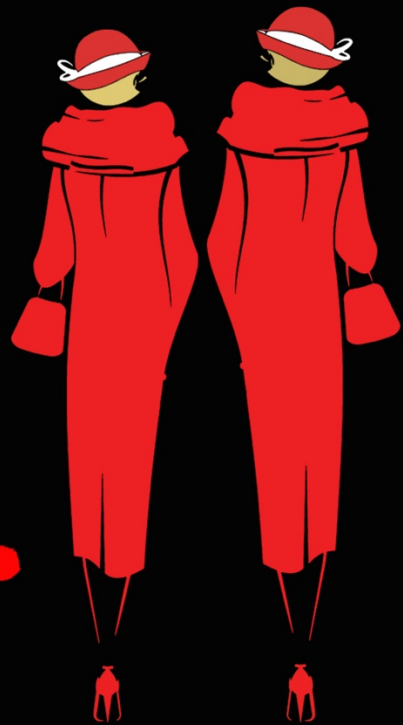


Alexandra & Edith's Escapades

**THE
DIAMOND
RING**

Ellen Read



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Note from Ellen, the Author

Dear Reader

Alexandra & Edith's Escapades - The Diamond Ring is a stand-alone short story that follows on from *The Dragon Sleeps*. However, even if you haven't yet read *The Dragon Sleeps* (It started out as being self-published – soon to be published by Crimson Cloak Publishing) – you will still follow *The Diamond Ring*.

This story features Alexandra Thornton and Edith Blackburn, and although Thomas Thornton and Benedict Archer are in it, they only play a minor part.

The idea for the girls to have some escapades came from a comment made by my editor, who asked me if I'd thought of writing a story about the girls on their own. At that stage, I hadn't. Since then, I've had numerous comments from readers who have read *The Dragon Sleeps*, telling me how much they love Lexy and Edie. Also, another friend wrote a short story with the characters from her book. This added to my thoughts.

Everything came together when I received the offer to have The Thornton Mysteries series published by Crimson Cloak Publishing. This would mean there'd be a wait until the series of books is published. So, I decided to write *Alexandra & Edith's Escapades*, to give readers something to fill the gap.

This story is free on my website as a PDF.

I hope you enjoy reading *The Diamond Ring*.

An Ordinary Man is another short story for FREE on my website. It's quite short and not at all related to the Thornton Mysteries.

Love The Gift, my first novella, is available on Amazon, [Apple iBooks](#), [Barnes and Noble](#) [Kobo](#), and other fine eBook retailers.

I would love to hear from you! If you would like to contact me, links are below:

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Best wishes

Ellen

ALEXANDRA AND EDITH'S ESCAPADES

The Diamond Ring

"Edie, look here," Alexandra Thornton hissed in a charged whisper. When Edith Blackburn remained with her head bent over columns of figures, Alexandra hurried to Edith's desk and grabbed her arm. "Come and look who's here."

"Gosh, Lexy." Edith looked up, her forehead creased, and her lips pursed. "I'm trying to add up and you've made me lose my number."

Alexandra tugged on Edith's arm. "Don't worry about that. You'll find it again but if you don't hurry that shifty chap from yesterday will be gone."

"Shifty chap?" Edith brows drew together over her hazel eyes. "I don't remember him."

"Don't be a silly duffer, Edie." Alexandra bent down and whispered in Edith's ear. "The man from yesterday. The one wanting to sell his mother's ring."

"Oh, him," Edith exclaimed, and scraped her chair back. "Didn't Uncle Thomas buy it?"

"Not yet but he probably will. I wish Daddy wouldn't buy it." Alexandra thought back to yesterday. She had been in the showroom with her father discussing a Russian silver gilt shaded cloisonné footed open salt by Feodor Ruckert, when this fellow had come into Thornton Antiques. Alexandra didn't like him from the start. Even though he'd cut a smart, well-dressed figure in his grey suit, with a black Homburg set at a jaunty angle and his black brogues, he had a shifty cast to his eyes. Alexandra could never trust anyone with eyes like his.

When he took a stunning sapphire and diamond ring out of his pocket, Alexandra had cut a glance to her father and he to her. Alarm bells had sounded in her head. No one carried around an expensive ring in their pocket, with no ring case to hold and protect it!

The fellow claimed it belonged to his mother. "She's passed away," he'd told them. "What price would you give me for it?" he asked.

