

Diamond Cut Diamond

By JANE BUNKER

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CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

She told me—as she had on the steamer—how she'd gone abroad to hunt new psychics for her seances and the circle meeting at her house, of which she was a sort of priestess, and how she had thus come in contact with the Duval girl. This girl had a "wonderful gift of prophecy," and at a private sitting with her had gone into a trance—and had given out that Mrs. Delario was "one of the chosen"—one of the disciples-elect of the Mystic Cult of the Crystal Sphere, whose headquarters were a lamasary in Tibet, and had then predicted that she was shortly to receive the "mystic sign of initiation" and a gift—conveyed through space by spirit influences—of seven blood-red gems, which she was at liberty to dispose of and convert into cash if she desired—the sacred masters not dealing in lucre but only its sublimated equivalents—and apply to her personal needs and the furtherance of her work for spiritualism.

On being pressed by Mrs. Delario to tell more—name the time and place of the gift—the girl had declared that the stones would be in a small oblong box which Mrs. Delario would "discover among her things when the time came," and that she would "receive them suddenly—secretly—without mortal knowledge of how they got there"—and they would probably be given to her in Paris. Beyond this the girl was unable to go.

But Mrs. Delario accepted the prediction and, greatly elated and excited, watched for the hour that was to mark her initiation into earthly wealth and occult glory. The hour did not come in Paris, and she returned to America a trifle disappointed but still expectant.

She unpacked. She found a slipper. Where could he its mate? Absent-mindedly she thrust her hand into it and found—her gift!

"And you see the prophecy was fulfilled," she told me. "I had been chosen—as the Duval girl said. Everything came out precisely as she predicted—the diamonds really came to me in Paris, though I didn't know it at the time; there were seven; they were worth enough to make me financially independent, so I can go on with my work for spiritualism; they came without human knowledge; I found them among my things—every detail was correct."

It was a frank, straightforward story, told with a heat of conviction that I think prevented her reading the astonishment that must have kept growing in my face all the time.

It was amazing every way I looked at it; the thing that struck me most was how her memory had slipped one little cog and allowed her belief to roll smoothly off and land her—in Tibet! She thought the box had been sent to her in Paris, but she had worn her slippers on the steamer! I was about to remind her of this as



It Was Amazing.

the first step to what I saw was going to be a very painful revelation, when she burst out, "But how could he have known about the diamonds?—that I had them in Paris. The only way I can explain it is that either the Duval girl told him—and she was in a trance and wouldn't have remembered her prophecy—or he's a wonderful psychic himself. . . . But the audacity of the man—saying he put them in my slipper!"

"Claire did," I corrected, by way of beginning.

"It's the same thing. What a lie—to say they're his!"

I hurried on: "Claire did it on the steamer—the night before we landed. That was how she had been set to smuggle them through the customs

house. She didn't know what was in the box—she thought it a cipher on tissue paper to save her father's life, and if it was found on her he'd be put to death; but if it was found on you or me—all right—we couldn't explain, for we didn't know anything."

"And do you believe that?" Mrs. Delario demanded, her face a picture of amazement—at me!

With that I went through the whole story of my experiences with monsieur, adding no comments on her story, but telling only his and Claire's—and the legend of the diamonds.

It took a long time—it took a long nerve. While I talked I did not once look at her—I would not witness the defeat of her deep religious convictions and the dissolution of her hopes. I ended apologetically, "So you see, according to that, the diamonds really belong to the Emperor William," I could not bring myself to come out with it flat-footedly and say they positively did.

"Well?" Her tone was so peculiar that I looked up quickly. And her face was a study. She was obviously puzzled, but amazement still held its ground—amazement at me; pity at me, too, for my credulity. And a moment before I had been almost ready to shed tears over her!

"He's cleverer than I thought," she commented. "Much. Oh, very much cleverer—if he can deceive you like that."

