

The KING of DIAMONDS.

By Louis Tracy,
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CHAPTER V.

IN after years Philip never forgot the shame of that march through the staring streets. The everlasting idlers of London's busiest thoroughfares gathered around the policeman and his prisoner with grinning callousness.

"Wot's 'e bin a-doin' of?"

"Nicked a lady's purse, eh?"

"Naw! Bin ticklin' the till, more like."

"Bill-me, don't 'e look sick!"

They ran and buzzed around him like wasps, stinging most bitterly with coarse words and coarser laughter. An omnibus slowed its pace to let them cross the road, and Philip knew that the people on top craned their necks to have a good look at him. When nearing the viaduct steps, the policeman growled something at the pursuing crowd. Another constable strode rapidly to the entrance and cut off the loafers, sternly advising them to find some other destination. But the respite was a brief one. The pair reached Farringdon street and had barely attracted attention before they passed the restaurant where Philip had lunched. The hour was yet early for midday customers, and the baldheaded proprietor saw them coming. He rushed out. The greengrocer, too, turned from his wares and joined in the exclamations of his friend at this speedy denouement of the trivial incident of twenty minutes earlier.

The restaurant keeper was made jubilant by this dramatic vindication of the accuracy of his judgment.

"The thievin' young scamp!" he ejaculated. "That's right, Mr. Policeman. Lock 'im up. 'E's a reg'lar wrong 'un."

The constable stopped. "Hello!" he said. "Do you know him?"

"I should think I did. 'E kem 'ere just now an' obtained a good blowout on false pretences, an'—"

"Old 'ard," put in the greengrocer, "that's not quite the ticket. 'E asked you to trust 'im, but you wouldn't."

The stout man gurgled.

"Not me. I know 'is sort. But 'e 'ad you a fair treat, Billy."

"Mebbe, an' mebbe not. 'Ennyhow, two bob won't break me, an' I'm sorry for the kid. Wot's 'e done, Mr. Policeman?"

Mr. Judd was nettled, yet unwilling to acknowledge he was wholly wrong.

"Stole a heap of diamonds. Do either of you know him?"

"Never saw him afore this mornin'."

"Never bin in my 'ouse before."

"Then come along," and Philip was tugged onward, but not before he found courage to say:

"Thank you once more, Mr. Judd. I will keep my word, never fear."

"What are you thanking him for?" said the constable.

"For believing in me," was the curt answer.

The policeman tried to extract some meaning from the words, but failed. He privately admitted that it was an extraordinary affair. How came a boy who spoke like a gentleman and was dressed like a street arab to be wandering about London with a pocketful of diamonds and admitted to the private office of the chief diamond merchant in Hatton Garden? He gave it up, but silently thanked the stars which connected him with an important case.

At last Philip's Via Dolorosa ended in the Bridewell police station. He was paraded before the inspector in charge, a functionary who would not have exhibited any surprise had the German emperor been brought before him charged with shoplifting.

He opened a huge ledger, tried if his pen would make a hair stroke on a piece of paper and said laconically:

"Name?"

No answer from the prisoner, followed by euphatic demands from inspector and constable, the former volunteering the information that to refuse your name and address was in itself an offense against the law.

Philip's sangfroid was coming to his aid. The horror of his passage through the gaping mob had cauterized all other sentiments, and he now said that if he would preserve his incognito he must adopt a ruse.

"Philip Morland," he said doggedly when the inspector asked him his name for the last time before recording a definite refusal.

"Philip Morland?" It sounded curiously familiar in his ears. His mother was a Miss Morland prior to her marriage, but he had not noticed the odd coincidence that he should have been christened after the "Sir Philip" of the packet of letters so fortunately left behind that morning.

"Address?"

"Park lane."

The inspector began to write before the absurdity of the reply dawned on him. He stopped.

"Is your mother a caretaker there or your father employed in a mews?"

"My father and mother are dead."

"Then will you kindly inform us what number in Park lane you live at?"

"I have not determined that as yet. I intend to buy a house there."

