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THE BLUE DIAMOND

BY ALICE AND CLAUDE ASKEW.

Authors of "The Struggle," "Eve—and the Law," "Gilded London," "The Premier's Daughter," "The House Next Door," Etc.
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(Continued.)

Patience's heart swelled painfully. She had never loved Jack as she loved him at that moment. He represented in himself all that was most fine and chivalrous in man, but she was more than ever determined to give him up. She told herself, apart from her promise to Lady Erline, that she was no fit wife for Jack Brathwaite. Gossip might even now be making free with her name and be repeating the story of how she had escaped the prison cell. No better let her marry a man she loathed and detested than bring shame on the man she loved.

She raised her eyes and looked Jack in the face. How handsome he looked, how strong, how manly! All the woman in her yearned to throw herself in his arms, to be caught in his embrace, and so be protected from the whole world.

But she must not yield to this wild longing; for Jack's sake she must be firm and resolute.

"If I can only make him believe that I am a thief," the girl thought to herself, "surely he will cease to love me. He will turn from me with horror and aversion. His love will die. It cannot help dying."

"So she argued, feeling that at all costs she must make Jack believe her to be guilty of the crime with which Lady Erline had charged her, and think her that vile and detestable thing—a thief. For it was inevitable that he must cease to love her believing this, and surely that would be the best thing that could happen—the best thing, at least, for him.

She cleared her throat and glanced up nervously, apprehensively, to find that Jack's eyes were fixed upon her, and that he was studying her as if he would read her very soul.

She uttered a little half-ingenuit cry, for how could she speak when he looked at her like that? She wished that the right light would die down, and leave the room in shadow. She thought she could lie better in the dark.

"You are making things very hard for me, Jack," she muttered, "very hard, in forcing me to confess my shame to you like this. Couldn't you spare me, and go?" She shivered as she spoke.

"No," he cried defiantly, "I will not spare you. Things have come to such a pass between us now that the matter of your innocence or guilt must be threshed out before I leave this room tonight. There was a ring of authoritative command in his voice. 'You say you are a thief,' he continued, 'you accuse yourself of having stolen Lady Erline's Blue Diamond, and I refuse to believe you. Yes, I refuse. Patience,' he went on, taking a step towards her, 'unless you can raise your hands above your head and swear in the name of Heaven that you stole the gem. Can you take such an oath—dare you?' He gripped her hands in his own firm grasp, and looked steadily and scrutinizingly into her face.

She turned white to her lips. He had asked more of her than she could do. For Patience Strangeway, who could swear a lie to man, could not swear a lie to Heaven.

She shook her head in silent protest, and two large tears rolled slowly down her pallid cheeks.

"No, no," she muttered faintly, "I cannot swear, I cannot. You are right, Jack—I am no thief."

"I knew it—I knew it all the time," he cried, passionately, triumphantly. "I knew you were innocent. Oh, my darling!"

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Daily Fashion Hint for Times Readers.



WHEN DRIVING HER OWN CAR.

The girl who drives her own car should be as sensibly and well and smartly dressed as her brother driver. Though utility is the first consideration in her auto garments it need not, of necessity, eliminate the element of fashion. The most practical, and withal the most fashionable, suit which the chauffeur will wear this summer is the suit of a very lightweight leather, in the popular golden brown shade. Her suit, or coat, whichever it may be, is made entirely of leather, and cap, gloves and footwear are of the same material in

the same shade. A la militaire is the maid pictured. The short walking-length skirt is severely plain, cut with a gored top and a circular flounce, and finished with a stitched hem, all the stitchings being done with brown silk. Topping this skirt is a skirted blouse with high military collar inset with brown suede and trimmed with heavy cords in military fashion at the neck and across the fronts. The entire suit is lined throughout with taffeta silk in a moss green shade. The gloves are brown suede and visored cap of the leather which makes the suit.

mond and put in prison; or, worse still, she could hurt someone I love. Jack, you must let me go and see this man."

He clenched and unclenched his hands. It was hateful to think that Patience must pass even a few minutes in the society of Spencer Stern. Still, she had brought forward a powerful plea when she pointed out that the man was an intimate friend of Lady Erline's, and, consequently a person who must be conciliated at all costs.

