

Jasper's Diamond

Frances Parker-Smith



Text copyright © Frances Parker-Smith 2021
Design copyright © Laura Fieldhouse 2021
All rights reserved.

Frances Parker-Smith has asserted her right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 to be identified as the author of this work.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

This title is intended for the enjoyment of adults and is not recommended for children due to the mature content it contains.

No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilised in any form or by electronic, mechanical or any other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying or recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without the permission in writing from the Publisher and Author.

First published 2021
by Rowanvale Books Ltd
The Gate
Keppoch Street
Roath
Cardiff
CF24 3JW
www.rowanvalebooks.com

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Paperback ISBN: 978-1-913662-36-3

Life has so many strands.

Never look back.

It's never too late to follow your dreams.

Contents

Prologue	1
Chapter One	5
Chapter Two	10
Chapter Three	17
Chapter Four	24
Chapter Five	31
Chapter Six	36
Chapter Seven	44
Chapter Eight	47
Chapter Nine	51
Chapter Ten	56
Chapter Eleven	62
Chapter Twelve	67
Chapter Thirteen	72
Chapter Fourteen	80
Chapter Fifteen	86
Chapter Sixteen	92
Chapter Seventeen	99
Chapter Eighteen	104
Chapter Nineteen	109
Chapter Twenty	115
Chapter Twenty-One	124
Chapter Twenty-Two	129
Chapter Twenty-Three	134
Chapter Twenty-Four	141
Chapter Twenty-Five	147
Chapter Twenty-Six	151
Chapter Twenty-Seven	154
Chapter Twenty-Eight	161
Chapter Twenty-Nine	165
Chapter Thirty	174
Chapter Thirty-One	178

Chapter Thirty-Two	182
Chapter Thirty-Three	188
Chapter Thirty-Four	194
Chapter Thirty-Five	200
Chapter Thirty-Six	206
Chapter Thirty-Seven	210
Chapter Thirty-Eight	215
Chapter Thirty-Nine	225
Chapter Forty	230
Chapter Forty-One	235
Chapter Forty-Two	238
Chapter Forty-Three	242
Chapter Forty-Four	248
Chapter Forty-Five	253
Chapter Forty-Six	259
Chapter Forty-Seven	263
Chapter Forty-Eight	272
Chapter Forty-Nine	280
Chapter Fifty	286
Chapter Fifty-One	290
Chapter Fifty-Two	293
Chapter Fifty-Three	300
Chapter Fifty-Four	305
Chapter Fifty-Five	310
Chapter Fifty-Six	314
Chapter Fifty-Seven	318
Chapter Fifty-Eight	322
Chapter Fifty-Nine	326
Chapter Sixty	330
Chapter Sixty-One	336
Chapter Sixty-Two	340
Chapter Sixty-Three	347
Chapter Sixty-Four	355
Epilogue	360

Prologue

The light aircraft bounced along the grassy runway, lurching to a halt next to the only completed hangar. A young Englishman wrenched the door of the aircraft open. He cast a wary eye around the field before slipping a well-worn satchel over his shoulder and jumping down. The woman stood precariously on the lip of the open door. He opened his arms and gave her a reassuring smile.

“Jump!” he quietly said.

He caught her and held her for a long moment. She had been sobbing ever since they had watched the German officer shoot her only child.

Her son had stood alone against the wall, silently waiting to be searched. A crowd had anxiously looked on, waiting and hoping.

The sound of the gunshot had pierced the silence. A loud gasp echoed from the crowd as they watched her son slide to the cobbled street. The bullet had hit him in his head. His only crime was being a Jew.

His mother had screamed; her husband had tried in vain to stifle her sobs. The young Englishman who was stood by them had put his arms around them and slowly guided them away from the crowd and the angry German officer.

“You can’t stay here,” he’d whispered. “Come with me.”

“We can’t. We have our home,” Jacob Isaacs had answered, still comforting his distraught wife.

