

A DIAMOND MYSTERY

BY DEREK VANE



FIRST OF ALL, HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO SECURE THE DIAMONDS?

One morning I received the following note from the Chief:

"I should be very much obliged if you would help an acquaintance of mine, who does not wish to employ an ordinary detective, in a search for some lost diamonds. It is out of your usual line, I know, but the reward is very handsome, and I thought you might be kind enough to take the matter up, as you have nothing else on hand just now. Also, although I don't like the man—his name is Robert Moss—I should be glad to assist him, if I could, in return for some valuable help he once rendered me."

To please Sir Edward I wrote saying that I would do what I could, and Mr. Moss called on me the same day.

It did not need more than a casual glance to see that "Moss" must have been originally written "Moses." His face and bearing showed his race, and showed it in its least pleasing form. Though a comparatively young man, his figure was full and heavy, his face coarse but strong, with thick, noticeably red lips, and bold, staring black eyes. Altogether I was not impressed in his favour.

"I want you to investigate a most extraordinary affair for me," he began excitedly. "I have always been able to manage my own business hitherto, but I acknowledge to being fairly puzzled now. I hear that you are very clever at unravelling complications, so perhaps you may be able to get hold of a clue; at all events it is my last hope."

I could see he was a little scornful of my capacity and my wit, and that made me the more keen to do my best.

"You must know that I am a dealer in precious stones, principally diamonds," he went on. "I have an office in Hatton Garden, but that has been such a happy hunting ground for London thieves lately—you will, no doubt, remember two robberies there within the last six months—that, for greater safety, I often keep the principal part of my stock at my room in the Gray's Inn Road."

"Is the question of greater security your only reason for doing this?" I asked. He looked at me sharply.

"Well, perhaps not entirely. I am not a diamond merchant in the regular way, you know. I am looked upon as the Gray's Inn Road man. Apparently, I have very little business. But I do a good deal in a quiet way. I get orders from private collectors or gentlemen who understand something about diamonds themselves, and are particular to have only perfect stones. I go to Amsterdam and other centers, and hunt up what they want, and they have the stones sent according to order. I have seen it more than happen," I said, "that at times you have stones in your possession representing a considerable amount of money?"

"Of course. And, as luck would have it, I had the prettiest lot of diamonds yesterday that I have had for a long time. I had collected them over an American millionaire, who was going to have some diamonds put in a pocket for his wife. He had been diamond digging himself at one time at Mato Grosso, in Brazil, and knew what he was doing, so I couldn't palm off anything second-rate on him."

"Otherwise, no doubt, you would have done so," I thought. Aloud I said:

"You say you had the diamonds yesterday? Do you mean that they were lost or stolen, then?"

"I don't know what to think," he said. "I've been half off my head since it happened. For I shall be ruined if they are found. They're gone—disappeared entirely, without leaving a trace, but how they could have done so I haven't the least idea. It's more like magic than anything else."

"Pshaw!" I said, a little contemptuously, for he looked nervous and half afraid. "Some of our London thieves are clever enough to get along without any of the black arts."

"You don't know all yet," he said, solemnly. "Wait until I have finished, and then if you will be as ready with an explanation."

"I have a bed-sitting-room in the Gray's Inn Road on the ground floor, with a cellar underneath. The cellar is long, but narrow, with no window or ventilation of any kind; the only means of admittance to it is by a trap-door in the floor of my room, which would not be seen by any one coming in, as the bed has been placed over it. I should say the existence of the cellar is not known to anybody, except myself and my landlady. When I first took possession of it, it had apparently never been used. It was in this convenient hiding-place I would on occasions deposit my valuable collection of stones."

"Yes. Yesterday morning I received the last stones which made up the required number, and, having nothing to do at the office, I came back to the Gray's Inn Road with the little canvas bag in my pocket. I locked the door of my room, counted the stones again to see that the number was correct, and then put them away in the cellar."

"How? Have you a safe there, or was that kind of a receptacle?"

"None. The cellar is a hiding place in itself. I could not have a better. There is a drop of about seven feet to the floor, and no means of getting into it. Of course, I could have had a ladder put there, but that would have called attention to the place, and implied that I meant to use it, which I particularly wished to avoid."

