

The Diamond Coterie

By LAWRENCE M. LYNCH

(E. M. Van Deventer)

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

(Continued)

"I've created news to tell you, sir, and Mr. Frank said to let you know it quick, so as you could come there at once."

Jasper Lamotte stares in angry astonishment, scarcely taking in the meaning of the none too lucid sentence.

"Well, sir," he says, shortly, "what are you talking about?"

"This time the man came at once to the point. 'Mr. Burrill has been murdered, sir. They found him this morning in an old cellar, close by Doctor Heath's; and they say, sir—'

"What! what do you say? Burrill—"

"Murdered, sir—killed dead—stabbed right through the heart, sir. They are anxious for you to come, sir. They are going to have an inquest right there."

"Drive there, at once," cried Mr. Lamotte, hoarsely. "I must see for myself," and he sinks back upon his seat, pale and trembling.

Meantime the carriage containing the portly gentleman arrives at the hotel. The rain is still falling, and the gentleman steps hurriedly from the carriage and across the pavement—so hurriedly, indeed, that he jostles against a boy who is passing with a tray of ivory carvings and pretty scroll-work.

Down comes the tray, and the gentleman, who is evidently kind-hearted, cries out—

"Why, boy! Bless me, but I'm sorry! Didn't see you, upon my word. Pick your wares up, sonny, and take stock of the broken things, then come in and I'll make it all square. Just ask for Mr. Wedron, and don't be bashful," and he bustles into the office of the W— House, where he calls for the best room they can give him, registers as "C. A. Wedron, att'y, N.Y.," and, asking that he might have dinner as early as possible, he goes at once to his room.

"I say," he calls to the porter who brings up his valise, "when that young image boy comes, just send him along to me; I owe him some damages."

A few minutes later, the boy enters the office and deposits his disordered tray upon a chair.

"Come along, you," calls the porter, gruffly. "The gentleman's looking for you."

"Wait a minit, can't ye?" retorts the boy coolly. "I jest want to take account of stock."

He drops on one knee and rearranges his tray with great care and no haste.

"There!" he exclaims, rising at length with a chuckle of satisfaction. "I reckon that big bloke'll be about two fifty out after I call." And he takes up his tray and says to the porter: "Now, then, give us the address."

"Twenty-one," he replies, and the boy ascends the stairs, and unceremoniously opens the door of twenty-one.

The gentleman, who stands at the window, turns quickly at the sound of the opening door, and when it has closed behind the boy, he advances and asks in a low tone—

"How lies the land, George? Is there any news?"

"I'm sorry, sir," replies the boy. "I was faithful to orders—but things have gone wrong."

"How, my boy?"

fell in with the crowd, and was one of the place where the body lay. It was an empty lot, right next to Doctor Heath's cottage; the body was down in an old cellar, and had been hastily buried by the murderers. They say it was Doctor Heath's dog that first discovered the body.

He pauses, and waits for a comment, but none comes; the gentleman stands with hands behind him, and head bent, as if still listening. For a long time, he stands thus, and then takes a turn or two about the room.

"Why, George," he says, at last. "I don't see that you could have done better. It was no part of our plan to have this murder happen, and it bids fair to make us some trouble that we had not counted on. But we are used to that, George. So you think you might have known who did the deed?"

"I might, sir, if I had followed Burrill; I felt all the time that he was the man to watch."

"Oh!" with an odd smile; "your instincts are on the alert. However, you did right in disregarding instinct, and obeying orders. Now then, be off, sir, and until you have further notice, keep both your eyes on Mr. Belknap. By the by, when do they hold an inquest?"

"At three o'clock, sir; they want to have Mr. Lamotte there."

"Well! that's all, George; you had better dispose of your traps for the day, and look sharp after Mr. Belknap."

"All right, sir," and taking up his tray, the little detective goes out, dropping back into his old impudent manner, as the door closes behind him.

