

THE DOUBLE DEALER

By VARICK VANARDY.
Author of "Missing—\$81,500."

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CHAPTER I.

The Spot of Sudden Starts.

"Oh, Mr. Moreaux! Please—please! I must speak alone with you for a moment."

The artist turned about quickly. It was the bride, of course. He had recognized the voice at the first word she uttered.

"I am so excited," she went on rapidly but in a tone that was pitched so that others might not hear her. "Please make an excuse to take me aside, away from all these people. You are such an old friend that you may do so without exciting comment—and I cannot tell anybody but you. Not yet, at least. It may be all a mistake."

The exquisite face was flushed; the beautiful eyes shone unduly and with an excitement which Moreaux could see quite plainly was not all due to the wedding ceremony just performed. The artist was never at a loss. He was always equal to an emergency, and judged—quite correctly as it presently developed—that this was one.

He bowed low and offered her his arm.

The more formal part of the reception was over, when the bride and groom stood together, side by side, to receive the congratulations of their friends. The comparatively informal part of it was on; but nevertheless, as if by the attraction of gravitation, everybody sought the bride.

Presently there should be the supper—but there remained still a good half hour or more before that would be announced.

"We will take a turn of the room together," he said. "Gradually we will draw away from the others. I happen to know that your father's 'mail den' has not been opened to guests. We will go there."

She gave his arm a grateful pressure; and so they walked twice the length of the great room apparently deeply interested in their conversation; and the guests who might otherwise have intercepted them stepped aside to permit them to pass, knowing that Birge Moreaux was a privileged character in that luxurious and palatial home.

"Now, Lorna, what is it all about?" the artist asked as soon as they were inside of the little room which her father denied to all but his intimates—and he had few such.

"My wedding presents," she replied breathlessly. "I have discovered that several of them are missing. My beautiful lavalliere, which I showed to you with such pride, only yesterday when you called. The diamond and emerald bracelet that Paul sent to me from Paris. The tiara of rubies and diamonds that was one of Aunt Eunice's gifts—those are gone; and oh, I don't know what else. What shall I do?"

"Do? Return to your guests at once. Conduct yourself as if nothing had happened; only, before you go, tell me this: are you sure, positively sure, out of this thing?"

"Indeed I am. I went—"
"It does not matter just now how you know it, Lorna. The question is, do you know it?"

"Yes; oh, yes."
Come, then. We will go back to the guests who must be clamoring for you by this time. Say nothing of this to any other person until I speak with you again," he added, as they again entered the great reception-room.

Then he resigned her to others who were all too eager for her return. They had not been absent five minutes—but a bride of such exquisite beauty and grace as Lorna Delorme possessed may be missed in five seconds.

Moreaux hastened toward the room where the bridal presents were on exhibition, and near the entrance to it encountered Richard Delorme, Lorna's father, rated as one of the men of great wealth in the country—one of the steel barons.

He was a frosty-haired, handsome, featured gentleman who was past middle life but did not look it, and who was known far and wide by his intimates and by report for his good-natured geniality.

Just then, however, his face was troubled, and he grasped the artist by both arms impulsively as he exclaimed:

"By jove, Birge, you are just the person I was seeking." Then, as if from second thought: "Where were you going?"

"Oh, I was looking you up, for one thing. Incidentally I wanted another glimpse at the display before it is packed away in safe-deposit vaults and other places," Moreaux replied carelessly.

"Some of the display, as you call it, has been 'packed' away already," Delorme said soberly, and added: "I use the word in its Western meaning this time, Birge."

"Eh? Just what do you mean, Mr. Delorme?"

"I have just made the discovery that several articles are missing. Some of the presents have disappeared."

Moreaux shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

"Probably Lorna has taken them away herself," he suggested.

The older man looked relieved. "I had not thought of that," he said.

"Your detective from the central office is in there, isn't he?" the artist inquired.

"Yes. Oh, yes, he is there."

