upwards against the top of the deck chair, as if she was drawing herself up with pride. Also, not being used to European skirts, she stuck out one tiny foot a little further across the other, as she stretched herself, and she indiscreetly showed a pale-yellow silk ankle, round which she could have easily made her thumb meet her second finger. Logotheti glanced at it.

"You will never understand," she said, but her tone had relaxed, and she made a concession. "If you will take me to him, and if he will not be my husband, I will let Spiro kill him."

"That might be better," Logotheti answered with extreme gravity, for he was quite sure that Spiro would never kill anybody. "If you will take an oath which I shall dictate, and swear to let Spiro do it, I will take you to the man you seek."

"What must be, must be," Baraka said in a tone of resignation. "When he is dead, Spiro can also kill me and take the rubies and the money."

"That would be a pity," observed the Greek, thoughtfully.

"Why a pity? It will be my portion. I will not kill myself because then I should go to hell-fire, but Spiro can do it very well. Why should I still live, then?"

"Because you are young and beautiful and rich enough to be very happy. Do you never look at your face in the mirror? The eyes of Baraka are like the pools of paradise, when the moon rose upon them the first time, her waist is as slender as a young willow sapling that bends to the breath of a spring breeze, her mouth is a dark rose from Gulistan—"

But Baraka interrupted him with a faint smile.

"You speak emptiness," she said quietly. "What is the oath, that I may swear it? Shall I take Allah, and the prophet, and the Angel Israfil to witness that I will keep my word? Shall I prick my hand and let the drops fall into your two hands that you may drink them? What shall I do and say? I am ready."

"You must swear an oath that my fathers swore before there were Christians or Mussulmen in the world when the old gods were still great."

"Speak. I will repeat any words you like. Is it a very solemn oath?"

"It is the most solemn that ever was sworn, for it is the oath of the gods themselves. I shall give it to you slowly, and you must try to pronounce it right, word by word, holding out your hands, like this, with the palms downwards."

"I am ready," said Baraka, doing as he bade her.

He quoted in Greek the oath that

Hypnos dictates to Hera in the "Iliad," and Baraka repeated each word, pronouncing as well as she could.

"I swear by the inviolable water of the Styx, and I lay one hand upon the all-nourishing earth, the other on the sparkling sea, that all the gods below may be our witnesses, even they that stand round about Kronos. Thus I swear!"

As he had anticipated, Baraka was much more impressed by the importance of the words she did not understand than if she had bound herself by any oath familiar to her.

"I am sorry," she said, "but what is done is done, and you would have it so."

She pressed her hand gently to her left side and felt the long steel bodkin, and sighed regretfully.

"You have sworn an oath that no man would dare to break," said Logotheti solemnly. "A man would rather kill pigs on the graves of his father and his mother than break it."

"I shall keep my word. Only take me quickly where I would be."

Logotheti produced a whistle from his pocket and blew on it, and a quartermaster answered the call, and was sent for the captain, who came in a few moments.

"Head her about for Jersey and Carterets, captain," said the owner. "The sea is as flat as a board, and we will land there. You can go on to the Mediterranean without coaling, can you not?"

The captain said he could coal at Gibraltar, if necessary.

"Then take her to Naples, please, and wait for instructions."

Baraka understood nothing, but within two minutes she saw that the yacht was changing her course, for the afternoon sun was all at once pouring in on the deck, just beyond the end of her chair. She was satisfied, and nodded her approval.

"When shall we reach that place?" she asked lazily, and she turned her face to Logotheti.

"Allah knows," he answered gravely. She had been so well used to hearing that answer to all sorts of questions since she had been a child that she thought nothing of it, and waited awhile before speaking again. Her eyes studied the man's face almost unconsciously. He now wore a fez instead of a yachting cap, and it changed his expression. He no longer looked in the least like a European. The handsome red felt gloved like blood in the evening light, and the long black silk tassel hung backwards with a dashing air. There was something about him that reminded Baraka of Saad, and Saad had been a handsome man, even in her eyes, until the traveler had come to her father's house with his blue eyes and golden beard. But Saad had only seen her unveiled face once, and that was the last thing he saw when the ball from the Mauser went through his forehead.

"I mean," she asked after some time, "shall we be there to-morrow, or the next day? I see no land on this side; is there any on the other?"

"No," Logotheti answered, "there is no land near. Perhaps, far off, we might see a small island."

"Is that the place?" Baraka began to be interested at last.

"The place is far away! You must have patience. All hurry comes from Satan."

"I am not impatient," the girl answered mildly. "I am glad to rest in your ship, for I was very tired, more tired than I ever was when I was a child, and used to climb up the foothills to see Altai better. It is good to be in your ship for a while, and after that, what shall be, will be. It is Allah that knows."

"That is the truth," responded the Greek. "Allah knows. I said so just now. But I will tell you what I have decided, if you will listen."

"I listen."

"It is better that you should rest several days after all your weariness, and the man you seek will not run away, for he does not know that you are so near."

"But he may take another woman," Baraka objected, growing earnest at once. "Perhaps he has already! Then there will be two instead of one."

