

# Sylvia's Secret

by Robert Machray  
Author of "Sentenced to Death," etc.

## CHAPTER VIII. An Open Verdict.

THERE is a widespread belief in the truth of the saying that "murder will out," but it is not a belief that is always or even often justified, for the list of unsolved murder mysteries is as long as it is alarming. Nor can there be much doubt that not a few deaths, reported as due to natural causes, particularly to "heart-failure," are in reality murders.

"There must be something soon," said Peggy Willoughby hopefully to Max Hamilton, as she bade him good-bye that Sunday afternoon, and she meant that some trace of the man who murdered Sylvia Chase must be quickly come upon by the police or others. She had been brought up with faith in the idea that "murder will out."

When she returned to the drawing room, this was in her mind, and she repeated the words to Hollander, who instantly agreed with her.

"Oh, yes," he said readily; "our detectives are very clever, I believe; they will speedily ferret out the truth."

"I can't imagine who can have done it," said Colonel Willoughby, wholly absorbed in this, the chief problem, presented by the case. "Nor can I see what motive the murderer had in destroying the poor girl—that is what beats me completely."

"No doubt when the facts are known," said Hollander moodily, "it will be seen that there is very little mystery about the affair."

"The facts so far don't help us very much, do they?"

"There must be something soon," said Peggy again.

"I have always thought travelling on our railways was so safe," said Mrs. Willoughby, speaking from another point of view, "but after this I shall never feel quite comfortable unless I have a proper escort. There is no communication between these first-class compartments except from outside. When you are in one of them you can't tell what is happening in the next—and it might be murder! In trains abroad you can see from one compartment into another."

"That is a safeguard," said her husband. He went on assuringly: "But there are very few of these murders in trains; at least, in England, they are exceedingly rare. Robbery has always been the motive, but there was nothing of the kind here. I cannot understand the affair at all! How unlikely it is that poor Sylvia Chase had an enemy—an enemy who was determined to kill her, and yet there must have been some one just like that—the man who sent that telegram to her." He turned to Hollander as he spoke. "I never was so puzzled in all my life."

"It certainly is very strange," said Hollander easily, "but when all is known the explanation may be very simple."

This conversation is given because it was typical of a great many other conversations which took place on the morning of next day, Monday, when the newspapers gave the story of Sylvia's murder to the world. Of all these journals, *The Day* had, as was to be expected in the circumstances, the fullest account.

After leaving the Willoughbys, Max had gone to the office of his paper, where he found that some particulars of the murder had already been sent in by a news agency which had obtained them from Scotland Yard. They were somewhat meagre, but correct so far as they went. They mentioned that it was he who had come upon the body in the train and had identified it as that of Sylvia Chase.

While he was reading this narrative several members of the staff of *The Day* gathered round

### SUMMARY OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

PREVIOUS chapters introduce chiefly Max Hamilton, editor of "The Day," Peggy Willoughby, with whom Hamilton is in love, and Villiers Chase, another friend of Peggy's! All at supper together in London. Max leaves hurriedly to catch a night train. Thinking of Peggy he is roused by "All Change" and turns to rouse a lady in the compartment who, upon investigation, turns out to be Sylvia Chase, sister of Villiers Chase—mysteriously murdered. Investigations are at once begun by Superintendent Johnson, who, to confirm a statement made by Max Hamilton, visits Colonel Willoughby. Peggy begins to recognize the fact that she loves Max. A telegram is found in Sylvia Chase's handbag sent from Charing Cross, and making an appointment at Hampstead Heath station.

him. They had heard the news, and now eagerly and excitedly asked him to tell them the whole story. Before he could comply with their request he was rung up on the telephone by the managing editor, who was still at his house, which was situated in one of the southern suburbs of the great city. Max had been in communication with him already, and they now arranged that Max was not to write out the narrative, but to dictate it, in the form of an interview, to another member of the staff, and that a condensed copy of this should be sent to any journal or news agency that wished to have it. Max immediately set to work; and, while one man took down his words in shorthand, the others listened.

"How lucky it was for you," said one of the latter, "that you were able to prove an alibi, and so quickly! If the constable or Superintendent Johnson had arrested you, you might have had no end of trouble."

MAX laughed a little, but said soberly enough, "it was very lucky indeed for me."

