THE DIAMOND from the SKY

By Roy L. McCardell

SYNOPSIS OF "THE DIAMOND FROM THE SKY."

A diamond that fell in a meteor centuries ago belongs to the elder branch of the Stanley family in Virginia. This diamond goes with the title to the Stanley ancestral in England. But one comes to the Virginia Stanleys. To clear a mortgage on both A. Stanley has substituted a gypsy baby for, bought from its unnatural father, for the little daughter born to him. The young wife dies. The reared gypsy mother steals and takes in revenge the little Stanley girl baby, reared in secret, and years the child as her own. The gypsy's own grows up to a reckless master and becomes great friends with Blair Stanley, who is reputed heir. Blair is reckless and desperate and dislikes Arthur, but dissembles. Arthur strangely learns he is only a gypsy changeling and flees west under the assumed name of John Powell, taking the name of a minister Blair has murdered. Blair telling Arthur it was his mother—but we are doubtful. Arthur is drawn to Lou Grant and succeeds Blair. But Arthur does not tell Blair he is the false heir and Blair the rightful one. The diamond from the sky passes from father to mother, worn for its value by many, and it proves fatal. In California Arthur becomes a millionaire and is surrounded by cronies who seek his end. He is blamed in an accident, and these cronies have a great hold of him. Esther, supposed to be now a grown girl, learns she is really Esther Stanley, and comes to California seeking Arthur, whom she loves. Vivian Marsina, an adventuress, secretly married to Blair, together with Durand and De Vaux, head of a diamond gang, and Blair Stanley, plot to lure Esther from Arthur. Blair takes charge of Arthur's great business affairs, while Durand, De Vaux, and Vivian lead "John Powell, the real millionaire" into Arthur's wonted—to wilder dissipations, the object being to ruin Arthur morally, financially, and physically. Blair seeks Arthur's wealth and girl—or in the death that he (Blair) may gain the diamond from the sky and the earldom. Vivian also desires the diamond, as do Durand and De Vaux. Blair employs Luke, former gypsy accomplice. Luke forges and robs Blair to prison. Esther is puzzled at Arthur's strange conduct—for the plotters convince Esther drug victim, he is going insane, and that symptoms of it are his hallucinations that he sees Esther. Hagar, Esther's foster mother, is but slowly recovering from a blow that Blair dealt her, which possibly has temporarily deranged. Meanwhile Esther's faithful friends, Quabba, a knockback, and Marmaduke Addison, an English lawyer seeking the heir to the Stanley earldom, are her only friends. Esther learns Arthur's addiction to drugs, and in disgust shows her understanding at last the cause of his erratic behavior. The crew seize the diamond from the gypsy gentleman. Luke escapes from prison and secures the diamond. Luke sends the diamond to Esther and Hagar in Virginia and they return it by express with a prayer to Arthur.

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE VIGIL OF THE MORNING.

"STRANGE irony of fate! The gem of hope, the great jewel that from "heart against harm" had come to me, so to speak, was crushed again in Luke Lovell's gypsy hands that, strong as they were, were never to hold it!

"Luke Lovell, sometime Arthur Stanley of Virginia, born son of Hagar Harding," he reflected in his chair. As Luke Lovell crushed the diamond the prayer of Hagar [illegible] on the table. Luke growled and [illegible] Arthur's resisting grasp, [illegible] it and tossed it back in scorn.

"You're soft," he sneered. "Live soft in some palace while I have wandered like a [illegible] in the wilds. But now I shall live soft and you shall be my servant [illegible] first you shall feed me!" [illegible] pocketed the diamond among its [illegible] and bolted the food that [illegible] brought the master of the [illegible] Hagar and which that soul snatcher was will half out the heart in taste.

[illegible] as in a dream, Arthur sat [illegible] without hope and without fear. Yet, [illegible] hope and without fear! Yes, he had reached the end of everything. The prayer of his mother had come home as a curse in this hour of his shame and humiliation. He had been the sorrow and sacrifice of her young motherhood and the heartbreak of her maturity. Esther whom he had despoiled of birthright and patrimony, her steadiest faith outraged at last, had left him in scorn and contempt. Blair, for whose sake he had borne undeservedly the brunt of shame and by his flight from Virginia had accepted the onus of Blair's guilt for the murder of Dr. Lee—Blair, too, had been false and faithless to every trust!

