

The Diamond From the Sky

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

A bitter feud has existed between Colonel Arthur Stanley and his cousin, Judge Lamar Stanley. The feud has been engendered in family jealousy over an heirloom, the diamond from the sky, that was found in a fallen meteor by an adventurer ancestor. Also, the succession to the Stanley earldom in England may come to an American Stanley. When a daughter is born to Colonel Stanley of the eldest branch of the Stanleys in America and the mother of the child dies at its birth, the chagrined colonel buys a newborn gypsy boy and substitutes him as heir. Three years later the gypsy mother, having had no part in this bargain, steals the colonel's little daughter, being reared in secret, and leaves her own son undetected as the heir. The gypsy mother has also obtained possession of the diamond from the sky and a document containing the secret of the false heir. She rears the little girl, Esther Stanley, as her own and grows to love her. When Esther is grown a beautiful young girl, Hagar, now gypsy queen, returns to Virginia with her. She has a wild plan that Dr. Lee, the late Colonel Stanley's old friend, may now adopt Esther, as originally intended. Her hope also is that her son, the supposed Arthur Stanley 3d, may fall in love with Esther, and thus the innocent girl may become by marriage what she is by birth—mistress of Stanley hall. Dr. Lee adopts Esther, but also demands that Hagar turn over to his custody the diamond from the sky. Dr. Lee also informs Hagar that her son, the supposed Arthur Stanley 3d, is a prodigal and not worthy of Esther, but Hagar hopes for the best, and with her people departs. Arthur Stanley does fall in love with Esther and so does his boon companion, Blair Stanley, the cousin who would be the rightful male heir of Stanley was the Stanley secret known. In stealing the diamond, Blair causes the death of the doctor. Outside is Arthur, serenading Esther. Blair, escaping, insultingly infers to Arthur that he has left Esther's room. Arthur forces him to fight a duel in which Arthur is victor and tumbles Blair into an open grave. He searches Blair and takes the diamond from the sky. Blair is only stunned and tries, with the aid of his mother, to place the blame for the murder of Dr. Lee upon Arthur. The sheriff attempts to take Arthur, but after a thrilling drive in a high powered motorcar Arthur studies his pursuers and throws into the river after a smashup. His body is seen floating down the river.

CHAPTER VII.

The Prodigal's Progress.

LIKE Rachel of old, Hagar, the gypsy, mourned for her children and would not be comforted. The years had brought nought but a harvest of heartaches for Hagar.

The son she had borne had been torn from her ere scarce she had felt his little head against her heart, and as



And the Face Was That of Arthur Stanley, Son of Hagar!

for the child she had taken from the house of those she deemed her enemies, the girl Esther, the child she had taken in retribution for the great wrong done her, the child she had nurtured in hate and had grown to love with every fiber of her being, sweet Esther, the rightful Stanley, of her, too, Hagar was now bereft.

Here, while her sad heart still mourned for both her children, yet longed the most for sweet Esther, came the homing plover to the rocks where it had been reared, and here Hagar saw it flying laden with its message and read the call for her that Esther sent. It did not take her long to mount and ride away.

Within a few hours she was at Dr. Lee's cottage to find Esther already cast out by the cold, proud widow of Judge Stanley, Blair Stanley's mother, and next of kin to Dr. Lee. For the doctor had delayed, in his easy going way, just one day too long to adopt Esther legally, to tell her who she was and to see she regained the heritage of Stanley hall and what was left of the estate the supposed heir was wildly squandering.

So it was Hagar arrived just in time to spare the shrinking Esther from fur-

ther humiliation. And as they rode home in the dusk and crossed the ford at the river near the gypsy camp, the only home that sweet Esther seemed fated to know, the hoofs of Hagar's horse, that bore them both, splashed water on the face of what seemed the corpse of a man in the sedg.

And the face of the seeming corpse was the face of Arthur Stanley, son of Hagar!

At Hagar's wild calls the gypsies came running from their camp not far



Hagar Tells Arthur of His Parentage.

from the river bank. The unconscious form of Arthur was tenderly borne to Hagar's luxurious van. But ere they bore him there Hagar's hand, feeling for his faint heart beats in the dusk, had closed about the diamond from the sky.

Distracting Esther's agonized attention, Hagar had unclasped the great jewel and hidden it in her breast unseen, scarce knowing why she did so. When Arthur recovered consciousness Sheriff Swain and his deputy had reached the camp in their search and inquired for the fugitive. No corpse had been found when the wrecked and overturned auto had been dragged from the river bed, and the sheriff knew that Arthur Stanley, dead or alive, had floated unseen down the river. The sheriff failed to find Arthur at the camp.

