

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 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 Donne (Margaret de 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 add him in winning the singer from Logotheti. Baraka approached Logotheti at Venetian night, 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 Kralsinsky, a Russian, arrived at Bayreuth. Van Torp believed him to be the one Baraka was pursuing. Baraka was arrested in London on the charge of stealing from Pinney, a jeweler, the ruby she had sold to Logotheti. Two strangers were the thief. Lady Maud believed that Logotheti's associations with Baraka were open to suspicion, and so informed Margaret. Van Torp believed that Kralsinsky 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 *Erima*. Baraka explains her plans for revenge on the man who had deserted her and left her to die. Logotheti succeeds in moderating her rage. Lady Maud arrived in Bayreuth.

CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

"On account of her temper, I suppose," answered the good lady absently, for she was looking up and down the columns in search of something she had already seen. "Here it is!" she said. "It is under the yachting news. 'Cape Finisterre. Passed at 4 p. m., going south, steam yacht *Erima*, with owner and party on board. All well. My dear child, it is quite clear that if this is Mons. Logotheti's yacht, he is going to Gibraltar."

"I don't know anything about geography," Margaret said, and her wrath, which had been smouldering sullenly for days, began to glow again. "Margaret," said Mrs. Rushmore, "you surprise me! You were very well taught—"

But the prima donna did not hear the long tirade of mild reproof that followed. She knew well enough where Gibraltar was, and that Logotheti was going all the way round to the Mediterranean on his yacht with some one for company, and that the voyage was a long one. After what Lady Maud had said, there was not the least doubt in her mind as to his companion, who could be no one but Baraka. He had been told that he was not wanted at Bayreuth, and he was celebrating the sunset of his bachelor life in his own way. That was clear. If he received the telegram that had just been sent to him, he would get it at Gibraltar, should he stop there, and as for answering it before Margaret left Bayreuth, she was inclined to make such a thing impossible by going away the next morning, if not that very night.

Her angry reflections and Mrs. Rushmore's lecture on the importance of geography in education were interrupted by the discreet entrance of Mr. Van Torp, who was announced and ushered to the door by Justine in a grand French manner. On the threshold, however, he stood still and asked if he might come in; being pressed to do so, he yielded, advanced, and sat down between the two ladies.

"Mr. Van Torp," said Mrs. Rushmore, "I insist upon knowing what has become of Countess Leven."

"I don't know, Mrs. Rushmore," answered the millionaire, slowly rubbing his hands. "I haven't spoken to her since I brought her from the station. I dare say she's all right. She's probably gone to take a walk. She often does in the country. I know—her father's country seat is next to mine, Mrs. Rushmore. I hope you'll pay me a visit some day. Why, yes, Lady Maud sometimes goes off alone and walks miles and miles."

"There, Margaret," said Mrs. Rushmore triumphantly, "what did I tell you? Mr. Van Torp says the countess often walks for miles and miles."

called her," Margaret answered patiently.

"Because if you had any reason," said Mrs. Rushmore, following her own thoughts, "I insist upon knowing what it was."

"Well, now, I'll tell you," rejoined Mr. Van Torp, to save Margaret the trouble of answering the futile little speech, "her husband didn't treat her very well. There's not a purer woman in the six continents, Mrs. Rushmore, but he tried to divorce her, because he'd lost his money, if he ever had any, and she had none, and he wanted to marry an heiress. However, they automobilized him, or something, in St. Petersburg last June."

"Auto—what did you say?" inquired Mrs. Rushmore.

"Killed by an automobile," explained Mr. Van Torp gravely. "But now I come to think, it wasn't that. He got blown up by a bomb meant for a better man. It was quite instantaneous, I recollect. His head disappeared suddenly, and the greater part of him was scattered around, but they found his pocket-book with his cards and things, so they knew who it was. It was driven through somebody else's hat on the other side of the street, wasn't it, Miss Donne? Things must have been quite lively just then, where it happened. I supposed you knew."

Mrs. Rushmore explained that she had never heard any details.

