



# JEWELER'S MARK

A **Crook Book** Series Novel

By Vincent Lash

CONTENTS

CHAPTER

---

	Prologue	9	
One	Bone-in-Teeth		14
Two	Pinched	28	
Three	All-a-Taut	37	
Four	Shanghaied	52	
Five	Mayday		68
Six	Neaped	93	
Seven	By Guess and by God	107	
Eight	Jolly Roger	118	
Nine	Plimsoll Mark	138	
Ten	Fly-by-Night	155	
Eleven	Half Seas Over		160
Twelve	Scandalize	172	
Thirteen	Sally	181	
Fourteen	Slipping the Cable	190	
Fifteen	Hove-to		204
Sixteen	Williamson Turn	220	
Seventeen	Dead Reckoning	236	
Eighteen	Fiddler's Green	254	
	Crook Books Coming Soon	263	
	Author's Biography	264	

# Prologue

"I disagree, Tom. There should be more curve in the hips."

"This isn't Rubens meets Warhol," Tom Padgett said, raising his voice to be heard over the hissing flame from the welding torch he held in his hand. He walked over to the acetylene and oxygen tanks and shut them off by screwing down on the valve of each bottle, one at a time. The excess fuel in the neoprene hoses connecting to the hand element cleared with an expected resounding snap.

Both men removed their welding goggles and scrutinized their work. Eric Kinsley stepped back from the abstract iron sculpture to better examine it. Eleven feet tall and four feet wide, this was their largest creation yet. "Look—right here. There should definitely be more curve."

"I don't think so. It'll look like it's bending over."

"More curve in the hips and bulkier all the way around," Eric said. "It needs to be bolder—bigger than life—our *pièce de résistance!*"

"Why must you do this with every project?"

"What?"

"We agree on a design, we get into production, then you start making changes—it's the same thing every time," Tom said.

"Don't say 'in production.' This isn't a factory."

"At least factories finish what they start."

"It's got to be perfect."

"Come on, Eric. I'm exhausted."

"I'm tired too."

"Yeah well, I'd like to get home before Hope and the kids wake up."

"Can't help it. The artist in me speaks."

"Fine," Tom said, throwing his hands into the air. He walked over to a three-foot-high Corinthian column standing on the far side of the room. On it sat a clear glass dome over a gold coin—a 1907 twenty-dollar Saint-Gaudens. He raised the dome and snatched up the coin, something both men had done many times before. "Here's your speaking artist." He shook his clenched fist. "Heads it stays as is and we get home by 3:00 AM; tails and we work on it until sun-up or I drop over—whichever comes first." He tossed the coin into the air, caught it in one hand, and slapped it onto the back of his other wrist. Without hesitating, he moved his hand away for both of them to see.

"Curves, it is!" Eric took the coin from Tom, kissed it, and returned it to its pedestal.

"Have it your way, but I'm getting horizontal for twenty minutes before I do anything else."

"What's the matter with you tonight, Thomas?"

"You really want to know? I'll tell you. I can't work every hour of every day. I'm tired, and I miss my family."

"I believe the word is *sacrifice*."

"Are you kidding? Try *divorce*."

"Don't tell me—Hope's pressuring you again."

"Can you blame her? I'm never home."

"Come on. She knew when we got involved with the Coterie there'd be a quota."

"Sure, we all did. But it's too much."

"Listen to me. No matter what it takes, we have to see this through. Everything depends on the next exhibition."

"So you keep reminding me."

"And I'm not going to stop until it sinks in. We've got a good thing going here. Let's not mess it up."

"I don't want to mess anything up, but be realistic, Eric. We have no artistic control. What the Coterie say goes—and that's that."

"What do you call what we're doing here? I don't see anybody else in the studio. They didn't have a thing to say about this beauty's hips. We're doing it—you and me, partner."

"This is one job. I'm talking about our careers."

"We're playing major league. We don't have to worry about the incidentals. Our job is to be artists—end of story."

"It's not that simple, and you know it."

"Just go lie down, and I'll trace out the new hips for our lovely lady. Okay?"

Tom sighed. "I know we've been over this too many times these past weeks, but I mean it, Eric, I want us to get out of the contract with the Coterie."

"And I'm telling you we'd be crazy to leave such a sweet deal. You know, the only time you stress over this is when you're tired."

"I wish that were true." Tom walked to the door leading to a room behind the studio. "We'll regret ever getting in bed with them."

