

DIAMOND CIPHER

A BASEBALL ROMANCE

By W. A. PHELON

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Secret Service Chief Wilkins, puzzled over the theft of the diamond cipher, calls to his aid Detective Pinkwell. They find they have discovered a new cipher, the one known as the "Iron Man" cipher.

CHAPTER II—Brockett, Chula Lon, a Siamese, Ramon Solano, a Cuban, together with some twenty other men, practice baseball playing until dark. One of Wilkins' stenographers is seen to pass a paper to the ball player.

CHAPTER III—An outcome of Brockett's cipher, the ball player and Solano are engaged by government for mysterious mission. Yuzimoto, mysterious Jap, calls on Brockett.

CHAPTER IV—Brockett falls into Yuzimoto's trap. A fight follows. Brockett escapes out on top; Messenger McKane coming to rescue.

CHAPTER V—McKane was bearer of the mysterious cipher; is also a ball player.

CHAPTER VI—Yuzimoto returns to headquarters and reports his failure to obtain the cipher to Baron Zolner, Miss Lawson, and the chief of the secret service.

CHAPTER VII—Brockett and Solano have encounter with the Baron in which the latter comes out second best.

CHAPTER VIII—Brockett and Solano arrive in Jersey City; make appointment to meet McKane, the "Iron Man" baseball manager.

CHAPTER IX—Brockett and Solano arrive in New York and run into a Chinese Tong war; rescued by a white man.

CHAPTER X—The place of refuge found to be a trap and Yuzimoto, McKane, and Solano are rescued by McKane.

(Continued)

"Surely," purred Mr. Yuzimoto, "Mr. Brockett knows most capably of the differences now between us. Mr. Brockett is custodian of knowledge much necessary to Mr. Yuzimoto. Mr. Brockett is not of ignorance in this particular."

"I think I understand you, Mr. Yuzimoto," returned Brockett, "but why don't you come down to facts, and tell us just why we are here, and just what you want of us?"

"I will proceed to elucidate," explained Mr. Yuzimoto. "Mr. Brockett has, one time already, politely declined the acceptance of money proffered for the interpretation of a certain code, a most meritorious cipher. Mr. Brockett also, one time already, has given repulse to Mr. Yuzimoto in effort to obtain much-desired knowledge by force. Now, Mr. Brockett should be more amably accommodating."

"Tell him to go to blazes," interjected Solano, viciously. Mr. Yuzimoto turned his gentle smile upon the Cuban for a second.

"Mr. Solano speaks with rudeness, most impolite. He should be chided for his expressiveness. Now, then, I am all prepared to make the honorable Mr. Brockett another proposition. He has with him cipher dispatches—that is very well indeed. I could take them from him instantaneously, with able help from honorable Mr. Kelly. And the Oriental nodded lightly toward the stocker of the Italians.

"You are a fine-looking guinea to be called Kelly," snarled Solano, as the broad-shouldered young man turned toward him for a moment. Mr. Kelly flashed his white teeth in a mocking reply.

"Kelly is a nice name, pal," said he. "My original name was way too long, and it tickled my teeth to say it."

"But," resumed Mr. Yuzimoto, "I need the key to those dispatches, at least times more than I require the dispatches themselves. Here, too, are a few little things—that you would call odds and ends—that I get from esteemed friend in Washington. With the cipher key, these all of much importance. Without, what value on this earth? None, unpleasingly, none."

Mr. Brockett, therefore, will give me the full key of the cipher, and that we may be sure Mr. Brockett keeps honorable faithfulness, we will translate these little scraps of paper, and the dispatches that Mr. Brockett carries."

"You won't get anything from me, you yellow sneakthief," snapped Brockett, setting his jaws sullenly. Mr. Yuzimoto smiled, waving his slim brown hand in a deprecating way.

"Mr. Brockett negatives too expeditiously. If Mr. Brockett will favor Mr. Yuzimoto in this little instance, Mr. Brockett can have his dispatches back, and go upon his mission. None shall ever obtain information. Moreover,

There was no chance to decline the hospitality of Mr. Kelly, even if the boys had wished to refuse. They had no desire to refuse his friendly proffers, for that matter—both of them, with the danger past, found themselves unstrung and shaky. The Italian's offer of coffee and steaks appealed at once, and it was only a few minutes before the Jewish youth superintended the setting of the table.

