

LEGENDARY BLUE DIAMOND

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PROLOG

Australian summer: 2012 AD

HISTORIANS WHO have researched the legendary blue diamond say it originated when the Earth was born. Some say the legend commenced at the union between a man who has skin, the colour of the night sky and a woman who has skin the colour of the sun. Rumor has it the blue diamond couldn't have been any larger than a single carat. Lately, there has been whispers the deep blue coloured diamond is reported to be more than nine carats possibly even ten or higher. What I believe isn't important, though I assume it lays somewhere in between. There's been bush talk from the Australian Kimberley's to Melbourne; whosoever touches the blue stone will die, for it is cursed by God. I believe it is due to man's greed and the blood dripping from his hands is the truth behind the cursed stone.

I have extensively researched a great number of books on the subject looking for a start date to the authenticity of the legend. I think I may have uncovered the actual events though I have no way of proving if the facts are correct. I have been able to ascertain the legend started around the mid-1800's when the State bank of Victoria was in its infancy. A gold prospector unearthed the diamond. In days, he sold it to a man in charge of the bank. He, in turn, made it into a ring for his wife. He described it as a definite once in a life time discovery. A businessman going by the name of Bobbi Forland invited the banker to play a game of cards. Eventually, the banker accused Forland of cheating him out of everything including the blue diamond ring. He was shot for his accusation. The banker made it home, dying in the arms of his wife. What of the blue diamond ring you ask? Of late a possible theory has been circulating the man's wife has it in her possession. How she escaped from being murdered one can only guess.

If you ask me do I believe in the story; I'll answer you truthfully. I know it only as a legend.

CHAPTER ONE

Australian summer: 1850 AD

FOR OVER a minute Jessica Hayes stared directly into her dead husband's eyes. The long-handled shovel she held in her hands had been used for easier times. The hole she finished digging was in the back corner of the cemetery, reserved for the peasants. Jessica pushed the shovel's blade into the clay to take a break, trying to make sense of the last seven hours. Her mind replayed the facts over and over on what had happened, including the reason behind her husband's murder.

On Jessica's twentieth birthday she stood at the altar pledging her vows to the man she wanted to love forever. Charles unquestionably conveyed he loved her too. She didn't expect to bury him the day before her twenty-first birthday.

Jessica's loving husband left her penniless due to a game of poker. Everything he worked towards he lost on a pair of Jacks. Her husband accused the man sitting opposite him of cheating. He'd been shot in the stomach from under the table for his accusation. Dragging his half dead body out of the hotel, he managed to mount his horse. In three minutes, he made it to the front door of their mansion. Sitting on the marble based verandah, leaning against the solid wooden front door his futile attempts to call out to Jessica were inadequate.

Conjuring up enough willpower to claw his way to a half standing position he opened the front door. Closing the door behind him to shut out prying eyes he staggered towards the stairs. Ten feet from the door he gazed up at Jessica standing on the top stair glaring down at him through wide fearful eyes. She watched his mouth open, his lips quivering. Jessica sprinted down. The moment her left foot touched the floor she ran towards him screaming at the top of her lungs. Jessica wrapped her arms around his waist to help prop him upright. Her arms couldn't hold his weight. They both crumpled to the slate tiles. Weeping uncontrollably, she studied her husband's face trying to understand the reason behind what occurred at the saloon.

The sickening answer hit hard.

Jessica's husband, a successful businessman, misused his power to gain even more money. At the height of his career, he gambled on a win. Charles lost everything, including his life.

On his last gasp, he mouthed the word sorry.

In the dead of night, Charles died in Jessica's arms.

The rough-edged man who won the card game, the same one who murdered Jessica's husband, pounded his fist seven times on the front door of the two storey mansion. The man's cold murderous expression depicted he felt determined to take possession of what should be legally his. He brought four large ugly friends for endorsement.

Jessica placed her dead husband's head gently on the floor. In a half standing position, she reached for the solid brass door knob. She didn't get a chance to open the door before someone kicked it in. The violent entry saw the fine workmanship, of the hand decorated china vase, fall off the small entrance table. Jessica could do nothing to stop it from smashing. Hundreds of fine china pieces spewed across the floor.

"You will replace the vase," spat Jessica, pointing. "My dead husband gave it to me on our wedding day."

"I will never replace anything I choose to break," jeered the tall rough-edged man wearing a three-piece suit. "Here is something else for you to remember the moment."

