

# Diamond Cut Diamond

By JANE BUNKER

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## CHAPTER XV.—Continued.

And she was expecting him! She had had an "impression" that he would come to her as soon as his interview with me was over, and she was not taken unawares.

The wide-eyed Swedish maid admitted him, showing him into the reception room and asking him to wait, as her mistress was "giving a reading." A moment later Mrs. Delario came in coolly and asked to be excused—she had a sitter and could not possibly see monsieur this evening. Of course there was no sitter in the seance room, but a miff and a boia on the chair beside him conveyed the impression that there was a caller.

Monsieur played his surprise card instantly. Saying he would detain her but a moment he sprang into her that I had told him she had the diamonds and he had come to apologize for the "unfortunate mistake" that had been made, and to arrange to get the stones "as soon as convenient."

It was a bold move; but Billy and I had taught him one thing—everything now depended on diplomacy, and if she denied having the stones he could do nothing.

It was also a bold lie—telling her I had said she had told me; but he failed to trip her even there: she says she "knew before the words were out of his mouth that it was a lie—that 'he' appeared in large white letters over his head."

"You must excuse me this evening—I have a sitter in the next room," she said quietly, and showed him she would not talk.

"But, madame, it is necessary that we make some arrangement—"

"But, monsieur," she returned, "I cannot discuss the matter with you now."

"If you will so kindly permit me to wait—" he began, using all his diplomacy—and feeling he needed it, I imagine!

She made a move on her own account—drawing herself up, she told him, "After the way you treated me last Monday—the accusations you brought against me of robbing your daughter—I positively will not talk with you for a single minute, unless you bring her with you."

He had not expected this demand, but he met it with a smile.

"It is well!" he cried, determined to humor her to the last degree. "I return to the hotel and bring my daughter back with me immediately. We will await your convenience for an interview."

"I shall not be through here for an hour."

"Certainly, madame—at your convenience."

She saw him jump into a waiting automobile and dash away in the direction of his hotel. It was from there he dispatched the notes to Claire and me. Hardly was he out of sight before



He Had Come to Apologize.

she had on her wraps and whisked out of the house and up to me with the diamonds. Not to let the elevator boy see her she had walked up and down on the opposite side of the street until she saw someone enter and go in the car; then she followed and crept softly to the top, where she remembered I had my flat. She had listened outside the door and had recognized both my voice and Claire's and hid herself on the dark stairway until she heard Claire and Billy leaving. With that she had slipped in, but had not dared to waste a minute in explanations; and she was back again in her own house and her Swedish maid didn't even know that her mistress had been out.

A crafty plan on monsieur's part! He had, by getting Billy to escort Claire back, bottled up our activities

as completely as if he had us gagged and handcuffed! And it all fell down because Claire fainted and went into hysterics when she reached the hotel! He did not see Mrs. Delario that night.

Neither did he see me—but then—he didn't intend to! I waited for the mysterious visit until half past ten, every minute feeling it more unwise of me to see him. At that hour, using its lateness as my excuse, I locked up, determined I'd not speak to him at all until I had had a chance to talk things over with Billy. I went to bed but not to sleep. I knew something unforeseen had happened—something Mrs. Delario must know or "sense," or she wouldn't have brought back the diamonds after the positive way I'd refused them in the morning.

I kept telling myself, "Oh, well—I'll know in the morning and I'll find some way to meet it when it comes. Things can't be any worse," and thus I fell asleep without an inkling of the muddle I'd be in before the sun set on another day.

I had gone to bed with quite a bit of a grouch on Mrs. Delario—I think anybody would have felt the same in my place. I was perfectly willing that she should keep her faith in Tibetan masters or mahatmas along with the emperor's diamonds, and I stood prepared to help her do both; but if I were willing to make such concessions to her it did seem as if she oughtn't to go throwing off her responsibilities and her diamonds on me all the time! She didn't seem to feel she owed me any consideration. Very complimentary, of course, that I was the only person in the world she dared to trust; but I've found from experience there isn't much in that sort of compliment—for the recipient. And she hadn't even troubled herself to explain why she'd brought them back—to warn me of what threatened! That was what rankled more than anything.

I waked up grouchy than ever—if she'd been there I'd have told her what I thought about her! How was I to hide her diamonds now? I had exhausted all my ingenuity with the hyacinths, so what between racking my brains and nursing my grouch, I decided I wouldn't hide them at all, and what I did was to turn them bottom side up under the cotton and fill the rest of the box with pens and drop it carelessly on the tray where it had been. And when I'd done that I was, to all intents and purposes, back in the same hole again—if I went out and left them in the house they might be stolen; if I took them out with me I might be robbed.

