

# Too Many Diamonds

by Ellery Watson Calder



*Carnahan knew his women. Otherwise he could never have unraveled as pretty a mess of doublecrossing as ever complicated a detective case.*

*He was passing the new building they were putting up when they jumped him. He didn't have a chance.*

IT WAS late in the afternoon. A well-dressed man came into Steve Carnahan's private office. He had a furtive look in his shifty eyes and there was a bandage on his head.

He looked at Carnahan and said, "Are you the proprietor of the Carnahan Detective Agency?"

Steve Carnahan said, "Yes. Sit down. What can I do for you?"

The man's eyes darted around the office. "You—you're sure we're alone? And whatever I say will be regarded as strictly confidential?"

Carnahan nodded. "Yes—to both questions," he answered.

The bandaged man lowered his voice. "I—my name is McIntyre," he said. "Last night I was slugged and robbed of a very valuable diamond necklace. I—I've got to get it back. At once!"

Carnahan studied his visitor, and decided he didn't like the man's crafty face. "Sounds like a police case to me," he grunted.

McIntyre flushed darkly. "I haven't reported it to the police. I—I'm not in a position to tell them anything. You see, I—I'm not supposed to be here in Los Angeles. My wife thinks I'm in San Francisco."

Carnahan settled his hefty bulk behind his desk. "So what?"

THE bandaged man licked his thin lips, twisted uncomfortably in his chair. "My wife is very

wealthy," he said. "We live in Fresno. Recently she bought an expensive diamond necklace. Two days ago she had me take it to San Francisco. I was to have a paste replica made for her to wear, so that she could keep the genuine necklace in her safe. The San Francisco jewelers finished the job sooner than expected. I—I decided to come down to Los Angeles by plane and . . . er, have a little fling."

Carnahan grinned unsympathetically. "So you came down here, and some dame rolled you for the sparklers, eh?"

"Yes," McIntyre answered swiftly. "I arrived here yesterday afternoon. Last night I—I got a little drunk. I met a red-haired girl on the street; she invited me to her apartment. It was late; dark. We walked past a new building at Seventh and Olive—a place with scaffolding and board fences all around it. Somebody jumped me from under the scaffolding, hit me on the head. When I came to, I'd been picked clean. My money was gone, the red-haired girl was gone—and so was the necklace!"

He leaned desperately toward the private detective. "Mr. Carnahan, I—I've simply got to get that necklace back! And it must be done without publicity. If my wife ever finds out that I came down here to Los Angeles and was robbed of her diamonds, she—she'd divorce me!"

Carnahan scowled. McIntyre, he decided, was a rat. Living off his rich wife's dough and afraid to

lose his soft berth. Sneaking out for a gay time, and scared to face the consequences. Carnahan didn't like any part of it. He determined to duck the case by setting an unreasonably stiff fee. He said, "I wouldn't touch your troubles for a nickel less than five hundred berries—in advance."

McIntyre surprised him. He pulled a thick roll of bills out of his pocket; peeled off five crisp centuries. He showed the money across the desk, toward Carnahan, and Carnahan noticed that there must have been nearly ten grand still left in the roll. "You—just get to work for me right away, Carnahan?" the man pleaded.

The detective frowned. "I thought you told me you were stripped of all your geetus last night?" he rumbled.

The bandaged man said, "You mean my money? I—I was afraid to carry a large sum with me; so I left most of it in the hotel safe before I went out."

That sounded fishy to Carnahan. He said, "Listen, mister. If you want me to do anything for you, you've got to come clean. Now, if you were cagey enough to leave most of your bankroll with the hotel manager last night before you went out to get stewed then why didn't you also leave the necklace with him? How come you carried those rocks on you, if you figured you might run into a stick-up?"

McIntyre swallowed hard. "But—but I thought it was the paste replica I was carrying around," he protested. "I didn't think the fake stones were valuable enough to worry about."

"I get it," Carnahan said slowly. "Well, run along. I'll see what I can do for you. But don't expect too much."

McINTYRE went out. When he had gone, Carnahan's brow furrowed. He was puzzled. Something smelled bad about the whole thing. The detective thought of something. McIntyre had said he thought it was the paste necklace he was carrying around with him. How, then, had he discovered that he'd been robbed of the genuine diamonds?"

