



DIAMOND DROP

**A BULLET CATCHER
SHORT STORY**

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DIAMOND DROP
A Bullet Catcher Short Story

Roxanne St. Claire

In spite of the cacophony under the marble dome of Antwerp's Central Station, Donovan Rush heard the distinct tap of high heels about ten feet behind him. The main terminal echoed with a hundred different languages and shook with the shrill whine of high speed train brakes on the platform levels, but the music of that familiar feminine drumbeat reached his ears, and slowed his step.

The footsteps grew closer, preceded by a whiff of peppery perfume, a whisper of a silky sleeve, a subtle clearing of a woman's throat...and she passed him without a glance.

But he stole one, and then stayed two strides behind her just for the fun of it.

Mahogany waves clipped in a careful French twist revealed a slender column of a neck, squared but narrow shoulders casually draped in a blood-red scarf. Hip-hugging black leather pants molded to a heart-breaker of a backside then tapered over long, lean thighs.

And then there were the noise-making shoes. Five inches if they were a centimeter, bright red, open toes, and little silver buckles that he'd like to unfasten with his teeth.

Deadly.

Too bad he'd only be in Antwerp for the brief hour it would take to pass security at the Beurs voor Diamanthe, meet with the client's sightholder, take delivery of two million dollars worth of rough-cut diamonds, and get back on the Thalys for the return trip to Paris.

There was no time for lovelies clad in leather. Especially when his boss had sent a text from New York just moments ago reminding him that the client for this routine diamond drop, Boisvert Jewelers, was run by a CEO who evidently did not tolerate tardiness. Lucy Sharpe had ended her brief text with three simple words: don't be late.

When the owner of the Bullet Catchers - and queen of the understatement - issued a warning like that, no one who wanted to keep his job with her elite security firm would dare disobey. Especially not because he was, uh, *sightseeing*.

The woman in front of him slowed almost imperceptibly, glancing to her left, then quickly pretending she hadn't.

Donovan did the same, noticing a man outside a café entrance, a cell phone to his ear, but his gaze on the leathers as well. That made him human, since Donovan would guess that most male eyes in the terminal would take the same trip his were.

But the highly-trained bodyguard in him noticed the woman's hesitation, the

change in her heel-to-toe tempo, and the aura of awareness that shot up around her.

She shifted to the right just as the man ended his call. When he took a single step forward, she turned on one of those spikes and beelined in the opposite direction.

The heels clicked into a trot.

The gaudy gold-embellished station clock read twenty-one minutes to ten. Donovan had been doing the Antwerp diamond drops long enough to know he needed twelve minutes to clear security at the Bourse, and two minutes to cross the cobblestone street that led there. That left seven minutes to follow his instinct...and a woman who'd just upped her speed from purposeful to petrified.

The man hustled toward her, small and spare and quick on his feet, smoky grey eyes locked on the lady, one hand in the pocket of a loose-fitting jacket.

With the reassuring weight of a Glock under his sports jacket, Donovan kept his attention evenly divided between the two people. She took a sharp left toward stairs leading to the upper level train platforms, snaking her way through the crowd with a quick burst of speed.

She paused once to glance over her shoulder, her gaze locking on Donovan's for a split second before she looked away. At the top of the stairs she blended in with a pack of travelers on the train platform, but Donovan kept sight of the ruby scarf.

So did the other man, who attempted the same maneuver up the stairs, but didn't nail it as gracefully as the woman. His failure let Donovan get right behind him and stay there.

Leather lady was on a tear now, running down the platform as the scream of the next high speed train reverberated through the second level's glass-domed ceiling. She spun around, giving Donovan his first chance to really see her face.

Normally, he'd register the contours of beauty, the appeal of every feature from a whisper of a widow's peak to a shadow of a clefted chin. But this wasn't normal. That expression of raw, ripe terror was *not* normal.

The man had her in his sights, then reached deeper into his pocket, shifting his weight like he was bracing to fire.

Donovan pounced. An arm to the throat, a knee to the thighs, and the guy was down and done.

"Hey!" He tried to thrust an elbow, but Donovan twisted the offending arm and locked it into a position of paralyzing pain. Certain he was immobilized, Donovan peered through the wall of the gathering crowd as the train doors zipped open.

