

The Missing Diamonds

Amelia Brankheart was in the process of settling up her mother's estate. She ascended the stairs of the family home of so many years and entered her mother's bedroom. Crossing the room, she sat at the ornate dressing table and gazed into the mirror, she remembered the many times as a young girl sneaking into the room and sitting just as she did now before pretending to prepare herself for an evening's outing to one of the many parties her mother regularly attended.

Looking down at the dressing table before her she reached across to the top righthand draw where her mother kept her favourite jewellery. Reaching into the draw she took out an Oyster shell case that housed her mother's diamond Cartier-Lavelle necklace she so admired. She placed it on the dressing table top and opened the lid, for a moment she gazed down at the case; for a moment nothing registered. Then a shockwave ran through her, she was looking at an empty box!

Amelia sat looking at the empty box, stunned by the vacancy within. A few seconds later, recovering from the initial shock her mind was now in a turmoil; What – Who – When? She cast her thoughts back to when she had last handled the necklace and who was in the house at that time?

The other possibility was a break-in and burglary, she placed the empty case down on the dressing table and stood up. She turned to face the bedroom, as she did so she scanned the scene to see if anything was out of place that could indicate a disturbance; but she saw nothing.

She moved from the dressing table and walked over to the windows to see if there was any evidence of a forced entry, again there was no sign of any disturbance. Continuing around the room she noticed that the carpet at the side of the bed was scuffed. Not unusual you would think but the scuffing was in the 'wrong' direction to the natural lay of the carpet. Amelia followed the extent of the scuffing and arrived at the oak panelled wall that was around the bedroom.

This discovery hinted at an opening in the wall; a secret passage if you will. Amelia had grown up in this house and was well acquainted with the many Priest Holes and other secret places around the property, but this one was a new discovery!

Intrigued; she examined the panel that the carpet had led her to. To look at, the panel did not show any means of activating a way of opening it; if indeed there was one. Moving forward she felt along and around the edges of a section of the panel, pressing the panel sides as she did so, nothing moved all remained solid.

She stood back and re-examined the panel in front of her, reaching out she pressed the top section of the face 'tile' (it should be noted that the panels were made up of oak squares held in place by oak rebated strips) but again nothing moved. Going to the next tile and tried the same thing again, this time there was a rewarding mechanical 'Click'.

The whole panel section approximately seven foot by four feet moved forward on the left-hand side, as indeed it had been indicated to do so by the scuff mark on the carpet.

Amelia pulled open the panel and looked into a dark interior. She returned to the dressing table having remembered her mother kept a small torchlight in one of the other draws.

Returning to the panel she opened it further and switched on the torch, Amelia entered the edifice; as she did so she became aware of a rather pungent aroma wafting along the passage.

The passage was a little narrower than the entrance panel, about three feet wide. She could see that the sides of the passage were dusty and cobweb adorned but she noticed that they were less dusty at about shoulder height. A sign surely that the passage had been used recently.

She moved along slowly, ahead of her there was a turn in the passage to the left, as she approached the turn she noticed that the smell was becoming stronger. Reaching the corner, she peered around it, shining the torch along it as she did so. There about eight feet along the passage there was the body of what appeared to be a young girl dressed in a black suit. Protruding from the left-hand wall was a blade; dried blood adhering along the edge, on the floor of the passage just in front of the girl's feet was a slightly raised tile, a coil spring below it just visible in the torch light.

Looking down at the girl she could see the fatal wound a little below her shoulder blades, the position would lead to the blade piercing her heart. Her arms were clasped to her chest, remaining in place as she fell to the floor, just in front of her on the passage floor lay the necklace.

The thief had been caught in flagranti; the punishment had been waiting for many years, patient and inert until needed.

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