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MY DIAMOND STUDS.

(From the New York Metropolitan Record.)

"Diamonds of a most proved water."—Pericles.

"Sir," said a stranger, "those studs are mine. We were alone together, face to face. The train was flying on at the rate of thirty miles an hour. It was already veering towards evening, and we were about half way between Liege and Brussels.

I shrank back into the farthest corner of my little compartment and stared at him. His hair was dark, and hung in long loose locks; his eyes were wild and brilliant; and he wore an ample cloak with a high fur collar. I thought the man must be mad, and I turned cold all over.

"Did you speak, sir?" I found courage to say. "I spoke, sir. You wear a set of studs—diamonds set in colored gold—very graceful design—stones of an excellent water; but—they are not yours."

"Not mine, sir?" "The stranger nodded. I had purchased them only a week before.—They captivated me from the window of a jeweller's shop in Berlin; and they cost me—no, I dare not say what they cost me, for fear my wife should chance to see this article.

I took out my pocket-book, and handed the bill to the stranger. He just glanced over it, and returned it to me. "I see," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "that they appear to be yours by right of purchase; but nevertheless they belong to me" by right of inheritance. I can make this clear to you very easily, if you choose to hear my story; and no doubt we shall presently contrive some plan by which to settle the question of ownership."

My heart sank within me at the cool certainty of his voice and countenance. "Shall I go on?" he asked, lighting a cigar. "O, by all means," I replied. "I shall be delighted."

He smiled ominously to himself; then sighed and shook his head; passed his fingers twice or thrice through his locks; crossed his feet deliberately on the opposite cushions; and fixing his eyes full upon me, thus began: "Though a native of Russia and born in St. Petersburg. I am of Hindoo descent. My grandfather belong to the province of Hyderabad; but, travelling thence while yet a young man, established himself at Balaghat, and became a worker in the great diamond mines commonly known as the mines of Golconda. A grave, silent, unassuming man was my grandfather, and little beloved by his fellow-miners.—The superintendent, however, placed great confidence in him; and by and by, being promoted to the situation of overseer, he married. The only offspring of this union was Adju Ghosal, my father. The Hindoos, as you must be aware, place a high value upon learning; and even the poorest evince such a respect for education as would do honor to the working classes of a more enlightened community. Of this feeling no man in his position partook more largely than my grandfather. Uninstructed himself, he was ardently desirous that his son should benefit by advantages which, generally speaking, were accessible only to the wealthy; and in pursuance of this ambition, sent Adju Ghosal at the age of eleven years to a large native academy at Benares. People wondered at first, and asked each other what the thing meant, and where the overseer found means to do it. 'Have you found a lac of rupees lately?' inquired one. 'Do you intend to make a diamond-merchant of the little Adju?' asked another. But my grandfather only held his peace; and after a time the marvel died away, and was forgotten. And thus eleven more years passed on; and my father, at the age of twenty-two, was summoned home to Balaghat to receive the last benediction of his expiring parent. He found the old man stretched upon a mat, and almost speechless.

"Adju," he murmured—"Adju, my son, thou art arrived in time—in good time; for I could not have borne to die without seeing thee."

My father pressed his hand in silence, and turned his face aside. "Adju," said my father, "I have a terrible secret to confide to thee: one which my soul refused to carry to the grave. Canst thou endure to hear it?"

My father urged him to speak. "It is my own shame to reveal it to thee, Adju; but I bow my head to the punishment. My son, I have sinned."

My father became more curious than ever. "Thou wilt not despise my memory," Adju. "By Brahma, no!" said my father, raising his hand to his head.

"Then hearken." The old man lifted himself upon his elbow and collected all his strength. My father knelt down and listened.

