

I LOVE YOU, DEAR.

A scent of violets in the air,
And singing birds,
And beauty new-born, fresh and fair,
Too dear for words.
A little maid with floral crown
On hair of gold,
And blushing cheeks where lies the kiss
Of lover bold.
Whose boyish lips a story tell
Into her ear,
As, bending low, he whispers soft:
"I love you, dear."
The breath of roses in the air,
And lilacs sweet,
A sunny sky of azure blue,
The morn doth greet;
A maiden crowned with womanhood,
And robed in white,
With smiling lips, and in her eyes
A tender light,
Before the altar proudly stands,
And answers clear
The one who whispers soft and low:
"I love you, dear."
A whirl of snowflakes in the air,
A cold, gray sky
Where scudding clouds and wintry winds
Go sweeping by:
A woman with a crown of years
On silvered hair,
And faded cheek, where youth's fair bloom
Once lingered there,
Beside the hearthstone knits and rocks,
While someone near
Bends low his whitened head and says:
"I love you, dear."
—Inez May Feit, in Boston Transcript.

THE STURGIS WAGER A DETECTIVE STORY.

By EDGAR MORETTE.

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CHAPTER XIX.—CONTINUED.

"That will do," observed Sturgis, presently; "the old woman is coming as fast as she can."
"What old woman?" asked the detective.
"I don't know. Perhaps I ought to have said an old woman. I hear her hobbling on the stairs."
The detective placed his ear to the keyhole. After listening attentively, he turned to the reporter with an incredulous smile.
"Well, Mr. Sturgis," said he, "if you can hear anything in there, your ears are sharper than mine. That's all I can say."
"She is on the second flight," replied the reporter, quietly. "Now she is in the second-story hall—and now you can surely hear her coming down the last flight."
By this time, sure enough, the sound of footsteps began to be audible to the other three men; and presently the door opened and disclosed the scared face of an old Irish woman.
"And phwat might yez be wantin', gintlemin, to be after searin' an ould woman most to death wid yer ringin'?" she asked, somewhat aggressively.

"We want to see Mr. Chatham," replied one of the detectives.
"Mister who, is it?"
"Thomas Chatham. Show me the way to his room. I'll go right up, and my friends will wait for me here."
"Mister Thomuz Chatham, is it?" said the old woman; "well, yez've come to the wrong house to see him. I do be thinkin', fer he don't live here."
"Come, that won't do," said the detective, sharply; "we belong to the police, and we saw Chatham enter this house."
At the mention of the police, the old hag's parchment face became a shade yellower and her eyes glistened.
"Sure, thin, if he do be hidin' here, it's meself as 'ud know it," she said, after a short interval; "but yez can find 'um, if yez loike; yez can find 'um."
Whereupon she turned and hobbled off, leaving the intruders to their own resources.

They found themselves in a narrow hallway. On the right was a rickety staircase leading to business offices in the upper part of the building; on the left, a door opening into the office of the Manhattan Chemical company, and at the end of the hall another door, marked:

PRIVATE OFFICE.
NO ADMITTANCE.

One of the detectives tried this door and found it locked. Whereupon he placed his shoulder to it and prepared to force it in.

"Wait a minute," said Sturgis; "let me see if I cannot open it."
The detective stepped aside with a quizzical expression upon his face.

"I guess you will find it pretty solid for your weight," said he.

The reporter took from his pocket a piece of beat wire, and with a few dexterous turns of the wrist, he shot the bolt of the lock.

"You would make an expert cracksmen," said the detective. "I didn't know you possessed that accomplishment in addition to all your other ones."

The four men entered the private office. The room was quite dark, the shutters being closed and the blinds drawn. As their eyes became accustomed to the obscurity they were able to distinguish the outlines of a desk, a table, and a few chairs.

Sturgis went at once to a door in the corner. With the aid of his skeleton key he had soon thrown this open. After peering for an instant into the darkness, he took from his pocket a candle, which he lighted. Then, beckoning to his companions, he started cautiously to descend. The other men followed him and soon found themselves in the cellar, which they proceeded to search.

On the street side there was a recess extending for a few feet under the awning in front of the house. The opening above was covered by an iron grating, over which was a wooden cover securely fastened on the inside by a chain and padlock. A number of carboys were carefully piled along the

east wall to within a few feet from the rear of the building. Here, in the northeast corner, rose narrow shelving, on which were arranged a collection of bottles containing a varied assortment of chemicals.