"Did you see the Jap gent on his way?" queried Mr. Kelly, as the coffee pot was borne in.

"I sure did that," grinned the Hebrew. "He wanted to stop and argue at the street door, but I give him the circus-hand and out he went, still calling. He's one sore guy, and we'll have to watch out for his smoke if we ain't careful."

"He'll never come back," said Mr. Kelly. "Not round here, anyway, but I won't trust him to get to you fellows while you are on your errand. Keep your lamps open, and don't forget to lock up the back door nights."

Jap government needed—something you have a right to get, and that we might have to give them a third degree to get it out of them. Correctly?"

"Of preciseness, Mr. Kelly. Why the questioning?"

"Because," smiled Kelly, focusing his black orbs upon the stanting eyes of the Japanese, "because you are a rotten liar, Mr. Yazy. These two boys are government messengers, and you are a Japanese spy. Cut them loose, kid."

The Jewish youth calmly bent over Brockett and severed the ropes that held his arms, and then performed the same service for Solano. Mr. Yuzimoto, his smiling face transformed to a brown mask of astonishment and horror, sprang back from the table, and stood hissing and spitting like some gigantic cat.

"I—I—you thief—you big Italian dog—screeched, and then came a flood of Japanese exclamations and aspersions. His right hand flew to his head like a pair of voltes Kells, and his brother plinked him in practiced grasp. The Jewish young man thrust sinuous, greedy hands into Mr.

Yuzimoto's pockets, and the packet of money, the little scraps of paper, and a small black, automatic pistol, were laid upon the table.

"Better be on your way, Mr. Yazy," said Kelly, pressing sharply on the wall. An opening, perhaps two feet wide and six feet high, seemed to appear from utter blankness, and Mr. Kelly politely waved his hand toward the exit.

Mr. Yuzimoto was no longer the courteous little brown man, purring and soft-mannered. He sputtered his rage in almost inarticulate cries, and then snatched at the money on the table. Mr. Kelly threw his wrist across the brown throat and flung him back again.

"You can leave the ten thousand, Mr. Yazy," said Kelly, while the Jewish young man retired, with the sheaf of money, to the farther corner of the room. "It's coming to us, I think. Just charge it up to profit and loss. Mr. Yazy. You'll never dare open your face about what came off, and you ought to be thankful that we let you go with your life. Hurry along now, Mr. Yazy—and here's a nickel for curfure."

Mr. Yuzimoto, looking more like a baffled wildcat than a trim little Japanese gentleman, stopped in the narrow exit to pour forth a volley of seething obligations, a perfect flood of remarks, most of which must have been highly uncomplimentary. Mr. Kelly pointed a supple finger towards the blackness that lay beyond the doorway.

"Be it as you wish, but before I come real annoyed at you. Such language! And I have sworn you were an educated gentleman! Get out of here, now, or you'll have a smoky go over, first thing you know. And don't you come bothering 'round the street again. If I ever see you this side of Fourteenth street I'll run you so fast you'll discover a lot of new avenues in this town. Move along now! Upstage!"

Mr. Kelly made a quick move toward the door, and Mr. Yuzimoto, with a final screech of fury, vanished into the dark regions beyond the threshold.

"I suppose," said Mr. Kelly, returning to his chair, while the Jewish youth walked on in the wake of Mr. Yuzimoto—just to see that he did no mischief en route—"you fellows would like to know all about this plant? I would, sure, if I happened to be you certainly would like all the information you could give us," assented Ramon Solano, stretching his cramped limbs, and breathing in the damp air of the cellar with earnest satisfaction. "It's had us guessing for the last few minutes, Mr. Kelly."

Kelly laughed good-humoredly. "You've had a close call all right," said he. "Want something to brace you? I can send right upstairs and get you anything you like. No? That's all right. If you are on the water-wagon, but you've been through some nerve-shaking stuff, and you need a little invigorator. Tell you what—I'll have some coffee and some good thick steaks brought down here; we can eat on this table, and I can tell you the whole story without any rubbernecking horning in."