From being grouchy I got mad at her; and from being mad it was but a step to the idea that I was fairly entitled to save the nation, and by the time I'd finished breakfast I had decided to go to Washington immediately and lay the matter before the president and let him attend to Germany.

I had just settled the laudable intention with myself when Billy breezed in. He was rosy; he was cordial—oh, very! I'm free to say I've never seen Billy quite so cordial since the day I rescued him from maternal sparks and curled his hair, and pressed his Fauntleroy suit—the day the boys threw him in the swimming hole. But his young face was also clouded with anxiety and he was puzzled still at the stand I'd taken the night before—that Mrs. Delario was to keep the diamonds—and that I'd had no chance to explain to him.

He said "Hello" four times and pumped my hand off.

"You're still alive, I see," he observed with a sweet smile.

Without waiting to hear what I had to say he threw his hat on the table and rattled off, "Well, I got her back to the hotel all right—she was as-as gay as anything all the way down. Her father was standing in the door looking for us—I guess he was scared stiff that she hadn't come—and the minute she saw him she threw herself in his arms and went into hysterics!"

Billy's face puckered up with his anxiety and his sympathy as I exclaimed, "Poor child!"

"I couldn't do anything more so I—evaporated," he continued. "Didn't even try to say goodbye to her. Do you think she'll think that was queer of me?—go off without saying goodbye?" He was anxious on this point.

"No. She's enough the lady to regard it as great delicacy on your part."

"I hope she will," he said fervently.

"But do you think the shock—last night and all—was too much for her? Say—I'm worried—" he looked at me in an appealing way.

I answered, amused, "I suppose that means you want me to go right down to the hotel with you and find out all about her. I suppose a maiden aunt has nothing to do but go racing off with jelly and make one big dramatic fuss—just as if fainting heroines weren't the most ordinary occurrences known to fiction."

"Ordinary!" gasped Billy. "A faint like that ordinary? I never saw anything like it—and I've seen a good deal—of life."

He jumped up and took a turn about the room. He was annoyed. I was amused—so much amused that I had forgotten my grouch on Mrs. Delario and that I had the diamonds and meant to take them to the president.

"Well—are you going down to see how she is?" demanded Billy, wheeling and planking himself in front of me.

"Dear auntie—sweet auntie," I jibed. "Please put on your camel's hair shawl and bunnit and haste away to Beauty-in-Distress that I may instantly know how she bore up under the strain of meeting the hero and how she liked his pink, round cheeks."

Billy gave me a vicious grunt and strode across the room—he wanted to say something ugly to me but he didn't dare, seeing how I held his fate in my hands.

"Oh, Billy!" I cried, suddenly remembering the latest news, "she brought back the diamonds last night!"

"Claire came back? Good heavens!" he sank into the chair.

"Claire? Of course not. Mrs. Delario." And I told him how she'd whipped in and out like a spook while he and Claire were going down in the elevator. Then for the first time I showed him the diamonds.

"Love and pumpkins!" he ejaculated, overcome by the sight. "Well, if this doesn't beat the 'Arabian Nights'! Are they real—real? Not paste? Why, if they're real they're worth about a million dollars!"

"And haven't I been telling you that all along?" I asked testily. Billy's words and tone gave it pretty well away that he hadn't believed it all along, no matter what I'd said and he'd pretended.

"Yes, I think you have," he admitted, rather stammeringly. "But of course—you realize that a million dollars is a—er—a pretty big order for a chap in New York to eat at a sitting."

He spread them out on his hand, muttering to himself. Finally he brought out: "And you've got these—here!" all alone in the flat with you! Well, save my shoestrings! I don't wonder your nerves are on edge!"

I let this pass about my nerves and gave him the story she'd told me Sunday morning—about the mahatma sending her these diamonds through the air and putting them in her slipper; and how she claimed them, absolutely, religiously, as hers.

"The woman's crazy," was the curt way he disposed of her, and added, to mitigate this harsh judgment, "Or else she's a thief."

"She's neither one thing nor the other," I defended sharply. "She's merely deluded the same as tens of thousands of other people have been deluded about things they believed in."

"Crazy," he repeated with conviction. I could only shrug—all I've ever been able to do; that was her incorrigible belief! I wasted no more time on it then, for our question was what to do next, and I went on to tell him how I'd decided to take his advice and lay the matter before the president.

To my astonishment, instead of the warm commendation I'd expected from Billy at taking the advice he'd given on both my duty and my common sense not forty-eight hours before—and remember, I'd barely restrained him from rushing off on the midnight train—he popped out of his chair and began excitedly pacing the floor. His first words were, "Why, you can't do that!"

"Oh, I see all the risks I'm running of getting there alive!"

"Risks?" he echoed, as if he hadn't given them a thought. "But how much are you going to tell about this affair?"

"Everything, of course—I mean everything I know. The government will have to undertake to find out the rest."