"So, Burrill has been killed," soliloquizes the portly gentleman seating himself before his cheery fire. "Well, that goes to show that we detectives don't find out all the tangles. We are lucky often than we are shrewd. Now look, I fancied I had the game in my hands, and stepped into town this morning to throw my trump and win, and now, my game is blocked, and a new one opens against me."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

All that long morning Clifford Heath sat alone in his cosy parlor, and what his thoughts were no observer had there been such, could have guessed. His features were grave, even stern, but there was no apprehension, no expectancy, no fear; nothing but calm gravity and inflexible haughtiness could be discerned in the face that was sometimes bent over a favorite book, sometimes submerged in clouds of smoke from his big German meerschaum, but that never once turned toward the window that overlooked the scene of the morning's discovery. All day the sounds from thence penetrated to his ear; all day men were coming and going, with much loud talk as they passed his doorway, and much bustle and excitement. But, Clifford Heath might have been deaf and blind, so little interest did he manifest in the sights and sounds that were attendant upon the scene of John Burrill's low, rain-soaked bed of death.

Crouched at his feet lay the great dog Prince, who had been comforted by his master for any harshness that he had suffered necessarily, and he now lay watchful but quiet, seeming to share, in a measure, the mood of his master and best friend.

At one o'clock Mrs. Gray came in and spread his luncheon beside him in tempting array, and the doctor laid aside his pipe, and, favoring Mrs. Gray with one of those kindly smiles that she always melted under to the extent of admitting to herself that her master was "a man who meant well, in spite of his horrid ways."

Then he drew his chair up beside the lunch table, and immediately set Mrs. Gray's good humor awry by indulging in one of his "horrid ways," namely, the teasing of dainty bits to Prince, who caught them in "his mouth with much adroitness and without quitting his position upon the Turkish rug.

Finally, when Prince had received his share of Mrs. Gray's dainties, the doctor fell upon the rest and made a hearty meal.

As he was washing down a tart with a large tumbler of claret, there came a knock upon the street door, and without a moment's hesitation—indeed, with some alacrity—he arose to answer it in person.

"O'ne more it was his neighbor, O'Meara."

"Come in, O'Meara," said he, coolly. "I'm just finishing luncheon," and he led the way back to the parlor.

"I just looked in for a moment in my capacity of friend and neighbor, Heath," said the little lawyer, briskly, at the same time seating himself near the table.

"Later on I may give you a call in my professional capacity, but not now, not now, sir."

"Don't do it at all, O'Meara," said the doctor, with a short laugh; "I have no earthly use for a lawyer."

"No more have I for a medical adviser just this minute, sir; but I may need one before night."

coroner's verdict thus: "Deceased came to his death at the hands of Clifford Heath, M. D.; and circumstantial evidence thus: 'Deceased has on several occasions been threatened by accused; he was found buried near the premises of accused, and upon his person was found a handkerchief bearing the name, Clifford Heath.' This, and how much more I can't tell. It's a beautiful case, O'Meara."

The little lawyer stared, astonished at his coolness.

"Don't underrate this business, Heath," he said, anxiously. "I'm glad to see that it has not had the opposite effect on you. I'm glad to see plenty of pluck, but—"

"But, there's a strong case against me; that's what you would say, O'Meara. I don't doubt, and let me tell you that neither you nor I can guess how strong the case is; not yet."

"Such an affair is had enough, at the best, Heath; I don't see anything in the case, thus far, that will hold up against an impartial investigation; as for other evidence, am I to understand—"

Clifford Heath bent forward, and lifted one hand warningly.

"Understand nothing for the present, O'Meara; after the verdict come to me, not as a lawyer, but as a friend and I will explain my language and attitude; for the present I have nothing to say."

"Then I must be satisfied with what you have said," replied the lawyer cheerfully. "Of course you will be at the inquest?"

The doctor nodded.

"Well, having seen—and heard you, it is not necessary to offer any suggestions, I see that," and the lawyer arose and took up his hat, "and it won't be policy for me to remain here too long. Count on me, Heath, in any emergency. I'm your man."

"Thank you, O'Meara; rest assured such friendship is fully appreciated." And he extended his hand to the friendly lawyer, who grasped it silently, seemed struggling, either to speak or to repress some thought, and then dropped it and went out silently, followed in equal silence by his host, who closed the door behind him, and then went thoughtfully back to his claret.

"Zounds!" muttered Lawyer O'Meara, picking his way back across the muddy street, and entering his own dwelling.

