

The KING of DIAMONDS.

By Louis Tracy,

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CHAPTER X—(Continued.)

"Yes, I must. The company which owns these premises intends to pull them down on the first of next month."

"What is your name?"
"Anson."
"Ah! I think I remember hearing something about your mother's death. Very nice woman, I was told. A lady too."

"Yes; all that and more."
"Of course. That accounts for your manner and appearance. Have you found some friends?"

The inspector's glance roved from the servicable portmanteau to Philip's tidy garments, and it was his business to make rapid deductions.
"Yes, most fortunately."

"Anybody connected with Sharpe & Smith?" the constable put in.

"Sharpe & Smith? Who are they?"

"Don't you know? Their young man certainly didn't seem to know much about your movements. He has been here twice looking for you. The first time was last Monday."

"I was on duty in the main road, and he asked me for some information. We came and looked in, but your door was locked. The man on this beat this afternoon told me that the same clerk was making further inquiries today, so as soon as I came on night duty I strolled into the mess to find out if you were at home. That is how I happened to see you."

He turned toward the inspector.

"He was packing his bag at the moment, sir, and Mason had evidently been sent from the window by my footsteps in the arch."

"The inspector pursed out his underlip. "The whole thing is perfectly clear," he said. "Boy, have you got a watch?"

"No," said Philip, surprised by this odd question.

"Bradley, he hasn't got a watch," observed the inspector. He again addressed Philip.

"Where are you going tomorrow?"

"I am not quite sure, but my address will be known to Mrs. Wrigley, the James street laundry, Shepherd's Bush."

"Ah! The constable says you do not wish to be mixed up in the arrest of Mason. There is no need for you to appear in court, but—in such cases as yours—the police like to show their appreciation of your services. That is so, Bradley, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. If it hadn't been for him, I shouldn't be here now. Jocky had me fairly cornered."

"You had no time to summon assistance?"

"I barely heard he was here before the window was smashed, and I knew he was trying to get out the other way. You heard him, Anson?"

Philip looked the policeman squarely in the eyes.

"You had just taken off your greatcoat when the glass cracked," he said.

Police Constable Bradley stooped to pick up his coat. He did not wish this portion of the night's proceedings to be described too minutely. In moving the garment he disturbed the packet of letters. Instantly Philip recalled the names of the solicitors mentioned by the constable.

"You said that a clerk from Messrs. Sharpe & Smith called here twice?" he asked.

"Yes."

He picked out one of the letters, opened it and made certain of his facts before he cried angrily:

"Then I want to have nothing whatever to do with them. They treated my mother shamefully."

The inspector had sharp eyes.

"What is the date of that letter?" he inquired.

"Jan. 18 of this year."

"And what are those—paw tickets?"

"Yes, some of my mother's jewelry and dresses. Her wedding ring was the last to go. Most of them are out of date, but I intend to—I will try to save some of them, especially her wedding ring."

Jocky Mason's romance was now dispelled into thin air. The contents of the portmanteau, the squalid appearance of the house, the date of the solicitor's letter, the bundle of paw tickets offered conclusive evidence to the inspector's matter of fact mind that the ex-convict's story was the effect of a truncheon rapidly applied to a brain excited by the newspaper comments on a sensational yarn about some boy who had found a parcel of diamonds.

This youngster had not been favored by any such extraordinary piece of luck. Simple chance had led him to put the police on the track of a much wanted scoundrel, and he had very bravely prevented a member of the force from being badly worsted in the ensuing encounter.

A subscription would be made among the officers and men of the division, and they would give him a silver watch with a suitable inscription.

The inspector noted the address given by Philip. It was on the tip of his tongue to ask his Christian name, when the constable suggested that they should examine the stable in which Mason had hidden.

They went up the mews. Philip looked his door, extinguished his candle and lay down on the mattress, fully covered, with his newly bought fur dressing.

He was so utterly tired, so exhausted physically and mentally by the storm and drang of this eventful day that he was sound asleep when the two men returned.

They saw him through the window.

"He's a fine lad," said the inspector thoughtfully. "I wonder what he is going to make of himself. We might have asked him who his friends were, but they are not badly off, or he couldn't have got that bag and his new clothes. What on earth caused Mason to connect him with that diamond story?"

"It's hard to say," observed the constable.

"I will look round and have a chat with him in the morning. Poor little chap! He's sleeping like a top now."

