

# THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER



BY THE BARONESS ORCZY.

## IV. WHO STOLE THE BLACK DIAMONDS?

*Still as Clever as He Ever was, the Old Man in the Corner now Gives a Most Surprising Solution Regarding the Theft of Some Royal Gems.*

### DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER...	...	...	Who Unravels the Mystery to—
THE LADY JOURNALIST	...	...	Who Re-tells it to the ROYAL Readers.
THE KING AND QUEEN OF BOHEMIA	...	...	Who Wished to Sell the Black Diamonds.
JOHN LUCAS...	...	...	Gardener at Eaton Chase.
MR. JAMES S. WILSON	...	...	An American Millionaire.
MRS. WILSON	...	...	His Wife.
MARY FRITCHARD	...	...	Mrs. Wilson's Maid.
LORD BARNSDALE	...	...	A Master of Foxhounds.
LADY BARNSDALE	...	...	His Wife.
MRS. VANDERDELLEN	...	...	A Wealthy Widow.
SIR ARTHUR INGLEWOOD	...	...	An Eminent Barrister.
MR. ALBERT V. B. SEDLEY	}	...	Friends of the Late Mr. Vanderdellen.
MR. CORNELIUS SHEE			

### CHAPTER I.

"Do you know who that is?" said the man in the corner, as he pushed a small packet of photos across the table.

The picture on the top represented an entrancingly beautiful woman, with bare arms and neck and a profusion of pearl and diamond ornaments about her head and throat.

"Surely this is the Queen of —?"

"Hush!" he broke in abruptly with mock dismay; "you must mention no names."

"Why not?" I asked laughing, for he looked so droll in his distress.

"Look closely at the photo," he replied, "and at the necklace and tiara that the lady is wearing."

"Yes," I said. "Well?"

"Do you mean to say you don't recognise them?"

I looked at the picture more closely, and then there suddenly came back to my mind that mysterious story of the Black Diamonds,

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which had not only bewildered the police of Europe, but also some of its diplomats.

"Ah! I see you do recognise the jewels!" said the funny creature after a while. "No wonder! for their design is unique, and photographs of that necklace and tiara were circulated practically throughout all the world.

"Of course I am not going to mention names, for you know very well who the royal heroes of this mysterious adventure were. For the purposes of my narrative, suppose I call them the King and Queen of 'Bohemia.'

"The value of the stones was said to be fabulous and it was only natural when the King of 'Bohemia' found himself somewhat in want of money—a want which has made itself felt before now with even the most powerful European monarchs—that he should decide to sell the precious trinkets, worth a small kingdom in themselves. In order to be in closer touch with the most likely customers, their Majesties of 'Bohemia' came over to England during the season of 1902—a season memorable alike for its deep sorrow and its great joy.

"After the sad postponement of the Coronation festivities, they rented Eton Chase, a beautiful mansion just outside Chislehurst, for the summer months. There they entertained right royally, for the Queen was very gracious and the King a real sportsman—there also the rumour first got about that His Majesty had decided to sell the world famous parure of black diamonds.

"Needless to say, they were not long in the market: quite a host of American millionaires had already coveted them for their wives, and brisk and sensational offers were made to His Majesty's business man both by letter and telegram.

"At last, however, Mr. Wilson, the multi-millionaire, was understood to have made an offer, for the necklace and tiara, of £500,000, which had been accepted.

"But a very few days later, that is to say, on the Sunday and Monday, July 6th and 7th, there appeared in the papers the short but deeply sensational announcement that a burglary had occurred at Eton Chase, Chislehurst, the mansion inhabited by Their Majesties the King and Queen of 'Bohemia'; and that among the objects stolen was the famous parure of black diamonds, for which a bid of half a million sterling had just been made and accepted.

"The burglary had been one of the most daring and most mysterious ones ever brought

under the notice of the police authorities. The mansion was full of guests at the time, among whom were many diplomatic notabilities, and also Mr. and Mrs. Wilson, the future owners of the gems; there was also a very large staff of servants. The burglary must have occurred between the hours of 10 and 11.30 p.m., though the precise moment could not be ascertained.

"The house itself stands in the midst of a large garden, and has deep French windows opening out upon a terrace at the back. There are ornamental iron balconies to the windows of the upper floors, and it was to one of these, situated immediately above the dining-room, that a rope ladder was found to be attached.