"And he's much more dangerous

than I thought—he must have very powerful occult influences working with him, or very remarkable psychics on the earth plane who can get names and dates. And it all shows how careful I've got to be. . . . I'm glad you told me. I see how I must guard myself."

I experienced a strong revulsion of feeling toward her—her manner of talking what I'd told her gave me a positive shock. I'd wasted both my sympathy and my reasoning powers on her. And I saw the machinations she'd be the center of—the wrath of the Emperor William, that I'd been threatened with, hounding her, perhaps to death. I must save her from her own folly—I must convince her in spite of herself and for her own good. If I didn't De Ravenol would before he got through with her, and I hated to think what he'd do; he had too much at stake himself to care what happened to her.

"But wait a minute," I struck in boldly; "you're forgetting that you wore the slippers on the steamer—that knocks Paris; the diamonds could not have been in the slipper when you bought it—or while you were in Paris."

"Why, so I did," she admitted. And I thought for a second that she wavered—that I had given her belief a serious blow. But if I did it rebounded immediately. "And that makes it only the more wonderful!" she cried, and repeated it with delight at the clenching discovery. She did not notice my dry and somewhat disgusted. "It certainly does," but bubbled on: "It only goes to show their powers—their all-seeing, all-helping powers! They made me the gift in Paris, and then, seeing it might be discovered too soon—at a time the knowledge I possessed such wealth and was smuggling it—though I didn't know I was smuggling it—but I should have felt I ought to say something at the customs house if I had known it on the steamer!"

I cut in with positive violence: "You mean they—wherever they are—put the box in your slipper in Paris, then took it out on the steamer so you could wear the slipper—and then put it back after you had worn the slipper? You mean that?"

"Certainly. Why not?" she answered calmly.

I declare I could almost have sworn at her! "Why not?" I gasped.

"Why—not?" she repeated, looking at me dasky. "If they can put it there they can take it out—that is simple every-day reason. Why!—you yourself gave me the proof!—you told me it was once in the other slipper—the one you carried off!"

In the face of such arguments, seriously put, I was helpless.

"If they didn't, who did?" she demanded. "Remember—Claire never told you she did—that's what he says—and he's a consummate scoundrel, capable of any fabrication of the truth to gain his ends and rob a defenseless woman."

Her question and her face both challenged me—demanded the blow direct; but I ducked the issue in a general protest.

"But really, Mrs. Delario, you know—a million dollars' worth of diamonds don't—just happen."

"That's what makes it so wonderful that it did happen—and to me!—the humble little me, who never could have expected it." Her eyes glowed with mystic fire.

"To suspect would have been to doubt God's providence—his promises—everything. How could I? How dared I? I had prayed—the prayer had been answered—" she spoke very solemnly, and added: "I would not let myself doubt."

"But you hadn't prayed for diamonds."

"God—and the masters who carry out the supreme plan—answer prayers in their own way." She said it as if she were admonishing a child, and then snatched the next argument out of my mouth.

"Don't millions of Christian people pray every day, on their bended knees, 'Give us this day our daily bread'—believing they will get it from a divine source, and is it any harder for God to give the diamonds than a crust?"

I was defeated. She went on—in a rather unsteady voice—and told me what she'd thus far held back—the end of the prophecy, not yet fulfilled and that she nightly anticipated; the ultimate revelation and ordination: one of the masters was to wing an invisible flight through the air, straight from Tibet to the room where we sat, and to place upon her bosom the mystic seal—seven blood-red stains, in symbol of seven bleedings of the contrite heart purging itself of its seven deadly sins.

And this, in the last word, is what the diamonds meant to her—the fulfillment of the most passionately cherished aspiration of her life.

"He will come—he will follow his gift—it will draw him like a magnet," she finished joyously.

I was put to rout. The very unreasonableness of her belief constituted for it a sort of dignity. It commanded respect by its isolation and the storms of argument it had withstood.

I got out the box of diamonds and handed it to her. She came out of the inner light in which she'd been silently basking. A shadow crossed her face. She started back—but I thrust them into her hand. And with that I rose.

