The Diamond Thieves

By Auther Stringer

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

Balmy Rymal, special agent and operative for the Jeweler's Protective Alliance, in New York, writes these stories for the information of Winkie, Mr. Winkford Eagland, to prove to him that although appearances were often against her, she always liked him. Balmy was discharged from a hospital where she was training because she set Angelo Parento, a young Italian who had killed his sweetheart at Coney Island, free. She later learns that he became a gem thief. A syndicate of diamond thieves had been eluding the police. As an object lesson for them, Inspector Sloan of the Alliance gave Balmy the job of stealing the Blue Pear, third biggest diamond in America. Brent Elliott is Grosset. She was then to be arrested by two of Sloan's men, Bird and sent to jail—and immediately released by Sloan. Bunny choreographer Grosset, and then found a masked man in the safe she went to for the diamond. Terrified, she ran back to Grosset's room, to find one of the detectives sent to arrest her bending over him. Grosset was dead. Balmy, overpowered at having killed him, is hurried away to Sloan's office. In the confusion the man she saw in the safe escapes. Sloan pulls wires to protect Balmy, but of course she is under suspicion to Sloan, whom she dislikes. She goes to Toosey Attril, a street person for the Alliance, for sympathy. Toosey is out. As Balmy turns away a note drops at her feet. It reads: "You no kill mun Grosset. They frak trick for you, I know—a friend."

Sloan scarcely looked at me as I stepped into his office. "Balmy," he said, with his hand on a half-opened desk drawer, "little Spearman of Loeb & Levin's shop, has just been black jacked in Detroit and that Swartzdorp Star taken away from him. It looks like a Sear Parker job to me. Go up to 17 Tuesy Attril, and remember it's the stone we want almost as much as Sear himself. Get the data from Doyle," he smoothed back to me over his shoulder. "It's typed and ready for you. And the sooner you hike it for Michigan the better."

Ten minutes later I had a carbon copy of the Doyle report, Toosey on the 'phone, and two berth reservations on a night train for Detroit. And 40 minutes later I was aboard my sleeper, quietly perusing a typewritten report which I kept well hidden behind the pages of an open "Lady's Own." Then I sat idly studying the back of Toosey Attrill's ash-blond head, eight seats in front of me. For when Toosey and I traveled on a case, we always traveled as strangers.

All Maiden Lane knew of the Swartzdorp Star, that pure white stone from the Kimberley mines which had been cut double-rose by Van Dam, bought by Bates the race horse king, passed on to a theatrical demi-mondaine, then stolen and recovered and re-sold to a Brazian coffee importer, who traded it to a Chilean diplomat, who in turn hung it upon the throat of a volcanic little Spanish dancer two weeks before the same lean little throat was cut, almost from ear to ear, in a quite unsavory San Francisco resort. It reappeared a year later in Cairo, and went northward again with the swallows to glitter in the Grand Salle at Monte Carlo, when it was carried off triumphantly by a Russian prince, only to return again to Amsterdam, where it was re-cut and, several carats lighter in weight, once more found the waves of fate tossing it upon the shores of America.

An ex-governor's wife, it also appeared, had snubbed the wife of a man named Woodworth, who'd piled up many millions in the automobile industry, with war munitions as a side issue. That was the step which started things. It started a sort of warfare of display, a sort of duel of diamonds, until the motor king, catching an echo of gossip as to the Swartzdorp Star in a New York club, sought out the stone, and ordered it delivered to his wife in Detroit.

But it was not delivered. Before Henry Spearman, a carrier for the Maiden Lane firm of Loeb & Levin, could hand over the star and eight smaller diamonds to the Woodward avenue jeweler, who was to mount them in a gold and platinum tiara, he was black-jacked in the streets of Detroit, presumably by one Sear Parker, alias English 'Arry, and the nine diamonds were carried away. Spearman, I found, still lay in Harper hospital with a cracked skull.

I went to bed turning these things over in my mind, slept soundly, rose early, and breakfasted before Toosey was even out of her berth. Then, having inventoried the car and found nothing out of the way in any of my fellow travelers, I bought a morning paper and went over it, heading by heading, to see what was happening in the world.

It was then, and only then, that I became conscious of the man across the aisle from me. He was a lean man in clericals, with that priestly blue jowl which comes, I suppose, from close and constant shaving. Presently he leaned timorously across the aisle.