And then Carnahan noticed a slip of paper on the floor of the office. It evidently had fallen out of McIntyre's pocket when he'd pulled out that thick roll of bills. Carnahan picked up the paper. There was a typewritten message on it. The detective read it:

McIntyre—

You know I don't stand for any double-crossing. I payed you ten grand for that string of rocks; and when you'd left, I discovered that you'd given me the phonies instead of the real sparklers. Either you made a mistake, or you're trying to pull a fast one. So come across with the genuine ice or give me back my ten grand. Otherwise you'll wish you's never been born. I'll give you until tomorrow morning.

Ben L.

Carnahan read the note a second time. Then he said, "Well, I'll be damned!"

Things were beginning to make sense now.

Carnahan closed his office, jammed his slouch hat low over his rough-hewn face. He went out.

He managed to get into a professional theatrical-costume shop just as it was closing for the night. He made a purchase. Then he stopped by a telegraph office and sent a wire to his agency's branch office in San Francisco.

After that, he went home and took a shower, shaved, changed into fresh linen and did certain things with the objects he had purchased at the costume shop.

Then he went out, whistling.

He hailed a passing taxi and rode to an apartment house at Twelfth and Figueroa. He went upstairs to the third floor, rapped on a door. It opened. A red-haired girl stared out at him.

She was young, she was pretty, and she had everything. Her hips were lush without being too broad; her legs were tapered, rounded, feminine. Her breasts showed through her fragile silken frock—firm, rounded, alluring. Carnahan decided she wasn't wearing a brassiere. He was glad of that. He smiled and said, "Hello, Mickey. How's tricks?"

The girl said, "Carnahan! What in hell do you want?"

He shrugged. "Just a little love, a little kiss . . ." he hummed. "Got any?"

"Not to give away!" she snapped.

"Who said anything about that?" he asked her reproachfully. "Do I ever ask for free lunch?"

"Always!" She tossed her head.

Carnahan grinned. "Tonight the program's gonna be different, Graham." Then his voice grew serious. "You still working for Ben Lubin's jewelry store, baby?"

"Yes. What of it?"

"If you'll invite me in and give me a drink, I'll tip you off to something."

The girl studied him. "Okay. Come on in," she said half-resentfully.

HE ENTERED her apartment, closed the door behind him. The red-haired girl looked him over. "Well, spill it. What's on your alleged mind?"

"The fire-water first, baby. Papa's tonsils need irrigating."

She got a bottle and two glasses; filled the glasses with gin. She drank with Carnahan.

"Well?" she demanded.

He smacked his lips. "Much better, thank you!" he remarked. His big arms went about her waist, pulled her down to the divan alongside him. "And now to business. I thought I'd drop in and tell you—you'd better quit your job with Ben Lubin. Ben's due for trouble."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that little Mickey O'Dare—which is you—had better get a rush of brains to the head before it's too late. Drop the racket. Ben Lubin's overstepped the line once too often. Somebody has put in a beef."

"I don't get you!" the red-haired Mickey O'Dare said, squirming as she tried to free herself from Carnahan's bear-like embrace.

He held on to her; forced his hand into the neck of her dress. His fingers encountered the bare warmly pliant flesh of her breasts. He cupped a smooth mound in his palm. Then he said, "Ever hear of a bozo named McIntyre?"

The girl was a damned good actress. Her face didn't change expression. But Carnahan's big paw, stroking her breast, could feel the abrupt, frightened acceleration of her heart. She faced him. "McIntyre? Who is he? What are you talking about!"

"Okay, baby," Carnahan said placidly. "Leave it lay. Forget it. Pretend I didn't say anything about it." He released her, lumbered heavily to his feet. "Guess I'll be going. Merry New Year."

She interposed herself between him and the front door. "You've got something on your mind, Carnahan. You come here to spill it. Well—why don't you?" She smiled at him, her manner suddenly coquettish. "What's the matter, anyhow? I've seen the time when you weren't so damned anxious to leave me!"

He lifted one eyebrow, roguishly. "What will you trade for the information I've got?"

She laughed. "What would you like?"

"Guess?" he grinned.

"I don't have to guess. I know. You're just a goat, Carnahan. And I like you—damn it. Come on over and sit down again. Have another drink. Let's be sociable."