"The burglar must have chosen a moment when the guests were dispersed in the smoking, billiard, and drawing-rooms; the servants were having their own meal, and the dining-room was deserted. He must have slung his rope ladder, and entered Her Majesty's own bedroom by the window which—as the night was very warm—had been left open. The jewels were locked up in a small iron box, which stood upon the dressing-table, and the burglar took the box bodily away with him and then, no doubt, returned the way he came.

"The wonderful point in this daring attempt was the fact that most of the windows on the ground floor were slightly open that night, that the rooms themselves were filled with guests, and that the dining-room was not empty for more than a few minutes at a time, as the servants were still busy clearing away after dinner.

"At nine o'clock some of the younger guests had strolled out on to the terrace, and the last of these returned to the drawing-room at ten o'clock; at half-past eleven one of the servants caught sight of the rope ladder in front of one of the dining-room windows, and the alarm was given.

"All traces of the burglar, however, and of his princely booty had completely disappeared."

## CHAPTER II.

"Not only did this daring burglary cause a great deal of excitement," continued the man in the corner, "but it also roused a good deal of sympathy in the public mind for the King and Queen of 'Bohemia,' who thus found their hope of raising half a million sterling suddenly dashed to the ground. The loss to them would, of course, be irreparable.

"Matters were, however, practically at a standstill, all inquiries from enterprising journalists only eliciting the vague information that the police 'held a clue.' We all

know what that means. Then all at once a wonderful rumour got about.

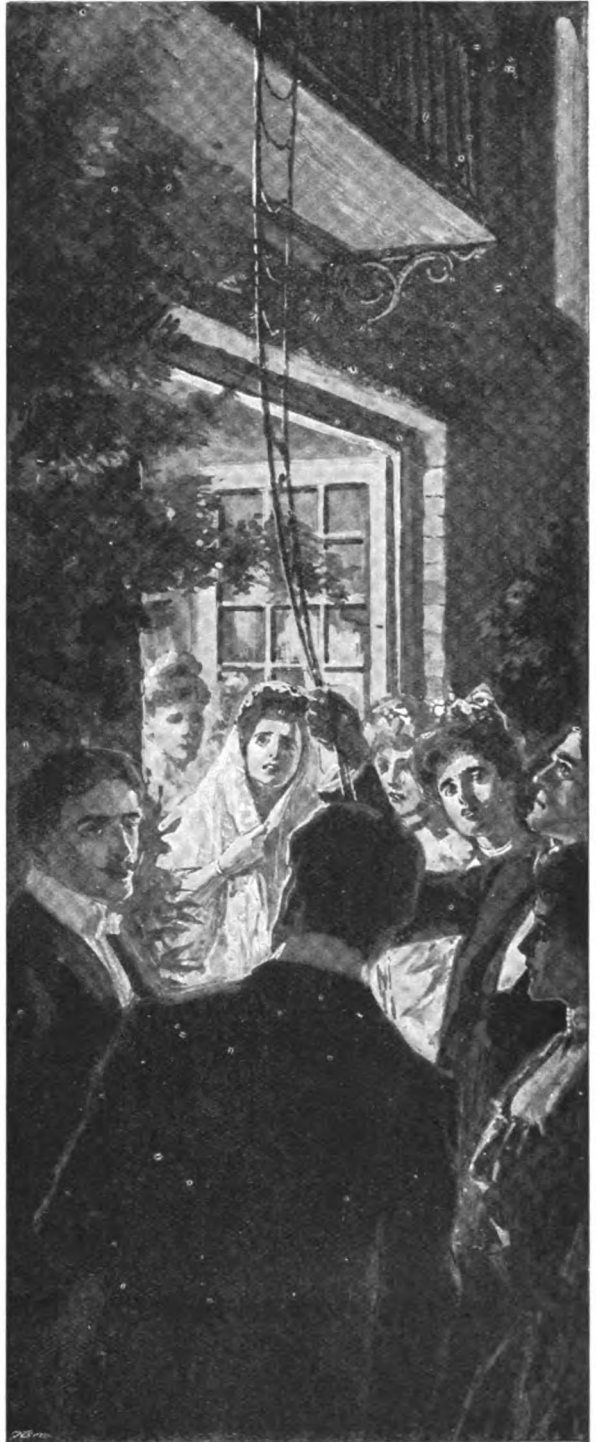
"Goodness only knows how these rumours originate—sometimes solely in the imagination of the man in the street. In this instance, certainly, that worthy gentleman had a very sensational theory. It was namely rumoured all over London that the clue which the police held pointed to no less a person than Mr. Wilson himself.