He might have been well-dressed, but he didn't have any manners. If his mother owned such a valuable ring, Alexandra would have expected him to know he shouldn't walk into an antiques' showroom and thrust it under the proprietor's nose. There were processes. Another reason not to trust the man!

Alexandra took the ring from his hand. The central stone was a heart-shaped diamond, probably about 2.5 carats, cocooned in a bezel setting, which showed it to perfection, while a space surrounding it, allowed it to breathe and shine. Beyond this, scissor-shaped sapphires circled the diamond, with another row of small collet-set diamonds on the bottom. The diamonds on the shoulders and on the top featured a foliate flourish.

“Why did you not have an estate sale?” Alexandra asked, her nose a little too high in the air. She didn’t care.

“My daughter is correct,” her father said. “We usually buy from estate sales.”

Alexandra shot a smile her father’s way and a disdainful glance at the man.

“An estate sale?” he repeated in a vague tone. Then, he appeared to have recovered himself. “We decided not to have one.”

“How strange,” Alexandra commented in what she hoped was her most condescending tone. “I assume you have some provenance?”

“Provenance?” he reiterated again.

He clearly had no idea what she meant. Alexandra slid him down the scale to one step worse than shift. Was he a thief? Or perhaps a grifter?

Her father filled the awkward gap that Alexandra’s distrust had opened between them. “We need proof of ownership,” he explained, in an overly polite manner.

Poor Daddy! Alexandra always embarrassed him with her forthright behaviour. After all, this man was a prospective client... Her father had welcomed her into the business and now she was being rude to customers. But this fellow, she felt certain, was a client they could do without.

“Who is your mother?” Alexandra had asked. “Perhaps we knew her.”

“Umm...” His eyes darted around. “Mrs Waters,” he muttered, as if he’d settled on something.

Who had to think about their mother’s name? Alexandra had glanced over her right shoulder to where his gaze had come to a stop. A Ming vase stood on a shelf, a cobalt blue waterfall painted on its translucent surface. Waterfall? Waters? He was a quick thinker.

“Mrs Waters,” her father toyed with the name, gazing into the distance. “I don’t think I know her. Did she live in Melbourne?”

“No, no she didn’t,” the man said.

He looked far too pleased with himself. Her father had unwittingly given him a way out.

Alexandra narrowed her gaze. “We nevertheless need to know you now own this ring. After all, you could have stolen it.”

Her father gasped but quickly corrected his shocked expression. “Not that we...” he stumbled over the words. “Of course, not that we infer that you...”

The chap snatched the ring out of her father’s hands. His expression looked as dark as a thunderstorm off the Great Southern Ocean. Alexandra felt totally justified in thinking ill of him. He hadn’t even had the manners to introduce himself.

“I’ll be back,” he had said, and strode away.

Alexandra jumped when Benedict came up beside her, wrenching her back to the present.

“What are you two whispering about?” he asked.

“Oh darling,” Alexandra said. “You startled me.” She patted her chest.

“I’ve known you long enough to suspect you two are plotting something,” Benedict said, his lips twisting in a smile. His thin pencil moustache followed the line of his top lip.

“Golly,” Edith exclaimed.

“Plotting?” Alexandra said in her most innocent voice. “As if we would?”

Benedict gave a mock-cough.

“I should be affronted,” Alexandra told him, “but you look so handsome, I can’t be cross with you. Doesn’t Benedict look stunning in his stylish light brown suit, Edie? It brings out your brown eyes, darling.”

“Just like John Gilbert,” Edith sighed, and then she shook her head, as she realised she had swooned over her best friend’s beau.

“My own silver-screen hero,” Alexandra said, and wrapped her arms around Benedict’s neck.

“All right.” Benedict chuckled. “I’d still like to know what you two are up to.”

“What have I missed?” Thomas Thornton asked as he entered the office.

“Nothing, Daddy,” Alexandra said, dropping her arms but not before she kissed Benedict’s cheek. “All this fuss and now we’ve missed him.”

“Missed who, my darling,” her father asked.

“I wanted to show Edith that rogue from yesterday. Did he try to sell you his mother’s ring again, Daddy?”

“He had a certificate that showed ownership.”

“He can’t have...” Alexandra exclaimed. “Who did it say owned it?”

“Mrs Waters,” her father told her. “Just as he claimed.”

