

The Stolen Diamond
by Frances Henshaw Baden

By the world!

I think my love be honest, and think she is not;

I think that thou art just, and think thou art not.

I'll have some proof. SHAKESPEARE.

“Your adopted daughter is very handsome, Ellen. My quiet, demure little Annie will be scarcely seen; indeed, quite eclipsed by the brilliant Lucia.”

“Yes, Lucia *is* handsome; but—“and Mrs. Davenport hesitated. A sigh escaped her lips, and an anxious expression settled on her face, as she answered her friend’s inquiry:

“What is it that troubles you, Ellen?”

“I will tell you. I ought to; and I feel sure you will lend me your assistance. And with dear, good little Annie’s example, my Lucia may be won from that love of ornament which causes me such uneasiness. Indeed, it was from this hope that I accepted your invitation for Lucia to spend the winter with you.”

“Annie’s example *may* do her good. I hope so; she is so very different. Although she is only my adopted child as Lucia is yours, I love her very dearly, and have a thought that some day she will be nearer to me. I know of no one I would so willingly welcome as my son’s wife. I do not know what I should do without her little helping hands. Although there is no necessity for it, she must always be busy about something. And about dress, her ideas are so very modest. She dislikes so much to attract attention. I have often to scold her, to have her appear in a style which her position really demands. You know she has quite a fortune, independent of mine,” said Mrs. Wilton.

“Yes, I’ve heard so. Well, you will have your heart and hand both full this season, in controlling and directing these girls, so entirely opposite to each other.”

“They may do each other good. Annie ought to gain a little appreciation of worldly good, and indeed I wish she did care a little more about dress. Point lace and diamonds afford her no more gratification than plain white linen, or simple jet or gold ornaments.”

“And poor Lucia would almost sell her heart for diamonds. Indeed, I believe the man who can give her the most of them will win her hand, if her heart should ache for ever after!”

A few days after the above conversation, Mrs. Davenport returned to her home, leaving Lucia with her friend Mrs. Wilton.

Notwithstanding Lucia’s failings were known to her hostess, she became very much attached to the orphan girl, who was so beautiful, bright, winning, and generally pleasant and entertaining. All, for a time, yielded to her.

Mrs. Wilton thought her quite an acquisition to her little home circle, and indispensable at the receptions and parties of the season.

George Wilton loved his mother’s favorite, the gentle little Annie, and he had told her so many times. Still there was no positive engagement between them. When Lucia first came to visit Mrs. Wilton, George did not seem very much taken with either her handsome face or easy, cordial manner.

“She was excessively vain, and too fond of admiration;” so he said to Annie.

But after a while he grew more tolerant of Lucia’s faults; a little longer, and he lingered to listen to her merry voice, then sought her side, and finally Annie’s quiet, artless little ways no longer won him, even for an hour, from the brilliant girl’s presence.

Annie’s heart ached bitterly, but bravely she hid it, even from Mrs. Wilton, her dearest friend.

As the weeks of her residence with her friends wore on, Lucia's restraint gradually passed away, and many times her ruling passion broke forth in a most glaring and disfiguring light.

On one occasion, after returning from a large party, she entered her room, and, unmindful even of the presence of Mrs. Wilton, she tore off her muslin dress, and throwing it down, stamped upon it; and in a perfect fury of envy and disappointment, she raged until exhausted, because she could not dress in diamonds and satin, like a new star that had just appeared in the fashionable firmament, and, of course, quite eclipsed Lucia that evening.

Sorely grieved, Mrs. Wilton tried to soothe and calm the excited girl, but with little effect.

George's infatuation was unmistakable. Lucia was daily gaining a greater influence over him, and his mother dreaded the result. Yet how could she open his eyes to the unworthiness of the object of his preference?

About that time cards were issued for a very brilliant reception; Mrs. Wilton and her family receiving theirs. Immediately the question arose, "What shall we wear?"

Lucia vowed, unless she could have just what she wanted, she would not go.

As the night appointed was a week off, Lucia had ample time to write to her adopted mother and express her wishes. This she said she should do.

The next morning Mrs. Wilton went out to make her purchases for the coming event. Lucia staid at home in a fit of ill temper; and Annie, to try and soothe her, by delaying her arrangements until Lucia could make them too, remained with her.

After a short absence, Mrs. Wilton returned with an anxious look; and after hastening up to her room, she came down again and said:

"I went out, intending to bring you both home a present, but I have met with quite a loss—a hundred dollars. I hoped it might have gotten out of my pocket-book somehow before I left my room, but I've looked in vain!"

Both girls started up, and exclaimed:

"Let us go hunt for you;" and, "Where can you remember having it last?"

But all hunting was of no avail. The money was gone.

Three days before the evening of the reception Lucia received a letter from home. And with great apparent satisfaction she asked Annie to go with her to get her dress and trimmings.

Although there were many more elegantly dressed women present that gala night, none looked more beautiful than Lucia, in a rose-colored silk, covered with puffings of tulle, the neck and sleeves trimmed with point lace.

Mrs. Wilton did not conceal her surprise at the beautiful dress, which, with its trimming, she knew must have cost a sum much more than she had supposed Mrs. Davenport could afford to give her.