"I beg your pardon, madam," he quavered, "but might I borrow your newspaper for a minute or two?"

I stooped to gather up the discarded sheets. I was surprised, as I did so, to see that the blue-jowled stranger had crossed the aisle and was somewhat hesitatingly sitting down in the seat opposite me.

"I get off at Detroit," he announced, as though the movement were one of importance. "Do you know that city?"

"I ought to. I was born there." It was a fib of the first water, but I said it without a quaver.

He sighed. "It is my first visit," he explained. "Yet I am visiting your city for a very pleasant mission—to read the marriage service for my wife's cousin. A cousin named Shepard. I approach it with a most unwelcome task on my hands."

"So you're cynic enough to think that of marriage?" He raised a pallid hand in protest.

"It's not the marriage," he corrected. "It is one of those semi-barbaric features of the ceremony which have come down to us from our pagan ancestors. I refer to the practice of ornamenting the human body with precious stones after the manner of the ancients."

"Why should that add to your troubles in this particular case?" I unfeelingly inquired. But that reference to precious stones had left me distinctly interested.

"Because," he said, in lowered tones, "I have been asked to carry a diamond of rather formidable dimensions to some sort of a goldsmith in your city, to a man named August Zwack, at 219 Cornell street."

"But why should you be carrying it?" I casually inquired.

"I was told that the traveler who should have delivered it met with an accident a couple of days ago. He was beaten and robbed in the streets of your city in open daylight. And I have no wish to share his fate. Yet, absurd as it sounds, for the last 15 hours I have been oppressed by the feeling that I am being followed!"

"But who is there to follow you?" I asked, round-eyed with studied wonder. "We're all very humble and honest looking in this neighborhood."

"You are, I know," he said, fondling his right hip the while. "And that prompts me to ask if you would just take a look off my shoulder. If you'd be generous enough to give me 10 minutes of your time detecting the stone to Zwack's workshop, at 219 Cornell street, for your Wat Tyler." He reached into the pocket of his black waistcoat and brought out something about the size of a bantam's egg. He fingered the wrapping of tissue paper and I saw a huge diamond cut brilliante after the Indian fashion and oblong in shape, yet logical one end than at the other. I knew at a glance that I was looking at the Blue Pear which had been stolen from Eleakim Grosset's house that night when he had been found dead.

As we drew toward Detroit, he crossed to his own section. I watched him closely as he dropped the Blue Pear into a manila envelope, moistened the flap and carefully sealed it. Then with a sigh of relief he stepped back against the aisle to my side. He sighed again as I took the envelope from his hand. I glanced down at my watch, shook it, and held it against my ear.

"It's stopped!" I complained, as I made an unsuccessful effort to open the case for inspection.

"Perhaps my hands are strong," he suggested. I watched him in silence as he took the little disk of shimmering gold and vainly struggled to open the case. Then he stopped, looked at the dial, and handed the timepiece back to me.

"It's going again," he explained with his lugubrious smile.

"So it is." I acknowledged as he got up from the seat for the porter had announced "Detroit!" While that sedentary back in black broadcloth was still turned to me, I slipped my handkerchief about the watch and dropped it into my hand-bag.

It had not escaped my attention, during the last quarter of an hour, that my conference had been under the discreet inspection of Toosey Attrill. Not once, however, did I look in her direction. Yet as I stood up to make my way out of the sleeper I sent her a message. I did this by turning my back to her and casually withdrawing an amber hairpin from my hair, just behind my right ear and rumpling it just back of my left ear, which, in our little system of code signals which Toosey and I had worked out, said, "Trail this man, for there's something wrong."

It wasn't until I had pushed my way out through the station crowd and stood, bag in hand, at the carriage entrance that my melancholy-eyed friend in black unexpectedly reappeared.

"You're going in a taxi, aren't you?" he quavered, with apprehension still in his abstracted eyes. And I announced to him that I was. The next minute I noticed he was wiggling with his ridiculous black umbrella. It brought a driver wheeling in to the curb with a swoop like a hawk's. I detected a vague something flash between him and the sombre figure beside me, a silent message which prompted me to make a mental note of his license number, 33869.