"It happened," said my grandfather, "just three-and-twenty years ago, and I was then but a working miner. I chanced one day upon a

vein of extraordinary richness. My son, I was tempted: the evil one took possession of my soul: I secreted five diamonds. One was incalculably valuable—larger than a walnut, and as far as I could judge, of admirable water. The other four were about the size of peas. Alas, Adju! From that hour I was a miserable man. Many and many a time I was on the point of confessing the theft; and was as frequently deterred by shame, fear, avarice, or ambition. I married, and a year after my marriage thou wert born. Then I resolved to dedicate this wealth to thee, and thee alone; to educate thee; to enrich thee; to make thee prosperous and learned; and never, never to profit in my own person by sin."

"Generous parent!" exclaimed my father enthusiastically.

"When I took thee to Benares, Adju," continued my grandfather, "I sold one of the four smaller diamonds; and with this I have defrayed the expenses of thy education. I never spent one fraction of the sum upon myself; and some few golden rupees of it are yet remaining."

"Indeed!" said my father, who was listening with the greatest attention. "And the rest of the gems?"

"The rest of the gems, Adju, thou canst restore when I am gone."

"Restore!" echoed my father.

"Yes, my child. Thou hast education. It will make thee far happier than the possession of ill-gotten riches; and I shall die in peace, knowing that reparation will be made. As for the few remaining rupees, I think, if thou art not over-scrupulous in the matter, thou mightest almost be justified in keeping them. They will help thee to begin the world."

"Indeed!" said my father, with a curious sort of smile flitting about the corners of his mouth. At this moment the old man changed color, and a shudder passed over him.

"I—I have told thee just in time, Adju," he said falteringly. "I feel that—that I have not many moments to live. Come hither that I may give thee my blessing."

"My dear father," said Adju Ghosal, "you have forgotten to tell me where the diamonds are hidden."

"True," gasped the dying man. "You will find them, my son—you will find them—but you will be sure to restore them as soon as I am dead."

"How can I restore them," said my father impatiently, "unless you tell me where to find them?"

"True—very true, my Adju. Look, then, in the roll of matting which I use for a pillow, and there you will find the three smaller gems and the larger one. See—see the superintendent—Adju—my—my—"

A rapid convulsion, a moan, a heavy falling back of the outstretched hands, and my grandfather was dead.

The stranger broke off abruptly in his story, and laid his hand upon my sleeve. "And now, sir," said he, "what do you suppose my father did?"

"Went into mourning, perhaps," said I deeply interested.

"Nonsense, sir. He went to the roll of matting. "And found the diamonds?"

"Not only found them, sir," said the stranger, laying his finger on his nose—"not only found them; but—can't you guess?"

"Well, really," said I hesitatingly, "I—that is—if I should not be offending you by the supposition, I should guess—that he kept them."

"Kept them, sir! that's it," said the stranger, rubbing his hands triumphantly; "and, in my opinion, he was quite right, too. Well, sir, to continue. As soon as my venerable ancestor had been consigned to the grave, my father left Balaghat for Calcutta; and embarking there on board a Russian vessel, sailed for St. Petersburg. Arrived at that city, he consigned the gems to a skillful artist, by whom they were cut and polished. Sir, when cut and polished, it was found that the larger stone weighed one hundred and ninety-three carats! My father knew that his fortune was made, and applied for an audience of the Empress Catharine II. The audience was granted, and the diamond shown; but the Empress was unwilling to accede to my father's terms; and he, believing that in time he should obtain his price, suffered the matter to drop; took a beautiful mansion overlooking the Neva, naturalized himself as a Russian subject, under the name of Peter Petroffski, and patiently bided his time. Thus nearly a twelvemonth passed, and my father, who had long since parted with the last of his golden rupees, began to feel nervous. The event proved, however, that he had done wisely; for he one morning received a summons to the palace of Count Orloff, and sold his diamond to that nobleman for the sum of one hundred and four thousand one hundred and sixty-six pounds, thirteen shillings and fourpence. Count Orloff

was then Catharine's favorite, and to her, on her birthday, he presented this royal gift, some few days after he made the purchase."

"Is it possible," I exclaimed, almost breathless with astonishment—"is it possible that these are all facts?"

