

*Nia D'Amato is a smart, feisty, impulsive Boston police detective who is caught up in a murder involving a shipment of diamonds. She follows a suspect's trail through a raging snowstorm to the Vermont Inn. A tension filled evening with a nervous suspect, sets the stage for a final dramatic confrontation.*

# Sparkles of Discontent

by Robert Tucker

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ROBERT TUCKER

A photograph of a snow-covered cabin with a tall evergreen tree in the foreground. The cabin has a white roof and several windows. The tree is dark green and stands prominently in the center. The background is a hazy, overcast sky.

**SPARKLES  
OF  
DISCONTENT**

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## *Part 1: Diamond Dreams*

### *Chapter 1*

“The door was wide open, wood splintered. The room smelled like fish gone bad and gunpowder.” *That acrid smell always reminds me of the Fourth of July.* Detective Nia D’Amato stopped, staring at a Mondrian print hanging behind the department’s psychologist.

Doctor Mary Alice Young finished jotting a note and looked up over her glasses. “Please continue, detective.”

“Someone was crying from behind a sofa on the other side of the living room. I released the catch and drew my gun, stepping over broken stuff scattered across the carpet. I stopped and leaned over the sofa. A woman was crouched over the body of a man covered in blood. She looked up, startled. I could hear muffled sounds of someone cursing and things crashing to the floor. I pressed a finger to my lips and walked quietly down a hallway. I stopped just outside an open door. A man with his back to me, was pulling open drawers and tossing things behind him. I identified myself and ordered him to freeze and put his hands into the air. He stopped. I heard him mutter, *fucking cops*. I saw one arm move in front of him. Then he slowly put his arms out and wheeled around all of a sudden. He fired one shot. I returned fire, hitting him in the chest.” She looked down, staring at the bullet-riddled body of the dead man.

The doctor looked back through her notes. “And you stated you shot him, three times. Is that correct?”

“Yes.”

“And why three times, detective?”

Nia drew a deep breath and looked up, hesitating, reliving the moment. *I was pushing down cold fear and anger.*

*He was a threat. I couldn't stop.* “Well, he was still standing there in front of me, holding his weapon.” She gestured with her hand. “It took two more shots to stop him.”

The doctor stared, appearing unconvinced. “Hmm. And what were you thinking at that moment, detective?”

“Nothing.” She hesitated, shaking her head. “No, that’s not really true. I was scared and maybe angry. I thought I’m fucking glad he finally dropped.”

“And what were you angry about, detective?”

Nia looked away glassy-eyed remembering a bloody bat dripping blood and shook her head. “Not sure.”

The doctor jotted another note. “Okay. We’ll leave that one for now.” She looked back into her notes again. “And why were *you* the first one to arrive on scene at this B and E, detective?”

“I just happened to be in the neighborhood when the call came in that there was some sort of disturbance and the sounds of shots being fired. When I pulled up, there was a neighbor standing out front. She directed me to the third-floor apartment.”

The doctor nodded. “You know that this is just part of departmental protocol any time an officer is involved in a shooting. And normally, you would be expected to wait for backup before entering an active crime scene. But given you had reason to believe there were innocent civilians in danger, your subsequent actions and use of deadly force would appear to be justified. Of course, the final determination will be up to a review board.” Nia nodded, looking with furrowed brow outside the draped window at the buildings lining Melina Cass Boulevard. “But given your prior history,” she paused, looking pointedly at Nia, “I need to make sure this shooting won’t impact your ability to perform your duties, detective.”

Nia nodded absentmindedly, not looking at the doctor. “It won’t.” *And there it is. I’m involved in another shooting. Now I’ve got ‘history’.* “Are we finished, doctor?”

The doctor pushed the glasses up on her nose and looked directly at Nia. “Detective D’Amato, I’ll clear you for active duty, on one condition.”

*How did I know there would be one condition?* “And what is that doctor?”

“I’ll clear you on condition you make another appointment to meet with me. After that, we can continue if you wish, or we’ll be finished.”

Nia made a face. “One more. I guess if that’s what it takes, then one more.” She stood up, shook the doctor’s hand and left the room as quickly as she could.