A red scarf fluttered as its owner darted on board. Holding on to the door, she

leaned into the light to look straight at him.

"Thank you," she mouthed and then disappeared into the train.

Donovan released his captive and stood slowly.

"What the hell?" The man croaked with a heavy British accent, pushing himself up and whipping around to Donovan.

Donovan stepped back and held up his hands. "Sorry. Had you confused with someone." He turned to leave, but the man grabbed his jacket.

"What's your fucking problem, mate?"

"Excuse me," Donovan brushed the hand off and glanced at the clock above the platform. "I'm late for an appointment."

* * *

"You are free to enter, Mr. Rush." The last of three security guards handed Donovan his clearance papers with an officious nod, his heavily-accented English flawless. "Monsieur Pelletier is waiting for you at table fourteen."

Donovan tucked his paperwork in the breast pocket of his sports jacket and entered the double doors to the main room. Sunshine poured through a hundred skylights, built for the express purpose of giving the jewel traders the best possible natural light.

Dozens of tables flanked a center aisle where men sat in small groups, face to face, nearly every one wearing a jeweler's loupe, examining stones.

A middle aged man sat alone at the far end of table fourteen, a black velvet cloth spread with an array of cloudy white diamonds in front of him. He looked up as Donovan approached and stood, no smile on his angular, harsh features.

Donovan slipped into the space behind the table, reaching out his hand in greeting, introducing himself. "I'm delighted to welcome Boisvert Jewelers to the Bullet Catcher client roster," he added.

"We understand your company provides the finest security couriers in the business."

"You understand correctly," Donovan assured him, gesturing toward the diamonds. There was no time for small talk if he was going to make the train back to Paris and meet the client's exacting timelines.

"This is what I've selected for you to deliver," he said. "I know the CEO of Boisvert to be quite demanding of excellence. I've no doubt these diamonds will meet the highest standards."

There were at least forty sizeable stones, many that would be cut to make two or

three multi-carat diamonds. Pelletier had probably spent the last three days pouring through hundreds and hundreds of rough cut rocks delivered from Africa and Australia, his job as a sightholder to be the “eyes” for the parent jeweler back in Paris. A parent company with deep pockets, if they could manage this purchase.

“You’ve chosen well,” Donovan said. Although it wasn’t his job to pass judgment on the diamonds Pelletier had purchased; his job was to safely deliver them to the Parisian jeweler whom he worked for. On *time*. “Is the paperwork complete?” If Pelletier had filled it out ahead of time, they were in luck.

The man slid a packet toward Donovan. “Yes. I’ll need your signature in all the right places, while I pack this parcel and sign off on what you’ve taken.”

The transaction was so standard, Donovan barely looked up from the pages he had to sign, flipping through each with just a cursory glance, until Pelletier pulled a cell phone from his pocket to take a call.

“Excuse me,” he said softly before launching into rapid French. Unable to follow the foreign language spoken that fast, Donovan continued to sign, until a note of alarm in the other man’s voice made him look up.

“Is there a problem?” he asked softly.

Pelletier just held up one finger. “*Tres bien. Merci.*” He hung up. “That was the CEO of Boisvert Jewelers.”

“Really.”

“We have an issue that I am obligated to bring to your attention. There has been a credible threat to this diamond delivery. Apparently, the details were leaked.”

“By whom?”

He shook his head, unable to hide disgust. “The CEO’s assistant. She’s been arrested and detained, but we don’t know how secure these diamonds will be between Antwerp and Paris.”

“I have them,” Donovan said, scooping them into a red velvet pouch that would fit in his jacket pocket. “So you can assure Boisvert management that they will be quite secure.”

The other man looked relieved, but dubious. “*Tres bien, mais...*a word of advice, Monsieur Rush?”

“Don’t be late?”

“Trust no one,” he replied. “*And don’t be late.*”

* * *

He didn’t alter his travel plans. Whoever was tracking this diamond drop would

assume that an experienced – and forewarned – courier would choose a different form of transportation back to Paris. But getting to the airport or renting a car would cause unnecessary delays and play right into a thief's expectations.

