

The Diamond Coterie

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(Continued.)

There Burrill showed such marked symptoms of outbreak that Mr. Lamotte who, throughout the hour they had passed in the drawing room, had been a quiet but close observer, thought it wise to interpose, and artfully attempted to avert the impending storm by saying:—

"Now that sounds natural. I'm glad that you feel like shopping, Sybil, and like getting out more. Very glad, aren't you, Burrill?"

But Mr. Burrill had no notion of being thus appeased; instead of spiking a gun Jasper Lamotte had opened a battery.

"I'm delighted to hear that Mrs. Burrill has stopped moping," he said gruffly; "but I'll be hanged if I'm glad to hear myself left out of all the programmes, and I'll be cussed if I'm going to put up with it, either," and Mr. Burrill, being full in more senses than one, arose and paced the room with more fierceness than regularity.

Mr. Lamotte forgot himself so far as to utter an angry imprecation between his shut teeth, and to wrinkle his forehead into a dark frown. Mrs. Lamotte allowed a shade of contempt to creep about her lips as she turned her eyes upon her daughter, but Sybil looked not one whit disconcerted.

"I've got something to say about my wife," went on Mr. Burrill, "and I'm blessed if I don't say it."

What had come over Sybil? Heretofore she would in any way, in every way, have avoided an encounter with him; she would have quitted the field or have remained as deaf as a post; but now, "Say it, then, Mr. Burrill, say it, by all means, here and now," she retorted in the coolest voice imaginable.

And Mr. Burrill did say it.

"I've had enough of being made a fool of, Mrs. Sybil Burrill; I've had enough of being a carpet under your feet, and nothing better. I'm your equal, and anybody's equal, that's what I am, and I'm going to have my rights. It's very well for you to announce that you're going here and going there, Mrs. Burrill; but let me tell you that you go nowhere except John Burrill goes with you, that's settled."

Sybil laughed scornfully.

"Not quite so fast, Mr. Burrill, just stand still one moment, if you can stand still, which I doubt. You say you will accompany me wherever I go. I say you will accompany me wherever people will tolerate you, nowhere else. You are not the man to force into a gentleman's parlor; you would disgrace his kitchen, his stable. The streets are free to all, you can accompany me in my drives; the churches are open to the vilest, you can go with me there; but into the houses of my friends you shall not go; I will not so abuse friendship. You have counted upon me to gain you entrance to Wardour and to a dozen houses, the thresholds of which you will never cross. If you are not satisfied with this, then you must be suited with less. I will not be seen with you at all."

Again Jasper Lamotte, vexed and alarmed for the denouement, interposed; knowing she was striking at Burrill's chief weakness:—

"But Sybil, Miss Wardour, here in her meetings with Burrill, tacitly recognized his right to call."

She turned upon him swiftly.

"You know why she did it, sir; it is useless to discuss the question. You may calm Mr. Burrill in any way you please, or can. You know the terms on which he became my husband. He will continue my husband on my own terms. He shall not cross the threshold of Wardour, protected by my presence, and without it the door would close in his face. If Mr. Burrill does not like my terms, let him say so. It is not in his power or yours to alter my decision." And Sybil once more gathered together her silken skirts, lest in passing they should brush the now collapsed Mr. Burrill, and swept from the room.

Mr. Lamotte turned to his wife.

"You must talk with that girl," he said, savagely, "what the devil ails you all?"

Mrs. Lamotte arose and faced him.

"I should be wasting my breath," she replied, looking him straight in the eye. "You have tried that girl a little too far, Mr. Lamotte," and she followed after her daughter.

A roar, not unlike the bellow of a bull, recalled Mr. Lamotte to the business of the moment. John Burrill, having recovered from his momentary stupor of astonishment, was dancing an improvised, and unsteady can-can, among the chairs and tables, beating the air with his huge fists, and howling with rage.

Seeing this, Mr. Lamotte did first, a very natural thing; he uttered a string of oaths, "not loud, but deep," and next, a very sensible thing; he rang for brandy and hot water.

And now the battle is in Mr. Lamotte's hands, why need we linger. Brandy hot will always conquer a John Burrill.

menced his vigil underneath the drawing-room windows, he had been shocked into sobriety by his sister's violence, and his own rage against her tormentors. Growing more and more sober, and more and more sullen, he stabled the ill-used thoroughbred with his own hands, and then, avoiding alike both servants and family, he crept into the house, and up to his own room.

In the morning he awoke betimes, and arose promptly; he had come to know the habits of his father and John Burrill, and he had good reason for knowing them, having of late made their movements his study.

Burrill would sleep until nine o'clock; he always did after a debauch, and he, Evan, had recently formed a habit of appearing late at breakfast also. From his room he kept up a surveillance over all the household after a method invented by himself.

He knew when his stately mother swept down to the breakfast room, followed soon after by his father.

The family all aimed to breakfast before the obnoxious Burrill had come to his waking time, and so were rid of him for one meal, all but Evan. He and his brother-in-law breakfasted together later, and in the most amiable manner. After a time he heard Frank go down, and the ring of his heels assured Evan that he was equipped for the saddle.

A little later, and, from his post at his front window, screened by the flowing curtains, Evan saw the horses led around, saw Sybil come down the steps in her trailing, dark cloth habit, saw her spring lightly to the saddle, and heard a mocking laugh ring out, in response to some sally from Frank, as they cantered away.

