

THE DOUBLE DEALER

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

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CHAPTER V.

The Cameo Brooch.

Crewe, left alone in that back room of his own resort, re-created himself at the table until Christy came in from the bar and seated himself in utter silence opposite his employer; but it was only for a moment before Crewe directed the bartender to bring him his coat and hat, and also a small package wrapped in tissue paper from the middle drawer behind the bar.

He had devoted merely one swift glance upon it when Sindahr gave it up so reluctantly, to assure himself that the juggler had not attempted one of his tricks; now he removed the tissue wrapping and put the wonderful cameo down upon the table, and for more than a minute sat quite still, lost in admiration of the exquisite and wonderful carving.

And Christy passed around the table and bent familiarly over Crewe's chair to observe it also.

"Do you realize, boy, that this brooch is almost priceless in value?" Crewe remarked at last, without raising his eyes. "This is one of six articles that disappeared from the home of Richard Delorme tonight; but this one came, if offered to a collector such as Mr. Morgan was, would have brought a price greater than the sum of all the others.

"It is the lost replica of the great Vienna Onyx—with the difference that the original is nine by eight inches while this one is five by four. Still it is a replica in all save size, done by the same hand. The carving, my boy, represents the coronation of the Emperor Augustus. No wonder Sindahr could not resist it."

He wrapped it again in the tissue paper and stowed it away in one of his pockets.

"Your last remark reminds me of something that I wished to say to you," Christy replied with an entire absence of the slang he was accustomed to using. "Sindahr will kill you if he ever gets half a chance. I saw it in his eyes and manner to-night when you made him give that up."

"Oh, I have not the slightest doubt of that, Christy."

"He came near to attempting it to-night when you turned your back to him to put that cameo in the drawer."

"I knew it even then; but, also, I knew that his cupidity would win out. If he had made such an attempt then he would have lost forever an opportunity to regain possession of the cameo."

"He will seek another one."

"Surely."

"Won't you stay here tonight, instead of going back up-town?" Christy inquired anxiously.

"No, I must get back."

"More than likely he is waiting for you in some doorway, right now, sir," Christy pleaded. "He and many of the others know that it is your habit to go out nights after we close, even though they have no idea where you go."

Crewe's reply was a light laugh as he rose to his feet prepared to take his departure.

"Don't fear for me, lad. I am like Napoleon in that I have work to do and I know that I will remain unharmed until it is done. Good night."

"Just one moment, please. I have watched that man every time he has been here. I have studied him as you have taught me to study all of them," Christy said eagerly.

"Well, what of it, lad?"

"He will not attack you openly. He will not shoot or stab. He belongs to that sect in India which are called Strangers. He will creep upon you from behind and use the cord."

"I know, Christy; I know! But I won't give him a chance. Good night."

Outside in the street, Crewe moved swiftly and warily, with every sense alert, for he was well aware that Christy's fears were by no means groundless; and he had not a doubt that Sindahr was even then waiting for his approach somewhere between the cafe and the square.

In passing along the last block before arriving at the square he watched every shadowy point narrowly, and when he was within a few doors from the corner his vigilance was rewarded—there was a blacker smudge against one of the black recesses as he passed it.

Crewe took two more steps, then turned swiftly—and the figure of a man tried to step backward into the concealment from which it had partly emerged.

"Come out here, Sindahr," Crewe ordered calmly. "I shall not harm you for what you would have done; but I want to talk to you."

Sindahr came slowly and reluctantly forward, his teeth gleaming in a grimace which was intended to be an ingratiating smile, but which, in the fear that gripped him, was only a contortion of his face.

"I was waiting to speak with you,

Crewe," he said, but his voice trembled. He was in deadly fear of Crewe since the latter had so mysteriously discovered his theft.

"Oh, yes; I know all about that!" Crewe replied with a shrug. "You were waiting here to strangle me—but that doesn't matter. Give me that cord. I know that you can make another like it, but I prefer to take this one as a memento of the occasion; and some day when you are on trial for murder, as you surely will be, I shall offer it in evidence against you. Give it up."

With hands that trembled in abject fear now, Sindahr gave the dead, braided cord into Crewe's outstretched palm; and Crewe, as if the incident were forgotten, said:

"Walk with me across the park."

