# THE DIAMOND THIEVES

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think I merely gurgled with a foolish sort of sound.

For instead of seeing the Blue Pear there I saw a man in black with a revolver in his hand. He was crouched low in an attitude that made me think of a track-runner waiting for the crack of the starter's pistol. But the fact that hit me harder was that his revolver was leveled directly at my own startled head.

I half leaped and half stumbled to one side, about the same as I'd to one side a speeding car that threatened to cut me down on a street corner. I went bodily against one of the hardwood doors, richocheted off it with a spring and, being given that start, ran wailing along the orderly row of cabinets for the door that opened into the next room. I ran through that door and back into the bedroom before I became at all conscious of my surroundings.

I don't know just when it was that I discovered that the light had been turned on full and that beside the bed where Eleakim Grosset lay stood a figure of yet another man, with his back

"Where's Doyle?" I weakly demanded, for I was still thinking, I suppose, of the man with the revolver in the next room. Yet I spoke in a whisper, as though the sound of my voice might waken the sleeper on the bed.

"Telephoning for Sloan," Wilkins told me, spelling between me and the bed.

"What's wrong?" I whispered.

"You'd better come outside," Wilkins said to me, very quietly, as he took me by the elbow and started to steer me toward the outer door.

"What's happened?" I demanded, in a voice a little shrill from nervousness.

"That old guy in there's been killed!" He said it with a frown of what seemed to be apprehension. But he said it very quietly.

"Killed!" I echoed. "How? When?"

"Chloroformed!"

That was all I waited for. I went straight back to the bed. The smell of the anaesthetic still hung thin above it. I reached out a hand and touched the blue-gray forehead on the pillow. It was cold. Then I slipped a hand under the bed covers. The body that I felt there was marble-cold. It was true. Eleakim Grosset was dead—stone dead! And I was the woman who had killed him!

"Get me out of here!" I slavered.

We were almost down to the street door when the sudden glare of a flash light leaped up against my eyes and almost blinded me.

"Is it all right, Wilkins?" a voice asked out of the darkness behind the flash. I recognized Doyle's voice.

"Where Sloan?" asked Wilkins.

"Coming," was the other's preoccupied retort. "He says he can get her down to the office."

There was a moment of silence. The flash went out and left everything dark.

"Well, he wants to get her quick," I heard the voice of Wilkins say.

"Wait!" I called out to the two figures beside me. "There's a man hidden up in that gem room—a man in a black mask!"

"How about it, Clove?" asked Doyle, in a voice of heavy scepticism.

"I saw him!" I frantically insisted.

"Nothin' in it," I could hear Wilkins's condoning voice say over my head. "The only man that's up there's a dead man."

"This girl's sure got her wires crossed," Doyle announced, with the air of a man being tried beyond patience.

"Then I'm going back to that gem room to get them straightened out!" I announced. I ran stumbling through the blackness, with my hands outstretched in front of me, until I came to the stairway. Doyle and Wilkins were calling for me to wait. But it was something quite different to their very hoarse commands that brought me to a standstill. It was the fact that I had come into unexpected collision with a human body—a human body hurrying noiselessly down the very steps which I was about to ascend. And in another moment or two, as I caught at a newel-post to steady myself, I heard the street door suddenly open and close again.

"She's gone!" gasped Wilkins out of the blackness.

"Then for the love of Mike let's get after her!" was Doyle's frantic comment, as they went shuffling and groping toward the door.

But that door opened again before they could get to it. There was a momentary flash and clash of opposing pocket lights, and then darkness again.

"Who went out here?" demanded a voice which I at once recognized as Sloan's.

"The Rymal woman," was Wilkins' answer. I could hear Sloan's quick snort o fdisgust.

"What man went out of this house?" he said, even more sternly than before.

The next moment I heard the click of a light switch, and in the sudden electric glow of the lower hall I could see the three heavy figures. They, too, at the same moment must have seen me standing there at the stair bottom with one hand against the newel post. Sloan's face cleared and a look of pity came into it—the same look that I'd already seen on Winkins' face.

"This is an awful mix-up, Balmy," he said, as he came slowly over to where I stood staring at him.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because you've killed a man, Balmy, and God only knows what it'll cost our office to get you cleared!"