Vivian. The scales had dropped from his eyes. She, too, was false—a wanton woman as she had always been.

Without fear and without hope! Crushed, dazed, the so-called John Powell gazed at the poisoned glass of brandy with which he had stood to pledge a toast to Death, when Luke had burst in upon him. Then his eyes turned upon Luke holding his food like a ravenous animal.

"I look strange to you, Luke?" said Luke, answering the look and speaking with a mouth full. "They shaved me and they clipped me in the pen, where you and Blair Stanley sent me. The express ship was all the proof that was needed against the poor, ignorant gypsy. They shut me up like a rat in a trap from the light and air in a prison prison for stealing the money that you stole, the money from the train robbery! O, I went back over all our track and I found the stolen horse and I found the empty valise. Yours were clear plain enough, when I got out of prison and went back. That stolen money you found in the desert was the start of your fortune, Mr. John Powell. The money was secretly repaid by you, but when they caught one of the poor robbers—as they thought—then they sent me to the pen.

"I don't look like I used to do?" That prison pallor that even the sun of the desert couldn't wholly take away. I'm thinner, too. But I'll fatten up yet. I'll share your life, for you are Hagar's son. But if I go to prison again you will go with me, for I have the proofs you found and used the stolen money, and I know you left Virginia as Arthur Stanley, accused of murder!

"Where is your [illegible] Stanley? Out with the fair lady, I suppose?" He shall feed and clothe me and be my lackey, or, [illegible] when helpless with two [illegible] in prison, is dead, I hear. All fine gentlemen, all, the whole of you! Well, I shall be a gentleman, too, a regular Romany Rye. I'm serious when this drink—it seems to have gone to my head—I'm serious when I say I'm a gypsy gentleman! And now that I have fed, some and clothe me. Your humbles are alleep, so you shall be my flunky! One Romany Rye as valet to another!"

And Luke rose from where he had gorged and Arthur followed him without a word to his suite of rooms and wardrobe upstairs.

. . . . . .

The storm had passed; a few heavy drops fell from the leafage of the live oak and hissed as they died on the embers of the smoking ruins of Hagar's van. Upon the ground Esther knelt, holding the head of the dying Hagar, for Hagar was dying, slowly dying.

Since their journey westward she had failed and faded slowly but surely. Nothing but her deep love for Esther and her strong faith that she could reach her son in time and take him had held Hagar to life. A harvest of heartaches through the years, sorrow and sacrifice had sapped her spirit and her physical strength. Only a sweet, complacent faith had sustained her. But now the shock of the lightning stroke, the burning of the van, and the exposure to the storm had hastened her passing.

In their long journey westward, slowly [illegible] they had reached wild [illegible] twenty miles of Los Angeles and the end of their quest for Arthur. Revealing to him his mother and valuables, Esther whispered to the ever helpful and loyal Quabba to mount one of the van horses and hurry back to the nearest town for an ambulance and bid them hasten. This Quabba did.

The ambulance was not far behind them, for hearing Los Angeles Hagar had given orders to have through the night that they might camp the next day on the outskirts of the city that was their journey's end. Hearing Quabba's cries, the gypsies lashed their tired horses and soon Hagar was in the loving care of the women of her tribe, with Esther always beside her, holding her hand and comforting the dying woman with a communion of silence.

On the outskirts of the town, driven from their open roadster to the shelter of a roadhouse by the rain, Blair and Vivian drank and revelled. Blair, learning John Powell wanted urgent calls in the departure of Luke to drink his toast to Death at his mansion in Los Angeles. They drank and revelled while a score of miles away Hagar and Esther hand in hand, waited for the end of time and the beginning of eternity for the sides of the twain.