The man pushed Jessica from his path, boldly marched to the base of the staircase, picking up an exact duplicate of the first vase from off another small French polished wooden table. The man lifted the vase high above his head.

Jessica screamed. "Surely you're not mean enough to smash another expensive item?"

In the act of non-cooperation, the man hurled the two-foot vase at the floor. The force saw fragments cover the entire area.

Through her grieving tears, Jessica focused on the man. Her entire body trembled from the intrusion. The man looked to be enjoying the moment, relishing in his power over a young widow.

"Get out of my mansion," yelled the man.

"This is my home; you get out."

"It is you who needs to get out. Boys come in. Chuck this trash out."

The four men came marching through the open doorway as if they owned the place. Their evil smirks looked callous. They acted excited at wanting to toss a defenseless woman out of the home she'd been living in.

"Girl, this is your last warning. Get out."

The businessman stepped forward, grabbing hold of Jessica's arm. She winced at the pain. In seconds, welts surfaced. The man mouthed more hurtful words. Jessica couldn't hear what they were over her pounding heartbeat throbbing noisily inside her ears.

"Drag the woman to the door," ordered the businessman glaring at the four men waiting for the next command. "After you have thrown out the rubbish, search the house. Inside an hour, I want what I came for."

Each man grabbed one of Jessica's limbs and carried her to the door. Before being tossed airborne, she spied the businessman throwing expensive paintings at the wall. Screaming for him to stop, he refused the request to cease destroying everything Jessica's husband gave to win her heart. The intruder even tore in half her favorite painting of a horse in the middle of an Australian bush.

In one massive throw, Jessica landed in the middle of a shallow pond twenty feet from the front door.

Battered and bruised she crawled out.

Crumpling into a ball, she listened to many more precious, items the man smashed against the internal walls of the home she loved.

Standing her five-foot seven-inch frame to full height, Jessica glared at the four men blocking the doorway. "Step aside, or I'll force you," she snarled through quivering lips.

The steel murderous expression of the four men fell away, replaced by laughter.

Jessica stepped up to the largest of the four men. She didn't hesitate in what she intended to do. Jabbing the man in the ribs followed by a tight fist to the man's nose saw him stumbling backwards, blood pouring from his broken nose. Agile as a cat Jessica turned her attention to the next one. He and the other two men sprinted for the safety of the closest tree leaving the entrance unguarded.

Jessica marched back into the house, staring at the intruder. The tall man faced the angry woman head on.

"What is the meaning of this invasion?" screamed Jessica, raising her fists at the man. "Answer me immediately, or you'll end up the same way as the man outside."

"This home is now mine. Leave before you get hurt."

"It is you who is about to be hurt. You have three seconds to explain the reason for your hostility."

The man seemed to hesitate. It was as though he was re-thinking his hostile actions. The ten inch square canvas painting he held tight in his right hand of a young lad waving and leaning out of the window of a train carriage, the one Jessica's dead husband gave her on their one month anniversary was already torn. Jessica didn't mourn over the loss. She used the pause to her advantage. She leaned sideways to pick up the fine English bowl sitting exactly in the middle of the Tasmanian oak buffet. She raised it above her head. "Talk fast, or your head and this bowl will collide," she yelled.

"Go ahead, throw it, I don't care."

Jessica hurled the object at the man. He easily ducked. The bowl smashed against the wall causing thousands of crystal fragments to fly about the room.

A belly laugh erupted from the tall man. The remaining three men who had walked up behind Jessica waited for the signal. The moment the man nodded two of the men stepped forward, took hold of Jessica's arms, lifting her off the floor, kicking and scratching. The tall man casually walked across the room. He gave Jessica a backhand across the face. To hammer the slap home, he groped for Jessica's white shirt, ripping the material and popping the six solid gold buttons. They bounced across the floor in different directions.

"Hopefully, the loss of the buttons will calm you down long enough to understand the power I have in this town."

The man signaled his men to apply a downwards pressure on Jessica's shoulders which in turn forced her to sit on the floor.

"You, horrid aggressive man; I see what your game is."

"Don't flatter yourself you, intolerable wench. I'm married. I have no desire to have you or this mansion. My colleagues, on the other hand, mightn't agree with my ideas. They can't resist a pretty young female who only wears a man's white shirt to bed."

Jessica clutched the edges of her shirt to overlap the material. She stared up into the eyes of the man. "If you have no interest in me or my home, what is it you want?"