Alexandra ran her fingers through her blonde finger-waved-bob. “So, he’s a forger as well as a liar and a cheat.”

“My darling...” Her father looked dismayed.

“Daddy, he conjured that name from thin air. He saw the waterfall on the Ming urn. I followed his gaze.” Her father’s face was a study in distress. Alexandra went to him and kissed his cheek. “I suppose you bought the ring?”

“It’s such a beautiful piece of jewellery.”

“It can’t be helped, Daddy.”

“He said he has more of his mother’s jewellery too.”

“Of course, he has,” Alexandra said. “I suppose we can only see what he brings in next. In the meantime, I’d put this ring somewhere safe and out of sight.”

“Do you think the ring is stolen, my love?” Benedict asked.

“I do, darling.”

“Just because you don’t like the set of his eyes?”

“Not only the look of his eyes but their expression,” Alexandra explained.

“Why didn’t he hold an estate sale?” Edith asked the question one more time.

“Exactly, Edie.”

“I shouldn’t have bought it,” Thomas lamented.

“Don’t worry, Daddy.” Alexandra kissed his cheek. “Let’s see if he comes back.”

Alexandra held the ring in her hand. If it turned out to be stolen, would the police arrest her father for buying stolen goods? They’d never before encountered a situation like this. Their clientele could usually afford to buy their wares. If someone requested the sale of an item, a phone call would first be made to Thornton Antiques, or perhaps a note written. In many cases, her father drove to the client’s house. None of their regular customers wanted to be seen haggling over prices in front of other people who might wander into the showroom. No one had ever bought in a valuable ring and extracted it from a trouser pocket. That, in itself, hinted at suspicious. Let alone this man’s shifty expression.

How had he managed to obtain a certificate of purchase so quickly if the ring hadn’t belonged to his mother? Was he a forger, as Alexandra had suggested the previous day? Or part of a group of criminals - thieves, forgers and... What other type of criminals were there? Not murderers, she hoped.

Alexandra locked the ring away in the showroom safe. Was she mis-reading all the symbols? Just because they’d had an ancient sword stolen from Thornton Park, it hadn’t made her an expert in these matters. Just because she’d help solve the murders...well, she hoped this wouldn’t lead to murder. She was no Hercule Poirot! She and Edie had just finished Agatha Christie’s first book, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*.

Perhaps she had it all wrong? What would Poirot do? He’d observe. That’s what he’d do.

Alexandra crossed to Edith’s desk where she leaned over a ledger. “You’re so good at figures, Edie. Doing sums and juggling money must be like solving a mystery.” When Edith glanced up, Alexandra leaned forward. “We have to observe, Edie. Like Poirot would.”

“Poirot,” Edie questioned, and scrunched her face.

“Shhh,” Alexandra said. She shot a glance across at Benedict’s desk. His head was down, poring through catalogues. He hadn’t heard. “If that shifty fellow comes in today, be prepared to follow him.”

“Follow him?”

“Edie, for goodness sake, be quiet.” Alexandra glanced around again. Benedict still flipped the catalogue’s pages. “We need to be like Poirot and observe.”

“Poirot?”

“Edie, you’re being tiresome by repeating everything I say. Didn’t Miss Violet teach you decorum?”

“No. Golly. The only thing I liked about Finishing School was when it was finished,” Edith said.

Alexandra giggled, despite herself. “Just be ready, Edie. Remember Poirot.”

“I liked Captain Hastings too...in the book,” Edith said. “Do you know in Agatha Christie’s second book, she introduced Tommy and Tuppence. We should read it, Lexy.”

“We should, darling.”

“We could be like Tommy and Tuppence. Lexy and Edie. We could have an escapade like them.”

“Really, Edie,” Alexandra exclaimed.

Edie rolled her eyes and shrugged.

“Anyway, Tommy and Tuppence are husband and wife. It would have to be Benedict and Lexy. It doesn’t sound right. In any case, Benedict wouldn’t want an escapade.”

“That’s why it should be Lexy and Edie’s escapade.”

Alexandra shook her head. “I despair of you, Edie. Just be ready.”

He walked into the antique’s showroom at 10.30am. Straw from a wooden crate Alexandra was unpacking lay strewn on the floor near the storeroom. She noticed a caution in her father’s greeting. He could never be rude. Mr Waters - Alexandra’s thoughts tangled when his supposed name went through her head - lost no time in taking a bracelet from his jacket pocket. It rested within a velvet case this time. Her father took it, lifted it to inspect it and asked if it was part of a set.