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Five young men of excellent appetites fell earnestly upon the steaks and coffee, and the hospitable Mr. Kelly seemed delighted at the enthusiasm shown by his guests. There was no discussion of any special subject while the meal was in progress, but when the feast was finished Mr. Kelly, lighting up a cigarette, began his work of explanation.

"I'll tell you fellows all about it, every line from the start to now, and I know you won't let it go any further. It's like this: I'm in the backroom of my cafe, upstairs here, when this Japanese duck comes in—oh, along about an hour before you made the acquaintance of the place. He introduces himself as Mr. Yuzimoto, and asked me if I could turn a trick—said he had read our newspaper reputation in a magazine. If I ever catch the stiff that wrote it, him and me will go to the floor, for it's made me a lot of trouble—still, it made me some easy money, so I oughtn't to get sore about it. One thing I oughtn't to get sore about is that he'd make a good deal of money to snare 'em. See the frame-up? He arranged for the mob scene. Those Chinks were all Japs in Chinese clothes. Of course, I don't know how on was wise that you two would be along soon, but a new you'd be in Doyers street at two."

"That gets me," exclaimed Brockett. "How on earth could Yuzimoto know where we would be, or at what time? And even if he had managed to cling on to the car, he could be posted far enough ahead to have things ready for our reception?"

"Got to give it to those yellow mokes," said Mr. Kelly. "They are a long ways wiser than we give 'em credit for, and they can do things that we can't even understand. One time I knew a party—well, I'll tell you that one some other time. Too busy now. Anyhow, this Yuzimoto man frames up the whole deal. The Chink trick would force you to over towards my door. I'd call you in to get out of the smoke, and they'd have you."

"You had us, all right," admitted Solano. "But what was to be done with us after the Jap got all he wanted?"

"Oh, that was all understood," explained Mr. Kelly. "After you had given him all he was after, you would both be put in a piano box—it's upstairs now. Along in the morning the piano box would be taken out, loaded on a wagon, carried to a vacant lot over on the west side of a pipe-dream there. In an hour or so you'd be able to wriggle out, and there you'd be, with Yazy's money in your clothes—he'd have played square on the dough you'd need 'em, see. And, when all these troubles are over, come down to Doyers street some day and spend a little time with Kelly."

"Tell us, Mr. Kelly," asked Solano. "How did you come to change your mind?"

"The Italian smoked half a cigarette before he vouchsafed reply. "This is the first time," said Mr. Kelly, "that I ever double-crossed anybody. If I give my word, that settles it. A mutt that double-crosses people that trust him won't get far in this world, and I've played straight. Besides, this seemed easy money for a job where I couldn't fail—wouldn't even have to hire a lawyer to look out for the finish. I'd take all O. K. to me, especially when the Jap paid me in advance, and I carried it through. Then, when we got you bagged and stowed, something seemed to hit me in the thought tank. You two didn't look like the kind of people the Jap had any right to bother, see? I don't often make mistakes when I size up men—not even when it's in a hurry and with a bag going over their heads."

"Something wrong here," thought I to myself. They told all O. K. to me. Just now, there's a lot of trouble between this government and Japan, ain't there? And Jap spies are working overtime all through the country, aren't they? This yellow man, thinks Kelly, is pulling something that is full of nerve, but hadn't ought to come through. Mind you, boys, I have to doze this out fast, and while the little man is right with me."

"I walked through the cafe upstairs, with a bunch of cops, and I gave me new bunk about how necessary it was to get some cipher or other off you, me pretending to give him close attention, but beginning to figure out that there would have to be a flip-out and a new turn of the cards. Suddenly the door opened—just a few inches—and I saw a little white envelope. I picked it up, opened the door again, and looked out into Doyers street. Who ever threw the envelope had made a getaway in the crowd. The envelope was addressed to me, all right, and as I opened it Mr. Yuzimoto edged up close to rubber."

"You will excuse me, Mr. Yuzimoto," said I, "but this note is very personal—from a young lady. And I sheered off a yard or so, while the little man smiled and apologized. I took out a little square card, and all that was on the card was these words: 'LET THEM GO.'"