"And you have got two or three others from one of the big agencies around the house, haven't you?"

"Yes. To be sure. Two."

"Either of them in there now?"

"One of them. I gave instructions that one of them should be present with the central office man all the time. By the way, he seems to be a mighty nice sort of a chap—that headquarters man, I mean. Muchmore is his name. You'll never in the world take him for a policeman."

"There are a lot of 'mighty nice chaps' among the New York policemen, Mr. Delorme," the artist said dryly. "Did you tell either of those men of your discovery?"

"No. Certainly not. I wished to be quite sure before I did that."

"Naturally. And neither of them mentioned such a subject, I suppose?"

"They are apparently entirely unconscious of it."

"So, more than likely there is a perfectly natural explanation of it somewhere, about. If I were you I would say nothing about the discovery for the present; not even to Lorna. Go back to the guests and look happy."

"Ah, here comes the bridegroom with two of his friends. You haste back to the reception, Mr. Delorme, and I'll go inside with them. But, mind, my advice is, not a word to anybody."

"Well, Mr. Fitzgerald Beverly, commonly called Jerry, I believe, you look the happy bridegroom all right," he exclaimed jovially, as the magnate moved away and the other three approached.

"I am happy, Mr. Moreaux—happier than I had believed it possible to be," replied Beverly, who then presented his two friends, a Mr. Thomas Gaffney and a Ross MacGreggor; both chums of his college days. "Come along inside with us, Mr. Moreaux," he replied.

And Birge Moreaux followed them into the room.

There were several persons there viewing the magnificent display of presents that the bride had received from her relatives and friends from all over the world. Also there were the two detectives mentioned by Mr. Delorme.

Moreaux, whose acquaintance was wide and varied—his profession probably accounted, in a large measure, for that—stepped aside from his three companions and approached the detective who had been detailed to the function from police headquarters.

"How do you do, Lieutenant Muchmore?" he said, cordially extending his hand, but speaking nevertheless in a low tone.

"Good evening, Mr. Moreaux," was the hearty response. "I am glad that you came in. I particularly wished to talk with some near friend of the family. There is a mystery floating in the air of this room, and although I have been here every minute of the time since the door was opened to permit the guests to see the bride's presents, I have not the least idea what it is."

"A mystery?"

"Yes."

"Tell me about it."

"A little while ago the bride came into the room with two of her friends. They passed around looking at things and commenting upon them as women will. I watched them, of course. I saw the bride give a start, turn pale, and for a second I thought she was going to faint. But she didn't. Instead, she made the round of the 'show,' rapidly peering here and there at things. Then she excused herself to her companions and went out of the room."

"They followed soon after that. Five minutes later the old man entered. He was alone. Of course you must understand that there were other people here all the time."

"I understand," Moreaux replied.

"Go on, Lieutenant."

"Well, he made a hasty circuit of the room—and it was the third time he has done it since the reception began. At precisely the same spot where his daughter had so nearly fainted I saw him bend suddenly forward, with compressed lips, as if something had startled him, too. Then he glanced sharply at me and at Sam Crandall—his one of the two 'agency' men who are here tonight, you know."

Moreaux nodded.

"After that he made a rapid tour of the room and went out; but he looked disturbed."

"Well, what then?"

"I went over to that spot of 'sudden starts' and took a look myself, but I couldn't see anything wrong—and I've got the whole layout pretty clearly in my mind. I went around the room as they had done, but I haven't found anything out of the way. I had just finished it when you appeared in company with the groom and two others. This is his third visit to this room since the reception began."

While the lieutenant was talking he did not once look at Moreaux. His

eyes were everywhere else around that room instead; now, after an almost imperceptible pause, he added:

"The funny part of it is that all of the people I have mentioned have made directly for that place which I have called the spot of sudden starts—until this time. Mr. Beverly began at the opposite side of the room this time. He is just approaching the 'spot'; watch him. Let's see if he throws a fit, too."

Beverly did not exactly do that, but he did fulfill Lieutenant Muchmore's expectations.