## Chapter 2

A hunched jeweler sat silently brooding, bathed in the cold glare of a cheap pole lamp. Will Caulder worked in the shadow of powerful, wealthy men, fantasizing about one day owning the precious jewels that passed through his hands every day. His body slumped in resignation as his eyes narrowed, pausing on the most recent losing lottery tickets scattered on the table. *Seems like I was born with shit luck. Horses, Dogs, Sports, Lottery. And now my bookie is pressing me to pay what I owe.* Will slowly scanned the sparsely furnished apartment. *Every night I come home to this pig sty. This is all I got to show after a dozen years of losing.* He stood and walked with a slight limp to the window, gazing with defeated eyes at the neglected gray-brown tenement buildings across the street. Looking down, he watched wind-blown litter playing chase through a gauntlet of broken bottles. He cocked his head and looked up into an overcast night sky. *That's one crazy idea, Caulder.* He shook his head, dismissing it as both fancifully absurd and beyond impossible. But once considered, however briefly, the idea persisted, consuming ever increasing amounts of his alone time.

Every night he kept returning to it again and again like an oyster lovingly caressing a tiny grain of sand. *There's no reason why I can't have some of those stones I work with every day.* He carefully considered how he might steal them and avoid being caught. *I could just take one or two stones, but they'd find out in a day or two. And then I could never go back. If I'm going to do this, it's got to be worth it. It has to be big, one of those large diamond shipments. Out of debt and more to spare.* He carefully pored over each detail that was either made part of his plan or dismissively rejected. After several weeks of compulsive planning, and stalling his increasingly impatient

bookie, he knew he was nearly ready to put it into action. He sat back in his stained, upholstered chair and zealously reviewed his daring scheme like a stonemason admiring a flawless diamond. *I think this is going to work.* He shook his head. *No. I know this is going to work.*

He tackled the easiest part of his plan first. He knew he couldn't just stuff a large number of stones in his pocket but needed a more discrete way to hide them. After searching extensively online, he found the perfect way to hide the stolen diamonds—an expandable lycra money belt. Next he purchased a hundred glass diamonds that would be more than enough to replace any shipment of diamonds. They would also buy him some additional time on Monday morning when the store manager did a cursory vault check.

He knew one of the hardest parts of his plan would be finding someone to fence the stolen gems. And diamond shipments only came in every two or three weeks, usually on Saturday, depending on business. *I need to start looking once I'm certain there'll be a shipment.*

On Tuesday morning, while sipping too hot coffee from his stained and chipped mug, he watched the shipping clerk walk by with the delivery schedule and hang it on the notice board. Will shuffled over, trying to appear disinterested while his heart pounded, blocking out all other sounds. He scanned the page and saw, near the bottom, a Saturday morning shipment of diamonds with a retail value of two million. But Will wasn't on the schedule to work! He hit the wall then looked around, hoping no one noticed. *Shit! I'm not on the schedule. I'm being pressed for the money and he's tired of my stalling. Don't want to think about what happens if I don't pay up. I can't wait any longer. Need to find a way to take the place of that idiot Tyler Gatling, this Saturday.*



On Wednesday, Will visited several pawn shops, asking about the best way to sell ‘high-value merchandise, no questions asked’. He had heard that expression used on TV and thought it made him sound streetwise. None of the dealers near the Jewelers Building wanted any part of his ‘merchandise.’ *What good are expensive diamonds if I can’t find anyone who wants them?* His face twisted in a determined scowl and he followed Washington Street south, to a rundown section of the city. He looked up at the creased and dented sign with letters missing, above a battered door. PA N HOP. Dried wine stains decorated the foundation like jagged ruby-colored spikes beneath a rusted crooked window grating. *This looks more promising.* He pushed up the collar of his coat and pushed open the battle-scarred door.

Bobby “the fence” Mastricola had a reputation for buying and selling almost anything. He had a nervous tick in his right eye that gave the impression he was always winking at you. Bobby wore a Red Sox baseball hat on backward over his slick-backed hair, and his tobacco-stained fingers were perpetually wrapped around a greasy chunk of fast food.

Will fixed what he hoped was an intimidating scowl on his face. “I have some high-end merchandise I’m looking to unload.” Will spoke the word ‘merchandise’ slowly, lowering his voice for effect.

Bobby raised his eyebrows, cocking his head to one side. “Yeah. Good for you, pal. You a cop, or working for the cops?”

Will shot him a surprised glare, “You must be kidding. Do I *look* like a cop?”

Bobby’s expression turned deadly serious. “I never kid. Answer the question or take a fuckin’ hike.”

Will took a deep breath. He didn’t want to blow what might be his only chance. “Of course not.”

“Okay. So, what kind of merchandise you got?”

Will leaned closer and whispered, “High quality diamonds.”

“Hmmm. How many are we talking about? “

“Eighty stones with a retail value of over two million dollars.”

