

The KING of DIAMONDS.

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

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CHAPTER II—(Continued).

A boy, tall and thin, and scantily attired for such weather, who had taken shelter in the dark portico of the mansion, ran forward to offer his services at the carriage door. A bundle of evening papers, covered with a piece of sack, somewhat impeding the use of his left hand, and, as it happened, in his right he held a large bun on which he had just commenced to dine.

Before he could turn the handle the carriage door opened from the inside. A man sprang out.

"Get out of the way," he said impatiently, and the newsboy obeyed, glad that he had not followed his first impulse and flung away the bun.

A vivid flash of lightning made the horses rear and plunge.

"Look sharp, Elfr!" cried the stranger in no more cordial tone. "Gather your wraps and jump out. On a night like this these nervous brutes—"

A peal of thunder that rattled the windows interrupted him. The two animals reared and backed with one accord. The plucky footman, hanging on to the crossbars of the bits, was lifted off his feet and banged violently against the pole.

He was forced to let go and fell, staggering backward some yards before he dropped. There was a smash of iron and wood, and the rear hind wheel of the carriage jammed against the curb. A slight scream came from the interior. Certain that the vehicle would turn over instantly, the man who had alighted slammed the door and sprang clear. In doing so he tripped over the newsboy and fell heavily on the pavement. The boy, quicker to note that the breaking of the pole had given a momentary respite, rushed into the roadway, throwing away both precious bun and still more precious stock of unsold papers.

He wrenched the other door open and shouted:

"This way, madam. Quick!"

"Madam" was quick. She sprang right into his arms and proved to be a girl of twelve or thereabouts, dressed all in white and wrapped in an ermine cloak.

Over went the carriage with a fearful crash. The coachman managed to jump from the box into the roadway. He retained the reins and whip in his grasp and now, losing his temper, lashed the struggling horses savagely. This caused them, and they ceased their antics.

The boy and the girl found themselves standing on the sidewalk close to the ruined vehicle.

"You have saved my life!" said the girl sweetly and without any trace of the nervousness which might naturally be expected after such a narrow escape from a serious accident.

The boy noted that her eyes were large and blue, that she wore a great shining ornament in her hair and that she appeared to be dressed in some what fanciful manner, though the big cloak she wore concealed the details.

The door of the mansion opened, and servants came running out.

Suddenly the boy received a violent blow on the side of the head.

"Confound you!" shouted the man who had fallen on the pavement, "why didn't you get out of the way when I told you?"

The boy, astounded by such recognition of his timely help, made no reply, but the girl protested vehemently.

"Oh, uncle," she cried, "why did you strike him? He got me out of the carriage just before it turned over. He did, indeed!"

Another vivid flash of lightning illumined the scene. It lit up the group with startling brilliancy. The boy, still somewhat shaken by the vicious blow, was nevertheless able to see clearly the pale, handsome, but dissipated features of his enraged assailant, whose evening dress and immaculate linen were soiled by the black mud of the pavement. The girl, dainty and fairy like, a little maid of aristocratic type, and of a beauty that promised much in later years, was distressed now and almost fearful.

Through the crowd of frightened servants, augmented by a few daring pedestrians, a burly policeman, gigantic in waterproof overalls, was advancing with official bluster.

"What has happened?" he demanded. "Is anybody hurt?"

The man answered:

Lord Vanstone was more enraged than ever by the girl's obstinate defense of her rescuer and her insistence on his own seeming cowardice.

"I was not hiding. I only took shelter from the storm. I tried to help you because the footman was struggling with the horses. I do not claim any credit for simply opening a door and helping the young lady to alight, but I lost both my dinner and my papers in doing so."

Every one experienced a shock of surprise at hearing the boy's elegant diction. The policeman was puzzled. He instantly understood the facts, but dared not browbeat an earl.

"You do not bring any charge against him, my lord?" he said.

But his lordship declined no reply. He told the coachman to arrange for the removal of the carriage, grasped his niece by the arm and led her, still protesting, into the house.

The policeman saw the bundle of papers scattered over the roadway and near them the partly eaten bun. After a wrench at his garments he produced a penny.

"Here," he said to the boy. "Buy another bun and be off. It's a good job for you the young lady spoke up the way she did."

"She merely told the truth. That man was a liar."

Refusing the proffered penny, the boy turned on his heel. The policeman looked after him.

"That's a queer kid," he thought. "Talked like a regular young goot. I wonder why he is selling papers. Poor lad! He lost a bob's worth at least, and small thanks he got for it."

