

The KING of DIAMONDS.

By Louis Tracy.

Author of "Wings of the Morning," "The Pillar of Light," Etc.

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CHAPTER IV.

THE keen, strong March wind soon blew the clouds from his brain. He did not hurry toward Hatton Garden. He sauntered, rather, with his right hand clinched on the tiny parcel in his pocket, the parcel which had suddenly been endowed with such magic potentialities. It was the instinct to guard a treasure of great value that led to this involuntary action. He was preoccupied, disturbed, vaguely striving to grasp a vision that seemed to elude his exact comprehension.

What did it all mean? Was it really possible that he, Philip Anson, orphaned, beggared, practically a starving tramp, should have the riches of Golconda showered upon him in this mad fashion? If the small stone he had shown to the jeweler were worth hundreds, then some of those in the paper were worth thousands, while as for the stone in the back yard of his house—well, imagination boggled at the effort to appraise it. The thought begot a sense of caution, of reserve, of well reasoned determination not to reveal his secret to anybody. Perhaps it would be best not to take Messrs. Isaacstein & Co. wholly into his confidence. He would simply show them the stone he had exhibited to Mr. Wilson and take the best price they offered. Then, with the money in his possession, he could effect a much needed change in his appearance, visit them again, and gradually increase his supply of diamonds until he had obtained more money than he could possibly spend during many years.

Above all else was it necessary that his meteor should be removed to a safer place than Johnson's Mews. Philip had scruples about appropriating it. Lords of the manor and crown rights he had never heard of.

His mother, watching his every action from some Elysian height, had sent the diamond loaded messenger as a token of her love and care. It was his, and no man should rob him of it. It behooved him to be sparing of explanations and sturdy in defense of his property.

A good deal depended on the forthcoming interview, and he wished he could convert a small fraction of the wealth in his pocket into a few honest pennies with the king's head on them. The excitement and exercise had made him hungry again. His breakfast was not of ample proportions, and his meals of yesterday had been of the scantiest. It would be well to face the diamond merchants with the easy confidence that springs from a satisfied appetite. Yet how to manage it? He was sorry now he had not borrowed a sixpence from O'Brien. The old soldier would certainly have lent it to him. He even thought of returning to the Mile End road to secure the loan, but he happened to remember that the day was Saturday, and it was probable that the Hatton Garden offices would close early. It was then nearly 11 o'clock, and he could not risk the delay of the long, double journey.

At that instant a savory smell was wafted to him. He was passing a small restaurant where sausages and onions sizzled gratefully in large tin trays and pork chops lay in inviting prodigality amid rich, brown gravy. The proprietor, a portly and greasy man with bald head and side whiskers, was standing at the door exchanging views as to business with his next door neighbor, a greengrocer. Philip, bold in the knowledge of his wealth, resolved to try what he could achieve on credit.

He walked up to the pair. "I have not got any money just now," he said to the restaurant keeper, "but if you will let me have something to eat I will gladly come back this afternoon and pay you double."

Neither man spoke at first. Philip was always unconscious of the quaint discrepancy between his style of speech and his attire. He used to resent bitterly the astonishment exhibited by strangers, but today he was far removed above these considerations, and he backed his request with a pleasant smile.

The fat man grew apoplectic and turned his eyes to the sky. "Well, I'm—," he spluttered. The greengrocer laughed, and Philip blushed.

"Do you refuse?" he said, with his downright manner and direct stare. "Well, of all the cool cheek!" The stout person's feelings were too much for him. He could find no other words. "It is a fair offer," persisted the boy. "You don't think I mean to swindle you, surely?"

"Well, there! I never did!" But the greengrocer intervened. "You're a sharp lad," he guffawed. "D'ye want a job?"

"No," was the short reply. "I want something to eat."

"Dash my buttons, an' you're a likely sort of kid to get it in. In you go. I'll pay the bill. Lord lumme, it'll do me good to see you."

"Mr. Judd, are you mad?" demanded his neighbor, whose breath had returned to him.

"Not a bit of it. The bloomin' kid can't get through a bob's worth if he bursts himself. 'Ere, I'll bet you two bob 'e pays up."

"Done! Walk in, sir. We'll you be pleased to 'ave, sir?"

Philip's indignation at the restaurant keeper's sarcasm yielded to his wish to see him annihilated later in the day. Moreover, the sausages really smelt excellently, and he was now ravenous. He entered the shop and gave his orders with a quiet dignity that astounded the proprietor and hugely delighted the greengrocer, who, in the intervals of business, kept peeping at him through the window. Philip ate steadily, and the bill amounted to ninepence, which his ally paid cheerfully.