"I'm here for the rare blue diamond ring. Why you're at it, hand over the two-magnificent solid silver Colt .45's. They have a horse on the side-etched in gold. They're the ones everybody wants to obtain. Once I have the items in my possession every man will look at me in admiration. The power I'll have will be outstanding. They will grovel at my feet."

"I don't know what you're talking about?"

"My dear girl, you do know exactly what I'm talking about."

Wrapping her arms tight across her chest, Jessica slowly shook her head. Already she felt as though the men in the room had attacked and violated her.

"Maybe I should turn my back to allow my men to escort you to the closest bedroom. They seem somewhat interested in you. I'm positive a few minutes in the bedroom will help jog your memory."

Jessica glared at the man through narrowed slits. "What sort of man are you to even consider such a horrendous act?"

"I'm a man who always gets what I want." He clicked his fingers at the four men standing behind Jessica. Two stepped forward. Using Jessica's elbows, they lifted her to her knees. "What is your answer, the bedroom or the information?"

"How do you know about the blue diamond?" whispered Jessica bowing her head.

"Now we are getting somewhere. I'm amazed how easily a few rounds of whisky loosened your husband's tongue. The ring my dear girl is worth more than this whole mansion. Hand, it over."

"If my husband were alive he'd never allow you or anyone else to waltz into my home claiming they owned it."

"You're quite right. You want proof; here it is."

The man opened a pocket on the inside of his coat. He threw a bloodied sheet of paper under her nose. To torment Jessica further, he threw the pair of losing cards on top of the handwritten sheet. The cards landed face side up. The man snickered.

“Before your husband accused me of cheating which ultimately led to his death, he signed the paper as credit for his final round of cards. Winner takes all. Your husband clutched a pair of Jack’s. I held a pair of Aces.”

Jessica wiped the tears from her face, trying to focus on the blood splattered words on the sheet of paper she held in her trembling hand.

“Correct me if I’m wrong. Are those words written in your husband’s handwriting?”

“Yes,” she croaked, hesitantly.

The businessman gathered a handful of Jessica’s long wet blonde hair. He pulled her head backwards forcing her to make eye contact.

“Read the entire note out loud.”

He let go of her hair and pushed her head level to the paper.

Jessica coughed in an attempt to either vomit the lump in her throat or to swallow it. Satisfied her voice would sound solid she read the note aloud.

“I Charles Lincoln Hayes will relinquish all my assets and money including the pair of silver colt 45’s and the rare blue diamond ring to Mr. Bobbi Forland if I should lose the next hand of poker; effective immediately, signed Mr. Charles L Hayes this day Wednesday 19th January 1850 AD.”

Dropping the sheet of paper, Jessica watched it float to the floor. The thought of being penniless hit hard in the pit of her stomach. Hugging her aching torso, she vomited on the floor.

Forland took a step closer. He hovered over Jessica. “If you inform me exactly where the blue diamond ring is, I will guarantee your safety by personally escorting you off my premises.”

Jessica looked up. “What if I don’t?”

“You give me no choice. What you have endured up to this point in time is a mere thimble full of what I’m capable of doing. My men will happily escort you to the nearest bedroom. When they have finished, what’s left of you will be taken outside. You will receive a dunking in the shallow pond. I do believe the stagnant water is deep enough to drown in.”

“Go to hell!”

Forland clicked his fingers. Jessica was immediately pulled off her feet and dragged along the floor towards the stairs. The iron grip belonging to the three men felt impossible to break free from.

“Wait,” yelled Jessica, frantically.

“Do you have something important to tell me?” asked Forland. The tone in his voice was full of sarcasm.

“The ring is in a small private safe at the bank. I placed it there myself. In the morning go to the bank, show the clerk the note and he’ll hand you the ring and a large pile of twenty-pound notes.”

“How do I know you’re not lying? A defenseless woman who is about to see the inside of a bedroom could say anything to postpone the act.”

Jessica rubbed her red swollen cheek. “I can understand how you’re thinking. I’m telling you the truth.”

Forland’s sigh sounded heavy. “The moment the bank opens you will bring me the ring. If I attempt to visit the bank an employee might get suspicious.”

“What if I gave you the key? The room full of small private safe boxes is on the left after you have entered the bank. No one will look at you.”

“Are you certain of this?”

Jessica quickly nodded. She prayed her facial expression looked confident. A nerve under her left eye twitched. She dared not frown. To her relief the twitch stopped.

“What do you want in return?”

