THE DIAMOND *from the* SKY

By Roy L. McCardell

SYNOPSIS OF "THE DIAMOND FROM THE SKY."

A diamond that fell in a meteor crashes ages ago belongs to the elder branch of the Stanley family in Virginia. This diamond goes with the title to the Stanley earldom in England. But now comes to the Virginia branches. To clear a dated mortgage of both the Stanley line sometimes a gypsy baby boy, bought from his unnatural father, for the little daughter born to him. His young wife dies. The surviving gypsy mother returns and takes in revenge the little Stanley girl baby placed in secret and raises the child as her own. The gypsy's son grows up a reckless wastrel and becomes great friends with Blair Stanley, who is rightful heir. Blair is poor and desperate and leaves Arthur, but not before strongly urging he be only a gypsy [illegible] and does not under the assumed name of [illegible] Blair, taking the blame of a murder Blair has committed. Blair tells Arthur it was no murder but an accident—Arthur believes the boy wronged, and shelters Blair. Dr. Arthur [illegible] tell Blair he is the false heir and Blair, the rightful one. The diamond from the sky passes from hand to hand, sought for its value by many, and it comes trouble [illegible]. In California Arthur becomes a millionaire and is surrounded by schemers who want his money. He is injured in an accident and Dave, another male a drug fiend of him. Dave is supposed to be only a gypsy girl. Esther, she is really Esther Stanley and comes to California seeking Arthur, with all she loves, Vivian Marston, an adventuress, secretly married to Blair, together with Lorton and De Vaux, heads of a diamond gang, and Blair [illegible] plot to keep Esther from Arthur. Blair takes charge of Arthur's great business affairs, while Dorsard, De Vaux, and Vivian lead "John Powell," the mad millionaire—as Arthur is known in order to facilitate the whole plot being to ruin Arthur morally, financially, and physically. Blair seeks Arthur's wealth and ultimately his death, that he, Blair, may pay the price demanded from the old and the soldier, Vivian plots desires the diamond, as do Dorsard and De Vaux. Blair double crosses his former gypsy accomplice, Luke Lovell, and railroads him to prison. Esther is puzzled at Arthur's strange conduct—for the plotters convince their drug victim he is losing reason, and symptoms of this are the fallacious fears that he is [illegible]. Hagar, Esther's foster mother, is but slowly recovering from a blow that Blair dealt her which rendered her temporarily deranged. Meanwhile Esther's devoted friends, Quabba, a hoodoo, and Marmaduke Surrey, an English lawyer, seeking the heir to the Stanley earldom, are her only friends. Esther learns Arthur is addicted to drugs, and in disgust spurns him—understanding at last the cause of his strange behavior. She casts aside the diamond from the sky he proffered. Luke escapes from prison and secures the diamond.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

MINE OWN PEOPLE.

LUKE LOVELL, forgetting his recent hurts in the jail delivery, forgetting his limp which he had favored to further disguise him, fled out of the Italian boarding house and through the deserted wine garden with the diamond from the sky. Even after she had brought another lamp to the so charming Signor Lancia's room Signora Solari was in excitement. In fact, she broke out into loud cries of "Assassins," "Robbers," and "Police!" and she also could be restrained had resolved to the doorway overlooking the wine garden and made the night hideous with her cries.

Luke Lovell, passing under a light in the empty street some distance off to reassure himself he had the diamond again, heard her screams and hid the baleful jewel once more beneath his rags and slipped off through the shadows.

In the opposite direction, two blocks away, Policeman McCarthy and Policeman Schultz, pausing to wait for their midnight relief, also heard the signora's cries. But when they reached the establishment of Solari the signora had quieted at the solicitude of her more composed daughter. They explained to the police that there had been a quarrel between two of the patrons, a quarrel that had greatly alarmed the signora and her daughter, since theirs, as the gentlemen of the police knew, was a most respectable place!

They were not regular patrons who had caused such an unseemly disturbance, the signora further explained. Happily, as the gentlemen of the police knew so well, the Café La Bella Napoli would not tolerate custom of this kind. The disturbers were gone; they had fled at the first coming of the so brave police when she had cried out, the signora added.

It was midnight and their relief was waiting for them. The police were glad to escape from a morning in court with offenders and accepted the explanations.

It was fated that the ill starred jewel would lose two guests for the Café La Bella Napoli, for, roused to his danger were he caught, and being tired of his confinement and feeling sure the evil repute of the diamond was well founded, De Vaux had hurriedly cast off the clothes he had been [illegible] in hiding for the last several weeks, and, donning his usual and more pleasing attire, the diamond thief, the last of "the pack," dropped from a back window of the lodging and made off down a deserted alley through the night, and regardless [illegible] at a hotel that pleased him better than the Café La Bella Napoli.