The detectives searched the cellar.

"Our man is not here, at any rate," said the leader, when at last he had returned to the foot of the stairs; "perhaps he'll try to give us the slip by way of the roof. Come along, Jim; let's go upstairs now. Hello! what are you doing there, Mr. Sturgis? Think you'll find him in one of those bottles?"

The reporter appeared to be closely inspecting the chemicals on the narrow shelves.

"Who knows?" he replied, coolly, continuing his examination.

The detective bit his lip and looked the unpleasant things he thought it best not to say.

"Well, Jim and I will take a look upstairs while you are busy here."

And the two men went up the dark stairway, Sprague remaining behind with the reporter.

"None so blind as those that won't see," said the latter, sententiously.

At the same time he placed his hand upon one of the shelves and gave it a lateral push. It responded slightly, and the entire shelving, with the door which it concealed, opened outward.

"I thought so," continued the reporter; "this looks as if it might lead somewhere. Will you come, Sprague?"

"How did you find the combination so quickly?" asked the artist, preparing to follow his friend.

"It is not a combination—only a concealed bolt. Our friends of the detective force might have discovered it themselves if they had taken the trouble. The first thing I noticed was that a truck had recently been wheeled through the cellar in the direction of this door, from under the grating on the street side. And this truck was not here; neither was a large case which we know was delivered here today. The trail extended clear up to the wall below the shelving; and yet no truck, even unloaded, could pass below that lowest shelf. The conclusion was evident. I sounded the back of the shelving and found that it covered an opening of some kind. After that, all that remained was to notice that one of the shelves was slightly soiled in just one spot, as though by the repeated contact of a hand. From this, I argued that the bolt must be attached to this board. And it was. That is all."

As he spoke, the reporter entered a dark and narrow passage.

"Don't shut the door," said he to his companion, who followed him.

At that moment, however, the artist stumbled; and, instinctively holding out his hands to save himself from falling, he released his hold of the door, which closed with a slam.

"That is unfortunate," said Sturgis; "we may have to lose some time in learning how to work the bolt from this side. Hold on; it will be prudent to keep open a line of retreat, in case of unforeseen emergencies. Hello! we are in luck. Nothing concealed on this side: the bolt in plain sight; works easily. All's well. Then let us go on; unless I am greatly mistaken, we shall find another exit on the other side."

After following the underground passage for some distance the men climbed some steps and reached a square chamber, on one side of which rose a stairway leading to a door above. The room was surmounted by a skylight, which was wide open, admitting a draught of cold air from the outside.

Sturgis set down his lighted candle and proceeded to examine his surroundings. In the middle of the room stood a truck, upon which lay a long pine box. A table and a chair constituted the only furniture of the place. At one side there was a long, low, lead-lined tank, filled to the depth of about two feet with a dark viscous liquid. Near it lay a few empty carboys. In the floor there was what seemed to be a hot-air register, of large size and of peculiar construction. The walls were bare, unbroken, save by the projection of the mouthpiece of a speaking tube, and by a set of shelves filled with flasks, crucibles, alembics and the other paraphernalia of a chemist's laboratory.

After the reporter had finished reconnoitering he sat down upon the long box in deep thought. Sprague observed him with silent curiosity for awhile, and then, with growing impatience:

"I say, old man," he ventured at last to ask, "did you bring me here, armed to the teeth, to see you go off into a trance?"

Sturgis started like a man suddenly awakened from a deep sleep.

"Eh? What? Oh, yes—those confidences. Well, you start in with yours. I am trying to find the denouement of my story. I feel that it is just within my grasp; and yet I cannot seem to see it yet. But I can listen to you while I am thinking. Go on."

"I have not any story to tell," said Sprague, somewhat offended at his friend's apparent indifference to what he had to say.

"Oh, yes, you have," retorted Sturgis, with a conciliatory smile; "you said you had news to tell me. Well, tell away. I am listening most respectfully, in spite of my apparent absorption."

"What a strange fellow you are, Sturgis," laughed Sprague, good-naturedly. "All I wanted to tell you—and you are the first to hear of it—is the, to me, rather important fact that I am engaged to be married."