Yet it was too late to draw back from that proffered conveyance. So I did the next best thing. As the cab rolling out from the curb and speed down again before the usual street corner congestion of traffic, I flung open the door opposite the one I had entered by, and stepped to the running board, bag in hand. From there I dropped to the pavement and hopped lightly up into an open bodied and roadster in which sat a plump and genial-eyed youth of about 18.

"Could you take me to 219 Cornell street?" I demanded. "And quick enough to save a life?"

"There's no such street in this burg," he announced.

The truth came over me in a flash. I remembered the old state fair con trick. With one jerk of the fingers I tore the end off that manila envelope and shook the stone out in my hand. Instead of the Blue Pear I found a large Cape May crystal instead.

"Then get me to Harper hospital as quick as this little go-cart of yours can make it!"

In the office at Harper's I showed my Protective Alliance badge, ordered a taxi to be waiting for my friend Babbitt to expect in headquarters, and requested a 10 minute interview with the patient answering the the name of Henry Spearman.

"That roughneck got me before I even saw him. His second thump put me down and out before I'd even got hold of my gun. There's only one thing I seem to remember. As I swung on him, before he slugged me the second time, I imagined I saw a scar somewhere in front of his ear," he told me.

That was enough. In two minutes I was in my taxi and speeding for Babbitt and his office.

"First thing," I told him as I carefully lifted my watch out and unwrapped it, "hand this to your identification bureau man and see whose finger prints I've got there on the case! And then find out who drives taxi number 33869 in this town."

I was already on my feet when the Identification bureau official brought my watch back to me.

"Bad Sam Everson, alias Curate Sam," he announced as he gave me the bertillon record. "Con-man, hotel-thief and penny-weigher."

"Where'd he go?" I asked, as Toosey came in.

"To the Pontchartrain, and took room 617," was Toosey's prompt reply. "As Paul R. Garvin, of Chicago."

"Any 'phones?"

"Three. I'd only a chance to get the last one. That's the Norman Woodworth home."

"That car, Miss Rymal, is owned by a diamond polisher named Babbitt, and is not a public cab, as you thought. Babbitt, by the way, was arrested for diamond smuggling from Windsor in 1915, but was discharged, so there's no record against him," said Babbitt.

"Thanks," I said to Babbitt as I handed him Toosey's slip. "But please 'phone Mrs. Norman Woodworth and say that Miss Elsie De Loche, the interior decorator she wrote about, is on her way out to her house. Then have information dig out the names and addresses of these two 'phone numbers. Get back to that hotel, Toosey, and keep behind the scenery. But if anything happens, have a look in if you can! Then find out Annie Casey's room number from the office and report to me there!"

I found Mrs. Woodworth a much older and much stupider woman than I had expected.

"Those diamonds were never even delivered at this house," she complained, when I had told her by business "So how can anybody in here be concerned in the case?"

"Then who in this house knew they were coming here, or even do the city?"

"Only my husband," she said.

"And your servants?"

"Would you mind talking these matters over with my husband?" she asked, with her finger already on the bell, "for my spare time today is extremely limited, and Mr. Woodworth, you'll find, is still down stairs."

The bell was answered by a trim figured lady's maid, with demure eyes and extremely red lips.

"Lucile, take this lady down to Mr. Woodworth," commanded the mistress of the house. Yet I noticed that she stood studying that red-tipped servitor with a new and narrow-eyed intentness.

Norman Woodworth proved to be one of those full-blooded, full-fed, high living nephritics with pathetically softened hands and prematurely hardened arteries.

"Mrs. Woodworth has sent me down to you about that interior decorating," I announced.

Norman Woodworth's shrewd and guarded eye studied my face for a moment. Then he glanced down at his watch.

"I've got to be at the chamber of commerce in half an hour," he explained. "Can you come in my car?"

I did so, after ordering my taxi to follow. I told him, in two minutes' time, why I was there.

"Then what do you want to know?"

"I infer from what your wife said that you yourself engage your help."

"I do," he acknowledged.

"Are any of them new?" He hesitated at this.

"Parsons, my butler, might be described as a recent arrival in the house. But he was 11 years with the Vanderbilts—before he came to us. I know that positively."

"Who recommended him to you?"

Again there was the momentary silence.

"Somebody already in my employment—I don't just remember who."

"And how about Mrs. Woodworth's own maid, the girl called Lucile? Has she been long in the house?"

"I fancy not," he said, after a moment's thought.