"Besides," said Mr. Van Torp, in answer, though not quite relevantly, "everybody always calls her 'Lady Maud' instead of 'Countess Leven,' which she has on her cards."

"She would naturally use the higher title," observed Mrs. Rushmore reverently.

"Well, now, about that," objected Mr. Van Torp. "I'm bound to say I think the daughter of an English earl as good as a Russian count, anywhere west of Siberia. I don't know how they figure those things out at courts when they have to balance 'em up for seats at a dinner party, of course. It's just my impression, that's all, as a business man. He's dead, anyway, and one needn't make personal remarks about dead men. All the same, it was a happy release for Lady Maud, and I doubt if she sits up all night mourning for him. Have you been out this afternoon, Miss Donne?"

He changed the subject with extreme directness, and Mrs. Rushmore, who was used to the dictatorial ways of lions, took the hint submissively enough, though she would have been glad to discuss the relative and intrinsic values of the designations "Lady Maud" and "Countess Leven." But it was much more important that the lion should be left alone with Margaret as much as possible, and the excellent lady therefore remembered that she had something to do and left them.

"I had a little talk with Kralsinsky before he left," said Van Torp, when she was gone. "He says he'll meet us in Venice any time in the next few days. He's just going to run over to Vienna in his sudden-death cart for 24 hours; then he'll go south, he says. He ran me up to the hotel and dropped me. I dare say you heard the toots. I thought I saw Lady Maud looking out of the window of your room as I got out."

"Yes," Margaret said. "But how do you know that is my window?"

"In the first place, I've counted the windows. I felt a sort of interest in knowing which was yours. And then, I often see your maid opening the shutters in the morning."



"I'm Not Sure He Was Ever in the West."

judge, so he went away happy; and we're old friends now, and punched cows on the same ranch, and he's coming on my yacht. I only wonder why he was so anxious to remember all that, and why he thought it would be kind of friendly if I called him Levi Longlegs again, and he called me Fanny Cook. I wonder! He says he's still very fond of 'Parsifal,' and came on purpose to hear it, but that he's completely forgotten how to whistle. That's funny, too. I just thought I'd tell you, because if you come on my yacht and he comes, too, you're liable to see quite a good deal of one another."

"Did you tell him that Mrs. Rushmore and I would come?" Margaret asked. "And Lady Maud?"

"Why, no. You've not promised yet, any more than you did last night when we talked about it, so how could I? I forgot to mention Lady Maud to him, or else I thought I wouldn't—I forget which. It doesn't matter."

"No," Margaret smiled. "Not a little bit!"

"You seem amused," observed Mr. Van Torp.

"By your way of putting it and your pretending to forget such a thing."

"It wasn't quite true that I forgot, but I wanted to, so I didn't say anything about her. That's why I put it in that way. I don't choose to leave you any doubt about what I say, or mean, even in the smallest things. The moment you feel the least doubt about the perfect accuracy of anything I tell you, even if it's not at all a downright lie or anything resembling one, you won't trust me at all, in anything. Because, if you trust me, you'll end by liking me, and if you don't trust me you'll go back to thinking that I'm the Beast out of Revelation, or something, as you used to."

"I've forgotten all about the Beast," Margaret said.

"Thank you," answered Mr. Van Torp. "To change the subject—I've got a little scheme to propose. Maybe he'll think well of it. Anyhow, as it's a mere matter of business connected with your career, you won't mind my explaining it to you, will you?"

"No, indeed!" Margaret was interested at once. "Do tell me!" she said, leaning forward a little.



"The Company, Which Is You and I, Will Probably Rule—"

New York for what I propose to do. It'll fill a want, I know, and that means success and money. Why don't we build a theater together? When I say a theater, I mean a first-class opera house and not a barn. We'll employ the best architects to build it, and, of course, I'd leave everything about it to you. I've got a block in New York just about in the right place, and it won't take long to build. I'll give the land and put up the money for the building, if you'll undertake the management. You'll put in any money you like, of course, and we'll share the profits. Maybe they'll be quite handsome, for we'll lease the theater to other people outside of the season. We'll have the best talent in Europe, and pay for it, and the public will pay us back. We'll call it the Cordova Opera, if you like, and you'll run it according to your own ideas, and sing or not, whenever you please."

