



## **THE DOUBLE EAGLE HAS LANDED**

**BY ANTHONY HOROWITZ**

**T**here was just one question I had to ask myself. How could I have ended up dangling from a flagpole, twelve stories above a street in North London, with an armed maniac walking toward me, a rabid dog snapping at my fingertips, and the world's worst detective clinging to my ankles? Actually, a second question also came to mind. What was I going to do next?

It had all started earlier that same day . . . a damp, wet Tuesday in January, the sort of day that made you forget that Christmas had ever happened or that spring would ever come. Looking out the window, all I could see was rain. In fact, looking into the window, I could see quite

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a bit of rain too. The roof was leaking. My big brother, Tim, was sitting behind his desk with water dripping into a bucket beside him. The bucket looked happier than him.

You may have heard of Tim Diamond. He called himself a private detective. That was what it said on his business card . . . at least, it did if you ignored the spelling mistakes. He was twenty-five years old, dark-haired, and good-looking provided you didn't look too closely. Tim had spent three years as a policeman. In all that time he'd never prevented a single crime or arrested a single criminal. The truth was, he wasn't too bright. He once put together an Identikit picture of someone suspected of robbing a bank and the police spent the next six months looking for a bald Nigerian with no nose and three eyes. He did once rescue a woman from drowning but she wasn't too grateful. He'd just pushed her in.

After that he set up his own business with an office in Camden Town. He got the place at a knockdown price, which was hardly surprising as knocking down was all it was good for. There was a reception room and a kitchen, two bedrooms and a bathroom. The pipes gurgled, the floorboards creaked, the windows rattled and the radiators groaned. On a bad day, you had to shout to make yourself heard. He got a sign painted on the front door. It read,

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TIM DIAMOND, PRIVATE DETECTIVE, and it looked great, although in my view it might have been more effective on the outside. Still, at least it reminded him who he was every time he left.

To be fair, Tim did get a few cases and you may have read about them in a series of bestselling adventures such as *The Falcon's Malteser*, *Public Enemy Number Two*, and *South by South East*. Okay—that's an advertisement, but Tim gets 5 percent from the publishers and frankly he needs it. The last time I looked he was down to his last fifty dollars—and we're not even talking American. I'm still not sure what he was doing with a Zimbabwe banknote in his wallet. It wasn't as if he'd ever been there. But that was all he had, and fifty Zimbabwe dollars wouldn't be enough to buy us breakfast . . . unless we went halves on the egg.

And how did I end up living with him? It was a question I'd asked myself a hundred times and I still hadn't got a sensible answer. I'd moved in when I was thirteen, just after my parents immigrated to Australia. I've got nothing against the Australians and their dollars are actually worth the paper they're printed on—but I didn't want to leave London and so I slipped off the plane just before it taxied onto the runway. After that it was a choice between living rough and homeless on the streets—begging off passersby

and trying to avoid being arrested and sent to an orphanage—or moving in with Tim. I'm still not sure I made the right choice.

Anyway, it was my first week back at school and I hadn't had a lot of fun. Either I was growing or my uniform had shrunk in the wash . . . if this went on much longer I'd soon be back in shorts. And of course, I was the only person in the school who hadn't got a new Xbox or a new iPhone or any other expensive gadget with a letter in front of it. Tim wouldn't even have been able to afford a new Tcup, and although Mum and Dad had sent me a card from Sydney (Santa surfing at Bondi Beach), they'd forgotten to enclose the book token or, better still, the check. On the other hand, I knew that things were tight out there. My dad had started a new business selling heated toilet seats but apparently the bottom had fallen out of the market.

So I was in a bad mood when I trudged home that Tuesday afternoon. However, as I climbed the stairs, I heard voices and realized that the miracle of Christmas had finally happened, even if it was a few weeks late. Tim had a client!

