
Diamonds & Dust
A Victorian Murder Mystery

Carol Hedges

Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1)

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This edition by Little G Books (January 2016)

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Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1)
this book to @carolJhedges.

For Martyn, Hannah and Archie

About the Author

Carol Hedges is the successful British author of 11 books for teenagers and young adults. Her writing has received much critical acclaim, and her novel Jigsaw was shortlisted for the Angus Book Award and longlisted for the Carnegie Medal.

Carol was born in Hertfordshire, and after university, where she gained a BA (Hons.) in English Literature & Archaeology, she trained as Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) a children's librarian. She worked for the London Borough of Camden for many years subsequently re-training as a secondary school teacher when her daughter was born.

Carol still lives and writes in Hertfordshire. She is a local activist and green campaigner, and the proud owner of a customised 1988 pink 2CV.

Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) is her first adult novel.

Also by Carol Hedges:

Honour & Obey

Death & Dominion

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to David Baird, friend and graphic designer, for a superb cover, and to Alison and Andrew French for their invaluable help with this edition.

To the following people, who always encourage and support me: Juliet, Lynn, Hap, the two Sues, Richard, Ros, Val, Jo, Anne, Brenda and Sheila, not forgetting numerous friends on Twitter and Facebook... many thanks.

Most of all, I owe a debt that is un-payable to all those wonderful Victorian authors whose work I have shamelessly plundered, paraphrased *Diamonds & Dust* (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) and pastiched. Without them, this book would never have been written. I thank them, albeit posthumously.

Diamonds & Dust

A Victorian Murder Mystery

“I behold Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) London: a Human
awful

wonder of God.”

Wm.Blake, Albion

London, 1860. Dream world of pain and pleasure, of fantasy and phantom. It is midnight, a full moon and a cold mist rising up from the river. Mist ghosts the masts of the sloops and Russian brigs waiting to unload their cargo. Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) Mist curls itself possessively around sooty chimneys and rooftops. Mist gently fingers its way into fetid courts and alleyways, and the crammed tenements where myriad Londoners toss and turn in troubled sleep.

Not everyone is sleeping, though, in this vast city of many million souls. Strange shapes of men and women drift through the misty streets like ghostly apparitions. They gather outside dim gaslit haunts. Street corners are beset by night prowlers. The devil slips a diamond ring on his taloned finger, sticks a pin Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) in his shirt front and steps out to take the air.

Look more closely. A solitary man is crossing Westminster Bridge. Tall and broad-shouldered, he wears a top hat, and an overcoat with wide lapels and a velvet collar. It is buttoned up against the chill night air.

The man walks with purpose, as if on his way to an important rendezvous. A gas lamp throws its shifting radiance upon the upper planes of his face. The lower part of his face is covered by a knitted scarf, protection from the stinking miasma that rises from the oozing mud.

Footsteps approach from behind him. Someone else is also crossing the bridge, moving with incredible speed. Darkness clings to a misty outline, pools around feet that step from shadow into light and back into shadow. The figure stretches out a black-gloved hand. Touches the man upon the left shoulder.

He turns. Freezes. Then cowers back, uttering a low cry of horror and covering his face with his arms. There is the sound Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) of

blows being struck, the ripping of flesh, the thud of something heavy hitting the ground. Then silence.

Running steps re-cross the bridge and echo into the distance. The man remains, lying motionless in the gutter, blood pooling beneath his head. A gas lamp flickers momentarily overhead, and goes out.

Morning arrives, bringing smoggy clouds that envelop the city like a grey shroud. In a house in St John's Wood, a young woman descends the stairs and enters Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) the morning room. Her name is Josephine King. She is eighteen years old and stands upon the threshold of life. Her whole future lies before her. And so, currently, does her breakfast.

Filling her plate with bacon and scrambled eggs, she carries it to the dining table, where she sits down and unfolds a starched white linen napkin. As if on cue, a prim white-aproned maid knocks and enters, carrying a shiny silver coffee pot. Steam curls fragrantly from its spout.

“Coffee, miss?” she inquires.

“Yes please, Annie.”

Josephine King begins eating her breakfast with relish. Breakfast at the Bertha Helstone Institute for Orphaned Clergy Daughters had consisted of a bowl of porridge and a mug of watered-down milk. At the Bertha Helstone Institute for Orphaned Clergy Daughters, feeding the soul was considered far more important than feeding the body.

In winter, the milk had lumps of ice floating in it. The porridge was frequently burnt, but they were still expected to eat it. Now she bites into thickly-buttered toast, and recalls the many times she had lain awake in the cold dark dormitory, shivering under her thin blanket, and dreaming about hot roast potatoes and white bread.

She'd probably Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) still be there, learning plain sewing and passages from the Bible in preparation for life as a governess, or a lady's companion, had it not been for Uncle Herbert King. Wonderful Uncle Herbert King, who had run away from England to seek his fortune, and having found it, had come back and rescued her.

Josephine finishes her breakfast and returns Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) to her room. She can Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) still scarcely believe she actually possesses a whole room of her own.

Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) It is furnished in the most delightful fashion. There is a writing-desk, a dressing-table with a looking-glass, and a bright chintz-covered sofa.

The walls are painted soft dove–grey, and the floor is spread with Indian matting in maize colour and red. Patterned chintz curtains frame the windows, and on the walls there are crayon sketches of exotic foreign scenes.

She opens the top drawer of her writing-desk and takes out a faded leather- covered book. It is her childhood diary, given to Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) her by Mrs Sams, the woman she met on board the coach taking her to the Bertha Helstone Institute for Orphaned Clergy Daughters.

She recalls Mrs Sams saying to her that a diary was exactly like a best friend. Back then, she had badly needed a best friend. She had lost both her beloved missionary parents to Indian cholera. Barely understanding the implications of what had happened, and only seven years old, she'd been thrust, alone and bewildered, into a world that did not know what to do with her. And did not very much care.

Turning to the first page, she reads the familiar words:

“Arrived at my new school.”

So few words for such a momentous event that began with a slow, backside-numbing journey that seemed to Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) go on forever, night and day blurring into one, until the coach ceased to rattle over stony town streets, entering instead a strange landscape of great black hills heaving up to the horizon, with dark woods and deep valleys.

Once more, as if in a waking dream, she hears the wild wind rushing among the trees, sees herself set down from the carriage, Diamonds & Dust (Victorian Murder Mystery: Stride & Cully Book 1) her little tin trunk at her feet. She is utterly alone, standing in front of the iron gates of the austere grey building that housed the Bertha Helstone Institute for Orphaned Clergy Daughters.

She turns the page.

I HATE THIS PLACE

is scrawled in big capital letters.

Followed by:

Ran away. Had to learn chapter of Leviticus by HART as punishment.

Ah yes. The punishments. They were very good at punishments at the Bertha Helstone Institute, she remembers. Learning passages of scripture was a favourite, closely followed by being slapped or beaten with a birch-twig rod.

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