It was with blazing eyes that Hagar confronted Arthur when he was strong enough to bear her fierce reproaches. "My sacrifice has been all in vain," she cried bitterly. "A ruined man and a murderer, you have wasted every chance in life for which I bowed my head in bitterness and sorrow. Better had you been bred the poor gypsy you were born, rather than to be a fugitive impostor who has squandered a heritage that was not his!"

Arthur regarded her as though she were, what she seemed to him, an insane harlot, who raged at him in half incoherent frenzy. Then Hagar drew a brass bound box from its hiding place, and opening it with a key from her bosom, handed him a sealed document, yellow and musty with age, on the outside of which were the words:

"To be opened only after my death in case my son, Arthur Stanley 2d, should prove unworthy of the name of Stanley."

With trembling hands he broke the seal and realized the woman before him had spoken the dreadful truth. For there, affixed, was the signature of Colonel Stanley, which he knew well, and also Dr. Lee's, also known to him, as witness.

"Nothing belongs to you, not even your name, and much less this for which you stained your hands with blood!" cried Hagar hysterically. And she threw down into the open brass box with a gesture of disdain the diamond from the sky.

"But I am not guilty of the death of Dr. Lee; he was my friend," replied Arthur hoarsely. "I did kill my supposed cousin Blair, and he now lies in a grave dug for another, but not for this," and he pointed to the baleful jewel. "I killed Blair Stanley because he spoke ill of Esther. Why have you driven her out to reproach me with what I am not guilty of? Tell me, if I am not Arthur Stanley, who is she? Is she my sister? I ask this, for by every wild deed of my reckless life in the past and for every good deed I hope to achieve I love her!"

"No matter who she is, you are not good enough to breathe the same air with her!" replied Hagar fiercely. "Make the better man of yourself that you boast you will! Make a name for yourself in place of the one you have lost and then return to me for a mother's blessing and to learn who Esther is!"

So saying Hagar, for she felt her fortune giving way, walked with dry eyes and head erect from the van.

Arthur picked up the diamond from the sky. In her agitation Hagar had forgotten it, and Arthur was of the belief that his Spartan mother had left it there that he might take it and make some temporary use of it to build his fortunes with. For Arthur believed that Blair still lay dead by his hand in the grave dug for another, and with him the last male Stanley save the old earl in England had perished.

As Arthur passed from the van he saw Esther come toward him from Hagar's side and was glad to note his fierce, stern mother made no attempt to stay her. And Esther had evidently been told as much as Hagar cared to tell her.

She called him "brother" and walked with him to the woods at the edge of the camp, and there they paused

and made Luke Lovell. "Be a good man, Arthur, my brother, and let me be proud of you!" Esther whispered tenderly. And Arthur folded her to his heart and kissed her and strode away.

He looked back once and saw her leaning against a great tree and weeping. But neither he nor the weeping Esther beheld the dark face of Luke Lovell peering at them through the shrubbery.

It was not until next morning that Hagar sought for the diamond and found it missing. Again her rage at Arthur burned high. Hagar hated the Stanley name and despised every Stanley possession, but she was resolved since all the Stanley line was near at hand that Esther, defrauded of every other birthright, should have the diamond from the sky.

Hagar had not wholly believed Arthur guilty of Dr. Lee's murder, even when she had first learned of his being suspected from Esther's lips when she had come for Esther to Fairfax the day before. Hagar resolved to go to Richmond, the nearest big city, feeling sure Arthur would be there in hiding, in the hope of finding him and securing the diamond from the sky for Esther, even if it were necessary to give Arthur, her own son, up to the law.

She telegraphed from the nearest railroad station, from which they took train to Richmond. This telegram was to the Blake agency, and it was sent to recall Tom Blake, the head of the concern, from Fairfax to Richmond.

No suspicion in the slightest had been directed at Blair in connection with the doctor's murder, nor did any living soul in Fairfax, save Blair and his mother, know of the encounter Blair had had with Arthur in the doctor's dooryard nor of the gruesome duel across the open grave at midnight that had followed Blair's wild ride to defame Esther's good name that Arthur might not suspect him of murder and robbery, the real guilt Blair felt the burden of.

But in order to be safe, and at his mother's suggestion, Blair Stanley had gone to Richmond, his mother giving the excuse that he went to attend to urgent matters brought about by the doctor's sudden and tragic death.