I let myself in and sure enough, there was my big brother, leaning across his desk with the wobbly half-smile he used when he was trying to look professional. The man sitting

opposite him was big and fat. He must have weighed three hundred pounds and my first thought was that I hoped he'd chosen the right chair. He had ginger hair, a round face, and a big smile, although with that hair and that face I wouldn't have thought he had a lot to smile about. He was wearing a crumpled suit and a tie that had only just made it all the way round his neck. There was a scarf draped across his shoulders and leather gloves on his hands. It seemed strange that he hadn't bothered to take them off, even though it was a cold day outside. I guessed he was in his late thirties and if he didn't give up the crisps and the sugary drinks, forty was going to be a stretch. He was smoking a cigarette, which wouldn't help, either. He needed to see a doctor or an undertaker . . . it was just a question of which one would get to him first.

Tim saw me come in. He was obviously in a good mood because he didn't try to throw me out. "This is Mr. Hollywood," he said.

"Underwood," the man corrected him. "My name is Charles Underwood. And who are you?"

"I'm Nick Diamond," I said. I jerked a thumb at Tim. "I'm his brother."

"Mr. Thunderwood needs a private detective," Tim explained. "He was just saying that he needs someone

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reliable and responsible . . . someone who isn't afraid of danger."

"Then what's he doing here?" I asked.

"I got your brother's name out of the telephone book," Underwood replied. He looked for an ashtray. There wasn't one so he stubbed the cigarette out on the desk. "I have an office in Clerkenwell," he went on. "It's on the twelfth floor of the House of Gold." He waved a hand in the air. "That's what I do for a living, Mr. Diamond."

"What? You're a conductor?"

"No. I buy and sell gold. Mainly old coins. Right now I have a Double Eagle in my safe worth five million pounds."

Tim's mouth dropped. "Your safe is worth five million pounds?"

"No. The Double Eagle is worth five million pounds."

"What? And it's guarding the coins?"

"The Double Eagle *is* the gold coin, Mr. Diamond. It was made in America in 1933 and it's incredibly rare." Underwood leaned forward—as far as his stomach would let him. "It landed in London yesterday . . . it was flown in from Chicago. And now I've had a tip-off that someone is planning to steal it. That's why I need a private detective."

"Why don't you just move the coin?" I asked.

"That was my first thought. But it's too risky. If I walked

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out of the office with the coin in my pocket, someone could shoot me or stab me or run me over. . . ."

"They could do all three!" Tim exclaimed.

"That's right. It would be easy to steal it off me. The coin is safer where it is. . . ."

"In the safe," Tim muttered. "But it is a safe safe?"

"It's six inches thick," Underwood replied. "It has a thirty-digit code. The office is locked with a sophisticated alarm system and the building is patrolled day and night. But here's the problem. The man in charge of security—his name is Harry King—he's the man who's planning to rob me. He's going to break in at midnight tonight."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"I'll tell you." Underwood took out another cigarette and rolled it between his fingers. It wasn't easy because he was still wearing the gloves. "First of all, King is a bad sort. I've checked him out. He spent three years in prison."

"He was a guard?" Tim asked.

"No. He was a prisoner. Armed robbery. Of course, you might think he's reformed. I'm all for giving a man a second chance. But the other day I overheard him talking on his mobile phone." Underwood lit the cigarette. Gray smoke curled out of his lips. I was just glad I wasn't one of his lungs. "Even before I found out about his past, I never

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trusted King," he went on. "He's a sleazy sort of fellow, always short of money. I think he gambles. I hate people who gamble!"

"I bet you do," Tim agreed.

"Anyway, he was standing outside the building with that dog of his—he has an Alsatian—talking on the telephone."

"Wait a minute. Wait a minute," Tim interrupted. "How could the dog talk on the telephone?"

"King was the one talking," Underwood growled, doing a pretty good impersonation of the dog himself. "I heard him say that he'd go in at twelve tonight. He said he would get it and hand it over tomorrow."

"How do you know he was talking about the coin?" I asked.

"I don't. I can't be a hundred percent certain. And that's why I haven't gone to the police. Let's call it a hunch. I just don't think he adds up."

"He's bad at math?" Tim asked.

Underwood ignored him. "I want you to go to the building tonight," he went on. "I can give you a key to the front door. I want you to follow King and see what he gets up to. My office is number twelve-oh-five. If he goes anywhere near it, you call me or you call the police. Tomorrow morning I have a dealer coming to buy the coin.