"Ah, the poor girl," said I, quick, just like that—ain't it a pity they get so stuck on a guy they just can't let him alone? And Mr. Yuzimoto was passing me some stall about it being no wonder the ladies loved me, but I'm not hearing him—I'm thinking. Then we went downstairs, and before we got to the cellar I had framed up the whole works, from start to finish, just as it came off."

"I don't know how we can ever repay you for your change of mind, Mr. Kelly," exclaimed Brockett, as the impetuous Solano burst out with profuse gratitude. "My father, Mr. Kelly," cried the Cuban, "is a rich man. Tell us what you think your kindness is worth, and he'll double the amount."

Mr. Kelly waved his hand, deprecatingly. "As far as that stuff is concerned, nix, nix," quoth the Italian. "I'm satisfied to know that you young fellows haven't anything against me for framing the trick in the first place. Some people would see good and sore about it. As for my kin—why, the Jap had

split it five ways—two thou to each of us."

"Couldn't accept it," negated Brockett. "It wouldn't seem right to take it, Mr. Kelly."

"None of it for mine," Solano rejoined. "Keep it all, Mr. Kelly—you are entitled to it."

"Entitled, not!" said the generous Mr. Kelly. "Look here, you two—don't be so dainty about money. Look at it this way: This Jap is an enemy. He was using his dirty money to do harm to you and to your government. We have his money now. It is prize-money taken from the enemy, just the same as if it was a fleet, do you understand? Take it and use it to help along whatever errand you've been sent on—I'm not asking what it is. Here's two thou—twenty centuries—for each of you. Cart it away!"

Solano laughed amusedly. "Mr. Kelly, your arguments are the best I have heard in many days. I'll tell you what I'll do; I'll take my share, and hold it in trust for Mr. Yuzimoto. If he ever calls for it he can have it."

"Under those circumstances," said Brockett, "I will take the money. I'll ever become friendly with Mr. Yuzimoto, I will give it back to him."

"As for me," said Mr. Kelly, dealing out the sheaves of bills, "I am now a naturalized American citizen and a loyal one, even if I was born in Sicily. As a prize court, sitting on the division of moneys taken from a Japanese warship, I declare the same condemned, and split evenly among the fire cruisers which effected the capture. Do I hear any objections? None. The money is hereby divided."

"I suppose," Mr. Kelly resumed, after the money had been pocketed and the laughter had died down, "that you fellows want to be on your way. There's another exit from this place, through a little tunnel that leads under the Chink junkstore on the south and then turns into a passage that runs all the way into a basement in Bayard street. Now there's a chance that the Jap will be stalling 'round, watching for a chance to put something over, so I'll just tend to that

for you. There's four hunks—two you fellows want a harp—upstairs, who'll go with you, and nobody will start anything with those babies, I can tell you straight. They'll see you wherever you want to be taken, and you keep 'em with you as long as you think you need 'em, see. And, when all these troubles are over, come down to Doyers street some day and spend a little time with Kelly."

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anybody's saying for you among these we can pretty near get 'em that way."

And, like a quartet of well-trained soldiers, the gangsters dropped back till perhaps twenty paces separated them from their charges. Brockett and Solano, willing to accept the judgment of the gang-youths in such affairs, walked along, gazing into the windows of the ancient panopshops, scrutinizing the tide of riff-raff and human hotsam that came ebbing to and fro, and in general conducting themselves after the fashion of verdant-green just seeing New York by air-light.

The huge, gloomy shadows of Brooklyn bridge loomed ahead, and the surge of mixed humanity was thicker and more diversified than ever, when half a dozen young men, rat-faced, weasel-eyed, slinking amid the darker places like wolves along the edge of the forest, came softly out from the blackness of the night, and the pillars of the "L" road. One of them, a stocky fellow with a gray cap pulled well down upon his forehead, stumbled against Solano, and regaining his balance with a quick spring of his nimble legs, caught the Cuban by the arm.

"Say, young feller, watchu mean by shovin' people around, anyhow? Can't you see where you are goin'?" Solano shook off the detaining hand, and Brockett closed up beside him. The pack of rat-faced young men seemed to spring up around them like ambushed Indians, and the trap was as neatly sprung as ever a savage planned an ambush. The next second there came the quick patter of feet from the rear; four more rat-faced, furtive-eyed young men had mingled with the attacking half-dozen, and the whole ten were exchanging amicable greetings.