The inspector called at No. 3 Johnson's Mews soon after 10 next morning, but the door was locked and the bird down. He spoke to Mason after that worthy was remanded for a week, but a night's painful seclusion had sealed the burglar's lips. He vowed, with fearful emphasis, to "get even" with the kid who "abused" him, for the policeman's evidence had revealed the truth concerning the arrest. But not another word would Mason say about the diamonds, and for a little while the inspector placed his overnight revelations in the category of myths familiar to the police in their daily dealings with criminals.

Philip awoke shortly before 7.

He was cold and stiff. The weather was chilly, and there was no ardent meteor in the back yard to keep the temperature of the house at a grateful point during the night.

But his active young frame quickly dissipated the effects of a deep sleep on a drafty floor. He washed his face and hands at the sink in the scullery, and his next thought was for breakfast, a proof, if proof were needed, that he arose refreshed in mind and body.

In the Mile End road there are plenty of early morning restaurants. At one of them he made a substantial meal, and on his return to the mews, he lost not a moment in carrying out a systematic search through all parts of the house and yard for any traces of the meteor which might have escaped his ken in the darkness.

Amid the earth and broken stones of the excavation there were a few fragments of ore and some atomic specimens of the diamantiferous material—not sufficient, all told, to fill the palm of his hand, but he gathered them for obvious reasons and then devoted five vigorous minutes with O'Brien's spade to the task of filling up the deep hole itself.

By lowering the flagstones and breaking the earth beneath he soon gave the small yard an appearance of chaos which might certainly puzzle people, but which would afford no possible clue to the nature of the disturbing element.

At best they might imagine that the dread evidence of some weird crime lay in the broken area. If so, they could dig until they were tired. But, indeed, he was now guarding against a most unlikely hypothesis. The probability was that Johnson's Mews would soon cease to exist and become almost as fabulous as the Island of Atlantis.

Moreover, he had a project dimly outlined in his mind which might become definite if all went well with him that day. Then the ownership of No. 3, Johnson's Mews, would cease to trouble him, for Philip was quite sure the whole power of the law would be invoked to prevent him from dealing with his meteor if once the exact place where it fell became publicly known.

O'Brien's shop was scarcely open before Philip was there with his remaining portmanteau.

"Arrah, Phil, me boy! Where in the name of goodness are ye gathering the beautiful leather thrunks from?" asked the pensioner.

"This is the last one," laughed the boy. "I am off now to find a cab, and you won't see me again until Monday."

"Faix, he's a wonderful lad entirely!" commented the old man. "What sort of plunder has he in the bags, at all at all?"

In idle curiosity he lifted the last addition to the pile. It was normal, even light in weight. Then he nodded knowingly.

"A lot of odd duds belongin' to Mrs. Anson, I'll be bound. Ah, well, the Lord rest her soul, 'tis she was the fine woman. I wish I had some one as fine as her to write for me to that thave of the vorrind who thriled—"

As there are no signs in the art of literature similar to those which serve the needs of musicians, whereby thoughts can be expressed *à capot*, like a musical phrase, without risk of wearying the reader, it must be understood that Philip had returned from faraway Fenchurch street station with a four wheeler before O'Brien exhausted the first tirade of the day against the war office.

With a cunning that amounted to genius, the boy placed the large, light portmanteau and the two small, heavy ones on the roof of the vehicle, where

the driver did not notice the least peculiarity in their weight.

The two large, heavy bags he managed to lift into the interior, one of them needing all his resources to carry it from the shop door to the cab. Where he had not fresh and untired he could not have done it. As it was, the effort was a splendid success.

The cabman knew little and O'Brien less of the tremendous avoirdupois of this innocent looking baggage. A long suffering horse may have had his private views, but he did not express them.

Saying goodbye to the pensioner in the shop, Philip took good care that none overheard his direction to the driver. In about three-quarters of an hour he lumbered into Charing Cross station without a soul in the East End being aware of his destination.

"Where to, sir?" asked a porter who opened the door for him.

"I only want these bags to be taken to the luggage room," said Philip. "You had better get some one to help you with these two. They are very heavy. They contain specimens of iron ore."

The man took a pull at the solid one. "By gum," he grinned, "you're right! That would surprise anybody who tried to pick it up and run away with it."

"Rather," agreed Philip. "I am glad to say it is not going very far, only to a laboratory for analysis."

He saw his belongings wheeled away on a barrow before he paid the cabman liberally. He only gave the porter sixpence. The man believed that Philip was a clerk in charge of the minerals. He was grateful for even so small a sum.