A moment later, as they walked on, side by side, he added: "You are a clever man, Sindahr. You live your daily life in a half disguise, and you do your slickest work without any disguise at all save the partial whitening of your hair and mustache. No wonder that Muchmore had no thought of recognizing you when he saw you for the second time tonight. What puzzles me is your chin so that it looks so natural; it looks as if it grew there."

"Ah," the Oriental replied with pride, "it is a preparation of my own; the result of long study. You could pull it—it would not come off; you could jerk it—it would be the same."

"Then, with the imperial gone, there is a preparation of chalk and bismuth and glycerine and rose-water, which whitens the hair to a silvery gray, and which does not rub off, which is affected by neither comb nor brush—and with the imperial gone, with the preparation on my hair and mustache, behold! I am transformed at once to the Count Suetini."

Crewe stopped at the north side of the square.

"I shall have other work for you to do soon as Count Suetini," he said. "I do not put any trust in you, but you will not fail me, for your own sake."

"Oh, no, no, no! I will serve you gladly. But the great cameo, Crewe. Do you know its wonderful value?"

"Certainly."

"You intend to keep it all for yourself?"

"No. Some day I will return it to its rightful owner—we will say because it is an heirloom, and because I am sentimental."

"When—when will you return it?"

"Sindahr, you wish to go after it again, don't you. Don't worry. I shall lock it away somewhere, in safety, for a year or two or three, and then, after you have been electrocuted for somebody's murder, or are in prison, we will say, I will claim a reward for its return."

"Crewe, you make me hate you, and my hatred is sometimes dangerous," Sindahr muttered in a low tone.

"Yes; you are like your native cobra—filled with venom. Good night. Report to me or to Christy every day."

"Wait. Tell me one thing that he would have lost forever an opportunity to regain possession of the cameo."

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mentioned the name of Crewe at least twice while he was at Delorme's tonight.

"And it is a fact that I saw Crewe coming out of the studio building where Moreaux has his studio only a short time after Moreaux must have arrived there himself. And Crewe had a key to the nameless street door. Now none but blue-stocking tenants are allowed a key to a building like that."

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

"This: Crewe was there, waiting for Moreaux. Crewe could have departed by the Blank street door without a key, and it was so late that there would have been no danger in doing so. But, Moreaux must have given Crewe his key to the rear door, and therefore, don't you see? Moreaux expects Crewe to return there again tonight. Anyhow, that's my hunch, and I am going up there."

Crewe approached the studio building in due time after his parting with Sindahr. The street called Nameless seemed deserted when he turned into it and hurried with swift steps toward the door of the studio building.

There were houses with high stoops adjoining it, and just as Crewe was passing the last one of these two officers stepped from the arway and confronted him.

CHAPTER VI.

The Man and His Mask.

Crewe stopped while a space of ten feet or more still separated him from the two detectives; and they, too, remained where they were.

"Got you right that time, didn't we, Crewe? You didn't expect to find us here, waiting for you, did you?" Muchmore asked with something of derision in his tone, although there was no indication of anger in his manner.

"Well, what of it?" Crewe asked calmly.

"Nothing particular; only we were curious to know if you intended to use that key to this building again tonight."

"And if I do happen to possess such a key and should use it—what then?"

"Bunting and I would be under the painful necessity of arresting you—that's all. A man of your reputation who offers a building like this one at this hour of the night is, at least, a suspicious character. Get me?"

"Quite so, Muchmore. But you don't get me."

Crewe turned on his heel, but a sharp command from Muchmore stopped him when he would have gone away again.

"Wait!" the lieutenant ordered, and Crewe saw that he held an automatic in his hand to enforce obedience.

"Well, Mr. Muchmore, what now?" Crewe asked.

"I'll trouble you for that key. Hand it over."

"This is a hold-up, with the characters reversed, officer?" Crewe inquired ironically.

"Call it what you like, but hand over that key."

"I suppose I refuse?"

"Don't we'll take you 'in, no matter what happens."

"Muchmore, for a man of undoubted genius in your chosen calling, you certainly can do the biggest fool things of anybody I know."

"Hand over that key, Crewe. I'm not going to lose my temper again."

"Thank Heaven for that!"

Crewe took the key from one of his pockets, held it between his thumb and finger for a moment, and then deliberately tossed it to Bunting, who, being surprised by the act, missed catching it, and it fell rattling to the pavement.