Passing out of the square by the first eastward street, Philip Anson, with his head erect and hands clasped in his pockets, strode onward at a rapid pace. The lightning was less frequent now, and the thunder was dying away in sullen rumblings. He was wet and hungry, yet, although he had three halfpence, the remaining balance of the only sales effected that evening, he passed many shops where he could have bought food.

In Piccadilly, where the cessation of the storm created a rush of traffic, he was nearly run over by reason of his own carelessness and received a slash from a whip, accompanied by a loud oath from an angry cabman. He shivered, but never even looked around. Crossing Trafalgar square, he plunged through the vortex of vehicles without troubling to avoid them in the slightest degree. Once the hot breath of a pair of van horses touched his cheek while a speechless driver pulled them back onto their haunches. Again, the off wheel of an omnibus actually grazed his heel as he sped behind the statue of Charles I.

At last he reached the comparative seclusion of the Embankment and stood for a moment to gaze fixedly at the swirling, glinting river.

"Not here," he muttered aloud. "I must be nearer to mother—dear old mother! She is there waiting for me."

He trudged steadily away through Queen Victoria street, Cornhill, Leadenhall street, and so on to Johnson's Mews, in the Mile End road. Pausing at a marine store dealer's shop kept by an army pensioner, an Irishman, with whom he had a slight acquaintance, he entered. An elderly man was laboriously reading a paper of the preceding day's date.

"Good evening, Mr. O'Brien," he said. "Can you oblige me with a piece of rope? I want a strong piece about three or four yards in length. I can only spare three halfpence."

"Fais, I dunno. They use nails on the crates mostly nowadays. If I have a bit it's at my service. I wouldn't be after charging the likes of you."

Philip's story was known in that humble locality, and the old soldier sympathized with the boy. "He has a rare spunk an' no mistake," was his verdict when others said Philip was proud and overbearing. O'Brien moved rheumatically about the squalid shop. At last he found some portion of a clothesline.

"Will that do?" he inquired.

Philip tested it with vigorous pulling against his knee.

"Excellent," he said. "Let me pay you for it."

"Arrah, go away wid ye! And, be the powers, isn't the poor lad cowed an' famished? Luke here, now. In five minutes I'm goin' to have a cup o' tea."

"I am awfully obliged to you, but I could not touch a morsel. I am in a hurry."

"Are ye goin' a journey? Have ye got a job?"

"I think so. It looks like a permanent one, goodby."

"Goodby, an' good luck to ye. Sure the boy looks mighty queer. 'Tis grief for his mother has turned his head entirely."

the open hints of the undertaker's assistants, barely sufficed to keep him in food for a week. Then he sought employment, but with such stiff upper lip and haughty indifference to success that he unknowingly turned those against him who would have assisted him.

For two days he was chosen to act as van boy for a parcel delivery firm. He earned a few meals, but in a fit of aberration induced by the sight of a lady who was dressed in a costume similar to one he remembered his mother wearing at Dieppe, he allowed a ham to be stolen from the rear of the van. This procured his instant dismissal, with threats. Then he sold newspapers, only to find that every good site was jealously guarded by a gang of roughs who mercilessly bullied any newcomer. Personal strength and courage were unavailing against sheer numbers. His face was still swollen and his ribs sore as the result of being knocked down and kicked at Ludgate Circus. At Charing Cross next day he was hustled under the wheels of an omnibus and narrowly escaped death. So he was driven into the side streets and the quiet squares, in which, during three or four days, he managed to earn an average of eightpence daily, which he spent on food.

Each night he crept back to the poor tenement in Johnson's Mews, his bleak "home" amid the solitude of empty stables and warehouses. The keeper of a coffee stall, touched one night by his webbed appearance, gave him some half dried coffee grounds in a paper, together with a handful of crusts.

"Put 'arf that in a pint of water," he said, looking critically at the sodden mass of coffee, "an' when it comes to a bile let it settle. It'll surprise you to find 'ow grateful an' comfortable it tastes on a cold night. As for the crusts, f' you bake 'em over the fire, they're just as good as the rusks you buy in tins."

This good Samaritan had repeated his gift on two occasions, and Philip had a fairly large supply of small coal, sent to his mother by the colliery company, so his position, desperate enough, was yet bearable had he not sought to accustom himself to the new conditions of life. There was a chance that his wild broodings would have yielded to the necessity to earn a living, and that when next a situation was offered to him he would keep it, but the occurrences of this stormy night had utterly shaken him for the hour. He was on the verge of lunacy.