He stood up straight very suddenly, glanced hastily about him with flashing eyes and compressed lips, discovered Birge Moreaux, and crossed the room rapidly toward him.

"Mr. Moreaux," he said rapidly, but in a low tone, "I suppose there are detectives in this room. I don't know them; perhaps you do. There is a thief in the house. At least one article has been taken—a very valuable one. I don't know but others may have gone with it. Will you tell me what I ought to do?"

CHAPTER II.

The Missing Wedding Presents.

"This is Lieutenant Muchmore, Beverly," Moreaux replied calmly. "He was sent here from headquarters, and has been in this room all the evening. You had better tell him what is missing—but do it quietly. I should advise not attracting the attention of others to your discovery."

"What is missing, Mr. Beverly?" the lieutenant asked quietly. "I made the round of the room just before you came in this last time. I discovered nothing wrong."

Beverly had regained his composure. He replied as quietly as the officer had spoken.

"The lavalliere—it was one of my own presents to my wife."

He lingered over that last word. The use of it was new to him. "You would not be likely to notice its absence, for the reason that it has been replaced by another—another that is not even a pretended duplicate, but yet which is sufficiently similar in construction to deceive an unpractised eye."

"You have been in this room twice before, within the last half-hour, Mr. Beverly. Was the missing article in its place both of those times?"

"It was."

"You are positive about that, I suppose?"

"I am."

"Will you make a tour of the room and determine, if you can, if anything else is missing?"

"Certainly. Will you go with me?"

"No. I will stay here with Mr. Moreaux."

But instead of doing that he crossed the room and began conversing in low tones with Crandall, the agency man, and the artist was left alone.

Whereupon he began an inspection of his own, starting in the opposite direction from that taken by Fitzgerald Beverly. They met presently, and Beverly raised a pair of troubled brows, but Moreaux interrupted him before he could speak.

"Nothing here," he told him.

"Well, until later," and passed on.

Each had just completed the circuit, and the lieutenant was crossing the room toward them, when a servant appeared in the doorway and announced in the usual perfunctory manner that the guests were expected in the drawing-room to form in line for the wedding supper.

There was no help for it. There was no time for further discussion, then; but Moreaux managed before he went out to say to Lieutenant Muchmore:

"You and Crandall will have ample time to go thoroughly over your lists and to make a careful inventory before we can return. Do that. I will come to you again as soon as I can."

At table, Moreaux found ample opportunity, in spite of conversation, toasts, and speeches, to study the personnel of the company. Several times he caught the eyes of the bride as she fixed them upon him inquiringly; and each time he returned the gaze with a reassuring smile and nod.

But he was glad when it was over; more pleased still when the bride and groom had taken their departure.

Nevertheless, Lorna Beverly found opportunity to say to him hurriedly: "Papa and Jerry both know that some of the presents are missing. They have not said so, but I can read it in their manner. Please, please, Mr. Moreaux, find them for me."

The artist smiled down upon her. "I will do the best I can," he replied. "It is rather out of my line; but—possibly I can think of somebody who might find them. There is a man named Crewe, whom I know, who may be able to help us. I will appeal to him—perhaps."

"Oh, do! Is he a detective?"

"Well, not exactly. As a matter of fact, he is on the opposite side of the fence. I have a fancy that one of Crewe's acquaintances was here tonight. It was only a fancy, but I shall satisfy myself on that point later. I am sure, Lorna, that your jewels will be recovered."

A moment later Beverly slipped a card into the artist's hands, saying hastily as he did so:

"Here is a list, so far as I could determine, of what is missing. Of course, I am not as well informed as Lorna concerning what was there; but I could not bear to spoil her pleasures this evening by telling her of the theft."

"You are quite right, Beverly. Keep it to yourself, if possible, until your return. Then look me up."

"You bet I will," was the hearty response.

A moment later the voice of Detective-Lieutenant Muchmore broke in upon the artist's reverie into which he had fallen.

