

King Diamond

by Jim Gold

Adam Hausner sold diamonds on Forty-eighth Street, in his narrow store squeezed between a diamond emporium and a Greek restaurant. Merchants, hundreds of potential customers, cyclists, pedestrians, police, motorists, tourists, prostitutes, shoppers, and assorted kings and queens from all walks of life paraded daily up and down the street.

Adam was something of a philosopher. Often he drove to work early--before the rush of the city descended on his narrow preserve--and sat behind his small desk in the back of his store. From this position, away from the display cases of diamonds, necklaces, rings, and the green carpeting, and with the tranquility that only a good night's sleep can bring, he liked to take a step backward onto Philosophy Street in the city of his mind. There he wandered aimlessly, wondering about the nature of the world. Was life really a waking dream? Who had created customers? Who had created diamonds? Who had created Adam?

He never came up with answers. Often, just as he was getting close to understanding the relationship between body, mind, and spirit, he would be interrupted. One day it was by a heavy-set man with dark glasses, in a black overcoat, who came through the door, pointed at the display case, and asked, "Whaddaya ya gettin' for dis stone?"

Adam looked at the diamond, set in a gold ring. "Eighteen hundred dollars."

The customer glared at Adam, grunted, turned, and walked out without a further word.

Adam returned to his thoughts. What was the real nature of a diamond? he asked himself. Then it struck him! The diamonds he sold had no intrinsic value. They were, rather, reflections of the inner worth, symbols of the "real diamonds" people searched for in themselves.

He was selling reflections.

So, in a sense, his business was superfluous. Was he a fraud? Maybe he should have listened to his father and become a teacher. Then he could have given people something useful, guided them, helped them find their lost parts. His father knew value; he could tell the difference between a lasting truth and a bauble with an ephemeral shine.

Another thought came to him: People owned "real diamonds," but they weren't aware of them. And the few who were didn't know how to find them. By selling his precious stones,

Adam was performing a social service for his customers. He was supplying them with reminders.

His brain was really cooking that morning. He thought up new copy for his next ad: When you're feeling down and out, remember your diamond within.

He unlocked the display case, picked out his most valuable DeBeers gem, and slipped it into his vest pocket, just above his heart.

He drove home in a good mood that evening. When he hit a traffic jam on the Long Island Expressway, he turned on the radio and listened to Bach while exhaust fumes and waiting cars piled up around him.

After a fifteen-minute wait, the traffic began to move again. He cruised through Queens. At the Great Neck sign, he patted his vest pocket. There was nothing there.

He began to tremble. Where was it? Hadn't he put it in his vest pocket? Or had he? He couldn't remember.

With sweating hands he searched his pockets but found nothing. His mind flew back to the store. Mentally, he combed the display cases, desk drawers, safe, the rows of catalogs lying open on his desk. It was all a blank.

He pulled over to the side of the road and stopped to search the front seat, the glove compartment, the floor. Still nothing. He panicked. Where could it be? How could he have misplaced--or worse, lost--such a valuable jewel?

He finished the drive a physical wreck and slumped in his living room armchair, unable to touch the martini his wife brought him.

He gazed into space. Try to remember. . .try to remember. His finger inadvertently slid over his breast pocket. Try. . . there it is! He touched it. His diamond had been with him all along, safe and secure. How could he have forgotten where it was?

He held his hand over his heart. He pressed gently against the precious stone and resolved never to forget it again. Then he fell fast asleep.

"Dinner's ready!" Laura had prepared a huge spaghetti repast. All three kids charged down the stairs, jumped onto their chairs, and began grabbing food. "Wait a minute!" Laura snapped. "Don't be pigs! Wait until everyone is seated."

Adam yawned, stretched, and took slow, leisurely strides towards the dinner table. The kids eyed him eagerly. As soon as he sat down, they dove for the food. "Where are your manners?" Laura shouted. The kids started yelling at each other.

Adam's peace of mind vanished. "Shut up around here!" he said, slamming his fist on the table. "I want quiet when I eat!"

“Listen to your father,” Laura whispered.

The dinner continued in silence until Liam, the eldest son, dumped his plate of spaghetti on the floor and ran upstairs.

Adam’s appetite disappeared along with the spaghetti, which he forced Liam to clean up and flush down the toilet.

He took a walk around the block to help digest what little food he had eaten. As he passed the candy store, the old panic returned. *Where was his diamond?* He wanted to touch it, see it, feel it. He wanted to remember how valuable he was. But he kept forgetting. And when he did, a terrible panic ensued, a heavy cloud darkening his world. He felt like a fool, weak, even stupid. Why must a grown man need to touch a diamond for hope, security, sustenance, self-knowledge, and wisdom? Did everyone need a diamond as he did?

He bought four halvah bars in the candy store and raced down the dark side street, tearing off wrappers and shoving the bars into his mouth one after another. He hardly chewed them.

The sudden rush of sugar softened his fear and gave him hope. But the energy surge soon ended on a low plane of lethargy and despair. He had lost it again. He sat on a park bench. The night air was cool and clear. A breeze blew, then stopped. No cars passed. The leaves above his head were still. Adam listened. His heart stopped pounding. He sighed and slouched forward as his shoulders relaxed. Then he felt the stone moving against his heart. His eyes lit up. Found. Why had he ever been afraid? Why the panic? It had always been there.

Why was it so hard to remember? No matter how many times he tried, he kept forgetting. His treasure lay, always and forever, deep within him. But he needed diamonds to remind him.

He headed home along the darkened streets, thinking about reminders.

from *Carlos the Cloud*

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