Some constables lounging about the office laughed, and the inspector, incensed out of his routine habits, shouted angrily:

"This is no place for joking, boy. Answer me properly or it will be worse for you."

"I have answered you quite properly. The constable who brought me here has in his possession diamonds worth many thousands of pounds belonging to me. I own a hundred times as many. Surely I can buy a house in Park lane if I like."

The inspector was staggered by this well bred insolence. He was searching for some crushing legal threat that would frighten the boy into a state of due humility when Mr. Isaacstein entered.

The Hatton Garden magnate again related the circumstances attending Philip's arrest, and the inspector promptly asked:

"What charge shall I enter? You gave him into custody. Do you think he has stolen the diamonds?"

Isaacstein had been thinking hard during a short cab drive. His reply was unexpectedly frank.

"He could not have stolen what never existed. There is no such known

collection of meteoric diamonds in the world."

"But there must be, because they are here."

By this time the parcel of dirty white stones was lying open on the counter, and both merchant and policeman were gazing at them intently. There was a nettling logic in the inspector's retort.

"I cannot answer riddles," said Isaacstein shortly. "I can only state the facts. If any other man in the city of London is a higher authority on diamonds than I, go to him and ask his opinion."

"Mr. Isaacstein is right," interposed Philip. "No one else owns diamonds like mine. No one else can obtain them. I have robbed no man. Give me my diamonds and let me go."

The inspector laughed officially. He gazed intently at Philip and then sought illumination from Isaacstein's perturbed countenance, but Isaacstein was moodily examining the contents of the paper and turning over both the stones and the scraps of iron with an air of profound mystification.

"I'll tell you what," said the inspector jubilantly after a slight pause. "We will charge him with being in unlawful possession of certain diamonds, supposed to have been stolen. He has given me a false name and a silly address. Park lane, the young imp said he lived in."

"A man in your position ought to be more accurate," interposed Philip. "I did not say I lived in Park lane. I told you I intended to buy a house there."

Seldom indeed were the minor details of the police station bearded in this fashion, and by a callow youth, but the inspector was making the copperplate hair strokes which had gained him promotion, and his brain had gone back to its normal dullness.

"I will just see if we cannot bring him before a magistrate at once," he said, addressing Mr. Isaacstein. "Can you make it convenient to attend the court within an hour, sir? Then we will get a week's remand, and we will soon find out—"

"A week's remand!" Philip became white again, and those large eyes of his began to burn. "What have I done?"

"Silence! Search him carefully and take him to the cells."

The boy turned despairingly to Isaacstein.

"Mr. Isaacstein," he said, with a pitiful break in his voice, "why do you let them do this thing? You are a rich man and well known. Tell them they are wrong."

But Isaacstein was wabbling now in a renewed state of excitement.

"What can I do, boy?" he vociferated, almost hysterically. "You must say where you got these stones, and then perhaps you can clear up everything."

Philip's lips met in a thin seam. "I will never tell you," he answered. And not another word would he utter.

They searched him and found nothing in his pockets save a key, a broken knife, some bits of string neatly coiled and a couple of buttons. He spent the next hour miserably in a white-washed cell. He refused some coffee and bread brought to him at 12 o'clock, and this was the only sentient break in a wild jumble of conflicting thoughts.

The idea came to him that he must be dreaming—that soon he must be awoken amid the familiar surroundings of Johnson's Mews. To convince himself that this was not so, he reviewed the history of the preceding twenty-four hours. At that time yesterday he was going to Fleet street with a capital of ninepence to buy a quire of newspapers. He remembered where he had sold each of the five copies, where he bought a penny bun and how he came to lose his stock and get cuffed into the bargain for rescuing a girl from an overturning carriage.