"To the health of the roadhouse planet scattering the last rain drops from his apparel, same Dick Jones. With him was a lady whom he addressed as Gert. It was not the first roadhouse where his arrival joy riders had stopped at. Mr. Jones was a lick of speech, flushed of face, and unsteady of gait. The lady he called Gert was more seasoned. She was voicing to a remark that she was as dry as a bone and hungry as a wolf.

At the sight of Blair Stanley, Mr. Jones was somewhat abashed. But some recollection came to him that steadied him, and he greeted Blair with an assumed indifference. Blair gave the newcomers a surly, supercilious stare.

"Who are they?" asked Vivian.

"I don't know the blonde I make with Gert," replied Blair carelessly. "But the gassy gentleman is Dick Jones, who was our shipping clerk at the Good Hope oil company offices—until I fired him for coming to work after being out the night before, as you see him now."

"You didn't fire yourself for that offense, or John Powell, the boss, I assume?" remarked Vivian sarcastically.

"No matter what I do the night before, my head is clear and my hands steady the next day," Blair answered. "As for John Powell—my boss, as you call him—since he has taken to dope and flying machines we do not see him at the office. And that reminds me, I am sick of this whole business. I have got the money in my own name. I am tired of hanging on like a parasite to the poor fool till he dopes himself to death. When do we make a getaway?"

"When we get the diamond from the sky," replied Vivian. "I have set my heart and soul on having it. It must turn up again."

Nothing ever happens and everything happens. While Blair drank in gloomy silence and made no answer to Vivian's last remark, Jones, the tipsy ex-shipping clerk, at the next table waxed playful with the lady he called Gert. Upon her ample bosom there hung a flashy lavalliere, suspended by a heavy chain. Mr. Jones toyed with it while waiting for the food and drink he had ordered and remarked thickly, "Pretty nifty piece of junk, Gert! But you should have seen the big diamond that John Powell got by express. It came in a sealed package, and our head clerk sent me up to Mr. Powell's house with it. He opened the package and nearly threw a fit, for there inside was a case and in that case was a letter that stung him hard, and with it was a chain and locket about a thousand years old. And in that locket was a diamond as big as an English walnut. I think it was the same diamond that the circus guy gave the lady lion tamer. Then the lion killed the lady and her husband, the clown, killed the circus guy, and then shot himself. Remember? John Powell bought the diamond at the auction of the busted circus; then some gink stole it from him, and Powell got it back by express, just as I'm telling you. They say John Powell is crazy. He sure acted crazy when he read the note that came with the big sparkler. He gave me fifty dollars to keep my mouth shut about it. But I don't have to keep my mouth shut about anything for anybody, for, as I say for the way I worked in his office—[illegible] out! Wait till I see Powell; I'll get my job back all right, and nobody won't stop me!"

Blair and Vivian had sat up as though electrified at the first words about the diamond they overheard. Now that the tipsy clerk had ceased speaking Blair spoke beside him.

"You'll get your job back, all right, Jones!" he said heartily. "Here's fifty dollars from me. Tell me details about the diamond coming by express."

And the clerk repeated his story. Meanwhile he was speaking Vivian had called the waiter to bring the bill and their outer wraps. Once in their gayest roadster Blair put on full speed through the night and cursed fervently.

"The evening done!" he cried. "Arthur has had the diamond safe and hidden from us—right under our noses for six months!"

"How will we get it?" asked Vivian anxiously. "Don't pull any more rough stuff, Blair. There has been too much of that. It gets us nothing, not even the diamond."

"Leave that to me!" said Blair grimly. "The time is ripe. Where are his mortgages? Durand is ready, De Vaux was certainly paid his price and sent the diamond back. He has changed his name, and need not be reckoned with. John Powell is as good as himself or anyone else for us before dead. When he is dead I can tell who he really was, and the earldom in England will be mine. You will be a princess, Vi!"

"Get me the diamond from the sky first!" answered Vivian.

"There won't be any trouble about that," remarked Blair. "The diamond is hidden in the house and we will need it after Arthur Stanley, alias John Powell, is dead!"