Bobby’s eyes widened momentarily in surprise. “Okay. That’s a *little* outside of what I can handle. But I may know someone who *would* be interested. Give me a number where you can be reached.”

Will scribbled his home number on a scrap of paper. His hand shook slightly as he wrote. “I need to hear by Thursday morning at 8:30.”

Bobby nodded then looked up as he heard the pawn shop door slam open. A heavyset young man, eyes red-rimmed, hair matted, face unshaven, stood framed in the light of the doorway. He was holding a shaking gun sideways. His raspy voice echoed across the poorly-lit interior. “Nobody move!”

Will startled and started to turn towards the sound. He froze midway.

The man motioned with the barrel. “You, over there.”

Will shuffled his way over to a stack of stereos and speakers lining one of the walls. The man was dressed entirely in black save for a plastic ring from a child’s candy on one of his dirt-caked fingers. He inched toward the counter, gun still shaking, his eyes darting between Bobby and Will. “I want the money.” Then he looked down at the display case. “And yeah. I’ll take those rings too.” He motioned with his head.

Bobby’s face remained an impassive mask. His eyes focused like laser beams on the man in front of him. He nodded but didn’t speak a word. He reached down and pulled out the tray of assorted gold and silver rings. He slowly slid off his stool, walked over to the cash register and opened it. He started

lifting out the cash slowly and stacking it on the counter. The man shifted his gaze from the rings to Bobby. “Come on. Come on. Hurry up!” He looked back down at the rings and started to shove handfuls into his pocket. He lowered his gun slightly. As Bobby lifted out the last of the cash, he reached with his right hand under the counter and drew out a gun from a concealed shelf. The young man looked up, sharply sucked in air, and swung his gun in Bobby’s direction. There was a deafening roar. The young man was driven backward, his weapon lifted up firing aimlessly, punching a hole in the ceiling causing a rainfall of plaster chips. Bobby fired again and he dropped to the floor in a blood-stained heap.

Will stared, mouth open and ashen-faced as he inched his way toward the door. Bobby waved the gun back and forth like a teacher correcting a wayward child. “Hey, buddy, just where do you think you’re going? That security camera is busted.” He jerked his head to the glass eye perched over the counter. “And the cops are just looking for an excuse to bust me. So, you’re my star witness. It was self-defense. Right?” He casually tilted the gun in his direction. “*And* you were just here looking to pick up a good watch cheap. Got it?” Will stared at the gun and then up at Bobby. He slowly nodded. *What the hell have I got myself into?*

### *Chapter 3*

Detective Nia D'Amato leaned back in her cushioned swivel chair, staring out the window at two off-duty patrolmen smoking on the bottom steps of the plaza immediately in front of headquarters on Tremont Street. It reminded her of when she used to visit her Dad at the old police headquarters on Berkeley Street. She'd sneak over to the window when he left to indulge a favorite vice, smoking a stogie. The bluish smoke from the cigar would blossom from between his lips and curl up and over his balding head. Nia could almost smell the rich, sweet tobacco aroma that seemed to follow him everywhere like a fragrant apparition. When her Dad returned, he'd usually have to scold her for doing something stupid, like trying to pick up his handcuffs with a nightstick, scattering the papers on his desk everywhere. She used to wonder if she'd be smoking cigars like him when she grew up. Nia smiled at the thought.

Nia was three hours into her eight-hour shift when the phone on her desk jumped to life, jarring her out of her reverie. It came from a cruiser responding to a call about an attempted robbery and shooting at a pawn shop in a rundown section of the city on lower Washington Street. She stood up, stretched, grabbed her jacket and walked briskly through the glass-walled cubicles, her reflection flashing by at odd angles.

She remembered when her looks made her the object of precinct jokes, leering looks, and offensive remarks. Nia had more than once considered pursuing the daunting task of pressing harassment charges. But she was painfully aware of the consequences. First, she'd be ostracized by many of her fellow officers for being a snitch and not being tough enough to take the comments and ribbing that they felt was part of being a new recruit. Then she'd receive the worst duty assignments in hopes she'd resign or request a transfer out of precinct. She

decided she needed to develop a thicker skin, build a repertoire of quick retorts to their bullshit, and keep working hard doing her job better than anyone else. She made a face and shook her head as she passed a middle-aged detective who raised his eyebrow and stared at her as she passed. “In your dreams, Butler.” *Well, I’ve earned the respect of some of them, but there’s still too many knuckle draggers in this place.* Seven years ago, she had passed her detective grade exam and been awarded her new badge. Six months later a position opened, and she put in long grueling hours determined to show that she was more than capable in her new role. She learned there was a price to pay for her dedication and hard work.