"You don't mean—" she began.

"I can't discuss it any further to-day," I said, and I hastened out of the house. It was absolutely the only thing I could do.

CHAPTER XV.

An Important Ownership.

When I left her house this was my situation with Mrs. Delario—she'd given birth to the incorrigible belief that a million dollars' worth of diamonds had been presented to her by an unknown lama in Tibet; sent her through the air; glued into the toe of her slipper, and this in answer to prayer. And I had to reckon with it as a fact—a fact that yelled me off the straightforward course I'd been about to pursue and bullied me into taking devious ways.

"No!" I replied to myself ten dozen times. "The Emperor William didn't consult me about what he should do with his old diamonds; why should he expect help from me now? He's got his own machinery to work with—let him get his diamonds back himself. I'm no detective—I'm not his tool."

Billy was an hour late in reaching the house and I interrupted his petulant explanation as to why he wasn't two hours late, or three, to communicate rapidly—knowing that monsieur would be there in a minute—my decision that Mrs. Delario was to keep the diamonds and the Emperor William might twiddle his thumbs and whistle.

"You took 'em back to her?"

"Yes, and she's to keep them."

"But—what did she say?"

The elevator was rumbling, and I knew who was coming.

"But what are you going to tell monsieur?"

The bell rang—I hadn't decided what I was going to tell monsieur.

I opened the door. Standing behind Claire, his glance to me under his obsequiously lifted hat and across her head, monsieur rapidly prowled my face for the sniff of a hint that I had everything arranged and my diplomacy had been successful. Which hint I'm positive he didn't get. Claire gave a little cry on seeing me, flung herself into my arms and hid her blushes on my shoulder. I ducked my face to hers and bade my visitors enter. I carried Claire forward, leaving monsieur to dispose of his hat and coat in the hall.

I presented Billy to Claire, and she shot him dead with one glance and brought him back to life with the next. At the sound of her lovely voice uttering a thrilly "How do you do?" Billy didn't know his own name—the only name he could at the moment have articulated was Claire de Ravenol.

Claire forgot him as soon as he stammered out his "awfully glad to meet you," and dropped her little hand. It was the magnet of those lovely eyes! Being middle-aged and proper does sometimes have its compensations!

I motioned us to chairs. What was I to tell monsieur? Claire gave me a moment's respite by hurriedly beginning. "Papa says to tell you everything I know."

She glanced at him and he nodded. "Yes—everything—from the beginning."

"You remember Vervey?"

I nodded and said "Yes."

"Well, papa came to see me there—while I was at school, you know—and

he brought me a little box to keep for him—so big."

"What was in that little box?" I questioned.

Claire's eyes mutely appealed to her father.

Monsieur had evidently been waiting for this question and hastily interposed, "She does not know—it was my wish she should know nothing of the contents—to this day she does not know—" and his whole face was filled with appeal to Billy and me.

I granted the appeal with a jerk of my head that I hoped told him, "All right—I'll keep your secret from her," and he replied to this with, "Tres bien," and a relieved look. But that didn't mean I was through with my questions to Claire.

"What did you think was in the box?" I went on.

"Papers—very valuable papers."

"Valuable in what way? Title deeds to property, for instance? Or a will? Anything of that kind?" I wanted to know what sort of a yarn he'd told her.

"Oh, no—much more valuable than that! A cipher on tissue paper. Papa said his life depended on it—and the life of the emperor of Russia," she hastily added, and blushed and cast down her eyes.

"Ze emperor of Germany," corrected monsieur quietly.

"Yes—I forgot—I thought it was the emperor of Russia."

"It is of no consequence—continue, my child, wis ze narrative."

She seemed a little off the track and I helped her on with another question: "What were you to do with those papers?"