As he spoke he stopped the machine, for they had reached the aviation field and the hangar where John Powell, amateur aeronaut, kept his latest toy, his aeroplane. Blair took a tire iron from the tool box, wrenched the hasp from the door, and entered the hangar. A file was on the work bench beneath the electric light. Blair switched on. Just a little tampering with the stay brace wires, but sufficient. The next time John Powell took a flight Death would ride beside him!

Vivian asked no questions. But she shuddered. For the man who was to die had been in her arms and her caresses had beguiled him. But she must choose, and as between the masterful Blair and the weakling doomed to die there was but one choice—for with Arthur Stanley dead and Blair Stanley come into his heritage all would be hers, she knew.

In the luxurious chambers of John Powell, Luke Lovell, gypsy and escaped convict, stands attired if not in purple and fine linen at least in fine linen and tailored clothes of a cut and texture as only millionaires, or at least the rich, may have. Arthur stood dumbly by. He had handed Luke the apparel in servile silence, the clothes, the fine kid boots, the snowy shirt, and even English walking gloves. Luke laughed as he gazed at his gloved hands and from them to his entire reflection in the cheval glass. "And now I am the Romany Rye, for sure!" he cried. "But where is my ring and my watch and my scarf pin? Why, here they are on the bureau! You are a careless valet, Powell. Suppose some ex-convict would walk right through my library window and come upstairs and coolly take them!" And Luke threw back his head and laughed again, for, as he spoke, he had taken the costly ring from the hand of the unresisting John Powell, removed his glove and put on the ring, and replaced the glove, all with the mock actions of a dandy, such as Luke had seen in cheap vaudeville at some time.

He took the gold repeater and the diamond studded chain from the dressing table; he stuck the costly star sapphire pin from the smoking into the gay neckties he had selected. Finding Arthur's monogramed wallet, well filled with banknotes and some private papers, in the upper drawer of the dressing case, Luke had also taken it and remarked: "I'll have a bank account soon, but just at present I'll use the ready cash. And now, if you don't mind, for it is getting towards morning, I will leave you. No, I won't go out the front door," he remarked, as they walked from the room and down the grand staircase in the silent mansion. "I'll go out the way I came. It's good luck."

In the library Arthur sank again into the easy chair. Not one word had he spoken. He was ready to part with the blacksmiller as he was ready to part with life itself—without fear and without hope. At the thought his eyes fell upon the brandy glass, the poisoned chalice with which he was to drink his toast to Death.

Luke's eyes followed his. "Why, I declare!" he cried with an air of clumsy playfulness. "I actually forgot to take my brandy with my coffee! He picked up the glass. "At parting we pledge," the Romany Rye drinks your health!"

Arthur silenced as though to stop him, but he was [illegible] without hope. This was death! What man may read the book of his fate? It was gypsy kismet that Luke and not he was to pledge the toast to Death!

Luke drained the brandy at a gulp, then licked his lips. "Queer stuff that!" he said. "Why, damn it, it burns like acid!" He looked at Hagar's son and plain as words he read what was in the dark eyes of the other.

"It was a trap!" he shrieked. "Damn your grinning, treacherous face, it was a trap! A gypsy trick! You have poisoned me!" And reeling and clawing and grasping at himself as though to stay the agony that burned at his vitals, Luke staggered through the window low to the lawn and across the grass plot to the driveway at the back of the mansion. And then a great glare of light played upon him like a mighty beam of incandescence, and with a rasping shriek from the electric horn Blair's heavy roadster tore around the corner of the great mansion and in a flash had struck the poisoned man, crushing in his face and leaving him a huddled, quivering mass in the roadway.

John Powell clutched at his heart. In [illegible] of the moment his soul seemed to leap from him as he [illegible] from behind the window shade as the tragic tale taking of death, the [illegible] of the diamond from the sky!

There was a shriek from Vivian as the swift auto struck the poisoned man. Then a grinding of the brakes; the car stopped with a jerk, and Blair ran back to the quivering figure in the roadway. One glance at the crushed, disfigured face and Blair, in merciful pity, strange to him, placed his coat over it to hide the dreadful sight. He bent down. There was every evidence in the attire as to who it was. The wallet had fallen from the breast coat pocket of the dead man. Blair knew it. He called for Vivian, and as she ran toward him he tore from the breast of the dead man the diamond from the sky, while the halted auto throbbed and panted as though it gloated at what it and Blair had done.