"To think of accusing a man of so much coolness, and presence of mind, of such a bungling piece of work as this. It's a queer suspicion, but I could almost swear that Heath smells a plot."

At this moment a carriage drove hastily by, all mud bespattered, and lying open in defiance of the rain.

"It's Lamotte's landau," said the lawyer, peeping out from the shelter of his verandah; "it's Lamotte's carriage, and it's Lamotte himself; I would like to see how he looks, just for one moment; but it's too wet, and I must go tell the old woman how her favorite doctor faces the situation."

A few moments after the landau had deposited Jasper Lamotte at the gate of the vacant lot, a pedestrian, striding swiftly along, as if eager to be upon the scene and satiate his curiosity, came in among the group of men that, all day long, had hovered about the cellar.

"What's going on here?" he demanded of the first man upon whom his glance fell, "an accident?"

"Good Lord!" exclaimed the man, who was one of Old Forty Rod's customers; "where have you come from that, you don't know a man has been killed!"

"Killed!"

"Yes, murdered! stabbed last night and buried in this old cellar."

"Heavens, man! was—was he a citizen?"

"Well, I should say! and a rum chap, too. Why, you are a stranger to these parts if you don't know John Burrill."

"Never heard of him in my life, old Top," replied the stranger. "I don't live in these parts."

The man drew back a little, and seeing this, the stranger came closer and laid one hand familiarly upon his arm, at the same time leaning nearer, and saying in a loud whisper—

"Any of the stiff's friends in this gang?"

The satellite of "Old Forty," who had at first seemed somewhat disposed to resent too much familiarity on the part of the stranger, turned toward him, drew closer, and allowed his features to relax into a grin of friendliness. He had not been so fortunate as to receive a morning dram, and the breath of the stranger had wafted to his nostrils the beloved, delicious odor of "whisky killers."

"Hush!" he whispered confidentially, "that man over there the tall, good-looking one with the whiskers, d'ye mind—"

"Yes, yes! high toned bloke?"

"Exactly; that's the dead man's father-in-law."

"Father-in-law, eh?"

"Yes, and that young chap beside him, the pale, handsome one, that's his son."

"Whose son?"

"The tall man's son; Frank Lamotte's his name."

"You don't say; good looking duffer! Found the assassin?"

"Not exactly, but they say—"

"Look here, pard, this sniffs of romance; now I'm gone on romance in real life; just let's step back among these cedars, and out of the crowd, where I can give you a pull at my brandy flask, and you can tell me all the particulars."

And the jaunty young man tapped his breast suggestively and winked knowingly down at his new found friend.

"Agreed," said the man, eagerly, and turning at once toward the nearest clump of trees.

"I may as well say that my name is Smith," said the stranger, as he passed over his brandy flask. "Now then, pard, fire ahead, and don't forget when you get thirsty to notify Smith, the book peddler."

The man began his story, and the book peddler stood with ear attentive to the tale, and eye fixed upon Jasper Lamotte.

(To be Continued.)

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Her Point of View.
They were discussing the construction of a new gown.
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The haughty beauty stopped her by a gesture.

"Hygienic point of view!" she exclaimed. "Matter of health! What has that to do with it? When I want health, I will go to a doctor. When I want style, I come to you. We will now eliminate all absurdities and discuss this purely from a common sense standpoint. Will it be fashionable and becoming?"—Philadelphia Times.

"De man dat boasts ob his cha'ty," said Uncle Eben, "makes some folks criticize. But he ain't ez bad ez de man dat ain't got no scuse foh boasting, eben if he wanted ter."—Washington Star.

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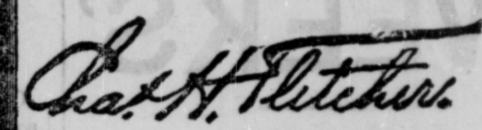
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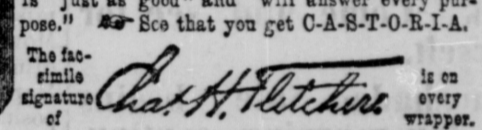
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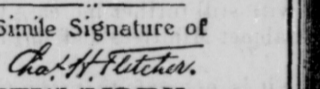
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