He plunked himself in front of me and demanded, "You aren't going to let Miss de Ravenol get dragged into a mess like this, are you?"

I didn't answer immediately, and he rapped on, "I ask you—are you going to do it? Are you going to be party to such a—such an outrage?"

"If I don't put the case to the president what am I to do? Here I am saddled with the diamonds—"

"Well, just keep them yourself," he bluntly offered, as his solution of the difficulty. "Keep them—put them in the safe deposit—and let things take their course."

For a minute I was really angry, and rapped out, "If I thought you were serious, Billy, I'd ask you to leave the house. Your suggestion is that I frankly become a thief, and your solution is not only criminal but—idiotic. What would it accomplish?—with so many people knowing!"

"Well—say—promise me one thing," he pleaded. "You'll wait—you won't try to see the president today—you won't rush off without telling me your going."

I was willing to grant this and suggested that he go down to the hotel at once and see how Claire was,

"You'll not come?" he asked, taking his hat, and I detected very mixed feelings in his question: there was a good chance he might not see her at all unless I went with him.

"How can I go off and leave these things alone in the house?" I pointed to the blue box.

At that moment the front bell rang and I found George glued to the button to tell me, "Why, thez a gen'le-



He plunked himself in front of me. m'n downstairs say he like to see you, but he don't give no name, an' I tell him I can't say if you's home or out, but I'll go up an' see."

"Has he ever been here before?"

"These are the times when I appreciate George's virtues! I these instructions Billy came ramping along the hall, "Hello, George—wait—I'm going down," and with a quick, "See you later," he was out of sight.

I don't know what instinct prompted me to it, but after I'd closed the door and gone back to my study I retraced my steps and put on the chain-bolt.

## CHAPTER XVI.

### A New Visitor.

A pretty kettle of fish! I had made up my mind to lay the case before the president, but then—as Billy said—ruin a young girl's life! If I told anything I'd have to tell all.

George rang. He was apologetic, but had the offish air of having received compensation for my scolding.

"Why, that gen'tlem'n downstairs, he says—soon as I tell him you ain't home—he says ain't you in, or is you out—"

"I told you positively that I was not at home."

"Well, I told him that—that's why he ask me is you not at home or is you out? An' he says for me to go up again with this here—" and he thrust a sealed envelope into my hand through the crack of the door, which was still on the chain-bolt.

Mechanically—as people will do those things without thinking of the possible consequences—I tore open the flap and read:

"Mademoiselle de Ravenol has disappeared."

That was all—no signature or anything—and the paper looked like a leaf torn from a notebook and hastily scribbled in pencil.

I made an exclamation and was in the very act of telling George to bring the man up at once, when the queerest feeling came over me—intuition, warning, whatever you choose to name it—a feeling of danger, and that this was what the detectives call a plant for me. It was George who recalled me to my senses by asking, "Shall I fetch him up?"

"No—certainly not. You've already told him I'm not at home."

"But he says—if you's out I'm to fetch back the letter to him, an' when I don't fetch it back he asks me, ain't you in, an' if you ain't in where's the letter?"

True—and aptly argued!

"Why didn't you tell me that in the first place?" I demanded, wondering at my own stupidity that I hadn't seen it myself in the first place.

"I ain't think of it," said George sulkily.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## BELGIUM SKETCHES

### The Fire of Madame Theré

By Katharine Eggleston Roberts.

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They marched into a town of empty streets, closed doors, and drawn blinds—those men with sharp spiked helmets. Their heavy tramp upon the cobble-stones resounded in the narrow rain-drenched lanes until they halted in the little square. Frightened eyes peeped from behind the shuttered windows—watched yet dreaded to see. The Germans had taken Aerschot. As the heavy clouds blackened into night, the only lights were those made by the troops in the square.

The house of Mathieu Theré was dark like the others.

"Mother, let's light the lamp. It's so awful here in the dark."

"No, Andre, we mustn't. Be brave like your brothers. See, Pierre and Paul don't mind the dark, do you my sons?" Madame Theré put a reassuring arm about her youngest and felt his shoulders stiffen.

The two boys stood with their father at the other window.

"No, I don't mind the dark but I am hungry." Pierre was two years older than Andre, too old to fear the dark and too young to fear the Germans.

But Paul did not answer. He stood with his arm locked within his father's and stared out grimly at the moving silhouettes. His army had refused him just because he was a year or so too young. What difference did age make? He was as strong as any man and he might have been out fighting instead of hiding here in the dark.

The soldiers were stirring about and forming into small detachments. Their helmets gleamed in the flickering light of the street lamps. A sharp order was given.

"They are coming," said Mathieu Theré.

The butt of a gun thudded on the street door. "Come out, come out where we can see you. Come out or you shall feel fire."