"Spiro," said Logotheti, with perfect truth, "would as soon kill two as one. I am sure, for he is a good servant. It will be the same to him; you call me a great man and a king; I am not a king, for I have no kingdom, though some kingdoms would like to have as much ready money as I. But here, on the ship, I am the master, not only because it is mine, and because I choose to command, but because the men are bound by English law to obey me; and if they should refuse and overpower me, and take my ship where I did not wish to go, the laws of all nations would give me the right to put them all into prison at once, for a long time. Therefore when I say, 'Go to a certain place,' they take the ship there, according to their knowledge, for they are trained to that business and can guide the vessel towards any place in the world, though they cannot see land till they reach it. Do you understand all these things?"

"I understand," Baraka answered, smiling. "But I am not bound to obey you, and at least I can beg you to do what I ask, and I think you will do it."

Her voice grew suddenly soft, and almost tender, for though she was only a Tartar girl, and very young and slim, she was a woman. Eye had



"You Are Wise as Well as Great," Baraka Said.

not had long experience of talking when she explained to Adam the properties of apples.

Logotheti answered her smile and her tone.

"I shall do what you ask me, but I shall do it slowly rather than quickly, because that will be better for you in the end. If we had gone on as we were going, we should have got to land to-night, but to a wretched little town from which we should have had to take a night train, hot and dirty and dusty, all the way to Paris. That would not help you to rest, would it?"

"Oh, no! I wish to sleep again in your ship, once, twice, till I cannot sleep any more. Then you will take me to the place."

"That is what you shall do. To that end I gave orders this afternoon."

"You are wise, as well as great," Baraka said.

They left the rail and walked slowly forward, side by side, without speaking; and Logotheti told himself how utterly happy he should be if Baraka could turn into Margaret and be walking with him there; yet something answered him that since she was not by his side he was not to be puffed by the company of a lovely Tartar girl whose language he could understand and even speak tolerably; and when the first voice observed rather drily that Margaret would surely think that he ought to feel very miserable, the second voice told him to take the goods the gods sent him and be grateful; and this little antiphone of Ormuzd and Ahriman went on for some time, till it occurred to him to stop the duo by explaining to Baraka how a European girl would probably slip her arm, or at least her hand, through the arm of the man with whom she was walking on the deck of a yacht, because there was generally a little motion at sea, and she would like to steady herself, and when there was none, there ought to be, and she would do the same thing by force of habit. But Baraka looked at such behavior quite differently.

"That would be a sort of dance," she said. "I am not a dancing girl! I have seen men and women dancing together, both Russians in Samarkand and other people in France. It is disgusting. I would rather go unveiled among my own people!"

"Which may Allah forbid!" answered Logotheti devoutly. "But where there are Englishmen, Allah does nothing; the women go without veils, and the boys and girls dance together."

"I have done worse," said Baraka, "for I have dressed as a man, and if a woman did that among my people she would be stoned to death and not buried. My people will never know what I have done since I got away from them alive. But he thought he was leaving me there to die!"

"Surely, I cannot see why you wish to marry a man who robbed you and tried to compass your death! I can understand that you should dream of killing him, and he deserves to be burnt alive, but why you should wish to marry him is known to the wisdom of the blessed ones!"

"You never saw him," Baraka answered with perfect simplicity. "He is a beautiful man; his beard is like the rays of the morning sun on a ripe cornfield. His eyes are bright as an eagle's, but blue as sapphires. He is much taller and bigger and stronger than you are. Do you not see why I want him for a husband? Why did he not desire me for his wife? Am I crooked, am I blinded by the small-pox, or have I six fingers on both hands and a lump on my shoulder like the Witch of Altai? Was my portion a cotton shift, one brass bangle and a horn comb for my hair? I gave him the riches of the world to take me, and he would not! I do not understand. Am I an evil sight in a man's eyes? Tell me the truth, for you are a friend!"

"You are good to see," Logotheti answered, stopping and pretending to examine her face critically as she stood and faced him.

"I do not desire you to speak for yourself," returned Baraka. "I wish you to speak for any man, since I go about unveiled and any man may see me. What would they say in the street if they saw me now, as a woman? That is what I must know, for he is a Frank, and he will judge me as the Franks judge when he sees me! What will he say?"

"Shall I speak as a Frank? Or as they speak in Constantinople?"

"Speak as he would speak, I pray. But speak the truth."

"I take Allah to witness that I speak the truth," Logotheti answered. "If I had never seen you, and if I were walking in the Great Garden in London and I met you by the bank of the river, I should say that you were the prettiest dark girl in England, but that I should like to see you in a beautiful Feringhi hat and the best frock that could be made in Paris."

Baraka's face was troubled, and she looked into his eyes anxiously.

"I understand," she said. "Before I meet him I must have more clothes, many beautiful new dresses. It was shameful, but it was easy to dress as a man, after I had learned, for it was always the same—the difference was three buttons—or four buttons, or a high hat or a little hat, not much. Also the Feringhi men button their garments as the Mussulmans do, the left over the right, but I often see their women's coats buttoned like a Hindu's. Why is this? Have the women another religion than the men? It is very strange!"

Logotheti laughed, for he had really never noticed the rather singular fact which had struck the born Asiatic at once.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

When Doomed.

"With us the crime is not in detection. It's in admission. All sorts of things may be thought of you, and said of you, and even known of you, and you can bluff them out; but when you have acknowledged them—you're doomed."—The Inner Shrine.