On leaving the station, with the receipt for his luggage in his pocket, Philip saw the four wheeler turning into the Strand on its way back to Fenchurch street. He smiled. The tie between east and west was severed. No matter what else might happen to it, his meteor had left Johnson's Mews forever.

It was now a few minutes past 9, but he still had a good deal to do before he presented himself at Isaacstein's at 11.

It was necessary to change his skin once more before the metamorphosis he contemplated was complete. He was acquainted with a large outfitting emporium in Ludgate Hill which exactly suited his requirements, so he rode thither on a bus.

Passing Somerset House, he recalled

and acted the sound man of business he really was.

He awaited Philip in his private office. He seemed to be pleased by the change effected in the boy's outward appearance. There was less of horselike, less outrage to his feelings, in discussing big sums of money with a person properly attired than with one who wore the garments of a tramp.

"Good morning," he said pleasantly. "You are punctual. I am glad to see. Have you been to Somerset House?"

"No," said Philip.

"Why not? If you are going to control a big capital, you must learn business habits or you will lose it, no matter how large it may be."

"Would Somerset House compel you to pay me, Mr. Isaacstein?"

"Not exactly, but the stamping of important documents is a means toward an end I assure you."

"I will see to it, but I wanted primarily to be certain of one of two things—first, will you pay the £5,000 as promised; second, will you give me a fresh purchase note for my diamonds which will not indicate so definitely that I am the boy concerning whom there has been so much needless publicity during the last few days?"

It was of no avail for Isaacstein to bandy words with Philip. A boy of fifteen who casually introduced such a word as "primarily" into a sentence and gave a shrewd thrust about "needless publicity" to the person responsible for it was not to be browbeaten even in business affairs.

The man whipped out a check book. "Am I to make out a check for £5,000 to Philip?" he asked.

"No; to Philip Anson, please."

"Thank you. And now, shall I put any address on the contract note which I will hand you?"

"The Pall Mall hotel."

Isaacstein with difficulty choked back a comment. The Pall Mall hotel was the most expensive establishment in London. He tossed the check and another document across the table.

"There you are," he said. "Come with me to my bank. You will excuse the hurry. I have a lot to do before I leave for Amsterdam tonight."

Philip saw that the acknowledgment of his diamonds appeared to be in proper form.

"There is no need at this moment to explain to the bank manager that I am the hero of the police court affair?" he said.

"None whatever. I am lending you the money, and will be paying you a good deal more very soon. That will be sufficient. He may draw his own conclusions, of course."

Philip was now looking at the check.

"Why do you put 'account payee' between these two strokes?" he said.

The man explained, and even found time to show him how to cross and indorse such important slips of paper. Then they walked to the bank, a few doors away. The elderly manager was obviously surprised by the size of the check and the youth of the "payee."

"Oh, this is nothing, a mere fide bite," said Isaacstein. "In a few days he will have ten times the amount to his credit."

"Dear me. Are you realizing property on his behalf?"

"Yes."

"Well, Mr. Anson," said the manager pleasantly, "I hope you will take care of your money."

"I want you to do that," smiled Philip, who was slightly nonplused by the prefix to his name, heard by him for the first time.

"Oh, if you leave it with me it will be quite safe."

"I cannot leave all, but certainly I will not spend £5,000 in a week. I mean to buy some property, though, and—can I have a hundred now?"

"By all means."

Philip wrote his first check and received twenty crisp five pound notes. Isaacstein stood by, smiling grimly. He had not yet got over the farcical side of this extraordinary occurrence, and he was wondering what the bank manager would have said could he but see Philip as he, Isaacstein, saw him no later than the previous day.

"By the way," said Philip, whose heart was beating a little now, "suppose I wish to give a reference to anybody, will you two gentlemen answer for me?"

"The bank will always say whether or not your check will be honored to a stated amount. In other respects Mr. Isaacstein, who brought you here, will serve your purpose admirably—none better in the city of London," replied the banker.

Isaacstein placed both feet together, and his head sank between his shoulders. He again reminded Philip of a top. The boy fancied that in a second or two he would begin to spin and pur. The bank manager's statement flattered the little man. It was the sort of thing he understood. Philip privately resolved to make this human top wobble when alone with him in the street again.

"One more question, and I have ended," he said. "Where is the best place to store some valuables?"

"It all depends on their nature. What are they—plate, jewels, paper?"

The man's ears were alert now, and the boy smiled faintly.

"Oh," he explained, "I have a very large quantity of rich ore which I wish to lodge in some place where it will be secure and yet easy of access."