"Are you in earnest?"

Margaret had some difficulty in pronouncing the words clearly. Was there ever a great soprano who did not dream of having the most perfect theater of her very own, and who could receive unmoved the offer to build one from a man who could build 20 if he chose? Very rarely in her life had she been aware of her bodily heart, but she could feel it now, beating like a hammer on the anvil.

"I'm in earnest," Van Torp answered with perfect calm. "I've thought the whole thing over in all its aspects, just as I would a railroad, or a canal, or a mine, and I've concluded to try it, if you'll help me, because it's going to be a safe investment. You see, Miss Donne," he went on slowly, "there's no artist on the grand opera stage now who's so well equipped for the business as you are. I'm not flattering you, either. In your own kind of parts you're simply got no rival. Everybody says so, and I suppose you won't play kiddy and deny it. Let's start fair, now."

"It would be silly to deny that I'm one of the first," Margaret admitted.

"That'll do, thank you. One of the first, and the first is one of them, and you're it. Besides, you've got before

you what's behind most of them. You're young, I'm not talking about your personal appearance, but that's just one more item in the assets. Another big one is that you're a first-class musician, whereas half these singers can only bang the box like great, thundering overgrown school-girls. Allow that?"

"I suppose I must 'allow' anything," laughed the prima donna.

"Well, now, I've told you. You've got the name I need, and you've got the voice, and the talent, and you've got the science and culture. I suppose you'll let me say that I've got the business ability, won't you?"

The iron mouth smiled a little grimly.

"Rather! I fancy some people have wished you had less!"

"And the money's here, for I always have a blank cheque in my pocket. If you like, I'll fill it in, and we'll deposit it wherever you say, in the name of the 'Cordova Opera Company,' or 'Mme. da Cordova, Rufus Van Torp & Co.' We can make out our little agreement in duplicate right here, on the corner of the table, and sign it; and before we leave here you might go around and speak to the best singers about an engagement in New York for a Wagner festival, a year from next Christmas. That's business, and this is a purely business proposition. If you'd like to think it over, I'll go and take a little walk before dinner."

"It sounds like a dream!" Margaret answered, in a wondering tone.

"Money's an awful reality," Van Torp remarked. "I'm talking business, and as I'm the one who's going to put up most of the capital, you'll do me the credit to believe that I'm quite wide awake."

"Do you really, really, really mean it?" She spoke almost like a child.

It was not the first time in his life that the financier had seen the stunning effect of a big sum, projected with precision, like a shell, at exactly the right moment. He was playing the great game again, but for a prize he thought worth more than any he had yet won, and the very magnitude of the risk steadied his naturally steady brain.

"Yes," he said quietly, "I do. Perhaps I've startled you a little, and I shouldn't like you to make a decision till you feel quite ready to. I'll just say again that I've thought the whole thing out as a genuine venture, and that I believe in it, or I wouldn't propose it. Maybe you've got some sensible lawyer you have confidence in, and would like to consult him first. If you feel that way, I'd rather you should. A business partnership's not a thing to go into with your eyes shut, and if we had any reason for distrusting one another, it would be better to make inquiries. But so far as that goes, it appears to me that we've got the facts to go on, which would make any partnership succeed. You've certainly got the musical brains, besides a little money of your own, and I've certainly got the rest of the funds. I'd like you to put some money in it, though, if you can spare it, because that's a guarantee that you're going to be in earnest, too, and do your share in the musical side. You see I'm talking to you just as I would to a man in the same position. Not because I doubt that if you put your name to a piece of paper you really will do your share as a partner, but because I'm used to working in that sort of way in business. How does that strike you? I hope you're not offended?"

"Offended!"

There was no mistaking the suppressed excitement and delight in her voice. If he had possessed the intelligence of Mephistopheles and the charm of Faust he could not have said anything more subtly pleasing to her dignity and her vanity.

