

# MISSING \$81,500

By Varick Vanardy

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Thrilling, Mysterious and Interesting

"In Shaughnessy, from headquarters," the operative announced was admitted to the green was Moreaux's favorite in his perfectly ap-

He was a clean-looking chap, and with a complex-

He wasted no time preliminaries.

He has told me what he knows. What about the newspapers, Mr. Branton? Was one of them missing?"

"No. Sit down. There they are. I brought them down-stairs for you to see. Two Heralds, a Times, a Sun, and a Tribune."

"Why two Heralds?"

"An accident. I wanted a paper to read on the train. All of the morning papers are in my office. As I was about to leave it for the station I picked up a Herald and shoved it under the rubber band, on top of the other papers that made up the package."

"I am to understand, then, that you had already pinned the envelope containing the money inside of another Herald?"

"Yes."

"Where did you place that paper, relative to the others in the package?"

"Before I picked up the extra one it was the second paper down from the top. When I shoved the extra paper under the rubber band it was in the middle of course."

"Who put the papers together and snapped the rubber band around them in your office?"

"I did, arranging them as I have described."

"Bingham thinks that he pinned the envelope that contained the money inside of a Herald also. He says he laid it on the table beside the other papers, for you to arrange. This envelope here that contained the bond, was in a Herald, wasn't it?"

"Yes. In the middle of the packet where I had put one that contained the money. Now, you just hold your horses for a minute, Shaughnessy, and I'll make you understand this thing. You know how I arranged the papers before I left my office. Well, that extra Herald that I brought along to read on the train, must have contained the envelope that Bingham thought held the money, and pinned into it. Forty-five new bills don't take up much space. A hundred of them laid down in a pile makes a package only five-sixteenths of an inch thick. So I must have picked up the paper that Bingham had used, and not have noticed the presence of the envelope inside of it—and so I put that one on top of the packet."

"But you would have discovered it when you read the paper on the train."

"I didn't read it. That's the point. I did pull it out from under the band intending to open it and read it, but I laid it upon the seat beside me instead. I fell to thinking of other things. I was so absorbed that I didn't realize that we were at Monterey until the train pulled up. I grabbed the paper and shoved it back into its place under the band, and hurried out."

"I held the packet under my arm while I stood on the station-platform waiting for the car that was to meet me there. I didn't take it from under my arm until I threw it upon the couch in my room up-stairs, and dropped my coat over it. After that I was in the bath-room with the door closed, fifteen or twenty minutes. When I came out I put on my coat, ripped the rubber band from the packet of newspapers, opened the one that was in the middle, took the envelope that I found pinned inside of it, and came down here where Moreaux was waiting."

"When the envelope that I brought with me to this room was opened, it contained the bond. Moreaux went up-stairs with me to examine the other Herald. There was no envelope in that one, but—there it is; look at it—you will find pin-holes through it showing where an envelope had been fastened to it. Hold on a moment till I get through."

"What happened? This? While I was in the bath-room somebody entered the outer room and stole the envelope that contained the money. He found the bond, first, and looked deeper. Then he found the cash."

"You mean, of course, that he discovered both envelopes," the operative interjected; "this one, containing the bond, first, then the other, with the cash? That he helped himself to the envelope containing the money, and restored the packet of newspapers to its original shape, with the Herald containing the envelope with the bond in the middle?"

"Precisely."

"That would suggest previous knowledge. Also that the thief knew your unusual method of carrying large sums in cash pinned inside of newspapers."

"Who's so likely to have acquired such knowledge as Moreaux's valet?" Branton retorted. "Only three persons knew that I was to bring that cash with me—Bingham, Moreaux, and myself. Only two persons knew that I was to come out by the 12:40: Bingham and myself. Not until after that train had left the station in New York did Bingham notify Moreaux of my departure, and ask him to send to the station to meet me." Branton turned sharply toward his secretary. "Who answered your telephone-call?" he demanded.

"The valet, Feltner. I gave him your message for Mr. Moreaux." Bingham replied.

Moreaux had flushed hotly during Branton's latest announcements. The flush was succeeded by an expression of amused contempt accompanied by a half-smile.

"Feltner knew nothing of your coming, Branton, until Bingham telephoned. He brought the message to me, and I sent him to the garage with the necessary order. He knew nothing of any cash, or that you intended bringing any with you. I have made no mention to him, or to any other person, of the business in hand," he said. "I would be as logical to charge me with the theft as Feltner."