Alexandra abandoned her unpacking and joined her father. Without preamble, she added, “Does the bracelet match a necklace?” she explained.

The eyes beneath his Homburg looked confounded.

“It would affect its value,” Alexandra explained. Now she had his attention.

“Possibly,” he murmured.

“Could you...possibly...bring in the set?” Alexandra felt her father squirm at her abruptness.

Waters glared at Alexandra. “Possibly.”

“Are you able to bring it in today?” Alexandra asked.

“It would be the most advantageous,” her father added. He continued speaking with the man - definitely a crook, a thief and a swindler.

Alexandra hadn't realised Edie had joined them. She stared at Waters, her gaze as narrow as his. “Excuse us,” Alexandra said. Edith seemed transfixed. Alexandra had to tug her arm, and then, getting behind her, bundled Edie through the office doorway. Alexandra took her cloche hat from the hat stand and grabbed her handbag and gloves. When she turned, she saw Edith peering around the office door into the showroom. Alexandra took Edie's hat, handbag and gloves, and pulling her backwards, thrust the items into Edie's arms.

“What are you two up to again?” Benedict asked.

“Nothing, darling.” Alexandra ran over to him and planted a kiss on his cheek. “Lunch. We're going to lunch.”

Benedict took out his fob watch. “At ten forty-five?”

“Shopping,” Alexandra cried. “Yes, shopping first.”

“Aren't you supposed to be unpacking your Eugene Michel glassware?”

“Later, darling.” Alexandra turned to look into the showroom. Mr Waters - if you could believe the name - had crossed to the door. The bell jangled as he closed it. “We must go,” Alexandra grabbed Edith's hand. “Shopping and lunch,” she called out as she hurried Edith into the showroom. “Shopping and lunch, Daddy.” Alexandra dragged Edith out of the door.

“Where are we going?” Edith demanded, while trying to put on her hat.

“We're going to follow him, of course.”

Edith stopped in her tracks. “Golly, Lexy.”

“There's no time to waste,” Alexandra said, and grabbed Edith's hand. “Look, he's turned into Swanson Street.”

“He might see us,” Edith objected.

“Of course, he won't. He doesn't suspect we'll follow him.”

Alexandra tugged on Edith's hand and pulled her along.

“Why is he going up Flinders Lane?” Edith asked. “There aren’t as many people in Flinders Lane. He’s bound to see us.”

“Edie, stop whining. It’s not something a lady would do.”

“But chasing a strange man, who could be a thief, is!”

“Be quiet, Edie. He’ll hear us if you continue to complain.”

The lane stretched ahead of them, a dark path, ever inclining. Alexandra hadn’t ever realised how little light reached down between the tall buildings. Now, as they hurried past small art galleries and other shadowy doorways, she felt a sense of foreboding. Not that she’d admit it to Edith. Perhaps Edie felt it too, as she hadn’t uttered another word as they hurried up the lane.

Alexandra halted abruptly. Edith cried out as she ran into her. “Hush, Edie. Look, he’s turning down that alley.”

They followed him, almost tip-toeing, until they reached an alley that sat between the backs of two buildings. They peered around the corner. Large rubbish bins stood against grime-covered walls, and yet crumpled paper, bottles and torn boxes lay strewn over the ground. People had been too lazy or careless to use the bins.

Their quarry had stopped in the middle of the alley to light a cigarette. Smoke curled lazily into the still air, as if it had an endless amount of time to spiral high. The man seemed to absorb its indolence as he stood and took long draws on the cigarette.

Edith leaned over Alexandra to watch. When he’d finished, he dropped the stub and ground it underfoot. Then strode towards a closed door in the other building, opened it and disappeared from sight.

“Get off me, Edie,” Alexandra cried out as she tried to move. She pushed backwards until Edith freed her. “Come on, we don’t want to lose him.”

Alexandra pushed open the same door he’d gone through and peered inside. A dingy-looking stairwell housed a set of stairs. “Right, Edie. There’s only one way, and it’s up.” Alexandra could hear his footsteps scuffing above them. “We’ll have to go quietly,” she added.

“Lexy, what if he hears us?”