She got into her cruiser, turned on the flashing lights and felt the familiar rush of adrenaline as the car sped out of the precinct lot. A cluster of runners streamed by in a colorful blur of nylon running pants and warm-up jackets. *The last time I jogged with a group was at police academy training in Hyde Park. Every morning at 7:30 we’d all leave the facility on Washington Street and jog a half-dozen miles, winding through parts of Milton and Readville, before returning to that closed elementary school. There were always a few stragglers returning a few minutes later to a torrent of harassment throughout the day by the instructors. Everyone had to complete that killer six-mile course in under forty-eight minutes to pass one of the physical requirements. I was determined never to find myself in that group of stragglers.*

There were two cruisers with lights flashing outside the pawnshop when Nia arrived. She ducked under the tape and walked up to the officer who secured the crime scene. He looked up and nodded. “Detective. We have one adult male, age early twenties, dead from two bullets fired by the owner, Bobby Masticola. Apparently, the deceased had come into the pawnshop holding a gun and demanding money. The owner

had started to comply and then he pulled out a gun hidden under the counter. There was an exchange of gunfire and our perp,” he motioned with his head toward the open pawnshop door, “got the worst of it. The M.E. is on his way.”

Nia nodded. “Were there any witnesses to the incident?”

He looked through his notes as he spoke. “Yes. There was one witness, William Caulder. He was inside checking out the merchandise when the perp entered. He’s over there, leaning against the cruiser. And I’m sure you already know Bobby Mastricola.”

Nia made a face and shook her head. “Unfortunately.” She donned booties and latex gloves before entering the pawn shop. She stood over the body, considering the dead man sprawled on the floor. He had taken two bullets to the chest, eyes still open in surprise. He hadn’t shaven in several days and his were clothes dirty and torn in places. Nia bent down. *You look like you’ve been living on the mean streets for a while, buddy.* She turned his arm over and saw needle tracks. *And you picked the wrong place to rob for drug money.* Nia looked around and walked over to a pair of old stereo speakers. She bent down and picked up a weapon by the trigger guard, inspecting it. *One spent round and no other bullets in the chamber.* She replaced the weapon, then stood up and surveyed the interior of the pawnshop. There were bits of plaster littering the floor. She looked up. *I think I know where we’ll find your bullet.* The dingy tobacco-stained ceiling now sported a round hole ringed with a starkly white crater of plaster missing around the edges. It was several feet away from where the robber collapsed. The counter at the far end of the shop stood like an oasis of calm surrounded on two sides by a chaotic jumble of cast-off items traded for their thirty pieces of silver. Nia left the shop to question Will Caulder. He was still leaning

against the squad car, looking nervously around, anxious to leave.

He looked at her, a fearful expression etched on his pale complexion. "Will Caulder? I want to ask you a few questions." He gave a small nod. "I see your address is on Sever Street in Roxbury." Another small nod. "What brought you to the pawn shop today, Mr. Caulder?"

He looked quickly down, appearing to search for answers on the graffiti scrawled sidewalk. "Ah, I hoped to find a deal on a really good watch."

Nia nodded slowly, not really convinced by his answer. "What kind of watch were you looking for Mr. Caulder?" *His eyes are searching for an answer. He's not very good at this.*

"Ah, I kind of like Seiko watches. They make some really good ones." He looked away not meeting her gaze.

"And what kind of work do you do, Mr. Caulder?"

"I'm a bench jeweler at E.B. Horn in downtown crossing."

"Yes, I know the place." She looked around for a parked vehicle. "And you came from work?" A nod. "So how did you get here?"

"I walked."

"I see. You are a *long* way from work." Another brief nod. Nia gave him a questioning look. "Okay. Now what can you tell me about what happened here, starting when the man who was shot walked in?"

"Not a lot to tell. It all happened so fast." He put his hands up and went silent.

Nia leaned toward him. "Please continue Mr. Caulder."

Will looked up. "Oh, yeah. Well, this guy walks in waving a gun and yells at the man working behind the counter to give him all of his cash. Then he sees all of the rings inside the case and tells him he wants them too. So, while he's looking

down and grabbing the rings, the guy behind the counter pulls out a gun and shoots him. He sort of staggers backward and his gun goes off, once I think. Then, the guy shoots him again.”

“And what were you doing all this time, Mr. Caulder?”