In his alleyways in the big left Quabba was aroused by the presence of Luke, and in the moonlight that streamed through the open window of the left Luke showed him the diamond from the sky. Quabba crossed himself and made the sign that fends off the evil eye. He had come to believe the great diamond of the Stanleys was the amulet of the evil one, perhaps the evil eye itself, who knows?

"You are to take it," said Luke. "Take it to Virginia to our mistress Hagar and our little mistress Esther. It belongs to them. I do not want it now. I only want revenge. When I have that, I too, will return to Virginia and serve Hagar faithfully again. Till then, you take the diamond and be gone. You have money the English lawyer gave you for your return and the shipment of the pony back. Give me the price to ship back the pony, and while you are gone I can for a while be a simple organ man with his monkey, as you were, and who will think to look for me as such?"

"No, no!" shuddered Quabba. "I do not wish to have the evil diamond."

"It will not harm you," said Luke, as superstitious as the low island. "The diamond from the sky is only evil to those who think on do evil. Your heart is good; take it!"

But Quabba was loath to do so; he was not so sure, poor fellow, that his heart was good. But Luke forced the great jewel upon him. Then Quabba had further objections to the plan proposed by Luke. "It is well what you say," he ventured, "all except Clarence. We could not be parted, could we, Clarence, my son? We were parted once for a short while and his little heart nearly broke by reason of it." And the monkey, as if he sensed his master's words, whimpered and clung to him.

"Well, take the monkey with you, then," said Luke. "It may be all the better, for the monkey is known as your other self; while as for the pony and the piano cart, what does it matter? One pony cart and one pony of the sort is much like another, but a monkey—there is something that people will remember!"

So at dawn Luke, in the guise of a limping itinerant musician, drove the pony and the street piano cart out from Los Angeles to a distant place, and in time shipped the outfit back by express to Quabba at Fairfax, near where was the gypsy rendezvous. Then Luke hid out in the wilds as a tramp workman, known to the confraternity as "a blanket stiff," and worked at such jobs as he could get, biding his time till the coast was clear for him as an escaped jailbird would have sailed and he could return to Los Angeles for his revenge.

When Quabba took the train his feelings so unmanned he dismissed the monkey, or secured his traveling in the smoking car. Fairfax is no separate village, yet sometimes was travel closely with the whites, whose counties are close, and so gossip keeps. In the Pullman journeyed the dapper, old furtive De Vaux. For the most part he kept his face behind a newspaper and hoped to be unseen, so he saw not. And for several thousand miles De Vaux, formerly a member and sworn to [illegible] in fear of the police and the vengeance of John Powell and the [illegible] Blair Stanley—and all for what, the priceless diamond for which he and his dead master had risked so much lay dead on the same train in the image of a poor hunchback with a monkey!

So the months passed. To keep Arthur from thinking, to keep him sugared that they might further enmesh and despoil him, Blair and Vivian had the poor fellow travel from one dissipation and wasteful luxury to another. He strove [illegible] his addiction and the other diversions more or less successfully. But his will had grown weak and he better will alone, all of which was beheld by his loyal main servant, Parker, the one faithful friend remaining to him with much misgiving and foreboding.

At Stanley hall, Lawyer Smythe gone about his affairs to England, Esther abode with Hagar. Hagar never fully recovered in health from Blair's murderous blow, though her mind was again clear and unclouded. She pleaded day to day with Esther that all Fairfax and all the world [illegible] below the truth at last. So far as [illegible] the two lone women at Stanley hall, they were regarded as strangers and the stories Blair's mother had died after a paralytic stroke, and there was none now in that part of Virginia who could [illegible] the truth concerning Esther.

Mysteries clung around Stanley hall as some evil thing. The murder of Dr. Lee after Esther had been betrayed, the flight of Arthur Stanley, been [illegible] as the old doctor's murderer, the disappearance of Blair Stanley—all these things made food for the gossips and caused the pretty of Fairfax to keep aloof.

Hagar realized that this was a cruel injustice to the fair young girl she so dearly loved. With Esther surrounded in a community where she should have been envied and sought after and with Arthur, the man for whom she had sacrificed and Esther had sacrificed, a profligate and a wastrel under another name not his own, the devoted Hagar reaped a harvest of heartaches, until she at last determined that Esther at least should be spared further ignominy.

