

The Diamond Coterie

By LAWRENCE M. LYNCH

(E. M. Van Dewater)

Author of "A Woman's Crime," "John Arthur's Ward," "The Lost Witness," "A Slender Clue," "Dangerous Ground," "Against Odds," Etc., Etc.

(Continued)

CHAPTER XXXI

"Well!"

It is Mr. Wedron, of the New York Bar, who utters this monosyllable. He sits at the library table in the little lawyer's sanctum; opposite him is his host, and a little farther away, stands Ray Vandeyck, a living, breathing, gloomy faced but mute interrogation point. He has just been introduced to Mr. Wedron, and he is anxiously waiting to hear how the two men propose to save from the gallows a man who will make no effort to save himself.

"Well!" repeats Mr. Wedron, "you have seen the prisoner?"

"We have seen him."

"And the result?"

"Was what you predicted? See, here in my note book, I have his very words, you can judge for yourself."

O'Meara passes his note book across to his questioner, and the latter reads rapidly, the short sentences scrawled by his host.

"So," he says, lifting his eyes from the note book, "Doctor Heath refuses to defend himself. Mr. Vandeyck," turning suddenly upon Ray, "sit down, sir; draw your chair up here; I wish to look at you, sir."

Not a little astonished, but obeying orders like a veteran, Ray complies dutifully.

"Now then," says Mr. Wedron, with brisk good nature, "let's get down to business. Mr. Vandeyck, I am here to save Clifford Heath; I was at the inquest; I have had long experience in this sort of business, and I arrive at my conclusions rapidly, after a way of my own. O'Meara, prepare to write a synopsis of our reasonings."

"Of your reasonings," corrects the lawyer, drawing pen and paper toward himself.

"Of my reasonings then, first; are you ready, O'Meara?"

"All ready."

"Well, then; and don't start to be astonished at anything I may say. First, Clifford Heath knows who stole his handkerchief; and who stole his knife."

A grunt of approbation from O'Meara; a stare of astonishment from Ray.

"For some reason, Heath has resolved to screen the thief," scratches, scratch.

"But he does not feel at all sure that the one who stole his belongings is the one who struck the blow."

Ray stares in astonishment.

"Now then, there has been a plot on foot against Heath, and I believe him to have been aware of it." He is looking at Ray, and that young man starts guiltily.

"Put down this, O'Meara," says Mr. Wedron, suddenly withdrawing his gaze.

"Doctor Heath has nothing to blush for in his past. He withholds his story through pride, not through fear; but it may be necessary to tell it in court, in order to prove that he did not know John Burrill previous to the meeting in Nance Burrill's cottage; and if he refuses to tell his story, I must tell it for him."

It is O'Meara's turn to be surprised, and he writes on with eager eye and bated breath.

"And now, O'Meara," concludes Mr. Wedron, "there were two parties sworn to-day, who did not tell all they knew concerning this affair. One was—Mr. Francis Lamotte."

Ray breathes again.

"The other was—Mr. Raymond Vandeyck."

Ray colors hotly, and half starts from his seat. O'Meara lays down his pen, and stares across at his contemporary, but that individual proceeds with unruffled serenity.

"Mr. Vandeyck did not tell all that he knows, because he feared that in some way his testimony might be turned against Clifford Heath. Here he can have no such scruples. Our first step in this case must be to find out who Clifford Heath suspects; and why he will not denounce him."

"And that bids fair to be a tough undertaking," says O'Meara.

"Not at all, Mr. O'Meara. I expect that this young man can give us all the help we need."

"I burst out Ray. "You mistake, sir; I can not help you."

"Softly, sir; softly; reflect a little, this is no time for over-nice scruples; besides, I know too much already. We three are here to help Clifford Heath. Mr. Vandeyck, can you not trust to our discretion; you may be able, unknown to yourself, to speak the word that will free your friend from the foulest charge that was ever preferred against a man. Will you answer my questions frankly, or—must we set detectives to hunt for the information you could so easily give?"

The calm, absolute tones of the stranger have their weight with the mystified Ray. Instinctively he feels the power of the man and the weight of the argument.

"What do you wish to know, sir?" he says, quietly. "I am ready to serve Clifford Heath."

"Ah, very good," signing to O'Meara.

"First, sir, as a friend of Doctor Heath, do you know if he has recently had any trouble, any disappointment? He is a young man. Has he been jilted, or—"

"Ah-h-h!" breaks in O'Meara; "why didn't you ask me that Wedron? Upon my soul, I have heard plenty about this same business."

"Then take the witness stand, sir. What do you know? You won't be over

delicate in bringing facts to the surface."

"Why," rubbing his hands serenely, "I can't see your drift, Wedron, any more than can Vandeyck here; but I have heard Mrs. O'Meara discuss the probable future of Clifford Heath until I have it by heart. Not long ago she was sure he, Heath, was in love with Miss Wardour, and we all thought she rather favored him, although it's hard to guess at a woman's real feelings. Later, quite lately, in fact, the thing seemed to be all off, and my wife has commented on it not a little."