"Look, we're going to make a hell of a lot of money when we sell this stuff. If you still want to get rid of the Coterie after that, I'm game. Man, we'll be so popular we won't need them anyway. But we have to stay focused on the art, or we won't have anything worth selling. Now, go get some sleep, so we can get on with it."

Tom retreated to the back room and lay down on a cot. The partners had built the little inner sanctum without windows when they had remodeled the inside of the one-story shingle house. Alone in the darkness, it took little time before Tom drifted to sleep, undisturbed by the muffled sounds made by Eric as he worked in the studio.

Suddenly there was a crash as something broke through the studio window and struck the floor with a low-pitched pop. Startled, Eric instinctively turned toward the noise, but he never had a chance to realize what happened. One moment, he stood looking straight ahead, dumbfounded. The next moment, the studio became a raging inferno. Eric went into shock, and for an instant, did not comprehend that he too was ablaze. Finally, he saw

the fire on his arms and hands, and in a panic, he flailed his limbs about wildly and screamed, until he fell to the floor unconscious.

The blaring sound of the studio's fire alarm and the roar of the fire as it quickly spread awakened Tom. He jumped up from his cot and reached for the doorknob, but it was unbearably hot and he cried out in pain. The noise and the heat intensified while choking smoke invaded the room from the opening under the door. Gasping for breath, he stepped backward and stumbled over the cot, landing hard on the floor. He shouted as loudly as he could, "Eric!"

Across an empty wooded lot, two hundred yards away, two men sat in a black Lincoln Continental, watching the building collapse inward as it burned to the ground. Convinced that no one had survived, the driver turned on the headlights of the car and headed down the lonely country road. As they distanced themselves from the blaze, the driver looked into the rearview mirror at the all-engulfing flames.

"Make the call," he said.

The man in the passenger seat pulled a cellular phone out from the inside pocket of his suit jacket. He pushed the send button and handed the phone to the driver.

"Baines here. There's been an accident."

~ ~ ~

## CHAPTER ONE

# Bone-in-Teeth

*A forward-moving boat churns water at the bow causing a froth of white foam, referred to in olden times as a bone. A boat has a bone-in-teeth when she moves speedily through water creating an exceptionally large, spray-throwing bone.*

*Trustrum Crook moved bone-in-teeth toward achieving a lifetime dream.*

"I've known you for—what—close to twelve years now?" William Weinstein asked.

"Actually, thirteen and a half," Trustrum Crook responded. "I know because we met a year before I started working for myself."

"Okay, then in nearly fourteen years, why haven't you ever told me how you got the name Trustrum?"

"Maybe it's because we've never been together on a four-hour train ride before. Or maybe it's because you never asked me."

"Then, I'm officially asking."

“Well, let’s see,” Trustrum said. He paused, taking his time, as if giving the matter in-depth consideration. “I guess I had at least two things going against me before I was even born.”

“Oh boy, here we go.”

“Now, do you want to hear this or not?”

“My apologies, please, go on.”

Trustrum looked straight at William. “The guilty parties are no longer with us.”

“Really? I’m sorry to hear that.”

“Thanks, but it was a long time ago, you know.”

“Just the same, it must have been rough.”

“It had its moments, I’ll say that. Of course, it didn’t help that I had a mother who idolized her grandfather—that would be great-grandfather Trustrum to me. Oh, and I can’t forget dear father—Mr. Crook, if you knew what was good for you—with his odd sense of humor.”

“So, your great-grandfather’s name was Trustrum? I got to tell you, in sixty-three years I’ve never heard that name before.”

“Victorians were always naming their children after virtues or anything positive like Felicity and Justin and Patience. Mom swore Trustrum was a fairly popular name in its day.”

“Ah, yes, nothing like being on the cutting edge—of the nineteenth century. So, I guess you’re going to make me ask to see the necklace, too?”

Trustrum turned his head and scanned the passenger car. “I’m surprised there aren’t more people aboard today. I suppose it’s safe enough.”

William also glanced around. In his profession, being careful was second nature. He settled back in the seat. “Nobody’s paying any attention to us,” William said.

Trustrum reached into his leather satchel that he had placed on the seat between them and pulled out a twelve-inch square, three-inch deep, hard-sided case. He handed it to William. “That’s the culmination of nearly twenty years of my life—my masterpiece.”