Then his mind reverted to his fixed resolve to hang himself and his stolid preparations for the last act in his young life's tragedy. Was that where the dream started or was the whole thing a definite reality, needing only a stout heart and unflinching purpose to carry him through triumphantly? Yes. That was it. "Be strong and brave and all will be well with you." Surely his mother had looked beyond the grave when she uttered her parting words. Perhaps if he lay down and closed his eyes he would see her. He always hoped to see her in his dreams, but never was the vision vouchsafed to him. Poor lad, he did not understand that his sleep was the sound sleep of health and innocence, when dreams if they come at all are but grotesque distortions of the simple facts of everyday existence. Only once had he dimly imagined her presence, and that was at a moment when his sane mind now refused to resurrect.

Nevertheless he was tired. Yielding to the conceit, he stretched himself on the wooden couch that ran along one side of his narrow cell.

Some one called to him, not unkindly. "Now, youngster, jump up. The van is here."

He was led through gloomy corridors and placed in a receptacle just large enough to hold him uncomfortably in a huge, lumbering vehicle. He thought he was the only occupant, having made a special call for his benefit.

After a rumbling journey through unseen streets he emerged into another walled in courtyard. He was led through more corridors and told to "skip lively" up a winding staircase. At the top he came out into a big room, with a well-like space in front of him, filled with a huge table, around which sat several gentlemen, among them Mr. Isaacstein, while on an elevated platform beyond was an elderly man, who wore eyeglasses and who wrote something in a book without looking up when Philip's name was called out.

A police inspector, whom Philip had not seen before, made a short statement and was followed by the constable who effected the arrest. His story was brief and correct, and then the inspector stated that Mr. Wilson of Grant & Sons, Ludgate Circus, would be called at the next hearing, as he—the inspector—would ask for a remand to enable inquiries to be made. Meanwhile Mr. Isaacstein of Hatton Garden had made it convenient to attend that day and would be pleased to give evidence if his worship desired to hear him.

"Certainly," said Mr. Abingdon, the magistrate. "This seems to be a somewhat peculiar case, and I will be glad if Mr. Isaacstein can throw any light upon it."

But Mr. Isaacstein could not do any such thing. He wound up a succinct account of Philip's visit and utterances by declaring that there was no collection of meteoric diamonds known to him from which such a remarkable set of stones could be stolen.

This emphatic statement impressed the magistrate.

"Let me see them," he said.

The parcel was handed up to him, and he examined its contents with obvious interest.

"Are you quite sure of their meteoric origin, Mr. Isaacstein?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Can you form any estimate of their probable value?"

"About £50,000!"

The reply startled the magistrate, and it sent a thrill through the court.

"Really! So much!" Mr. Abingdon was almost scared.

"If, after cutting, they turn out as well as I expect, that is a moderate estimate of their worth."

"I take it, from what you say, that meteoric diamonds are rare?"

Isaacstein closed his throat with a premonitory cough and bunched up his shoulders. A slight wobble was steadied by his stumpy hands on the rail of the witness box. He was really the greatest living authority on the subject, and he knew it.

"It is a common delusion among diamond miners that diamonds fall from the skies in meteoric showers," he said. "There is some sort of foundation for this mistaken view, as the stones are found in volcanic pipes or columns of diamantiferous material, and the crude idea is that gigantic meteors fell and plowed these deep holes, distributing diamonds in all directions as they passed. But the so called pipes are really the vents of extinct volcanoes. Ignorant people do not realize that the chemical composition of the earth does not differ greatly from that of the bodies which surround it in space, so that the same process of manufacture under high temperature and at great pressure which creates a diamond in a meteor has equal powers here. In a word, what has happened in the outer universe has also happened at Kimberley. Iron acts as the solvent during

the period of creation, so to speak. Then in the lapses of ages it oxidizes by the action of air or water and the diamonds remain."

The magistrate nodded.

"There are particles of a mineral that looks like iron among these stones?" he said.

The question gave Isaacstein time to draw a fresh supply of breath. Sure of his audience now, he proceeded more slowly.

