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The Darley Diamonds.

By George R. Sims.

The Darley diamonds were famous. They had been in the Darley family for several generations. When Lord Darley died they passed to her only son Lord Darley, and disappeared from view, as he remained, in spite of the frantic efforts of Belgravia mothers to find him a wife, a confirmed bachelor.

"Thank you very much for telling me this," said Miss Montessor, rising to go. "It is better that I should know it. Good evening." She gave the manager a dignified bow and went out of the room.

"It's odd, denoted odd!" said the manager to himself, as he lighted a cigar and sat back meditatively in his chair. "There's not the slightest doubt that they are the Darley diamonds, but how the deuce did she get them?"

Soon after his mother's death he announced his intention of going to South Africa on a hunting expedition, and a month later quietly took his departure. His arrival at Fort Elizabeth was duly chronicled, and then nothing more was heard of him, and he had almost dropped out of men's minds when, two years later, a society was suddenly startled by the appearance of a new burlesque actress at a West End theatre, who, in the last act of a variety entertainment, came on hissing with the famous Darley diamonds.

There was absolutely no mistake about them. They were too well known not to be recognized. Lady Baltham, who knew everybody and everything, was the first to discover them, and she turned to her husband and said, "My dear, look, those are the Darley diamonds," and Lord Baltham, who was the first to discover them, was directed by his spouse, inspected the gems which adorned the young lady's long and carefully, and agreed with her. She pointed out to him in particular a pendant which was famous and in the centre of which was the famous severed hand of the Darley crest.

"How on earth did she get them?" exclaimed Lady Baltham; and as soon as the story went around society, and society had been seen to see for itself, that question was repeated everywhere. The manager of the theatre was approached on the subject. Who was Miss Montessor, and where did she come from?

The manager knew nothing except that she had come from America, where she had been playing for some few months with considerable success, mainly on account of her diamonds, and she had applied to him for an engagement in London, and as there was a big show part in the last act of the piece he had given it to her after seeing the diamonds which she had proposed to wear.

When he was told that these were the famous Darley diamonds, the property of Lord Darley, who had disappeared in South Africa, or who, at any rate, had not for nearly two years communicated with any of his friends, the manager said he would see Miss Montessor and "pump" her, and so, after the performance was over he sent round and asked if she would come into his room for a moment.

It was rather a delicate matter. He couldn't very well say to the young lady: "Where did you get those diamonds? It is not unusual, and it would not be considered good taste to ask young ladies on the stage who gave them their jewelry." So he approached the subject in a roundabout way.

"Your diamonds have made a great sensation, my dear," he said. "Oh, yes, they always do," replied Miss Montessor, with a smile. "They were a fine, tall girl, almost a brunette, with glorious eyes and a set of beautiful white teeth, which was showed every time she spoke. "Then you've had them some time?" "No, I wore them for the first time in New York on the revival of 'The Black Crook' at the beginning of this year."

"You mean on the stage?" "Yes." "But you had them before?" Miss Montessor looked up with a roguish look in her eyes, and smiled, and showed her white teeth. "You want to know who gave them to me, I guess."

The manager protested. They were such magnificent diamonds, and every one was talking about them, that was all. And—several people had told him that there was only one set in England like them, the famous Darley diamonds. The manager watched Miss Montessor closely as he delivered that homeward thrust, but it appeared to have no effect upon the young lady.

"The Darley crest!" she said. "Then I suppose people think my diamonds are the Darley diamonds?" "Well, to speak plainly, my dear, they do," replied the manager; "but, of course, you never met Lord Darley and he didn't give them to you and his diamonds are probably still at his bankers in London—why, of course it's a very odd coincidence, and that's all."

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Miss Montessor drove home to her house in Fulham, not at all easy in her mind. Her maid, who accompanied her and assisted her to guard the case in which the famous jewels were nightly packed, spoke to her several times, but received no answer. Miss Montessor was absorbed in thought.

Directly she got home she went to her boudoir, and opened her escritoire, took from it a bundle of letters. She took out an envelope in which there was a photograph. She looked at the photograph long and earnestly. It was that of a tall, handsome-looking man, with curly hair and a clean-shaven face—a man of about five-and-thirty.

