

The Diamond Coterie.

(Continued from 1st page.)

"It seems that the thing had been done so rapidly, that Burrill had had time to get a fair look at the face of his assailant; but the second time he scrambled to his feet, Heath stood facing him, tall, broad and ready, when, behold, Burrill, under one look, turns as pale as a specter, utters a yell of fear, and dashes out of the house like a madman. Burrill, at this time, several people had come in, and the thing puzzled them not a little. Heath asserted that he had never to his knowledge, seen Burrill before; and yet, when he saw the fact of Burrill's flight at sight of him, some believed it a case of mistaken identity; others, that Heath was trying to mislead them, and he did this, Burrill. The affair became noised about as such things will be, and some were anxious to see another meeting between Heath and Burrill. And here comes the queer part of the business. In his sober moments, Burrill avowed Heath, and can not be brought to deny his name. But when he gets a little too much on board—bored, pained, Conny—I mean, somewhat intoxicated, he becomes very loquacious; then he throws out strange hints, and gives mysterious looks; states that he could tell a tale about Heath that would open everybody's eyes. He talks of 'loved plumes,' and insinuates that Heath would like to buy him off. He says that he took to his heels because he knew that Heath did not mean fair play, etc. Finally, two or three evenings ago, when Burrill was remarkably tipsy, and therefore, unusually ripe for a combat with any one, Heath and I, crossing the street opposite Spring's Bank, encountered him coming toward us, surrounded by a party of roughs. As we approached, Burrill, making some vague gestures, came forward in advance of the rest, and as he came opposite Heath, leaned toward him and whispered a few words in his ear. Burrill, at this time, as he said, but the effect on Heath was magical. For a moment he seemed staggered, as if by a blow, and then he took the fellow by the throat, and shook him till his teeth rattled; then loosed his hold so suddenly that his man dropped to the ground. Heath by this time was a little cooler, he stooped over the prostrate man, took him by the collar, and fairly lifted him to his feet, then he said:

"Understand this, fellow. I allow no man to interfere with my peace of mind. This is only a sample of what will happen to you if you ever try this dodge again. My name will be in the papers, and you, and private, if you want whole bones in your body; then he marched past the whole astonished crowd, minding them no more than if they were grass. I followed, of course, and said as I came up with Heath—

"Quite an adventure, upon my word; you seem to possess a strange attraction for Burrill!"

"Burrill," he exclaimed, "who the mischief is the fellow, Ray?"

"He is Mr. Lamotte's son-in-law," I answered.

"Ah," he mused, "so Jasper Lamotte has married his daughter to a black-maller; and after that, he said never a word more on the subject. I had it in my mind to tell him of the hints and insinuations Burrill in his ungoverned moments was putting in my ears, but his reticence closed my lips."

He paused, and looked to his auditor for some comment, but she sat with her eyes fixed upon the carpet, and a troubled look on her face.

"Don't think, Conny, that I am one of those who construe this against Heath," said the fellow, "I am the best fellow in the world. The whole thing, for me, lies in a nutshell. Heath is not a man to disturb himself about his neighbor's concerns, and he don't expect his neighbors to interest themselves in his. This Burrill has picked up, somehow, a little information; something concerning Heath's past life, I suppose, is not known to W—, and he is trying to make capital of it. The secret in itself may be a mere nothing, but Heath is the first man to resent impertinence, and the last man to make explanations. And he's right, too, especially under the present circumstances. I like him all the better for his pluck and his reticence; let him keep his secrets; so long as he gives me his friendship, I am quite content."

Constance felt a thrill of satisfaction. She had known Ray from her childhood, and had been always very close to him; but she had never admired him so much, as she did at this moment. His enthusiasm was contagious; she forgot all her fears of a personal nature and became in an instant the true woman and unselfish friend.

"Ah, Ray," she exclaimed, lifting two admiring gray eyes to meet his, "you are a friend indeed! a friend to be proud of; but tell me, you have nothing more of Burrill after that second encounter?"

"He made some pretty loud threats," replied Ray, "but fellow named Brooks, a sort of crony of Burrill's, took it upon himself to call upon Heath the next day, and advise him to keep a pretty close lookout for Burrill, as he was likely, in one of his drunken rages, to make an assault upon him. Heath thanked the fellow, and assured him that he was quite capable of taking care of himself, and Burrill, too, if need be; and Brooks looked out, declaring that he 'meant no harm to any man.'"

"Ray," said Constance, earnestly, "John Burrill is not the only man Doctor Heath has to fear. I may have acted hastily in sending you away, but I am troubled by certain facts that have just come to my knowledge, that I could not resist without doing something. It's almost an abuse of confidence to ask so much of you and tell you so little, but in a few days I hope to be mistress of my own tongue, and then you shall have all the particulars. For the present, Ray, promise to follow my instructions blindly."

"I have promised that, Conny," replied Ray, "you will keep this all a secret; you will do your part without hinting to Doctor Heath your true motive, unless circumstances compel an explanation."

"I promise that, too,"

"When I sent for you, it was to ask you to warn Doctor Heath, in the most delicate way you can devise, that he was menaced by an enemy, and under hourly surveillance; but, since you have told me of this Burrill it occurs to me that in some way he may be mixed up in this matter, and—I have thought of a better plan."

Ray nodded, and looked full of interest.

"Your description of his manner of receiving Burrill's interference, and of his reticence throughout, makes me feel that it might be only precipitating a catastrophe if we warned him, and oh, Ray, I want you, for three days, to be his constant shadow. Devise some excuse for remaining in town; trust yourself upon his hospitality; observe any strangers who may approach him. If possible, do not let him get out of sight, even for a short time; in three days you shall be relieved."

"By whom?"

She lifted her hand, warningly. "No questions, Ray. Can you manage all this?"

He pondered a while, then said: "I think I can; I am a pretty good actor, Conny. What do you say to my feigning illness?"

"He would find you out,"

"Not if I did it well, perhaps. I think I could manage for a few days."

"It won't do, Ray. He would send you to bed and walk away and leave you."

Ray groaned.

"Tell him your room is under repairs, and throw yourself on his mercy; then feign low spirits, and make him think it is his duty to entertain and cheer you up."

"Capital, Conny! we can make that work I know; your wit is worth more than my wisdom; for three days then I am your watch dog."

"And your friend's guardian?"

"Precisely. I begin to swell with importance. But seriously, Conny, let me have your confidence at the earliest moment. For, whoever does battle with Heath, will find me arrayed against him, and it's difficult fighting in the dark."

"You shall know all as soon as possible, Ray, and now—"

"And now," repeated he, rising with alacrity. "Heath's horse stands outside, and Heath himself waits my return; so, best he should, lest he should see where mischief awaits him, I will go now and begin my task."

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