“Shush, then.” Alexandra started up the concrete steps, careful to place each foot down and not scrape her leather soles. Careful, too, not to touch the rail. It, like the steps and the building itself, reeked with an air of staleness, age and uncleanliness. She stopped when she could no longer hear the man’s steps from above. “He’s gone through a door, Edie. I wonder which level he’s on?”

“We must be on the second floor,” Edith suggested.

“You’re right,” Alexandra agreed. “He must be on the fourth storey.”

They climbed until they faced a door with the number 4 painted on it. In truth, so much paint had peeled off, the digit could hardly be recognised.

Alexandra turned the doorknob, but Edith's hand restrained her before she could open the door.

"We don't know what we'll find inside," Edith warned. "He could be standing on the other side."

"I doubt it, Edie. It probably leads to a corridor." Alexandra opened the door, at first by an inch, and then three. When she pushed it wide, it was as she supposed. A corridor cut through two rooms, perhaps offices, before it turned left. They passed more rooms, one whose door held a sign stating that W. Parker and Sons conducted business there. One could only guess at the sort of business.

Alexandra led Edith further into the building before a right turn revealed their man disappearing into a room. When he closed the door, Alexandra hurried to it. Its shingle read K. Wong Trading Company.

"Trading company," Alexandra scoffed. "A likely name and cover for nefarious endeavours."

"What are we going to do, Lexy?"

"Wait and observe." Alexandra could hear the terror in Edie's voice. "It's all right, darling."

"It's not," Edith disagreed. "He could leave at any minute. He'd recognise us. We can't just stand here."

"He won't recognise us," Alexandra said. "We have our hats on."

"As if that will make any difference," Edith exclaimed.

"Shush, Edie," Alexandra whispered, as she knelt down and put her eye to the keyhole.

"What can you see?"

"It looks like an office, but I can't see our man. Wait...there's another man. He's Asian."

"Mr Wong of the trading company?"

"Presumably. Ooh, our Mr Waters has come into view. He's arguing with Mr Wong. Waters shoved him, and Wong nearly fell."

"Let me see, Lexy." Edith shoved Alexandra aside.

"Edie," Alexandra protested, as she nearly fell.

Edith took no notice. "Wong pushed Waters back. The Asian man is the smaller of the two. My money's on Waters."

"The things you say, Edie," Alexandra said, and then dug Edith until she moved aside. "As if you've ever gambled. Money on Waters, indeed."

"That's what they say in the flicks."

Alexandra shook her head. "They are silent films, Edie, with the emphasis on silent."

“The slide says it,” Edith objected. “Anyway, if the emphasis is on ‘silence’, we’re making enough noise to raise the dead.”

Alexandra gasped and fell backwards. The blood drained from her face as ice tracked through her veins. She scrambled back to the keyhole and stared at the men in the room. Waters, or whatever his name was, stood over the Asian man, who lay on the floor, a pool of blood spreading out from him.

“Edie...our man has just stabbed Mr Wong.”

Edith’s hand flew to her mouth. She placed her eye to the keyhole. “I think he’s dead, Lexy. What do we do?”

Alexandra grabbed Edith’s hand and pulled her away from the door, hurrying along the corridor until they turned a corner. Alexandra stopped and peered back. “Edie, you wait here and watch the door.”

“Where are you going?” Edith’s eyes stared like two dark moons at her.

“I’ll go to the police station.”

“I’m not staying here on my own,” Edith exclaimed. “What happens if Waters leaves the room?”

“All right. I’ll stay. You find Chief Inspector Wentworth.” He’d helped them with the recent murders at Thornton Park.

“I’m not leaving you either,” Edith cried. “We should both go to the police station.”

“One of us has to keep an eye out. Remember Poirot, he’d wait and observe. He’d send Captain Hastings off to alert the police.”

Before either of them could say more, the offending door opened, and their quarry stepped into the corridor.

“Hey, you there,” he shouted at them.

Alexandra’s heart sunk. All of a sudden, she felt like the prey.

Alexandra realised that Waters could only see her and not Edie, who had turned into the other corridor. Alexandra leaned into Edith and pushed her away. “Go, Edie,” she said in a charged whisper. “Tell Chief Inspector Wentworth.”

Edie’s eyes rounded, and she stumbled backwards.

“What are you doing here?” Waters voice reached them.

“Hurry Edie,” Alexandra whispered, but although her words were almost inaudible, her fear sharpened them with urgency.

Edie ran, and Alexandra stepped back into the corridor and faced the angry man running towards her.

