

THE DOUBLE DEALER

By VARICK VANARDY.
Author of "Missing—\$21,600."
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The old gentleman turned impatiently toward Baxter—and it was at that moment when Moreaux became conscious of the arrival of the other officers.

"There is no necessity for you to remain here any longer," Delorme continued. "This man seems to have been alone, and—"

Baxter interrupted further speech by stepping in front of Bobcat and shaking his fist in the man's face.

"You lie when you say that you came here alone, Rickett!" he shouted. "Out with it now, who was your pal? If you don't tell me now, I'll bring it out of you down-town. Name him."

"There wasn't anybody with me. I was alone," was the sullen reply.

"Spare me, ain't you, Bobcat? Scared of Crewe, eh?"

"No, I ain't."

"Well, you'd better be. Take him out, boys. Mr. Moreaux, where'd you blow in from?"

"The street, lieutenant," Moreaux replied calmly; and then he crossed quickly to Bobcat and bent forward as if to peer more closely at the man. Next he turned his gaze to Baxter, and there was a quizzical half smile in his eyes as he said with deliberation:

"Why, lieutenant, this burglar is a friend of yours. Artists do not forget friends—especially types; and this one is a type. I have seen you together, I am sure. Isn't he that thing which you call, in your lingo, a 'school-teacher'?"

He wheeled upon Mr. Delorme before Baxter could reply and added:

"I think, sir, that you should report this affair to the inspector at headquarters. It is plainly a put-up job. This man with handcuffs on his wrists was SENT here."

"Whaddya mean by that, Mr. Artist?" Marline demanded, blustering forward.

"I mean that it is quite evident to me that you plain-clothes men not only knew that this house was to be entered tonight, but it is quite likely that you SENT the burglar here yourselves for some ulterior purpose of your own." Moreaux turned the head and called out: "Lieutenant Muchmore! Bunting! Come here, please."

The two officers thus summoned apparently quickly at the top of the stairs and waited there quietly.

"Lieutenant Muchmore—Mr. Moreaux began, but that officer interrupted him smilingly.

"Captain Muchmore, if you please, Mr. Moreaux," he said. "I received my promotion late this afternoon."

Baxter and Marline glared.

"Good! Capital! I congratulate you, Captain Muchmore! Also, the fact greatly simplifies conditions here. I charge that man"—pointing a finger at Bobcat Rickett—"with burglary. I charge those two men, Baxter and Marline, with being accessories to the crime, and therefore, also, with burglary. Mr. Richard Delorme joins with me in preferring these charges. Tomorrow we will present formal charges to the commissioner. Just now, captain, your duty as the ranking officer present is plain."

Muchmore turned to the two uniformed policemen.

"Take Rickett to the station-house and lock him up," he ordered shortly. "Baxter, you and Marline had better report at headquarters without delay. In the meantime I will telephone in that you are on your way."

Baxter turned away with bowed head and without replying.

Not so Marline. He took a step toward Moreaux, then stopped; but he shook his fist in the air, and every one of his fiery red hairs seemed to bristle as he ground out savagely:

"I'll get your goat yet, Mr. Birge Moreaux, and when I do I'll get it good and hard. You was more'n half responsible for me bein' laid off before, and by—"

Muchmore stepped forward in front of the man.

Marline hesitated, stopped, then turned away and followed Baxter down the stairs.

Just half an hour later—that is to say, at half past two o'clock in the morning—Moreaux, alone, unaccompanied, halted in the street beneath an arc light and attentively examined two small flat keys that he held in the hollow of his hand. He was endeavoring to decide which one of the two he should make use of first.

One of them, he felt assured, would unlock the mystery of the lost wedding presents—but which one? Which one?

He asked himself that question over and over again as he went on his way.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Jewel Worshiper.

After a rapid walk of ten minutes Moreaux came to a stop in front of a low, one-and-a-half story brick structure which once had been a stable, although it was plain that a long time had elapsed since it had been put to

such uses. The wide door seemed to be solidly sealed, but a smaller one had been cut through it and into the lock of the little door Birge Moreaux fitted one of the keys.

He stepped through quickly, closed the door after him, and then struck a match, and so found the switch of the electric lights.

The room in which he stood extended the entire width and half the depth of the small building. It was the studio, the workroom, of a sculptor.

Busts, figures, groups, plaques, reliefs, many of them finished or half finished and others just begun and abandoned, were everywhere, on tables, tabourettes, shelves, and even chairs. Mounds of clay waiting to be softened for use were there.

There were some valuable paintings against the walls; there were curios and decorations about the room, which evidenced the fact that the sculptor—whichever the sculptor might be—did not depend upon art for a livelihood.