"What had happened was this: Minute inquiries on the part of the most able detectives of Scotland Yard had brought to light the fact that the burglary at Eton Chase must have occurred precisely between ten minutes and a quarter past eleven; at every other moment of the entire evening, somebody or other had observed either the terrace or the dining-room windows.

"I told you that until ten o'clock some of 'Their Majesties' guests were walking up and down the terrace; between ten and half-past servants were clearing away in the dining-room, and here it was positively ascertained beyond any doubt that no burglar could have slung a rope ladder and climbed up it immediately outside those windows, for one or other of the six servants engaged in clearing away the dinner must of necessity have caught sight of him.

"At half-past ten John Lucas, the head gardener, was walking through the gardens with a dog at his heels, and did not get back to the lodge until just upon eleven. He certainly did not go as far as the terrace, and as that side of the house was in shadow he could not say positively whether the ladder was there or not, but he certainly did assert most emphatically that there was no burglar about the *grounds* then, for the dog was a good watch-dog and would have barked if any stranger was about. Lucas took the dog in with him and gave him a bit of supper, and only fastened him to his kennel outside at a quarter-past eleven.

"Surmising, therefore, that at half-past ten, when John Lucas started



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on his round, the deed was not yet done, that quarter of an hour would give the burglar the only possible opportunity of entering the premises *from the outside*, without being barked at by the dog. Now, during most of that same quarter of an hour, His Majesty the King of 'Bohemia' himself had retired into a small library with his private secretary, in order to glance through certain despatches which had arrived earlier in the evening.

"The window of this library was immediately next to the one outside which the ladder was found, and both the secretary and His Majesty himself think that they would have seen something or heard a noise if the rope-ladder had been slung while they were in the room. They both, however, returned to the drawing-room at ten minutes past eleven.

"And here," continued the man in the corner, rubbing his long, bony fingers together, "arose the neatest little complication I have ever come across in a case of this kind. His Majesty had, it appears, privately made up his mind to accept Mr. Wilson's bid, but the transaction had not yet been completed. Mr. Wilson and his wife came down to stay at Eton Chase on June 29th, and directly they arrived many of those present noticed that Mr. Wilson was obviously repenting of his bargain. This impression had deepened day by day, Mrs. Wilson herself often throwing out covert hints about 'fictitious value' and 'fancy prices for merely notorious trinkets.' In fact, it became very obvious that the Wilsons were really seeking a loophole for evading the conclusion of the bargain.

"On the memorable evening of July 5th Mrs. Wilson had been forced to retire to her room early in the evening, owing, she said, to a bad headache; her room was in the west wing of the Chase, and opened out on the same corridor as the apartments of Her Majesty the Queen. At half-past eleven Mrs. Wilson rang for her maid—Mary Pritchard, who, on entering her mistress's room, met Mr. Wilson just coming out of it, and the girl heard him say: 'Oh, don't worry! I'll have the whole reset when we get back.'

"The detectives, on the other hand, had obtained information that two or three days previously Mr. Wilson had sustained a very severe loss on the 'Change, and that he had subsequently remarked to two or three business friends that the Black Diamonds had become a luxury which he had no right to afford.

"Be this as it may, certain it is that within a week of the notorious burglary the rumour was current in every club in London that James S. Wilson, the reputed American millionaire, having found himself unable to complete the purchase of the Black Diamonds, had found this other very much less legitimate means of gaining possession of the gems.

"You must admit that the case looked black enough against him—all circumstantial, of course, for there was absolutely nothing to prove that he had the jewels in his possession; in fact no trace of them whatever had been found, but the public argued that Mr. Wilson would lie low with them for a while, and then have them reset when he returned to America.

"Of course, ugly rumours of that description don't become general about a man without his getting some inkling of them. Mr. Wilson very soon found his position in London absolutely intolerable: his friends ignored him at the club, ladies ceased to call upon his wife, and one fine day he was openly cut by Lord Barnsdale, an M.F.H., in the hunting field.

"Then Mr. Wilson thought it high time to take action. He placed the whole matter in the hands of an able if not very scrupulous solicitor, who promised within a given time to find him a defendant with plenty of means, against whom he could bring a sensational libel suit, with thundering damages.