“To be able to walk out of this house untouched,” Jessica whispered.

“The guns, where are they?”

“The same place as the ring.”

“Where’s the key?”

“Upstairs in my bedroom,” replied Jessica.

“If you’re trying to bluff me in any way you’ll end up lying dead next to your husband.”

“Why should I try to deceive you? At this point, my life depends on me telling the truth.”

Jessica’s confident desperate words helped to paint a sly smirk on Forland’s face. Staring at his men he rubbed his hands together.

“May I take five minutes to collect what belongs to me?”

Forland's evil smirk instantly vanished. "What things?"

"Seeing how I'm wet through and you ripped open the shirt I'm wearing; a change of clothes. I have three pounds sitting in my draw. Can I have your permission to take the money?"

"I'll give you one minute. Be warned, if you take a second longer or anything other than what you have asked for, I will pay someone to dig two graves."

Jessica's bare feet hardly made a noise as she sprinted across the room. She ran up the stairs to the second level. Her heart pounded against her rib cage. Entering her large bedroom, she turned in quick circles. Panic wanted to take over her thoughts. Her precious seconds were fast running out. Jessica needed to find anything she could use as a weapon and grab some clothes.

Forland frowned at one of his lynch men. "Get after the woman. In exactly one minute drag her outside. Use any means possible. If you have to shoot her, so be it."

When it came to collecting his winnings, Jessica guessed Forland wasn't a tolerant man. His ruthless character haunted her brain. Hearing footsteps trudging up the carpeted stairs, she froze. In seconds, the man will be in her bedroom, gloating.

Jessica threw open the small cupboard situated behind the door. She spied a small white stringed bag. Reaching in, she swiped it from off the bottom shelf. Not thinking of fashion, she stuffed a few things to the bottom of the bag. Next, she sprinted to the French dresser sitting under the open window. For several moments she paused, her eyes bulged, her jaw fell open. Jessica wanted to scream at the top of her lungs. If she could get her hands on a gun, she'd shoot Forland dead.

"Gun," she whispered.

In desperation, Jessica sprinted back to the cupboard. In her haste, she didn't see the solid silver Colt .45's or the gun belt and the solid silver buckle her uncle gave her on her fourteenth birthday. The same ones Forland wanted. She checked both guns for bullets. The chambers were empty.

"Charles must have placed the bullets downstairs in the locked gun's cupboard for safety. Damn it," she grumbled.

The guns and gun belt joined her clothes in the string bag. To disguise the theft, she used her clothes to cover the weapons. In a race against time, she searched for anything else she may need.

The blue diamond ring and the silver key to the cupboard were sitting on top of three pounds at the bottom of the gold edged bowl sitting on a side table next to the solid brass bedhead. She snatched up the ring and the money, burying them in the bag. Swiping out the key she held it tight in her left hand.

"What's taking you so long," growled a gruff voice. "Your time is up."

Jessica spun around, facing the man taking up the doorway. "I have to change my clothes. There is no way I'm leaving this house dressed in my husband's ripped shirt."

The man pushed the door fully open. He stood grinning. "Get started."

"Turn around. I'm not changing my clothes in front of you," growled Jessica, dropping the string bag on the lace covered bed.

The man viewed her through narrowed slits, eager to view the show. "Stay wet."

Jessica frowned at the man watching her start to drag the wet shirt off her shoulders. "If you take one step closer I'll kill you," she growled. Swiping a nail file from off the side dresser she poked it at the man's face.

He returned the favour by flashing his Colt .45. His threadbare leather gun holster proved the man had used the weapon many times.

Jessica swallowed her embarrassment. She threw her wet shirt at the man and finished dressing in trousers and riding boots. The man grabbed her by the hair when she started buttoning the white shirt she'd slipped on. Jessica only just managed to snatch the white stringed bag from off the bed before the man dragged her downstairs. The man forced her to stand at attention directly in front of Forland. He eyed her suspiciously, his gaze stopping at the string bag Jessica held in her left hand.

"What about my horse?" she asked desperately trying to avert his attention away from the contents of the bag.

Forland glared directly at Jessica. His three-second pause caused her to tremble.

"Put the corpse on a saddled horse. We'll watch the girl lead the beast away. The act will prove to the widow I am a man of my word."

Jessica marched towards the front door, debris from once-precious items crunched under her riding boots.

Forland clicked his fingers. "Mrs. Hayes, before you leave I'd like to have a moment."