"Would you mind dropping me here?" I said as I opened the door and motioned to my taxi driver. We came to a stop.

"I am afraid I haven't helped much," ventured the motor magnate.

"More than you imagine!" I told him. He looked down at my expressionless face for a second or two. Then, as I prepared to shut the door, and I noticed he did so with quite unnecessary force.

CONTINUED ON PAGE SIX

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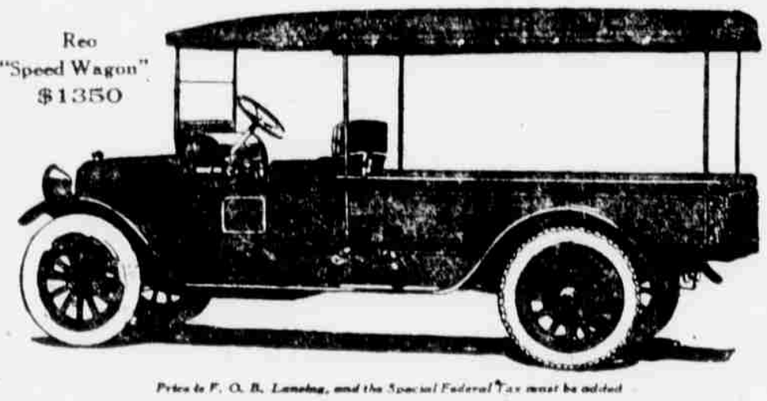

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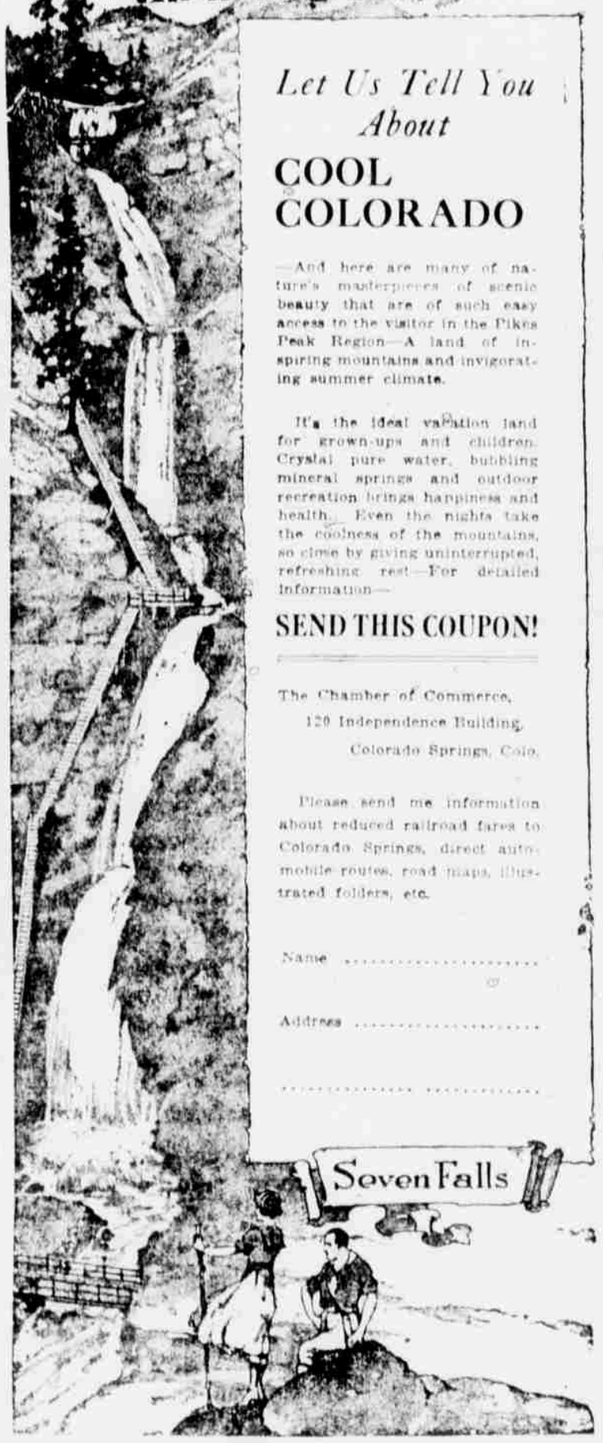

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