Instead, Donovan slipped right back into the train station, and purchased a new Comfort One ticket on the high-speed Thalys to Paris using different identification. He boarded the first car the moment the giant red wedge-shaped train blew into the station, before most of the other passengers had even reached the platform. Strolling the length of the train, he memorized the face of every passenger already on board since Amsterdam or Rotterdam.

Under the guise of a traveler looking for the most privacy and comfort, he perused nearly four hundred seats in a dozen connected cars, including the bar and café, and every lavatory. And he had no doubt where he would sit.

The last set of glass doors whisked open with an automatic vacuum that responded to the slightest pressure. This small compartment seated only eight, with two rows of seats facing each other, separated by a narrow aisle. Well protected, away from most passengers, and with a single entrance that he could watch every minute of the hour and a half trip to Paris, it made the perfect place to watch for a thief.

But, shit, someone had beat him there. He could see the top of dark hair, not quite tall enough to extend above the orange headrest, facing the back seats. No matter. He drew his weapon. He would convince the passenger to leave.

But the person shifted positions to cross a foot into the aisle. A foot wearing a bright red shoe with an unforgettable silver buckle.

Trust no one.

Especially damsels in distress and leather. There were no coincidences in this business, his experience as a Bullet Catcher taught him that. She identified him this morning, got a good look at him, and no doubt had the Boisvert informant tell her what train he'd be on.

Of course, he could simply turn and take another seat before she even saw him.

But that's not what Lucy Sharpe demanded from her men. She wanted to impress the new client? All right, then. He'd deliver the diamonds *and* the thief. *On time.*

He cleared his throat. "May I join you?"

"I was hoping you would." A sultry and feminine American voice answered.

He came around the seatback, his gun drawn, but not yet aimed at her. Let her know he had it, and wasn't afraid to use it. "Although I'd prefer not to have to kill anyone who's chasing you on the way to Paris."

"On the contrary." She lifted amber eyes and met his gaze, not even a flicker of surprise. "You've done your good deed for the day."

"So this is no coincidence?" Not that he thought it was for a moment.

Her lips widened in a sexy smile. "I was on the platform and saw you get on board. I decided you were the type of man who would choose the back compartment for...privacy."

"So you're just riding the rails for fun today."

She shrugged. "I did have to take an unexpected trip to Rotterdam, thanks to you giving me that chance to escape, but I easily made it back here on a return train. Going to Paris?"

"I am."

"Then we'll travel together." Her smile was warm. No, *hot*. And inviting. "That guy is gone now, so you can put the gun away."

Not a chance. "I prefer to err on the side of caution." He took the seat across from her - the one he would have taken anyway, because it allowed for a direct view through the doors and into the next car - and kept the pistol in his hand, resting on the seat next to him.

"I'm Claudia Greenwood," she said.

"Donovan Rush." No reason to lie. Obviously, she either knew exactly who he was - in which case he'd either kill her or deliver her to the authorities at the Gare du Nord in Paris - or she really was just a beautiful American on holiday or business in Belgium. Not too hard to guess which. "And who was your pushy friend in the station?"

She exhaled a breath of disgust. "A bad choice from my past."

Yeah, right. "A woman who looks like you involved with a guy who looks like that? C'mon, I might be big and ugly, but I'm not dumb."

"You're quite big," she let her gaze slide over his shoulders and chest. "But you are *definitely* not ugly. Sadly, I wouldn't be the last woman who got swayed by an impressive...bank account. What brings you to Belgium, Donovan?"

As if she didn't know. "Business."

"Business that requires you to carry a gun?"

"It is Antwerp," he said, as though that explained it. That *would* explain it to a diamond thief, which, he'd bet the entire pouchful in his pocket, she was. "And you?"

"Business, as well." Her fingers flicked the end of her scarf. "Fashion accessories."

I'm headed to Paris for a trade show."

"Then we have a whole hour and a half to get to know each other." And to see just how long it would take for her to make her move.

She settled back into her seat with an alluring smile. "I can't imagine a better way to spend my time."