"Pick it up, Sam, and find out if it fits the lock," Muchmore directed, still keeping Crewe covered with his gun.

It did, of course, and presently the door swung open; and Bunting, holding it partly ajar, waited.

"Crewe," said Muchmore, "I ought to arrest you for having the key in your possession, but I guess you would have no difficulty in proving in the morning how it came into your possession, so I'm going to let you go—with a warning. I don't know what the game is that you are playing but I suspect it is a deep one—and I'm going to find out what it is, too."

"There is a man up-stairs waiting for you who can tell me, and I am going up there now to ask him. You have got something on him. Blackmail of some sort, I suppose. Now, get back to your 'div, where you belong, and thank your stars that we permitted you to go there. Your race is about run, Crewe, take it from me."

He turned and the two officers disappeared into the building, locking the door after them; and strangely enough Crewe laughed aloud, and with genuine amusement when they had gone.

Then he wheeled and hurried around the corner toward a drug-store that was located two blocks distant.

two officers who were waiting for me at the door. They are now climbing the stairs to the studio.

"Hurry down to the studio door, and when they ring wait a suitable time and then demand to know who is there. Make them believe it is Moreaux who is talking, but refuse to admit them. Tell them to go to the devil, if you want to. When they go away follow them down the stairs, and as soon as they pass outside at the rear door flash a light to me through the front door and open it and let me in. That's all."

Whosoever has climbed twelve flights of stairs at one inning will comprehend something of the condition, mental and physical, of the two officers when at last they stood before the door of artist's studio.

Breathless, exhausted, weak-kneed in the true sense of the expression, they waited there several moments before touching the button of the electric bell. They had snapped on a light in each hallway as they ascended; they intended to snap them off again when they returned.

Crewe had counted on that idea when he gave that direction over the telephone about following them down the stairs when they should go away.

Muchmore rang several times before there was any response; but at last an impatient voice—the lieutenant—who was very keen of ear, had not the slightest doubt that it was the voice of Moreaux—demanded to know who was there and what was wanted.

"I am Lieutenant Muchmore, Mr. Moreaux," that officer announced. "Detective Bunting is with me."

"Well, what do you want? What the devil do you mean, disturbing me at this hour?"

"I want to see you. I want to talk to you—about the incidents that happened at the reception. Let us in, if you please."

"I do not please, Lieutenant Muchmore. If there is anything that you want to see me about, come around in the daytime."

"But—this is important."

"I don't care if it is. Go away. Go to the devil, for all I care."

"It's about that man Crewe."

"Oh, is it? Well, Crewe can wait as well as the other things. You can't get in here tonight, and that settles it. The idea of pulling me out of bed like this. You need not speak again, for I shall not answer."

Nor did he, although Muchmore who began to suspect that he had made another mistake, pleaded for several moments after that, until his unruly temper again asserted itself.

He shook his fist at the door and called out savagely:

"I'll tell you one thing, Artist Moreaux, if you are still there to hear me, things are getting mighty mixed up in this business. I took a key to this building away from your friend Crewe, and it is my belief that maybe you knew something about that jewel robbery yourself. Anyhow, I'm going to find out."

He turned away and stamped noisily down the stairs. Bunting followed after, snapping off the hall lights as he passed them. Bunting, to tell the truth, was more amused than perturbed by the incidents of the night.

Neither of them thought of looking behind them while they descended the twelve stairways of the building to the ground floor.

They would have seen nothing had they done so, for Feltner, Birge Moreaux's faithful and well-trained valet, kept himself a full flight behind them, nor could they have heard his noiseless movements, even had Muchmore made less racket than he did.

They passed outside the building at last, and as Muchmore turned to lock the door he said savagely to his companion:

"You can bet your sweet life, Sam, that I'll take this key to Mr. Moreaux tomorrow, and, by gad, if he can't explain why he gave it into the keeping of that man Crewe, I'll swear out a warrant for his arrest on information and belief!"

Inside the building, as soon as they had gone, Feltner hurried to the front entrance, and between the inner and the outer doors, flashed one gleam from an electric pocket-light that he carried in his hand. Then he opened the outer door and Crewe stepped inside.

"Pooled them eh, Feltner?" Crewe asked smilingly, as he led the way to one of the two elevators. With another key in his possession he opened the door to the elevator, and the two rode comfortably to the top of the building.