"But how did you manage, then, when you wanted to go down?" I naturally inquired.

"I have never been down. I had an ingenious arrangement, made like a window,

whereby I could let down any packet until I heard it touch the ground, and wind it up again when I required it. The handle was fastened on the inside of the trap-door, so that nothing could be seen, even by any one who might look under my bed."

"How does the trap door open?" I asked.

"In the usual way, with a sunk handle."

"Is there a fastening of any kind—a bolt, or lock or key?"

"No. I would not have given much credit to security, and I should have had to call in outside help to have anything of the kind done."

"You let down the bag of diamonds into the cellar in the ordinary way, I presume, when you came in. How long was it before you missed them?"

"I intended taking them round to my customer this morning, and when, after breakfast, I pushed the bed on one side and opened the trap-door, I saw the end of the chain dangling loose. There was nothing attached to it. The leather pouch with which it was always weighted, and into

which I dropped my valuables, had gone—and the diamonds, of course, with it."

"I suppose it is not possible that the chain had broken?" He shook his head, decidedly.

"Quite impossible. It was nearly a new one, and though the links were small, it was very strong, and well made, capable of bearing a much greater weight than what I had attached to it."

"Did you make an examination of the cellar?"

"As far as I could by the light of a candle, for you see I could not go down without sending for a ladder, and I thought I had better keep the matter as quiet as I could for the present." I nodded approvingly.

"Quite right. About how much of the chain had gone?"

"Nearly half, I should say."

"So far," I said, "although the affair is a little unusual, I see nothing in it too strange to be accounted for. Some one must have heard of your hiding place and

watched for an opportunity when you were out of the room to rob you. If they had once discovered the existence of the trap-door, the rest would be comparatively easy. The only thing I don't understand is why they should have troubled to cut the chain, when they could have wound up the diamonds within reach. For, of course, the person who committed the robbery must have known all about your arrangements."

"But," he cried excitedly, "I was never out of the room! That is where the mystery comes in!"

"Never out of the room?" I echoed. "Oh! you must have been in it might be only for a short time and you have forgotten?"

"I never left the room," he repeated solemnly. "From 11 o'clock yesterday morning, when I returned from my office, until 9 o'clock this morning; twenty-two hours in all. I was very busy with some private affairs, and I had my meals brought in to me and went early to bed."

"Then," I said, "the thief must have got in in the night when you were asleep."

"That cannot be," he replied. "For the door of my room was locked on the inside this morning, as I locked it last night before going to bed, and the window was fastened. Besides, I am a light sleeper and no one could have moved my bed away from the trap door without rousing me, and it is impossible to open the trap unless the bedstead is pushed on one side."

"I was nonplussed."

"And you were in the room twenty-two hours," I mused. "and you say the cellar was very strong, and well made, capable of being gained admittance to it before your return home and remained shut up all night they would be dead or unconscious by this morning. No one could keep his senses in such a confined space for such a length of time, without having any fresh air."

"Of course they could not," he assented eagerly. "That is what made the place so safe. You see how inexplicable it is."

"Then," I went on, "there is a chance you may find the thief lying asphyxiated on the floor of the cellar. You could not have seen very far into the darkness by the light of a candle." He started.

"I hadn't thought of that," he said. "But do you think any man would have risked his life in such a way? Surely, when he found his senses going he would have called out for assistance? Penal servitude is better than death." I shrugged my shoulders.

"I do not know; some men are very obstinate and will take any risk rather than be caught. At all events we will go round and have a look at the place; it is the only thing I can suggest at present."

"We set out for the Gray's Inn road together, buying a rope ladder on the way. The room and the position of the cellar answered to the description given by Mr. Moss. Locking the door as we entered, he pushed the bed on one side and opened the trap. The air that met us was damp and noisome and I involuntarily drew back. It was impossible that any one could have lived twenty-two hours in it. For it is a well-known scientific fact that "expired air, besides being short of oxygen, is charged with carbon dioxide, watery vapor, and other products, which no one can breathe for any length of time."