* * *

He had to give the woman a lot of credit. She never dropped character, chatting about clothes and fashion shows, her apartment in New York, her small business. All the while, the train careened through the autumn-washed fields of the Dutch countryside, bridges and farms a blur in Donovan's peripheral vision. No one entered the compartment but a conductor checking tickets after they'd stopped in Brussels, and neither of them made a move to hit the rest room or get a drink for a full hour.

But thirty minutes outside of Paris, she finally got down to business.

"I really owe you a debt of gratitude for your assistance this morning, Donovan."

"Not at all. You seemed like you were in trouble."

"I don't suppose you'd let me take you to lunch when we arrive in Paris."

"I'm sorry. I have an appointment."

She gave a hopeful smile. "Dinner?"

"I'm leaving for Rome this afternoon."

"Oh, how can I thank you for what you did? I mean, you really saved me. How did you even notice what was happening?"

"I'm observant," he said, letting his gaze drop from her glossy lips to her silky scarf to her leather-clad legs. "For instance, I noticed your sexy shoes."

She smiled, raising one foot toward his left hand. "You like them?" She set the heel in his palm playfully, allowing him to cup the crimson leather.

"You wear them well."

She straightened her leg a little, which made his hand slide up to touch skin. "I can unweave them, too."

Ah, so she was going to use sex to get the diamonds. As appealing as that strategy was, it almost made him laugh with its unoriginality.

"That won't be necessary," he said, circling his fingers around the fine bones of her ankle. "Nice thought, but not necessary."

She leaned forward, a gap in her creamy silk blouse revealing the curve of her breast. Lifting red-tipped fingers, she toyed with the loose knot of the scarf, giving him an even better view of her cleavage.

An announcement in French almost drowned out the slither of silk over silk as she drew the scarf along the collar, sliding it off.

"We have less than thirty minutes," she said softly, the light and message in her eyes unmistakable. "I can use them to...thank you."

She let the scarf hit the floor. Her knees would be next, he surmised. One minute and she'd be kneeling in front of him, unzipping his pants...reaching into his jacket pocket when his eyes closed in pleasure.

Really, the oldest trick in the book.

She reached up to her hair clip in a move that pressed the thin material of her blouse against luscious breasts.

"Do you mind?" she asked in a sultry voice.

"Not at all."

Auburn hair cascaded over her shoulders, assisted by a slow shake of her head. The halo of soft curls made her delicate features even more attractive, and ratcheted up his already high trouble alert, sending an unwanted bolt of heat into his lower half.

No doubt about it, Claudia Greenwood was a pro.

But she surprised him; instead of dropping to her knees, she leaned back, lifted her other leg and set her shoe on his lap.

"So you really like my shoes?"

He was still holding the left one, his hand running up and down a velvety calf under the leather pants. "Very much. That's what I noticed about you."

She gave him a dubious look. "Not my leather pants?"

"I heard your heels behind me."

"And that sound turns you on?"

"A little," he admitted. He thumbed the little buckle in response, swallowing against a dry throat and willing his cock not to react to the proximity of her other shoe.

He had a thief by the ankles and he wasn't about to let his dick get in the way of taking her down.

"So, you're a shoe guy." She glided one sole over his thigh. His cock stiffened some more but his brain wasn't bloodless. He calculated exactly how far that greedy foot was from the diamond pouch in his jacket pocket.

Far enough that he could snap her leg in two before she got anywhere near it.

But it wasn't the diamonds she tucked her toes into. It was another set of jewels

altogether. She wiggled her toes and shot a little fire into his balls.

"Spread your legs, Donovan," she whispered, her fingers closing over the edge of her seat as she added pressure by pushing her feet into his groin a little more. When he obliged – he had to see how far she'd take this – she pulled her other foot out of his grasp and set it on his leg. "Watch what my shoes can do."

"I'm not worried about your shoes." He surreptitiously slipped his index finger on the trigger of his gun while her stilettos bracketed his erection. She released her grip on the seat to finger the button of her blouse, and open it to reveal more creamy cleavage.

"You shouldn't be worried about anything. Just take your reward for being a good Samaritan." She wet her lips and let her eyelids shutter, the leather of her pants skimming over his legs as she worked the shoes up and down the erection tenting his trousers.

"Close your eyes," she told him. "I'll do all the work."

