

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.)

CHAPTER XV.

Constance followed her friend up to the room where they had so often passed long hours together, wondering at Sybil's composure and seeming resignation, and shudderingly recalling the bland devolving stare of the man who was her husband.

It was the first time since Sybil's return that they had been alone together, and Constance half dreaded the interview, as well as wondered not a little that the opportunity was of Sybil's own making; hitherto she seemed anxious to avoid a tete-a-tete.

Sybil moved straight on in advance of her friend, and never turned her head nor spoke, until the door of her boudoir had shut them in; then she turned and faced her companion, uttering as she did so a low mirthless laugh.

"Well!" she asked abruptly, "how do you like him?"

Constance bent a searching gaze upon her friend, and read her state of mind with a woman's keen intuition. The tensely strung nerves, the dread of this interview, the determination to have it over, and to bear her part bravely; a proud and stubborn nature, battling with despair, and unspeakable heartache. She understood it all, and her own heart bled for her friend. But, being a wise little woman, she held her pity in reserve, and replied, as if the question concerned a new dancing master:

"I don't like him at all, child; let's talk about something more interesting," and she threw herself down upon a fauteuil, and tossed off her hat; just as she had tossed it aside a hundred times, in that same pretty room. The simple action, brought a thrill of tenderness, and sad recollection, to the heart of Sybil. She seated herself beside her friend, and her face lost a shade of its bitterness.

"It's like a shadow of the old days, Con," she said sadly, "and the substance I can never have any more. But you must let me talk, I feel as if I must talk, and you will let me say what I will, and ask me nothing. Con, you saw that—that creature down stairs? You saw him, but you did not hear him."

She shuddered, and paused for an instant; but Constance did not speak, and so she continued:— "I had made up my mind never to speak of him to you, but the very thing I had dreaded has happened; you have met, and, in the generosity of your soul, for my sake, you have extended to him your hand; have openly accepted his acquaintance. Oh, Con! I could have struck him dead before he touched your hand. He! Ah, there is a limit to my forbearance; he has forced himself into my life to blight it; he has forced himself into my family to be an added curse. But he shall not force himself upon my friends. Con, treat him with the disdain he deserves, else, he will force his way into your very drawing room. Never, never, never, extend to him the courtesies due to an equal. He is not an equal, he is a man at all; he is a fat, sleek, leering, ruminating animal, at his best; he is a wolf, a vampire, a devil, at other times; ignorant, vain, avaricious, gross. Rather than see him force himself upon you, as he has forced himself upon me, I will myself sever our friendship. I will never see, never speak with you again. John Burrill shall find a limit, which even his brute force cannot pass."

She was growing more and more excited, and a bright spot burned on each cheek.

Constance was startled, but fully understanding the necessity for perfect coolness, now that Sybil's composure had almost given way, she never attempted to interrupt the words that were but the overflow of long pent up feelings; but sat quietly stroking one of Sybil's slender hands, and becoming more amazed and mystified as she listened.

"Sometimes I find myself wondering at the tenacity of my life," went on Sybil, more hurriedly and with increasing excitement. "Sometimes I feel my strength leaving me, and think the battle is over; but somehow it is renewed, and I find myself growing strong instead of weak. For months I lived with my inevitable fate constantly before my eyes. I knew that there was no escape; that what has transpired, must happen. I have suffered tortures, passed nights without sleep, and days without food. I have grown a little paler, a little thinner, and a great deal wickered, and that is all. I am strong, as strong as in the beginning, and yet, what am I but a galvanized corpse? I am dead to all that is worth living for. My one wish is to be free, and yet, Con, do you know I have never once been tempted to self-destruction."

Constance Wardour sprang impetuously to her feet, and paced the length of the boudoir again and again in perfect silence. The terrible weight of torment that was crushing Sybil's heart, and maddening her brain, seemed to rest, too, upon her, and weigh down her spirits; she was tortured with the sight of Sybil's misery, and the thought of her own helplessness. Could nothing be done? Struggling for an appearance of composure, she paced to and fro, and at last, having mastered her feelings, and arranged her thoughts, she resumed her seat beside Sybil, whose eyes had followed her movements with curiosity.

"Sybil, listen!" she began with that clear, concise energy of manner that, in itself, inspired confidence. "If you do not wish me to make any overtures of friendship, rest assured I shall make none. I at least am not under the spell which this man seems to have thrown about you all. There, don't draw back, child, I have no more to say on this part of the subject. I may ask a few questions, however, without treading on forbidden ground. You say John Burrill is avaricious; can he not be bought off?"