In the left half of the partition which divided the depth of the building a door was wide open, and through it Moreaux could see a luxuriously appointed lounging room. To the right of the door the partition was concealed by a tapestry of unquestionable richness.

Moreaux, without hesitating, stepped forward and pulled the tapestry aside, and so disclosed a second door, which was locked.

But the small object that Crewe had taken from the oblong silver box in the safe-deposit compartment of Lorna Delorme's room, and which Rickett had not been able to see, was the tiny key to the lock of that door.

Moreaux produced it, opened the door, and so disclosed another door behind it—a door which was unmistakably made of steel, and which was fastened against intruders by a combination lock.

And here Moreaux referred to the small, silver-bound book which, as Crewe, he had been at such pains to procure, and the clasp of which he had forced for him in Lorna's room.

He opened it, turned the thick, leathery leaves rapidly until he found the page he sought, studied the figures he had found for a moment, and then turned his attention again to the steel door, reaching out a hand toward the dial of the combination lock.

But his extended hand paused ere it touched the dial.

Moreaux bent forward and studied it attentively for several seconds.

Then, with a startled intaking of his breath, he grasped the handle of the door below the dial and turned it.

The steel door was not locked!

He pulled it open with a jerk—and then, with an exclamation of startled amazement, he sprang through the opening and got down upon one knee beside a prostrate figure that was lying at full length upon the rug of black velvet that covered the floor.

The prostrate, motionless, unconscious figure on the floor was Lorna Delorme Beverly, the bride of less than three days before.

Moreaux paid no attention to the glittering array of jewels that adorned the walls of that remarkable room, the walls and ceiling and floor of which were entirely covered with black silk-velvet; nor to the ebony pedestals, tall and short, with which the room was littered, each one bearing its precious burden of precious stones.

He lifted Lorna gently in his arms and carried her into the lounging room at the other side of the partition; and he saw, when he put her down upon the couch, that she had only fainted, and that nature was rapidly restoring her again to consciousness.

Knowing that she would open her eyes presently to a full realization of her surroundings, he left her and returned to the velvet room and its incalculably valuable contents, where a single cluster of electric bulbs glowed from the middle of the black-bound ceiling overhead.

The riches, the values, the wondrous collection of precious ornaments and stones that were there appalled even Birge Moreaux.

He had anticipated something of the sort, but nothing that approached the reality of it. He knew that Lorna's father was a multimillionaire and that the daughter had, ever since unattended in her allowances; but he had expected no such revelation as this.

Nevertheless, he devoted no more than passing glances upon the various treasures of that strange room.

He had gone there to seek the missing wedding presents—for, ever since that time when he had painted Lorna's portrait while she was still a girl, ever since she had gone into such raptures over the wire-weld rajah's bracelet, with its setting of a single ruby, and had insisted that it should appear on her arm in the portrait, Birge Moreaux had known her as one who was obsessed by a mania for jewels—a jewel worshiper!

Upon one occasion, two years before that night, he had met her in the street when she was returning to her home from the studio which her father had purchased for her, and which she had reconstructed according to her own designs; for she was an enthusiastic student of sculpture, and had demonstrated considerable talent in the art even then. She had at the time, carried a little silver-bound book under her arm, and in a burst of confidence when he had asked her, "What is inside of the little book with the locked clasps, Lorna?" she had replied:

"It holds all of my most precious secrets, Mr. Moreaux."

And so, when the wedding presents disappeared so mysteriously at the reception, Moreaux had at once surmised that they had been taken by none other than the bride, and that she had reported the loss to him the better to cover up her crime against herself.

And Moreaux had taken this roundabout method for their recovery only because he believed that the outcome of it would result in an absolute cure of her mania.

He had confidently anticipated finding the lost jewels in the secret room of Lorna's studio. He had not at all expected to find HER there.

But Lorna WAS there, notwithstanding the fact that she was supposed to be traveling westward in her father's private car—and a quick though thorough search convinced Moreaux that the lost jewels were not there.

A slight sound attracted him, and he turned quickly.

Lorna was standing in the doorway of the jewel room, clinging with clenched fingers to the casing. Her face was as white as alabaster. Her eyes were wide, frightened, appealing. Her lips parted, and she breathed spasmodically.

Moreaux went quickly to her, and he led her gently, and unresistingly again to the lounging room.

"Wait a moment, Lorna," he said then, "and don't be frightened, and he returned to the jewel-room, snapped the lights, closed the steel door, twisted the dial, drew the tapestry into place over it, and went back to her.

His first question was a natural one. "How does it happen that I find you here?" he asked her.