“Oh, well when he came in, he told me to move over to the side by a bunch of speakers. That’s where I was when he got shot.”

“Then what did you do?”

“My first thought was to get the hell out of there. I didn't want anything to do with a shooting. So, I started to leave, and the guy behind the counter waved his gun and told me to stay cause I was his witness to what happened.”

“Anything else?”

“Nope. I’ve just been waiting here for you guys to question me.”

Nia pointed at his wrist. “I see you own a pretty fine watch already. It looks like one of those fancy Citizen brand watches. A look of fear creased his face and his eyes twitched from side to side like.

“Well, yeah.” He hesitated, thinking. “You see, I've been having problems with this one and thought I might find another expensive watch here for less money.”

She gave him a skeptical look. “You know, there are lots of pawnshops closer to where you work, Mr. Caulder.”

He opened his mouth then closed it. “Well, I searched for some pawnshops online that looked like I could get a good deal. I guess I didn’t realize how far away this one was.”

Nia closed her notebook, still unconvinced. “I see. Thank you, Mr. Caulder.” She turned to go, then stopped and turned back to Caulder who had already started to leave. “Oh, one more thing. Did you find a Seiko you liked?”

He looked at her puzzled. “What?”



Nia looked back through her notes. “You said you were looking for a Seiko watch.”

“Oh that. Ah, yeah, I did see one. But we were interrupted when that guy came in waving a gun.”

“Okay, Mr. Caulder.” She pointed her pen at him. “That should do it for now. We have your contact information in case we need to follow up with you again.” Will stood looking worried for a moment, then turned and walked back up Washington Street as fast as his uneven gait would permit. Nia watched his receding figure, a troubled expression on her face. *What were you really doing in this pawnshop, Mr. Caulder?*

Bobby ‘The Fence’ Masticola was slouched near a corner of the brick pawnshop façade, a barely visible cigarette dangling from between his lips and yellowish-brown stained teeth. Nia knew Bobby well. He was never too far away from whatever shady dealing was taking place on lower Washington Street. He rolled his eyes as he saw her approach and held up his hands. “Detective, this was self-defense. You saw the guy on the floor, *and* I got a witness who'll swear to it.”

“Bobby.” She shook her head. “Why is it that you are always around whenever something bad happens?”

He shrugged. His face broke into a thin smile that never reached his eyes. “Bad luck detective. It’s all just bad luck.”

Nia smirked. “Right, all just bad luck. Okay. You’ve done this before. Tell me what happened and start with Mr. Caulder coming into the shop.” Nia listened to him recount the sequence of events around the attempted robbery. *His story matches Will Caulder’s almost word for word. Almost.*

“So tell me Bobby about this watch Mr. Caulder was looking to buy.”

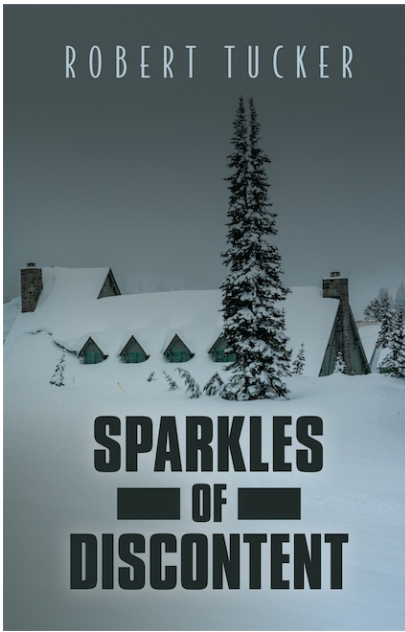
Bobby stretched back and looked up. Well, he was looking to pick up a good watch, probably for small money. But we were interrupted and never got that far.”

“And what kind of a watch was he interested in?”

Bobby shrugged. “Don’t know. Like I said, we didn’t get that far cause we were interrupted.”

Nia nodded. “Okay. I think we’re done for now, Bobby.”

*So one of them, maybe both, are lying. Caulder was here for another reason. They didn’t need much time before the cruiser arrived to make up a cover story, but why? A bench jeweler, looking to buy an expensive watch in this dump doesn’t make any sense. She shook her head in frustration. Nia stayed at the pawnshop until the crime scene photographer finished taking pictures and the medical examiner took the body away. She stood outside, reflecting on the dingy exterior before heading back to the station. A bench jeweler and a pawnshop owner meet here to discuss, something. They’re interrupted by a junkie. Nia made a face. I know there’s more to this story.*



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