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I just need to be sure it's still there. . . ."

"All right, Mr. Slumberwood," Tim said. "I'll do it. But it's going to cost you seventy pounds."

"I'll pay you twice that to make sure the Eagle is safe!"

"Okay. A hundred and twenty pounds it is."

"I'll give you the money tomorrow." Underwood got to his feet and I almost felt the chair sigh with relief. He slid a plastic entry card onto the desk. "This is an electronic key-card," he said. "It'll get you into the main building. The House of Gold is on St. John Street. You can't miss it."

"Why is that?" Tim asked.

"Well . . . it's got 'House of Gold' written on the front door."

"Good."

"And make sure Harry King doesn't spot you! I don't want him to know we're onto him."

"I'm the invisible man," Tim said. "Everyone who sees me calls me that!"

Underwood was about to leave, but before he went he did something very strange. He picked up the dead butts from the cigarettes he'd smoked and slid them into his top pocket. Why would he do something like that? He didn't look like the sort of man who was interested in keeping the place clean. Of course, Tim hadn't even noticed. He was

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already imagining the money he was going to be paid the next day. And that worried me too. If Underwood had a five-million-pound coin that he was going to sell, how come he couldn't afford even a five-pound down payment now?

"Tim," I said, once he'd left, "I've got a bad feeling about this."

"Relax, kid!" Tim winked at me. "This case is right up my street."

*Yeah. The street to the loony bin,* I thought. But I didn't say that. "I'm not so sure I trust this guy Underwood," I went on. "That story he told you . . . the security guard talking about the robbery on his phone. Don't you think that's a bit unlikely?"

"Not really. Lots of security guards have phones."

"I mean, talking about a robbery when he can be overheard! Also, Underwood didn't pay you. And he told you to ring him if anything happened, but he didn't give you a number!"

"Look, Nick," Tim interrupted. "It's a simple job. All I have to do is follow the security guard and see what he gets up to."

"Okay," I said. I knew I was going to regret this but I felt I had no choice. "But I'm going too."

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"Where are you going to?" Tim asked.

"I'm coming with you, Tim."

"Forget it, Nick. No way. Absolutely not. No chance."

"So when do we leave?" I asked.

Tim nodded. "As soon as it's dark."

The House of Gold might have had a fancy name but it was just an ordinary office building in an ordinary street. It was twelve stories high with a flagpole sticking out below the roof, and as I glanced up at it for the first time, I never thought that in about half an hour, I was going to be clinging to it with both hands with Tim clinging to me by both ankles. But maybe that's my problem. I just don't have enough imagination.

We let ourselves in using Underwood's card and, to be honest, part of me was surprised that it even activated the doors. I'd thought it was going to be as fake as him. We found ourselves in a reception area with half a dozen potted plants that looked half-dead and wilting . . . which was quite surprising as they were actually made of plastic. There was an empty reception desk and on the wall a list of names. More than fifty jewelers and gold dealers worked at the House of Gold and there was the name, Underwood, with the number—1205—among them. That surprised

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me too. Charles Underwood hadn't looked like a coin dealer to me. Everything about him had smelled wrong . . . even his aftershave.

There was no sign of Harry King or his dog but that was just as well. I had no desire to get arrested or bitten . . . and who knows? If he'd seen us, Harry might have done both.

Tim was wearing black jeans, a black jersey, and a black balaclava covering his face. Frankly, he looked more like a burglar than a private detective and more like an Alpine skier than either. I was still wearing my school clothes. Tim had a flashlight but he didn't need it because there were lights on throughout the building. Anyway, the batteries were dead, and it occurred to me that any minute now we could be too. I had a nasty feeling about this. Half of me wished we hadn't come and the other half agreed.

"There's a lift!" Tim waved his flashlight in the direction of a corridor leading away from the reception area.

"Forget it, Tim," I said. "We can't risk it."

"What? You think it might break down?"

"No. But somebody might notice it moving. Let's take the stairs."

