

# The Diamond Coterie

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

(Continued)

## CHAPTER VI.

Doctor Heath and the detective went in silence down the wide shrub-bordered walk to the spot where the doctor's horse awaited him. Here the detective paused suddenly and listened a moment.

"We should not be seen together," he said in a low tone. "Do you mount your horse and ride on slowly. I will follow."

"But—"

"No buts; I can follow you, never fear; that's my business; do you go straight home and prepare to admit me on the quiet. Stay—have you any gelatine?"

"No."

"Any plaster of Paris?"

"No."

"Any wax?"

"Only a small quantity."

"Too bad; I must have some. There will be a drug store open?"

"At this hour? Oh, yes."

"Then get me some, half a pound at least. Now move on, I hear a horse coming down the road."

"Some farmer going home. Well, I'm off, then."

"And so am I."

Half an hour later Doctor Heath was standing in his open doorway, wondering what had become of the detective, when a light touch upon his shoulder caused him to start suddenly, and turning, he saw the man for whom he watched, standing behind him, and within the dimly-lighted hall.

"Are we alone?" whispered the detective. "Is the coast clear?"

"Quite clear; but how the mischief did you get in there, man?"

"Through the door," replied Bathurst, as he followed his host into a cozy parlor, where a shaded lamp burned. "You are not a good sentinel; why, I all but brushed you; have you no sense of feeling, then; why, man, I can recognize a near presence in the darkest room."

"Now that I think of it," retorts the doctor, maliciously, "I did feel a queer sensation in the ends of my thumbs. Make yourself at home now; take that chair, rolling a comfortable-looking monster close to the round table; there are cigars and—why—I say man, have you eaten any thing since you started on this chase?"

"Now you mention it, I distinctly recollect that I have not."

"Of course not; I will wake up Mrs. Gray."

"Pray don't; I couldn't think of eating Mrs. Gray."

"Nonsense!" laughs his host; "Mrs. Gray is my housekeeper, and she is deaf as a post."

"Well, that's a comfort, the deafness. Is she dumb, too?"

"Unfortunately, no; but as I have not been home to dine, she will think she is preparing my supper, and I will tell her you are a patient come to be treated, and that I am going to give you a bed; here," tossing something which he finds upon a bookcase, across to his guest, "tie you face up in that rag, before she comes in. She will not give you a second glance; she never troubles her head about my patients."

So saying, he goes out, and the detective proceeds to spread out the "rag" to prepare his bandage. Suddenly he starts, scrutinizes closer, turns it about, and looks again, then—

"Ah!" says Mr. Bathurst; "Oh! really!"

And he folds up his bandage, and puts it in one pocket, whips a clean pocket handkerchief from another, and substituting it for the "rag," awaits the coming of his host.

"Very comfortable quarters," he muttered, looking about him. "Luxurious too; quite so. Our doctor has not forgotten how people ought to live."

The doctor's "quarters" were all that he described them. Luxurious, comfortable, and luxury and comfort do not always go hand in hand; rattleful, too. Nothing too much; nothing lacking—just the beau-ideal of a bachelor's parlor. Warm browns rightening here and there into bronze. Books, a great many and of the best. Pictures, a very few, and all rare and beautiful. Bronzes and statues in plenty. Bric-a-brac, not any, for no fair and foolish woman has trailed her skirts through these apartments, leaving traces of her presence in the shape of those small and costly abominations, recept "ceramics."

Presently Doctor Heath reappears, and not long after, Mrs. Gray bears in a heaped-up tray of edibles. Then Doctor Heath sets forth brandy and wine, and informs Mrs. Gray, through the medium of his ton fingers, that she is dismissed for the night.

When she has retired the detective unties his face, and falls upon the food spread before him, as a hungry man will. While he eats he talks a little, and his host sits opposite him, answering his frequent questions and observations, and thinking.