"If you go back there, you'll be tortured and shot or sent to a camp."

The young man's worried tone had done nothing to change the couple's minds. They had insisted on returning to their apartment one last time.

"There's more diamonds in the apartment," Jacob had said, hoping to tempt the Englishman.

"Many?" The Englishman's uninterested tone had masked his addiction to the glittering gems. But the Dutchman knew he couldn't resist them.

They'd quickened their pace, weaving through the back streets until they'd reached the Englishman's car, an open-top MG. His heart always missed a beat when he gazed upon the car. He didn't know how it had come to be in Amsterdam, but he was thankful.

After his velvet tongue had persuaded the Isaacs to stay in the car, he quickly walked to the apartment block. The Isaacs' home was on the second floor. He'd rattled their apartment's locked double doors. A forceful kick, and they had swung open. Mr Isaacs had given him detailed instructions on where to find the diamonds.

The young man's eyes settled upon what he considered to be the ugliest desk he had ever seen. Each drawer had a carved head instead of a handle. He'd twisted the head of the main drawer, and a secret compartment opened. He'd snatched the velvet pouches from inside and stuffed them into his jacket pocket.

With the Germans snapping at their heels, he'd felt sorry for the couple, and that was unusual. He never felt sorry for anyone.

Hastily, he had pulled a battered suitcase from the top of a wardrobe and stuffed it full of clothes, along with Mrs Isaacs' jewellery box.

The MG had skidded to a halt next to the aircraft, where the pilot and a teenager were waiting.

“You’re late!” the disgruntled pilot had said, throwing a cigarette onto the grassy runway and snubbing it with his shoe. He’d raised his eyebrows when the Isaacs had struggled out of the car, Mr Isaacs still comforting his wife, Hannah.

“A few problems,” the young man had said, pushing first Hannah and then Mr Isaacs into the plane. He threw the car keys to the teenager. “Hide it well.”

The accomplice had nodded and leapt into the MG.

“Colin! Did you get them?” the pilot had asked, glancing at Colin Carmichael, who sat next to him staring at the uninviting English Channel. He was referring to the diamonds, but Colin’s thoughts had been on the Isaacs.

Jacob and Hannah Isaacs had been Colin Carmichael’s main diamond contacts in Amsterdam. They were part of a group of men—bankers, jewellers and the like—that were smuggling diamonds to England before the Germans could get their hands on them.

However, there was one problem with the Isaacs—their only son. They’d ignored his overconfident manner and his anti-German behaviour, which hadn’t gone unnoticed. Colin had asked him to take a low profile, but the young fool wouldn’t listen. It was just a matter of time before he was picked up and the Isaacs’ apartment raided.

Colin had turned in his seat so he could get a good view of the Isaacs. Hannah’s head was tucked into Jacob’s shoulder; they were both crying. Colin’s eyes had momentarily filled, but his mind was already turning to life after the war and how he could tap into Jacob’s expert diamond knowledge.

He had already decided that they could live in his Wellsbury house, which he had bought when

the ministry started to develop the airfield. Wellsbury wasn't much of a place. Not many people lived there, and it wasn't marked on any map. An ideal place for a secret airfield and diamond dealing.

"What you going to do with them?" the pilot had asked, nodding towards the Isaacs.

"The bloody Germans shot their son, right before their eyes. What could I do? I couldn't just leave them."

"Getting soft, Carmichael?" The pilot had grinned.

"You know me; I have a plan for everything," Colin Carmichael replied, tapping his pocket where the Isaacs' stash of diamonds lay.

The moon had peeped from behind the clouds as the aircraft circled the airfield.

"You're a lucky bastard, Carmichael," the pilot had said as he gazed down at the moonlit runway. "The moon would only make an appearance for you."

Colin had grinned. He knew he was lucky.