"Facts!" echoed the stranger indignantly. "Turn to the article on diamonds in any encyclopædia, and convince yourself. Facts, in deed! Why, sir, that nestimable gem now adorns the sceptre of Russia."

"I beg your pardon," I said humbly; "pray go on, sir."

He seemed vexed, and remained silent; so I spoke again.

"In what year did you say this happened?"

"In the year 1772," he replied, falling back insensibly into his narrative. "My father now found himself in a position to command immense commercial influence: so he embarked a portion of his wealth in the fur-trade, and became in process of time one of the foremost among the merchant-princes of Russia. During many years he devoted himself utterly to the pursuit of riches; for gold, I must confess, was my father's weak point. At last when he had obtained the reputation of being at the same time a millionaire and an irreclaimable old bachelor, he married; married at sixty years of age, just thirty-eight years from the time when he left Balaghat. The object of his choice was a rich widow, in every way suitable as regarded money and station; an excellent woman, and the best of mothers! I respect her memory."

Here the stranger paused, and wiped his eyes with a very fine combed handkerchief, which fitted the carriage with an overpowering perfume of patchouli. Presently, conquering his emotions, he resumed:

"But for my birth, which took place within two years from the date of my father's wedding, the newly created family of Petroffski must have become extinct. As it was, therefore, my appearance was hailed with extravagant rejoicing. I was christened after my father, Peter Petroffski. My school-fellows called me Peter the Second. I remember little of my boyhood, excepting that I had always plenty of roubles in my pocket, and a pony and a mounted servant to attend me to and from school; and plenty of indulgence from all my teachers. No boy in the academy played so many pranks, or was so readily forgiven as myself; but money covers a multitude of sins, especially in St. Petersburg."

He paused for a moment, and a question which had long suggested itself to my mind rose to my lips.

"You have not yet told me," said I, "what your father did with the three smaller diamonds."

"Sir," replied the stranger, "I am coming to that presently."

So I bowed, and waited in silence.

"From school I went to college; and, as my father's position excluded me from the college of nobles, I travelled into Germany, and studied five years at the University of Heidelberg."

"Peter," said my father, as we parted, "remember what a priceless life is yours. Above all things, my darling son, be careful not to injure your health by over application."

Never was so good advice more scrupulously followed. My studies at Heidelberg were pleasant rather than profound, and consisted chiefly of rowing, drinking, and fighting. By dint of strict attention to these duties I earned for myself the rank of a 'mossy-head'; and indeed I may say that I graduated in Bavarian beer, and took out my degree in sabre-cuts. At length, I reached the age of twenty-one, and returned to St. Petersburg just in time for my birthday day.—On this occasion my father threw his house open for a succession of dinner-parties, balls and suppers. On the morning of the actual day he called me into his study, signifying that he had something to say and something to give me. A small morocco case of triangular form was lying on his desk. From the moment I entered the room I felt convinced that this was intended for me; and my attention, I fear, wandered sadly away from the wise and affectionate discourse which my father (leaning back complacently in his great arm-chair) was pleased to bestow upon me. He said a great deal about the extent of his trade, and the satisfaction it was to him to have brought up a son who should succeed him in it; informed me that from this day I was to fill the position of junior partner, with a magnificent share in the yearly profits; and finally, taking up the morocco case, bade me accept that as an earnest of his parental love. I opened it, and beheld a superb set of diamond-studs.—Each one was a brilliant of the purest water, and about the size of an ordinary pea. Their value, I feel convinced, could not be less than three hundred guineas of your English money. For some moments I was speechless with delight and astonishment, and could scarcely stammer forth a word of thanks. Then my father smiled and told me the history which I have just related to you. I had never heard anything of this be-

fore. I knew only the common story current in the city, that my father had been a great Eastern merchant before he settled in Russia, and that he had sold a wonderful diamond to the Empress Catharine many years ago.—If, therefore, I had been amazed before, I was now still more so, and listened to the narrative like a man in a dream.