"The solicitor was as good as his word. He bribed some of the waiters at the Carlton, and so laid his snares that, within six months, Lord and Lady Barnsdale had been overheard to say in public what everybody now thought in private, namely, that Mr. James S. Wilson, finding himself unable to purchase the celebrated Black Diamonds, had thought it more profitable to steal them.

"Two days later Mr. James S. Wilson entered an action in the High Courts for slander against Lord and Lady Barnsdale, claiming damages to the tune of £50,000."

### CHAPTER III.

"Still the mystery of the lost jewels was no nearer to its solution. Their Majesties the King and Queen of 'Bohemia,' had left England soon after the disastrous event which deprived them of what amounted to a small fortune.

"It was expected that the sensational slander case would come on in the autumn, or rather more than sixteen months after the mysterious disappearance of the Black Diamonds.

"This last season was not a very brilliant one, if you remember; the wet weather, I believe, had quite a good deal to do with the fact; nevertheless, London, that great world centre, was, as usual, full of distinguished visitors, among whom Mrs. Vanderdellen, who arrived the second week in July, was perhaps the most interesting.

"Her enormous wealth spread a positive halo round her, it being generally asserted that she was the richest woman in the world. Add to this that she was young, strikingly handsome, and a widow, and you will easily understand what a furore her appearance during this London season caused in all high social circles.

"Though she was still in slight mourning for her husband, she was asked everywhere, went everywhere, and was courted and admired by everybody, including some of the highest in the land; her dresses and jewellery were the talk of the ladies' papers, her style and charm the gossip of all the clubs. And no doubt that, although the July evening Court promised to be very brilliant, everyone thought that it would be doubly so, since Mrs. Vanderdellen had been honoured with an invitation, and would presumably be present.

"I like to picture to myself that scene at Buckingham Palace," continued the man in the corner, as his fingers toyed lovingly with a beautiful and bran-new bit of string. "Of course, I was not present actually, but I can see it all before me; the lights, the crowds, the pretty women, the glistening diamonds; then, in the midst of the chatter, a sudden silence fell as 'Mrs. Vanderdellen' was announced.

"All women turned to look at the beautiful American as she entered, because her dress—on this her first appearance at the English Court—was sure to be a vision of style and beauty. But for once nobody noticed the dress from Felix, nobody even gave a glance at the exquisitely lovely face of the wearer. Everyone's eyes had fastened on one thing

only, and everyone's lips framed but one exclamation, and that an 'Oh!' half of amazement and half of awe.

"For round her neck and upon her head Mrs. Vanderdellen was wearing a gorgeously magnificent parure composed of black diamonds.

## CHAPTER IV.

"I don't know how the case of Wilson v. Barnsdale was settled, for it never came into court. There were

many people in London who owed the Wilsons an apology, and it is to be hoped that these were tendered in full.

"As for Mrs. Vanderdellen, she seemed quite unaware why her appearance at Their Majesties' Court had caused quite so much sensation. No one, of course, broached the subject of the diamonds to her, and she no doubt attributed those significant 'Oh's' to her own dazzling beauty.

"The next day,



"Round her neck and upon her head Mrs. Vanderdellen was wearing a gorgeously magnificent parure composed of black diamonds."

however, Detective Marsh, of Scotland Yard, had a very difficult task before him. He had to go and ask a beautiful, rich, and refined woman how she happened to be in possession of stolen jewellery.

"Luckily for Marsh, however, he had to deal with a woman who was also charming,

and who met his polite inquiry with an equally pleasant reply:

"My husband gave me the Black Diamonds,' she said, 'a year ago, on his return from Europe. I had them set in Vienna last spring, and wore them for the first time last night. Will you please tell me the reason of this strange inquiry?'

"Your husband?" echoed Marsh, ignoring her question, "Mr. Vanderdellen?"

"Oh, yes," she replied sweetly, "I dare say you have never heard of him. His name is very well known in America, where they call him the "Petrol King." One of his hobbies was the collection of gems, which he was very fond of seeing me wear, and he gave me some magnificent jewels. The Black Diamonds certainly are very handsome. May I now request you to tell me," she repeated, with a certain assumption of hauteur, "the reason of all these inquiries?"

"The reason is simple enough, madam," replied the detective abruptly, "those diamonds were the property of Her Majesty the Queen of "Bohemia," and were stolen from Their Majesties' residence, Eton Chase, Chiselhurst, on the 5th of July last year."

