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dropped the letter and its envelope into her lap and resumed the pose. Sprague tried to renew the conversation where it had been interrupted; but his efforts were in vain. Both he and Agnes were preoccupied during the balance of the sitting.

When at last the time came for Miss Murdoch to leave, Sprague advanced into the gutter and bending low advanced around to Exchange place and gazed at the building. Dunlap walked with the reporter. Perhaps the reporter thought that generally used by the employees other entrance on Exchange place—the entrance to the bank. Then a man began to peep back and forth before the Sturgis the minutes' space, and the girl looked up in surprise. There was no one in sight. He resolved to look up and down the street. There was no one in sight. He resolved to look up and down the street.

At last, as Dunlap reached the Knickerbocker bank, the clock in the street struck the hour. The reporter looked up and down the street. There was no one in sight. He resolved to look up and down the street.

## CHAPTER IX

others like it on the sidewalk yesterday afternoon, but they have been obliterated by the pedestrians. Here, however, are some that have remained. As he spoke, he led Dunlap to the Exchange place entrance of the bank, and pointed out a number of similar spots on the stone steps. "Fortunately," he said, as if speaking to himself, "fortunately the detectives entered through the front door last night so that they did not interfere with this portion of the trail."

"But what are these spots?" asked the banker. "They are blood-stains," replied the reporter. "I have every reason to believe them to be human blood. But that question I can settle positively as soon as we are in the bank, for I have brought a powerful microscope. Let us enter now, if you like; I have seen all there is to be seen outside. By the way, do you know this key?" He held up a large steel key of complicated structure.

# The Sturgis Wager

BY EDGAR MORETTE

"Why," exclaimed Dunlap, surprised "that looks like the key to the Exchange place door. Where did you find it?" "In the gutter, near the sewer opening at the corner." "But how did it get there?" asked Dunlap, anxiously. "Perhaps I shall be able to answer that question presently," said Sturgis. "Shall we go in now? No, not that way. Let us enter by the Wall street side, if you please."

"Excuse me if I pass in first," said Sturgis, entering. "I wish to see something here." He bent low over the tiled entrance with the magnifying glass in his hand. "It is too bad," he muttered to himself presently. "They have trodden all over the trail here. Ah! what is this?" "What?" inquired Dunlap.

"The reporter vouchsafed no reply to this question, but asked another. "Is Thursday a general cleaning day at the bank?" "Yes," answered the banker. "Every evening, after the closing hour, the floors are swept, of course and the desks are dusted; but Mondays and Thursdays are reserved for washing the windows, scrubbing the floors, and so forth." "Then it is lucky that yesterday was Thursday," observed Sturgis. "Will you please hand me the key to this gate, and that to the inner door?" Upon entering the bank Sturgis requested his companion to seat himself on a particular chair, which he designated. He then began a critical examination of the premises. Inch by inch he scrutinized the walls, the floor and even the ceiling; sometimes with the naked eye, sometimes through the magnifying glass. He also constantly brought into play a tape measure; and several times he called upon Dunlap for assistance, when the distances to be measured were longer than his reach.

"The Wall street entrance of the Knickerbocker bank led directly into the space to which the public was admitted. This space was partitioned off as usual from the bookkeepers' and cashier's departments. At the farther end a door led to a reception room communicating with the president's office. This office itself opened into the cashier's department on one side, and on the other into a small room occupied by the president's secretary and typewriter, and into the vestibule of the Exchange place entrance to the bank. On the right of the vestibule was a large room in which the bank employees kept their street clothing, and to which they could retire when they were off duty. A door from the clerks' room led into the cashier's department, while another one opened into the private secretary's room.

"Have you the key to the desk?" "Yes," replied the banker. "Will you kindly see if the revolver you mention is in its place?" "It ought to be," said Dunlap, picking out the key on a bench which he took from his pocket, and walking towards the cashier's department with Sturgis at his heels. "Yes, here it is in its accustomed place."

He handed it to the reporter, who examined it attentively. "Exactly," said Sturgis, with satisfaction; "this is what I was looking for." "What do you mean?" asked Dunlap. "I mean that this is the revolver which was fired twice last night in the Knickerbocker bank. See for yourself; two of the cartridges are empty, and the weapon has not been cleaned since these shots were fired."

"But who can have fired the pistol, and at whom was it fired, and why?" "Hold on! hold on!" exclaimed Sturgis, smiling; "one thing at a time. We shall perhaps come to that soon. For the present, if you will come back to your private office, I shall endeavor to piece together the scraps of evidence which I have been able to collect. There, sit down in your own armchair, if you will, while I fit these bits of paper together; and in less than ten minutes I shall probably be ready to proceed with my story."