William carefully opened the case. Trustrum watched his friend’s eyes widen in wonderment when he saw what was inside. “I had no idea, Trustrum. Are you out of your mind showing me this now—here on the train?”

“Well then, give it back so I can put it away.”

William laughed. “Calm yourself,” he said. Then his expression turned serious. “Just look at this thing. What a stunning necklace. Platinum?”

“Only the best.”

“What are the specs?”

“One hundred and sixty-seven assorted-shape diamonds with a total weight of about a hundred and sixty carats—above average clarity, color, and proportions,” Trustrum said.

Reminiscent of Edwardian design, the necklace was a breathtaking piece—dazzling with thousands of sparkling facets. Throughout his career, Trustrum had collected one diamond at a time, except for the last thirty-eight, which he acquired in one consignment

parcel from William. A diamond expert in his own right, William Weinstein had forty-one years in the wholesale trade.

Trustrum had found his calling—as he liked to think of it—for the jewelry industry at the age of seventeen. Over the past nineteen years, he had done just about everything there was to do in mastering the industry—from platinum and goldsmithing to clock and watchmaking, from studying gemology and metallurgy to hand engraving and managing a retail jewelry store. There was even a time, short as it was, when he carried a wholesale line of high fashion jewelry, selling to jewelers in Delaware, Maryland, and Virginia.

At one time or another, and often overlapping, he had succeeded in learning the heart of the business as well as the tricks of the trade. Throughout the past ten years, he had made a living specializing in the appraising of old and new jewelry of cultures from all parts of the world. He had always preferred appraising to other aspects of the jewelry business and had learned the additional skills only to hone his appraising ability. For it was early in his career, when he had realized that a proficient appraiser must have a well-rounded mastery of the business of jewels—and when it came to jewelry, Trustrum Crook knew what he was doing—most of the time.

“I could stare at this all day,” William said. “I can’t remember ever seeing anything quite like it.” He seemed to take in as much as he could of the beautiful jewel as it sat in its open case before reluctantly handing it back.

Trustrum gazed at the necklace before closing the lid of the case and putting it safely away in the satchel. When he returned his attention to William, he could not stop from smiling. He chuckled and, with his elbow on the armrest, brought his hand to his chin, partially hiding his mouth.

“Look at you grinning. You can’t help yourself, can you?”

“It’s been a long time coming, William.”

“I guess I’d be a happy man, too, selling a jewel like that. What do you expect to clear at auction?” William asked.

“Well, I estimate in the retail market it would list around seven hundred and fifty thousand. Based on that, I figure the auction reserve should be about three hundred thousand. Of course, I’m hoping that aggressive bidding will push the price up and that it’ll sell for more. After paying you for the consignment, I’m shooting to walk away with a minimum of two twenty-five to two hundred and fifty thousand.”

“Not a bad day’s work,” William said.

“More like a lifetime’s. I mean, I have a little savings and some stocks, but for the most part, I’ve put my discretionary income into these stones.”

“Always riding that edge, aren’t you, Trustrum?”

“Believe me, I don’t mean to. Things just seem to work out that way more times than not.”

William stretched out his legs, folded his arms, and closed his eyes to take a short nap. But before he dozed, he said, “It’s the nature of our trade.” He yawned, and then added, “You got to love this business, huh, kid?”

“There’s no doubt about that,” Trustrum said. He also closed his eyes and leaned his head back to rest, but only after pulling the satchel containing the necklace onto his lap and wrapping both arms around it.

The Amtrak train he and William were on headed for New York City. They had boarded in Washington, DC, but now the train had just left Newark, New Jersey. Manhattan’s Penn Station, their final stop, was the next point of arrival and less than twenty minutes away. It was the same line Trustrum had ridden many times before out of Philadelphia during his school days at the Gemological Institute of America. And now, so many years later, he had come full circle. Trustrum Crook was unquestionably a happy man.

~ ~ ~

Trimble & Durst, LLC

Publishers ~ Baltimore, Maryland

Publisher’s Note:

This is a work of fiction. Incidents, places, characters, and names either are the product of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, or persons—living or dead—is entirely coincidental.

JEWELER’S MARK

Copyright © 2007 Vincent Lash

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any manner, except for brief quotations in critical articles or reviews, without permission.

ISBN: 978-0-9718891-1-8

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data  
Available upon request

Manufactured in the United States of America