“What are you doing?” Waters demanded. He grabbed Alexandra’s arm in a vice-like grip and wrenched her aside, so he could look down the passageway.

Alexandra felt a wave of relief wash over her. At least Edie had got away, unseen.

“Who else was with you?”

“No one,” Alexandra cried. She thrust chin out. “Now, let me go. How dare you lay your hands on me.”

“I know you,” Waters said. He leaned down and peered into her face. “You’re that one from Thornton’s...the daughter.”

Alexandra attempted to once again wrench her arm free, but his grip only tightened. “I am Miss Thornton. Now let me go.”

“Did you follow me here?”

Alexandra raised her brows. “I believe that is the only way I would get here,” she drawled.

“Don get too smart with me, Missy.” He raised his free hand as if he would strike her.

Alexandra steeled herself but when he didn’t hit her, she added, “I have a message from my father.”

Waters huffed out a breath. “Do you think I’m stupid?”

Alexandra thought it best not to answer that question. He wouldn’t like her answer.

“I’m sure he’d send his little princess to find me.” He pulled her closer, so he could stare into her eyes. “Why are you really here?”

It took all of her courage to hold her nerve. It angered him. Alexandra felt certain he’d love to hit her. It was just the thing a thug and a bully would do. His jaw clenched but he must have thought better of it. Instead, he dragged her back to Mr Wong’s door. He opened it and pulled her inside.

Alexandra gasped when she saw the Asian man’s body on the floor, blood pooling around him. To see his poor body this close seemed far more real and shocking than through a small keyhole. Fear cut a cold track through her chest. It didn’t bode well that Waters had brought her inside to witness this horrible scene. The last thing he’d want was someone who could tell the police that he had stabbed this man. So, what did that say about her future?

He strode around the office, dragging Alexandra with him.

“Where’s some bloody rope,” he said.

“Rope is not a usual office staple,” Alexandra retorted.

“That mouth of yours will get you into more trouble if you don’t shut your trap.” Water’s turned a vicious expression on her, and then threw her into a chair that he first dragged clear of the desk. “Don’t move,” he snapped at her.

Alexandra’s gaze darted about the room. To reach the door she had to skirt around Mr Wong’s body and not slip on his blood. She probably only had a minute or two before Waters found something he could use to tie her up.

Then a thought shot through her brain. It had worked before. She reached up to her cloche hat.

Waters saw her movement. “What are you doing? Keep still.”

“I’m only removing my hat,” Alexandra told him, her expression benign. She even gave the barest hint of a smile. She didn’t want his alarm bells sounding. After all, she banked on the fact he knew nothing of women’s attire. Before he objected again, she first pulled out her hat pin and then whipped off her soft felt hat, dropping both to her lap. She ensured the hat pin remained out of sight under the cloche. While her right hand rested on her hat, she plumped up her hair with her left. She hoped he’d be annoyed by another movement and grab her left arm...which he did. He really wasn’t too bright!

As soon as he took hold of her left hand, ripping it away from her head, Alexandra thrust the hat pin into his leg. He cried out, let go of her hand, and bent over to his limb. By this time, Alexandra had pulled out the hat pin - it hadn’t gone in too far - and stabbed him again, this time plunging it deeper into his thigh. He howled like an injured animal. Alexandra didn’t feel a moment’s sympathy or guilt.

She stood up and pushed him over in the process, leaned down to extract her good hat pin, and then she kicked him in his injured leg. It came down to him or her, and she didn’t concern herself about a murderer.

He reached out to grab her ankle, but she stabbed the hat pin into his hand. Again, he cried out. He struggled to stand and this time he succeeded.

Alexandra had already moved away from him. She skirted Mr Wong’s body and ran for the door. She swung it open and ran along the corridor...right into Chief Inspector Wentworth. The senior policeman swung her around to Edith’s arms, while he hurried on. He reached the door just in time. Waters ran into him. Two constables grabbed the murderer and another young policeman puts handcuffs on him. Waters glared at Alexandra as he limped away.

“Oh Lexy,” Edith cried and held her tight. “Are you all right?”

“Yes, darling, don’t you worry about me. I might have a couple of bruises. It’s nothing compared to what I did to him.”

Alexandra raised her bloodied hat pin. “I think he’s a little sore.”

Edith gaped. "You stabbed him?"

"He deserved more."