"You are?" exclaimed Sturgis, with genuine pleasure. "I congratulate you, old fellow, from the bottom of my heart."

He seized the artist's hand and shook it in his hearty grasp.

"To the original of the picture you wanted to show me yesterday?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then she was not betrothed to the other fellow, after all?"

"No; that seems to have been a mistake."

"I am glad of that, very glad," said the reporter. "By the way, you have not yet told me the young lady's name."

"I thought I had mentioned it yesterday morning. Didn't I? No? My fiancée is Miss Murdock."

At the sound of this name Sturgis started visibly, and a shadow crossed his features.

"Miss Murdock?" he echoed.

"Yes," said Sprague. "What is it? You do not seem pleased."

Then, as a sudden thought struck him:

"I hope I am not treading on your toes, old fellow," he said, putting his hand gently upon his friend's shoulder and trying to read his thought in his clear gray eyes. "But how absurd! Of course you cannot be a rival for Miss Murdock's affections, since you do not even know her—"

"No," laughed Sturgis, regaining his composure, "I am not your rival. As to the other point, while I can hardly claim an acquaintance with the young lady, I think I saw her not more than a couple of hours ago."

"A couple of hours ago!" exclaimed Sprague; "why, I was with her myself then."

"I know that now, although I was not aware of it at the time."

"What, were you at the Murdock's at the same time as I was?" asked Sprague, surprised.

"I had just come from there when I met you. I was in Murdock's study while you were—er—busy in the parlor."

"In Murdock's study? How long were you there?"

"About half an hour, I should judge," replied Sturgis, "and perhaps 15 minutes more in the hall, while Murdock was engaged."

"I suppose Chatham was still with him?" mused Sprague.

Sturgis started at the name.

"Chatham!" he ejaculated; "what do you know about Chatham?"

"What, are you interested in Chatham?" asked the artist, curiously. "I know very little about him, only that he is one of my disappointed rivals."

And he thereupon related to the reporter what he knew of Chatham's suit.

Sturgis listened with deep attention to his friend's narrative, and ruminated in silence long after the artist had ceased speaking.

At last he started up with a sudden exclamation, and, walking over to the



BEGAN TO SEETHE AND BOIL.

side of the tank, he looked into the depths of its oily contents, as if fascinated by some horrible thing he saw there.

Sprague came and stood beside him and gazed curiously into the viscous liquid. There was nothing there that he could see.

"What is it?" he asked.

Without replying, Sturgis took from his pocket a bone-handled knife and carefully dipped one end of the handle into the fluid in the leaden tank. At once the liquid began to seethe and boil, giving out dark, pungent fumes.

"I thought so," muttered the reporter, under his breath; "that man is truly a genius—the genius of evil."

"Who?" asked Sprague.

Sturgis made no reply. His eyes were wandering about the room, as if in search of something.

"Hand me a couple of those long glass tubes from that shelf yonder," he said, earnestly.

The artist complied with the request. Dipping these tubes into the oily liquid, Sturgis, after considerable difficulty, managed to seize with them a small dark object which lay at the bottom of the tank. With infinite precaution he brought it to the surface. It had the appearance of a flattened leaden bullet.

"What is it?" inquired Sprague.

"Sit down," answered Sturgis, in a low, tense voice. "I have just found the last link which completes my chain of evidence; I am now prepared to tell you such a story as you will scarcely credit, even with the absolute proofs before your eyes."

CHAPTER XX.

THE LEAD-LINED VAT.

Sprague seated himself upon the long pine box; and Sturgis, dropping into the only chair, began his narrative. As he talked, he carelessly whittled the cover of the wooden box with the knife which he still held in his hand. He began with an account of his investigation at the Knickerbocker bank, and explained the result of his observations and inferences down to the time of his visit to Murdock's house, omitting, however, to mention any of the names of the actors in the reconstructed drama.