He just smiled and dropped his head back, pretending to follow her orders but ready for her to slam a heel into his balls. She'd be dead before the pain hit his brain.

She stroked harder, faster...and touched her breast with a sensual sigh. He waited, ready...but she seemed intent on pleasuring him.

The first announcement of the arrival at the Gare du Nord filled the compartment, the French barely drowning out the thump of blood in his head. It was time to end the party, sadly. He lifted the gun.

"Party's over, Claudia. Pack up. You're going to the French Police."

"What?" She paled, her feisty feet suddenly still. "Why?"

"Because I'm taking you in."

Confusion darkened her features. "For what?"

For a moment, he almost believed her. Then he laughed. "You're very good, Claudia, but I'm better. I've been in this game too long." He leaned forward, lifting both her ankles in one hand and setting them on the floor. "I like you, so I don't want to shoot you. When we pull into the Gare du Nord, we're going straight to the French police."

Her jaw completely unhinged. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about..." Was it possible he was wrong? No. This couldn't be a coincidence. "Your effort to charm, mesmerize, and foot fuck me."

"Look, I'm sorry." She started buttoning her blouse with trembling fingers. "I'm not some kind of a hooker. I just was...fooling around." Her voice hitched with a very

believable crack. "Please, I didn't know it was against the law. *Please.*"

Doubt crept into his head. His instinct was rarely wrong. But was it possible this really was no more than a chance encounter?

"I know what you want," he pressed.

Her golden brown eyes flashed like flames. "I don't want anything," she insisted. "I was being...nice. And, evidently, stupid."

Was it possible he was completely wrong about her? He had to find out. He had to know. She was so intriguing, so beautiful, and so in the right place at the wrong --

The door swooshed open and a conductor barged in.

"We've already had our tickets punched," Donovan said quickly, shooing him out.

The man's hand slipped from beneath his uniform, drawing a pistol he instantly aimed at Claudia's temple.

Over her shocked shriek, he made his demand. "Give me the diamonds or I'll splatter her brains all over this compartment."

* * *

Either she was in the wrong place at the wrong time or she was a hell of a good actress because blood drained from Claudia's face, her eyes popped wide, her next breath trapped in terror. All very...convincing.

"Please..." Her voice was no more than a croak. "Give him what he wants."

The Glock was still secure in his hand. But if Donovan so much as lifted that pistol, this woman would be dead. And while that wouldn't bother him if she were a plant and part of the ruse...it would piss the hell out of him if she were an innocent fashion accessory buyer on a trip to Europe.

"Pick the gun up with two fingers and throw it into the aisle, Mr. Rush, or this woman will die."

She might anyway, and she obviously knew it. Claudia's eyes brimmed with fearful tears, her lower lip clamped under her teeth, a plea for her life emanated from every cell.

"The gun," the conductor repeated, as calmly as if he were asking for his ticket.

Was her life worth two million in diamonds? Not if she was in on this...but if she wasn't? He couldn't risk it. He slid the Glock down the aisle between the seats.

"Now hand me the bag. And if you have another gun in that pocket, she will be dead before you can produce it."

She whimpered and the man's Walther pressed a bloodless spot in her temple.

Okay, what were his options? To give up the diamonds, and possibly his life. To

make a surprise attack that would cost hers. Or...to trust this woman to work with him.

"The diamonds are hidden in her shoes," Donovan said. "I transferred them there."

The conductor's eyes narrowed as he dropped his gaze to her feet. "Where?"

"They're hidden in the platforms." Which would make a perfectly creative and logical place to smuggle diamonds.

"Take them off her," he ordered.

Donovan crouched into the space between the two seats to unbuckle her shoe. As he did he looked up to silently communicate with her. Her gaze shifted to the gun with a slight question in her eyes.

Working as one, they could get this guy. If she really was...*innocent*.

Torn between warring instincts, his fingers caught the silver buckle and slid the leather strap through, the shoe sliding off in his hand.

"Give it to me," the man demanded.

Once more, he shared a look with her, boring into her lioness's eyes, searching for...trust. He saw something there, enough to take a chance.