*He lunged, caught her as she came from her bath.*

He sat down and had the drink. "That's more like it," he grunted contentedly. He grabbed the girl, tilted her chin back, kissed her.

She responded with an ardor that had Carnahan gasping. He hadn't had a kiss like that in a long time. She opened her mouth; clamped it down over his lips like a warm, moist vacuum. He felt her darting, licking tongue. . . . When finally she pushed him away, there was lipstick smeared all over his face.

He took a deep breath and dived in for more, his thick fingers unfastened the front of the girl's frock. He was glad she wasn't wearing a brassiere. Breasts like hers didn't need any artificial support. They were firm, resilient to his exploring touch. Carnahan's lips descended to the hollow of the girl's throat, lingered there until she panted.

She said, "Carnahan, quit. I—I can't stand it!"

He said, "That's the way I feel about it, too."

AFTER a while, she stirred lazily in his arms. She said, "Well, big boy—what about that trade you were talking about? Have I earned the information you promised me?"

It was dark now. Carnahan reached for the cord of lamp behind the divan; pulled it. The lamp glowed with soft pink-shaded light. Carnahan grinned and said, "Yeah. You've earned it. Plenty. Give a listen."

"I'm giving a listen. Shoot."

Carnahan said, "Ben Lubin, the guy you work for, is a high-grade fence—as we both know damned well. He buys stolen jewelry. Right?"

"Maybe."

"Maybe, hell! I know what I'm talking about, and so do you. Well, anyhow, a guy named McIntyre sold Ben Lubin a string of hot sparklers yesterday. Lubin paid him ten grand for the rocks. Then, after McIntyre left, Lubin discovered he'd been crossed. McIntyre had passed him a phony string instead of the genuine necklace."

The girl stared at Carnahan without saying anything.

Carnahan continued. "Then Ben Lubin wrote McIntyre a note, demanding the real diamonds or his ten grand back. Which was an idiotic thing to do, on Ben's part. Because McIntyre is a stoolie. He's dickering with the cops to turn Ben Lubin's note in as evidence. Whereupon the D.A. will crack down on Lubin; and Lubin will hereafter languish in the bastille for a nice long stretch."

The girl drew a sharp breath and sat upright on the divan. She said, "You—you're on the level with this, Carnahan?"

Carnahan said, "Yeah. I'm telling you straight."

"But—how do you know so much?"

Carnahan grinned. "This bird McIntyre hired me to be his go-between. I'm the guy who is to make the dicker with the D.A.'s office. McIntyre turned Lubin's note over to me. I've got it on me right now."

"Good Lord!" the girl breathed heavily. "That calls for a drink!" She got up, picked up the gin bottle. "Empty!" she exclaimed, concealing it from Carnahan. "Excuse me while I run down the hall to a friend of mine. I'll borrow a full bottle. You wait here."

Before he could say anything she had gone. Carnahan waited a minute. Then he went to her telephone, dialed Postal Union. He said, "You got a message for Steve Carnahan—from San Francisco?"

There was a brief interval. Then a voice said, "Yes, Mr. Carnahan. Shall I read it to you?"

"Shoot. Make it snappy."

The voice said, "The message is signed Carnahan Agency, San Francisco. It reads: 'McIntyre had two replicas made.' That's all."

Carnahan grinned. "That's plenty. Thanks." He hung up. He just had time to sit down on the divan when the apartment door opened. The red-haired Mickey O'Dare entered, with a full bottle of gin.

She poured a couple of generous slugs. They drank. Then the girl looked at Carnahan. "Making love always gives me an appetite . . . afterward, I'm hungry."

"I could stand a bite to eat myself," Carnahan said. "Where'll we go?"

Casually, she said, "There's a nice café on Olive between Sixth and Seventh. 'How about it?'"

"Okay by me," Carnahan said

SHE left him and went into the tiny bathroom. He could hear her splashing around in the shower. She took a long time. Then he got a flash of her as she legged it for her bedroom. She was freshly toweled, pink as an angel. He made a lunge for her, caught her before she could get her door closed.

Her enticing body smelled faintly of bath-salts and dusting-talc; and her skin was satin-smooth, deliciously cool from the shower. In a couple of minutes, however, she wasn't nearly so cool. Her eyes grew smoky, and her breathing became short, panting. Carnahan's hands were exploring the slim places of her back, the lushness of her hips, the resiliency of her breasts . . .

