

# The Diamond From the Sky

By ROY L. McCARDELL

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## CHAPTER XIV.

"Here Are the Proofs!"

AND Mrs. Burton Randolph returns to Richmond. Vivian and Blair have quarreled. Vivian realizes Fairfax will be dull while it feasts upon gossip that will not interest her. She will return to Richmond with her friend.

With a woman's presence she realizes that Blair's mother intuitively suspects her. So Vivian Marston thinks it best to return to Richmond too.

That night the Monticello hunt is minus a member. Inquiry and investigation bring some of the hunters to Stanley hall. The dead man is identified for the man he really is and is



"Here are the proofs that your son murdered Dr. Lee!"

borne away. And the breach is wider yet between Fairfax and Monticello in consequence.

The next day Hagar has a visitor at Stanley hall. It is Detective Tom Blake of Richmond, and he bears with him a curious list of photographs. He and Hagar examine these curious photographs in the library at Stanley hall, leaving Esther upon the broad piazza, innocent of any knowledge of what passes between the gypsy woman and the astute private detective Hagar employ.

But the photographs are vital things, vital especially to Blair Stanley, for they hold the evidence that proves him guilty of the murder of Dr. Lee!

For the photographs are the telltale reproductions of Blair Stanley's finger prints. Some were made by Blake from impressions he found on the rifled cash box and the dead doctor's throat, and one other is the reproduction of the plain mark of his ink stained thumb, stained by a leaky fountain pen, made on the bad check he passed on Abe Bloom, gambling den keeper of Richmond.

The check has come back to the vindictive, angry gambler marked "No funds," and when Abe Bloom has called upon the Blake Detective agency to aid him recover the amount of the check the wily Tom Blake has in his possession the convincing identification he has been seeking—the duplicate thumb print of the murderer of Dr. Lee, the thumb print of Blair Stanley!

The astute if not overscrupulous detective is working only for his client, Hagar Harding, who pays him well. There is no reward offered for the apprehension of Blair Stanley or any other man save the innocent Arthur Stanley.

Detective Blake knows that Hagar will use the evidence he brings her in her own time and in her own way. It concerns him no further, for the present at least, and he takes his fee and returns to Richmond, strangely enough, on the same train that bears Mrs. Burton Randolph and Vivian Marston.

Blair and his mother have returned from the little station at Fairfax after seeing their late guests to the train. Blair and his mother are at daggers drawn. He asks that she give him money and let him go upon his way in the world, as he wishes to leave Fairfax and never return.

"You have been under enough evil influences in following the promptings of your own unfortunate ways," says his mother coldly. "This Vivian Marston cannot deceive me for a moment. And as she seems to have also completely deceived and infatuated you, you shall have no money of my

ing to waste upon an adventress."

Blair made no reply, but inwardly he felt wild curses mounting to his lips, and he flung himself in the house, leaving his mother alone on the porch ere he might utter them.

But he was resolved to leave Fairfax, and he was resolved to gain see and regain the favor of Vivian.

There was no time like the present, was his thought. Blair went rapidly up the steps and into the living room on the second floor, while his mother remained in bitter contemplation on the piazza.

He nerved to his desperate undertaking. He closed the door of the living room behind him. He pressed the spring, and the "Tory hiding place" behind the chimney opened.

Taking the heavy poker from the fireplace that now was swung outward into the room, Blair stepped into the recess and closed the hiding place after him.

Here he lit a candle and furiously pried at the old iron bound chest where, among his father's papers, his mother kept the ready money which she, like her husband had before her, lent out at heavy interest to such unfortunates as fell into her meshes—when their security was good.

At Stanley hall, after the departure of Detective Blake, Hagar ordered her carriage. "I am going to pay a call. I will not be long," was all the information she vouchsafed to Esther. But Esther knew that, whatever was the errand that called Hagar away, although a secret, it was one that was for Esther's good.

Luke Lovell, who spent his time at Stanley hall partly and partly as headman under Hagar at the gypsy rendezvous some dozen miles away in a hidden fastness of the Blue Ridge, brought around the horse and buggy to the front of Stanley hall. At this instant a diversion was caused by the appearance of a hunchback organ grinder hurrying up the driveway.

It was Quabba, his monkey, shrieking with fright, clinging closely to his master's breast. Behind them came Sheriff Sam Swain on horseback, lashing the unfortunate Quabba.

Hagar and Esther both flew to the rescue of the poor hunchback. "He's lucky I am not chasing him out of the county!" explained the irate sheriff. "But for the trick he played upon me yesterday I would have caught Arthur Stanley. Do you know what this organ grinding monkey toting imp of Satan did?"

"Why, he handcuffed me to Blair Stanley, and Arthur Stanley, the murderer, who had the nerve to come riding at the mask tournament, got away! I could have this organ grinding scoundrel sent up for a year for interfering with an officer in the discharge of his duty!"

"I didn't mean any harm," whined Quabba. "You were teasing and joking with me, saying you were going to put the handcuffs on me, and I only joked with you and the other gentlemen in putting them on you and him."

