

# The KING of DIAMONDS.

By Louis Tracy.

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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 this 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, an orphan, beggarly, 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 laden 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'll—" 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. "Dye 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 too. 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. Wot'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 Victoria 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, mum? 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 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 and blay, vil you? I'm pissy."

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. Phil 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 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 appearance.

"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



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

make every inquiry to satisfy yourself that it was not stolen. I suppose that is what you fear."

Sheer wonder kept the man silent for a space.

"Do you know its value?" he said, with a sudden snap.

"Mr. Wilson told me it was worth several hundreds of pounds."

"Did he really?"

"Yes. He said you would treat me quite fairly, so I wish you to advance me a few pounds until you have decided upon its real price. You see, sir, I am very poor, and my present appearance creates an unfavorable impression."

"Still, I am telling you the absolute truth, and I show my confidence in you and in my own case by offering to leave the diamond with you on your receipt, together with a small sum of money."

Philip thought he was getting on very well. Isaacstein's large eyes bulged at him, and speech came but slowly. He leaned forward and rummaged among some papers. Then he opened a drawer and produced a magnifying glass, with which he focused the diamond.

"Yes; it is worth £600 or £700," he announced, "but it will be some time before I can speak accurately as to its value. I think it may be flawless, but that can only be determined when it is cut."

Philip's heart throbbed when he heard the estimate.

"Then I can have a few pounds"—he commenced.

"Steady! You are not in such a

hurry, 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—two-thirds 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.

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