"What—what are you going to do with me?" I asked, struggling in vain to keep my lip from trembling. He put his hand on my arm. The gesture, I suppose, was meant to be solicitous, as though he wanted to help me, as though he was going to do all in his power to help me. But, for some reason which I couldn't understand, there was a thin glint of triumph in his eye—a glint which he didn't seem quite able to cover up.

"I guess we'd better both get down to my office and talk this over," he said, as he made a motion for one of his operatives to open the door for us.

Once we were back in the inspector's office, I had hoped, things would array themselves in a different light. But my midnight hour in that dismal office was nothing more than a dismal succession of humiliations. It seemed like a sort of long drawn out third degree, in which I couldn't even find the satisfaction of speaking for myself. For as Sloan sat at his desk, with both the office wire and his own private line busy, I could think of him only as a big black spider at the center of its web, setting a dozen and more threads of metal quivering with his calls, talking to this person and to that, from somebody supposed to be acting for the district attorney's office, to somebody else speaking for the Pinkertons, and still somebody else at police headquarters, and yet another unknown somebody at the Grosset house itself.

Then he swung around in his chair and looked at me. "I don't want to talk about this, Balmy, any more than you do," he said. "But I guess I've got this thing patched up."

"What'll I have to do?" I inquired.

"You stay right here and face it out!" he said. "We'll have some reports to do over, and two or three affidavits to doctor up, naturally. But if things go the way I want them to go, this—this little accident of yours is going to be something just between you and my office. Something, remember, just between the two of us."

"It's no use," I told him, with a hopeless little shake of the head. "You've tried to help me, I know, but it's no use!" He gave me one of his stares.

"It's got to be some use," he said, in his heavy voice. "We want you here, and we can't afford to lose you!"

"But what good can I be to you—now?" I contended.

"You stick to the alliance, Balmy, and the alliance will stick to you," was Sloan's answer to that infantile protest of mine. "It's an awful mess, I know, but we're going to get you out of it, and keep you out of it—in some way."

I saw then, in one prophetic flash, just what life held over me. I saw myself the marked and uncomplaining operative of their Security alliance, with no choice as to what cases I should enter and what cases I should shun.

"You'd better go home now, Balmy, and get some sleep," he muttered. He said it with a sort of gruff kindness. He was through with me, I could see, the same as an overworked office man is through with an unlooked for worry that has kept him at his desk.

He came down to the street with me and held my arm as I climbed into the taxicab. Then he slammed the door shut and motioned the driver to start.

I sat there, shaken in spirit, stunned, heart-sick. It wasn't home I was going to, but four walls that would seem like a jail, four unfriendly walls, for which I paid so much every week. I gulped as I thought of them. And I knew they couldn't hold me in, any more than a match-box could hold a weasel. So instead of going to them I commanded my driver to drop me at a Broadway hotel, where the visible machinery of comfort at least eases the nerves as the drone of a motor sometimes does. Once inside that hotel, however, I went straight to the switchboard operator and put in a call for "Mr. Winkfred Ealand."

The operator stopped short at the "Winkfred," as so often had happened before. She asked me, with a half-fretful sort of indifference, if the name shouldn't be "Winifred." And I had to explain that it was "Winkfred," a man's name. For I wanted, above all things to talk to my Winkie. I wanted the comfort of his voice, and some word of help from him. And, oh, Winkie, if only you had been there to help me straighten things out, if I'd only stumbled across the thinnest ghost of a hope that it all mattered to you in any way—how different everything might have turned out!

But there was no way the tired-eyed operator told me, after trying number after number, of getting in touch with Mr. Winkfred Ealand. And once more all the world felt like a lonely, icy noisome that sloped down to even lonlier precipices yawning up out of black depths of nothingness.

Clear thinking was beyond me. It was one of the few times in my life when I wanted somebody else to do my thinking for me. But I could think of no one to go to—no one, at least, but Toosey Attrill. The thought of that rough-tongue and pert-eyed young stool-pigeon suddenly flashed out of the darkness at me, like a harbor light on a lonely coast. Toosey, for all her rough, had known her troubles. It wasn't until after I'd crossed Chatham Square that I gave up hope. But when the sleepy-eyed Shake McManc told me that Toosey had been called out an hour before by a "singed cat" from the Pinkerton office, I felt that my last liferaft had sunk under me.

I stood in that sordid doorway that winked like a crafty eye out on its sordid side-street, as much alone in the world as though I was the last woman on a worn-out planet wheeling desolately about a worn-out sun. I could feel my throat tighten as a weakening wave of self-pity swept through me. Then, biting my lips to keep from making a fool of myself and blubbering to the obligate of the Second avenue L, I turned about and closed the street door which seemed to be shutting out my last hope in life.

