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CHAPTER I. A Heritage of Hate.

IT is June in Virginia, June in the year of our Lord 1882. The fields are green, the early blossoming of the honeysuckle gives a fragrance to the air. At such a time, in such a scene and such surroundings, two horsemen meet. Both are men of striking appearance and proud presence and are in the maturity of their middle manhood. They are Stauleys, cousins in blood. The one on the bay hunter, Judge Lamar Stanley, is smooth of face, that is marked with cruel and heavy lines. His face is harsh and set, and the grim lines of his countenance set the grimmer at the approach of his kinsman, Colonel Arthur Stanley. The latter rides his chestnut saddler like a soldier. Judge Stanley's seat is that of a huntsman, and as they ride they differ. Colonel Stanley's face is kinder. A white mustache and imperial add to his soldierly appearance.

In Richmond during the war Judge Lamar Stanley had been high in the councils of the cabinet of President Jefferson Davis. In the field his cousin, Arthur Stanley, followed the fortunes of the Confederate arms as a member of the staff of General Lee. Crossing each other in love, crossing each other in martial, civic and social ambitions, their mutual hatred grew with their growing years. There were deep causes for all this in the thwarted social ambitions of the judge. As the scion of the elder branch of the American Stauleys, springing from their common ancestor, Sir Arthur Stanley, a gentleman adventurer, who came to America in 1630, Colonel Stanley held possession of the precious family heirloom, the diamond from the sky.

The family tradition ran that this great gem had fallen in a blazing meteor at the feet of Sir Arthur Stanley three centuries ago just as he was about to be hanged at the stake by the Indians, whom he had in some way affronted and aroused.

The legend was that the Indians had deemed the falling meteor an omen from the Great Spirit that the white man about to be tortured was under the favor of his protection. This legend further stated that Sir Arthur Stanley himself had accepted the diamond from the sky as a token of supernatural favor, especially as the Indians had called it "the fallen star," and as "The Fallen Star" Sir Arthur Stanley himself had been called after his banishment from the court of King James of England for some wild escapade of gallantry when he was but turned of twenty-two.

In the age stained family archives kept in the strong box at Stanley hall, the great mansion home of Colonel Stanley, there was the will of the wild Sir Arthur, and at its end there was a strange prophetic clause. This clause read that when the noble line of Stauleys became extinct in England and an heir of the old Stanley earldom was sought among the "elbow sons" of the American family of Stauleys in Virginia the diamond from the sky, the heritage of the elder son of this elder branch, should be borne and worn back to England by the American heir when he came into his English earldom.

At the time we write that is, in June, 1882—the last of the earl of Stanley was a bachelor invalid and reclusive, without hope or desire of an heir.

Colonel Stanley had no son to succeed to the earldom in England. He was married to a fair young wife, who expected shortly to bear a son.

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Were this child a girl it could have no hope for the English great title in the family nor to ever possess the diamond from the sky.

On the other hand, Judge Lamar Stanley had a son, a sturdy boy of three. His proud wife, equally with himself, dreamed of a day when this boy should bear the honors and have the vast estates of the Stanley earldom and the wonderful, priceless diamond from the sky.

As the two horsemen, kinsman and foe, rode down upon each other in a smiling Virginia lane neither would swerve his horse a hairs-breadth for the other. Into each other, full tilt, their blooded horses charged, and then the superior horsemanship of the soldier, skilled in cavalry encounters, told. Over went horse and judge into the dust of the road, and, with a mocking laugh and not deigning to look back at his fallen kinsman, who arose and cursed and shook his fist at him, Colonel Stanley rode on.

The judge, discomfited in the dust, saw the dark face of a gypsy grinning at him through a hedge near by. The hedge was on the property of Judge Stanley. Mounted on his horse again he now saw a gypsy van on the other side of the hedge. Judge Stanley, quivering with rage, rode into the gap of the hedge and hoarsely ordered off the intruders.

"But, yo' see, it is like this," expostulated the gypsy. "I am alone here with my wife, sir. Our people has gone on. My wife is very sick. We can't go on, sir."

"What do I care what ails your wretched wife?" snarled the judge. "Drive your horses off my land and get out. I am judge in this county."

"Mebbe you are president of the United States, too," grumbled the gypsy. "Do you think you own the roads because the gentleman that just rode by knocked you off your horse on the road?"