Esther, too, was gone from Fairfax now, and this, with the flight of Arthur and the presence of the Richmond detective, made the countryside of old aristocratic Fairfax county ring with rumors and the revival of old, long forgotten tragic and mysterious happenings among the Stanleys.

In Richmond Arthur Stanley, giving himself the name of John Powell, found humble lodgings awaiting opportunity to slip from Richmond when the hue and cry after him had died down. It was necessary for him to have funds. To obtain these he resolved to pawn the diamond from the sky, believing that no living person save Hagar knew of its existence.

In eighteen years the diamond from the sky had almost come to be regarded as a myth in Fairfax county. Some there were who claimed it had never



"Be a good man, Arthur, my brother!"

existed at all and others who believed it had been a bit of old trumpery that Colonel Stanley had found valueless and destroyed.

It was only when he came out of his hiding place after several days that Arthur dared buy and read a Richmond paper. There were no further accounts from Fairfax of the death of Dr. Lee and the flight of his supposed murderer.

Arthur also came to the conclusion that the death of Blair Stanley and his being found shot through the head in a new grave intended for another had also ceased to be a three days' wonder in the Richmond newspapers. In Fairfax, like enough, the whole county side was still agog at this double tragedy. Arthur reasoned, but here in Richmond the papers gave no mention to it now. Their one absorbing topic was the ball to be given by Richmond's society leader, the wealthy Mrs. Burton Randolph.

CHAPTER VIII.

The New York Society "Belle."

MEANWHILE, desperate and fear-stricken, Blair Stanley was endeavoring to forget his peril, present and prospective, in wild and reckless indulgences in Richmond.

While his fugitive cousin lay in humble lodgings, Blair Stanley lorded it at a fine hotel, and every night found him gambling at the exclusive establishment of Abe Bloom. In desperation, finding himself "cleaned out" at Mr

Bloom's luxurious temple of chance, Blair had got that estate gentleman to cash his personal check on the Bank of Fairfax.

In a few days this would be returned marked "No funds," Blair well knew, but he hoped meanwhile to recoup his losses and laugh in Abe Bloom's hawk-like face as he "made good the bun check" out of the winning he expected to gain at Abe's own roulette wheel.

But the \$2,000 went the way of the \$500 his mother had given him—back into the coffers of the gambling house keeper who had advanced the money on the worthless check.

One desperate chance was left. Blair resolved to pawn his watch and with the proceeds invoke the wheels of chance again and by a streak of luck, who knows, win back all and as square himself and the check when it came back, for Blair found Richmond to his liking. Then, too, he worried over the mysterious visit to Fairfax of Tom Blake, the detective. Who had hired Blake?

There was also the ball to be given by Mrs. Burton Randolph, who was a relative of his mother, and counted upon Blair's presence at her grand ball, the event of the social year in Richmond.

Also Blair thought of Vivian Marston. Glorious Vivian, luxurious Vivian! She had come to Richmond, sworn friend of Mrs. Randolph, who had met her the winter before at Palm Beach. It was known of Vivian Marston that she was a wealthy and dashing young widow, high in the circles of New York's "Four hundred."

Blair Stanley had met her at his mother's cousin's mansion, and Blair had been first among those to fall victim of her charms.

Arthur Stanley entered the pawnshop of Ike Bloom, brother and some said partner of the redoubtable Abe Bloom, king of the Richmond gamblers. The pawnshop was divided into partition spaces. Arthur saw the vulture eyes of Isaac Bloom gleam when they fastened upon the diamond from the sky, with its antique chain and curious setting.

Only too eagerly did the pawnbroker hand over the \$300 Arthur asked on it, and only too eagerly did he hide it in a drawer.

Arthur was about to slip from behind the privacy partitions to the street when he heard a voice say, "I want \$50 on this watch." He staggered, half fainting with fear and joy, against the partition.

It was the voice of Blair Stanley! There could be no mistake. In a revulsion of feeling to find he was not a murderer and that Blair was alive and well Arthur threw himself around the partition and into the arms of Blair.

Somewhat surprised, but feigning joy also, Blair repeated his supposed cousin's cries of wild delight. Then he made haste to explain that Dr. Lee had called him to his study and had given him the diamond from the sky and that, having done this, the doctor, who was greatly agitated, had fallen dead in his chair.

"I was afraid I would be suspected of killing him for the diamond. How could I explain when you caught hold of me?" lied Blair glibly. "I did not mean any reflection upon Esther, as you thought I did," he continued. "I only thought my intervention at such a time and the doctor lying dead might jeopardize her good name. I was too frightened to explain, and you were too angry to listen to me."

