

The KING of DIAMONDS.

By Louis Tracy.

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

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Gripping the reader fast with its tale of the astounding transformation, in one day, of a ragged London waif into the possessor of incalculable wealth, this story by Louis Tracy measures up fully to the standard of this romancer's other popular tales. In the unfolding of the story he depicts not merely the change in the hero's material circumstances, but the interesting development of his character. The stirring adventures in which Philip Anson became embroiled by reason of his suddenly acquired riches, literally sent to him from heaven, his loyalty to the girl friend of his childhood and his manly efforts to win her love, are among the many elements of a plot which is well known skill.

CHAPTER I.

"Is there no hope, doctor?" "Absolutely none—now."

"If she had gone to the—workhouse infirmary—would she have lived?"

The doctor paused. The gulp before that hateful word was not lost on him. He tried professional severity and bestowed some care on the buttoning of a glove.

"I am surprised," he said, "that an excellent woman like your mother should encourage your feelings of—repugnance toward—er—Confound it, boy, have you no relatives or friends?"

"No, sir. We are alone in the world."

"And hard up, eh?"

The boy dug a hand into a pocket with the stolid indifference of despair. He produced 2 shillings and some pennies. He poked out the silver, and the man reddened in protest.

"Don't be stupid, Philip. That is your name, is it not? When I want my fee I will ask for it. Your mother needs a nurse, wine, chicken broth. You are old enough to realize that a doctor practicing in a neighborhood like this might want such things himself and whistle for them. But in the—er—infirmary they are provided by the state."

"Would my mother have lived had she consented to be taken there a month ago?"

Again the man wondered at the stony persistence of the questioner, a fearless looking, active boy of fifteen, attired in worn clothes too small for him and wearing an old pair of boots several sizes too large. The strong, young face, pinched with vigils and privations; the large, earnest eyes, heavy with unshed tears; the lips, quivering in their resolute compression over a chin that indicated great strength of character, appealed far more to the doctor than the whimpering terror with which the children of the poor usually meet the grim vision of death.

The wrestle with the glove ceased, and a kindly hand rested on Philip's shoulder.

"No," came the quiet answer. "May God help you, she would not have lived."

"God does not help anybody," was the amazing retort.

The doctor was shocked, visibly so. "That is a foolish and wicked statement," he said sternly. "Do not let your mother hear such awful words. She has lived and will die a true Christian. I have never met a woman of greater natural charm and real piety. She has suffered so much that she merits the life eternal. It is a reward, not a punishment. Cast away these terrible thoughts. Go, rather, and kneel by her side in prayer."

For an instant the great brown eyes blazed fiercely at him.

"Am I to pray that my mother shall be taken from me?"

"Even that if it be God's will."

The gleam of passion yielded to utter helplessness. The boy again brought forth his tiny store of money.

"Surely," he said, "I can buy some small amount of wine. In the shops they sell things in bins that make chicken broth, don't they? I have a fire and a kettle. Would you mind telling me?"

"There, there! You go to your mother and endeavor to cheer her up. I will see what I can do. What! I must argue with me? Go it once. I insist. Listen. She is calling for you."

In that poor tenement there were no secrets. A rickety staircase, crudely built against the retaining wall of the only living room on the ground floor, led steeply to an apartment above and culminated in an opening that suggested a trapdoor. The walls, roughly paneled, were well provided with shelves and pegs. The back door was fastened with a latch, a contrivance rarely seen in the London of today. The front window looked out into a badly paved court by tumbledown stables. A small yard darkened by lofty walls. Although little more than a stone's throw removed from the busy Mile End road, the place was singularly quiet. It was already dead and only waited the coming of man with

pickaxes and crowbars to sweep away the ruins.

The boy heard his mother whispered rather than spoken. The sound galvanized him into consciousness.

"Doctor," he said earnestly, "you will come back?"

"Yes, yes; within half an hour. Tell your mother to expect me."