"Oh!" ejaculates Mr. Wedron. "And had Doctor Heath any rivals?"

"Miss Wardour has plenty of lovers; but I believe that Mr. Frank Lamotte was the only rival he ever had any reason to fear."

"Ah! so Mr. Frank Lamotte has been Heath's rival? Handsome fellow, that Lamotte! Mr. Vandeyck," turning suddenly upon Ray, "the ice is now broken. What do you know, or think, or believe, about this attachment to Miss Wardour?"

"I think that Heath really hoped to win her at one time, and I believed his chances were good. Something, I don't know what, has come between them."

"Do you think she has refused him?"

"Honestly, I don't, sir. I think there is a misunderstanding."

"And young Lamotte, what of him?"

"I suppose he has come in ahead; in fact, he has very good cause for thinking him engaged to Miss Wardour."

"Bah!" cries O'Meara, contemptuously. "I don't believe it. There's nothing shy about Constance. She would have told me her wife."

"I'll tell you my reasons for saying this, gentlemen," says Ray, after a moment's hesitation. "I'll tell you all I can about the business. Some time ago, shortly after Heath's last encounter with Burrill, I came into town one day to keep an appointment with him."

"Stay! Can you recall the date?"

"It was on Monday, I believe, and early in the month."

"Go on."

"I met one of the Wardour servants, who gave me a note. It was a request that I wait upon Miss Wardour at once; she wished to consult me on some private matters. Miss Wardour and I, you must understand, are very old friends."

"Yes, yes; go on."

"I excused myself to Heath, and, just as I was leaving the office, Lamotte came in. He challenged me, in handglove, as though he had a right to say who should visit Wardour. He overheard me telling Heath where I was going."

"Yes."

"During my call, I made some allusion to Lamotte, speaking of him as he accepted lover. She did not deny the charge, my language implied, and I came away believing her engaged to Lamotte. When I returned to Heath's office, Lamotte had gone, and Heath asked me, rather abruptly, if I believed Miss Wardour would marry Lamotte. I replied, that I did believe it then, for the first time."

"Ah, yes! Mr. Vandeyck, are you aware that on this same day, this Monday of which you speak, Clifford Heath received an anonymous note, in a feminine hand; warning him against danger, and begging him to leave town?"

"What, sir?" starting and coloring hotly.

"Ah, you are aware of that fact. Did you see that note, Mr. Vandeyck?"

"I did," eagerly.

"How did Heath treat it?"

"With utter indifference."

"So! And did he, to your knowledge, receive other warnings?"

"I am quite sure he did not."

"During your call at Wardour's office, did Miss Wardour mention Doctor Heath?"

"She did," reluctantly.

"She did. Can you recall what was said?"

"It was soon after that street encounter with Burrill. I related the circumstance; she had not heard of it."

"And did she seem unfriendly toward Heath?"

"On the contrary, I think she was, and is, his friend."

"You met Lamotte in Heath's office. Does Lamotte go there often?"

"Why, he made a pretence of studying with Heath, but he never stuck close to anything; he had read a little in the city, I believe."

"Then he is quite at home in Heath's office?"

"Quite at home."

"Thank you, Mr. Vandeyck." Mr. Wedron draws back from the table and smiles blandly upon poor Ray. "Thank you, sir. You are an admirable witness; for the second time to-day you have evaded leading questions, and withheld more than you have told. But I won't bear malice. I see that you are resolved not to tell why Miss Wardour summoned you to her presence on that particular day; so I won't insist upon it—I will find out in some other way."

"Thank you," retorts Ray, rather stiffly. "It will be a relief to me, if you can do so. Can I answer any more questions, sir?"

"Not to-night. And, Mr. Vandeyck, as a friend of Clifford Heath's, we ask you to help us, and to share our confidence. Now, we must find out first, if Constance Wardour is engaged to Lamotte; and second, the cause of the estrangement between herself and Doctor Heath. Can you suggest a plan?"

"Yes," replies Ray, a gentle break in

CHAPTER XXXII

During the night that saw Sybil Burrill's reason give way under the long, horrible strain that had borne upon it; the night that witnessed the downfall of Frank Lamotte's cherished hopes, and closed the earthly career of John Burrill; Mrs. Lamotte and Mrs. Alston hovered over the bed where lay Sybil, now tossing in delirium, now sinking into insensibility. Early in the evening Dr. Heath had been summoned, and he had responded promptly to Mrs. Lamotte's eager call.

They could do but little just then, save to administer opiates; they told them there was every symptom of brain fever; by to-morrow he would know what course of treatment to pursue; until then keep the patient quiet, humor all her whims, so far as was possible; give her no stimulants, and, if there was any marked change send for him at once.

The two anxious women hung upon his words; afterward, they both remembered how cheerful, how brave and strong he seemed that night; how gentle his voice was; how kindly his glance; how soothing and reassuring his manner.