"Stolen!" she repeated, aghast and obviously incredulous.

"Yes, stolen," said old Marsh. "I don't wish to distress you unnecessarily, Madam, but you will see how imperative it is that you should place me in immediate communication with Mr. Vanderdellen, as an explanation from him has become necessary."

"Unfortunately that is impossible," said Mrs. Vanderdellen, who seemed under the spell of a strong emotion.

"Impossible?"

"Mr. Vanderdellen has been dead just over a year. He died three days after his return to New York, and the Black Diamonds were the last present he ever made me."

"There was a pause after that. Marsh—experienced detective though he was—was literally at his wits' ends what to do. He said afterwards that Mrs. Vanderdellen, though very young and frivolous outwardly, seemed at the same time an exceedingly shrewd, far-seeing business woman. To begin with, she absolutely refused to have the matter hushed up, and to return the jewels until their rightful ownership had been properly proved.

"It would be tantamount," she said, "to admitting that my husband had come by them unlawfully."

"At the same time she offered the princely reward of £10,000 to anyone who found the true solution of the mystery: for, mind you, the late Mr. Vanderdellen sailed from Havre for New York on July the 8th, 1902, that is to say, three clear days after the theft of the diamonds from Eton Chase, and he presented his wife with the loose gems immediately on his arrival in New York. Three days after that he died.

"It was difficult to suppose that Mr.

Vanderdellen purchased those diamonds not knowing that they must have been stolen, since, directly after the burglary the English police telegraphed to all their Continental colleagues, and within four-and-twenty hours a description of the stolen jewels was circulated throughout Europe.

"It was, to say the least of it, very strange that an experienced business man and shrewd collector like Mr. Vanderdellen should have purchased such priceless gems without making some inquiries as to their history, more especially as they must have been offered to him in a more or less 'hole in the corner' way.

"Still, Mrs. Vanderdellen stuck to her guns, and refused to give up the jewels pending certain inquiries she wished to make. She declared that she wished to be sued for the diamonds in open Court, charged with wilfully detaining stolen goods if necessary, for the more publicity was given to the whole affair the better she would like it, so firmly did she believe in her husband's innocence.

"The matter was indeed brought to the High Courts, and the sensational action brought against Mrs. Vanderdellen by the representative of His Majesty the King of 'Bohemia' for the recovery of the Black Diamonds is, no doubt, still fresh in your memory.

"No one was allowed to know what witnesses Mrs. Vanderdellen would bring forward in her defence. She had engaged the services of Sir Arthur Inglewood, and of some of the most eminent counsel at the bar. The Court was packed with the most fashionable crowd ever seen inside the Law Courts; and both days that the action lasted Mrs. Vanderdellen appeared in exquisite gowns and ideal hats.

"The evidence for the Royal plaintiff was simple enough. It all went to prove that the very day after the burglary not a jeweller, pawnbroker, or diamond merchant throughout the whole of Europe could have failed to know that a unique parure of black diamonds had been stolen, and would probably be offered for sale. The black diamonds in themselves, and out of their setting, were absolutely unique, and if the late Mr. Vanderdellen purchased them in Paris from some private individual, he must at least have very strongly suspected that they were stolen.

"Throughout the whole of that first day Mrs. Vanderdellen sat in Court, absolutely calm and placid. She listened to the evidence, made little notes, and chatted with two or three



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American friends—elderly men—who were with her.

“Then came the turn of the defence.

“Everybody had expected something sensational, and listened more eagerly than ever as the name of Mr. Albert V. B. Sedley was called. He was a tall, elderly man, the regular angular type of the American, with his nasal twang and reposeful manner.

“His story was brief and simple. He was a great friend of the late Mr. Vanderdellen, and had gone on a European tour with him in the early spring of 1902. They were together in Vienna in the month of March, staying at the Hotel Imperial, when one day Vanderdellen came to his room with a remarkable story.

“‘He told me,’ continued Mr. Albert V. B. Sedley, ‘that he had just purchased some very beautiful diamonds, which he meant to present to his wife on his return to New York. He would not tell me where he bought them, nor would he show them to me, but he

spoke about the beauty and rarity of the stones, which were that rarest of all things, beautiful black diamonds.

