

THE DOUBLE DEALER

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

That Same Night at Crewe's.

Crewe stood with both arms outstretched, his strong but delicate hands gripping the inner edge of the bar of his famous place in South Fifth avenue.

It was his customary attitude when he was not wiping glasses or otherwise engaged.

The ugly, almost hideous blemish on one side of his face, which shaded from red to a hue that was nearly purple, seemed more pronounced than ever, although if he turned his head so that it did not show, and one could

see only the smooth side of his face, one would unhesitatingly have pronounced him a handsome man.

There were possibly a score of "regulars" seated at the tables, which were many, for the saloon was both wide and deep; but Crewe's trusted assistant, Christy, was attending to their wants, so that he was himself unoccupied.

The hands of the clock above the back bar pointed at five minutes to midnight.

The front door opened and a tall, dark man of the elder Hermann type came swiftly toward the bar where Crewe was standing.

He moved with a peculiar grace and ease that suggested both fitness and great reserve strength, and his black eyes under their heavy brows were remarkably soft in their expression. Women would have admired him—at a distance.

Men would have shrugged their shoulders and shook their heads if his good looks were mentioned. Crewe maintained his familiar attitude until the newcomer was directly in front of him; then he said, still without moving from his position: "How are you, Sindahr? What are you going to have?" But, as if he had known before he asked the question, he reached into one of the receptacles behind him and brought forth a bottle that was never called for save by this particular customer.

It contained some kind of an Eastern cordial, which must be nameless here for the reason that it is unpronounceable.

"Thank you, Mr. Crewe," Sindahr said in a low voice that was soft as velvet and in perfect English, although one could see that he was a foreigner, and doubtless of Hindu origin, notwithstanding the ink-black mustache and imperial he wore.

"Well, were you there?" Crewe asked as he helped himself to a glass of vichy.

"Surely! Did I not say that I was there? I was the Italian Count Suciini I much resemble. I had no difficulty in obtaining the invitation, Mr. Crewe."

"Don't 'Mister' me, count," and Crewe showed his white teeth in a half smile. "I am just plain Crewe. I have no other name. Did you obey my orders?"

"Most assuredly." "You are lying, Sindahr," Crewe announced coolly.

And when the man in front of the bar took a step backward away from it and shot a gleam from his eyes that was half hatred and half fear, the proprietor added as coolly as before: "You East Indians think that you are the only wise guys on earth, but you will find when you know me better that I am gifted with something of the occult myself. Shell out, count."

"What do you mean by that expression, Crewe," the Oriental demanded, and there was no mistaking the hatred in his eyes then.

"I sent you up there, Sindahr, to watch, not to 'lift.' I told you expressly that you were not to pinch a thing, even if the opportunity offered. You disobeyed me. Shell out!"

"I have nothing. I stole not a thing." "Count, do you want me to send you up the river?"

"No, no, no! Not even if you could do so," was the hasty but half-uncertain reply.

"Then dig down in your jeans and cough up that cameo brooch that you lifted tonight."

Sindahr's expressive eyes grew wide with fear. Then, without a word of reply, he thrust one hand inside his waistcoat and brought forth an article wrapped in tissue-paper.

He passed it across the bar to Crewe, who opened the wrapping enough to see what it contained, then turned and dropped it into a drawer behind him, which he locked.

"I think not. If so, I did not detect them."

"Was anything stolen besides the cameo?"

"I do not think so. I came away immediately after the supper. If there were things missing I did not hear of it. I was—"

The front door opened, and Crewe interrupted him sharply: "Here comes a man who may question you. Be careful what you say." Lieutenant Muchmore strode swiftly to the bar. Another plain-clothes man was with him.

"Hello, Crewe!" he said. Then: "Who's your friend?"

"Good evening, Muchmore. How are you, Bunting?" Crewe replied easily. "My friend is the celebrated and justly renowned Professor Sindahr, known to the public as the 'Worker of Miracles.'"

"And known to the police as the slickest 'dip' that ever happened," Muchmore snapped out, whirling upon the Oriental savagely.

"You've got something in common with the artist, Crewe," he said crossly. "You are hand in glove with him. I want to know what it is all about." Crewe made no reply.