In past days, and under very different circumstances, these men have met and known each other, and Doctor Clifford Heath is wondering how much of his story it will be necessary to tell, in order to explain his present position, which, he knows, must seem a most strange one to his former acquaintance; for Doctor Clifford Heath, like most of us who have not passed a vegetable existence, has a history, and a past.

Of that fact, however, Mr. Bathurst seems quite oblivious as he washes down

his repast with a glass of brandy and water, and pushes back his chair from the table.

"Now, then," he begins, with his usual brisk business manner, "I'm rested and refreshed, and all ready for that white wax, if you please, Doctor Heath."

"I'm quite curious about that wax," says the doctor, rising. "Just let me draw away this table and bring up another, it's the easiest way of disposing of the dinner things, and will furnish Mrs. Gray with food for comfortable comment; she takes all such opportunities to disparage men's ways, and as she seems to enjoy them, I make it a point to afford her as many as possible," making the proposed change as he talks. "Now, then, there's a table and there's your wax."

"Now something to melt it in and over; I'm going to take an impression." There is a little difficulty about getting the necessary articles together, but after a while they are all there, and the wax is simmering in the melting cup. Then the detective takes from his pocket the borrowed bottle of chloroform, and asks for an empty vial. This being given him he pours out the chloroform carefully, and wipes the emptied bottle.

"It's a pity I can't keep this bottle just as it is," he says, eyeing the cut-glass stopper regretfully, "but it must be returned, of course; and I must do the next best. What's your notion of the original use of that little gimcrack?"

He reaches out the bottle and the doctor takes it in his hand, saying: "Why, it's from one of those dainty toilet cases used by ladies principally there will be a set, uniform in size, that are filled with perfumes of various sorts, and larger bottles, of the same pattern, for goodness knows what use. I have seen the kind, but not the pattern."

"Well," says the detective, slowly, "I think that I have seen the pattern; but where? However," dipping a stick into the melting wax, "I shall find out, and before very long."

"I wonder," says Doctor Heath, stretching out his hand for a fresh cigar, "at the fellows leaving such a testimonial as that behind them. What's your theory?"

"I have expected that question from both yourself and Miss Wardour. I am glad she did not ask me."

"Why?"

The detective takes a spoon and dips up his wax, letting it drip from the spoon, drop by drop. It is ready for use, and, without seeming aware of the doctor's presence, he busies himself with his impression taking—seeing which, Doctor Heath smokes on, and is silent.

Finally, his mould is set to cool, and the detective resumes his seat; and, quite ignoring that long neglected monosyllable inquiry, uttered by his host, begins:—

"When the burglars, for, no doubt, there were two of them, entered Miss Wardour's dressing room, they carried on a dark lantern. This one of them took, and kept with it into the sleeping room; here, he was, for a moment, troubled. He had prepared himself with the chloroform, but must use his own handkerchief, and that is marked."

"Oh! a burglar with marked linen!"

"Even so. It's nothing unusual. You reason like a reader of too many novels. Burglars are not all escaped convicts, blue-eyed and hideous; nor do they all go about in fustian. It's the burglar in broadcloth that makes us the trouble. Fustian starves, and steals, and is soon found out; runs away with its booty, as a dog runs away with its bone. Broadcloth is wiser, just as a skilled workman is wiser than a hod carrier. It brings to its service tact, study—who knows what, of scientific skill? It looks before it leaps it plans before it executes and it covers up all traces of its progress, or else leaves a network of false clues and misleading evidences. Bah! if we had only fustian to deal with, it would not be worth while to be a detective."

"Granted," says the doctor, drumming impatiently upon the table, with the fingers of his strong, white right hand. "We have to deal with a broadcloth burglar, who marks his linen, and, perhaps, perfumes it. Was it perfumed? I forgot."