"And now, my dear boy," said my father in conclusion, "these diamonds, as I dare say you have already guessed, are the three remaining stones which I took from your grandfather's pillow of matting just sixty years ago."

From this time I led an enviable life. I owned the handsomest *droshky*, the finest horses, and the smallest tiger in St. Petersburg. My pleasure-yacht was the completest that lay in the quays of the Neva. My stall at the opera was next to that of young Count Skamnikoff, the great leader of fashion and folly, and close under the box of Prince Ruppantuff, who was at that time one of our most influential nobles, and generalissimo of the Russian army. It was not long before Skamnikoff and I became the firmest friends in the world; and before six months were over, I was known far and near as the fastest, the richest, and the most reckless scapegrace about town.

It was at this period, sir, that I first beheld the peerless Katrina."

The stranger paused, as if he expected me to be surprised; but finding that I only continued to listen with a countenance indicative of polite attention, he looked at his watch, ran his fingers through his hair, hemmed twice or thrice, and then went on with his story.

"You will ask me, perhaps—who was the peerless Katrina? Sir, she was a violet blooming upon a rock; a rainbow born out of the bosom of a thunder-cloud. She was the dream of the poetry, the passion of my life! Katrina, sir, was the only child of Prince Ruppantuff, whose name I have already mentioned. Strange that the fairest, the most ethereal of beings should come of so stern a parentage! As Katrina was the gentlest of women, and the most loving, so was Ivan Ruppantuff the fiercest of soldiers and the severest of fathers. He carried the discipline of the camp into the privacy of his home, and made himself dreaded as much by his household as by his troops. I never saw so forbidden a countenance, or one more expressive of pride and defiance. Gazing upon the delicate creature seated beside him in his box, one wondered how nature could have played so strange a turn, and sought in vain for the faintest trace of apparent consanguinity between them. Prince Ivan was a giant in stature; Katrina was almost childlike in the graceful proportions. Prince Ivan was swarthy of complexion, and his features were moulded after the flat unintellectual type of the Tartar tribes; Katrina's features were regular, classical, and Greek. Prince Ivan was proud and cruel; Katrina was loving, innocent—born for all purposes of tenderness and womanly compassion. What marvel, then, that I loved her? Loved her, sir, as only few can love—loved her with all the force, and self-abandonment, and passion, of which man's nature is capable. I had never been in earnest before but I was in earnest now—hopelessly in earnest, as I well knew; but despair itself fed my love with fresh energy, and obstacles only served to make me more determined. For a long time I loved her with my eyes and heart alone, as a devotee worships a saint upon an altar. I could but gaze upon her afar. I had never even listened to the sound of her dear voice, though I would have died to hear her pronounce my name. Night after night, during the whole opera-season, I sat and watched her from my stall. I heard no more of the music than if I had been in Siberia; I grew thin and pale and abstracted; I fell into a listless dreaming mood, and replied at random when spoken to; above all I wandered like a ghost in and out of the sazoons and gaming-rooms where I had of late been so eager in the pursuit of pleasure. At last Skamnikoff came to my rooms one morning, and remonstrated with me upon my unaccountable despondency.

"You don't do justice to me, dear fellow," he said, twirling his mustachios. "I have introduced you, set you going, made you, in point of fact, the fashion; and I take it rather unkindly that you should reflect so glaring a discredit upon my judgment. You might as well be at La Trappe, as far as your conversational powers go at present; and as for your looks, why, hang it, you know the least a man can do for society is look pleasant. Are you in debt, and does the dear papa draw his purse-strings too closely?"

I shook my head. I had no debts but such as I could readily liquidate, and my father was as liberal to me as I could reasonably desire.—It was not that.

"Not that!" exclaimed Skamnikoff; "well, then, you must be in love. Why, man, you blush! The thing's as clear as the sunlight; and Peter, the magnificent Peter, is in love!—"

Now, by all the saints, this is too ridiculous!—Who's the girl?"