Dunlap was still nervous and impatient; but all trace of amusement and skepticism had vanished from his face, as he took the proffered armchair and watched Sturgis patiently piece together the tiny fragments of paper he had so carefully gathered. When this work was accomplished, the reporter went to the typewriter and wrote a few lines on a sheet of paper. He next proceeded to examine under the microscope the minute fragments and particles which he had collected in his search.

When he had finished this operation, he leaned back in his chair and looked up into space for what seemed to Dunlap an interminable length of time. Then at last he glanced at the banker who could hardly contain his growing impatience. "I am ready to go on now," said Sturgis, reaching for a sheet of paper upon which he began to draw with ruler and pencil. "At last!" sighed the banker. "Yes; but my first, as the charades say, is a question."

"Another!" gasped Dunlap; "when is my turn to come?" "Just a few more," replied Sturgis; "and then your turn will come for good." "Well, out with your questions then, if you must," said Dunlap, seating himself resignedly in his chair.

"What do you make out?" asked Sturgis. "Nothing whatever," replied the banker, promptly. "What?" exclaimed the reporter; "do you mean to say that you do not distinguish any marks on the blotting paper?" "I mean to say that I do not see anything to which I can attach any semblance of a meaning. The blotting paper has been used, and, of course, there are ink marks upon it; but, as far as I can see, these are wholly disconnected. They are entirely void of sense to my eyes, at any rate."

"Examine the blotter again carefully in this direction," said Sturgis, drawing an imaginary line upon the mirror, "and pay no attention to any other marks which seem to cross these lines. Now do you see anything?" The banker examined the image in the mirror for some time before replying. "If I allow my imagination to enter into play, I can complete several isolated letters."

"Will you dictate these while I note them here. Be careful to distinguish between capital and lower-case letters. Also separate the lines, and state whether letters come close together or are separated by a space." "Very well," agreed Dunlap, who then proceeded to read off the letters he saw in the reflection of the blotter in the mirror. When he had finished, Sturgis handed him the paper, upon which were

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"Yes," said Sturgis, who was apparently wool-gathering. "A silence of several minutes followed, during which the reporter thoughtfully inspected his collection of microscopic odds and ends, while Dunlap beat the devil's tattoo upon the desk. Presently the reporter spoke again: "Do you know a young man, about five feet eight inches tall, with fiery red hair, who affects somewhat loud clothes?"

"Why, that is Thomas Chatham. You know him, then?" "I? No; I never heard of him before." "Then, how on earth do you know—?" "He has been here recently."

"Yes; I told you he had been here last week; but—"

"No; I mean he was here yesterday afternoon," interrupted the reporter. "Not to my knowledge," said Dunlap, incredulously. "I thought as much," Sturgis replied, quietly; "but he was here, for all that." The banker looked perplexed. "Now, another thing," continued Sturgis. "I notice in the bookkeepers' department an announcement to the effect that on January 2—that is to say, to-morrow—a new system of book-keeping will be adopted. Would this be such as to bring to light any irregularities that might exist in the books?"

"Yes; it involves the transfer of each bookkeeper every month to a different set of books. But I fail to see the drift of your questions." "You will see it presently. Have you examined the safes this morning?" "Yes; one of the first things I did, after you allowed me to move at all, was to examine the cash safe."

ng the bank was I do not yet know; but an examination of the books will doubt reveal this; and I should advise you, Mr. Dunlap, to lose no time in having it made."

"But," argued Dunlap, anxiously, "I tell you the books were examined last week."

"Yes; by Arbogast's accomplice." "What, Chatham his accomplice?" exclaimed Dunlap, faintly. "Chatham was in the plot beyond a doubt," answered Sturgis. "So long as no one had access to the books except his accomplice Chatham, of course Arbogast felt secure. But when, yesterday, the announcement was made that after the beginning of the new year his books would pass to the custody of another man, he saw that the game was up."

The men had returned to the president's office. "Those are his very words," continued the reporter; "those he telegraphed to Chatham yesterday, as you will see if you hold before that mirror this sheet of blotting paper which I found on Arbogast's desk."

Dunlap, with an unsteady hand, took the blotting paper; and, holding it before the glass, studied the reflection intently. "What do you make out?" asked Sturgis. "Nothing whatever," replied the banker, promptly. "What?" exclaimed the reporter; "do you mean to say that you do not distinguish any marks on the blotting paper?" "I mean to say that I do not see anything to which I can attach any semblance of a meaning. The blotting paper has been used, and, of course, there are ink marks upon it; but, as far as I can see, these are wholly disconnected. They are entirely void of sense to my eyes, at any rate."

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