

## A Diamond in the Rough

**Marilyn Land**

iUniverse (Jun 7, 2017)

Softcover \$24.95 (438pp)

978-1-5320-2140-4

*A Diamond in the Rough is a multilayered family epic that is as unpredictable as it is action-packed.*

Marilyn Land's *A Diamond in the Rough* is an earnest novel about life's biggest milestones; its ambitious narrative spans decades and continents, exploring themes of persistence in the face of loss in ways that are both heartening and heartbreaking in turn.

Apprentice diamond cutter Jacob Lyons has just turned seventeen in wartime London when a horrific tragedy forces him to make grave choices about his life's path far too early, and he gives up his trade to join the RAF. A mystery element is introduced when Jacob, who years later is a successful pilot, learns he has inherited a bejeweled chest from a late, gem-dealing uncle.

Jacob travels across the globe to South Africa and Israel to collect both the treasure and details of his family history. To his shock, the spoils of his estate make him a rich man. A surprise reunion with his childhood sweetheart Lexi gives him the unexpected opportunity to finally have a family.

While the novel's central themes of family and fortune are strong, they are sometimes lost under the weight of everything else that's happening. The narrative style is inconsistent. The story at various times takes the form of an action/adventure tale, a romance, and even a city guidebook. Historical events are recounted throughout as a backdrop to the action—from Jesse Owens's gold medal to the creation of the state of Israel—but the impact of these events on the central characters' lives is unclear, and so these asides end up seeming out of place.

Jacob's resilience keeps the story intriguing. The obstacles he faces are extraordinary, yet he somehow perseveres. He works toward his goals to understand his family's history; find and keep hold of Lexi; build the business his father would have wanted; and reunite with his newly formed family against enormous odds after the war.

While it's painfully believable that just when the loose ends start to feel tied up, another complication gets in the way of Jacob living a peaceful life, what informs and motivates his persistence through those relentless challenges is not fully explored.

Jacob wholly embodies the stiff-upper-lipped English archetype: in perpetual motion forward, never stopping to ruminate or reflect on either his remarkable adventures or his grave setbacks. Jacob remains stoic and steadfastly resolved at the center of every challenge in the story even when it seems impossible that he could be so composed, which feels too convenient.

*A Diamond in the Rough* is a multilayered family epic that is as unpredictable as it is action-packed.

SARAH STEWART (October 2, 2017)

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