

# THE DIVA'S RUBY



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SYNOPSIS.

He waved the sheet slowly to and fro, to dry the ink.

"It's only a preliminary agreement," he said, "but it's binding as far as it goes and I'll attend to the rest. You'll have to give me a power of attorney for my lawyer in New York. By the way, if you decide to come, you can do that in Venice, where there's a real live consul. That's necessary. But for all matters of business herein set forth, we are now ready. The Mme. da Cordova and Rufus Van Torp Company, organized for the purpose of building an opera house in the city of New York and for giving public performances of musical works in the same, with a nominal capital hereafter to be agreed upon. That's what we are now."

He folded the sheet, returned it to his inner pocket and held out his hand in a cheerful, business-like manner.

"Shall we shake hands on it?" he asked.

"By all means," Margaret answered readily, and their eyes met; but she drew back her hand again before taking his. "This is purely a matter of business between us," she said, "you understand that? It means nothing else?"

"Purely a matter of business," answered Rufus Van Torp, slowly and gravely.

## CHAPTER XII.

On the morning after the transaction last described, Van Torp's attention was attracted by a sensational "scare-head" about a thief and a ruby worth \$50,000. Some disaffected colleague in London had known, or cleverly guessed, where the stone was that had been stolen from Mr. Pinner's, and had informed the police; the nice-looking young fellow who spoke like an English gentleman had walked directly into the arms of the plain-clothes man waiting for him on the pier in New York, the stone had been found sewn up in his waistcoat, and his pleasant career of liberty had ended abruptly in a cell.

Mr. Van Torp whistled softly as he read the account a second time. Then he neatly cut the column out of the paper, folded it with great precision, smoothed it with care and placed it in his pocket-book next to a cheap little photograph of Mme. da Cordova as "Juliet," which he had bought in a music shop in New York the day after he had heard her for the first time, and had carried in his pocket ever since.

He took up the mutilated newspaper and looked up and down the columns, and among other information which he gathered in a few moments was the fact that Logotheti's yacht had "passed Capt Saint Vincent, going east, owner and party on board." The previous telegram had not escaped him, and if he had entertained any doubts as to the destination of the Erinna, they vanished now. She was certainly bound for the Mediterranean. He remembered having heard that

many steam yachts coming from England put into Gibraltar for coal and fresh provisions, coal being cheaper there than in French and Italian ports, and he thought it very probable that the Erinna would do the same; he also made some deductions which need not be explained yet. The only one worth mentioning here was that Logotheti would be likely to hear in Gibraltar that the ruby had been found and was on its way back to England, and that as he would know that Margaret would be anxious about it, since he had already given it to her, he would hardly let the occasion of communicating with her go by. As for writing from Gibraltar to any place whatsoever in the hope that a letter will arrive in less than a week, it is sheer folly. Mr. Van Torp had never tried it, and supposed it possible, as it looks, but he was tolerably sure that Logotheti would telegraph first, and had perhaps done so already, for the news of his passing Cape Saint Vincent was already 24 hours old.

This was precisely what had happened. When Mr. Van Torp opened his door, he came upon Margaret and Mrs. Rushmore on the landing, on the point of going out for a walk, and a servant had just brought the prima donna a telegram which she was reading aloud, so that the American could not help hearing her.

"Cruising till wanted," she read quickly. "Ruby found. Address, Yacht Erinna, Naples."

She heard Van Torp close his door, though she had not heard him open it, and turning round she found herself face to face with him. Her eyes were sparkling with anger.

"Very sorry," he said. "I couldn't help hearing."

"It's of no consequence, for I should have told you," Margaret answered briefly.

He argued well for himself from her tone and manner, but he chose to show that he would not force his company upon her just then, when she was in a visible rage, and instead of stopping to exchange more words he passed the two ladies hat in hand, and bowing rather low, after his manner, he went quietly downstairs.

Margaret watched him till he disappeared.

"I like that man," she said, as if to herself, but audibly. "I cannot help it."

Mrs. Rushmore was more than delighted, but had tact enough not to make any answer to a speech which had probably not been meant for her ears.

"Perhaps," she said, "you would rather not go out just yet, my dear."

Margaret was grateful for the suggestion, and they turned back into their rooms.

Meanwhile Van Torp had reached the door of the hotel, and found Lady Maud standing there with her parasol up, for the sun was streaming in.

"I was waiting for you," she said simply, as soon as he reached her side, and she stepped out into the street. "I thought you would come down, and I wanted to speak to you, for I did not get a chance last night. They were both watching me, probably because they thought I was ill, and I had to chatter like a magpie to keep up appearances."

"You did it very well," Van Torp said. "If I had not seen your face at the window when I got out of the automobile yesterday I shouldn't have guessed there was anything wrong."

"But there is—something very wrong—something I can hardly bear to think of, though I must, until I know the truth."

They turned into the first deserted street they came to.