"The Princess Katrina," I answered with a groan.

Skamnikoff started, and whistled dismally. "The Princess Katrina!" he repeated.

"I laid my head down upon the table, and burst into tears.

"I know that I am a fool," I said, sobbing. "I know that I have no chance—no hope—no resource but exile or death; and yet I love her, O, I love her, and I am dying—dying—dying day by day!"

My friend was moved.

"Cheer up, Petroffski," he said, laying his hand upon my shoulder. "Cheer up; for I think I know of a plan by which to gain you an interview with her; and that once done, why you must accomplish the rest for yourself. You will propose an elopement, or a secret marriage.—She will not have the heart to refuse you. We will set relays of horses for you on the road to the nearest seaport; you will embark on board a schooner, ready hired for the purpose; and, once off and away, who is to follow? Come, come, I see nothing but success for you; and if you will but look a trifle more lively, I'll set out at once to see about the ways and means."

I felt as if might had turned to day on hearing these words.

"Skamnikoff," I said, "you have saved my life!"

That evening, to my surprise, I saw him enter Prince Ruppantuff's box in company with a nobleman of his acquaintance, and be presented in due form both to Ivan and his daughter. He did not remain there very long, but contrived to enter into conversation with Katrina. Just before he left the box, he nodded to me and waved his hand. She instantly raised her glass. They exchanged a few sentences. She looked again; and I felt as if the whole theatre were turning round. In a few moments he had made his bow, taken his leave, and returned to his stall at my side.

"The ball is rolling," he said, rubbing his hands gaily; "the ball is rolling and the game's begun. She saw me recognize you, and naturally asked me who you were. 'A fellow,' said I, 'with the best heart and the handsomest studs in St. Petersburg.' 'Of horses?' asked the fair Katrina. 'No,' said I, 'of diamonds.' Whereupon she looked again. 'Not but he has horses too,' I added, 'and my most intimate friend; but he is far from happy.' She surveyed you with more interest than ever. There's nothing like telling a woman that a man's unhappy. She's sure to be half in love with you directly. 'He looks pale,' said the fair Katrina. 'What is the cause of his sorrow?' I smiled and shook my head. 'Princess Katrina,' I said meaningly, 'you are the very last person in the world to whom I could confide that secret.'—With this I took my leave; and I think you ought to be very much obliged to me."

And I was very much obliged to him, especially when I saw Katrina's attention wandered continually that evening from the stage to myself. Once or twice our eyes met. The first time, she started; the second time, she blushed; and I thought myself the happiest fellow in the world.

Henceforth life assumed for me a new and beautiful aspect. Somehow or another (whether through the hints dropped by my friend, or her own attentive study of my eloquent glances, I know not) the fair Katrina became aware of my passion, and was not so cruel as to discourage it. Sometime, when they stood near me in the crush-room, she would drop her handkerchief or her fan, that I might have the opportunity of handing it to her. Sometimes she left a flower from her bouquet lying upon the front of her box, that I might go round and take it when she and her father were gone. At last she accorded me an interview.

The stranger buried his face in his hands, and sighed heavily.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, in a broken voice. "My—my emotions on recalling this portion of my history are so overwhelming, that with your permission I must smoke a cigar."

I have, be it known, a particular aversion to the odor of tobacco. The speaker, however, disagrees with me. However, in this instance I waved my objections; the stranger lit his Havana; and presently the story of my diamond studs went on.

"Those only who have loved," said the stranger; "can picture the condition of my mind during the hours that preceded that eventful interview. I could think of nothing, speak of nothing, but Katrina. To me, the universe was all Katrina, and there was only nothingness beyond. Dusk came at last—the dusk of a winter evening when the tinkling bells of the *droshki*, horses, and the guttural 'Yukh, yukh!' of the drivers, rose from the streets and public squares where the snow lay thickly on the ground, and on the bare branches of the trees, and upon the