"What is that about Crewe, Mr. Moreaux?" he inquired sharply.

Moreaux raised his eyes leisurely, and with a slow smile he replied:

"Oh;—you heard that, did you?"

"I could not avoid it. I was just coming to speak to you, and stood, waiting, behind you—but without any intention of overhearing your conversation with Mrs. Beverly. But now it is my duty to ask you what you meant by that reference to Crewe. He is rather a shady character, as you doubtless know."

"Oh, yes, I know!" the artist replied with another of his slow smiles.

"Will you answer my question, Mr. Moreaux?"

"I very much doubt if I could, even if I tried."

The lieutenant was silent for a moment. Then he said with pointed directness:

"Mr. Mortaux, I am going to put it to you straight."

"That is surely the best way to do, Lieutenant." They had drawn aside, away from others, and stood in the embrasure of one of the windows. "I suppose the two agency men are on the job in your absence?"

"Yes; and an officer of the Croydon Safe Deposit Company is superintending the packing of the presents. He is also taking a careful inventory of them. That part of the job is off my hands now."

"Good. Now, what is it that you were going to put to me straight?"

"This: Mr. Richard Delorme made application to the department for a man to be detailed here tonight. I am that detail. The responsibility of what has occurred rests upon me."

"I have been called a capable officer, and yet those things were taken under my very nose, and I was none the wiser. How it was done I have not the least idea; but if young Beverly spoke the truth, or knew what he was talking about, I have a pretty clear idea as to when the thefts occurred—or at least one of them—that of the lavalliere. But never mind that just now."

"The point is this. I am responsible to the department for it. I will be called to account for it, and I will be made to suffer for it unless those missing articles are found, and speedily."

"In a sense, I am in authority in this house at the present moment. I want you to look at my position fairly. I heard you say to the bride—I quote your exact words—'I have a fancy that one of Crewe's acquaintances was here tonight.' I want you to tell me exactly what you mean by that statement. I think I have the right to know."

"You have, Lieutenant. This is what I meant: I am acquainted with Crewe. I have visited his place in South Fifth avenue. Being an artist, I have a good memory for faces."

"Two or three days ago, in the lower part of the city—to be exact, in the Bowers, near Houston street—I saw a face which I remembered to have seen at Crewe's upon the occasion of my visit there. Another man was in conversation with him—and that other man was here tonight."

"Who was he? Tell me that."

"Oh, no, Lieutenant; I won't tell you that."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing I might be doing him a great wrong in doing so. You see, he might merely have been asking a direction of the man I saw at Crewe's. They were together only a short time, for I stopped and watched them—from a mere sense of curiosity, I assure you. You know I wander through all parts of the city, seeking 'types,' as we artists call them."

"But—great Heavens, man, don't you see what I am up against?"

"Naturally; and I am going to do my utmost to help you push it over."

"Don't you see that I'm going to catch hell when the inspector finds out what has happened here tonight?"

"No. What I do see is this: I am quite sure that Mr. Delorme would greatly prefer that nothing should be said about this—publicly, I mean. He is a man of power and influence."

"I am sure that he will not blame you for what has occurred. I will ask him to say as much to the inspector, and to request, at the same time, that you be assigned to the case of finding the lost jewels."

The lieutenant threw out both hands in a gesture of despair.

"A lot of good that will do," he said. "Then: At least, you can tell me who the man was whom you had seen at Crewe's."

"I can't tell you his name. He is a tall, dark, Mephistophelian-looking person. I was told that by vocation he is a slight-of-hand performer in vaudeville theaters, and a very clever one; that by vocation he is a thief. And that is all I can tell you about him. Perhaps you know him."

"No, I don't; but, by jingo, I'll find him, whether I am sent back to the pavements or not, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Moreaux. And when I do find him I'll make him give up the name of that other party."

"If he happens to know what it is—which I very much doubt."

"Anyhow, I'll see Crewe before I go to bed this night."