"That is a certain proof of a meteoric source. A striking confirmation of the fact is supplied by a district in Arizona. Here, on a plain five miles in diameter, are scattered thousands of masses of metallic iron varying in weight from half a ton to a fraction of one ounce. An enormous meteoric shower fell there at some period, and near the center is a crater-like hole which suggests the impact of some very large body which buried itself in the earth. All mineralogists know the place as the Canyon Diablo, or Devil's gulch, and specimens of its ore are in every collection. Ordinary tools were spoiled and even emery wheels worn by some hard ingredient in the iron, and analysis has revealed the presence therein of three distinct forms of diamond—the ordinary stone, like those now before you, both transparent and black graphite and amorphous carbon—that is, carbon without crystallization."

"I gather that the diamantiferous material was present in the form of tiny particles and not in stones at all approaching these in size?" said Mr. Abingdon.

"Exactly. I have never either seen or heard of specimens like those. In 1886 a meteor fell in Russia and contained 1 per cent of diamond in a slightly metamorphosed state. In 1846 the Ava meteorite fell in Hungary, and it held crystalline graphite in the bright as well as the dark form. But, again, the distribution was well diffused and of slight commercial value. Sir William Crookes or any eminent chemist will bear me out in the assumption that the diamonds now before your eyes are absolutely matchless by the product of any recorded meteoric source."

Isaacstein, having delivered his little lecture, looked and felt important. The magistrate bent forward, with a pleasant smile.

"I am very much obliged to you for the highly interesting information you have given," he said. "One more question. The inevitable corollary of your evidence is that the boy now in the dock has either found a meteor or a meteoric deposit. Can you say if it is a matter of recent occurrence?"

"Judging by the appearance of the accompanying scraps of iron ore, I should say that they have been quite recently in a state of flux from heat. The silicates seem to be almost eliminated."

The magistrate was unquestionably puzzled. Queer incidents happen in police courts daily, and the most unexpected scientific and technical points are elucidated in the effort to secure an accurate comprehension of matters in dispute. But never during his long tenancy of the court had he been called on to deal with a case of this nature. He smiled in his perplexity.

"We all remember the copybook maxim, 'Let justice be done though the heavens fall,' he said, "but here it is clearly shown that the ideal is not easily reached."

Of course every one laughed, and the reporters pried pen and pencil with renewed activity. Here was a sensation with a vengeance—worth all the display it demanded in the evening papers. Headlines would whoop through a quarter of a column, and Philip's meteor again run through space.

The boy himself was apparently the most disinterested person present. While listening to Isaacstein, he again experienced the odd sensation of aloofness, of lofty domination, amid a commonplace and insignificant environment. The man was clever, of course, but his cleverness was that of the textbook, a dry record of fact which needed genius to illuminate the printed page. And these lawyers, reporters, policemen, with the vacuous background of loungers, the friends and bottle holders of thieves and drunkards—the magistrate, even, remote in his dignity and sense of power—what were they to him?—of no greater import than the paving stones of the streets to the pulsating life of London as it passed.

The magistrate glanced at Isaacstein and stroked his chin. Isaacstein gazed intently at the packet of diamonds and rubbed his sinuous nose. There was a deep silence in court, broken only by the occasional shuffle of feet among the audience at the back—a shuffle which stopped instantly when the steely glance of a policeman darted in that direction.

At last the magistrate seemed to make up his mind to a definite course of action.

"There is only one person present," he said, "who can throw light on this extraordinary case, and that is the boy himself."

He looked at Philip, and all eyes quickly turned toward the thin, tagged figure standing upright against the rail that shut him off from the well of the court. The professional people present noted that the magistrate did not allude to the strange looking youth as "the prisoner."

What was going to happen? Was this destitute urchin going to leave the court with diamonds in his pocket worth £50,000? Oddly enough, no one paid heed to Philip's boast that he owned far more than that amount. It was not he, but his packet of diamonds, that evoked wonder. And had not Isaacstein, the great merchant and expert, appraised them openly? Was it possible that those dirty white pebbles could be endowed with such potentiality? Fifty thousand pounds! There were men in the room, and not confined to the unwashed, whose palates dried and tongues swelled at the notion.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

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