I took a candle, and swinging it gently to and fro I tried to look into the depths, quite

expecting to see a figure stretched dead or senseless on the floor. But it was too dark to see distinctly, except just under the trap door. It would be necessary to go down. Mr. Moss secured the rope ladder and taking the candle in one hand I cautiously descended, looking sharply all round. But there was nothing human to be seen. It was a dirty place and had apparently not been used or cleared for years. The floor had worn away in parts and was rotten and slippery, and the walls were damp and slimy, with discolored blotches and fungus-like growths. There was no ventilation of any kind, and the air was almost poisonous. As I carefully examined the walls to ascertain whether there was not a door or outlet of some kind concealed in them which might help to explain the mystery, I suddenly caught sight of something that made me stop short with a sharp exclamation.

On the soft, dirty-white composition of which the walls consisted was the distinct impression of a hand, which must have been made quite recently. It was long and narrow and, though not very large, it suggested a man's hand more than a woman's. The person to whom it belonged must have pressed rather heavily on the wall, for the markings of the fingers and thumb were distinctly to be seen in the yielding substance, particularly all the lines of the thumb.

I took my pocketknife and with some difficulty I cut out the impression of the tell-tale hand. Then I climbed up the rope ladder and breathed the fresh air above with a sigh of relief.

"Well," Mr. Moss said impatiently, "I suppose you have discovered nothing?"

"I have not discovered the thief, but I have found his mark," I replied. "The man to whom this hand belongs is the man who has your diamonds."

"And I showed him the plaster cast. For a moment he was speechless with amazement, and stared at my find as though it were something supernatural."

"But I don't understand," he exclaimed. "What has become of him? How has he vanished? Could any one have lived down there for a day and a night?"

"Quite impossible," I said decidedly. "How the robbery was committed is a perfect mystery to me, and it is of no use wanting my time over trying to explain it. Instead of that, I shall direct all my energies to finding the owner of the hand."

"To begin with, who lives in this house besides yourself?"

"The landlady and two lodgers," he replied, pulling himself together.

"Are you on a friendly footing with either of the lodgers?"

"No. I have run across them occasionally, but I purposely keep them at a distance. I do not want any one prying round my place. There is no love lost between us," he added with a laugh.

"I could well imagine that."

"I suppose they are out all day? Do you know what their work is, or anything about them?"

"The woman who has the first floor is a dressmaker. The old man at the top is half deaf. I fancy, but harmless enough."

"In what way is he deaf?"

"Well, he looks crazy enough and he very seldom goes out, but spends all the day and half the night, too, very likely, making

experiments. But I've never heard of their coming to anything. There is a horrible smell of chemicals sometimes, and I should not be surprised at an explosion any day. However, the woman at the house wouldn't listen to me when I advised her to give him notice."

"Have you any printing ink?" I asked, after a moment. He looked at me in surprise.

"No; but I can get some. What do you want it for?"

"Never mind now," I replied. "Bring in a small blotting-pad at the same time."

He returned in a few minutes with both articles. I poured some of the ink on the pad, and when it had absorbed enough to leave the surface moist, I wrapped it up carefully with the blotting-pad.

"Now," I said, "I must leave you a little while. Wait here till my return." And before he could raise an objection, I had gone, closing the door behind me.

Passing myself off as a traveler, with a wonderful domestic article to recommend, I managed to secure interviews with both the landlady and the dressmaker, but without result. Their hands did not match with the hand of the cellar. Now there only remained the old inventor to be examined.

I inquired on the landing to collect my thoughts, and to think of an excuse that should pass muster with him. As an inventor, he would naturally be interested in any new discovery; I would ask his advice and assistance in an imaginary experiment of my own.

I knocked at the door, and in a few minutes the key was turned, and it was opened a little way. A curious figure met my gaze. I did not under that a coarse-natured man like Moss should call him half-crazed. A pale, worn face, surrounded by a shock of white hair, under which a pair of brilliant dark eyes looked out with the fixed absent gaze of the enthusiast. A man who would be only fully alive when he was at work. A man of mind and brains, evidently, if a dreamer; certainly not a common thief.