"Do. That is a good idea. Excuse

me. I see Mr. Delorme beckoning to me. I think that Mr. Delorme will want us both in consultation with him before we say good night."

The evening was young yet.

The ceremony had been performed at five; the supper was at eight. The bride and groom had just gone to their special train and private car, and it was not yet half past ten.

The guests were thinning out rapidly. In another half-hour there would be none but servants and the master left in the great house. It had had no mistress, alas! since Lorna was very young; she had only a faint recollection of her mother, and supposed her to be dead.

The son, Paul, was a globe trotter—never at home—and he was the product of a former wife of the steel baron.

"Come into the 'den' with me, Birge," the elder man said. "I have got Mills's inventory—the safe deposit company's man, you know."

Then, inside the small room where Moreaux had been once before that evening, he continued: "Have you any idea how many articles are missing?"

"Five—possibly six—although I think that Lorna may not have left that in the 'exhibit'; one calls it by no other name. The five articles are the diamond lavalliere which was one of Jerry's presents; the diamond and emerald bracelet that Paul sent to her from Paris; the tiara of rubies and diamonds that my sister Eunice gave her; a bandeau of pearls, almost priceless in value, the gift of one of my business associates, and—I hesitate to tell you about it, Birge."

"I know already, Mr. Delorme. The small bauble that I donated."

"Bauble, indeed; The wire-gold bracelet with the single but wonderful ruby that was given to you by some India raja when you were a youngster, and which you prized so highly."

"I recall very well indeed that day at your studio, nearly ten years ago, when Lorna, when only a child, went into raptures over it, and you told her that when she grew up and was married you would make her a wedding present of it. Why, she wore it when you made the portrait of her. You painted it on her wrist in the picture."

"So I did, to be sure. What is that sixth article that may be missing, Mr. Delorme?"

"A present that I made to her mother before we were married, and which she left behind when she went away. A cameo brooch of exquisite workmanship which once belonged to my mother."

The artist nodded understandingly. He knew that any subject which related to Lorna's mother was painful to Richard Delorme.

"What shall I do about it, Birge?" the older man asked anxiously. "You must advise me. I much prefer to keep the incident out of the newspapers—if that is possible."

"Then I should advise that you accompany Lieutenant Muchmore to police headquarters now. Be with him when he makes his report to his superior. Exonerate him as far as possible. Show your belief in him by requesting that he be assigned to the case of running down the thief."

"Give us your reason for that request the fact that you do wish to avoid publicity. You have power and influence. You will find that the inspector will respect your wishes. And show your confidence in Muchmore himself by making him a substantial present before you leave the house to-night."

"But—you will go with me, won't you?"

"No. Unfortunately I cannot. I have another engagement still to-night."

There was an odd little smile about the corners of Birge Moreaux's mouth when a moment later he left the small room and found Muchmore impatiently awaiting him.

"Mr. Delorme wants to see you, Lieutenant," he said. "He is going to headquarters with you. Don't stop to talk with me. Go right in and find out what the old gentleman has to say to you."

Moreaux drove directly to the tall building in Blank street where he had his studio.

Oddly enough, less than half an hour after he arrived there the man called Crewe—he of the bleached face and unsavory reputation—left the same building by the rear door, for the building runs through from street to street.

As he stepped outside and turned to lock the door after him a limousine car drove rapidly through the street directly behind him.

He did not turn his head to look toward it. Had he done so he would have recognized the car as one of Richard Delorme's—and he would have seen the face of Lieutenant Muchmore peering out at him from the window in the limousine door.

(To be Continued.)

Our Job Work

HAVE YOU TRIED THE JOB WORK OF THE COMMERCIAL? OUR WORK IS OF THE BEST AND OUR PRICES ARE RIGHT. GIVE US A TRIAL.

BUY YOUR POTATO CHIPS AT BITTNER'S GROCERY.

MADE HIS HOST LAUGH

GUEST'S REMARK REALLY HAD ELEMENT OF HUMOR.