"How couldn't have been Lord Darley," she said; "and yet it wasn't, how did he come by those diamonds? Perhaps it was Lord Darley, and if it was—well, he wouldn't have given me diamonds which he must have known would be recognized sooner or later. Poor Jack! I wonder what's become of him; if I shall ever hear or see him again? Lord Darley is away in South Africa, they say. I must find someone who knows him, and find out if this is his photograph or not."

Then she went downstairs to the dining room and had her supper, and sat late into the night thinking. She wondered whether or not she ought to wear the diamonds again under the circumstances, but if she didn't the manager would probably object. She had been engaged for her diamonds, not for her talent, and though she was a handsome woman, there were plenty of handsome women about who would have filled her part for very much less than she was taking.

She was worried. The circumstances under which she had received those diamonds were peculiar, and she had lost sight of the donor in a very mysterious way. She had met him first in America, when she was only a chorus girl in a variety company. He had sent her flowers to the stage door and had soon afterwards been introduced to her at one of those Bohemian gatherings where millionaires and professionals met on equal terms.

He had not disguised his admiration for her, and he had made her a temporary offer of his hand. Such arrangements not being outside the code of morality in a certain section of the original Darley diamonds, and she was the daughter of a New England farmer, had accepted it, and had suddenly burst into beautiful clothes and precious stones and a carriage and an elegant suite of rooms in one of the best parts of New York.

Mr. Dalmain was, it was understood, a rich Englishman, who had made a colossal fortune in Peru. That was current gossip, but nobody seemed to know anything very definite about him. It was after they had lived together for two months that one day Mr. Dalmain—Jack, as Miss Montessor called him—suddenly produced the wonderful diamonds.

"Look here, little woman," he said, "as long as we're together you can wear these, but on one condition."

"What is that?" "That if we ever part you give them back to me. You can give me a little note to say they are only lent to you. I can't give them to you for—well, for family reasons."

Maggie had accepted the beautiful diamonds gladly on these terms, and had worn them on the stage for the first time in the revival of "The Black Crook," and had driven half the ladies of New York mad with envy. As to the girls in the company, they were simply stupefied at Miss Montessor's good fortune, and they agreed among themselves that Jack Dalmain was either a new Monte Cristo or a prince in disguise.

Jack Dalmain was a good fellow, and Maggie Montessor was really very much in love with him, and very fond of reaching home after the performance she found a little note from him saying that he had suddenly been called away on a journey connected with important business, that he hoped to be back in a few days; and if he wasn't he would write to her and let her know when to expect him, she was very much upset. From the day that Jack Dalmain had left her she had never heard of him again, and so at the end of six months, having exhausted all the money he had banked on her behalf and sold some presents, she found herself getting hard up as well as ill from anxiety about the mysterious action of her lover, she determined to take a trip to Europe and, if possible, get an engagement for a time in London. She couldn't sell the diamonds, because they were not hers to sell, and she would sooner have starved than parted with them after her promise to Jack.

She brought her diamonds with her, and got the engagement in London, and now she had been brought face to face with the fact that the wonderful jewels Jack Dalmain had given her were well known in London as the property of Lord Darley.

Was Jack Dalmain Lord Darley, that was the question that was worrying Maggie Montessor, and if he was, why had he never written and never claimed those family jewels from her?

Maggie Montessor passed a sleepless night and lay late the following morning—late even for a professional lady—and it was past noon when she came downstairs dressed to go out for a walk. She was pale and felt ill as usual of the fresh air and the sunshine.

Just as she was about to start the servant entered with a card. A gentleman wished to see her on an important business. Maggie glanced at the card and saw that the visitor was a Mr. Oldfield, a solicitor. She told the servant she would see the gentleman, and a moment afterward she went into the drawing room to him.

Mr. Oldfield was an elderly gentleman, with old family solicitor written on every feature and on every article of his attire. He greeted Miss Montessor with old-fashioned courtesy, and then without any preamble proceeded to explain his business.

"You must excuse my calling upon you, Miss Montessor," he said, "but I am Lord Darley's solicitor."

Miss Montessor gave a little start. Was the explanation of the mystery coming at last? "I have called upon you in consequence of my having just heard, through a client of mine, Lord Baltham that you have in your possession a set of diamonds which bear an extraordinary resemblance to the family diamonds of my client."

"Yes," said Miss Montessor. "I have the diamonds, but I was told last night for the first time that they resembled others which were well known."

"Under these circumstances, my dear young lady, you will not mind my asking you for a little explanation."