We found the staircase and began the long climb up. There were sixteen steps between each floor and twelve floors. I counted every one of them. Finally, we got to the

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top and found ourselves in front of a pair of solid-looking swing doors that met in the middle with metal plates and wires positioned so that they connected. It was like the entrance to a vault or to a top secret laboratory or something. I stopped to catch my breath. Perhaps we should have taken the lift after all.

"Tim . . .," I began.

"What?"

"I'm not sure you should open these doors."

"Why not?"

Tim pushed them open. At once about a hundred bells all around the building began a deafening clang. A recorded voice burst out of hidden speakers shouting "Intruder Alert! Intruder Alert!" Somewhere, a dog started howling. Searchlights positioned in the street exploded into life, blasting the windows, blinding us. In the far distance, about fifty police cars turned on their sirens, shattering the still of the night as they began to close in.

"Do you think the doors are alarmed?" Tim asked.

I grabbed hold of him and began to drag him back down the stairs. All I knew was that this was the sophisticated alarm system that Underwood had mentioned and we had to get out fast. If the police arrived, how were we going to persuade them that we weren't actually trying to

rob the place ourselves? But I'd only taken two steps before I realized that the howling was coming from below me and about half a second later, the biggest dog I had ever seen turned the corner and began to bound toward us.

By big, I mean big . . . perhaps a hundred pounds of knotted muscle and fur. Its eyes were ablaze and the last time I'd seen so many teeth I was looking at a crocodile. The dog was leaping toward us with a look in its eyes that simply said "dinner"—and it was clear that Tim and I were the ones on the menu. Behind it, I glimpsed a uniformed figure who I guessed must be Harry King. He was black and bald with arms and shoulders you could use to advertise a gym. Frankly, I've seen friendlier sumo wrestlers. He was about ten steps behind the dog. They were both heading our way.

"This way, Tim!" I shouted.

We burst through the double doors. It was too late to do any more damage. The alarms were still jangling and the recorded voice was louder than ever. "Intruder Alert!" I think we'd got the message. The police cars were getting nearer too. It was like the whole building was under attack. I was already wishing I'd stayed at home. I'd left behind two hours of French homework—but even that would have been more fun than this.

We found ourselves in a long, dark corridor with offices on both sides. One of them had to be 1205 but I didn't stop to check the numbers. I was thinking of the dog coming for us. The doors had swung shut behind us and that might hold it up for a moment. But a moment wasn't long enough. What was I looking for? A second staircase. A lift. A fire escape. A helicopter launchpad with a helicopter just about to take off. Anything to get us out of here.

"In here!" Tim had found a door and burst through it. I didn't bother following him. With typical brilliance, he had found his way into the gents' toilet. I waited for him to come out again and at that moment the double doors swung open and the dog came pounding through. Tim was holding something and hurled it in the dog's direction, and at least that distracted it for a few seconds. In the meantime, I found another door. This one opened onto a staircase that climbed up. We took it. We had nowhere else to go.

The staircase led to a door that took us onto the roof and before we knew what had happened we were out beneath the stars with a freezing January breeze whistling around us, reminding us we'd be much warmer inside. Unfortunately, Fido was also inside, and given a choice between catching a slight cold and being ripped to pieces,



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I knew which I preferred. Without even stopping to catch breath, we set off across the roof. Surely there had to be another way down.

Then two things happened at once. The dog burst through the same door that we'd just taken. That was when I realized it was rabid. White foam was pouring out of its mouth, and its eyes were bulging and discolored. At the same time, Harry King appeared. I wasn't sure where he had come from but he was suddenly there, making his way toward us, and he was holding something in his hand. He raised it, pointing it in our direction.

"It's a gun!" Tim shouted.

To be fair to him, he was trying to protect me. I mention this only because it was Tim who nearly killed me. Thinking that Harry was about to fire, he rugby-rackled me to the ground. The only trouble was that there was no ground. At that moment, we were right on the edge of the building, and with a certain sense of surprise I realized that, in his attempt to protect me, my big brother had just thrown me into thin air with a twelve-story fall and a concrete pavement waiting for me below. I was also aware that Tim was coming with me. I don't quite know why, but part of me was glad that we were going to be together at the very end. This seemed an unusually stupid way to die, even by

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Tim's standards. I'd have hated to do it on my own.