"Just keep off these two guys, just let 'em be," explained one of the escorting four. "Friends of yours, Casey?" queried the apparent leader of the newcomers. "Friends, Kelly's, Ike. He told us to see that they got to any place they might choose to go."

"The deuce you say! All right, if you ducks says so. Tell Kelly you see us, and we sent him our best regards."

"Sure thing, Ike. So long. See you later, maybe."

The recent assailants faded into the darkness of the "L" shadows as strangely as they came, and the quartet of protecting gangsters resumed the journey.

"Good thing we went with you fellows," quoth the chief of the protective squad. "Those gorillas would have fixed you sure."

"So I would judge," admitted Solano. "We would have given them some fight, at that, but six against one, they'd have had us in a minute. Are they part of your own crowd?"

"Nix, not in a hundred. They're Five Points, do you see? And we are

the unmistakable features of the Oriental, were jammed up against the side-rails of the boat. For one instant the light shone upon the frenzied brown visages, and the boys caught one recognizing glimpse of Mr. Yuzimoto. Then the lights of the boat went out; utter blackness shrouded the huge floating structure, and there was a splash, a gurgling yell, and another splash beside the boat. The lights flared up again, and the gang leader stood beside Brockett, cool, unruffled, smiling affably.

"Good thing Hogan knew where to find the electric switch," he said, pleasantly. "He worked on one of these boats last summer, and he knows where they keep everything. Your Jap friend is pretty wet by now, I'm thinking. We made 'em just in time. They had you spotted and was just slipping up to hand you something."

On the big boat men were running and bellowing hoarsely. Brockett and Solano heard the uproar, and gazed out across the silent waters of the North river, while the members of the Eastman gang, as unshaken and disinterested as the most innocent member of the throng, were idly standing near them. Somewhere out among the wash of the tide two men were fighting for their lives, or perchance had already sought the bottom—but there was nothing to be seen from the rail of the ferry-boat, and the North river was keeping its newest secret well.

CHAPTER XIII.

Manhattan, the Hudson, and the exciting scenes of the previous day were far behind. The adventurers were rolling west upon a rapid train, planning details as they went, and reviewing their recent adventures with much perplexity. Most bewildering circumstance of all was the way in which Mr. Yuzimoto seemed to have kept track of their movements, and the persistence with which he had turned up at every inconvenient hour.

"You have to give credit to the Jap," remarked Solano. "He was game, he took long chances, and Sherlock Holmes never had anything on him when it came to following a clue. I'm almost sorry that he's in the river."

"Always provided that he is," murmured Brockett, doubtfully. "Somebody or other I can't believe that we've seen the last of him. I'd wager

"Not much show for anything with any gangs," explained their leader, "but if the Jap gets as wild as they seem to get to you, there may be something doing. Pretty mean people, those Japs. They'll hang on forever in hopes of getting an even break with Kelly—they're after. Tell you what—Kelly didn't tell us to go any farther than the ferry, but we'll see you get safe to Jersey, anyhow. Might be some doings on the ferry, you know."

The little squad went through various devious wanderings and doublings during the rest of the route to the Christopher street ferry, pursuing a tortuous course that evoked expressions of admiration from the disciples of Monk Eastman. "You fellows are pretty wise, all right," commented the chief of the escort. "It would take a good by-gone to trail you, and if the Japs can keep track of your movements they'll have to go some. Honest, we'd like to go the route with you two, but the best we can do is to back-track and beat it across again on the ferry just as quick as we see you landed. Some of us is entirely too popular in Jersey. They'd like to keep us there for a long time, they like us so much over there."

As the lights of the ferry came in sight the gang chief called a sudden halt. "Seems to me," was his sage observation, "the remark of an able general—that if those Japs have anything coming at all it'll be pulled on the boat, and the same plan as we

worried in Park flow ought to be a boom. You two go on ahead and boom the boat just a bit in front of us. We'll all be right on the job, and if anything happens some of those yellow boys will have a smoky go-out. That all right? Sure it is. Now beat it along and leave the rest to us."