Philip ran up the stairs. Long practice had enabled him to move with a minimum of noise. It was pitiful to see the manner in which he emerged, with stealthy activity, into the creaking loft above. Here at first glance there was an astonishing degree of comfort. Odd pieces of worn carpet neatly joined covered the floor. The two windows, facing only to the front of the dwelling, were curtained. The whitewashed walls were almost hidden by cuttings from the colored periodicals published during the previous Christmas season. A screen divided the room into two compartments, each containing a tiny bed. On one of these, propped up with pillows, lay the wasted figure of a woman, over whose face the shadows were falling fast. The extreme thinness, the waxen pallor, the delicate texture of debilitated skin and unnatural brilliancy of the eyes gave her a remarkably youthful appearance. This fantastic trick of death, in life accentuated the resemblance between mother and son. The boy, too, was sharply outlined by hunger, and in the fading light of a March day the difference between the dread tokens of approaching collapse and the transient effects of a scanty regimen on a vigorous youth was not readily distinguishable.

"Do you want anything, mother dear?" said the boy, laying his hand tenderly on the clammy forehead.

"Only to ask you, Phil, what it was that the doctor told you."

The voice was low and sweet, the diction that of an education woman. The boy, too, though his tones were strong and harsh, spoke with the accent of good breeding. His manner and words gained some distinction from a slight touch of French elegance and precision. This was only noticeable in response. When excited or moved to deep feeling, the continental veneer acquired at the Lycee in Dieppe instantly vanished, and he became the strenuous, emphatic Belton he undoubtedly was by birth and breeding.

"He said, dearest, that what you wanted was some good wine—nice things to eat. He is an awfully nice chap, and I am afraid I was rude to him, but he didn't seem to mind it a bit, and he is coming back soon with chicken broth and port wine, and I don't know what."

His brave words were well meant, but the mother's heart understood him too well to be deceived. A thin hand caught his wrist and feebly drew him nearer.

"You say you were rude to him, Phil? How can that be possible? What did you say or do to warrant such a description?"

He hesitated for a moment. With rare self control in one so young he fiercely determined not to communicate his own despair to his mother. So he laughed gently.

"We are so jolly hard up, you know, and it sounded strange in my ears to talk about expensive luxuries which I could not buy. He has often told us, dear, that you would be better cared for in the infirmary. I am afraid now he was right, only we couldn't bear—to be parted. Could we, mother?"

Not all his valor could control his tremulous lips. A beautiful smile illumined the face of the invalid.

"So you are trying to hoodwink me, Phil, for the first time. I know what the doctor said. He told you that I could not recover and that I had not long to live; in a word, that I am dying."

Then the boy gave way utterly. He flung himself down by the side of the bed and buried his face in the coverlet.

"Oh, mother, mother!" he wailed, and his passionate sob burst forth with alarming vehemence. The poor woman vainly strove to soothe him. She could not move, being paralyzed, but her fingers twined gently in his hair, and she gasped brokenly:

"Phil, darling, don't make it harder for me. Oh, calm yourself, my dear one. If only for my sake, I have so much to say to you and perhaps so little time! Be strong, Philip. Be strong and brave, and all will be well with you. I know you will miss me. We have been all in all to each other since your father's death. But my memory must be sweet, not bitter to you. When you think of me I want the recollection to inspire you to do that which is right regardless of consequences, to strive always for honor and for the approbation of your own conscience. My own dear boy, we must bow to the will of God. We have indeed been sorely tried, you far more than I, for I can look back on years of perfect happiness with a loving husband and a delightful child, whereas you have been plunged into poverty and misery at an age when life should be opening before you with every promise of a successful career. Perhaps, Phil, your trials have come to you early, as mine have found me late

I trust I have borne reverses of health and fortune with patience and resignation. My present sufferings will be a lasting joy to me if in the life to come I can know that my example has been a stimulus to you amid the chances and changes of your career. Promise me, darling, that you will resign yourself to the decrees of Providence even in the bitter hour of our parting."

Her voice failed. Tears stood in her eyes. The knowledge came to her anew that natural emotions can at times conquer all restraints. The maternity strong within her clamored for the power to shield her offspring from the dangers that would beset him. There was a maddening pain in the thought that a few brief hours or minutes might unclasp her arms from him forever.

It was Phil who first gave utterance to the wild protest in their souls.

"Mother," he mourned bitterly, "I don't want to live without you. Let us die together. If you cannot stay with me, then I swear—"

But a scream of terror, so shrill and vehement that it seemed to be almost miraculous from so frail a form, froze the voice on his lips.