"Well, Lucia, you are contented tonight, I trust. You were admired sufficiently, and there was not a more beautiful dress in the room. Nothing was wanting," said Annie.

"Yes, something was. I had no jewels. Let me don yours for a moment, Mrs. Wilton, and see how I will look when I have diamonds of my own."

Mrs. Wilton was just removing her wrappings. Throwing off the opera hood, she unhooked one earring, and handed it to Lucia; then, putting her fingers to the other ear, she exclaimed:

"See! I have pulled the other out. It has caught in the tassel or fringe of my hood. I had it when I came up stairs, I know. Look quick, girls! Be careful not to tread on it!"

Both girls commenced to look over the wrappings. The hood was turned in and out; every inch examined carefully. But it could not be found.

George was called and joined in the hunt, through the halls, up and down the stairs.

“It may be on the pavement. But it will not be wise to take a light out to hunt tonight. I will get up with the first ray of light and look,” said George.

“Look again, girls. I feel so sure it must be in among those things. I will give the one who finds it twenty-five dollars.”

But the offered sum failed to bring it forth. It could not be found that night, nor the next morning. Mrs. Wilton was closeted with her son. As if fearful that the walls had ears to hear the words, she bent her lips, and whispered into his, words that caused him to spring up and cry out:

“Oh, mother! You are unjust! How can you? Such a thought is unworthy of my mother, usually so kind and just!”

Again she whispered low into his ear, and his face grew grave, puzzled and anxious.

“I will not let such a suspicion linger for one moment in my mind. Why should you, mother? No, no! Cast it forth!”

“I will not breathe it to any other, my son. I hope it may be as you say.”

The evening of the next day the family were in the sitting-room, Lucia trifling over her work-box, when Mrs. Wilton, greatly to George’s amazement, said:

“Lucia, I see you have a safe little box there. Please lock up this earring. I had it showing to a friend who, seeing our advertisement of the other’s loss in the paper, asked to look at this. I do not want to go up stairs to put it away. Just keep it until I ask for it.”

Speculations relative to the missing jewel were the continual subject of conversation with the family and every calling friend.

The afternoon following the night that Mrs. Wilton had given Lucia the earring to keep for her, some friends were speaking of it, and Mrs. Wilton said:

“Lucia, I will take that earring now, please. George, dear, go up and ask Annie for Lucia’s work-box—”

“Why, Mrs. Wilton, I gave it to you just last night!” answered Lucia quickly.

George stopped.

Mrs. Wilton said:

“My dear, you will see you have it. Just look. I cannot be mistaken. Go, George; get the box.”

“Why, surely, Mrs. Wilton, I gave it to you! We were up in your room, you and I, and—”

“Lucia, if you look well, you will find the earring that I have not got,” answered Mrs. Wilton, and looking into Lucia’s eyes, her own speaking more than her tongue could ever have; the words so dreadful would have faltered and died in the attempt for utterance.

Lucia gazed amazed, terrified, an instant; and the bright crimson flush which had spread over her face when she first denied the possession of the jewel, gave place to a deathly paleness, and she faltered:

“Indeed, I gave it to you. I—I—”

“And I will declare, to the public if necessary, you have it still in your possession. Will you get it, Lucia?”

Footsteps were heard on the stairs—George’s. With a powerful effort for composure, Lucia said, as he entered:

“I—was so frightened! I knew I had taken it out to give you. I remember now. When I retired, I put it in my trunk for more perfect safety. I will get it.”

In a few moments she returned, and placed in Mrs. Wilton’s hand the earring.

That night, when the girls had retired, Mrs. Wilton called George into her room, and opening her jewel box, displayed, to his amazement, both earrings.

With a warning movement, she hushed the cry that was about to escape his lips, and in a whisper

he asked:

“Where did you find it?”

“Where I told you.”

“Oh, no, no, no!”

“Yes.”

“She gave them *both* to you?” he asked, with a suppressed groan.

“She did. As you heard her say, one last night—that which you saw me give her. I asked her for it when we were alone, with no witness, you see. This afternoon you heard me demand it. I looked at her. She saw I had her completely in my power then, and brought forth the missing one, that she had taken that night when I first dropped it. It was an experiment.”

“But if you had been mistaken, mother, what then?”

“She would have proved her innocence by insisting, notwithstanding my words, and more than words, my looks, that she had given it to me. And I should have seen that I was wrong.”

The next day Lucia stated that she was called immediately home, and bade them “good-bye” the same evening. George escorted her to the depot, and was very kind. But there was an air of deep dejection about him, that, like his mother’s looks, spoke more than words.

Mrs. Wilton informed her friends that she had found the earring, it having been restored to her through the efforts of a detective.

About the missing money nothing was ever known to prove the guilt of any one; only suspicions lurked in the minds of those who had cause to doubt the honesty of one.

George was, after a while, restored to his former position in Annie’s loving and forgiving heart; and in a year after his temporary blindness—caused, he says, by too close proximity to such a *light* object—Annie became Mrs. Wilton.

Her mother no more regrets Annie’s disregard of fine dress and jewels. Better so than, as it might be, of the danger into which such a passion might lead its possessor. She had a touching example.

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