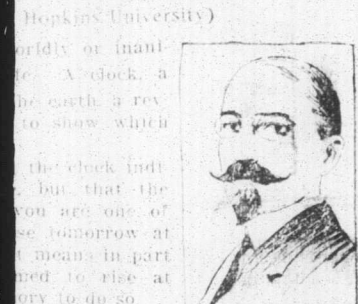


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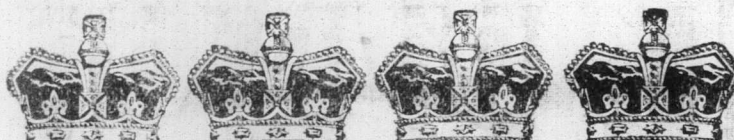
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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

A feud has existed between Colonel Arthur Stanley and his cousin, Judge Lamar Stanley, ever an heirloom, the diamond from the sky, found in a fallen meteor...

Tom Blake, a detective of Richmond, Virginia, hired by Hagar, proposes to convict Blair. Hagar proposes silence to Mrs. Stanley as the price of Fairfax society. Blair strikes down Hagar and steals the finger prints...

The diamond is later picked up by an Indian woman, Dr. Lee, Arthur learns, died of heart disease. Becoming very rich, he buys Stanley Hall, sold at auction through Blake, and also provides for Hagar and Esther. Luke Lovell buys the diamond, but loses it in a fight.

Vivian is saved from drowning by Powell, who is infatuated by her. Smythe finds the diamond and gives it to Esther to deliver to Arthur. Blair joins Vivian in Los Angeles. Durand, "king of diamonds," a crook, knows to Vivian, goes to a saloon to try to discover the diamond...

CHAPTER LV.

A ROMANY RYE. STRANGE irony of fate! The gem desired, the great jewel that from "a charm against harm" had come to be a curse, was grasped again by Luke Lovell's gypsy hands...

John Powell, sometime Arthur Stanley of Stanley Hall, born son of Hagar Harding, sat collapsed in his chair. As Luke Lovell grasped the diamond table, Luke growled and tore it from Arthur's resisting grasp...

stood without hope and without fear. Without 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.

Blair, for whose sake he had borne undeservedly the brand of Cain 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, you false, 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.

"I look strange to you, huh?" 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 slip was all the proof that was needed against the poor ignorant gypsy."

"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—in me, they sent me to the pen.

"I don't look like I used to, do I? That's prison pallor that even the sun of the desert couldn't wholly take away."

"I'm thinner, too, but I'll fatten on you. I'll spare 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 so-called cousin, your pal and fellow crook, Blair Stanley? Out with the fair lady, I suppose? He shall feed and clothe me and be my banker too."

"Dunked, who helped you two railroad me to prison is dead, I hear. All fine gentlemen, eh, the whole of you! Well, I shall be a gentleman, too, a regular Romany Rye. You know what that means—it means gypsy gentleman. And now that I have fed, come

and clothe me. Your stunkies are asleep, so you shall be my dunkey! One Romany Rye as valet to another!"

And Luke rose from where he had gorged, and Arthur followed him with a look in his suit of rooms and wardrobe upstairs.

The storm had passed; a few heavy drops fell from the haze of the live oak and hissed as they fell on the ebb 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 save him had held Hagar to life.

A harvest of heartaches through the years, sorrows 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 the passing of Hagar.

"Yes, live soft!" he moaned. "Live soft in your luxury while I have wandered like a hunted wolf in the wilds. But now I shall live soft, and you shall be my servant and my banker. First, you shall feed me!"

And Luke, placing the diamond again in his rags, sat down and bolted the food that had been brought the master of the house hours ago, but which that soul shattered wretch had not the heart to taste.

As in a daze, as in a dream, Arthur

the slower moving cavalcade of gypsies and bid them hasten. This Quabba did.

The caravan was not far behind them, for nearing Los Angeles Hagar had given orders to move 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 reveled, little knowing John Powell waited opportunity in the departure of Luke to drink his toast to death at his mansion in Los Angeles.

They drank and reveled 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 elder of the twain.

Up the steps of the roadhouse piazza, scattering the last raindrops from his apparel, came Dick Jones. With him was a lady whom he addressed as Gert. It was not the first roadhouse these late arrived joy riders had stopped at. Mr. Jones was thick of speech, flushed of face and unsteady of gait.

The lady he called Gert was more composed. She was rocking the remark that she was as dry as a fish 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 lady, but as for him," replied Blair carelessly, "that the boozey 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 hand steady the next day," Blair answered.

"As for John Powell—my boss, as you call him—since he has taken to dope and lying 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 boob until he hopes 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 talked with the lady he called Gert.

Upon her ample bosom there hung a dainty lavalliere, suspended by a heavy chain. "Pretty nice piece of junk, Gert!" said Jones. "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 1,000 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."

"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 \$50 to keep my mouth shut about it."

"But I don't have to keep my mouth shut about anything for anybody, for all I got for the way I worked in his office was to be thrown out! Wait till I see Powell; I'll get my job back all right, and nobody won't stop me!"

(To be Continued)

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