He glanced from his face to his hands, but they were immersed in thick leather gloves to protect them from injury, no doubt. He looked at me impatiently, holding the door with one hand.

"I must apologize for disturbing you," I said, courteously. "But I have heard that you are a clever inventor and have considerable scientific knowledge, and I am anxious to consult you about a little experiment of my own."

"Will you come in?" he said, his face lighting up. "I did not think I was so well known. In what way can I serve you?"

"Mine is only a very humble invention," I said with a laugh. "but I hope it will be a paying one. So, if you can help me over the difficulty, I shall be glad to acknowledge your services in a liberal manner. I am trying to invent a new ink, which shall dry of itself almost instantaneously. You will understand how useful such an invention would be, as it would do away with the need of blotting paper or any similar clumsy adjuncts of the writing table."

"What is your difficulty?" he asked, with a touch of contempt for the smallness of my ideas. He had evidently expected something more high-flown.

"My ink will dry in thirty seconds, but that is too long. I must have it dry in ten. Hitherto I have failed to do this and

WHERE THE WRECKED OREGON IS BEING REBUILT.

FAMOUS BATTLESHIP NOW RESTS IN DRY DOCK AT PUGET SOUND NAVAL STATION.



THIS PICTURE SHOWS THE DAMAGED HULL OF THE OREGON AFTER THE HOLES HAD BEEN PATCHED.

only stops were made for coal. Immediately after coaling at Key West she took her place in the blockading list at Santiago, and in the great battle of July 3 quickly developed a power greater than that attained on her trial trip and a speed only slightly less, easily distancing all the other ships immediately engaged except the Brooklyn, and forcing the fleetest of the Spanish cruisers to surrender.

Present Visit Made Necessary By Wreck in Orient.

The present visit of the Oregon to the naval station here was made necessary because of the severe damage sustained when she ran onto the uncharted rocks in the Gulf of Pe-chi-li, at the time of the recent international complications in China. It is probable that she will not be in commission again for six months at least, so extensive are the repairs and reconstruction work planned, which will cost \$200,000.

It was on a bright, beautiful day in the latter part of October that the majestic warship steamed from the wharf at Puget Sound Naval Station into the dry dock that will be her berth for several months to come. The Oregon had been at the naval station several weeks getting ready for the overhauling. Her ammunition

had been taken off at San Francisco, there being no magazine here large enough to hold it. Because of the strain sustained by the warship when she grounded on the rocks in Chinese waters, it was necessary to take special precautions in docking her. For days previous to the docking, preparations were made for the event. Certain parts of the ship forward were strengthened with heavy timbers, and the blocking in the dry dock arranged under the direction of Carpenter J. P. Yates of the Oregon, so that it would not interfere with the broken sections of the keel and plates. Then a line was stretched across the dock to show just where the warship should stop, and the water was turned in. As soon as the required depth was reached, the ponderous gates were opened and the warship steamed in, with her colors flying and the naval station band playing "Hail to the Chief." The gates were again closed. As the water was pumped out, slowly, the big ship settled down gently on the blocks and timbers placed to receive her, and divers sent below ascertained that she rested evenly. Shores were placed in position on port and starboard sides, the dock was pumped dry and the extensive work of reconstruction was ready to proceed.

Carpenter J. P. Yates, who knows the great warship from stem to stern, will, un-

der Naval Constructor Hibbs, superintendent of the rebuilding of the ship. Mr. Yates was with the Oregon at the time she struck the rocks in the Gulf of Pe-chi-li, when he took charge of the temporary repairs that enabled her to proceed to Kure, Japan, where she was put on the dry dock and patched up.

Carpenter Yates Graphically Describes the Accident.

"It was an anxious time," said Mr. Yates, "when the Oregon was grounded in Chinese waters. When we struck, the water began rushing in and flooding the decks, and we thought our time had surely come. The pumps were put to work and the water finally lowered, enabling us to go below and ascertain the extent of the damage. By groping about we learned in a general way that where the ship had struck on the hard flint rock amidships she was badly hurt. The keel for some distance was bent up-wards fully nineteen inches, a number of plates were crushed and torn, frames were broken, rivets started and other damage done inside."

