

The Beauxlieux Diamonds

By Mrs. HARRIET PRESCOTT SPOFFORD.

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CHAPTER I—Continued. They rallied round her that night in all the splendor of their ancient regiments, and the duchess was herself immeasurably magnificent. But, sooth to say, the gentle lady in the imperial box, with the gruesome man of power beside her, wore her diadem with as fine a grace and was a trifle more magnificent yet—she could not be more beautiful.

It was when they were leaving the house that just as the duchess was passing to her carriage, her cloak slipped from her shoulder, and a young officer of the imperial guard, standing near, passed an idle jest, only half under his breath, about that dazzling graciousness.

When the duke saw the young officer, he said to himself: "What a beautiful girl! I have never seen her before." He called her by her name, and she turned to him, her eyes full of tears. "What a beautiful girl!" he repeated. "What a beautiful girl!" he said again. "What a beautiful girl!" he said a third time.

CHAPTER II. "Eh bien, prophet of evil," said the duke, coming down the room, "with what tales are you frightening the duchess? Come, it shall be billiards," and sauntered off with him.

CHAPTER III. "Oh, monsieur," she cried, "I beg you not to let it pass, madame! I beg you not to let it pass." "What good, alas, what good will it do you to take his life?" "It will efface the stain on my honor, the sting of his blow." Behold, my check burns with it yet.

were all part and parcel together—he despised them, and was at no pains to keep his despising quiet and thus this very action of the duchess was the cause of his making himself more offensive to the imperialists than he had been, so offensive that at last it was open war with Duke des Sarazines Beauxlieux, and he found the old chalet in the Landes, a place better suited to his health than the house in Paris where kings had been his guests.

But after all it was not love, certainly not wisely love, that had made the duchess interfere on her husband's account in that matter of the challenge. It was a life to save—and she herself the cause of the trouble—it would have been almost as necessary for her to try to avert the evil had the person concerned been St. Malo, or Montaguvert, or a stranger. She had a warm and quiet affection for her husband, an immense belief in him, and admiration for him, but that was all.

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