"Quite so," Branton retorted coldly.

## CHAPTER IV

### The Finger of Guilt.

Birge Moreaux pressed the electric button that hung suspended from the chandelier above the table. The footman who responded summoned the valet.

"Feltner, you are charged with theft," Moreaux said, without preface. "When Mr. Branton arrived I sent you to his rooms to offer your services. He sent you away. Did you, nevertheless, enter that room while he was in the bath-room?"

"I did, sir, Feltner replied, apparently unmoved by the abrupt charge made against him.

"What did you do there?"

"I carried Mr. Branton's coat to the window and brushed it. It was thick with dust. I replaced it as I had found it, upon some newspapers that Mr. Branton brought with him. I also dusted his hat. Then I came away."

"Why did you do all that after being told that you were not wanted?"

"Because you told me to, sir."

"For the enlightenment of all, tell us exactly what directions I gave you."

"You said, sir: 'Attend upon Mr. Branton. He will probably send you away, but don't mind that. It is his manner. He needs brushing.' So I did as I have said. But I hadn't a desire to thrust myself personally upon the gentleman, sir."

"Did you notice the newspapers that were under the coat, particularly?"

"Only that there were several of them held together by a rubber band. I am under the impression that the top one was a Herald. I did not examine them."

"Did any other person enter that room while you were there, Feltner?"

"Yes, sir. You did."

"Thank you. That will suffice for the present. You need not concern yourself about my first remark to you."

"Mr. Shaughnessy," he added quietly to the operative when the valet had gone, "when Mr. Branton arrived here I was already aware of two things concerning him, a these: that he was to bring with him \$81,500 in cash, and that it was his habit to carry large sums like that pinned inside of a newspaper. I noticed the bundle of papers under his arm, and I assumed that the money was concealed among them. I sent Feltner to wait upon him. Then, I followed up the stairs and went to my own room."

"Feltner was dusting Branton's coat when I came out of my room two or three minutes later. I don't think he saw me then. I saw him replace the coat upon the bundle of newspapers. I entered the room while he was dusting the hat. Feltner went out of the room. I remained. So, if anybody in this house stole the envelope containing the money, I am the only one who could have done it."

"One moment, if you please; I haven't finished."

"Mr. Branton has charged my servant with the theft. Feltner and I are the only persons who had opportunity to steal it. I am positive that Feltner did not take it, and I know that I did not."

"Branton says that he removed the top paper from the bundle while he was on the train, but that he did not read it. He put it down upon the seat beside him, became absorbed by his thoughts, and picked it up again and returned it to the bundle, hastily, only when the train rushed in at Monterey station."

"He assumes—he has not said so, but it is plainly his assumption—that the envelope containing the bond was pinned inside of that paper which he intended to read on the train coming out; that the thief discovered it first, and found it to be substituted the Herald with the bond in the middle of the bundle, removed the envelope with the money, and put the Herald from which he had taken it at the top."

"It is all very simple, of course. Put there is a palpable error in Mr. Branton's cocksureness."

"There probably wasn't any envelope inside of that top Herald when he pulled it from the bundle and laid it on the seat beside him."

"He says that he himself put the Herald that held the money in the middle of the bundle. He says that his secretary told him over the telephone that he pinned the envelope that contained the money inside of a Herald, and laid it upon the table in the office. Probably Bingham did do that. But he did more than that. He watched his opportunity, and,

when Branton's back was turned, substituted the Herald with the bond-envelope for the Herald with the cash-envelope, in the middle of the bundle, and slipped the cash-envelope into his pocket.

"That, it strikes me, is the only way to account for the pin-holes in the newspaper at the top of the package."

"I don't really believe that Bingham stole that money, but I return the compliment which Mr. Branton has paid to me in the matter of my servant, by showing that his secretary might have taken it. Plainly the money was taken before it left Mr. Branton's office, and there are only two men who could have taken it while there: Branton, himself, or his secretary."

Moreaux turned calmly to Branton as he concluded his rather long speech, and, with a deprecatory shrug of his shoulders and a half-smile upon his cameo-like features, but with none in his eyes, added:

"So I say to you, Branton, practically the same thing that you said to me before the arrival of Mr. Shaughnessy. Fire the fellow, and let's see what comes of it. I point the finger of guilty knowledge at Bingham."

Bingham, white with sudden rage, started to his feet.