As he passed through the dark archway leading to his abode, the desolate stable yard was fitfully lit by lightning and in the distance he heard the faint rumble of thunder. The elemental strife was beginning again. This was the second and more disastrous outbreak of the evening of March 19.

Although wet to the skin, he was warm now on account of his long and rapid walk. When he unlocked the door another flash of lightning revealed the dismal interior. He closed and locked the door behind him. On the mantelpiece were a farthing candle and some matches. He groped for them and soon had a light. On other occasions his next task was to light a fire. By sheer force of habit he gathered together some sticks and bits of paper and arranged them in the grate. But the task was irksome to him. It was absurd to seek any degree of comfort for the few minutes he had to live. Better end it at once. Moreover, the storm was sweeping up over the East End with such marvellous speed that the lightning now played through the tiny room with dazzling brilliancy, and the wretched candle burned with blue and ghostlike feebleness. The cold of the house, too, began to strike chillily. He was so exhausted from hunger that if he did not eat soon he would not have the strength left to carry out his dread purpose.

He sprang erect with a mocking little laugh, picked up the candle and the piece of rope and climbed the stairs. He paused irresolutely at the top, but, yielding to overwhelming desire, went on and stood at the side of the bed on which his mother had died. He fancied he could see her lying there still, with a smile on her wane face and unspoken words of welcome on her lips.

A flood of tears came and he trembled violently.

"I am coming to you, mother," he murmured. "You told me to trust in God, but I think God has forgotten me. I don't want to live. I want to join you, and then perhaps God will remember me."

He stooped and kissed the pillow, nestling his face against it, as he was wont to fondle the dear face that rested there so many weary days. Then he resolutely turned away, descended four steps of the ladder-like stairs and tied the clothesline firmly to a hook which had been driven into the ceiling during the harness room period of the room beneath. With equal deliberation he knotted the other end of the cord round his neck, and he calculated that by springing from the stairs he would receive sufficient shock to become insensible very quickly, while his feet would dangle several inches above the floor.

There was a terrible coolness, a settled fixity of purpose far beyond his years, in the manner of these final preparations. At last they were completed. He blew out the candle and stood erect.

At that instant the room became absolutely flooded with lightning, not in a single vivid flash, but in a trembling, continuous glare that suggested the effect of some luminous constellation fierce with electric energy. Before his eyes was exhibited a startling panorama of the familiar objects of his lonely abode. The brightness, so sustained and tremulous, startled him back from the very brink of death.

"I will wait," he said. "When the thunder comes, then I will jump."

Even as the thought formed in his mind a ball of fire so glowing, so brilliant, in its flaming heat that it dominated the electric waves fluttering in the overburdened air darted out the little window that looked out over the tiny yard in the rear of the house and crashed through the flagstones with the din of a ten inch shell.

Philip, elevated on the stairway, distinctly saw the molten splash which accompanied its impact. He saw the heavy stones riven asunder as if they were tissue paper, and from the hole caused by the thunderbolt or meteor came a radiance that sent a spreading shaft of light upward like the beam of a searchlight. The warmth, too, of the object was almost overpowering. Were not the surrounding walls constructed of stone and brick there must have been an immediate outbreak of fire. As it was, the glass in the windows cracked and the woodwork began to scorch. In the same instant a dreadful roll of thunder swept over the locality, and a deluge of rain, without any further warning, descended.

All this seemed to the wondering boy to be a very long time in passing. In reality it occupied but a very few seconds. People in the distant street could not distinguish the crash of the fallen meteor from the accompanying thunder, and the downpour of rain came in the very nick of time to prevent the wood in the house and the neighboring factories from blazing forth into a disastrous fire.

The torrent of water caused a dense volume of steam to generate in the back yard, and this helped to minimize the strange light shooting up from the cavity. There was a mad hissing and crackling as the rain poured over the meteor and gradually dulled its brightness. Pandemonium reigned in that curiously secluded nook.

Amazed and cowed, not by the natural phenomenon he had witnessed, but by the interpretation he placed on it, the boy unfastened the rope from his neck.

"Very well, mother," he whispered aloud. "If it is your wish, I will live. I suppose that God speaks in this way."

CHAPTER III.

PHILIP descended the stairs. He was almost choking now from another cause than strangulation. The steam pouring in through the fractured window panes was stifling. He took off his coat, first removing from an inner pocket the bundle of letters found under Mrs. Anson's pillow, and carefully stuffed the worn garment into the largest cavity. By this means he succeeded somewhat in shutting out the vapor as well as the lurid light that still flared red in the back yard.