"I was only stunned and got home all right. But there has been a detective hired, and I believe he will find some clue, and your evidence would only tend to convict me, and I am innocent!"

Arthur reflected that Dr. Lee had known he was the spurious heir and that the diamond did properly belong to Blair in consequence. He did not tell Blair the Stanley secret, that he, Arthur, was but a gypsy changeling. But he resolved to stand by Blair and thus in reparation do what good he could until the time came when he might tell. So for the time being he resolved to keep Hagar's secret—and his own.

Blair was quick to take advantage of Arthur's joyous and softened mood. "I never will be able to prove I did not kill Dr. Lee," he said, with affected sadness. "True, there would not be any proof to convict me, but the suspicion of it would ruin me. You must stand by me, Arthur."

And Arthur, in the foolish impulsive generosity of his nature, promised. The relief he felt at seeing Blair alive placed him in the mood to promise anything that Blair might ask.

Then, too, with an inward shame, he realized that after all he was an impostor and stood in Blair's way, and yet he could not bring himself to be despised of Blair should he tell him the Stanley secret.

The spirits of Blair rose correspondingly. With Arthur gone, suspicion would forever rest upon the hidden fugitive! Blair received a sigh of relief and then said to Arthur, "You do not know my mother's cousin, Mrs. Burton Randolph, who gives the grand ball in Richmond tonight. Come, let us

have one fling, one good time together, in memory of the old days at Stanley hall before you go to the west. I will introduce you under any name you choose. There is a stunning young New York widow—lots of money and style about her—I want you to meet. She's just my style and I want your approval of her."

Arthur hesitated a moment and then realized that if the pursuit were still hot on his trail the last place he would be sought for would be at a high soci-

ety function. So he shook hands with Blair and exclaimed heartily: "I'll go you, Blair! One good fling before I go west to make my fortune. And if I make it, Blair, I promise you that you shall share it."

For Arthur all his generous impulses were now founded on the desire to



Hagar's Half Servant, Half Bodyguard, Luke Lovell.

recompense Blair for the heritage he had, unknowingly till now, deprived him of. And Arthur was young. For him the strong, brotherly affection he bore for Esther and the desire in his heart to do justice to Blair were now the main motives of his life. And he would have this farewell joyance with Blair.

Blair took him first to Abraham Bloom's private "club," and here, despite Arthur's wiser counsels, counsels the wisdom of which he now wondered at himself, Blair plunged again at roulette and lost the money he had got on his watch at the pawnbroker's and half of what Arthur had got from the same source on the diamond from the sky, of which, of course, Blair knew nothing.

Up to Richmond this night of Mrs. Randolph's ball came Hagar. She brought with her Esther, from whom she was resolved never again to be parted. Hagar brought also as half servant, half bodyguard her lieutenant in her gypsy queenship, Luke Lovell.

Tom Blake, the detective, returned to Richmond at her summons and met her. It took but few inquiries with the means at Blake's command to locate Blair Stanley, cutting a swath in Richmond's gayest circles. It was with surprise Hagar learned, and a happy surprise, too, that Blair Stanley was alive and seemingly uninjured, the while Arthur had believed he had killed him.

Later in the evening Blake brought her word that Arthur was with Blair under an assumed name and it was evident was going to the Randolph ball with Blair that night.

On many occasions the thrifty Hagar had turned such fashionable functions as the Randolph ball to good account. She knew the idle rich welcomed the diversion of the impromptu appearance of a gypsy fortune teller on such occasions. As a gypsy fortune teller she determined to appear and confront Arthur and get the diamond ere he left Richmond to make his way in the world.

Meanwhile a fair vision was on the threshold of Abraham Bloom's private "club." This fair vision was none other than the stunningly attired and virginal woman of the world, Vivian Marston.

Abe's "club" was on a quiet side street. The supposed "New York society belle" ran little risk of being seen by any of Richmond's "best society people" at 4 in the afternoon as she hurriedly passed from her waiting cab into the double doorway of the "clubhouse."

Abraham Bloom received the supposed "New York society leader" with an astonishing air of friendly familiarity. Vivian Marston may not have been a society leader in New York, as the rest of Richmond supposed, but it was true enough that she was a gay New Yorker, and Mr. Bloom had met her there on more occasions than one when he had visited the gay metropolis.