"Of course," he said. "It needn't be a very large sum. Still it ought to be something that would make a difference to you."

She hesitated a moment, and then spoke rather timidly.

"I think perhaps—if we did it—I could manage a hundred thousand pounds," she said. "Would that be too little, do you think?"

The large mouth twitched and then smiled pleasantly.

stock was in my own pocket. That's only a little illustration. But I guess you can leave the financial side in my hands. You won't lose by it, I'm pretty sure."

"I fancy not!" Margaret's eyes were wide open, her hands were clasped tightly on her knee, and she was leaning forward a little. "Besides," she went on, "it would not be the money that I should care about! I can earn more money than I want, and I have a little fortune of my own—the hundred thousand I offered you. Oh, no! It would be the splendid power to have the most beautiful music in the world given as it could be given nowhere else! The joy of singing myself—the parts I can sing—in the most perfect surroundings! An orchestra picked from the whole world of orchestras, the greatest living leaders, the most faultless chorus! And the scenery, and the costumes—everything as everything could be, if it were really, really the best that can be had! Do you believe it is possible to have all that?"

"Oh, yes, and with your name to it, too. We'll have everything on earth that money can buy to make a perfect opera, and I'll guarantee it'll pay after the first two seasons. That is, if you'll work at it as hard as I will. But you've got to work, Miss Donne, you've got to work, or it's no use thinking of it. That's my opinion."

"I'll work like a Trojan!" cried Margaret enthusiastically.

She had enough experience in herself, and enough knowledge of the conditions to believe that her own hard work, combined with Van Torp's unlimited capital, could and certainly would produce such an opera house, and bring to it such artists as had never been seen and heard, except perhaps in Bayreuth, during its first great days, now long past.

Then, too, he had put the matter before her so skillfully that she could look upon it honestly as a business partnership, in which her voice, her judgment, and her experience would bear no contemptible proportion to his money, and in which she herself was to invest money of her own, thereby sharing the risk according to her fortune as well as giving the greater part of the labor. She felt for some weak place in the scheme, groping as if she were dazzled, but she could find none.

"I don't think I shall need time to think this over," she said, controlling her voice better, now that she had made up her mind. "As I understand it, I am to put in what I can in the way of ready money, and I am to give my time in all ways, as you need it, and my voice, when it is wanted. Is that it?"

"Except that, when you choose to sing, the company will allow you your usual price for each appearance," answered Van Torp in a business-like manner. "You will pay yourself, or we both shall pay you, just as much as we would pay any other first-class soprano, or as much more as you would get in London or New York if you signed an engagement."

"Is that fair?" Margaret asked.

"Why, certainly. But the company, which is you and I, will probably rule that you mustn't sing in grand opera anywhere in the states east of the Rockies. They've got to come to New York to hear you. Naturally, you'll be free to do anything you like in Europe outside of our season, when you can spare the time."

"Of course."

"Well, now, I suppose we might as well note that down right away, as a preliminary agreement. What do you say?"

"I say that I simply cannot refuse such an offer!" Margaret answered.

"Your consent is all that's necessary," he said, in a matter-of-fact tone.

He produced from an inner pocket a folded sheet of foolscap, which he spread on the corner of the table beside him. He took out a fountain pen and began to write quickly. The terms and forms were as familiar to him as the alphabet and he lost no time; besides, as he had told the prima donna, he had thought out the whole matter before hand.

"What if Mrs. Rushmore comes in just as we are signing it?" asked Margaret.

"We'll tell her, and ask her to witness our signatures," replied Van Torp without looking up. "I judge Mrs. Rushmore to have quite a knowledge of business."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

"Tea with Children."

"Tea," says the London Chronicle, "in the garden is one of the best-established of our mid-Victorian institutions. Mr. E. V. Lucas—who is a connoisseur of the caddy—recalls in his essay, 'The Divine Leaf,' a story of the late Arthur Cecil, who once encountered the following inscription in a garden at Kew: 'Tea, plain, 6d.; tea, with shrimps, 9d.; tea, with children, 1s.'"