Sybil shook her head. "Not with the Wardour estate," she replied, sadly. "Not with all our fortunes united?" "Cannot he be frightened then?" "Frightened! You don't know what you are saying!" "Then, I can think of no other way. He is a bad man; he must have led a wicked life; can we not find something in his past, which will place him in our power? Can he not be driven into banishment, through fear of justice?"

Sybil turned her eyes full upon her friend; eyes dark with the shadow of despair, but unwavering in their sad firmness. "If that could be done," she said, slowly. "The very day that witnessed his downfall, would bring about the catastrophe I have sacrificed myself to avert. Constance, say no more; we can do none of these things; there is no help for me on this side of the grave."

Constance looked once more at her friend; looked long and earnestly then. "Sybil," she cried, with swift resolution. "Do you know what you are bringing upon yourself? Do you want to go mad, and so be at the mercy of John Burrill? It is what will come upon you if you don't throw off this torpor. Your eyes are as dry as if tears were not meant to relieve the overburdened heart. Let your tears flow; shake off this lethargy; battle royally for your life; it is worth more than his; do not let him put your reason to flight, and so conquer. Sybil! Sybil!"

The words ended in a sobbing cry, but Sybil only gazed dumbly, and then looked helplessly about her.

"There, there, Conny," she said at last, as if soothing a hurt child; "don't mind me. It's true my life is worth more than his, but—I can't cry, I don't feel like crying."

"Then laugh," cried Constance desperately; "laugh and defy your tormentor; harden your heart if you must, but don't let it break."

"I won't," said Sybil, with quiet emphasis. "Now come and see my diamonds, Con."

She crossed the room as she spoke, bent over a dressing case, and came back with a tray of sparkling newly set jewels. "Bah!" she said, as she dropped the glittering things one by one into her friend's lap. "How I loved their glitter once, and how I envied your treasure of jewels; now you have lost your treasure, and I have no more love for mine."

Constance laughed oddly, as she bent to recover her hat from the floor, where it had lain during their interview.

"Secret for secret, Sybil," she said, with forced gaiety. "I have one little secret of mine own, and I am inclined to tell it to you, because I know you can appreciate it, and can keep it; and I choose to have it kept. Bend down your head, dear, wails may have ears. Listen."

Sybil bent her dark head, and Constance whispered a few short sentences that caused her to spring up erect and excited.

"Constance! you are not jesting?" "Honestly no. I have told you the truth, plain and unvarnished."

Sybil stood as if transfixed with surprise, or some sudden inspiration.

"Why, how amazed you look, dear; after all it's an old, old trick, and easily played. Come, don't stare at me any longer; put away your diamonds and come below with me, my ponies must be coddled with impatience, and I am anxious to avoid our mutual foe, for I make common cause with you, dear, and I have told you my secret, that we may be in very truth, fellow conspirators. Make my adieu to the family, and be sure and come to me just as you used; if your ogre insists upon coming, trust me to freeze him into an earnest desire to be in a warmer and more congenial place. Courage, mon ami, somehow we must win the battle."

Sybil took the diamonds from her hands and put them away, with far more care than she had displayed in bringing them forth; then she followed her friend from the room, closing and carefully locking the door behind her.

Constance observed the unusual caution, but made no comment. Only when many days after she remembered that day she wondered how she could have been so stupidly blind.

She effected her departure without being seen by Frank or Burrill, and drove homeward, revolving in her mind various plots for the confusion of the latter, and plans for awakening Sybil from the dangerous melancholy that would surely unseat her reason.

"If I could only move her to tears," she murmured, "only break that frozen calm one. How can I touch, move, melt her? It must be done." And pondering this difficult task, she drove slowly on.

"I wonder if I blundered in telling her my secret," she mused. "I know she will keep it; and yet, somehow, I fear I was too hasty. One would think it had grown too big for me to keep. But, pshaw! it's not a life and death matter, and I wanted to give a new impulse to

that poor child's thoughts. But I must try and cure myself of this impulsiveness, just as if it were not 'bred in the bone,' for it was an impulse that made me whisper my secret to Sybil; and once, it has got me into serious trouble." And her brow darkened, as she thought of the feud thus raised between herself and Doctor Heath.

While she was thus pondering, Sybil Burrill had hurried back to her own room, locked herself in, and with hands clasped and working nervously, was pacing restlessly up and down, as Constance had done a little earlier.