"I was to help papa get them to America—so they wouldn't be found. So I hid the papers while I was at school—I wore them in a little bag around my neck that papa bought for



Monsieur Rapidly Prowled My Face.

me, and it was all arranged with madame that she was to bring me to Paris when papa telegraphed. And she couldn't, you know, so you brought me."

"So that was why you were so afraid of being searched at the customs house on the frontier?"

"Yes, papa told me they might—and if they found the papers he would be handed over to the government. But they didn't find them!" She smiled in childish delight. "I got them to Paris with you all right, and then I ran on ahead and told papa and said how kind you'd been, and I said you were just going to America, and he said the governess he'd engaged had been taken sick and couldn't go to America, but the Russian spies were after him and he was afraid he'd be killed, and perhaps you would take me with you."

Billy glared at monsieur. Monsieur answered him with a shrug as much as to say, "Well, what would you?"

Claire went on, "And then papa asked you to let me go with you, and you—you—couldn't."

She was too exquisitely polite to remind me of that stern, uncompromising refusal.

"Well, papa found Mrs. Delario, and it was all right."

"And now, Claire, what was precisely the plan about that little box? What were you to do with it?"

She blushed and grew so embarrassed she could hardly go on, but her father helped her by telling her, "Conceal nothing, my child—you have done only what your father has commanded you to."

Thus encouraged, she confessed, "I was to put it in your slipper—if you had one you weren't wearing, because you know you told papa that your baggage wasn't examined—your cousin was an inspector, or someone like that. And if I couldn't get it into your baggage I must put it in one of Mrs. Delario's slippers."

"I remember now!" I suddenly exclaimed. "That time I caught you in my cabin—at my suitcase—you were trying to do it then?"

Tears came to her eyes.

"Yes," she almost whispered, "I was going to put it in one of your slippers—I found you had a pair just like Mrs. Delario's."

"Oh!" I said. And at this, monsieur interposed, "It was my plan—ze slipper—if one could be found not worn on ze steamer."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

Proverbs are but the offspring of practical experience.

BELGIUM SKETCHES

Reminiscences of a Belgian Baby

By Katharine Eggleston Roberts.

(Copyright, 1920, Western Newspaper Union)

Whee-ee-ee! Zing! Bang! There I was right in the middle of it. I thought the whole world was like that and I'm free to confess the first impression was anything but favorable. Those Zeppelins and their bombs were awfully annoying; they made me nervous. Furthermore, a cellar is no place in which to be born. It gives one such a wrong idea of home. Of course, I know now it was the best place for safety, but then I didn't have my present viewpoint. That was about five years ago.

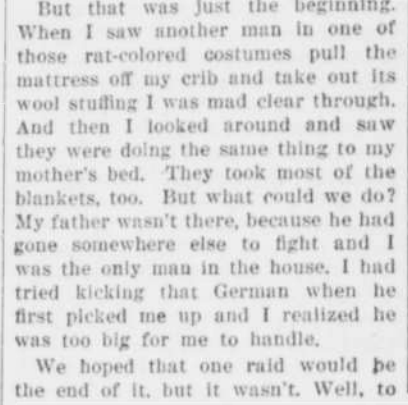
Yes, my entrance was quite dramatic. You see, I came just at the wrong time. They were expecting the roof to fall in at any minute and the atmosphere was rather strained. It wasn't at all the sort of welcome a new member of a family expects.

But, after all, I hadn't much reason to complain. As soon as the Germans took our town they stopped destroying houses, because they wanted to keep the city in good condition to live in after they had won the war. (I suppose they are sorry now.) Even at that they weren't pleasant people to have around. I was asleep when they first came to our house. I'd heard a banging outside, but didn't think anything of it and went on sleeping. All of a sudden some one picked me up and he was anything but gentle. I didn't like it and I didn't like him, and I said so in very plain and forceful language. My lungs and vocal cords were simply worn out afterward. I surely was relieved when my sister took me away from him—and I guess he was, too.