In the gray of the morning, Sybil dropped into one of her lethargies after hours of uneasy mutterings, that would have been mad ravings but for the doctor's powerful opiate; and then, after a word combat with Mrs. Lamotte, just such an argument as has occurred by hundreds of sick beds, where two weary, anxious watchers vie with each other for the place beside the bed, and the right to watch in weariness, while the other rests; after such an argument, Mrs. Alston yielded to the solicitations of her hostess, and withdrew, to refresh herself with a little sleep.

The vigil had been an unusual one, and Mrs. Alston was very weary. No sound disturbed the quiet of the elegant guest chamber where she lay; and so it happened that a brisk rapping at her door, at ten o'clock in the morning, awoke her from heavy, dreamless slumber, and set her wandering wits to wondering vaguely what all this strangeness meant. Then suddenly recalling the events of the previous night, she sat up in bed and called out—

"Who is there?"

"It's ten o'clock, madam," replied the voice of Mrs. Lamotte's maid; "and will you please breakfast in your room, or in the dining room?"

Slipping slowly out from the downy bed, Mrs. Alston crossed to the door, and peering out at the servant, said—

"I will breakfast here, Ellen. How is Sybil?"

"She is worse, I think, madam, and Mrs. Lamotte is very uneasy; I think she wishes to speak with you, or she would not have had you awakened."

"Tell her I will come to her at once; and Mrs. Alston closed the door and began a hurried toilet; before it was completed, Mrs. Lamotte herself appeared; she was pale and heavy eyed, and seemed much agitated.

"Pardon my intrusion," she began, hurriedly; "I am uneasy about Sybil; she is growing very restless, and for more than an hour has called incessantly for Constance. Do you think your niece would come to us this morning? Her strong, cool nerves might have some influence upon poor Sybil."

"I am sure she will come," replied Mrs. Alston, warmly, "and without a moment's delay. I will drive home at once, Mrs. Lamotte, and send Constance back."

"Not until you have had breakfast, Mrs. Alston. And how can I thank you for your goodness, and your help, during the past horrible night?"

"By saying nothing at all about it, my dear, and by ordering the carriage the moment I have swallowed a cup of coffee," replied the good-hearted soul, cheerily. "I hope and trust that Sybil will recover very soon; but if she grows worse, you must let me help you all I can."


Half an hour later the Lamotte carriage rolled swiftly across the bridge and towards Wardour; and so Mrs. Alston, for the time at least, was spared the shock that fell upon the house of Mapleton, scarce fifteen minutes later—the news of John Burrill's murder, and the finding of the body.

Little more than an hour later Constance Wardour sprang from the carriage at the door of Mapleton, and ran hurriedly up the broad steps. The outer door stood wide open, and a group of servants were huddled about the door of the drawing room, with pale, affrighted faces, and panic-stricken manner.

Seeing them, Constance at once takes the alarm. Sybil must be worse; must be very ill indeed. Instantly the question rises to her lips—

(To be Continued.)

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Louis Pasteur was of humble origin and was always proud of it, but he belonged to the peculiar race of Franco-Comtois, or old Burgundians, who were noted for industry, simplicity and pledged persistence in any course which they deem right. Pasteur's character was a perfect exemplification of these qualities.

He was a great patriot and a true republican, and in speaking once in praise of the chemist Bertrand, who had risen from being an apothecary's assistant to presiding over the world's scientific congress, he uttered these words, which deserve to be remembered by every one who is struggling to make his own way in the world:

"The true democracy is the one that gives to every individual the chance to accomplish his maximum of effort."

An amusing anecdote is related which illustrates Pasteur's candor and good nature at the same time. One day at the Academy of Sciences a position which he took was actively controverted by two men who knew not a tittle of what he knew of the subject. He heard them patiently and then rose and with much animation answered them to the satisfaction of every one present; but, warmed up with the controversy, he forgot himself a little. Turning to the two men, he said:

"Do you know what you lack? You"—indicating one of them—"lack the power of observation, and you"—the other—"lack the reasoning faculty!"

There was an outcry at this, and Pasteur was rebuked by the president for exceeding the proper limits. Pasteur saw that the rebuke was just.

"I am sorry," he said, "I was carried away by the heat of the discussion. I beg the pardon of the members to whom I have referred and of this honorable body."

Every one smiled at the frankness of this apology. Then Pasteur added:

"Having recognized my fault, may I not mention an extenuating circumstance in my favor? All that I said was true—absolutely true! And he seemed to wonder that everybody present laughed, including his two opponents.— Youth's Companion.

A Turkish Joke.

A capital anecdote is told of the late sultan.

He was very fond of gossip, and sent for the banker, Abraham Beg, to learn the small talk of Pera and Stamboul. As Abraham was being conducted to the sultan's residence by the master of the horse, that functionary begged him, should the sultan question him on the subject, to say that the funds were at 80, his majesty having been so informed by his ministers.

Poor Abraham consented.

He had not been long with Abdul Aziz when he was questioned as to the funds, and replied as he had promised.

To the horror of the banker the sultan expressed himself delighted, and handed Abraham a large bundle of bonds to sell for him.

Abraham sold at 13 and paid Abdul Aziz 80. "The sultan had originated that little 'joke'."

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