## CHAPTER V

### Shannon the Shadow.

G. Mortimer Branton's apparent anger was never deeper than the surface. It existed in his demeanor, and was used only as a buffer. It was never real. Policy would have forbidden him to be angry even if his natural inclinations had not been the antithesis of ill-temper. He could be oddly moved to laughter, at times, and he was so then. But he ventured no further opinion.

After he had laughed, he turned to Shaughnessy.

"It's up to you, now, Mr. Detective," he said with characteristic bluntness. "I have always said that you fellows weren't worth your salt. Here is an opportunity for you to prove that you are. Moreaux has turned the tables upon me nicely. What have you got to offer about it?"

"It seems plain enough to me that you left the money in the seat you occupied in the train that brought you out here, Mr. Branton," the operative replied with the cool assurance of one who is convinced of the correctness of the statement made.

"This is utter and abject nonsense, of course."

"Let us see if it is. Have you telegraphed to the conductor of that train or to anybody, concerning your loss?"

"No. Of course I didn't leave the cash in the car seat, but even if I had done so, what would be the use of telegraphing now? Pooh! If the cash-envelope had been in that paper I pulled out of the bundle, and didn't read, it would have remained in that paper when I returned it to the bundle. If it had dropped out of it, I would have seen it, or heard it."

"The Occidental Express, due in New York at one-eight, was late today," Shaughnessy remarked reminiscently. "I was at the station when it got in. I know the features of a good many crooks, and I saw one that I did know leave that train. I also know that the same man was in the city last night so he couldn't have come very far on that particular train."

"All of this is suggested by the thought that Shannon—that's the crook's name—might have gone out on the twelve-forty with you, might have secured the envelope, and might have caught the Occidental back to New York, at the next station beyond here, where it was, no doubt, held up for orders. Such a thing is barely possible, you know."

"I know it to be wholly absurd." The angry mannerism had returned to Mr. Branton. "What you say is simply damfoolishness. There were twelve passengers in that coach besides me. Every one of them was in front of me. There wasn't a soul behind me in that car. I sat with the bundle of newspapers on my lap, all the way out to Monterey. I don't think that both of my hands were off it at the same time all the way out."

"If Shannon, as you call him, and a dozen others like him, had been in that car, they couldn't have got hold of the cash. I didn't leave the seat until the train got to Monterey. If I knew positively that Shannon was in that car, I'd swear that he didn't get the money, because he couldn't."

"Wait a moment," said Moreaux. "Which end of the car did you enter, at the station in New York?"

"The rear. I got aboard just as the conductor gave the signal to start. I told him who I was, and directed him to stop at Monterey to let me off. The train was moving when I sat down."

"Which end of the seat did you occupy? Nearer the aisle, or the window?"

"Both. I sat near the window, at first, but the sun came into it a trifle, so I shifted to get out of it. But what's the use of all this? What difference does it make which end of the car-seat I occupied?"

"You're a large man, Branton. You approached that seat from the rear of the car. No doubt you stopped at the seat with your hand on the back of the one in front of it, and edged into your own place sideways," Moreaux said, musingly. "If there had been a newspaper lying upon that seat when you approached it, you would have seen it."

"What in the name of goodness are you driving at now, Birge?"

"Why, this: If Shaughnessy's theory is correct, you probably sat down upon another Herald that somebody else had dropped there. While the train was passing through the tunnel, didn't you pull your own paper from under the rubber band so that you'd have it ready to read as soon as you were in the daylight again? Wasn't that the time when you laid your own paper down upon the seat beside you?"

"Maybe it was. I guess so."

"You shifted to the opposite end of the seat after the train had passed

from the tunnel. Your mind was occupied—but I have never known it to be so occupied that you do not instinctively remember the crease in your trousers. In other words, to move from one end of the seat to the other, you first stood up, then moved along and sat down again. You sat down upon the paper you had laid upon the car seat, and you left exposed the paper that was already there."

"Fact decreed that the extra paper should also be a Herald. When you got up hastily to leave the car at Monterey, you picked up the extra paper, and left your own in the car-seat, where you had been sitting upon it."

Branton, always amenable to logic, scowled, and was thoughtful.

"That's all right," he remarked presently; "all but the pin-holes. How are you going to explain the pin-holes in that extra paper that you have created?"

By way of reply Moreaux picked up the two copies of the Herald which Branton had brought with him. He examined them a moment. Then he put one of them down on his knee and held the other one in his hand.