The lightning had ceased totally, and the improvised blind plunged the room into impenetrable darkness. He felt his way to the stairs and found the candle, which he relighted. The rain beating on the roofs and on the outer pavements combined with the weird sounds in the inclosed yard to make a terrifying racket, but it was not likely that a youth who attributed his escape from a loathsome death, self inflicted, to the direct interposition of Providence in his behalf would yield to any sentimental fears on that account. Indeed, although quite weak from hunger, he felt an unaccountable elation of spirits, a new born desire to live and justify his mother's confidence in him, a sense of power to achieve that which hitherto seemed impossible.

He even broke into a desultory whistling as he bent over the hearth and consumed five minutes earlier with such sudden soul weariness. The candle, too, burned with cheery glimmer, as if pleased with the disappearance of its formidable competitor. Fortunately he had some coal in the house—his chief supply was stored in a small bin at the other side of the yard, beyond the burial place of the raging, steaming meteor and consequently quite unapproachable.

Soon the fire burned merrily, and the coffee stall keeper's recipe for using coffee grounds was put into practice. Philip had neither sugar nor milk, but the hot liquid smelled well, and he was now so cold and stiff and he had such an empty sensation where he might have worn a belt that some crusts of bread, softened by immersion in the dark compound, earned keener appreciation than was ever given in later days to the most costly dishes of famous restaurants yet un-built.

Continued next week.

Remarkable Rescue.

That truth is stranger than fiction has once more been demonstrated in the little town of Fedora, Tenn., the residence of C. V. Pepper. He writes: "I was in bed, entirely disabled with hemorrhages of the lungs and throat. Doctors failed to help me and all hope had fled when I began taking Dr. King's New Discovery. Then instant relief came. The coughing soon stopped, the bleeding rapidly diminished, and in three weeks I was able to go to work." Guaranteed cure for coughs and colds. 50c and \$1 at W. L. Delano's drug store. Trial bottle free.

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WASHINGTON ORATOR SPOKE BEST OF ALL

(From Friday's Guard.)

The fifth annual oratorical contest of the interstate association was won last night by J. E. Erickson, of the University of Washington, using as his subject "The Power of the Press." J. H. Frazier, of the University of Idaho, was awarded second, and H. E. McKinney, the Oregon representative, third. Each candidate did well, but Erickson won the popular approval by the power and virility with which he dealt with the inequities of the so-called yellow journalism and the well known Associated Press. Probably neither evil, as he proved both, ever received such a fearful denunciation in the same length of time.

Mr. McKinney opened with his oration on "Precedent." Mr. Erickson following with his speech, and Mr. Frazier closing with a resume of the problem handled by the interstate debating league, under the title of "The Problem of the Twentieth Century."

Mr. McKinney's oration, being very abstract, was more difficult than either of the others in thought. In reality, however, it was little more than an exposition, and there was was but little chance to show the speaker's power of persuasion. Mr. Erickson in his speech put forth pleading, warning arguments that could hardly help but win the decision. Mr. Frazier's language was the smoothest of all, but his thought seemed weak and his oration was too short, taking only ten minutes to deliver it.

Erickson received the highest average on delivery and composition, Frazier being given second on composition and third on delivery, and McKinney second on delivery and third on composition. McKinney's fault in composition was very hard to see, unless it was too many harsh combinations of sounds.

The judges on delivery were W. R. King, justice of the supreme court of Oregon; Hon. H. W. Thompson, and Rev. H. N. Mount, of Eugene. The judges on composition were the heads of the English departments of Minnesota, Stanford and California.

Mr. Erickson is an Oregon boy, his home being in Astoria. He is also an old student of the university, as he attended Oregon in 1904-05. He has many friends here and will probably be here during commencement. He is now the guest of friends in the dormitory.

LITTLE GIRL KILLED IN A RUNAWAY

A fatal accident occurred near Harrisburg Wednesday morning that resulted in the death of an eight-year-old girl. Mrs. O. E. Trout and daughter Zola, and Mrs. Cory had been over in the Lebanon neighborhood after strawberries. They were returning home, and when near Harrisburg one of the lines unbuckled. Both ladies jumped out to reach the horses, but this only added to their terror and the team dashed away with the little child in the wagon. It is supposed the child was jolted out as the team ran for about four miles without injury to the wagon or harness. The little girl was found unconscious. Medical aid was quickly summoned but she was beyond help and she died during the afternoon without regaining consciousness. The body was brought over here and taken home the same evening and was interred Thursday.—Junction City Times.

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