"A gypsy trick!" the dying man had cried. There were other gypsy tricks. John Powell was dead; with him should Arthur Stanley pass! The now nameless man ran to his room and hastily donned a heavy dark suit of clothes.

The cries of Vivian and Blair had roused the house, and the nameless man heard the half dressed servants rushing down the stairs and out by the front door to the back of the house. Unseen, he passed in the library, and then, as they bore the corpse of him they thought John Powell to the front and into his mansion for the last time, the man who had been Arthur Stanley and John Powell slipped from the window, stole across the lawn, and made his way through the mark before dawn to the hangar. Bringing out the great, birdlike machine, he rose with it and climbed up the stairway of the wind and rode upon the wings of the morning!

Out to sea, far out. This was a death to die! But the wings of the morning wafted exultation to his soul. He cast aside the husk of his degradation and turned and wheeled his distant flight—clean of mind and clean of soul again!

On the wings of the morning, and far below a gypsy caravan.

"Esther!" he thought. "Esther, my beloved, and Hagar, my dear mother!"

And then, on the wings of the morning, something snapped. Down, down, he plunged. He saw in the bright light of day that now filled the earth the gypsies swarming out, and he could discern the slight figure of Esther. Then he felt the air rise up on either side as he sank like a plummet. And so he went down, down—seeing, he believed, the outstretched arms and upturned face of Esther—without fear and without hope.

At the mansion of the late John Powell a wreath of flowers is on the door. The newspapers screech sensationally of his death and the strange story Blair has disclosed that the mad millionaire, who took poison and threw himself in the way of an enrushing automobile, was not John Powell but Arthur Stanley, fugitive from justice in Virginia and heir to an English earldom and the diamond from the sky!

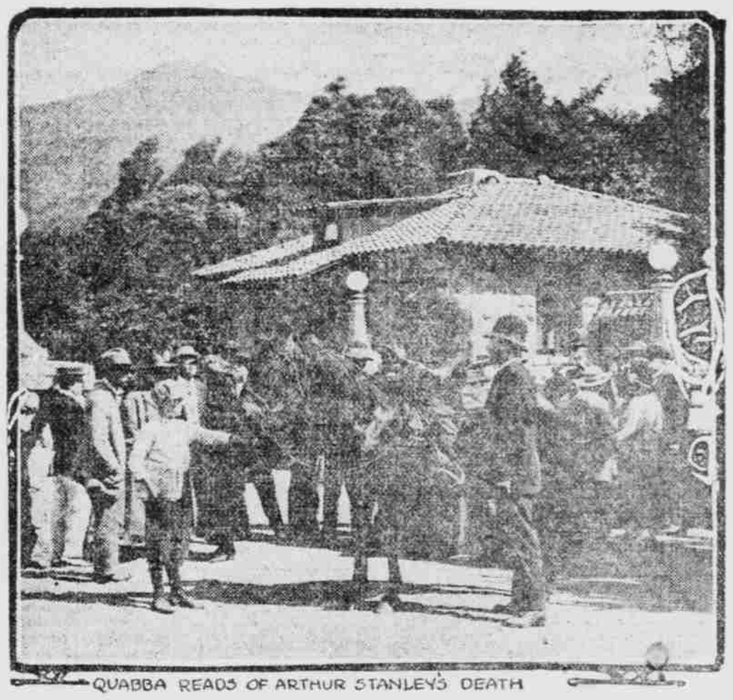
A gypsy horseback riding to the dead man's house on a travel tired horse is told all this. He turns sadly away. How shall he ask such a message to a dying mother?

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

THE SUPPOSED DEATH OF ARTHUR STANLEY

ARTHUR IS ABOUT TO PLEDGE A TOAST TO DEATH

THE GYPSIES DISCERN AN AEROPLANE



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