She did not weep, but she stared long and intently at him before she replied: "Then—"

"I—I was half crazed, by the thought that the wire-weld bracelet, the locket, and the other jewels might not have been delivered—might be lost," she faltered, still staring into Moreaux's eyes unblinkingly.

"I was possessed by the fear of it. We were detained two hours at Detroit. Jerry left me alone to make some purchases. A through train to New York was standing upon another track, ready to start. I scribbled a hasty note to Jerry, seized my little hand-bag, and I came back here on that train."

"I told Jerry to wait there for me. I explained to him in that note I wrote exactly why I was returning. I told him the truth—that I had stolen my own jewels. It was necessary, but it was plain, and it was the truth."

When I arrived in New York I telegraphed to him to go to a telephone at the Wayne hotel across the street. Then I waited two hours, and talked to him. He will wait there for me. He says he understands. Oh, isn't he good? Isn't he?"

"Then I came here. I don't know what time it was—midnight, I think, or later."

"But Lorna, why did you come here? Surely, you did not expect to find the jewels here? You had no opportunity to bring them here from the reception," Moreaux said quietly.

"No. But I did put them in a round leather case, which I wrapped and addressed to myself. Then I wrapped that and addressed it to the woman who takes care of the studio for me—and she comes here every day and stays until evening. I wrote a hasty note, telling her what to do with the package, and where to put it."

"But she did not receive it. I went to her house and roused her when I found that the package was not here. She had neither seen it nor heard of it."

"The man to whom I gave it to forward for me did not send it or deliver it—and I have not the least idea who he was, although he was properly presented to me. Then—then, Mr. Moreaux I came here again. I went into the jewel-room and closed the door after me—and that is all I know until—until—"

"I understand, Lorna. Now, tell me: You gave the package to one of the guests to mail for you?"

"Yes, yes; but—"

"And you do not know who the gentleman was?"

"No. He was a stranger. I don't think I had ever seen him before. That was why I selected him for my messenger. An acquaintance might have thought it strange."

"Can you describe him, Lorna?"

"No. No. I cannot. I was excited, nervous, distraught, bewildered—miserably ashamed of what I had done, but alive to the fact that it was too late then to remedy it. Oh, Mr. Moreaux! Birge, help me! Tell me what I must do. I have been insane, but this experience has cured me. I will strip that room of everything it contains. I will have the steel door removed. Tell me what I must do!"

"And the lost jewels?" Moreaux asked quietly.

"Let them go. I will explain it all to Jerry and papa. Nobody else need know."

"Have you eaten anything since—when?"

"Yes, I have eaten. I am not hungry. I need nothing."

"Then I will leave you here until morning, Lorna. You can make yourself some tea over the alcohol burner here. I will leave you now. I will send a telegram to Jerry within a few hours. I will ask him to meet you at the station in Buffalo, and I will return here for you at eight o'clock. In the meantime brew yourself a cup of tea, and then go to sleep."

"But—why need you leave me? It is almost morning now. See— it is nearly half past three."

"I MUST leave you, Lorna."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to make one more effort to recover the lost jewels," he replied gently.

"Oh, if you only could! And yet I don't much care—now, I have been all my life a jewel worshiper. It is a mania, and it is horrible! I have sat in that black-room by the hour, all alone, gloating, gloating, gloating, until every fiber in me burned and glowed just like the stones I worshipped. But all that is past now, thank God! Oh, thank God for it!"

Moreaux picked up his hat.

Lorna sprang from the couch and went hastily to him, resting her hands upon his shoulders, and with her beautiful face dangerously near to his; and he pushed her away from him, almost roughly.

"Birge," she said quietly, but with conviction, "next to Jerry and papa, I love you more than anybody in the world."

A moment later that Birge Moreaux was again in the street.

(To be Continued.)

SALISBURY.

(Held over from last week)

Mr. Wm. Broman and Miss Elizabeth Cochran both of Salisbury, were married in Cumberland on December 27th.

Mrs. Wm. Knecht of West Salisbury is seriously ill with an attack of pneumonia. She is being nursed by her sister, Miss Nellie Evans, a trained nurse from Connellyville.

Alfred Ringler of Pittsburg spent the holiday season with his family at this place.

Miss Lucile Lichtner of Washington, D. C. spent the holiday vacation with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. C. S. Lichtner.

Jay L. Shaw of Pittsburg spent several days of last week with his parents, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Shaw and his sister, Mrs. Lydia Shaw and family.

Miss Mayme Flaw, who has been living in Pittsburg, has accepted the position as housekeeper at the parsonage of St. Michael's church, West Salisbury.

Mr. and Mrs. J. S. Stevanus of the Sand Flat Fruit Farm were shopping in town Saturday last.