"Young feller," said the sheriff impressively, "never joke with an officer of the law. It is against the peace and dignity of the commonwealth of Virginia and the law and the statutes that therein apply! And, having delivered himself of this pseudo legal dictum, the sheriff touched his hat to Hagar and Esther and cantered off.

Quabba was a wandering, solitary gypsy of Italian stock. A word in Romany fell on his astonished ear from the lips of the grande dame at the portals of this grand house, who gave orders to Luke that Quabba be cared for at the kitchen of Stanley hall.

This done, Hagar was prepared to go upon her mysterious errand with, as Esther noticed, the black flat portfolio the strange man from Richmond had brought that day, when her keen gypsy eye noticed that the horse was slightly lame.

Half angrily she ordered Lovell to return it to the stable, and after Lovell, with the equipage and Quabba, the latter uttering expressions of his gratitude, had turned the corner of the great house, "I am not going so very



Quabba Appears at Stanley Hall.

far, so it doesn't matter if I walk," said Hagar and kissed Esther again,

and went upon her way.

Little did Esther dream of the strange return this secretive yet kind woman, whom she deemed her mother, was to make to Stanley hall.

At Mrs. Lamar Stanley's house that austere woman sat upon her piazza, rocking and waiting for Blair to return from inside the house. She had more to say to her son, and as she reflected upon the bitter phrasing of the words she would speak her heart ached dully.

What was the use? she kept saying to herself. What was the use, what use the ambition, the cold, calculating ambition that had darkened her life and had caused the tragic death of her husband eighteen long years ago?

What was the use to scheme and plot and hope and hate for a bauble

that had disappeared—the diamond from the sky—and an earldom farther away than even distant Warwickshire?

The diamond from the sky and the earldom were not for her. They were never to be the possessions of her son either, it would seem.

Dead men lay between and a living man, a wanderer and a fugitive, and the earl, old and feeble, a helpless invalid for years, still lingered on. And Arthur Stanley, proscribed as a murderer though he was, bore a charmed life that stood between her son and the earldom and the diamond from the sky.

The diamond from the sky itself was gone, vanished from the sight of man. As for her son, that son was infatuated with a worthless woman. Vivian Marston would make a fit mate for Blair Stanley, son she had borne and reared!

But bitter as all these reflections were, the Stanley pride was strong in the breast of Blair's mother. Bad as he was, she thought, it were better he never possess the diamond from the sky or the Stanley earldom with such a woman to share these great possessions.

And then the judge's widow saw coming toward her Hagar Harding, the present mistress of Stanley hall. At the sight of Hagar Mrs. Stanley stiffened, and instinctively all the old hopes and all the old hatreds leaped again within her withered breast. She rose as if to enter her house and ignore Hagar, but Hagar stayed her with a gesture.

"Do not go, Mrs. Stanley," said Hagar in even tones. "I have with me the proofs that your son and not Arthur Stanley is guilty of the murder of Dr. Henry Lee." And she indicated with a meaning gesture the flat black portfolio she carried, the same portfolio Detective Blake had brought from Richmond.

"Hush!" whispered the judge's widow tensely. "Come inside!" And she led her strange guest within the portals of her home and up to the living room.

Here Hagar without a further word showed her the photographs of the thumb prints left by the murderer in Dr. Lee's study and the photograph of the returned dishonored check, with the fatal ink thumb print of Blair Stanley resting against his signature, as though he had attested to it.

"I will get my son. He is somewhere about the house!" cried Mrs. Judge Stanley. "What is the price you ask for your silence? I cannot think you would come here except to bargain."

"My price is an easy one," replied Hagar. "I ask that you and all your friends receive my daughter Esther and myself in Fairfax. I have only this to say: Deem me who you may, my daughter Esther is of as high birth and blood as the proudest families of Fairfax."

"What you ask can be arranged, I feel sure," said the judge's widow, regarding her cold composure. "Wait here till I find my son."

Mrs. Stanley bowed and hurried down to the porch, where she called loudly for Blair, thinking perhaps he was in the garden or at the stable.

Meanwhile Blair in the "Tory hiding place" behind the chimney had heard every word that had been uttered in the room. In his hands he clutched a mass of bank notes. Thrusting them in his pocket, he touched the spring and pushed aside the swinging fireplace noiselessly.

Hagar stood by the table, her back to the fireplace, watching the door. In her hands were the incriminating photographs of the thumb prints of Blair Stanley.

As she turned at the sound of Blair's advance he struck her down with the heavy iron poker, and she fell to the floor as though lifeless, in a crumpled heap.

As Blair stooped to seize the photographs of his guilty thumb prints that had fallen to the floor a gleam of steel on the table caught his eye. It was the sheriff's handcuffs that Vivian Marston had brought to the house with her and left for Blair, as she said mockingly, "as a souvenir of the white knight's leap."

Hagar moaned and stirred. Blair could hear his mother calling him in the hallway now. He seized the handcuffs and clasped them on the unresisting wrists of Hagar.

