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Mysterious thief takes jewellers for a ride

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PARIS: With her headscarf, long black coat and gold-rimmed glasses, she looks like a wealthy Middle Eastern woman with a taste for diamonds.

Jewellers across Europe are discovering the mysterious middle-aged "Qatari" is, in fact, a quick-fingered thief who can steal valuables worth hundreds of thousands of euros without guards realising that anything is wrong.

A jewellery industry source said the woman had exposed holes in the security of some of Europe's most prestigious boutiques. After she stole a E635,000 (\$1.3 million) ring from Cartier, the Paris jeweller, police are trying to establish her identity and whereabouts before she strikes again.

Internationaler Juwelier Warndienst, a crime prevention network for the German jewellery trade, has placed her on a list of its most wanted suspects.

German police believe the woman in the headscarf, as she has become known, has been stealing rings from top hotels in Germany and Switzerland for at least a decade.

It is her recent exploits, however, that have propelled her into the select group of what Le Figaro called "high-flying magicians" of crime.

Detectives believe that behind the Middle Eastern disguise lies a French woman from a community of travellers based in Provence.

They say she almost certainly operates with members of her family, who check out jewellers, identify the rings they want to steal and provide her with replicas. French police believe they know her name but do not know where she is hiding.

The Times

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