IT WAS nearly an hour before they started out for dinner. As they left the apartment, the girl said, "Let's walk. I need the exercise."

"Suits me," Carnahan agreed affably.

They strolled down to Olive; started toward Sixth. The street wasn't too well lighted; and as they approached Seventh, Carnahan saw the board fence, the scaffolding that marked the construction of a new building on the corner. His jaw tightened.

Under that scaffolding McIntyre had been hit on the cranium the night before. He had been slugged silly, and robbed of that diamond necklace—

Carnahan and the red-haired girl entered the tunnel-like enclosure of scaffolding that framed the sidewalk in front of the building construction. Imperceptibly, the girl seemed to draw ahead one or two paces. Carnahan tensed his neck-muscles. . . .

There was a whooshing sound and something

heavy, vicious, smashed down on Carnahan's head. His battered slouch hat muffled the noise of the blow, but not its deadly impact. Even with his neck-muscles tensed, Carnahan went sprawling.

He pitched forward on his face, with an entire galaxy of stars dancing before his eyes. He quivered and lay still.

Over the roaring in his ears, he heard a man's voice say: "That got him, the louse!" Then, "Mickey, you keep your eye peeled while I frisk him!"

Carnahan heard the red-haired girl laugh and say, "Do it quick, Ben."

Then somebody leaned over Carnahan's prone form, fumbled through his pockets. Carnahan waited until everything was just right; until his attacker's hands were together. Then, with a grunt, the detective whipped out a pair of handcuffs.

There was a snapping, metallic click. Carnahan leaped to his feet, grinning. He had his automatic out. He said, "Okay, Ben Lubin. Don't try to run." Then he turned toward the white-faced O'Dare girl. "Mickey, if you make a move I'll put a slug in your left tibia, so help me!"

The girl just stared at him, gaping.

Carnahan looked at her employer, Ben Lubin, the crooked jeweler. "Well, Ben, how do you like the feel of those bracelets?"

Lubin was a tall, broad-shouldered, blue-shaven man. His eyes were wide with utter amazement. He said, "Good God—! You must have a steel skull!"

Carnahan shook his head, took off his wrecked slouch hat. "Not a steel skull, Ben. But the next best thing." Then he removed the metal, helmet-like affair he had been wearing. "I bought this as a precaution," he remarked. "Vaudeville comedians wear 'em for slapstick work. I got it at a theatrical costume shop. It fits right over the head like a wig—has hair and everything. A guy can take a hell of a bat over the dome if he's got one of these things on."

Then he tossed the dented steel head-protector over the fence and said, "Well, children, suppose we grab a taxi and go places? I've got a lot of talking to do."

He herded them out from under the scaffolding, flagged down a passing cab.

TEN minutes later, Carnahan and his two prisoners were in Ben Lubin's apartment. Carnahan settled back in a chair, grinned, lit a

cigarette out of a crumpled pack. He said, "Well, you two certainly fell nicely into my trap. I told Mickey O'Dare, here, about that incriminating note I had in my pocket. I knew, when she slipped out to get some gin, that she would phone you, Ben. I knew the two of you would frame it up to smack me goofy under that scaffold, so you could get the letter away from me. Since the stunt had worked so well on McIntyre, I figured you'd repeat it."

Lubin went white, "Are you accusing me of biffing McIntyre?"

"Sure." Carnahan widened his eyes. "Why not? Here's the way it all happened: This egg, McIntyre, had a rich wife. She gave him her diamond necklace, so he could have a replica made in paste stones. He saw a chance to doublecross his frau and make himself a nice bit of geetus. So he had two replicas made in San Francisco."

Lubin squirmed; said nothing.

Carnahan went on. "The reason McIntyre had two replicas made is perfectly plain. He intended to sell the genuine diamonds and pocket the dough. Then he'd give the two phony strings to his wife. She'd put one of them away in her safe, thinking it to be genuine. The other one she would wear, knowing it to be paste."

"Smart dick!" Lubin sneered.

"Thanks. I think so, too," Carnahan agreed placidly. "Well, McIntyre came down here to Los Angeles and sold the real diamonds to you, Lubin, for ten grand. They're probably worth twenty."