"I dare say I can give a guess at what it is," Van Torp answered gravely. "I went to see him alone yesterday on purpose, before he started, and I must say, if it wasn't for the beard I'd feel pretty sure."

"He had a beard when I married him, and it was like that—just like that!"

Lady Maud's voice shook audibly, for she felt cold, even in the sunshine.

"I didn't know," Van Torp answered. "That alters the case. If we're not mistaken, what can I do to help you? Let's see. You only had that one look at him, through the window, is that so?"

"Yes. But the window was open, and it's not high above the ground, and my eyes are good. He took off his hat when he said good-by to you, and I saw his face as distinctly as I see yours. When you've been married to a man"—she laughed harshly—"you cannot be easily mistaken about him, when you're as near as that! That is the man I married. I'm intimately convinced of it, but I must be quite sure. Do you understand?"

"Of course. If he's really Leven, he's even a better actor than I used to think he was. If he's not, the resemblance is just about the most extraordinary thing! It's true I only saw Leven three or four times in my life, but I saw him to look at him then, and the last time I did, when he made the row in Hare court, he was doing most of the talking, so I remember his voice."

"There's only one difficulty," Lady Maud said. "Some one else may have been killed last June. It may even have been the pickpocket who had stolen his pocket-book. Such things have happened, or do in books! But

this is certainly the man you met in New York and who sold you the stone you gave me, is he not?"

"Oh, certainly. And that was at the end of July, and Leven was killed late in June."

"Yes. That only leaves a month for him to have been to Asia—that's absurd."

"Utterly, totally, and entirely impossible," asserted Mr. Van Torp. "One of two things. Either this man is your husband, and if he is, he's not the man who found the rubies in Asia. Or else, if he is that man, he's not Leven. I wish that heathen girl had been here yesterday! She could have told in a minute. She'd better have been here anyway than cutting around the Mediterranean with that fellow Logotheti!"

"Yes," Lady Maud answered gravely. "But about myself—if Leven is alive, what is my position—I mean—I don't really quite know where I am, do I?"

"Anybody but you would have thought of marrying again already," observed Mr. Van Torp, looking up sideways in her eyes, for she was taller than he. "Then you'd really be in a bad fix, wouldn't you? But as it is, I don't see that it makes much difference. The man's going under a false name, so he doesn't mean to claim you as his wife, nor to try to get a divorce again, as he did before. He's just going to be somebody else for his own good, and he'll get married that way, maybe. That's his business, not yours. I don't suppose you're going to get up in church and forbid the banns, are you?"

"I would, like a shot!" said Lady Maud. "So would you, I'm sure! Think of the other woman!"

"That's so," answered Van Torp without enthusiasm. "However, we've got to think about you and the present, and decide what we'll do. I suppose the best thing is for me to put him off with some excuse, so that you can come on the yacht."

"Please do nothing of the sort!" cried Lady Maud.

"But I want you to come," objected her friend.

"I mean to come. Do you think I'm afraid to meet him?"

Van Torp looked at her in some surprise, and not without admiration.

"There isn't anybody like you, anyway," he said quietly. "But there's going to be a circus on that ship if he's Leven," he added. "If he makes a fuss I'll read the riot act and lock him up."

"Oh, no," answered Lady Maud, who was used to Mr. Van Torp's familiar vocabulary, "why need there be any trouble? You've not told him I am coming, you say. Very well. If he sees me suddenly after he has been on board a little while, he'll certainly betray himself, and then I shall be sure. Leven is a man of the world—'was' or 'is'—God knows which! But if it is he, and he doesn't want to be recognized, he'll behave as if nothing had happened, after the first moment of surprise. At least I shall be certain. I must be positively sure whether Leven is alive or dead, for what I have got back in these last two months is my whole life. A mere recognition at first sight and at ten yards is not enough. It may be only a marvelous resemblance, for they say every one has a 'double' somewhere in the world."

"They used to say, too, that if you met your 'double' one of you would die," observed Van Torp. "Those things are all stuff and nonsense, of course. I was just thinking. Well," he continued, dwelling on his favorite monosyllable, "if you decide to come on the yacht, and if the man doesn't blow away, we shall know the truth in three or four days from now, and that's a comfort. And even if he turns out to be Leven, maybe we can manage something."

Lady Maud chose not to ask what her friend thought he could "manage;" for she had glanced at his face when he had spoken, and though it was half turned away from her, she saw his expression, and it would have scared a nervous person. She did not like him to be in that mood, and was sorry that she had brought him to it.

But Mr. Van Torp, who was a strong man, and had seen more than one affair in his ranching days, did not help thinking how uncommonly easy it would be to pick up Count Kralinsky and drop him overboard on a dark night next week, when the Lancashire Lass would be doing 22 knots, and there might be a little weather about to drown the splash.