"Let us go together. It is all that we can do." The father led his family into the street.

Quickly the narrow lanes filled as the houses emptied—filled with people who dared not speak aloud. "What are they going to do?" "Where are we going?" "What are they doing now?" The terrified whispers ques-

tioned. In the ill-lit streets, faces peered trying to recognize neighbors. Then came the order to march with upraised arms. Families were separated. Lost babies cried. Women shrieked the names of their husbands and children. Everywhere was confusion. But in spite of it all, Mathieu and Madame Theré and their sons managed to keep together till the people were herded into the market-place before the church. A light was coming from somewhere behind them—a light that grew redder and redder.

"Mother, mother, what is it?"

"Hush, Andre, I do not know."

"It's the houses. They've fired the town." Paul's voice was thick.

The crowd was ordered about. "You wouldn't have lights? Well you have them now," a German voice taunted "See them?"

As the flames whipped over the roofs, the soldiers went through the town. "We are going to Paris," they said, "your men and boys must march ahead of us."

Madame Theré stood as her husband and sons were marched away—stood with the other women gazing wide-eyed and mute. The flames of the town died down and the gray dawn came to the women huddled together in the market place. The soldiers laughed into their grief-filled faces, "Go home." They said, "Go to your homes."

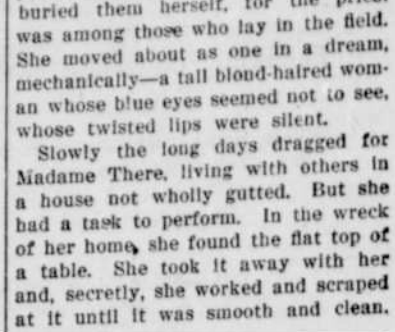
Home! Madame Theré, scarcely knowing what she did, went to a heap of bricks and mortar facing the square. Part of a charred wall was standing and she started through its sagging doorway. Suddenly there burst a fusillade. She listened and again the shots rang out. She hurried to the square where other women ran about. "Our soldiers are coming to help us. They are fighting. Hear!" But no, it could not be that for no more shots were fired.

"Sh—what is he saying?"

"Your men are not going with us to Paris. They are too much trouble. You'll find them in the field east of town."

And they saw them—two hundred men and boys lying riddled with bullets. Madame Theré found her husband and Paul with Andre between them and near them lay Pierre. In a cart, she carried them to the churchyard and there she made a prayer and buried them herself, for the priest was among those who lay in the field. She moved about as one in a dream, mechanically—a tall blond-haired woman whose blue eyes seemed not to see, whose twisted lips were silent.

Slowly the long days dragged for Madame Theré, living with others in a house not wholly gutted. But she had a task to perform. In the wreck of her home, she found the flat top of a table. She took it away with her and, secretly, she worked and scraped at it until it was smooth and clean.



"Here Lies Mathieu Theré."

Only by one irregular letters grew and straggled over the board. The people who knew her wondered, and they whispered among themselves, "What is wrong with Madame Theré? Surely her mind is gone." And the soldiers who saw her each day stepped aside to let her pass, for they feared the woman who never spoke with her lips but whose eyes burned into their souls.

The sentry tramped up and down in the moonlight and his thoughts were far away. The same moon was shining in Germany on a little village like this one and here he had to stay guarding a cemetery where no one wanted to come and from which no one could go. At home—he didn't see the crouching figure dart behind the hedge as he turned the corner. In the morn-



After a Baptism of Flame and Shell.

ing, he wondered at the wooden tablet which seemed to have grown overnight:

Here lie Mathieu Theré and his sons Paul, Pierre, and Andre, guileless, murdered by the Boche Barbarians.

Madame Theré hurried to answer the sharp rap at the door. "Is this yours?" demanded the soldier. In his hand was the wooden tablet.

"It is mine."

"Don't leave it about," he growled and flung it at her feet.

"It will stay one day in spite of you," she cried.

Day after day, he met her going to church. She became so worn and emaciated that it seemed only her spirit was alive, but it gleamed brightly and more brightly in the flame of her eyes. And so the long time passed. Always the German soldier thought the fire of Madame Theré would surely burn out, but daily her challenge scorched into his conscience.

Then in the chill autumn, came word that was unbelievable. An armistice had been signed. The firing had stopped, and the Germans were ordered to leave Aerschot.

For the last time the sentry guarded the cemetery. For the first time the dawn flushed on a quiet world. As the light grew, the soldier looked about. What was that? He entered the churchyard. At the head of the four graves, the wooden mark stood firmly:

Here lie Mathieu Theré and his sons Paul, Pierre, and Andre, guileless, murdered by the Boche Barbarians.

Across the graves lay Madame Theré and the fire was gone from her eyes.

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Dated at Vale, Ore March 4, 1920.