Chapter One

Present Day

Rupert Manning stood staring at the empty chairs in the boardroom of the Carmichael trust fund. The fund had been run from its conception by Meredith Spencer, the Carmichael family's trusted and influential lawyer. Old Jasper Carmichael Senior hadn't paid much attention to the fund; consequently, Meredith had ruled with an iron rod. The board members were weak and had treated him as some kind of god.

Manning had always disliked Meredith and considered himself to be just as competent—if not more so—and after Meredith's unexpected death, Manning had stepped into his shoes.

That was until the missing Colin Carmichael was pronounced dead and his bastard son, Jasper Carmichael, decided to honour his birthright, becoming Lord Carmichael and head of the Carmichael trust fund.

Manning was furious. He hated all of the Carmichaels—Jasper Carmichael Senior; Colin Carmichael, the renowned diamond thief; and the current Jasper Carmichael, the last of the rich and powerful Carmichael clan.

The boardroom's door creaked; a cough echoed through the empty room.

"Come in, Higgins," Manning said in his characteristic deadpan tone.

Higgins, Meredith's old butler-cum-Man Friday, shivered as nerves welled in his empty stomach.

Manning slowly lowered himself into the soft leather desk chair. He pointed his long index finger at Higgins.

"What do you know about Kate Carmichael?"

The question wrong-footed Higgins.

"Nothing. I didn't even know she existed until Meredith went to Wellsbury," he lied, for he had read Meredith's journal before giving it to Jasper along with the other documents that had been in Meredith's safe.

Manning reached inside his jacket pocket and dropped a brown envelope onto the large mahogany table that filled the room.

"This is a copy of Meredith's last will." He paused. "Kate is a very rich woman. Meredith changed his will when he returned from Wellsbury, leaving her his estate. No wonder his sons are contesting it." He picked up the will, glanced over it pointedly, and dropped it back onto the table. "Did you know?"

"To be fair," Higgins nervously stuttered, "she has refused the money."

Manning raised his eyebrows; he couldn't understand how anyone could refuse a fortune.

"What's she like?"

"I don't know her well enough."

"Get to know her—and that no good husband, Carmichael." Manning's voice rose. "How did he meet her?"

"She worked for him."

"He fucked her, you mean. He has a reputation. Women fall at his feet. God knows why."

Manning paused, jealously reflecting on Carmichael's charisma. Carmichael was a known womaniser, and Manning had tried to pay women to get into his bed. But for some reason, Carmichael

wasn't interested, only having eyes for Kate. Why?

Manning's fingers drummed on a folder resting beside him.

"I've had a private investigator look into Kate Carmichael." A photo of Kate skimmed across the table to Higgins. "Not a great beauty, is she?"

Higgins stared at the photo of Kate getting out of her Evoque. "It's not a true likeness."

"But she dresses like a hippy. Not like Lady Carmichael," Manning scoffed.

"I wouldn't say a hippy. Kate likes her jeans and white blouses. Her trademark, if you like."

"I'm told Carmichael had a court order for the boys," Manning continued in the same derisive tone. "And now she has them back."

"Kate hasn't the resources that Jasper has. The boys were very unhappy living in the castle. Harry, the eldest, isn't the same boy as he was before."

"What do you mean?" snarled Manning.

"He cried a lot. Wouldn't eat. Oliver, the youngest, fought the school bullies for him. Harry was covered in cuts and bruises."

"See? You do know stuff." An awkward silence lingered between the two men before Manning said, "They now live with her in Wellsbury. Carmichael has moved his office there. She's in charge when he's not there."

"I believe that's correct," Higgins nervously replied, wondering where this was going.

"She's opened a bookshop and gallery."

"Y-yes," Higgins stuttered.

"Very popular, I believe. Making money."

"Kate works very hard." Higgins' tone had become defensive.

"Carmichael Books' hangs above the shop."

"That's correct."

"You haven't mentioned the first editions."

"Not a lot to say. I believe Kate came across some first editions left by Mrs Isaacs," Higgins explained.

