

The King of Diamonds

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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 onto the urchin with the refined utterance who had dared to 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 good humor. He had just purchased a pearl for two hundred and fifty pounds which he would sell to Lady Somebody for eight hundred pounds, to match another earring.

"It appears to be," said Philip, after the merriment had subsided.

For some reason the boy's grave, earnest eyes conquered the big 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' talk with you in regard to business of an important matter."

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

Sheer wonder kept the Jew 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 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 going 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 six or seven hundred pounds," 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 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."

"Oh? 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; 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 the Jew 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, twenty—of assorted sizes, eh?"

"Far more! Far more! Be content with what I tell you to-day, 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 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 Jew, 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, ten pounds, a twenty-carat gem of the same purity is worth any sum beyond two thousand pounds, and the diamond Philip had submitted for inspection would probably cut into ten or twelve carats of fine lustre. To speak, therefore, of an abundance of larger and finer stones, was a simple absurdity. The Den 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 steadily fixed on the Jew's face and yet with a distinct 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 enough 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.

The Jew, seemingly at a loss for words, bent again over the stone. He was scrutinizing it closely when a heavy tread crossed the outer show-room and the door was flung open.

A policeman entered, and Isaacstein bounced out of his chair.

"I have sent for you, constable," to take this boy into custody," he cried, excitedly. "He came here, ten minutes ago and offered for sale a very valuable diamond, so rare, and worth so much, that he must have stolen it."

Philip, too, sprang up.

"It is a lie!" he shouted. "How dare you say such a thing when I have told you that it is mine!"

The policeman collared him by the shoulder.

"Steady, my young spark," he said. "Mr. Isaacstein knows what he is about, and I don't suppose he is very far wrong this time. Do you know the boy, sir?" he went on.

Isaacstein gave a voluble and accurate summary of Philip's statements and each moment the policeman's grip became firmer. Evidently the boy was the mere agent of a gang of thieves, though it was beyond comprehension that any sort of an idiot should choose an emissary with broken boots and ragged clothing in order to effect a deal with the leading house in Hatton Garden.

Philip listened to the recital in dumb agony. His face was deathly pale and his eyes glowed with rage and shame that filled his soul. So the Jew had been playing with him, merely fooling him until some secret signal by fooling him until some secret signal by an electric bell had sent a senger flying for the police. His dream of wealth would end in the jail, his fairy oasis would be a felon's cell. Ver ywell, be it so. If he could help Philip in his eagerness, nearly forgot his resolution to advance slowly. How the diamond merchant would

shook out, but not before he found courage to say:

"Thank you once more, Mr. Judd. I will keep my promise, 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 his straws for being connected with an important case.

At last Philip 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.

"You are hurting me," said the boy. "I merely wish to put my hand in my pocket. Are you afraid of me, that you hold me so fast?"

The policeman, like the rest, did not fail to notice Philip's diction. The scornful superiority of his words, the challenge of the final question, took him aback. He relaxed his grip and grinned confusedly.

Philip instantly produced a paper of diamonds and opened it widely, so that all the stones could be seen. He handed his parcel to the policeman.

"Take good care of them, constable," he said. "Judging from results, they would not be safe in that man's hands."

But Isaacstein did not hear the insult. When he saw the collection he nearly lost his senses. What had he done? Was he or the boy mad? The veins stood out on his forehead, and he wobbled so fearfully that he clutched the desk for support. A scarecrow of a boy wandering about London with thousands of pounds' worth of diamonds in his pocket, wrapped up in a piece of newspaper like so many sweets! There were not any meteoric diamonds of such value in all the museums and private collections in the world. He began to perspire. Evthepoliceman was astounded, quite as much as being called "constable" by Philip as by the mean appearance of articles presumably of great value.

"This is a rum go. What do you make of it, Mr. Isaacstein?" he said.

The query restored the Jew's wits. After all, here was the law speaking. It would have been the wildest folly for a man of his position to dabble in this mysterious attraction.

With a great effort he forced himself to speak.

"Lock him up instantly. The matter must be fully inquired into. And do be careful of that parcel, constable. Where do you take him? To the Bridewell station? I will follow you in a cab in five minutes."

So Philip, handcuffed, was marched down the stairs past the gratified office boy and out into the street.

As for Isaacstein, he required a little brandy before he felt able to follow.

CHAPTER V. Perplexing a Magistrate.

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 a grinning callousness.