As I did so a shadow fluttered across that door and something fell on the worn step. I did not look down to see what this was, for I was startled more by the transit of that shadowy figure of a man which sulked away and vanished into a tangled warren of cellarways. Then I groped about in the uncertain light and found a small piece of brick wrapped in a square of paper.

I unwrapped the fragment of brick and turned it over and over in my hand, wondering what it could mean. I carried it with me as I moved somewhat apprehensively away from that lonely side-street neighborhood. I reached the corner before it occurred to me to look at the crumpled square of paper. I stopped at the street lamp there and smoothed out that none-to-clean looking square. I saw that it had writing on it. It was unruled and unbonded writing, and in lead pencil. It took me some time to make it out. It said:

"You do will now forgeast they mak trick for you—I know.

A friend."

That was all. But as I stood under the street lamp, frowning over those roughly penciled words, I at least felt that somewhere in that vast and sleeping city there was one human atom who knew of my unhappiness, and in some blind and foolish way was trying to let me know that he knew. And the very thought of this, if it did not actually lift the blackness out of my soul, gave birth to a ghostly sort of hope that the truth they had marshaled against me wasn't altogether the truth.

## ONLY ONE-TWELFTH OF POPULATION REMAINS

By The Associated Press.

RHEIMS, France, May 3.—Rheims, which had a population of 115,178 before the war, now has only 8,458 inhabitants—3,987 men, 3,223 women and 1,213 children.

The "martyr city" was shelled by the Germans on 1,051 days and over 1,000 persons were killed, including some 300 women and 100 children. The cathedral was struck by 287 shells up to March 21, 1918. After that date no record was kept.

April 24, 1917, was the worst day of the war for Rheims. The bombardment was so terrific that no record could be made of the casualties and damage on that day.

## CORPORATION COMMISSION WILL NOT FIGHT RAISE

Special to The World.

OKLAHOMA CITY, May 3.—The commission will not attempt to enjoin the order of Postmaster General Burleson increasing telephone rates. "I don't think we are in a position to do anything," is the phrase of the commission here.

It was generally the same answer as when we attempted to enjoin the telephone rates two weeks or so ago some time ago. Judge Dunn

ley said. We secured a restraining order in the district court and the supreme court dissolved it. It isn't feasible for the commission to do anything more."

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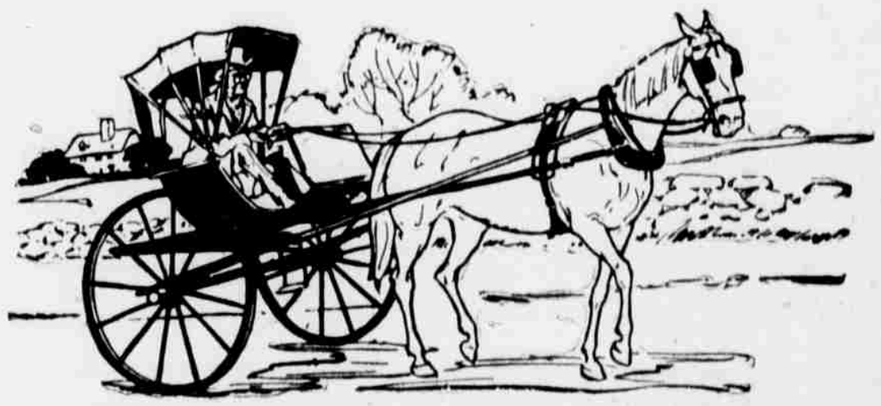

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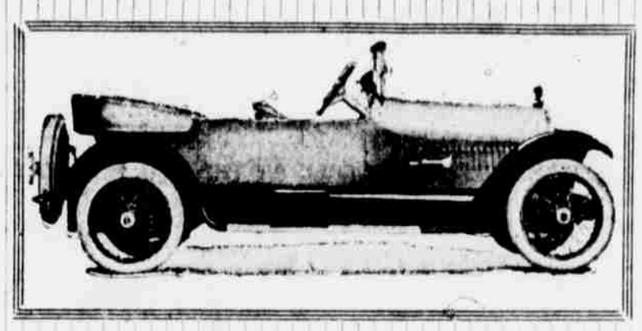

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