

The Tell-Tale Diamond

by R. D. Mason

ON the night of January 10, 18—, the Clifton Bank was entered by burglars who made good their escape with thirty thousand dollars in their possession. As soon as the robbery became known I repaired to the bank and sought the president, to whom I presented my credentials and made known my intention of beginning work at once. The old gentleman readily acquiesced, and together we passed into the main office where several spruce looking young men were scratching away as unconcernedly as if they had not been engaged in an animated discussion of the robbery only a minute before. I glanced at them sharply, but saw nothing suspicious in their looks, and concluded it would be a waste of time to question them.

I examined the [lock] of the door opening upon the street, and found it had not been tampered with, although the first arrival had found the door ajar. I next turned my attention to a door opening upon the rear, and found it securely locked, in which condition it had been, so the president assured me, since the night before.

“Who has charge of the key of this door?” I inquired.

“Mr. N—, the cashier, has one, and our janitor the other.”

“Can either of these gentlemen be summoned?”

“Yes, both if needs be. Here, Warren, run round to Mr. N—'s and tell him that I wish to see him immediately.”

The clerk addressed was about to obey, when a sudden thought struck me, and I called him back.

“You need not trouble Mr. N—; but if the janitor can be found ask him to step down for a minute or two.”

In less than two minutes the clerk returned accompanied by the janitor—a broad shouldered Irishman, whose answers to my questions were given in such a straight forward manner, that I at once exonerated him from all blame.

“You lock up after the clerks have gone home, do you not?” I inquired, looking the man in the eyes.

“Yis, sometimes I does, an' sometimes I dosent,” was the laconic answer.

“When do you not?”

“Whin Mr. N— worruks late o'nights as has been the case putty much o'late.”

“Did you lock up last night?”

“Yis, sir, an' fwats more, tried every dure afterwards.”

“At what time did you lock that door?” and I pointed toward the front entrance.

“Well, as near as I can recollect, half past siven.”

“Are you sure you shot the bolt into its socket?”

“Aye! I could swear that I locked that dure an' left it locked.”

“How about the windows? Did you fasten them as well?”

“Yis, ivery wan or thim.”

“Very good, sir. You may go now if you like,” and I turned to the president.

“Now then, Mr. J—, with your permission I will investigate matters below stairs.”

“Certainly, sir; but first let me get my coat and hat. I am troubled with rheumatism, you observe, and have to exercise more than usual care when descending to the vaults, I will be with you in a minute or two,” and the old gentleman disappeared within his private office.

“The old hunks!” I heard someone exclaim, “Devilish careful of himself, ain't he?” And then a snicker ran around the room.

I judged from this that the “old hunks” in question was something of a bugbear to the gentleman who had just delivered himself; but I had no time for reflection, for the old gentleman made his appearance at this instant and conducted me to the vault below. The heavy iron door of the large vault in which the bank's funds were stored stood wide open, affording a view of the interior, which presented a scene of confusion not unfamiliar to my eyes. Books and papers lay upon the floor in every direction, where they had been thrown after having gratified the curiosity of the burglars.

I stooped to pick up a crumpled document that lay at my feet, and as I did so, the sparkle of a gem, heretofore concealed by the paper, caught my eye. With a quick motion of the hand I picked the stone from the floor and held it concealed in the palm of my hand while I perused the document, more for the purpose of concealing the exultation I felt at having gained so important a clue, than for any other reason.

Having glanced at several other papers similar to the one I had first picked up, I began a thorough search of the vault, which proved fruitless; but the diamond in my possession was sufficient foundation on which to weave a network of circumstantial evidence.

“Well, sir,” queried the president, as I signified my intention of returning above, “have you discovered anything that would be likely to aid you in bringing the villains to grief?”

I nodded.

“Ah! Then you will have no difficulty in bringing the authors of this deed to justice?”

“None whatever.”

“Good! I am glad to hear you say that. Only catch the perpetrators and they shall be prosecuted to the full extent of the law!” And he brought his cane down as if to give force to his utterance.

“You may possibly have occasion to retract that assertion,” I mentally added, as I made a few notes in my diary.

Having no further business at the bank I took my departure and went direct to a celebrated jeweler's establishment in Somers street. The proprietor of the store knew me, and intuitively guessing my business, conducted me to his private office.

“Well, Tracy, what's up?” he inquired, when we had become seated.

“Nothing unusual,” I replied. “You have heard of the Clifton Bank robbery, I presume?”

“The Clifton Bank? Ah! yes, I did hear someone remarking about it. There was no account of it in the morning papers.”

“No, I believe not. The affair was not discovered in time for the reporter to get hold of it. Well, sir, the bank has been robbed to the tune of fifteen thousand dollars, and I am engaged on the case.”

“Hum! Indeed! Hope you will catch the rascals, old boy. Dreadful state of things to exist in a small city like this,” and the little man twisted uneasily in his chair.