"So you see," he concluded, "we have established the identity of the body in the cab, and of the young man who disappeared after the cab was upset. But one of the most salient features of the case, from the start, was the

fact that neither of these two men had derived much, if any, pecuniary profit from his crime. The bookkeeper, as we have seen, was a mere cat's-paw in the control of the accountant, and his posthumous confession has given us the explanation of the power exerted over him by his accomplice. It was not so easy to establish the motive which controlled the actions of the accountant, who was himself only a tool in the hands of a higher intelligence. The *deus ex machina* of this crime is a man of genius who has hardly appeared upon the scene at all, but whose traces I have found at every turn. He was the brains of the whole scheme; the other men in his hands were mere puppets. Through the accountant, this master spirit managed the bookkeeper; and the accountant himself was controlled by him more directly, but no less surely. If he held the former through his fear of exposure and consequent ruin, he influenced the latter through even more potent motives. He is the father of a beautiful girl, whom he did not scruple to use as a decoy. The price agreed upon for the accountant's assistance was the hand of this daughter, for whom the young man had doubtless conceived a passionate love. Whether or not the leader would have had the power to carry out his part of the contract matters little; for it is highly probable that he never had the slightest intention of so doing. He evidently realized very early in the game that the bookkeeper could not long escape the clutches of the law. But as he had taken every precaution to prevent him from knowing anything of his very existence, the fate of the unfortunate bookkeeper would have mattered little to this heartless villain, had not the probability remained that, when brought to bay, the bookkeeper would denounce the accountant's connection with the crime. This would have been extremely awkward, since the accountant was very likely in possession of some dangerous secrets. The safest way out of the difficulty was to quietly suppress the now useless bookkeeper. This plan was decided upon, and would doubtless have been carried into execution, had not fate otherwise decreed. After the bookkeeper's death, under the circumstances which I have related, it became quite probable that the accountant's connection with the case would be discovered; for luck had been against him from the start, and he became more and more entangled in the chain of circumstantial evidence of whose existence his leader was soon fully aware. In the first place, the accountant was wounded; and thus not only partially disabled, but also—what is far worse—conspicuously marked. A man who carries his arm in a sling can hardly fail to attract attention, especially when this distinguishing mark is accompanied by another equally glaring one in the form of a head of brilliant red hair—"

"Hold on, Sturgis!" interrupted Sprague, who had been listening with growing interest; "don't you know the accountant's name?"

"Yes," replied the reporter; "his name is Thomas Chatham."

"Thomas Chatham!" exclaimed Sprague, as the image of the miserable young man came to his mind.

"Yes," replied Sturgis, answering his thought, "the man you met only a few hours ago."

[To Be Continued.]

LEGEND OF THE TOPAZ.

Pretty Story of the Restoration of a Blind Emperor's Sight by a Snake.

The topaz is called the stone of gratitude, and the old Roman books record the following legend from which the stone derives its attribute, says the Philadelphia Press:

"The blind Emperor Theodosius used to hang a brazen gong before his palace gates and sit beside them on certain days, hearing and putting to right the grievances of any of his subjects. Those who wished for his advice and help had but to sound the gong, and immediately admission into the presence of Caesar was obtained.

"One day a great snake crept up to the gate and struck the brazen gong with her coils, and Theodosius gave orders that no one should molest the creature, and bade her tell him her wish. The snake bent her head in homage and straightway told the following tale:

"Her nest was at the base of the gateway tower, and while she had gone to find food for her young brood a strange beast covered with sharp needles had invaded her home, killing the nestlings and now held possession of her little dwelling. Would Caesar grant her justice?"

"The emperor gave orders for the porcupine to be slain and the mother to be restored to her desolate nest. Night fell, and the sleeping world had forgotten the emperor's kindly deed, but with the early dawn a great serpent glided into the palace, up the steps into the royal chamber and laid upon each of the emperor's closed eyelids a gleaming topaz. When Emperor Theodosius awoke he found he was no longer blind, for the mother snake had paid her debt of gratitude."

Merely Reminiscent.

"Mr. Bash, how long have you been coming to see me?"

"About six years, Miss Julie. Why?"

"Nothing, only I had a little argument with mamma about it this morning. She thought it was seven or eight. Isn't it a beautiful evening?"—Chicago Tribune.

Light Enough.

Tramp—Kind lady, have yer got any light employment yer kin give a pore man?

Lady—Well, you might clean the lamps and wash the windows.—N. Y. Journal.

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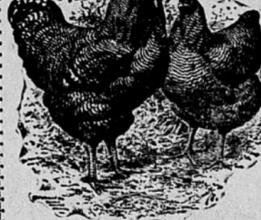
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