But that was just the beginning. When I saw another man in one of those rat-colored costumes pull the mattress off my crib and take out its wool stuffing I was mad clear through. And then I looked around and saw they were doing the same thing to my mother's bed. They took most of the blankets, too. But what could we do? My father wasn't there, because he had gone somewhere else to fight and I was the only man in the house. I had tried kicking that German when he first picked me up and I realized he was too big for me to handle.

We hoped that one raid would be the end of it, but it wasn't. Well, to

laugh and cry again. Of course, I never seen him and, at first, I believe that the tall, thin man with hollow cheeks was my father. The truth, I felt rather out of the edge of the crowd till he remembered me and I was paid to father. Frankly, I didn't get the proper way to greet him, but course he was my father but,



The Way the Germans Destroyed Homes.



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make a long story short, they came another time and took all the pretty shiny copper and our doorknobs. They removed our big bronze chandeliers and even the little hinges from the piano. We tried to hide some things, but they found all except a few doorknobs and a couple of candlesticks. Then they came again and took the linen. Finally they made a search for potatoes. After that, they visited us once a week and seized whatever they had missed before. Honestly, I concluded, they were going to take the whole house and were moving it on the installment plan. But they left the house itself and whatever they didn't want in it.

My mother was awfully sad because we didn't hear from father. Of course we didn't hear much to live on either. The Germans wouldn't let anyone have more than a little bit of bread a week and everything else was just as scarce. I was always hungry and said so till I noticed mother was giving me part of her share. I didn't make so much fuss after that. As to clothes—well, as I grew, I had to have new ones and we couldn't buy them because we didn't have money and materials were terribly high-priced. The rest of the family had worn out all the things they had in the beginning. My sister dyed some blankets and we made coats and other clothes of them. Then at night we put them over us to keep warm. Believe me there were some queer costumes here during the war.

As soon as I learned to talk, I began getting into trouble. One day I saw that German officer who had yanked me out of bed when I was just new. I thought maybe he hadn't understood my former remarks and so I made a few more. He reached for me and I ran. At first he started to chase me, but it jostled his dignity too much, and I was safe. I got into one scrape after another and, sometimes when I was hungry, I couldn't run fast enough. Those men certainly knew how to use their swagger-sticks. I guess they must have practiced at home.

I won't bother you with the tails of those four years. They were mostly a monotony of nothing and nothing to wear. Every day I was sorry for me because I was a baby.

When the armistice was signed just went crazy here. The first soldier who rode into town was terribly anxious to get the Germans out, because they leave fast enough to suit us. I wore little pins like brooms in them we were going to sweep out, if they didn't hurry.

Suddenly my father came and heard my mother call him. All the family ran into the hall and he was and everyone began to



When Father Came Home.

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we were practically strangers. I felt too, for he looked at me as though I were a stranger. We got through the war somehow. Since then we've been better acquainted. You know, I see how we got along with

How are things now? We have more to eat and we have Germans around all the time. I was glad when they stopped weekly visits. But, of course, I noticed we haven't any doctors. Everything that was taken had been replenished. I heard the family when I was supposed to be asleep, said something about bills that been run during the war. Father he was glad his credit had been paid, but he didn't know whether it be five years from now. I don't exactly what he meant. Mother him that the clothes we'd made the blankets were so worn they wouldn't do for either clothes or as this winter. But my sister's downtown pricing things and you can't buy wool clothes any less than a fortune. Father didn't see how they were going enough new machinery in the story to make the necessary. Mother and my sister can't get the same time any more, but the coat question. Father's that none too good. And just look at trousers I'm wearing! Aren't they right? They're too tight, too. I get a new pair pretty soon, I'm desperate.

Take it from me, I'm never to be born again during a war. I wait till it's all over and then I could do was take up room and clothing. And, anyhow, my introduction to life. Well, when we began to get more food, was actually food-shy. I'm not enough yet, but if I have these clothes much longer, it's a good thing. Then, as I fore, it has knocked my digestion to smash and now I'll have a running jump to make

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