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

"Nicked a ldy's purse, eh?"

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

"Blimey, 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 across 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-st., and had barely passed the restaurant where Philip had lunched. The hour was yet early for mid-day customers, and the bald-headed 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 denunciation of the trivial incident of twenty minutes earlier.

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

"The thieving young scamp!" he ejaculated. "That's right, Mr. Policeman, lock 'i mup. 'E's a reg'lar wrong 'un."

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

The stout man gurgled.

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

"Mebbe, an' mebbe not. Enny-how, two bob won't break me. 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:

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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 the Jew.

"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 are wrong."

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

"What can I do, boy!" he vociferated, almost hysterically. "You will have to say where you got those 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 whitewashed cell. He refused some coffee and bread brought to him at twelve 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 would awaken amidst 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 moneypence to buy a quire of newspapers. He remembered 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 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 which his same 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, which was true enough, the prisoner's van having made a special call for his benefit.

After a rumbling journey through unseen streets, he emerged into another walled-in court yard. He was led through some more corridors, and told to "skip lively" through 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 gentleman, 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 made the arrest. His story was brief and coherent, 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 to-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 anything. He wound up an account of Philip's visit and the meteoric diamonds known to him from which 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 fifty thousand pounds!"

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 ideas, 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 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 lapse 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 centre 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 Diabolo, or Devil's Gulch, and specimens of ore are in every collection. Ordinary tools were spoiled, and an emery wheel worn by some hard ingredients in the iron, and analysis has revealed the presence therein of three forms of diamonds—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 these. In 1886 a meteor fell in Russia, and contained one 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 in 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 or 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 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 copy-book 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, everyone laughed, and the reporters plied 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 ran through space.

The boy himself was apparently the most disinterested person present. While listening to Isaacstein, he once

again experienced the odd sensation of aloofness, of lofty domination, amidst a commonplace and insignificant environment. The Jew was clever, of course, but his cleverness was that of the text-book, 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. The Jew gazed intently at the packet of diamonds and rubbed his simious 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 turned toward the thin, ragged 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 look 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 fifty thousand pounds? 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 had 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.

CHAPTER VI. A Game of Hazard.

Philip knew that a fresh ordeal was at hand. How could he preserve his secret—how hope to prevail against the majesty of British law as personified by the serene authority of the man whose penetrating glance now rested on him? His was a dour and stubborn nature, though hardly molded as yet in rigid lines. He threw back his head and tightened his lips. He would cling to his anonymity to the bitter end, no matter what the cost. But he would not lie. Never again would he condescend to adopt a subterfuge.

"Philip Morland," began the magistrate.

"My name is not Philip Morland," interrupted the boy.

"Then what is your name?"

"I will not tell you, sir. I mean no disrespect, but the fact that I am treated as a criminal merely because I wish to dispose of my property warns me of what I may expect if I state publicly who I am and where I live."

For the first time the magistrate heard the correct and well-modulated flow of Philip's speech. If anything, it made more dense the mist through which he was trying to grope his way.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that if I state who I am, I will be robbed and swindled by all with whom I come in contact. I have starved, I have been beaten, for trying to earn a living. I was struck last evening for saving a girl's life. I was arrested and dragged through the streets, hand-cuffed, this morning, because I went openly to a dealer to sell a portion—to sell some of my diamonds. I will take no more risks. You may imprison me, but you cannot force me to speak. If you are a fair man, you will give me back my diamonds and let me go free."

The outburst fairly electrified the court. Philip could not have adopted a more domineering tone were he the Governor of the Bank of England charged with passing a counterfeit half-crown. The magistrate was as surprised as any.

"I do not wish to argue with you," he said, quietly; "nor do I expect you to commit yourself in any way. But you must surely see that for a poverty-stricken boy to be found in possession of gems of great marketable value is a circumstance that demands inquiry, however honest and—er—well bred you may be."

"The only witness against me has said that the diamonds could not have been stolen," cried Philip, now thoroughly aroused, and ready for any war of wits.

"Quite true. The inference is that you have discovered a meteoric deposit of diamonds."

"I have. Some—not all—are before you."

A tremor shook the court. Isaacstein swallowed something, and his head sank more deeply below his shoulders.

"Then I take it that you will not inform me of the locality of this deposit?"

"Yes," said Philip, "but only if you will disclose your name and address; you will reveal that locality?"

(Continued on page 4.)