“‘As the whole story sounded to me a little bit queer and mysterious, I gave him a word of caution, but he was quite confident as to the integrity of the vendor of the jewels, since the latter had made a somewhat curious bargain. Vanderdellen was to have the diamonds in his keeping for three months without paying any money, merely giving a formal receipt for them; then if after three months he was quite satisfied with his bargain, and there had been no suspicion or rumour of any kind that the diamonds were stolen, then only was the money, £500,000, to be paid.

“‘Vanderdellen thought this very fair and above board, and so it sounded to me. The only thing I didn’t like about it all was that the vendor had given what I thought was a false name and no address; the money was to be paid over to him in French notes when

the three months had expired, at an hotel in Paris where Vanderdellen would be staying at the time and where he would call for it.

"I heard nothing more about the mysterious diamonds and their still more mysterious vendor," continued Mr. Sedley, amidst intense excitement, 'for Vanderdellen and I soon parted company after that, he going one way and I another. But at the beginning of July I met him in Paris, and on the 4th I dined with him at the Elysee Palace Hotel, where he was staying.

"Mr. Cornelius R. Shee was there too, and Vanderdellen related to him during dinner the history of his mysterious purchase of the Black Diamonds, adding that the vendor had called upon him that very day as arranged, and that he (Vanderdellen) had had no hesitation in handing him over the agreed price of £500,000, which he thought a very low one. Both Mr. Shee and I agreed that the whole thing must have been clear and above board, for jewels of such fabulous value could not have been stolen since last spring without the hue and cry being in every paper in Europe.

"It is my opinion, therefore,' said Mr. Albert V. B. Sedley, at the conclusion of this remarkable evidence, 'that Mr. Vanderdellen bought those diamonds in perfect good faith. He would never have wittingly subjected his wife to the indignity of being seen in public with stolen jewels round her neck. If after July 5th he did happen to hear that a parure of black diamonds had been stolen in England at the date, he could not possibly think that there could be the slightest connection between these and those he had purchased more than three months ago.'

"And, amidst indescribable excitement, Mr. Albert V. B. Sedley stepped back into his place.

"That he had spoken the truth from beginning to end no one could doubt for a single moment. His own social position, wealth, and important commercial reputation placed him above any suspicion of committing perjury even for the sake of a dead friend. Moreover, the story told by Vanderdellen at the dinner in Paris was corroborated by Mr. Cornelius R. Shee in every point.

"But there! a dead man's words are *not* evidence in a court of law. Unfortunately, Mr. Vanderdellen had not shown the diamonds to his friends at the time. He had certainly drawn enormous sums of money from his bank about the end of June and beginning of July, amounting in all to just over a million

sterling; and there was nothing to prove which special day he had paid away a sum of £500,000, whether *before* or *after* the burglary at Eton Chase.

"He had made extensive purchases in Paris of pictures, furniture, and other works of art, all of priceless value, for the decoration of his new palace in Fifth Avenue, and no diary of private expenditure was produced in Court. Mrs. Vanderdellen herself had said that after her husband's death, as all his affairs were in perfect order, she had destroyed his personal and private diaries.

"Thus the counsel for the plaintiff was able to demolish the whole edifice of the defence bit by bit, for it rested on but very ephemeral foundations: a story related by a dead man.

"Judgment was entered for the plaintiff, although everyone's sympathy, including that of judge and of jury, was entirely for the defendant, who had so nobly determined to vindicate her husband's reputation.

"But Mrs. Vanderdellen proved to the last that she was no ordinary every-day woman. She had kept one final sensation up her sleeve. Two days after she had legally been made to give up the Black Diamonds, she offered to purchase them back for £500,000. Her bid was accepted, and during last autumn, on the occasion of the last Royal visit to London and the consequent grand society functions, no one was more admired, more *fêted* and envied, than beautiful Mrs. Vanderdellen as she entered a drawing-room exquisitely gowned, and adorned with the parure, of which an empress might have been proud."

*(At this point you should attempt to solve the mystery for yourselves.)*

The man in the corner had paused, and was idly tapping his fingers on the marble-topped table of the A.B.C. shop.

"It was a curious story, wasn't it?" said the funny creature after a while. "More like a romance than a reality."

"It is absolutely bewildering," I said.

"What is your theory?" he asked.

"What about?" I retorted.

"Well, there are so many points, aren't there, of which only one is quite clear, namely, that the parure of black diamonds disappeared from Eton Chase, Chislehurst, on July 5th, 1902, and that the next time they were seen they were on the neck and head of Mrs. Vanderdellen, the widow of one of the richest men of modern times, whilst the story of how her husband came by them was to all intents and purposes *legally* disbelieved."