"She's buying these fucking books, and you failed to tell me." Manning was growing impatient.

Higgins' face reddened.

"There's an advert in the paper: Carmichael Books. First Editions." Manning pulled a folded paper from the desk drawer and threw it towards Higgins. "How's she funding this? Fucking Carmichael, I suppose." Manning paused, gathering his thoughts. "Have you any idea what these books sell for?"

Higgins nervously shook his head.

"How is Carmichael financing his growing empire?" Manning glared at Higgins. "It's only a matter of time before he develops that airfield."

A tense silence hovered between the two men. Higgins didn't want to annoy Manning, so he kept quiet.

"I've paid for top people to look into Carmichael's finances. Nothing! Fucking nothing! His only records are public and legit. The trail of his shell companies and bank accounts ends at the Caymans."

Higgins watched as Manning's expression stiffened and his face reddened. He took a step back, readying himself for a quick exit.

"What do you know about Carmichael's diamonds?" Manning calmly asked.

Bile filled Higgins' mouth, making him cough. Manning glared as Higgins struggled to answer.

"Meredith mentioned them just before he went to Wellsbury," Higgins managed to say.

"I'll tell you about those diamonds." Manning's bitter tone returned. "The authorities knew Colin Carmichael organised that robbery. The thing is, how did he know that the shipment was coming in

from Amsterdam? No one will say how much it was worth. He was finally put in prison, so we are led to believe. But he resurfaced as Lord Carmichael.”

Manning paused to regain his composure. Talking about Colin Carmichael always stirred his temper. “Who did he pay off? There were some powerful men in cahoots with Carmichael. His son set up a new business in Wellsbury.”

Higgins went to speak, but Manning silenced him with a wave of his hand. “Jasper Carmichael is a murderer and money launderer, to name just two, but he has never been investigated. And now he struts around as Lord Carmichael.” The air thickened as Manning’s temper rose. “Colin Carmichael left those diamonds with his son. I’m convinced. I’m also convinced that Jasper is in cahoots with Zak Cohen. Do you know, my investigators can’t find any link between the two? No emails, text messages, phone calls. Yet Cohen and Carmichael prosper. I’m also convinced that Mrs Carmichael is involved.”

“This is all conjecture,” Higgins finally interrupted. “You have no proof.”

“You will get that proof. You will wheedle your way into Carmichael’s confidence, and you’ll report to me. Me alone. I want gossip about his private life, who he’s fucking, whether she’s seeing another man, and diamonds. Cos you believe me, Jasper’s empire is built on diamonds.”

Chapter Two

Lord Jasper Carmichael gently inserted the key into the lock of his ancestral London home, a four-million pound Georgian terrace.

His meeting at the Freemason Lodge had been uncomfortable. Although he had been made welcome, there had been periods of silence where some of the members glanced furtively at each other as if they knew something that Jasper didn't. The strong handshakes and tapping of his shoulders cut no ice with Jasper. He had been greeted like that before, and that was by a group of criminals.

He wondered what this group of well-heeled men wanted. Whatever it was, their silence put Jasper on his guard.

However, it wasn't the Freemason meeting that was prominent in his mind but his wife, Kate, and Sebastian Manning, Rupert Manning's son. He had watched them earlier, through the camera installed in the gallery. It was obvious Sebastian was making a play for his wife. Jasper was familiar with foreplay; he was a master at it.

Kate had looked tired. He wondered if the burden of his diamond arrangement with Zak was too much for her. But she wanted her sons, and he needed her. *There's a price on everything*, he thought.

While Jasper was watching the camera, the gallery's glass doors had suddenly bounced open

and in marched Oliver, who'd looked as if he'd spent a couple of rounds with Mike Tyson.

Jasper had to fiddle with the sound controls of the live feed to pick up Oliver's voice.

"I told 'em!" Oliver had bellowed, his little chest bulging. "If they touched 'im again, what would 'appen."