"Certainly not, but first of all let me ask you one question. If Lord Darley has his diamonds, why need he trouble about mine?"

"Exactly, but we don't know whose Lord Darley is or what he has done with his diamonds."

"No, he went to South Africa two years ago, and in spite of every effort on our part to get information concerning him we can learn nothing about the fact that he arrived at Port Elizabeth safely."

"Then he has never written home," said Maggie. "No, he has never written home."

"And his diamonds—they are not left with anyone?" "I have told you we can find no trace of them. His mother, old Lady Darley, kept them in the house, we know. At her death Lord Darley naturally took possession of everything. When he went away he left everything in charge of responsible people, and he took certain things to his bank, but the jewels are not there, and there is no trace of them in the house. The jewels and Lord Darley have disappeared together. Now you understand why I am going to ask you to be candid with me, and to tell me where you obtained the diamonds you wear nightly on the stage, and which I—well, I am sure are his."

"That is the person who, in New York a year ago lent me the diamonds, Mr. Jack."

"Lent you?" "Yes, it was understood that I was to return them to him when he asked me."

"And he did not ask you?" "No, at least that is, he went away without doing so, and I have never heard from him since."

Maggie felt that for her own sake it was better to conceal nothing and tell Mr. Oldfield the whole story of her connection with Jack Dalmain and his mysterious disappearance.

"It is all very mysterious," he said, "and I don't know anything about the man's disappearance, and in some extraordinary way Mr. Dalmain at the time of his disappearance was practically the possessor of the Darley diamonds. I must confess that I cannot understand the affair at all."

"And the diamonds," said Maggie, "do you intend to dispute my possession of them?" "Well," said the solicitor, hesitatingly, "I really can't say definitely at present. I have only just taken the matter up. I am obliged to you for your information you have been most frank and candid, and, so far as I can see I—er—don't exactly know how we are going to dispute your claim to them."

"I would give them up to you, Mr. Dalmain, but I certainly should not for the other side. Thank you again. You will probably hear further from me. Good morning."

Mr. Oldfield shook hands cordially with Miss Montessor, and took his departure. And Maggie, more puzzled than ever, wondered what on earth could be the connection between her former lover and Lord Darley. Jack Dalmain, she knew now, was not the missing English peer who, according to Mr. Oldfield, was the rightful owner of the gems she was nightly wearing. She was convinced herself that they were

the Darley diamonds, and the affair so worried her that but for her promise to Jack, who might after all return some day and claim them, she would have given them up.

She wore them to the theatre that night and the following night, and they attracted more attention than ever. The story had got about, suggested from paragraphs were beginning to appear in the society journals. The moment she came upon the stage every opera glass was levelled at her. Miss Montessor had ten lines to speak, but she was the attraction of the great up-to-date burlesque at the Merriment Theatre.

But she did not wear the diamonds long afterward. One night when she reached home the servant who opened the door informed her that a gentleman had called and left a note for her. She opened it and read it, and it dropped from her hand. "I will come again at one o'clock. Send your servants to bed—open the door yourself and let me in. I only want to see you for a minute. Jack."

It was Jack Dalmain, come again as mysteriously as he had disappeared. At 11 o'clock, having obeyed his instructions, Maggie opened the door. Jack Dalmain was waiting opposite the house, crossed the road and stepped in.

"Maggi," after a hurried word of greeting, led the way to the dining room, where he sat down at the table. "What does it all mean, Jack? What does it all mean?" "I can't explain now, Maggie," Jack answered, "but I've come for you to return your promise."

"You mean you tell me how you got them? Since I have been in London everybody has talked about them, and I don't think they are the property of Lord Darley."

"I gave them to you and you promised to give them back to me afterward. Yes, I will keep your word."

Maggie looked at her former lover, searchingly. He looked older and there was a worried look on his face. "I don't know what you mean, Jack," she said, "but something in his face chilled her. She went up to her room, took the jewels from his hiding place, came back again, and handed it to Jack.

"I don't know where they are, I can't find them there as I received them from you."

"Thanks, Maggie, I knew that I could trust you to keep your word."

"I have kept it, but remember, I shall have to account for what I have done to you. I have been told of the Darley diamonds, and that Lord Darley, their owner, has disappeared. What shall I say when I am asked where the diamonds are?"

"I am sorry that you have returned them to me, but I don't know what to do. You have returned them to me, but I don't know what to do. You have returned them to me, but I don't know what to do."

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