"It was not perfumed. I wish it had been. Yes, ours is a broadcloth burglar. When he approached Miss Wardour's bedside, he produced from a convenient pocket, his stupefying drug and then he looked about for something with which to apply it, and at the same time, no doubt, he berates himself for omitting to provide himself with a plain, small napkin, or piece of linen. There was nothing at hand that was not too large for his purpose, and too coarse, for he understood the delicacy of his undertaking. So, he produced his pocket handkerchief, which, as I said before, was marked he tears off the half bearing the name, but, in his haste, does not observe that he has left evidence that the name was there. He then saturated the linen, and set the bottle upon the night stand, leaving his two hands free to apply his drug with utmost care. Then he pauses for a moment, to note the effect of his application, or to gaze upon the fair sleeper. And then comes a sound from the outer room, an impatient call, the click of steel implements, no matter what—he snatches up the dark lantern and, forgetting the bottle, goes out to his comrade."

"You believe there were two?"

"Yes; there were two. These affairs are seldom operated by one man."

"You said this evening that they had

blundered. It seems to me that they made a very neat job of the affair."

"They did blunder. It does look like a neat job to a non-professional, but they have left several flaws in their work. They felt very confident of future safety. I am sure, for they were shrewd fellows; that's established in my mind. There's a something about this case that puzzles me, and some queer ideas are drifting through my head, but for the present I shall keep them there. About those blunders now. That boat business was the first. There's plain proof; then look at the manner in which they stirred up the library. Why, man, didn't you reflect that those heavy chairs never could have been overturned by hasty careless hands, without coming down with a loud bang? and there are three of them, all thrown down in different positions; every one of them was lowered slowly, carefully. Why, look at that pile of books upon the floor! do you imagine they were ever tossed down from their shelves, as they appear to have been, without striking upon the floor or each other, with a thud? I can see the whole operation one man held the lantern while the other disarranged the room. But they did not do it well. That much of the business looks like the work of an amateur. Perhaps you wonder why I did not speak of this to Miss Wardour. I said enough to convince her that I had studied the matter. I did not wish to exhaust the subject, that is the business of the man who is to come. And now I think I will remove my cast, and then, my dear fellow, I am quite ready to retire, for I feel the need of all the sleep I can get between now and sunrise."

"Shocking confession," laughs the doctor, lazily. "Let me tell you it's highly improper for a detective to get sleepy, or hungry, or tired; they never do it in print."

"Which should convince you that they always do it out of it. Detectives, my dear sir, are like doctors, their success depends upon the people's faith in them, not on their own merits. Now I know that you can't see through the anatomy of old Mrs. Grundy, and tell what she had for dinner, unless, to be sure, she had been eating onions; but if Mrs. Grundy doubted for a moment your ability to don your professional spectacles and peer into the innermost depths of her disordered old being, she would write another name than yours on her books, as favorite physician."

"Guide, philosopher and friend," quotes the doctor, composedly. "Let Mrs. Grundy alone, will you, she is one of my best customers."

"She is not one of my worst, but the world is not quite filled up with Mrs. Grundy's, else our fortunes were soon made; for instance, up at Wardour Place to-night, that seraphic old lady was prepared to receive all my statements, as Mrs. G— takes your pills, on faith. But the young lady; oh, no! she has too much head for a woman."

"Why, for a woman?"

"Not got scope enough. 'Woman's kingdom's too small for her; too much top to her head; brow too broad; eyes too full; won't believe a thing is true, because you say it is true; got to convince her reason. Such people make chaps like you and me lots of bother; won't take us for granted."

"Granted we wish them to."

"Bah! Of course we wish them to! everybody wants to be taken on trust; but there, we can waive this discussion; Miss Wardour will find occupation for that head of hers for a time at least. My head must rest."

"I should think so; you are as full of whimsies as ever, when off duty, and since to-night I accept you as a detective, a la 'Mrs. Grundy,' just follow me now, Sir Trump. By the way, how will you get out of here in the morning?"