“Not so bad as you may imagine. Be calm, my friend; the parties that robbed the Clifton Bank will not be likely to pay you a visit.”

“Ah! I hope your surmises are correct; but pray tell me your reasons for thinking as you do.”

“Certainly. In the first place, the bank robbery is the work of one man, and he is not a professional burglar; in the second place, that man cares more for greenbacks than he does for gold ornaments, and would not plunder your place for all there is in it; in fact, this very same party owned a diamond, but threw it away rather than carry it around with him. It is very pretty, is it not?”

And I held the stone up to him.

The jeweler took it, examined it closely, and returned it to me, with the remark:

“It is, as you remark, a very pretty stone, and, I might add, very valuable for a gem of its size. That is your clue, I presume?”

“Yes; the only clue I happen to possess. Now, then, I am anxious to find the ring to which this stone belongs, and will you please allow me to see the rings that have been left here for resetting since the robbery.”

“With pleasure. Excuse me one moment.”

And my friend disappeared, returning, a minute later, with a number of rings on a tray, which he placed on a table, and began to examine the labels attached.

“Some of these rings have been in our possession a number of days. Ah! here is one received this morning. ‘Jan. 11—diamond setting—E. Baker.’”

And he read the inscription.

I took the diamond from his hand, and examined it. It was a finely chased ring of virgin gold, with the stone missing. I fitted the diamond in the setting, and passed it to my friend.

“By Jove, Tracy, that is the very ring you are in search of! Now, let me see.”

And he went nearer the light.

“Yes, there can be no doubt about it. The stone fits in the setting nicely, and, now that I think of it, is of the same size and quality ordered.”

“What name did you say the party gave?”

“Baker—Emily Baker.”

“Emily Baker! Then it was a lady?”

“I presume so; at all events she looked and acted like one.”

“When is she to call for the ring?”

“To-morrow afternoon.”

“I must see her when she calls, and in order that I may play my cards to better advantage, I shall enter your service as clerk. What do you say?”

“I am perfectly willing, but take care what you do, old boy; there may possibly be some mistake.”

“That is very true, and if such should be the case, you may rest assured that I shall discover it in

time. Did I understand you to say that you had promised to have the ring ready to-morrow afternoon?"

"No, sir; I said nothing of the kind. She said she should call for it to-morrow afternoon, and I simply nodded assent."

"Then lay the ring aside, and leave the rest to me. I shall call to see you again to-morrow; until then, adieu!"

And I passed into the street.

I had thus far met with better success than I had anticipated, but I was nowise elated nor thrown off guard, for I knew I had a genuine sharper to deal with, whom it would be a difficult matter to outwit.

During the day I visited several places where "ye little game of faro" was in full blast, and picked up several items of interest, all of which tended to convince me that I was on the right scent.

Early the next morning I repaired to my friend's establishment, and was assigned a position behind the counter, where, it is needless to say, I felt ill at ease; but years of training and patient study had enabled me to act almost any role to perfection, and it was not long before the feeling of uneasiness wore off.

The day dragged slowly along, for trade was not very brisk, and the salesman had but little to do besides reading the papers and yawning at each other over the glass cases.

Four o'clock! Would the owner of the ring ever come? I asked myself the question a hundred times, and was on the point of doing so again, when the door opened, and a heavily veiled figure glided in, approached the counter, and inquired, in a somewhat hesitating voice:

"Is Mr. — in?"

"No, madam, he is not," I replied. "Can I do anything for you?"

"I left a ring in charge of Mr.— for a diamond setting, which was to be ready this afternoon. You will please let me have it, together with the bill."

"What name?" I inquired, bringing out the tray containing the articles left for repairs.

"Emily Baker."

"Emily Baker," I muse, picking up several rings and examining them. "It does not appear to be among these. Ah! I recollect what has become of it," and I replaced the tray and took from the glass case a small box, removed the lid, and exposed the ring to view.

"Is that your ring madam?"

“It is. Why has it not been attended to?”

“Simply because the original stone has been recovered, and presuming that you would prefer that to any other, we have waited until we could hear from you.”

“The original has been recovered? I do not understand you,” and her voice sounded strangely masculine. “Pray tell me where it was found.”

“Certainly. It was found just where lost it, in the vault of the Clifton Bank!” and I reached across the counter, and with the quickness of thought tore the veil from the face of no less personage than the cashier of the Clifton Bank!

He saw that it was all up with him, and quietly submitted to the handcuffing process, but when I took him before the Chief he broke down and begged piteously to be let off for the sake of his wife and child.

When on trial, he confessed that he had stolen the bank's funds to liquidate gambling debts, and having missed the stone of his ring a short time after the robbery, and fearing that it might lead to his detection, had attempted to have it replaced, as we have shown.

The Bloomfield Times [New Bloomfield, PA], April 15, 1873

Newport [RI] Mercury, November 21, 1885

The *Newport Mercury's* version is slightly abbreviated and fails to credit the author.