"It's the only way," she muttered between shut teeth, "the only possible way." And then she unlocked the dressing case, took out her jewels once more, handling them with greatest care. She spread them out before her, and resting her elbows on the dressing table, and her chin in the palm of one slender hand, gazed and thought with darkening brow and compressed lips; and with now and then a shudder, and a startled glance behind and about her.

(To be Continued.)

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CALENDAR, MAY, 1897

MOON'S CHANGES. New Moon, 1st, 4h. 33.8m. p. m. First Quarter, 9th, 5h. 24.3m. p. m. Full Moon, 16th, 9h. 42m. a. m. Last Quarter, 23rd, 5h. 22m. a. m. New Moon, 31st, 8h. 13.1m. a. m.

Day of Week.	Sun. Rises.	Sun. Sets.	High Water.
1 Saturday	4 51	7 4	10 4
2 Sunday	49	5	10 5
3 Monday	48	6	11 3
4 Tuesday	46	7	11 5
5 Wednesday	45	8	1 12
6 Thursday	43	10	1 2
7 Friday	42	11	2 3
8 Saturday	40	12	3 3
9 Sunday	39	13	4 3
10 Monday	38	15	5 3
11 Tuesday	37	16	6 2
12 Wednesday	35	17	7 2
13 Thursday	34	18	8 3
14 Friday	33	19	9 3
15 Saturday	32	20	9 4
16 Sunday	31	22	10 1
17 Monday	29	23	10 7
18 Tuesday	28	24	11 2
19 Wednesday	27	25	1 16
20 Thursday	26	26	2 20
21 Friday	24	27	3 30
22 Saturday	23	28	4 25
23 Sunday	23	30	5 11
24 Monday	22	31	6 00
25 Tuesday	21	32	6 48
26 Wednesday	20	33	7 41
27 Thursday	20	34	8 32
28 Friday	19	35	9 23
29 Saturday	18	36	9 28
30 Sunday	18	37	9 41
31 Monday	17	38	10 19

P. E. Island Railway

On and after MONDAY, 4th January, 1897, the trains of this Railway will run daily (Sundays excepted) as follows:—

Trains Outward. Read down.	STATIONS.	Trains Inward. Read up.
3 10 P. M.	Charlottetown	3 10 P. M.
3 17 P. M.	Royalton Junction	3 50 P. M.
4 17 P. M.	North Wilshire	3 04 P. M.
4 31 P. M.	Hunter River	3 48 P. M.
5 05 P. M.	Bradallbane	3 15 P. M.
5 13 P. M.	Emerald	3 57 P. M.
5 27 P. M.	Freetown	12 53 P. M.
5 47 P. M.	Kensington	12 33 P. M.
6 20 P. M.	Ar. S'Side	Lv. 12 00 P. M.
12 30 P. M.	Lv. S'Side	Ar. 10 30 P. M.
1 31 P. M.	Miscouche	10 10 P. M.
1 37 P. M.	Wellington	9 47 P. M.
2 19 P. M.	Port Hill	9 00 P. M.
3 34 P. M.	O'Leary	8 00 P. M.
4 34 P. M.	Blomfield	7 34 P. M.
5 30 P. M.	Alberton	6 55 P. M.
5 30 P. M.	Tignish	6 04 P. M.
P. M.		A. M.
2 30 P. M.	Charlottetown	10 30 P. M.
2 50 P. M.	Royalton Junction	10 10 P. M.
3 23 P. M.	Bedford	9 50 P. M.
3 55 P. M.	Ar. MtStew's	Ar. 9 05 P. M.
4 10 P. M.	Lv. MtStew's	Ar. 8 55 P. M.
5 50 P. M.	Morell	8 17 P. M.
5 12 P. M.	St. Peters	7 48 P. M.
5 57 P. M.	Bear River	7 03 P. M.
6 40 P. M.	Souris	6 20 P. M.
P. M.		A. M.
4 10 P. M.	Mt. Stewart	8 50 P. M.
5 22 P. M.	Cardigan	7 35 P. M.
5 45 P. M.	Georgetown	7 10 P. M.
P. M.		A. M.
5 15 P. M.	Emerald	7 50 P. M.
6 05 P. M.	Cape Traverse	7 00 P. M.
P. M.		A. M.

Trains are run by Eastern Standard Time. A McDONALD, Superintendent, Charlottetown. D. POTTINGER, Gen. Mgr. Govt. Bldg. Charlottetown. Montreal, N. B. Railway Office, Jan 1, 1897.

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