M. D. Thomas who has for several months been polling our town has been dismissed by the burgess, not for inefficiency, nor for lack of need for an officer, but for lack of funds in the borough treasury.

Miss Myrtle Johns of Cleveland, Ohio, spent last week with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. R. S. Johns on "Grand Hill."

Miss Olive Maust of Blue Ridge, New Windsor, Md., spent the holiday season with her parents, Mr. and Mrs. F. A. Maust.

Samuel Ringler, of Elk Lick township, who for a number of years operated a coal mine for local custom on his farm has started to ship coal and last week loaded two cars on the Maust siding at West Salisbury. For two days they could not operate the mine on account of its being too full of water.

Mr. Clarence Stevens of Pittsburg, and Miss Grace Short of Salisbury were married in Cumberland on December 27th.

Miss Della Kretzman of Pittsburg spent Christmas season with her mother, Mrs. Annie Kretzman.

J. M. Middledast of New York, spent the past week with his daughter and his wife at this place.

Miss Irene Newman spent last week with her sister, Mrs. N. P. Meyer in Summit township.

ROCKWOOD.

The Rockwood borough council was reorganized and the new councilmen were sworn in on Monday evening.

Dr. G. F. Speicher who was elected to both the town council and to the school board, has resigned from the council and the new council elected Dr. Chas. H. Ridenour to fill the vacancy. The new officers are: President, J. R. Shanks; Sec., W. M. G. Day; Treas. E. J. Weimer. The new policeman is E. E. Sullivan.

Irvin Wolf is seriously ill at his East Main street residence.

Mr. and Mrs. C. E. Miller of Cumberland are guests of friends for several days.

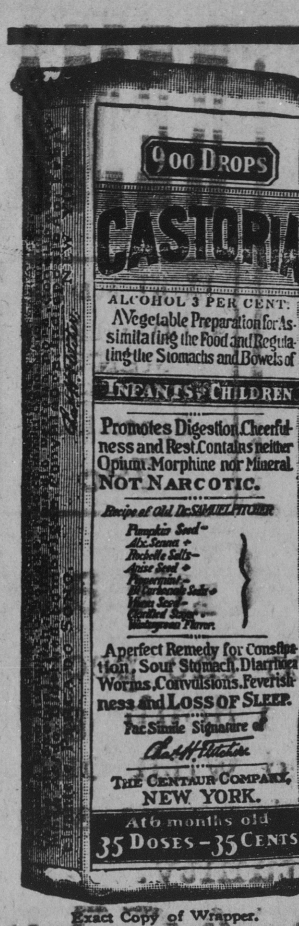
Mrs. Robert Groff and children of Berlin are spending several days this week with relatives here.

Mrs. Swanson of Pittsburg, is the guest of her parents, Mr. and Mrs. E. E. Sullivan.

NEW DIVISION OPERATOR.

H. D. Pigman has been reappointed division operator of the Connellyville division of the Baltimore & Ohio railroad, with headquarters at Connellyville, Pa. The position was dispensed with about a year ago, when Mr. Pigman resumed his duties as a dispatcher of the main line district of the road.

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CLEAN COOPS, MORE EGGS.

It has often been said that hens lay well in a new house. The reason for this is that a new house is perfectly clean. Dust, dirt and disease germs are absent. To get as many eggs in an old house it must be made, from a sanitary standpoint, as good as new.

First, the walls and ceiling must be swept to remove dust and cobwebs. Then all the dirt on the floor should be taken out. If there is a board or concrete floor the job of cleaning is an easy one but if there is only a dirt floor then all the dirt should be removed that has been worked in by the hens.

After the sweeping and shoveling are done cover all cracks in the walls with tarred paper fastened on with lath and then the walls and ceiling can be whitewashed. The excellent advice given by C. N. Whittaker in Farm and Home. The orchard sprayer may be used or a bucket sprayer will answer the purpose equally well. The whitewash should cover everything and penetrate every corner and crevice.

Half a sack of hydrated lime makes five or six pails of good wash and practically all of it will pass through a nozzle. By adding half a pint of crude carbolic acid to each pailfull the henhouse will be thoroughly disinfected.

Leave the nests out of doors to be purified by sun and rain and replace in the house as fast as the hens need them, first giving them a good going over with disinfectant. If, when all this is done, the windows are washed, suitable ventilation and sufficient litter provided, the fowls will have clean, well lighted quarters and the winter egg problem will be more than half solved.

E. W. Wheeling, the new chief physician and surgeon of Windber Hospital, has arrived in Windber and assumed his new duties, succeeding Dr. R. F. McHenry, who died several months ago. Dr. Wheeler has for some time past been chief of the staff of the Spangler hospital.

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