As Esther had steadfastly refused to permit Hagar to avow to all the world that the missing Arthur Stanley was but a gypsy changeling and that Esther was the true heir of Stanley hall, Hagar determined to proclaim the truth and flee to her gypsy people. Once Esther's true status was known Hagar realized there could be no social consolation for the gypsy and the mistress of Stanley hall.

One night Hagar made the venture. Her things were secretly packed; her silent gypsy help had prepared her for departure in the night. Esther slept and Hagar crept silently by her bedside to pray and leave a note that would tell Esther of her determined resolve. But Esther stirred and woke and caught the weeping Hagar at the portals of the old mansion while yet her carriage waited. In loving struggle Esther bore Hagar back to the library that had seen the great tragedy of their lives.

"You shall not leave me! I will die! I will kill myself, if you do!" cried Esther, throwing herself into the arms of Hagar, while the tears welling from those two loving, steadfast hearts gave bitter savor to the parting. But Hagar was resolved.

"This dreadful lie, this living lie of twenty bitter years and more must die!" said Hagar resolutely. "Our ways lie different. The wrong of years I can undo at the breaking of my heart, my darling child!"

"And at the breaking of mine!" cried Esther. "What are the Stanleys to me; what have they done for me; what will they do for me? What will they do for you? I would rather beg my bread by your side throughout the world than dwell without you here or anywhere in every luxury that could be proffered me. I swear you shall not leave me!"

But Hagar sobbed yet was resolute.

"You are my mother, in place of her who died when I was born. A tender mother through all the happy years we dwelt together before ambition and desire for things that are vain parted us and brought the sorrow to our hearts that now we feel!" continued Esther. "I will not let you go, or if you go I shall go with you!"

Again she flung herself into the arms of Hagar, who, though her own tears blinded her and her own sobs choked her, endeavored to calm the shuddering, heartbroken girl.

In the struggle the Bible fell from the table beside them. Hagar picked it up as it fell open upon the floor.

"It shall be an omen and a portent," she whispered brokenly. And lo, her hand was upon the Book of Ruth and her finger at the sixteenth verse of the first chapter. With eyes scarce seeing, the twain chanted that old, sweet inspired message from one loyal woman's heart to another:

"And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: For whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people and thy God my God!"

A deep hush fell upon them. Then Hagar spoke: "It is God's will!" she said.

And so that night these two, never again to be parted in this life, closed the great door of the stately house behind them and journeyed on in a dreary, silent happiness to where the humble gypsy people awaited them.

"Strike camp!" was Hagar's command when the wild and happy clamor of the wandering folk at the return of their beloved queen and princess had calmed. She pointed westward. No further word was said, but day by day, month after month, the caravan moved ever westward, and Esther knew they journeyed to seek Arthur and to save his soul and bring him back from the living hell wherein he dwelt.

In far Los Angeles "the mad millionaire," John Powell, has a new toy. It is an aeroplane of the latest, most complete, and costliest type. Drink and drug crazed, the new toy fills the mad millionaire with wild, insensate delight. Speed! Speed! He drives it like a demon, flying like the lost soul he is at breathtaking pace adown the slopes of the wind.

"It will fall with him and break his neck some day," says Blair to Vivian, philosophically. Blair is a true prophet, so far as that the machine will fall. He will take good heed that something breaks when all is ready with his other plans. Then he can announce and prove that John Powell, the mad millionaire, shattered to death by his accidental fall, is Arthur Stanley, fugitive from justice in Virginia and sometime heir to the Stanley earldom in England and to the diamond from the sky. Arthur Stanley dead and out of the way, then he, Blair Stanley, possesses these honors as next of kin.

Blair keeps to Arthur's business affairs while "John Powell" keeps to his wild pleasures. Already Blair has diverted funds in secret that will mean the wreck of the Powell enterprises at the death of Powell. Blair only waits, as Vivian waits, for the reappearance of the diamond from the sky.

But where is the diamond?

Hagar could tell and Esther and Quabba. Better still, John Powell knows, for he has it safe and hidden. The one cunning thing he does is to keep this secret, for it is more than all else the cause of his present more desperate evil courses. Quabba delivered it safely to Hagar and Esther in due time. But these two fell back from it as a thing accursed. They returned it sealed and carefully marked. With it Hagar felt in his secret soul it would be sacrilege to place the diamond around her fair white throat after it had been blessed by a prayer, even though he was lost too far to heed it.