"Surprised to see me in your town, Abe?" asked Vivian gayly. "Well, I met one of your society dames, Mrs. Randolph, at Palm Beach last winter. I made a hit with her, and I am here as her guest."

"She gives that big blowout you hear so much about tonight. I want to pick up some rich guy of Richmond and marry and settle down among the southern aristocracy. I have got plenty of fine clothes, but I had to hock my ice in New York to get them and get here."

"I want to beg, borrow or steal a fine outfit of jewelry, and I want you to help me get the loan of some, unless you get enlargement of the heart and present it to me."

"Nix on that generosity stuff, Vi, old girl," replied Mr. Bloom. "Business is hum. There's no money in Richmond except the old Confederate bills they printed here by the ton during the war. But I got a brother who runs a hock shop."

"And you and your brother catch them coming and going," merrily interjected the New York society leader, so called. "After you break the boobs

your hock shop brother gets their jewelry."

"Never you mind about that, kiddo," replied Mr. Bloom affably. "I'll give you a note to brother Ike to lend you all the ice in the refrigerator. He'll fix you out with sparklers till you'll look like a chandelier."

The lady departed from Mr. Bloom's establishment with a compelling note to his brother, the pawnbroker. The best Mr. Ike Bloom had in the shop was the diamond from the sky. In a fatal moment he displayed it to the opulent-looking lady friend of his brother, Miss Marston of New York, and that dazzled young person had eyes for nothing else.

"That for me!" she cried, "and nothing else! It would be a sacrilege to wear anything else with that!"

"Be very careful of it," warned the cautious Bloom reluctantly. "I don't know where it came from, but when you wear that I know you are wearing one of the finest diamonds in the world!"

"They can't come too good for me, Mr. Bloom," said Vivian, as she gazed enraptured at the great jewel in its antique setting.

That night Vivian Marston, in all her luxuriant beauty, set off as it was by the diamond of the sky blazing on her fair bosom, was the cyprusure of all eyes at Mrs. Randolph's ball as she stood with her hostess in the receiving line.

Arthur and Blair gazed at her beauty, but stared as if turned to stone to see the diamond from the sky gleaming on the bosom of this fair stranger in Richmond.

Hagar, admitted as soon as her application reached the hostess, happy to have the novel diversion of real gypsies to tell fortunes at her ball, gazed, too, to see the diamond flaunting boldly by this dark, luxurious stranger from the great city.

She thought Arthur had given this bold faced beauty the diamond from the sky, and her heart again hardened to him.

Esther, dazzled by the lights and the luxury, clung timidly to Hagar's arm. She had never seen the diamond from the sky before nor had she ever heard its history.

Outside Luke Lovell loitered idly, awaiting to guard Hagar and Esther back from the ball when the function should come to an end.

"Shall we have the fortunes first?" asked the hostess of her guest from New York. "It will be great fun and help to get things started."

Hagar had given no sign of recognition to Arthur, and he in turn was relieved that his gypsy mother did not seem intent on creating any scene. He stood aloof with Blair and silent, and both of them gazed from afar as though fascinated at the diamond from the sky blazing on the breast of Vivian Marston.

How came it here? was the thought of both of them, for in all their recollection they had sedulously avoided discussing the baleful gem of their ancestor.

"I have a wondrous fortune to tell this lady," said Hagar huskily as she indicated Vivian. "Will the lady go aside and wait for me?"

"What fun! You must tell me all your wondrous fortune! Now, don't forget!" exclaimed Mrs. Randolph as Vivian Marston smiled and nodded assent to this and glided away to a seat by a low, heavily curtained window in the small tea room off the great Randolph parlors.

Vivian had just settled herself with the serene self satisfaction which she



A Strong Hand Clutched at Her Throat.

was the sensation of the evening, she and the great blazing gem upon her breast. Then she saw Hagar, leaving Esther to be gently patronized by Mrs. Randolph, coming toward her to tell her fortune.

She settled herself back in the low gilt chair against the parted velvet hangings of the window, and then she felt a strong hand clutch at her throat, throttling her through the curtains so she could not shriek aloud. Then a brawny forearm drew back her shapely neck, and the strangling hand loosened its hold on her neck and snatched away boldly the diamond from the sky.

CHAPTER IX.

"For the Sake of a False Friend."

HAGAR'S hands almost touched the diamond from the sky as she clutched at it over the shoulder of Vivian Marston as it disappeared through the velvet window curtains clinched in a strong, dark fist.

As for Vivian Marston, she caught her breath with a great gulping sob,