"Well, well, Miss Thornton," Chief Inspector Wentworth muttered. "I see you employed your hat pin?" A slight twinkle hung around his eyes.

"A girl has to make do, Chief Inspector." Alexandra smiled.

"Are you injured?"

"A couple of bruises. Nothing really."

"I'm not certain your father will agree. You took an immense risk."

"I know, Chief Inspector, I know."

"You do realise you should have reported this fellow first and then left it to us."

"I do," Alexandra said, trying to look contrite. "I will next time."

"Next time?" Chief Inspector Wentworth exclaimed.

"Gosh," Edith said.

"I think we'd better get you home."

"Back to the showroom would be appreciated, thank you, Chief Inspector Wentworth."

Alexandra smiled.

He shook his head.

Alexandra took the last piece of Eugene Michel from the wooden crate she'd abandoned yesterday. The vase, circa 1890, had a lustrous finish in pink, with a vine twining around its surface until it reached a ruby flower. When Chief Inspector Wentworth, accompanied by Sergeant Smith, entered Thornton Antiques' showroom, she placed it down and smiled at the policemen.

They doffed their hats and bid her good morning. "How are you this morning, Miss Thornton?"

"Very well, Chief Inspector," Alexandra replied.

Her father and Benedict came out of the office - no doubt after hearing the policemen's voices.

"Good morning, gentlemen," the senior detective said. "Your daughter, Mr Thornton, is made of sterner stuff than the average young lady." Edith joined them. "Miss Blackburn too." The Chief Inspector nodded at Edith. "How are you after your ordeal?"

"I'm perfectly all right, thank you, but gosh...Lexy is battered about."

"A few bruises," Alexandra scoffed.

“I do have a remarkable daughter...two remarkable daughters, in fact,” Thomas said.

“Although, they scared the life out of me.”

“Sorry, Daddy.” Alexandra pursed her lips and hope she looked contrite.

“Sorry, Uncle Thomas,” Edith intoned.

“Perhaps leave it to the professionals next time,” Chief Inspector Wentworth commented.

“Indeed, Chief Inspector,” Alexandra replied, her voice grave. She hoped it convinced the policeman. If she’d left it to the police, her father might have been arrested for buying stolen goods. This way, he could hand the ring over to Chief Inspector Wentworth without any difficulty.

As if he’d read her thoughts, her father went to the office and retrieved the sapphire and diamond ring. He handed it to the senior policeman. “Waters...or whoever he is...sold this to me yesterday.”

“I assume Waters had stolen this ring, and other jewellery and artworks?” Alexandra asked the policeman.

“You were right there, Miss Thornton. Waters, whose real name is Brooks, had joined forces with Mr Wong sometime back. The Export Company proved an excellent cover for them to fence their loot from a spate of robberies all over Victoria. We’ve been trying to track them down for a long while.”

“Well, I say,” Thomas muttered.

“So, in fact, Miss Thornton...and Miss Blackburn did you a service, Chief Inspector,” Benedict said. The slightest hint of amusement played over his lips.

Alexander smiled at him.

“Golly gosh,” Edith explained. “I hadn’t thought of that.”

The Chief Inspector had the grace to look a little shame-faced. After a few moments, he took the valuable ring. In exchange, he handed Alexandra her hat pin. It had Waters’, no, Brook’s blood on it.

“I don’t think we’ll need to keep this, Miss Thornton.”

Alexandra took the hat pin and thanked the chief inspector. He said his farewells and departed.

“Gosh,” Edith said when the policeman had gone. “We’re heroes, Lexy, and we didn’t even know it.”

“Edie, darling,” Alexandra said. “I don’t think anyone knows it.”

“I could do without any more heroics,” her father commented.

“The same here,” Benedict added, and put his arm around Alexandra.

“You two are just worriers,” Alexandra told them.

“Your life was in danger,” Benedict exclaimed.

“I don’t think so,” Alexandra said and raised the hat pin. “Not with this.”

“Gosh, Lexy, it has blood all over it.”

“But not my blood, darling. That’s the main thing.”

“I think I need a cup of tea,” her father muttered.

“Ooh, yes please,” Edith said and headed for the showroom kitchen. “I might go to the Hopetoun Tearooms and buy some cake.” She raised a hand to prevent Alexandra from speaking. “I know. It will go straight to the hips, but it tastes so good getting there.”

Alexandra giggled. “Edie, you are incorrigible.”

The End