"Phil, what are you saying? Oh, my son, my son, do not break my heart before I die. Kiss me, dearest. I am cold. I can scarce see you. Come nearer. Let me look once more into your brave eyes. You will be a great man, Phil. I know it. Who should know your character like your mother? But you must have faith in God always. I have prayed for you, and my prayers will surely be granted. I will watch over you. If you are in danger, my spirit will come back to you across the void. We cannot be parted. Oh, God, it is impossible! You are the life of my life. I am not dead while you still live."

Even as she spoke her left hand and arm, hitherto untouched by the cruel blight which had made her a helpless invalid during many weary months, became numb and rigid. She was dying now, not with the struggle against the king of terrors which often marks the passing of humanity, but with a slow torpidity more akin to sleep.

Her brain was clear, but the stock of nervous force had sunk so low that her few remaining words were spoken with difficulty. They were mostly endearing expressions, appeals to her loved one to hope and pray, to trust steadfastly in the all-wise power that would direct his destiny. With the last flicker of existence the maternal instinct became dominant again, and she asked him not to forget her.

The boy could only murmur agonized appeals to the merciless unseen not to rob him of the only being he held dear on earth, but even in that awful moment he had the strength to cease his frantic protests when they seemed to cause her pain, and he forced himself to join her in prayer.

When the doctor brought a nurse and some small store of the much needed delicacies Mrs. Anson was already unconscious.

The boy, aroused from frenzy by the steps on the stairs, shrieked incoherently:

"I have killed my mother. See! She is dead. I killed her. I made her cry. You told me to look after her until you returned. She cried and screamed because I spoke so wildly. It is all my fault. I—"

"Hush! Your mother is not dead, but dying. Not all the skill of man can save her. Let her die in peace."

No other words could have checked the wild torrent of lament that surged from that wounded heart. So she still lived. There remained a faint flicker of life. Not yet had she passed the dreadful barrier of eternity. Through his blinding tears he thought he could discern a smile on the worn face. The doctor watched Phil more narrowly than the sunken frame on the bed. It was best that the paroxysm of grief should go untrammelled. The nurse, a young woman unused as yet to the inevitableness of death, moved timidly toward the windows and adjusted the curtains to admit more light.

At last when Phil's strength yielded to the strain of his sorrow and the very force of his agony had spent itself the doctor leaned over the inanimate form and looked into the eyes.

"It has ended, Phil," he whispered. "Your mother is in heaven!"

In heaven! What a tocsin of woe in a message of faith! The boy suddenly stood up. Hope was murdered within him. His tears ceased, and his labored breathing came under control with a mighty effort. He stooped and kissed the pale cheeks twice.

"Goodby, mother," he said, an' the dull pain in his voice was so heart-rending that the nurse's sympathies mastered her. She burst out crying. Professional instinct came to the doctor's aid. He sharply reprimanded the half hysterical woman and sent her off on an errand to bring those whose duty it is to render the last services to frail mortality. The boy he led downstairs. He was a busy man, with many claims on his time, but this strange youngster interested him, and he resolved to turn the boy's thoughts forcibly away from the all-absorbing horror of his mother's death.

"Have you a tumbler or a cup?" he said sharply.

Phil handed him a tumbler. The doctor poured out some wine taken from the nurse's basket, soaked a piece of bread in the liquor and gave it to the boy with an imperative command to eat it instantly.

Somewhat to his surprise, he was obeyed. While Phil was devouring the food of which he stood so greatly in need the doctor reviewed the circumstances of this poverty stricken household so far as they were known to him. Mr. and Mrs. Anson had occupied a fairly good position in Dieppe, where Philip's father was the agent of an old established London firm of coal ship-

perators. Some of these were merely formal acknowledgments of letters received and forwarded, but one stated that they "were instructed by Lady Morland to inform Mrs. Anson that Sir Philip Morland declined either to see or hear from her."

That was all. Philip sprang up with a gasp. He was alone in the house now, alone with his dead mother.

He went upstairs, with the letters crushed in his right hand as though he would choke a reptile which had stung the only being he loved. He bent over the shrunken form, so placid, so resigned, so angelic in the peace of death, and his hot tears fell unchecked.

"You poor darling!" he murmured. "I believe you humbled yourself even to beg from these people for my sake. What can I do to show my love for you?"

CHAPTER II.