Brockett and Solano had by this time learned to trust implicitly in the rat-faced and stinking members of the Eastman gang. They were upon the big ferry-boat scarcely five seconds ahead of the departure signals, and, as they sought the bow of the clumsy old vessel, they could see no sign of their faithful escort in the midnight crowd of home-seeking Jerseyans. Nevertheless, there was the pleasant feeling that the gangsters were still with them—somewhere within hearing and striking distance—and it was a cheering thought to realize that the subtlest enemy, against such rough fighters of the dark, could inflict but little injury.

The lights of the city were dancing on the black waters of the North river when from the forepart of the cabin rose a shrill cry of surprise and horror. Then another cry, this time of pain and despair. There was a rush of feet, a tussling amid a knot of men, and the next moment two little fellows, finely dressed, and, as the cabin lights fell upon their faces, showing

back some time—at least, I hope so, Brockett commented.

"If not one way, we will another," said Solano, "for this trip is over. If we get back with our heads and skins—I'm going to visit New York, call on Mr. Kelly and invite the whole Eastman gang to a banquet at my expense. What they have done for us was well worth it, wasn't it?"

The train pulled into Pittsburgh towards noon, and the youngsters departed. They had decided to turn their route to Cleveland, then to Detroit, and thence across Michigan to Chicago, changing railroads at each city. A night train to Cleveland was selected for the next trip, and the boys put in the afternoon in the justly celebrated city of steel, shipping and receiving millions. A glance at the baseball schedule showed them that Pittsburgh was playing at home during the afternoon—a circumstance which settled their whereabouts for the greater portion of the day. It had never occurred to any of the boys to see Hans Wagner, and the chance was one that was not to be resisted. Even with the anticipation of a glimpse at Wagner to lure them on, Brockett and Solano did not lose their caution. Instead of going straight to Forbes field, home of the Pittsburgh team, they started in the opposite direction, circled here and there among the busy streets for an hour, lunched in a restaurant with entrances on two different streets, and departed by the door through which they didn't come when they first went in. Then they separated, went round opposite sides of a block, and rejoined each other on a side street, so clear of traffic that they could easily have spotted anyone following or shadowing the movements of either one. The trip to Forbes field was then in order, and the youngsters worshipped at the shrine of the great German shortstop for two delicious hours. When the mighty Honus, in the tenth inning, put his weight against a fast ball and drove it over the middle wall for the home run that won the game, no native Pittsburgher could have created more noise or come nearer an actual delirium than Brockett and Solano.

The early evening hours were spent in pretty continual motion, and the boys were well fagged out when they betook themselves to a Pullman car, Cleveland-bound. They had decided to take two berths, upper and lower, with Solano sleeping in the lower berth, while Brockett, with the jealously guarded letters and cipher keys, would mount on high, beyond the reach of a possible pilferer. The good-natured negro in the adjacent car made up their couches without delay, and then went to the platform to receive belated travelers, arriving barely in time to swing aboard the train.

"As some one was tossing off his shoes, and Brockett loosening his tie, the train cleared the Pittsburgh station, gathering speed and whizzing along on its northwestern way. The porter came grinning up to the berth where the boys were preparing for much-needed sleep, and handed a small, square envelope to Brockett.

"Gentleman in the crowd?" echoed Brockett. "Why—that sort of looking man he?"

The negro grinned and shook his head. "Couldn't exactly tell you, sub. Dere was three or four people climbing aboard de cab, an' Ah was so busy Ah habbly noticed anyone in particular. Jest took it soht ob mechanical, an' Ah never did see de person."

Solano turned on the electric bulb in the lower berth. They drew the green curtains tight, and Brockett opened the envelope. It contained only a square white card, and across the card was written, in the diamond cipher their lettering:

"R 3BH POS E 2BH SW W TC FN Pos TO SH POS C O B B AB SH BB Pos TO R 3BH SB FN PO."

"Meaning," Brockett translated, "change route at Detroit. Be watchful."

"Meaning, also," said Solano, "that even if we have evaded our pet enemies we have not passed from the sight of the secret service chief. I take off my bon