"Things happened tonight at a house where I was present and where that artist was present also. Articles of value were stolen. I am pretty certain that you know something about it, too."

"Anyhow, I'm going to invite you to walk down to headquarters with me where you can tell the inspector all about it. You're not under arrest, understand," he added with a grim smile. "This is merely a courteous invitation."

"Thanks," said Crewe; and at that instant the lights went out—and stayed out.

For a moment there was silence while all present seemed to wait for them to flash on again. Then the front door was heard to close with a bang, and something metallic fell to the floor beside the two officers.

Another moment passed and the lights flashed on again—and the two officers found themselves looking wildly about them, and then staring blankly into each other's faces.

The place was deserted save for themselves and Christy, who was placidly wiping glasses behind the bar. The chair that Sindahr had occupied was vacant. He was gone, and on the floor at his feet was the pair of handcuffs which had bound him, still locked.

Even Crewe himself had disappeared.

"Well, I'll be—," Muchmore began and stopped. "Christy, come here!"

CHAPTER IV.

The Many-Sided Crewe.

"Where is Crewe, Christy?" Muchmore asked with extreme but dangerous mildness. He was quite conscious that he had gone a step too far with the man of the blemished face that night.

Christy ceased wiping the glass, raised his chin and his eyes gazed thoughtfully toward the ceiling before he replied. Then he said: "Seems to me that I heard him say something about a date that he had at ten minutes to one. It's about that now, ain't it, lute?"

Bunting had picked up the handcuffs and was examining them. He held them out toward his side-partner with the remark: "That miracle-worker slipped them all right. They were a snug fit, too."

"Never mind that now," Muchmore replied. "Now, Christy, where is that switch, and how do you work it?"

"What switch, lute?" "I want to know how those lights were turned on and off so neatly," the lieutenant insisted, still in the same dangerously mild tone of voice.

"Lord love you, lute, that thing happens every now and then, and always 'long between twelve and one o'clock. I guess there must be something wrong with the wiring—or something."

"Very likely. All the same I'll go around behind the bar and have a look for myself."

"Sure. Come ahead. Say, what'll youse have to drink?"

Neither man paid the slightest attention to the invitation. Muchmore passed around the end of the bar and spent five fruitless minutes searching for an electric switch—and gave it up; but he remained behind the bar, facing Christy.

"I want to know how Crewe left this place," he said shortly.

"Well, lute, I guess you'll have to ask him about that. I'm blowed if I know. Why, I've known him before now to disappear while my back was turned—in broad daylight, too. That miracle worker ain't got nothin' on him if anybody should ask you."

"You will show me the way he went out if you know what is good for you, Christy," the lieutenant said sharply. His quick temper was asserting itself again.

"See, I wish I knew it. I wouldn't have wanted here, either—with you that mad that you wanted to fight. Say, lute, don't you know that you can catch more flies with merrasses that you can with vinegar? That ain't no way to stack up against Crewe, the way you done it."

"Well, Christy, one thing is quite certain. You and Crewe both aided a prisoner to escape, and so I'm going to take you down to headquarters with me, just to find out if your knowledge and memory of things won't improve on the way."

"Now, wouldn't that jar you?" Christy exclaimed without excitement.

He was midway of the length of the bar, facing Muchmore, who stood in the opening at the end of it. "I wasn't anywhere near the miracle worker, and I heard Bunting say just now that the guy slipped the irons

off'n him. Anyhow, he wasn't any prisoner. You didn't have any warrant for him. He was only a suspicious character, as you call it—and I ain't one of them. I guess, maybe, if you take me in for what happened here tonight I'll go an' see my lawyer tomorrow. How about that, lute?"

Christy was too "wise" to the game to be frightened.

Muchmore realized that with a grim smile. The only way to take him in would be to plant something on him, or frame him up, and Muchmore and Bunting were above that sort of thing.

"Do you think you could find a way to ask Crewe to return here, Christy?" Muchmore asked him—and as he finished the question the electric light winked again.