Kate had turned away from Oliver. Jasper couldn't see what she was looking at, but he knew it was Harry.

"School phoned just as we were loading the car with groceries." Jasper recognised Malcolm's abrupt voice. Malcolm and his wife, Clare, were more like family than housekeeping staff. "They insisted I brought 'em here. I told 'em you were busy with clients."

Kate knelt and Harry had raced into her arms. Oliver's face fell until Kate held her arm out so she could cuddle both.

Where had that precocious five-year-old gone? Jasper had thought as he gazed at the unrecognisable Harry, who was withdrawn and cried a lot.

"What do you want me to do? Take 'em back to the house?" Malcolm had asked.

"No. They can stay here," Kate had said.

Sebastian moved assertively next to Kate. Oliver gave him the evil eye, and Jasper couldn't help but smile.

"I'd thought we could have lunch, and you'd show me around the hotel?"

Jasper had watched Kate turn and stare disbelievingly at him.

"I'd like to see the penthouse suite," Sebastian continued. "I'm told it's out of this world."

"I don't do that sort of thing. You should know that." Kate's voice was a little curt.

"I thought I'd be the exception, considering how well we get on."

"You two go into the bathroom and clean up," Kate had said to the boys. Oliver wasn't happy; he obviously didn't like Sebastian.

"Do they always come first?" Sebastian tried to sound hurt as he watched the boys dragging their feet towards the bathroom.

"Yes!"

"No wonder Jasper spends time away."

"What does that mean?" snapped Kate.

"You won't keep him if you don't pay him any attention. There's already gossip."

Kate had lifted a first aid kit from the corner cupboard.

"What do you want from me?"

"I thought I'd try my hand at fucking Lady Carmichael. But you're nothing like a lady. I mean, look at the way you dress. Like some hippy," he'd said bitterly, his tone changing abruptly as he realised he'd failed. Jasper hoped Manning's father would be angry.

Jasper had stood and punched the antique desk. Sebastian Manning wanted what was his.

Jasper was content with his marriage and their sex life. Kate loved him and he loved her in his own way; they trusted each other. But Manning was right: there was talk about Jasper and other women. Beth and Joanne had both wheedled their way back into his life.

"Malcolm!" Kate had shouted. "Show Mr Manning out."

"You'll regret this. I have friends in high places. They'll ruin this pathetic effort of a gallery." He'd begun to walk towards the door. "And if you think you're going to inherit Meredith's fortune, think on."

Jasper's musing abruptly ended when he heard his name.

"Lord Carmichael!" whispered a voice.

Jasper's hackles rose. It was late, and his immediate thought was *mugging*.

"It's Willis. Our fathers were friends. They had a mutual interest."

Who the bloody hell is Willis?

Jasper slowly turned, preparing himself for an attack, but he met the gaze of a small man dressed in a long black overcoat that had seen better days and a black homburg hat.

Who the fuck wears homburg hats?

"Can we walk?" whispered Willis.

Not bloody likely.

"What do you want?" asked Jasper, trying to hide his churning stomach.

"My father knew yours, back in the day. He taught me everything I know. He was fifty when I was born." Willis paused and nervously chuckled. "A late starter. I can remember your father, Colin."

Jasper's initial thought was *Colin's inside man*.

"Colin delivered diamonds to my father. They'd meet at the Isaacs'—I believe you know the house. The diamonds would then go to various locations to be cut. Even after the war they kept in touch. Colin was addicted to diamonds and the thrill of robbery. I know everyone thought he had an insider in Hatton Gardens. He was a good liar."

Jasper couldn't believe his ears. Was he talking to Colin's insider?