But we didn't die. You've probably guessed what happened next. I saw the flagpole and managed to grab hold of it, and at the same time, Tim managed to grab hold of me. And that's how this all started (you can go back to the beginning if you've forgotten) with the two of us dangling in the air like a couple of comedians in those old black-and-white movies except without the honky-tonk piano and the laughing audience.

I don't think I'd have been able to hold on for more than about thirty seconds. My hands felt like they were being pulled off my wrists. My feet felt like they were being pulled off my ankles. My shoulder blades and spine weren't doing too well, either. Looking down, I could just make out my big brother, swaying in the breeze. And looking up . . . ?

Well, suddenly Harry King was there, leaning over the edge. The dog was with him. But neither of them was trying to kill us.

"Hold on!" Harry shouted. He lay on his stomach and reached down with one hand and I felt his fingers close around my wrist. I could tell at once that he was incredibly strong. It was like being seized by a crane. And then, inch by inch, he was pulling me up—and Tim with me. My fingers found a grip on the edge of the building and I

was able to help him, pulling myself over the top. At the same time, Harry got a stronger grip under my arms. He was panting with the effort. The dog—still foaming at the mouth—was wagging its tail. This was all very strange. We weren't being chased anymore. We were being saved.

I felt solid ground underneath my chest, then my thighs as I was pulled onto the roof. Tim came with me. As soon as I was safe, Harry reached past and helped him up the rest of the way. Down below, I could hear the police cars pulling in. There was the thud of car doors and feet hitting the pavement. Somehow I knew that the ordeal was almost over. But I still didn't quite know what it was all about.

"Are you okay?" Harry demanded. Looking at him close-up, I could see that he was a friendly, pleasant sort of man. But then, he had just saved my life, which may have helped change my opinion. He certainly wasn't carrying a gun. What Tim had seen was actually a walkie-talkie . . . and it made my head spin to think that this had been enough for him to throw both of us over the edge of a twelve-story building.

"Thanks," I muttered.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

I didn't answer. Too much had happened too quickly.

Then the first police made it up onto the roof and I was almost grateful when we were both placed under arrest.

There's not a great deal more to tell.

I suppose I should start with the man who had come to the office and who had told us his name was Charles Underwood. It wasn't. The real Charles Underwood visited us in our cell and he turned out to be silver-haired, about five foot three, and Irish. He wasn't very happy, either. Because while Harry King had been chasing us, while the police had rushed up to the roof and arrested us, someone had slipped into his office and stolen his precious Double Eagle coin.

I only had to explain it all to Tim five or six times before he understood. The fake Underwood was the thief. Somehow he'd got a key to the building—which he'd given to us—but he hadn't been able to get past the security system in order to crack the safe. So he'd used us as a diversion. We'd been spotted by CCTV cameras the moment we entered—that was how the police had got there so quickly. We'd set off the alarms. We'd been chased onto the roof. And while everyone was busy dealing with us, he'd had ample time to open the safe and make off with the contents.

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And while I'm tying up the loose ends, I might as well mention that Harry King had never been in prison, and his dog, Lucy, didn't have rabies. When Tim had ducked into the men's toilet, he had picked up a bar of soap and that was what he had thrown as we ran for the stairs. The dog had eaten the soap—which was why it was foaming at the mouth.

They never did find the thief. Of course, we gave the police a description, but the man who had come to our office could have been wearing a wig. He could have had padding under his jacket. He must have heard about Tim from somewhere because it can't just have been luck that had made him choose the most stupid detective in London. Tim had played right into his hands. And of course those hands were wrapped in gloves, so although the police searched our office, they didn't find so much as a fingerprint. Our visitor had been careful to take his cigarette butts with him too—making sure he left no DNA.

He was one of the ones who got away but that's what happens now and then. In fact, where Tim Diamond is concerned, it happens quite a lot of the time. A happy ending? Well—I hadn't been killed. I hadn't fallen twelve stories and fractured every bone in my body. I hadn't been chewed up by the dog. And speaking personally, I was perfectly happy with that.