Roused to a burst of fury, the judge drove his horse at the gypsy and asked him cruelly with the heavy riding whip he always carried. A wan but handsome gypsy woman, clutching at her side as though in pain, tottered out from the van as though to protect the judge from the slender brutality of the horseman. Stanley struck the gypsy woman across the face, leaving a livid welt. To his surprise she never flinched, but faced him dauntlessly.

"The bitterest disappointment of your life and a death that will be a buzzard's feast for you for that blow," she said tensely, a light of prophecy in her courageous eyes.

The judge faltered and wheeled his horse, but turning to the gypsy man he cursed him again and bid him be off his land. Then he rode on. Meanwhile Colonel Stanley had ridden to the village church and had halted his horse at the gate of a pretty cottage. A sign by the gate bore the words, "Dr. Henry Lee."

The doctor was an amiable man of some sixty years, inclined to corpulence, a kinsman of General Robert E. Lee. The doctor had been a surgeon in the Confederate army. Some fifteen years older than the colonel, he had been the guardian of the other, during the war the colonel had saved the doctor's life by carrying him when wounded back to the Confederate lines under a galling fire. A further bond between them, if others were needed, was the mutual hatred they bore to Judge Lamar Stanley, who through some legal chicanery had impoverished the doctor in his old age, a breach of confidence if not of trust. "Yes, doctor, come at once. My wife will need you tonight," said the colonel.

As the colonel neared his estates and was within sight of the broad lawn of his colonial mansion, Stanley hall, a landmark of the countryside, he saw a gypsy van approaching. On the driving seat were two figures, a man and a woman. The man was following horse cursals at the distance the colonel recognized as his hated cousin, the judge.

As he heard the approaching gypsy outfit the colonel noticed the woman had fainted from pain and weariness. He had just time to wheel his horse close beside the van and catch her as she was falling from the seat.

In a few words the gypsy man explained their miserable situation. The kindly heart of the colonel was touched. The fainting woman had now revived and was listening anxiously. "So the judge Stanley has ordered you off the earth?" roared the colonel. "Well, my good man, that little crowd of woods right over there, not far from my house, belongs to me. Camp there as long as you wish and I will see your sick wife gets every attention. She expects a child, you say? Ah, the curse of Eve falls alike in lot and mission. We expect this same momentous event at my house. You are doubly welcome. I will send Dr. Lee, our family physician, to attend your wife. The gypsy woman now spoke for the first time. "For your kind heart I owe you a bitter triumph over those you hate the most comes to you, sir."

"Well, better fortune than that to the child you expect," said the colonel with a kindly smile. "And here is \$20 to buy christening clothes and found the fortune of my expected namesake—if he is a boy." (To be continued.)

Music and Drama

Manager Gus Hill has launched another winner apparently in his latest production "Bringing Up Father", a new three act singing and dancing comedy suggested by the popular cartoons of George McManus, the famous artist. The latest offering will be at the Grand Opera House on Tuesday evening next. In point of interest and continuity, the vehicle is easily the best that Mr. Hill has fostered in his long and successful career as a surveyor of wholesome theatricals. The aim has been to provide entertainment on a scale calculated to appeal to the masses as well as the classes. There are no lagging moments in the far which accrues from the situations as well as the lines of the piece which has been pronounced one of the best of its kind now catering to the approval of a critical and exacting theatre-going public.

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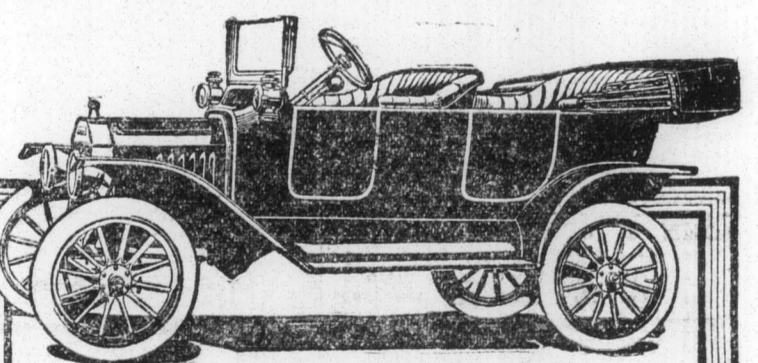
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