ON Friday evening, March 19, a thunderstorm of unusual violence broke over London. It was notably peculiar in certain of its aspects. The weather was cold and showery, a typical day of the March equinox. Under such conditions barometric pressure remains fixed rather than variable, yet many whose business or hobby it is to record such facts observed a rapid shrinkage of the mercury column between the hours of 6 and 7. A deluge of rain fell for many minutes and was followed about 7:30 p. m. by a mad turmoil of thunder and an astounding electrical display not often witnessed beyond the confines of the giant mountain ranges of the world.

So violent and unerving was the outburst that the social life of London was paralyzed for the hour. Theater parties, dinners in the fashionable restaurants, the greater millions anxious to get away from offices and shops, those eager alike to enter and leave the charmed circle of the four mile radius, were ruthlessly bidden to wait while the awesome forces of nature made mad racket in the streets. All horseflesh was afraid. The drivers of gigs and omnibuses were unable to make progress. They had sufficient ado to restrain their maddened animals from adding the havoc of blind charges through the streets to the general confusion caused by the warring elements. Telegraph and telephone wires became not only useless, but dangerous, and the suburban train service was consequently plugged into a tangle from which it was not extricated until midnight.

So general was the confusion, so widespread the public alarm, that the sudden cessation of the uproar at 8 o'clock caused more prayers of thankfulness to be uttered in the metropolis

than had been heard for many a day. But worse remained. Thus far the lightning had been appalling, brilliant, lurid, but harmless. At 10 o'clock the storm raged again, this time without the preliminary downfall of rain, and the lightning, though less sensational in appearance, was demonic in effect, levying a toll on human lives, causing fires and general damage to property, accounts of which filled many columns of the newspapers next morning. This second outburst was succeeded by heavy and continuous rain. At the hour when the theaters emptied their diminishing audiences into the streets London wore its normal rain soaked aspect. It was not until the following day that people fully understood the magnitude and terrifying results of the later display.

About a quarter to 8, while the first storm was at its height, a carriage and pair dashed into a fashionable West End square and pulled up outside a mansion east in the stereotyped mold of the early Victorian period. The horses, overfed and underworked, had been rendered frantic by the drive through the park from the farther west. Fortunately, they knew this halting place, or the coachman would never have succeeded in stopping them. As it was, they sweated white with fear, and the footman, shouting to the occupants of the carriage that he could not attend to the door, ran to their heads after giving a vigorous tug at the house bell.

(Continued next week.)

Don't! ! ! Don't let your child suffer with that cough when you can cure it with Ballard's Horehound Syrup, a sure cure for coughs, bronchitis, influenza, croup and pulmonary diseases. Buy a bottle and try it. B. B. Lauchter, Byhalia, Miss., writes: "I have two children who had croup. I tried many different remedies, but I must say your Horehound Syrup is the best croup and cough medicine I ever used." Linn Drug Co.

The curt civility of the note brought an angry flush to the boy's face. Who was Sir Philip Morland that he should dare to offer this insult to a lady? Evidently a relative, and a near one, for Morland was his mother's name, and his own Christian name suggested a family connection. Yet she had never spoken of any such person.

Three other letters of preceding dates showed that "Louisa Morland" kept accurate reckoning. There were half a dozen more, from a firm of solicitors.

Phil glanced at his watch. "Four o'clock. I am an hour late on my rounds. No, Phil. Don't go upstairs. There are some women coming. Wait until they have tended your mother. And—one last word. It will do you no good to keep vigil by her side. Best think of her as living, not dead. You will be grateful for my advice in after life."

The women arrived, coarse but kindly hearted creatures. One of them gave the boy a packet of letters.

"I found 'em under the dear lady's pillow," she said. Neither poverty nor death robbed Mrs. Anson of the respect paid to her by all who came in contact with her.

He sat down, untied a string which bound the letters together and looked at the address on the first envelope. It bore his mother's name and a recent postmark. Wonderingly what correspondence she could have had during these later months that demanded such careful preservation, he took out the letter. Suddenly he hesitated. Perhaps these documents alluded to something which his mother did not wish him to know. For an instant his impulse was to consign the packet to the fire. No; that might be wrong. He would glance at their general purport and then commit them to the flames if he thought fit.

The letter in his hand was headed, "The Hall, Beltham, Devon," and dated about a month earlier. It read:

Dear Madam—I am requested by Sir Philip Morland to ask you not to trouble him with further correspondence. This is the fourth time I have been desired by him to write in these terms, so please note that your letters will in future remain unanswered. Yours truly, LOUISA MORLAND.

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