## CHAPTER XIII.

The millionaire did things handsomely. He offered to motor his party to Venice, and as Margaret declined, because motoring was bad for her voice, he telegraphed for a comfortable special carriage, and took his friends down by railroad, and they were all very luxuriously comfortable.

Kralinsky was not on board the yacht when they came alongside at sunset in two gondolas, following the steam-launch, which carried the load of luggage and the two maids.

Stemp led the way, and Mr. Van Torp took the three ladies to their cabins; first, Mrs. Rushmore, who was surprised and delighted by the rich and gay appearance of hers, for it was entirely decorated in pink and gold.

On the writing-table stood a tall, gilt vase full of immense pink roses, with stems nearer four feet long than three. Mrs. Rushmore admired them very much.

"How did you know that I love roses above all other flowers?" she asked. "My dear Mr. Van Torp, you are a wizard, I'm sure!"

Lady Maud and Margaret entered, and kept up a polite little chorus of admiration; but they both felt uneasy as to what they might find in their respective cabins, for Margaret hated pink, and Lady Maud detested gilding, and neither of them was especially fond of roses. They left Mrs. Rushmore very happy in her quarters and went on, Lady Maud's turn came next, and she began to understand, when she saw a quantity of sweet wood violets on her table, just loosened, in an old Murano glass beaker.

"Thank you," she said, bending to smell them. "How kind of you!"

There was not a trace of gilding or pink silk. The cabin was paneled and fitted in a rare natural wood of a creamy-white tint.

"Beg pardon, my lady," said Stemp. "This and Miss Donne's cabin communicate by this door, and the door aft goes to the dressing-room. Each cabin has one quite independent, and this bell rings the pantry, my lady, and this one rings Miss Donne's maid's cabin, as I understand that your ladyship has not brought her own maid with her."

"Very nice," said Lady Maud, smelling the violets again.



"Yes, sir. He got rare this morning from Vienna in his motor, sir, and sent his things with his man, and his compliments to you and the ladies, and he will come on board in time for dinner. That was all, I think, sir."

Lady Maud heard, and made a scarcely perceptible movement of the head by way of thanks to her friend, while listening to Margaret's enthusiastic praise of everything she saw. Mr. Van Torp and his man departed, just as Potts appeared, accompanied by a very neat-looking English stewardess in a smart white cap. Lady Maud was unusually silent, but she smiled pleasantly at what Margaret said, and the latter made up her mind to drown her anger against Logotheti, and at the same time be avenged on him, in an orgy of luxurious comfort, sea-air, and sunshine. The capacity of a perfectly healthy and successful singer for enjoying everything, from a halfpenny bun and a drive in a hansom to a millionaire's yacht and the most expensive fat of the land, or sea, has never been measured. And if they do have terrible fits of temper now and then, who shall blame them? They are always sorry for it, because it is bad for the voice.

Mr. Van Torp reached his quarters, and prepared to scrub and dress comfortably after a week at Bayreuth and a railroad journey.

Lady Maud did not begin to dress at once, as there was plenty of time before dinner; she left the stewardess to unpack her things, and came out upon the six-foot gangway outside her cabin door to breathe the air, for it was warm. The city lay half a mile away in the afterglow of the sunset.

But she felt none of that healthy pleasure which a lovely sight naturally gave her. She was at a crisis of her life, and the exquisite evening scene was the battlefield of a coming struggle, with herself, or with another, she hardly knew. In half an hour, or in an hour, at most, she was to sit at table with a man she fully believed to be the husband for whom she had been wearing mourning, out of mere decency, but with the profound inward satisfaction of being free.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

**Spider Colonies.**

Our native spiders are notable for their extreme unsociability. Of those which are spinners each one constructs its web apart from those of its kind. And those which hunt pursue their prey alone, says the London Globe.

In other countries, however, there are spiders which live in communities, and one such, a native of Mexico, is described by M. L. Diguat. It is known as the mosquero and makes a large nest in oaks and other trees. Here the spiders live gregariously and along with them in the nest is found a minute beetle and another species of spider. The beetle is said to act as scavenger. Parts of the nest of the mosquero are hung up in the houses during the wet season to get rid of the flies.

"Do as you would be done by," he said. "That's the company's rule."

She laughed at the allusion to their agreement, of which Lady Maud knew nothing, for they had determined to keep it secret for the present.

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## CHAPTER XI.—Continued.

... the page round, and she to her. The writing was perfectly legible, but very from the "commercial" hand of an American business man. Any taken at random, might be unformed, at first sight, and symmetrical. Margaret the clauses carefully. She had already signed a good many papers in connection with her own small business and the language was not so to her as it would have been to most women.

"I sign first?" she asked, and had finished. "My own name, please," said Van Torp, and she signed. "The other's name, please," said Van Torp, and she signed. "The other's name, please," said Van Torp, and she signed. "The other's name, please," said Van Torp, and she signed.



Ended Abruptly in a Cell.

She Buried Her Handsome Face in the Splendid Flowers.