Donovan reached up to hand over the shoe, deliberately holding it far enough away so the other man had to bend to get it. As he did, Donovan pitched the shoe toward the glass door, the weight making the auto-suction whip the door open. In the split-second the man followed the path of the shoe, Donovan dove for his gun.

The man fired, but Donovan heard the bullet ricochet. Claudia dropped to the ground with a cry.

When the man launched at the shoe, Donovan grabbed his leg, pulling him down with one hand so they both landed on Donovan's Glock. He had the gun in his hand, but the other guy pounced, wrestling and rolling as Claudia cried out again, scurrying to her feet. As she leapt over the two men, she scooped up the shoe and threw herself toward the door, making it slide open again. She was gone in an instant.

"She took the fucking diamonds!" the man said, scrambling to get up and run after her.

So she *wasn't* in on it. Now he had to protect her or this guy would kill her for sure. Donovan tried to pull him down by the leg, but the man fell on top of him, crushing him with his weight. He had complete advantage and a gun pointed directly at Donovan.

"Bye bye, bodyguard." He took a breath, just about to pull the trigger when a

deadly five inch heel smacked him in the face, shocking him enough to let Donovan shove him off.

Instantly, Donovan flipped him over and got his own Glock in the bastard's belly, looking up long enough to see the Claudia in the doorway.

"Thank you," she mouthed.

Without bothering to retrieve her shoe, she disappeared into the next car and let him finish the job of taking down the thief.

* * *

Even with the side trip to the French police station, it was 2:59 when Donovan arrived with the bag of diamonds at the Paris showroom of Boisvert Jewelers, a few doors away from the Plaza Athénée. Lucy had texted her congratulations and informed him the client was most pleased.

Getting there on time would just be icing on the happy guy's cake.

"*Bonjour*," he greeted the receptionist outside the management offices. "I'm Donovan Rush with the Bullet Catchers. I have an appointment with Monsieur Boisvert."

She smiled. "*Oui?*" There was amusement and admiration in her eyes. "We have heard of your heroics on the Thalys, monsieur. *Une moment, s'il vous plait.*"

He glanced at his watch as the receptionist disappeared behind a set of double doors. If she hurried, he'd make it.

Four minutes later, she emerged. "You may go in now, Monsieur Rush." She held the door and he walked past into a large, dimly-lit empty office. No one was here? After all the warnings to be on time?

"Excuse me?" he said to the thin air. "I was told I had a meeting in here."

"You're late, Monsieur Rush." Very slowly, the executive chair facing the window turned, revealing...a woman.

He just stared at her, processing everything. The mahogany hair. The crimson scarf. And a heartstopping smile of pure sex and...authority.

"Claudia Greenwood?"

"Claudette, actually. And you should study your French, Donovan." Her accent was thick...and natural.

Green wood...*bois vert*. Of course. "You're the CEO of Boisvert Jewelers." It wasn't a question; it didn't need to be. "Why?"

"We often test new couriers. The run-in at the train station was a test of your observation skills." She pushed the chair back. "You passed."

“And the foot massage?” He lifted a brow. “A test of my concentration skills?”

“Yes, but...” A soft flush rose to her beautiful cheeks. “I let my attraction to you take that a little too far.”

Actually, not far enough and the attraction, he couldn't deny, was mutual. “And the attempted theft?”

Her expression grew serious. “Unfortunately, that was no test. There was no real threat that we knew of; you were told that so we could monitor how you handled such a situation. But, when it happened? It was real. And you were impressive.”

Holding her gaze, he approached her desk as she stood up. “I believe I have something of yours,” he said, reaching into his jacket pockets.

“It better be worth two million dollars.”

He held out the red velvet pouch. “It is. And this...” He reached into his other pocket and slid out a sexy high heeled shoe. “Is priceless when you consider it saved my life.”

“You saved mine first, so we're even.”

She reached for the shoe, but he tossed it to the floor and let the diamonds drop with it. “No we're not,” he said. “I haven't had a chance to thank *you*.”

He pulled her into his arms and backed her up to the desk to lay her down right on top of it.

“Now?” Her question was a breathy whisper in his ear.

“I wouldn't dare keep my client *waiting*.”

The End

Diamond Drop by Roxanne St. Clair

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