"I will send him away as soon as I can," Patience's voice faltered, for she could see how annoyed Jack was at the proposed tete-a-tete between herself and the man he so heartily disliked. She moved towards the door, her face pale and troubled, her eyes cast down, and Jack let her go without a word.

"He is annoyed with me, he is annoyed," she murmured the words to herself as she crossed the dark hall, for the servants had forgotten to light the lamps. A spirit of disorder appeared to reign in the whole household.

There was light enough to spare in the study, though, too much light, for flames leaping up in the grate and a big lamp on the table made Spencer Stern's figure stand out in startling distinctness. Patience gazed at him with troubled eyes. He was leaning back against the mantelpiece, and his face looked more dark and saturnine than she had ever seen it before; also, there was a curious glitter in his black eyes, an expression of sinister triumph. He reminded Patience as he stood up, tall and lean, of some bird of prey, some keen, cruel hawk, and this was the man she had pledged herself to marry unless the Blue Diamond could be restored to Lady Erline, the Blue Diamond stolen as Patience firmly believed, by Spencer Stern himself.

"How do you do?" she murmured the commonplace words almost mechanically, and held out her cold, pale hand. He had brought her a message from Lady Erline," she continued.

Then she motioned the man to a chair. Spencer Stern did not sit down, but stood up in front of Patience, staring at her with curious eyes, and there was an expression in his face which made the girl long to fly from the room and hide herself from him in some remote corner of the earth.

"Forgive me for coming," he spoke in calm, measured tones. "But, as you say, I am the bearer of a message from Lady Erline. I met her at the railway station an hour ago, and she told me to come here and fix the date for our wedding."

He spoke with stupid deliberation, deprecating Patience with his eyes.

"Oh! is that the message?" Patience drew herself up to her full height, and a curious courage came to her. She thought of Jack, who loved her, and determined to make a bold fight for freedom. Besides, what did Lady Erline mean by going back on her promise? She had told Patience that if the Blue Diamond could be recovered within three weeks' time there need be no talk of a marriage with Spencer Stern; repeated this, too, barely an hour ago, so what did she mean by sending the man round? Was it merely because she hated Patience and wanted to inflict fresh injury and humiliation upon her? Or had Spencer Stern used his influence to make Lady Erline alter her mind again and forget her covenant with Patience?

"Please do not talk to me in this way," the girl began slowly. "You know perfectly well that I do not love you, and that I have no wish to marry you, and that if I ever become your wife, it will only be under strong compulsion."

She clenched her hands and looked at him scornfully. "How can you want to marry a woman that hates you as much as I do?" she asked. "It seems incredible."

"It's a fact all the same," he replied, quietly. "I do want to marry you, and I don't care a hang whether you love me or not. Love will come. You won't be the first girl who has married a man without feeling an atom of affection for him, and has grown to care devotedly for her husband later on. Of course, I know that, you dislike me now."

He smiled, and stroked his heavy black moustache. "I shall always dislike you," Patience said, the words very slowly—"always hate you, always fear you. But I am not your wife yet." She said the last words with some decision.

"No, not yet," he smiled, a cruel, evil smile—"but do you think you are likely to find the Blue Diamond within three

weeks' time? And, if you don't, what about the promise you have made Lady Erline?"

"What! Has she told you?" Patience interrupted him with a sharp cry, gazing very earnestly into his face. "Has she told you all—everything?" she went on.

He nodded his head. "Told you that she herself put the diamond into my bag—disclosed the shameful part that she played?"

"Yes," he returned, "Lady Erline has no secrets from me."

"But you may have secrets from her," replied Patience; "strange, mysterious secrets of your own. Oh, how can you come here," she continued, clasping her hands, "and stand up and look me in the face, when you know that you are really the man who instigated the theft of the diamond? For it was you Mr. Stern, who blackmailed my unhappy sister into robbing Lady Erline of her gem. Don't deny it!"

Patience sank down into a chair as she spoke, for a sensation of trembling sickness was coming over her, and she wondered if she was going to faint. She was afraid to stand.

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