It was then that the first wild idea of self-destruction crossed Arthur's disordered mind. He secured a deadly and sudden poison and hid it in the safe in the library together with the diamond and its wrappings and the message from the heart of his mother, the heart he knew he had broken. Knowing he had wronged Blair and kept him from his birthright, a deep regard for Blair, wicked as he knew him to be, had grown in Arthur's heart—like a weed where there should have been flowers. Dumb, loyally, he trusted Blair, trusted and loved him because he knew he wronged him and was not man enough to tell the truth now that the truth had grown a living lie through all the years.

Vivian, such times as she languished over him, endeavored to dissuade him, that Blair was but her friend, their mutual companion. Blair, constrained, submitted to this scheme, though he little knew in his jealous heart how far the false Vivian carried it.

And ever westward the gypsy caravan journeyed, bearing the two devoted hearts that sought to save Arthur's soul. The caravan was within a few hundred miles of Los Angeles when matters came to a tragic crisis for the mad millionaire.

Vivian and Blair were motoring when John Powell's secretary came to his employer's mansion begging with him the irrefutable proofs of Blair's treachery and showing beyond dispute, by the doctored accounts and canceled checks, how Blair by devious ways had the Powell properties on the point of ruin and that Blair had waxed rich in his own name.

Another fell and brought more ill tidings, as is the wont of friends. Parker, Arthur's devoted man servant, viewing with deep concern the machinations of both Blair and Vivian, had won the confidence of Vivian's spinster maid. This mature female had cast longing eyes on the dignified and reserved Parker. She had hinted at a secret she held over her mistress' head. Parker, selecting to succumb to the wiles of the none too prepossessing femme de chambre of Vivian, had been given the secret. It was the marriage certificate of Vivian and Blair, dated in Richmond the year before.

This fills the cup of bitterness for John Powell, sometime Arthur Stanley of Stanley hall. False friend, false woman, and he a weakling, disowned and dishonored—a weakling who had betrayed the love of sweet Esther and broken the heart of his anguished mother.

He takes all these proofs of perfidy, his own and others'—his own being the diamond from the sky and his mother's message—and lays them out before him. He is locked in his library alone. The clock nears 12. At midnight he will drain a poisoned cup and drink a toast to Death!

At this hour Hagar and Esther have drawn ahead of the gypsy caravan in Hagar's van to hasten on to the end of their journey. A storm breaks, and Luke and Quabba, who drives the van, guides the horses beneath the shelter of a great live oak by the wayside. There is a blinding crash, a bolt of lightning strikes the tree and the van is in flames.

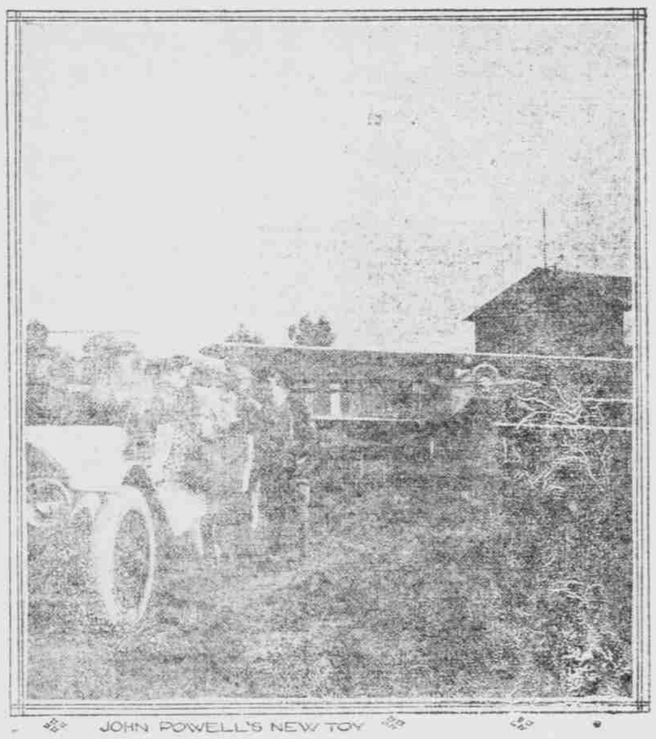
A hundred miles away Hagar's son raises his glass to drain the bitter cup of his life to the dregs and drink his toast to Death. The rain beats upon the window, the lightning flashes, and then the window opens, and from the lawn the drenched figure of Luke Lovell steps into the room.

"You gypsy renegade, look at me!" cries Luke. And then he bends low, his eyes glisten all the before, and he reaches forth a coarse and brawny hand and grasps again, and for the last time, the diamond from the sky!

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

THE RETURN OF THEIR BELOVED QUEEN AND PRINCESS

THE EXPLANATIONS TO THE POLICE



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