"Then," I argued, "the only logical conclusion to arrive at in all this is that the Black Diamonds owned by His Majesty the King of 'Bohemia' were not unique, and that Mr. Vanderdellen bought some duplicate ones."

"If you knew anything about diamonds," he said irritably, "you would also know that your statement is an absurdity. There are no such things as 'duplicate' diamonds."

"Then what *is* the only logical conclusion to arrive at?" I retorted, for he had given up playing with the photos and was twisting and twining that bit of string as if his brain was contained inside it and he feared it might escape.

"Well, to me," he said, "the only logical conclusion of the affair is that the Black Diamonds which Mrs. Vanderdellen wore were the only and original ones belonging to the Crown of 'Bohemia.'"

"Then you think that a man in Mr. Vanderdellen's position would have been fool enough to buy gems worth £500,000 at the very moment when there was a hue and cry for them all over Europe?"

"No, I don't," he replied quietly.

"But then . . ." I began.

"No?" he repeated once again, as his long fingers completed knot number one in that eternal piece of string. "The Black Diamonds which Mrs. Vanderdellen wore were bought by her husband in all good faith from the mysterious vendor in Vienna, in March, 1902."

"Impossible," I retorted. "Her Majesty the Queen of 'Bohemia' wore them regularly during the months of May and June, and they were stolen from Eton Chase on July the 5th."

"Her Majesty the Queen of 'Bohemia' wore a parure of Black Diamonds during those months, and those certainly were stolen on July the 5th," he said excitedly; "but what was there to prove that *those* were the genuine stones?"

"Why! . . ." I ejaculated.

"Point number two," he said, jumping about like a monkey on a stick; "although Mr. Wilson was acknowledged to be innocent of the theft of the diamonds, isn't it strange that no one has ever been proved guilty of it?"

"But I don't understand . . ."

"Yet it is simple as daylight. I maintain that His Majesty the King of 'Bohemia' being short, very short, of money, decided to sell the celebrated Black Diamonds; to avoid all risks the stones are taken out of their settings, and a trusted and secret emissary is then deputed to find a possible purchaser; his

choice falls on the multi-millionaire Vanderdellen, who is travelling in Europe, is a noted collector of rare jewellery, and has a beautiful young wife—three attributes, you see, which make him a very likely purchaser.

"The emissary then seeks him out, and offers him the diamonds for sale. Mr. Vanderdellen at first hesitates, wondering how such valuable gems had come in the vendor's possession, but the bargain suggested by the latter—the three months during which the gems are to be held on trust by the purchaser—seems so fair and above board, that Mr. Vanderdellen's objections fall to the ground; he accepts the bargain, and three months later completes the purchase."

"But I don't understand," I repeated again, more bewildered than before. "You say the King of 'Bohemia' sold the loose gems originally to Mr. Vanderdellen; then, what about the parure worn by the Queen and offered for sale to Mr. and Mrs. Wilson? What about the theft at Eton Chase?"

"Point number three," he shrieked excitedly, as another series of complicated knots went to join its fellows. "I told you that the King of 'Bohemia' was *very* short of money, every one knows *that*. He sells the Black Diamonds to Mr. Vanderdellen, but before he does it, he causes duplicates of them to be made, but this time in exquisite, beautiful, perfect Parisian imitation, and has these mounted into the original settings by some trusted man who you may be sure was well paid to hold his tongue. Then it is given out that the parure is for sale; a purchaser is found, and a few days later the false diamonds are stolen."

"By whom?"

"By the King of 'Bohemia's' valued and trusted friend, who has helped in the little piece of villainy throughout; it is he who drops a rope ladder through Her Majesty's bedroom window on to the terrace below, and then hands the imitation parure to his Royal master, who sees to its complete destruction and disappearance. Then there is a hue and cry for the *real* stones, and after a year or so they are found on the person of a lady, who is legally forced to give them up. And thus His Majesty the King of 'Bohemia' got one solid million for the Black Diamonds, instead of half that sum, for if Mrs. Vanderdellen had not repurchased the jewels, someone else would have done so."

And he was gone, leaving me to gaze at the pictures of three lovely women, and wondering if indeed it was the Royal lady herself who could best solve the mystery of who stole the Black Diamonds.