"I would recommend you to rent a strong room in the safe deposit across the street. There you have absolute security and quick access during business hours."

Philip expressed his thanks and quitted the bank with his agent.

In the middle of Holborn, in the midst of the jostling, hurrying occupants of one of the busiest thoroughfares in London, he pulled the giant diamond out of his pocket and suddenly held it under Isaacstein's nose.

"I told you I had them as big as

ben's eggs," he cried. "What do you think of this one?"

Isaacstein glanced at it for one fascinated second. Then he looked around with the stealthy air of a man who fears lest he may be detected in the commission of a terrible crime.

"Are you mad?" he whispered.

"No, not mad," answered Philip coolly as he pocketed the gem. "I only wanted you to wobble."

"You wanted me to wobble?"

"Yes. You look so like a big top at times. When do we meet again, Mr. Isaacstein?"

"You are not going away by yourself with that stone in your pocket?"

"Why not? It attracted no special notice from the people as I came here. Nobody can smell it. It won't explode or burn a hole in my clothes. It is quite safe, I assure you."

"But let me take it to Amsterdam. Boy! boy! It must weigh four hundred carats!"

"Enough of business for today. I have a lot of things to attend to. Shall we say Tuesday?"

"No; Wednesday at 11. One word. Let me put it in my safe."

"Goodbye."

Philip hailed a hansom and drove off to Ludgate Hill, smiling graciously at Isaacstein as he whirled away.

The man swayed gently through the crowd until he reached the office, when he dropped limply into his chair. Then he shouted for his confidential clerk.

"Samuel," he murmured, "take charge, please. I'm going home. I want to rest before I start for Harwich. And, Samuel!"

"Yes, sir."

"While I am away you might order another scales. In future we will sell diamonds by the pound, like potatoes."

CHAPTER XI.

AFTER picking up his belongings at the outfitter's, two smart Gladstone bags with "P. A." nicely painted on them, Philip stopped his cab at Somerset House. He experienced no difficulty in reaching the proper department for stamping documents, and thus giving them legal significance.

An official glanced at Isaacstein's contract note and then looked at Philip, evidently regarding him as a relative or youthful secretary of the "Philip Anson, Esq., Pall Mall hotel," whose name figured on the paper.

"I suppose you only want this to be indicated?" he said.

"Yes," agreed Philip, who had not the remotest idea what he meant.

"Sixpence," was the curt rejoinder. Philip thought he would be called on to pay many pounds—some amount in the nature of a percentage of the sum named in the agreement. He produced the coin demanded and made no comment. With stamp or without, he knew that Isaacstein would go straight in this preliminary undertaking. A single glimpse of the monster diamond in his pocket had made that quite certain.

For the rest he was rapidly making out a plan which should secure his interests effectually. He hoped before the day was out to have set on foot arrangements which would free him from all anxiety.

From Somerset House he drove to the Pall Mall hotel. A gigantic hall porter, looking like a youthful major general in dress uniform, received him with much ceremony and ushered him to the office, where an urbane clerk instantly clasped him as the avant courier of an American family.

"I want a sitting room and bedroom en suite," said Philip.

"One bedroom?" was the surprised query.

"Yes."

"How many of you are there, then?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

The clerk fumbled with the register. Precocious juveniles were not unknown to him, but a boy of Philip's type had not hitherto arisen over his horizon.

"A sitting room and a bedroom en suite," he replied.

"Exactly."

The clerk was disconcerted by Philip's steady gaze.

"On what floor?" he asked.

"Really," said Philip, "I don't know. Suppose you tell me what accommodation you have. Then I will decide at once."

The official, who was one of the most skilled hotel clerks in London, found it ridiculous to be put out of countenance by a mere boy who could not be a day older than seventeen and might be a good deal less. He cast a critical eye on Philip's clothing and saw that, while it was good, it had not the gloss of *Vere de Vere*.

He would paralyze him at one fell blow, little dreaming that the other read his glance and knew the exact mental process of his reasoning.

"There is a good suit vacant on the first floor, but it contains a dressing room and bathroom," he said, smiling the smile of a very knowing person.

"That sounds all right. I will take it."

"Ah, yes. It costs £5 a day!"

Each of the six words in that portentous sentence contained a note of admiration that swelled out into a magnificent crescendo. It was a verbal avalanche, beneath which this queer youth should be crushed into the very dust.

"Five pounds a day?" observed Philip calmly. "I suppose there would be a reduction if taken for a month?"