The boy held out his hand. "Thank you, Mr. Judd," he said frankly. "I will return without fail. I will not insult you by offering more than the amount you have advanced for me, but some day I may be able to render you good service in repayment."

Then he walked off toward the viaduct steps, and Mr. Judd looked after him. "Talks like a little gentleman, 'e does. If my little Jimmie 'ad lived 'e would ha' bin just about his age. Lord lumme, I 'ope the lad turns up again, an' not for the sake of the bloomin' ninepence, neither. Tomatoes, num? Yes'm. Fresh in this mornin'."

After crossing Holborn viaduct Philip stood for a little while gazing into the showroom of a motor agency. It was not that he was interested in Panhard or De Dion cars, then but little known to the general public in England, but rather that he wished to rehearse carefully the programme to be followed with Mr. Isaacstein. With a sagacity unlooked for in one of his years, he decided that the meteor should not be mentioned at all. Of course the diamond merchant would instantly recognize the stone as a meteoric diamond and would demand its earthly pedigree. Philip resolved to adhere to the simple statement that it was his own property and that any reasonable inquiry might be made in all quarters where meteoric diamonds were obtainable as to whether or not such a stone was missing. Meanwhile he could obtain from Mr. Isaacstein a receipt acknowledging its custody and a small advance of money far below its real worth, leaving the completion of the transaction until a later date. The question of giving or withholding his address if it were asked for was a difficult one to settle offhand. Perhaps the course of events would permit him to keep Johnson's Mews altogether out of the record, and a more reputable habitation would be provided once he had the requisite funds.

Thinking he had successfully tackled all the problems that would demand solution, Philip wasted no more time. He entered Hatton Garden and had not gone past many of its dingy houses until he saw a large brass plate bearing the legend, "Isaacstein & Co., Diamond Merchants, Kimberley, Amsterdam and London."

He entered the office and was instantly confronted by a big nosed youth who surveyed him through a grille with an arched opening in it to admit letters and small parcels. "Is Mr. Isaacstein in?" said Philip.

"Oah, yess," grinned the other. "Will you kindly tell him I wish to see him?"

"Oah, yess." There was a joke lurking somewhere in the atmosphere, but the young man had not caught its drift yet. The gaunt and unkempt visitor was evidently burlesquing the accent of such gentle people as came to the office on business.

Philip waited a few seconds. The boy behind the grille filled in the interval by copying an address into the stamp book.

"Why do you not tell Mr. Isaacstein I am here?" he said at last. "Oah, yess. You'll be funny, eh?" The other smirked over the hidden humor of the situation, and Philip understood that if he would see the great man of the firm he must adopt a more emphatic tone.

"I had better warn you that Mr. Wilson, of Messrs. Grant & Sons, Ludgate Hill, sent me here to see Mr. Isaacstein. Am I to go back to Mr. Wilson and say that the office boy refuses to admit me?"

There was a sting in the description, coming from such a speaker. "Look 'ere," was the angry retort. "Go away und blay, vil you? I'm plizzy."

Then Philip reached quickly through the little arch, grabbed a handful of shirt, tie and waistcoat and dragged the big nose and thick lips violently against the wires of the grille.

"Will you do what I ask or shall I try and pull you through?" he said quietly.

But the boy's ready yell brought two clerks running, and a door was thrown open. Philip released his opponent and instantly explained his action. One of the clerks, an elderly man, looked a little deeper than the boy's ragged garments, and the mention of Mr. Wilson's name procured him a hearing.

Moreover, he had previous experience of the youthful janitor's methods. With a cuff on the ear, this injured personage was bidden to go upstairs and say that Mr. Wilson had sent a boy to see Mr. Isaacstein. The added insult came when he was compelled to usher Philip to a waiting room.

Soon a clerk entered. He was visibly astonished by the appearance of Mr. Wilson's messenger, and so was Mr. Isaacstein when Philip was paraded before him in a spacious apartment filled with glass cases and tables, at which several assistants were seated.

"What the deuce?" he began, but checked himself. "What does Mr. Wilson want?" he went on. Evidently his Ludgate Hill acquaintance was useful to Philip.

"He wants nothing, sir," said Philip. "He sent me to see you on a matter of business. It is of a private nature. Can you give me a few minutes alone?"