"This is the paper that you brought down-stairs with you, Branton," he said. "It is the one that contained the envelope with the bond. The pin-holes are at the bottom of the first page of the news-section, at the third column, indicating that the paper was simply lifted open as it was originally folded, when the envelope was pinned to it. Is that the position in which you believe you pinned the envelope that contained the money?"

"It's the position in which I always pin such envelopes."

"Bingham, where did you pin your envelope?" Moreaux put down that paper and picked up the other one.

"In precisely the same place. I have seen Mr. Branton do it often enough to know his habit about it."

Bingham was sulky, and his reply was not gracious. It was none the less to the point.

"I'd like you to be certain about that, Bingham," Moreaux insisted.

"I am as positive about it as I am that you charged me a moment ago with having stolen that money," Moreaux smiled, and tossed the paper toward him.

"There lies your exoneration," he said. "The pin-holes in that paper are at the top of the first page of the news-section. And, Branton, I notice something now that escaped our attention before. The pin-holes are smaller. You and your secretary used bankers-pins, which are larger and longer than the pins in ordinary use. The pin-holes in that paper are small, and are much closer together than if you or Bingham had made them for the purpose defined."

"The newspaper now in Bingham's hand was carried aboard of that train by a person who had received it this morning from a news-dealer who had attached his bill to it. Branton, it was Bingham who placed the cash-envelope into the newspaper, at your office. It was you who pinned in the bond-envelope, not knowing what your secretary had done with the bond into the middle of the packet of newspapers. You put the money at the top of that packet."

"You pulled it out and laid it on the seat beside you while you were sitting up this paper. Then you shifted over and sat on your own. When you left the train you picked up this paper and left your own in the seat."

Shaughnessy, who had been an attentive listener, bent forward in his chair and seized the telephone.

"Police headquarters, New York. Quick action, please," he said.

Then, a moment later, while the others listened tensely: "Hello, Cleary. This is Shaughnessy. I want Shannon, the shadow, and want him quick. Holderness made a report on him yesterday, and will know where to find him. Send him. Quick action, Cleary. It's eighty thousand this time, if Holdy gets there. I'll be in on the next train. Eighty thousand, cash. Lifted from G. Mortimer Branton."

He replaced the receiver and started to his feet, addressing Moreaux. "How soon can I get a train into the city?"

"Now, if you sprint for the garage. You have about twelve minutes to get to the station," Moreaux replied. Bingham leaped to his feet and followed the operative, calling out to Branton as he went:

"I'll go with him to identify the money. You won't need me here."

A moment later the two who remained heard the whir of the automobile as it fled down the driveway toward the main road to the railway station.

"Birge," Branton said, after a time, "you showed more sense than that detective."

"Oh, I don't know. He suggested the idea in the first place. I followed it up. Besides, he saw that fellow Shannon."

"Who the devil is Shannon?"

"He robbed me once. I have respect for his abilities in that line. That's all."

## CHAPTER VI

### The Dead Thief.

The deal involving \$81,500 in cash which had taken G. Mortimer Branton to Moreaux's, has no place here. Moreaux's house was merely a convenient location for the transaction, and Moreaux's interest in it was only that of a witness. Bingham took out more funds with him to replace that which was lost. Branton remained overnight with his host, and late in the evening Shaughnessy reappeared at The Fells.

He was shown into the greenroom where the two gentlemen received him. He laid a white envelope upon the table in front of Branton. It had two pin-holes through one end of it. Also, he put down a copy of the Herald of that morning. It also had two pin-holes through the bottom of the third column of the first page of the news-section.

"Lieutenant Holderness found

them in Shannon's room in Fourth street," he said. "They seem conclusive. Can you identify the envelope, Mr. Branton?"

"Yes. Where is the money?"

"Gone. Not found. The envelope was empty."

"Where is Shannon?"

"Dead. He was there all right, but he'd been dead several hours."

"Murdered? For that money?"

Shaughnessy shrugged.

"No. He died naturally enough. Morphine, cocaine, et cetera, killed him, the doctors said. Shannon was a fiend in the use of everything in the drug line. That's his record at headquarters. He took too much, or too little, or the cumulative properties of one or more of them did the business. Or, what is more likely, \$81,500, in one dose, settled him. It would be a heart-excitant to most men. Anyhow, he's dead."

(Continued next week.)

The trouble about taking a chance is that you can't always put it back where you found it.

U. W. P. A. 105

## REAL ESTATE

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