"Well—or—during the season it is not—or—usual to—"

"Oh, very well. I can easily arrange for a permanency later if I think fit. What number is the suit, please, and will you kindly have my luggage sent there at once?"

The clerk was demoralized, but he managed to say:

"Do you quite understand the terms—thirty-five pounds a week?"

"Yes," said Philip. "Shall I pay you a week in advance? I can give you notes, but it will oblige me if you take a check, as I may want the ready money in my possession."

Receiving a faint indication that, under the circumstances, a check would be presented a favor, Philip whipped out his check book, filled in a check to the hotel, and did not forget to cross it "cas. payee."

The clerk watched him with an amazement too acute for words. He produced the register and Philip signed his name. He was given a receipt for the payment on account, and then asked to be shown to his rooms.

A boy smaller, but not younger, than himself—a smart page, who listened to the foregoing with deep interest—asked timidly whether the guest would go by the stairs or use the elevator.

"I will walk," said Philip, who liked to ascertain his bearings.

The palatial nature of the apartments took him by surprise when he reached them. Although far from being the most expensive suite in the hotel, the surroundings were of a nature vastly removed from anything hitherto known to him.

Even the charming house he inhabited as a child in Dieppe contained no such luxury. His permanent fellow-lodger quickly, and a yet evener, Philip's quick ears caught the accent of a Frenchman, and the boy spoke to the man in the language of his country, pure and undiluted by the barbarisms of John Bull.

They were chatting about the weather, which, by the way, ever since the 19th of March had been extraordinarily fine, when there was a knock at the door, and the manager entered.

The clerk found the situation too much for him. He had appealed to a higher authority.

Even the suave and diplomatic M. Foret could not conceal the astonishment that leaped to his eyes when he saw the occupant of suit F.

"I think you will find these rooms very comfortable," he said for lack of aught better. A *commissaire* was already on his way to the bank to ask if the check was all right.

"Are you the manager?" asked Philip, who was washing his hands.

"Yes."

"I am glad you called. One of your clerks seemed to be taken aback because a youngster like me engaged an expensive suit. I suppose the proceeding is unusual, but there is no reason why it should create excitement. It need not be commented on, for instance."

"No, no; of course not."

"Thank you very much. I have a special reason for wishing to live at this hotel. Indeed, I have given this address for certain important documents. Will you kindly arrange that I may be treated like any ordinary person?"

"I hope the clerk was not rude to you?"

"Not in the least. I am, only anxious to prevent special notice being taken of me. You see, if others get to know I am living here alone, I will be pointed out as a curiosity, and that will not be pleasant."

The request was eminently reasonable. The manager assured him that strict orders would be given on the point instantly, though he was quite certain in his own mind that inquiry would soon be made for this remarkable youth, perhaps by the police.

"You can leave us," said Philip to the valet in French.

Now the chance use of that language, no less than his perfect accent, went a long way toward removing the manager's suspicions. A boy who was so well educated must be quite out of the common. Perhaps some eccentric parent or guardian encouraged him to act independently thus early in life. He might be the son of a rich man coming to London for a special course of study. The name, Anson, was an aristocratic one. But his clothes—they were odd. Good enough, but not the right thing.

"Will you oblige me by recommending a good tailor?" said Philip. "I need a complete outfit of wearing apparel, and it will save me a lot of trouble if somebody will tell me exactly what to buy and where to buy it."

His uncanny trick of thought reading disconcerted the manager greatly. Undoubtedly the boy was a puzzle. Never had this experienced man of the world met any one more self possessed, more direct and yet, with it all, exceedingly polite.

"I take it that you want the best?" he inquired pleasantly.

"Yes."

"Are you lunching in the hotel?"

"I would like something sent here, if you please, and there again your advice will be most gratefully accepted."

The manager felt that a generation was growing up of which he knew nothing, but he simply answered:

"I will see to it. Do you—er—take wine?"

Philip laughed, that pleasant whole souled laugh of his which instantly secured him friends.

"Not yet, monsieur."

"Foret is my name."

"Well, M. Foret, I am far too young as yet for either wine or tobacco. I promised my mother I would touch neither until I am twenty-one, and I will keep my word. I think I would like some café au lait."

"I understand. Your déjeuner will be sent up in ten minutes. By the time you have finished I will have people here from two or three establishments who will meet all your requirements in the shape of clothes and the rest."

An hour's talk and the payment of checks on account worked wonders. Before many days had passed Philip was amply provided with raiment. His presence in the hotel, too, attracted no comment w—