He Intended to Make a Very Polite, Sincere Compliment, but Used a Somewhat Vulgar Synonym for Food.

"It was in Chillicothe, O., that I had my first glimpse into American history. The 'hard times' did not prevent me from buying 'A Brief History of the United States,' the contents of which I virtually devoured. My instructors were my fellow guests at a comfortable boarding house.

"I would retire to my room, ponder the annals of this modern 'chosen people' until I reached a passage whose words proved too big for my mind to grasp (which was often the case), when I would go out and demand light on the subject from the first guest I happened to meet. A physician's wife and the genial, gray-haired proprietor of the boarding house manifested deep interest in me and were ready to aid my strenuous endeavor to become 'an enlightened American citizen.'

"The proprietor, who, I believe, had fought in the Civil war, would relate to me events of that great conflict in such a droll manner that my study of history under his supervision was a supreme delight.

"But the genial proprietor enlightened me on other subjects than that of the Civil war. He gave me my first real lesson in English on table manners. One day he asked me, 'How do you like our grub?'

"What is your grub, sir?" I asked.

"With a mischievous smile that scarcely agitated his weeping-willow mustache and thick beard, he said: 'It is the things we eat, you know. And—and—it is a part of good manners to show—in—in—some way that we like the grub, just to please our host.'

"That was to me a most welcome bit of information. I had been greatly at a loss to know how to express in the English language my appreciation of a good dinner. Certainly now I had no longer an excuse to omit such a polite formality.

"It was only a short time thereafter that I happened to dine with a minister whose gracious wife served for the occasion a bounteous and elegantly appointed dinner. I could hardly wait for the proper moment to express my great appreciation of the repast. When the moment came I turned to my hostess with cheerful dignity and said, 'Mrs. F., I have greatly enjoyed your grub.' But when her husband laughed so that he nearly fell from his chair I suspected that my instruction in table manners at Chillicothe was somewhat defective."

—Abraham Ribbany in His Autobiography.

Real Cure, Perhaps, for Hay Fever. In discussing the use of vaccines made from pollens in the treatment of hay fever, Dr. Henri Iskowitz of New York writes in the Medical Record that there are about thirty flowering plants in this climate the pollen of any one of which may act as the exciting cause in hay fever. From the latter part of May to the middle of July the air is heavily charged with the pollens of the grasses and cultivated cereals. From the middle of August the plants responsible are chiefly goldenrod, ragweed and Indian corn.

The serum used for immunizing persons is prepared from the pollen of some twenty flowers. This is injected between the shoulders, 15 doses being given at intervals of three to five days. The treatment should begin about eight weeks before the hay fever season. Some patients carry their immunity over to a second season, others do not. Patients must be treated for several successive years if the immunity is to be permanent.

Paper Money Popular. The issue of the one-pound and ten-shilling notes in England is admitted to be a bold experiment, but it has proved so successful that every effort is being made to increase their circulation. The improvements made on the second series of notes lessen the danger of forgery and still other improvements may be made.

The notes are convertible into gold on demand, for which the treasury of Great Britain has hoarded up a gold reserve for the notes, so that in time the paper issue, instead of raising prices by inflating the volume of money in circulation, will represent one kind of money instead of another.

Practical financiers want the note to remain in circulation to displace gold, so as to build up the central reserve of metal and prevent the usual waste by handling in circulation.

The Silver Lining. War does not make all men bloody-thirsty. On the banks of the Yser in Belgium where there has been such fierce fighting, the ambulance men one day found a young German badly wounded; and in the midst of the bursting shells they stopped to scribble a line describing what they had seen and heard, and pinned it on the blanket that enveloped him.

When he reached the improvised hospital, the nurses read the blood-stained sheet of packing paper, and one or two brushed away tears as they did so. It bore these words: "He saved the lives of seven British soldiers." It is good to know that, tenderly cared for by an English doctor, he eventually recovered. — Youth's Companion.