"There they go again," the bartender chuckled. "Why, lemme see. I don't think he meant to be gone but a few minutes when he went out. You see, he was in his shirt sleeves, and he hadn't no hat, and—"

Christy stopped, gazing directly ahead of him, past the lieutenant, toward the rear of the room. Both officers had their eyes upon him and had not heard nor seen a door as it opened suddenly at that end of the place.

But they turned their heads quickly to follow Christy's gaze and discovered Crewe advancing toward them with the swift motion that was his chief characteristic. And he seemed not in the least disturbed.

"I can't find it, Chris— Hello! Where is the professor? Oh, I see, Muchmore; you decided to let him go. I think you did right, too. It is closing time, boys. What will you have before I lock up?" and he stepped behind the bar and stretched out his arms in the customary gesture, thus drawing the two officers around in front of him again.

"We didn't let him go; he let himself go, Crewe," said Bunting. He had said very little since he entered the place; now, for some reason—perhaps Muchmore had signaled to him—he took up the conversational and, had he but known it, Crewe liked him, and respected him above the average.

"He slipped out of the cuffs and chucked them on the floor at our feet while the lights were out. Oh, he's a miracle worker all right; take it from me."

"Well, well!" said Crewe, and put out bottle and glasses, and a siphon of vichy. He had never been known to drink anything stronger than vichy in his own place.

"But we don't care anything about that, now, Crewe," Bunting went on quietly. "The thing that we are curious about is, how and when you got out?"

"I? Why, I just walked out—to see if I could find out what was the matter with the lights."

"Aw, say, Crewe, do we look as easy as that?"

Crewe shrugged his shoulders. "Oh, well, I won't try to convince you. Have another? No? Well, it's after closing time, now, and I don't want to get into trouble with the inspector of this district. And say, Muchmore, if you still insist, and will wait, I'll take a walk down with you for that talk with your chief. How about it?"

"Go ahead and close up," Muchmore replied, still a bit unsettled as to temper. "Then come into the back room where Bunting and I can have a talk with you. That will be quite as well."

"Come on, then. Christy can do the closing," and he led the way to the back room.

"Crewe," Bunting began when the three were seated together at the one big round table that it contained, "do you happen to know anything about a wedding in high life that was pulled off tonight?"

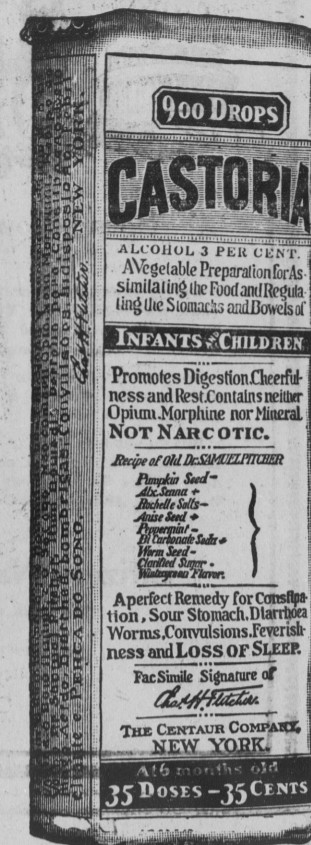
"Every crook in town has known about it for a week, so why shouldn't I—since that is the way you bulls usually refer to me? The papers have been filled with lists of the presents and their priceless value."

"That is just the point, Crewe. Some of those presents were 'lifted,' and by a gun who was so slick that Muchmore, who was assigned there, and who was in the room all the time, never had a chance to drop to it."

"Well, what's the answer, Bunting?"

"Muchmore and I believe that you could assist us to recover that lost property—and there is a generous reward in it for all of us if you can."

"Se?"



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Bunting, who seized his arm and held it.

Crewe sat perfectly still, the blemish on his face glowing hideously under the electric-bulb over the table.

Then, when that first paroxysm of rage had passed, when Bunting had released his partner's arm, Crewe slowly left his chair and threw open the door that led into the hallway.

"Good night, Bunting," he said. "This is the way out. Tell your friend that when he comes to me in a proper frame of mind and makes that apology because he believes it to be due me, I may—I do not promise—I may decide to try to help you both."

(To be Continued.)

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