Isaacstein was a big headed, big shouldered man, tapering to a small point at his feet. He looked absurdly like a top, and surprise or emotion of any sort caused him to sway gently. He swayed now, and every clerk looked up, expecting him to fall bodily on to the urchin with the refined utterance who had dared penetrate into the potentate's office with such a request.

Kimberley, Amsterdam and London combined to lend effect to Isaacstein's wit when he said:

"Is this a joke?"

All the clerks guffawed in chorus. Fortunately Isaacstein was in a good humor. He had just purchased a pearl for £250 which he would sell to Lady Somebody for £800 to match another in an earring.

"It appears to be," said Philip when the merriment had subsided.

For some reason the boy's grave, earnest eyes conquered the big little man's amused scrutiny.

"Now, boy, be quick. What is it?" he said testily. And every clerk bent to his task.

"I have told you, sir. I wish to have a few minutes' conversation with you with regard to business of an important nature."

"You say Mr. Wilson sent you—Mr. Wilson of Grant & Sons?"

"Yes, sir."

Isaacstein yielded to amazed curiosity. "Step in here," he said and led the way to his private office, surprising himself as well as his assistants by this concession.

Philip closed the door, and Isaacstein turned sharply at the sound, but the boy gave him no time to frame a question.

"I want you to buy this," he said, handing over the diamond.

Isaacstein took it and gave it one critical glance. He began to wobble again.

"Do you mean to say Mr. Wilson sent you to dispose of this stone to me?" he demanded.

"Not exactly, sir. I showed it to him, and he recommended me to come to you."

"Ah, I see. Sit down there," indicating a chair near the door. The diamond merchant himself sat at his desk, but they were both in full view of each other.

"Where did you get it?" he asked.

"I found it."

"Quite so. But where?"

"At this moment I do not wish to go into details, but it is mine, mine only, and I am quite willing that you should

buy it, eh? You won't tell me where you got it?"

"I may later if you continue to deal with me as honestly as you have done already."

Isaacstein moved on his seat. Even in a chair he wanted to wobble. There was a slight pause.

"Have you any more like this stone?" I suppose not, eh?"

"Yes; I have many more."

"Eh? What? Boy, do you know what you are saying?"

"No doubt you are surprised, sir, but not more than I am myself. Yet, it is true. I have some—as big again."

Philip, in his eagerness, nearly forgot his resolution to advance slowly. How the diamond merchant would shake if only he could see some of the white pebbles in the meteor.

"As big again! Where are they?"

The chair was creaking now with the rhythmic swaying of its occupant. "Where this one came from, Mr. Isaacstein."

Philip smiled. He could not tell how it happened, but he felt that he was the intellectual superior of the man who sat there glowering at him so intently. Already the boy began to grasp dimly the reality of the power which enormous wealth would give him. Such people as this man and his satellites would be mere automata in the affairs of his life, important enough in a sense, with the importance of a stamp for a letter or a railway ticket for a journey, but governed and controlled utterly by the greater personage who could unlock the door of the treasure house.

For the first time Philip wished he was older, bigger, more experienced. He even found himself beginning to wonder what he should do until he reached man's estate. He sighed.

Isaacstein was watching him closely, trying to solve the puzzle by the aid of each trick and dodge known in a trade which lends itself to acute roguery of every description. The look of unconscious anxiety, of mental weariness on Philip's face seemed to clear away his doubts. He chuckled thickly.

"How many, now," he murmured. "Ten, twenty—of assorted sizes, eh?"

"Far more! Far more! Be content with what I tell you today, Mr. Isaacstein. I said my business was important. When you are better acquainted with me I think you will find it sufficiently valuable to occupy the whole of your time."

Philip was ever on the verge of bursting out into confidences. His secret was too vast, too overpowering, for a boy of fifteen. He wanted the knowledge and the trust of an older man. He did not realize that the merchant, beginning by regarding him as a thief, was now veering round to the opinion that he was a lunatic, for it is known to most men that the values of diamonds increase out of all proportion to their weight. While a one carat stone is worth, roughly speaking, £10, a twenty carat gem of the same purity is worth any sum beyond £2,000, and the diamond Philip had submitted for inspection would probably cut into ten or twelve carats of fine luster. To speak therefore of an abundance of larger and finer stones was a simple absurdity. The De Beers company alone could use such a figure of speech, and even then only at isolated dates in its history.