"I am both hungry and thirsty, Feltner," Crewe announced as soon as they entered the studio; then he passed into another room and closed the door while the valet went to fulfill the suggestion that had been made.

Twenty minutes later the door of the room into which Crewe had disappeared was opened again, and Birge Moreaux, the artist, looking quite himself although dressed only in pajamas, bathrobe, and slippers, came out and seated himself at the table whereon Feltner had placed the things he knew his master liked best after a night with Crewe.

The transformation wrought by the changes from one character to the other was the more remarkable because, in reality, there was so little transformation about it—but the explanation of all that will appear later when an occasion occurred where it had to be accomplished under sudden and strenuous circumstances.

"Halt past two. Why, it is not so late as I supposed," Moreaux remarked presently, after a glance at

the mission-clock in the corner of the studio.

He lighted a cigar and retired to the depths of his favorite chair to smoke. Feltner remained standing respectfully beside the empty fireplace.

"You had better turn in, Feltner," Moreaux remarked, after a moment. "and you may sleep as long as you like in the morning. I shall breakfast at the club with Mr. Delorme, and you need not get up to wait upon me. Lay out what things I will need now, and let it go at that."

So Feltner went away to his small room which Moreaux had built expressly for him on the roof of the building above one of the two rear rooms of the apartment, and which was reached only by a special staircase which led from a closet in that room.

Moreaux, left to himself, smoked on in silence and evident enjoyment of the solitude and isolation that he could find in no other place.

He was smiling to himself in mental contemplation of the ultimate discomfiture of the two officers who had toiled to the top of that tall building to see him, when he was startled by the sound of the bell at the studio door.

For a moment he sat quite still, thinking, and then the solution of that summons at the door suddenly occurred to him.

Smiling and pulling the cords of his bathrobe more tightly around him, he crossed to the door and opened it; but he placed himself squarely in the opening, so that the two men who were outside could not enter. Needless to say that they were Muchmore and Bunting.

"Well, what do you want, Muchmore?" Moreaux demanded coldly. "Don't you think that you have disturbed me quite enough for one night?"

"We went to the top of another building and saw that your skylight was lighted up, Mr. Moreaux," Muchmore replied gruffly, "and having a key—the key that you gave to Crewe—I made up my mind that I'd make one more effort to talk with you before I swore out a warrant for your arrest. Do we go inside or don't we?"

"Oh, come in by all means," Moreaux replied, and with mock astonishment he added: "I had no idea that it was so serious as all that. Come in, by all means."

CHAPTER VII.

The Jewel Worshiper.

"Mr. Moreaux," Muchmore began, ignoring the gesture by which the artist assigned him to a very comfortable chair, although Bunting accepted one gratefully and smilingly. "I would be very much pleased if you would explain the mystery of your association with that man Crewe, and I think I have a right to demand it."

"Mystery? There is no mystery, Lieutenant," the artist replied, smiling. "Then why was he here awaiting your return from the wedding reception?"

"We will say that it was at my request."

"Don't you know that he is the biggest crook in town?"

"I have heard such a report, or words to that effect."

"Why did you give him a key to this building tonight?"

"We will say that I expected him to return here after his business was closed up."

"Why?"

"That is rather an intimate question, is it not, Lieutenant?"

"Don't you appreciate the significance of those coincidences, Mr. Moreaux?"

"Possibly I do not."

"Let me tell you, then, than on information and belief I could swear out a warrant for your arrest in connection with the—"

"That will suffice, Lieutenant," Moreaux interrupted him, leaving his chair suddenly, crossing to the door, and throwing it open. "This is the way out, sir, and I will ask you not to return until you bring that warrant with you—and the laughter and derision of the whole detective bureau with it."

He turned, then, ignoring Muchmore, and addressed Bunting. "I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance," he added, "but this dismissal is not intended to reflect upon you. For your own information I will say that Crewe telephoned to this studio immediately after the key to the building was taken from him, so I am well informed as to what happened. I will ask you to return the key now."

"My name is Bunting, and here is the key. Will you give me a short interview at any time tomorrow that will suit your own convenience?"

" cheerfully. Gladly. Come here to the studio at noon. I will expect you."

Muchmore, who had not stirred from his position, stepped forward quickly then.