"Leave that to me. By the way, don't disturb my waxwork. I will leave the bottle and linen; do you restore them to

Miss Wardour to-morrow at the earliest hour possible to a caller. I shall present myself in my own time and way, governed, of course, by circumstances, and it is probable that you will not see me again for some time. Therefore let me say, thanks for your hospitality. Call on me when you want a service, and good night."

So saying he vanished into an inner room, the door of which the doctor has just now thrown invitingly open. As the door closes quickly, and in his very face, Clifford Heath stares blankly at it, and for a moment stands so, looking half bewildered.

Finally a look of amusement crosses his face, and he returns slowly to his seat beside the table, slowly selects a cigar, and slowly lights it.

"There's a queer customer," muses he, as he settles himself for a comfortable meditation. "He can go to sleep in the very teeth of mystery, and wake up, clear headed, in a fog. Now I can't sleep, and I've been awake longer than my allotted time, too."

Shades of my ancestors! What a day! And, oh, my prophetic soul, what will it bring forth? Well, Doctor Clifford Heath, as Doctor Clifford Heath, what is it to you? You have been honored by the confidence of Constance Wardour, what then? There was no one else in whom she could confide; may she not honor your judgment without coveting your adoration. Bah! the very fact that she confides in you proves that she cares nothing for you. However, she has a heart for somebody; that is proved by her agitation upon hearing the story, and reading the letter telling of poor Sybil Lamotte's misery. For undoubtedly in some manner she has been a victim; can it be that wretched Evan? His agitation to-day bore the look of remorse, and God knows where dissipation will not lead a man. I know something of that, too." Here he frowns darkly, and sits for a long time looking the incarnation of resentment and defiance.

"Bah!" he mutters presently, "what a blot upon the record of a proud family! A father who is a philanthropist and public benefactor; a mother who is 'une dame sans reproche' a brother against whom I can bring no charge save that he is my rival a sister, beautiful and good and accomplished, but that beauty, goodness, culture, are all shipwrecked; how could either live in the same atmosphere with John Burrill, as I

have heard him described. John Burrill is a black sheep; I should take it Burrill must be a black dog, or worse, and sheep and dog are covered by the same family. After all, what is a dog for pedigree. It's the dog that tells. Here in the next room I have a man who claims to be nobody. Nothing is said or known about his blood; a great deal is said and known about his brain, favorably said, too, and honorably known. He is a detective, and as such, dead to the blue book; it's his business to hunt men down, to pry into secret places, to unmask villainies, and drag to light shameful family secrets; and, for the second time, he has stumbled upon a secret of mine, and treated it most generously."

"To-night I say to him, 'know me only as Doctor Heath, from Nowhere.' Another man would have asked for an explanation, when the opportunity came but not he. He sits with me, sips with me, sleeps under my roof, and makes no sign that he ever knew me save as I now am. He treats me as a man worthy his confidence, yet asks none of mine. That's what I call splendid behavior that's a man worthy to be called a gentleman. I wonder" here his countenance darkens, and his eyes look gloomy. "I wonder what this honorable officer would say if he knew what I did to-night? if he knew, say I! does he not know? how can I tell? he is sharp as a lynx; and heaven only knows what mad impulse prompted me to do a mean thing. Bah!" rising and stretching himself; "we are all fools or knaves, or both; when a beautiful woman has dethroned reason and common sense, and sways us body and soul. I wonder what Constance Wardour would say if she knew? A keen witted detective takes me on trust; will she do the same?"

There is little of the look of a despairing swain on his face, as he concludes his soliloquy, and goes out to see that the outer door is secure, before retiring. A trifle pale, a trifle bored, a trifle cynical, and a trifle sleepy he looks. He also looks, for a man who has just been indulging in a fit of severe self-depreciation, exceedingly confident and full of faith in himself. And why not? Let that man despair who has lost confidence in his own ability to wrest favors from the fingers of Fate or Fortune. Despair is not for the brave.

(To be Continued.)

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