The boy, with his eyes steadfastly fixed on the man's face and yet with a distant expression in them that paid slight heed to the waves of emotion exhibited by the heavy cheeks and pursed up mouth, awaited some final utterance on the part of his questioner. Surely he had said sufficient to make this man keenly alive to the commercial value of the "business" he offered. Under the conditions Isaacstein could not refuse to give him sufficient money to meet his immediate wants.

The man, seemingly at a loss for words, bent again over the stone. He was scrutinizing it closely when a heavy tread crossed the outer showroom and the door was flung open.

"I have sent for you, constable," he cried excitedly. "He came here ten minutes ago and offered for sale a very valuable diamond so rare and worth so much that he must have stolen it."

Philip, too, sprang up. "It is a lie!" he shouted. "How dare you say such a thing when I have told you that it is mine!"

The policeman collared him by the shoulder.

"Steady, my young spark," he said. "Mr. Isaacstein knows what he is about, and I don't suppose he is very far wrong this time. Do you know the boy, sir?" he went on.

Isaacstein gave a voluble and accurate summary of Philip's statements. Each moment the policeman's grip became firmer. Evidently the boy was the mere agent of a gang of thieves, though it was beyond comprehension that any one short of an idiot should choose an emissary with broken boots and ragged clothing in order to effect a deal with the leading house in Hatton Garden.

Philip listened to the recital in dumb agony. His face was deathly pale, and his eyes glowed with the rage and shame that filled his soul. So the man had been playing with him, merely fooling him until some secret signal by an electric bell had sent a messenger flying for the police. His dream of wealth would end in the jail, his fairy oasis would be a felon's cell. Very well, be it so. If he could help it, not all the policemen in London should read his secret from him. With a sudden glow of fiery satisfaction he remembered that his clothing contained no clew to his address, and he had not given his name at either Ludgate Hill or Hatton Garden. How long could they keep him a prisoner? Would others find his meteor and rob him of his mother's gift? In less than a fortnight men would come to tear down the buildings in Johnson's Mews. Well, it mattered not. The courage of de-

spair which nerved him the previous night came to his aid again. He would defy them all, careless of consequence. The policeman was saying:

"It's a queer affair, sir. Did he really say he had lots more of 'em?"

"Yes, yes! Do you think I am romancing? Perhaps they are in his possession now."

"Have you any more of these stones, boy?"

Philip, with lips tensely set, was desperately cool again. He moved his arm, and the constable's grasp tightened.

"You are hurting me," said the boy. "I merely wish to put my hand in my pocket. Are you afraid of me that you hold me so fast?"

The policeman, like the rest, did not fail to notice Philip's dictation. The scornful superiority of his words, the challenge of the final question, took him aback. He relaxed his grip and grinned confusedly.

Philip instantly produced his paper of diamonds and opened it widely so that all the stones could be seen. He handed the parcel to the policeman.

"Take good care of them, constable," he said. "Judging from results, they would not be safe in that man's hands."

But Isaacstein did not hear the insult. When he saw the collection he nearly lost his senses. What had he done? Was he or the boy mad? Vexes stood out on his forehead, and he wobbled so fearfully that he clutched the desk for support. A scarecrow of a boy wandering about London with thousands of pounds' worth of diamonds in his pocket wrapped up in a piece of newspaper like so many sweets! There were not any meteoric diamonds of such value in all the museums and private collections in the world. He began to perspire. Even the policeman was astounded, quite as much at being called "constable" by Philip as by the mean appearance of articles presumably of great value.

"This is a rum go. What do you make of it, Mr. Isaacstein?" he said.

The query restored Isaacstein's wits. After all, here was the law speaking. It would have been the wildest folly for a man of his position to dabble in this mysterious transaction.

With a great effort he forced himself to speak.

"Lock him up instantly. This matter must be fully inquired into. And do be careful of that parcel, constable. Where do you take him? To the Bridewell station? I will follow you in a cab in five minutes."

So Philip, handcuffed, was marched down the stairs past the gratified office boy and out into the street.

As for Isaacstein, he required brandy, and not a little, before he felt able to follow.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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No. 31—Local Freight..... 12:24 p. m.
No. 31—Fast Mail..... 4:41 a. m.

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No. 4—Mail, (daily)..... 4:41 a. m.
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No. 32—Fast Mail, (daily)..... 9:25 a. m.
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No. 30—Cin. to Chicago Vesp. Mail..... 2:04 p. m.
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