"Yeah—and he slipped me the phonies—"

"Oh! So you admit he sold them to you, eh?" Carnahan grinned. "That's fine. Only you're lying when you say he palmed off the paste rocks on you, Ben. You've got the real ones, all right. But you decided to do a little doublecrossing on your own hook. So you got your secretary, Mickey O'Dare, here, to flirt with McIntyre last night. She decoyed him under that scaffolding at Seventh and Olive. Then you slugged him and robbed him of the paste necklace, which he happened to be carrying with him at the time."

"You're screwy! What in hell would I want with the paste rocks?" Lubin flared.

"If you'll shut up, I'll tell you. You had a nice scheme all cooked up. After you robbed McIntyre of the phony necklace, you waited until he got back to his hotel. Then you sent him that note; made him believe that through some error, he'd given you the replica and kept the genuine diamonds himself.

You demanded either the real sparklers or your ten grand back. Which put him in a hell of a spot. Because, meanwhile, he'd been robbed.

"And now he was convinced that the stick-up man had actually taken the genuine necklace from him. So there he was, up a tree. The real necklace was gone; he didn't have it. And you wanted it—or your dough back."

Lubin's face paled.

Carnahan smiled gently. "Your whole plan, Lubin, was to make McIntyre kick back that ten grand. Then you'd have your own money, and you'd also have McIntyre's diamonds."

"So what?" the crooked jeweler rasped. "Suppose you've got the straight of it? What are you going to do about it, Carnahan?"

Carnahan said, "I'm going to give you your choice of two propositions. You can hand over the diamonds to me, and I'll keep my kisser shut. Refuse, and I'll turn you over to the bulls and pin a fence rap on you. You are a fence, you know. I've got your letter to prove it."

Lubin's eyes glittered like a cornered rat's. "You've got me over a barrel!" he whined. "There's nothing for me to do but give in, damn you!"

"Nice little boy. I thought you'd see it my way. Now get me that necklace."

LUBIN went to a wall safe, fiddled with its dial. He was awkward, because his wrists were manacled with Carnahan's handcuffs. But he succeeded in opening the safe. He extracted two plush-covered oblong boxes, handed them glumly to Carnahan.

Carnahan flipped them open. Nestled in each satin-lined box lay a glittering, coruscating necklace. The detective grinned, scratched the stones of one with the facets of the other. He tossed one of the necklaces back to Lubin. "You can keep the paste replica as a little souvenir," he said. He pocketed the genuine diamonds, started toward the

door of the apartment.

Lubin said, "Listen, you rat! You can't leave me here with these damned handcuffs on me—"

"I'll mail you the key. You'll get it in the morning; then you can unlock yourself. Meanwhile, you won't be following me around tonight," Carnahan grunted. He went out.

He went to the hotel where his client, McIntyre, was staying. He went up to McIntyre's room, knocked on the door. McIntyre let him in, stared at him wide-eyed. "Carnahan! You—you've got some news for me?"

Carnahan nodded. "I've got your sparklers."

"You've recovered then? Good God—where are they?" the man gasped.

Carnahan said, "Take it easy. I had to put up ten thousand bucks of my own dough to get 'em back. Now—do you want 'em bad enough to buy 'em from me at that price? Or do you prefer to go back to your wife and tell her you lost 'em?"

McIntyre went white. "T-ten thousand dollars?" he whispered. "I—" Then his shoulders sagged. "I'll pay you!" his voice was harsh. He fished in his pocket, withdrew that thick roll of bills. He handed the money to Carnahan.

Carnahan counted it carefully. Then he gave McIntyre the diamond necklace. And as he went out, he stopped just long enough to say, "Much obliged, McIntyre. And by the way—better not try to doublecross your wife next time. In fact, you'd better stay clear of Los Angeles. Ben Lubin's pretty sore at you." Then, grinning, he stepped into the corridor and closed the door of McIntyre's room behind him.

He went downstairs, whistling. Everything had turned out just right. McIntyre had the fear of God in him; wouldn't be likely to go crooked again. Ben Lubin, the doublecrossing fence, was out ten grand and wasn't in a position to squawk about it. And Carnahan had Lubin's ten thousand bucks . . .

"Not bad!" Carnahan grunted as he lumbered heavily out of the hotel, into the night.