"Mr. Moreaux," he said, "I apologize. I am very sorry for speaking to you as I did just now. Will you—"

The artist thrust out his hand, laughed aloud mirthfully, and interrupted him.

"Then say no more about it, Muchmore," he said. "Forget it. Come here with Mr. Bunting at noon. Possibly I will be able to make some suggestions. Now come, I will take you down in the elevator and let you out of the building. As for the stolen jewels, gentlemen," he added when they were descending the shaft, "I have an idea that they will soon be recovered, and that you will get the credit for it."

Late as the hour was when he retired, Birge Moreaux was seated opposite Richard Delorme in the breakfast room of the club at eight o'clock the following morning. It was his own favorite club, and the tete-a-tete breakfast was by his invitation.

"Mr. Delorme," he said when the morning meal was half consumed, "did you ever know or hear of a Wall Street man named McCormack, who was a collector of rare paintings and rarer jewels? He is dead now, but his remarkable collection, and the basement room down-town which he fitted up to hold it, remains in the memory of a great many people. Did you ever know him?"

"Oh, yes. I knew him quite well, Birge," was the instant reply, given with interest.

"Did you ever see his collection?"

"Several times."

"And have you listened to his discourses upon it?"

"Yes, indeed."

"He was a very unusual man, a very splendid man, loved by everybody who knew him. Did it ever occur to you that he was what one might call a jewel worshiper?"

"Jewel worshiper? I do not remember to have heard the expression until now."

"There are many such, Mr. Delorme—and it is never the intrinsic value of a stone that attracts them. It must be unique, unusual. For example, Mr. McCormack once showed me a large diamond that was perfectly flawless, but which was as yellow as the yellowest topaz. He considered it priceless, because there was not supposed to be another like it in the world."

"Yes, yes; I recall it myself."

"Has it occurred to you, Mr. Delorme, that the five articles which disappeared from your house last night—I do not mention the cameo, because, you know, you never showed it to me, and I did not see it among the presents—has it occurred to you that all five of those lost articles will come under the definition of the word unique?"

"No, Birge; it had not. But—what are you getting at?"

"Simply this: That the articles stolen from your house last night were not taken by any common thief or by any person who went to the reception with the deliberate intention of stealing, but that they were lifted by a so-called collector, who could not resist the temptation when it was presented."

"They were stolen by some person who would be least suspected by any of your family or friends; by somebody who has a choice collection stored away in a secret room, where he or she, as the case may be, can go to them in secret and in solitude and worship them."

"Birge, you amaze me!"

"I suppose so. It amazes me, too, when I consider the possibilities of it all."

"Who could it be—if your surmise is correct?"

"That question, I think, will be determined in due time."

"Then the thief—one can use no other expression in connection with this affair—was some person among my acquaintances?"

"Undoubtedly. A person whom even the detective on duty there would consider above the necessity of espionage. A person well known to you, to your daughter, to your intimate friends."

"But why—tell me why you have arrived at this decision, Birge?" said Mr. Delorme.

"I have told you. I will add this: Every pearl in that bandeau was a curiosity itself—and each one was of undoubted value. No attempt had been made to match them. There were oval pearls, pear-shaped pearls, and two very remarkable twin-pearls among them. The assembling of them in that bandeau created one of the most unique as well as valuable ornaments I have ever seen. Don't you agree with me?"

"Entirely—now that my attention is called to the fact."

"Take that bracelet of wire-gold, with the rajah's ruby, that I gave to Lorna. There is nothing else in the world like it, Mr. Delorme. There is no duplicate, and could not be one."

"I quite appreciate that fact, Birge."

"Very well; the diamond and rubytars, the emerald bracelet, and, more than either of those, the lavalliere that was one of Jerry's presents to his bride, all come under the same head, if one should stop to describe them."

"In their way, they are all unusual, curious, and cannot be duplicated. Intrinsically, there were other articles there of greater value which might have been taken as easily—and a thief, seeking for profit only, would have selected them."

"You are undoubtedly right about it, Birge. But, great Scott! Must this affair develop into a scandal?"

"Let us hope not, sir."

"Have you any idea—"

"None whatever as yet, Mr. Delorme," Moreaux hastened to interrupt him.

(To be Continued.)

A healthy man is a king in his own right; an unhealthy man an