"I could go on about Colin, but that's the past and I want to talk about the present and make you an offer you can't refuse." Willis paused, making sure he had Jasper's attention. "I know a little about you. How you fence diamonds. I imagine you still have some. I know you had Colin's diamonds. Zak

Cohen must be cutting them.” He paused again, giving Jasper a few moments to digest what he was telling him. “There was a lot of guessing in the diamond community who this mystery dealer was, but I knew it was you. You’d waited and waited until it was safe to sell.” Another pause as he stared at Jasper, hoping for a reaction. But there wasn’t one. “I want someone to sell some diamonds for me. Some may need re-cutting. No questions. No paperwork. No calls except on burners and definitely no texts or emails. Interested? Yes or no?”

Jasper’s gut was nervously churning as he stared at the man. *Trap, trap*, shouted through his mind.

He took a deep breath. “You’ve got the wrong man.” His firm tone had such weight that Willis took a step back into the poorly lit street.

“I don’t think so,” Willis retorted. “Think about it. Talk to Zak. I know where to find you.” His words faded into the night air.

Jasper turned the key in the lock and the door clicked open.

“Lord Carmichael, is that you?” shouted Chester, the butler of the London house.

In the absence of a Carmichael, for the last several years Meredith Spencer had taken it upon himself to maintain the London house and employ its butler. Jasper considered this to be unnecessary as the house was rarely used.

“I phoned the lodge. They said you’d left ages ago. You didn’t go to the club!” said Chester.

“No. I needed to walk and think.”

“It will take some adjusting being Lord Carmichael,” continued Chester, not noticing Jasper’s preoccupied mood as he helped him remove his all-wool overcoat. “Probably you should wear a hat. All members of the lodge do.”

“Hat!” exclaimed Jasper in disbelief.

“I’ll accompany you to Saville Row. All gentlemen go there.”

Jasper stared at Chester. He had no intention of wearing the Saville Row uniform, as he termed it. For a brief moment, he appreciated Kate’s reluctance to wear the Carmichael and Swain uniform. She was the only member of staff that referred to the dress code that way.

He turned and pushed open the oak doors of Lord Carmichael’s study, a depressing, musty room clad in dark wood panelling. Thick velvet curtains covered the floor-to-ceiling windows that overlooked the manicured garden.

“I hope you’re not going to start work. It’s very late and I’ve got an early start.” Chester had followed him.

Jasper clenched his fists.

“Don’t forget Higgins and Mr Manning are coming, and you’re taking your seat in the Lords.”

“Go to bed, Chester. I just want to relax for a minute,” Jasper calmly replied.

Chester hovered by the door. After a long moment, he uttered, “Very well.”

Jasper carefully lowered himself onto the Chesterfield leather couch. He speed-dialled the first number on his phone. She answered after one ring.

“Miss me?” His words were soft and loving. “Did I wake you?”

“I’m going over accounts. Would you mind if I sack your accountant?”

Jasper laughed. “How are the boys?”

“Harry still is withdrawn and being bullied, and Oliver is fighting his way through the school.”

“And you?”

“Well, I’m not withdrawn or fighting.”

"Tell me you love me."

"You know that."

"I need to hear you say it."

"What's wrong?"

"I need to be inside you, Kate. I need to feel your love." There was a hint of despair in Jasper's voice.

"Come home."

"I've been to the lodge."

"It's not for you."

"It's a different world here."

"Come home. I'll be at the office tomorrow. The penthouse is waiting."

"Tell me you love me."

"I'll tell you tomorrow."

"I'm not sure the Bentley will make it."

"That wouldn't stop my Jasper."

A warm glow passed through his body when she referred to him that way.

"What are you wearing?"

"Just a robe."

He sighed at the thought, and could almost see her teasing smile in response.

"I couldn't sleep. I was waiting for you to call."

Jasper briefly closed his eyes as images of his wife naked flashed into his mind. Her soft skin. Full, heavy breasts. He fidgeted and adjusted his trousers when he recalled her delightful sigh and soft whisper—*'Don't make me wait'*—as he slipped into her magical place that quelled the demons that stirred inside him.

"Come home. I'll work my magic." Her voice had taken a soft tone. "I love you."

"Kate!"

The phone was dead. She'd ended the call.