"The thing to be done is to find the man in the fur coat who bought the two tickets at Hampstead Heath station—that is the heart of the mystery," said the news editor. He was a clever journalist, and rather prided himself on being a successful amateur detective, but in the position he occupied he could not make any independent investigation. That must be done by some other man. He looked at Max and asked: "What would you like to do in connection with the case, Max? Shall I leave it in your hands?"

"That is just what I wish," said Max. After the story—in newspaper parlance it was a "great story" which was set forth in *The Day*—was in type and had been revised, Max rang up Scotland Yard and had a short conversation with Superintendent Johnson, who told him that he and another detective had been to Sylvia's flat, had gone over everything in it, and satisfied themselves that it afforded them absolutely no clue.

"What seems to me most remarkable," said Johnson, summing up the results of his second visit to the flat, "is the total absence of what might be called purely personal things. You would think that Miss Chase had no friends outside her literary work. There are no photographs to speak of, and no letters of a purely personal character. It is so strange that I am almost inclined to wonder if by any chance all such things had been removed."

"You remember that her brother said she was absorbed in her work, and didn't go very much into society," said Max.

"I know he said so, but still it seems unnatural for a young and

handsome woman to cut herself off so completely from the world, as appears to have been the case," persisted the superintendent.

"Have you any news?" Max next asked.

"Only this: Miss Chase dined at her club, the Ladies' Military, at 7.30 last night, and stopped there till shortly after ten. She walked out of the club; the porter asked if he should call a taxi for her, but she said she did not want one, and bade him good-night. He says she was in good spirits, and was very well. And there for the present the matter stands," said Johnson in conclusion, "for we have not yet been able to hear what she did after leaving her club—whether she went by train or otherwise to Hampstead Heath station, nor have we heard of anything out of the way in the shape of a strange vehicle at or near that station last night about eleven—everything was quite of a normal character."

"All very disappointing, I'm afraid," said Max. "But something may turn up at any moment." This was another echo of Peggy's hopeful words.

"It's all downright mystery still," said Johnson.

THE first edition of *The Day* went to press at one o'clock in the morning. Just before that hour Max rang up the superintendent again, and was informed by him that there had been no further development—that, in fact, there was no fresh news, but that the inquest would be held on Tuesday.

The "Train Murder Mystery," as it came to be called, caused an immense sensation throughout London and the whole country. The youth, beauty, and social position of the victim of the tragedy, as well as the extraordinary circumstances in which it was enveloped, excited public interest in the highest degree, and evoked the profoundest sympathy.

Mrs. Willoughby had raised a note of alarm with respect to the danger of railway travelling. It was by no means a new note, but Sylvia's fate gave it fresh point, and made it bulk largely in the public mind, so that there was a general outcry. There were letters and suggestions on the subject in most journals.

One result of the murder was that Max Hamilton came in for a great deal of prominence, but it was a kind of prominence which he was far from desiring. For a few days, however, he was the most talked of man in England. It was a huge advertisement, which afterwards was to serve him well, though he could not have foreseen it, in a strange and wholly unexpected connection with the case, but for the time being it was most disagreeable and unpleasant. Queer people came to see him. He was inundated with the strangest letters, he was in some danger of having his life made a burden to him.

However, there was one vital question, and everybody, like the news editor of *The Day*, was asking it. The general consciousness fastened itself on it—Who was the man in the fur coat that had been with Sylvia Chase at Hampstead Heath station on that fatal night?

The inquest did not answer the question.

It is unnecessary to set forth the evidence produced by the police at the inquest, for that would be to repeat a very large part of the preceding narrative. There was no new evidence. The doctors, Maxwell Hamilton, Bertha Schmidt, the telegraph clerk, the railway ticket clerk, and Villiers Chase were the principal witnesses, and what they said was, and could be nothing but, what they had previously stated. To all intents and purposes

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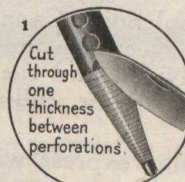
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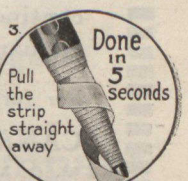
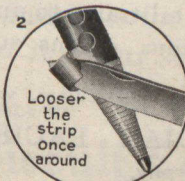
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