Picking her up, he thrust her in the "Tory's hiding place" and hastily swung the wall-back in position, leaving the unconscious and manacled form of Hagar imprisoned by the broken open chest in the darkened niche.

At this instant he heard his mother on the threshold and turned and fled with the photographs and the stolen money by the door that led to the inner rooms and was gone.

Far away a colored boy, who had

been driving a pig the day the gentleman of Fairfax held their vaunted tournament, is playing he is a hunter after eagles.

He has a wooden gun, this colored boy who herds pigs while gentle white folk ride to tournament and to chase the fox, and with his wooden gun he plays a part in the destinies of those concerned in this strange story.

For beneath a wayside tree he finds a handful of feathers. "Owls up dar!" says the mimic hunter, and he drops the rude wooden gun and climbs the tree. An owl flies from its nest with a querulous screech.

That evening an obscure negro urchin, whose lot it is that he must attend to swine, leans over a noisome pen and dangles before an unappreciative pig, gorging at his swill, the diamond from the sky!

## CHAPTER XV.

"A Mind in the Past."

A DULL, aching resentment burned in the bosom of Blair's mother as with a voice hoarse to her own ears she called to summon Blair to make his part of the bargain with the implacable visitor, who waited for them in the somber living room upstairs, with the photographs of the guilty thumb prints of Blair.

No answer was returned to her call, and Mrs. Stanley remembered again the bitter quarrel she had had with Blair over Vivian Marston.

With a bitter sigh the realization came to her again that all the stern, persisting ambitions that had embittered her life—the desire for the earldom and the great diamond for her most unworthy son—were not worth the heartache and tragedy that had darkened her life.

It was with a fierce resolve, in a sudden revulsion of desperation and despair, that Mrs. Stanley returned to the living room to tell her strange visitor, Hagar, to do her worst, let the consequences be what they might.

For herself the austere Mrs. Stanley resolved to strive no more for the sake of her dissolute and desperate son.

"I will make no bargain with this woman even to save Blair from the gallows," was her grim thought. "Neither she nor the strange girl who was Dr. Lee's ward and whom she now mothers at Stanley hall shall have social countenance from me."

But as she ascended the stairs to make known her resolve she heard the slam of a door and the sound of hurrying feet from the living room to the chambers at the back of the house.

She opened the door from the stair landing to the living room. The center table was overturned, and there were other signs of a struggle, but the room was empty.

Then a muffled groan, a low moan of pain, fell upon the ears of Blair's mother. The sound came from near the floor, behind the fireplace.

Mrs. Stanley pressed the spring, and the wall with the fireplace turned out, and there in the semidarkness of the "Tory's hiding place" lay the unconscious figure of Hagar. It was manacled with the sheriff's handcuffs that Vivian Marston had brought to the house after the tournament in mockery of Blair.

The form of Hagar lay half reclining against the rifled family strong box. Mrs. Stanley picked up the key of the handcuffs, lying near, and unfastened the manacles on the wrists of the dazed and unresisting Hagar.

Then the judge's widow realized that here was the culmination of the wicked deeds of the son she had inculcated with a lawless desire for things that were not his.

She raised Hagar, dragged her out into the room and closed the hiding place. She was not surprised to note that the photographs of the thumb prints were gone. She revived Hagar and regarded her stricken visitor, prepared for a harsh defiance with no thought of compromise.

But the whole expression of Hagar had softened to a pathetic, cowed wistfulness. Her face seemed younger, her eyes moist and pleading.

She turned to Mrs. Stanley with outstretched arms and murmured, "Give me my child!" And then Blair's mother saw that the blow her son had dealt the strange visitor had deprived her of all realization of the present.

The stricken brain of Hagar Harding was cognizant of no recent happening. Her mind was in the past. But the judge's widow was not aware that the disordered intellect of the woman before her dwelt only on the great tragedy of Hagar Harding's life, the sale of her son to the earldom and the diamond from the sky, nearly twenty years ago.

Mrs. Stanley had no suspicion of the import of Hagar's words, but she realized the crazed woman was no menace to either herself or her son, and she led her downstairs and to the door, where she set her on her way to Stanley hall.

At Stanley hall in the gathering twilight Esther waited for Hagar. It was a sad homecoming. The dull eyes of Hagar gleamed with recognition of the portals of Stanley hall. But the face of Esther, the gentle, loving Esther, was the face of a stranger to her.

Alarmed and weeping, Esther led the moaning woman she deemed to be her mother up the broad steps and into the wide hallway of Stanley hall.

Here a fierce, wild change came over Hagar. She sprang to the door of the library and threw it open.

"See, he is in here!" she cried. "They have him in there, the child they stole and sold from me. See the diamond that blazes on his little breast! Take off the diamond! There is a curse on

it for all our race! Take off the fine raiment! Give him back his rags! He is my son!"

As it had been with Blair Stanley's austere mother, the wistful Esther sensed no importance in the wild pleadings of Hagar.

Now, too, even the crazed mind of Hagar seemed to realize the library was empty and unoccupied, for she gave a wild cry and fell sobbing on the breast of Esther.

(Continued next week)

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