"At the time we went on the rocks the weather was fair and the sea comparatively calm. We were apprehensive that a storm might come up and wash us off the rocks and sink us in deep water before the holes could be plugged. It was an anxious time

to all an board, from the Captain down to the youngest apprentice. The grand old ship had made so fine a record and was such a splendid fighting machine that we had to think of losing her. While every effort was being put forth to get her in condition to stand a trip to the nearest dry dock, a foreign warship stood by ready to render any assistance necessary. Mattresses, bedding, canvas and tarpaulins were stuffed into the holes. We finally slid off the rock. Only constant pumping kept her up until we reached Kure, Japan, where she was promptly docked. The accompanying photographs, taken for the Japanese Government soon after she was placed in the dry dock, give an excellent idea of the extent of her injuries. How we ever managed to keep her afloat on the trip to Kure was a nine days' wonder to all who saw the terrible holes in her hull."

Richmond Pearson Hobson's Report on the Vessel.

"Naval Constructor Richmond Pearson Hobson, who had been ordered from Manila to Kure, made a thorough examination of the Oregon and reported her condition to the Navy Department at Washington, with recommendations as to the repairs necessary. In view of the large cost and the long time that it would take in the dock at

Kure to permanently repair the Oregon, it was recommended that she be fixed up temporarily to enable her to reach a home port and there be completely overhauled. This plan was carried out by the Japanese Government assisting in every way possible. The weakened parts of the warship's structure were strengthened with shoring. Wherever possible the plates were riveted. Holes were patched up with wood and covered with plating; the spaces in the inner bottom were filled with cement and made perfectly watertight. In that condition the Oregon was enabled to reach Puget Sound safely.

Naval Constructor Hobson, in his report on the Oregon's accident, said, in part: "There are two principal injuries, both occurring forward, where the vessel struck heavily upon the hard flint rock, the first being amidships, forward of the foremast, about twenty feet in length and extending about ten feet up on each side; the second occurring about the same distance from the foremast, from the edge of the keel plate for about twelve feet up the side, extending over a length of about twenty feet. In both injuries the indentations are deep and abrupt, but the plating escaped tearing in the first. In the second, however, it is badly crushed and torn."

The naval constructor further suggested "that to make proper permanent repairs the outside plating and the inside structure adjoining would have to be removed practically over the whole area of the two principal injuries, and almost all the material involved in the injury on the port side would have to be renewed."

When in command of the Oregon has a complement of 400 officers and men, with 30 marines. There being no necessity for that number now, the crew has been reduced to 200 officers and men and six marines. The officers are: Captain G. A. B. Williams, Commander J. P. Yates and Machinist T. J. Green and W. H. Wood. C. E. C.

The Two Locks of Hair.

A youth, light-hearted and content,
I wander through the world;
Here, Arab-like, I pitched my tent,
And straight again is furled.

Yet oft I dreamed that once a wife
Close to my heart was locked,
And in the sweet repose of life
A blessed child I rocked.

I wake! Away, that dream-away!
Too long did it remain!
So long, that both by night and day
It ever comes again.

The end lies over in my thought;
To a grave so cold and deep
The mother beautiful was brought,
Then dropped the child to sleep.

But now the dream is wholly o'er;
I bathe mine eyes in soot;
And wander through the world once more,
A youth, so light and free.

Two locks—and they are wondrous fair—
Left me that vision mild;
The brown is from the mother's hair,
The blond is from the child.

And when I see that lock of gold,
Falls forward, and I sigh,
And when the dark lock I behold,
I wish that I were dead.

—Gustav Paus.

Leaves at Play.

Scamper, little leaves, about,
In the autumn wind, and
I can hear the old wind about,
Laughing as you run;
And I haven't any doubt
That he likes the fun.

When you'll run a month or so,
Very tired you'll get;
But the same old wind, I know,
Will be laughing yet.
When he tucks you in your snow-
Downy coverlet.

So, run on and have your play,
Romp with all your might;
Dance across the autumn day,
While the sun is bright.
Soon you'll hear the old wind say,
"Little leaves, good night!"

—Frank Dempster Sherman.