"Act one in the insurrection," said Evan, as he turned away from the window. "Now let me prepare for action." His preparation were few and simple; he removed his boots and coat, and crept out, and softly along the hall until he reached Burrill's door. Here he paused, to assure himself that he was not observed, and then softly tried the door; as he had expected, it opened without resistance, for Burrill had been escorted to bed, by his faithful father-in-law, in a state of mellowness, that precluded all thought for the night, or the dangers it might bring forth. Evan entered, cautiously closing the door as he had found it, and approached the bed. Its occupant was sleeping heavily, and breathing melodiously. Satisfied on this point, Evan opened a commodious wardrobe near the bed, threw down some clothing, spread it out smoothly, and then stepping within, he drew the doors together, fastened them by a hook of his own contrivance, on the inside; for Evan had made this wardrobe do service before. Then he laid himself down as comfortably as possible, and applied his eye to some small holes punctured in the dark wood, and quite invisible to casual observation.

He had begun to grow restless in his hiding-place, and fiercely disgusted with the sleeper's monotonously musical whistle, when his waiting was rewarded. The door once again opened cautiously, and this time, Jasper Lamotte entered. He looked carefully about him, then closing and locking the door, he approached the sleeper.

"I knew it," thought Evan; "the fox will catch the wolf napping, and nail him before he can fortify himself with a morning dram."

It took some time to arouse the sleeper, but Jasper Lamotte was equal to the occasion; this not being his first morning interview with his son-in-law; and, after a little, John Burrill was sufficiently awake to scramble through with a hasty toilet, talking as he dressed.

"Business is getting urgent," he grumbled, thrusting a huge foot into a gorgeously decorated slipper. "I'd rather talk after breakfast."

"Pshaw, you are always drunk enough to be unreasonable before noon. Turn cold water upon your head and be ready to attend to what I have to say."

What he had to say took a long time in the telling, for it was a long, long hour before the conference broke up, and the two men left the room together.

Then the doors of the wardrobe opened slowly, and a pale, pinched face looked forth; following the face came the body of Evan Lamotte, shaken as if with an ague. Mechanically he closed the wardrobe, and staggered rather than walked from the room. Once more within his own room he locked the door with an unsteady hand, and then threw himself headlong upon the bed, uttering groan after groan, as if in pain.

After a time he arose from the bed, still looking as if he had seen a ghost, and, going to a desk, opened it, and took therefrom a capacious drinking flask; raising it to his lips he drained half its contents, and the stimulant acting upon overstrained nerves, seemed to restore rather than to intoxicate.

"At last," he muttered to himself, "I am at the bottom of the mystery, and—I am powerless." Then, like his sister on the previous day, he muttered, "There is but one way—only one—and it must be done!" Then throwing himself once more upon the bed, he moaned:—

"Oh, that I, the accursed of the family, heretofore, should live to be—but pshaw! it is for Sybil I care. But—for to-day let them all keep out of my sight—I could not see them and hold my peace."

He pocketed the half empty flask, and made his way from the house to be

by none at Mapleton for the next twenty-four hours.

After that morning interview with his father-in-law, John Burrill blusters less for a few days, and makes himself less disagreeable to the ladies. He accepts the situation, or seems to; he rides out on one or two sunny afternoons with Mrs. Lamotte and Sybil, and on one of these occasions they met Constance Wardour, driving with her aunt. The heiress of Wardour smiles gayly and kisses the tips of her fingers to the ladies, but there is no chance for him—he might be the footman for all Constance seems to see or know to the contrary. This happens in a thoroughfare where they are more than likely to have been observed, and John Burrill chafes inwardly, and begins to ponder how he can, in the face of all the Lamottes, gain a recognition from Constance Wardour. In his sober moments this becomes a haunting thought; in his tipsy ones it grows to be a mania.

One day, during this lull in the family siege, Sybil and her mother visit the city, doing a mountain of shopping, and returning the next day. Sybil keeps on as she began on the night when she listened to her father and husband while they held council in her mother's room. She is full of energy and nervous excitement always, and the old stupor of dullness, and apathetic killing of time, never once returns. But Mrs. Lamotte likes this last state not much better than the first; neither does Constance; but they say nothing, for the reason that it would be useless, as they know too well. Sybil goes out oftener, sits with the family more, and seems like one waiting anxiously for a long expected event.

John Burrill is a little disturbed at Sybil's visit to the city. He knows that she will go and come as she pleases there, unquestioned, and, if she choose, unattended by her mother. And, without knowing why, he feels inclined to rebel; but he is still under the spell of that morning interview, and so holds his peace.

Evan, too, under the same uncanny spell, goes about more morose than usual, more silent than usual, more sarcastic than usual. More and more, too, he attaches himself to John Burrill; they drink together in the dining room, and then repair together to "Old Forty Rods," or some other favorite haunt. Together they seek for pleasure in the haunts of the vilest, Evan continually playing upon the vanity and credulity in Burrill's nature, to push him forward as the leader in all their debauches, the master spirit, the bon vivant, par excellence.

And Burrill goes on, on, down and down. He begins to confide all his maudlin woes to Evan, and that young man is ever ready with sympathy and advice that is not calculated to make Jasper Lamotte's position, as bear trainer, a sinecure.

But Evan contrives to leave Sybil tolerably free from this nuisance for a time; but only for a time. John Burrill has other advisers, other exhorters, other spurs that urge him on to his own downfall.

Burrill begins to throw himself in the way of Constance Wardour; to meet her carriage here and there; to stand near by as she goes and comes on her shopping excursions; to drive past Wardour Place alone and often.

At first, this only amuses Miss Wardour; then it annoys her; then, when she finds her walks in the grounds so often overlooked by the slowly passing Burrill, she begins to mark his maneuvers with a growing vexation.

But Burrill perseveres, and the more nearly he approaches the fourth stage of his intoxication, the more open becomes his stare, the more patent his growing admiration.

(To be Continued.)

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