

# Sylvia's Secret

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

**S**YLVIA'S SECRET is one of the most successful spy stories yet given to the world, and the spy story has begun to replace the old detective story; because the German spy system and the operations of the Secret Service in other countries contain more material for mystery stories than anything else in vogue. "Sylvia's Secret" was written before the war. It deals with condi-

tions in England and Germany that led up to the war. It is a first-class detective story with all the elements of mystery, suspense, surprise, climax and interesting human people. It is also a story written in good form. The author spent years as professor of English literature in Manitoba; but he did not forget the old adage that "literature is life." "Sylvia's Secret" is a story with a grip.

## CHAPTER I.

### "All Change Here!"

**S**HE had been christened Margaret, but it was felt, even while she was a child, that the name did not really fit her.

Very few people who knew Miss Margaret Willoughby at all well addressed her by her baptismal appellation; they invariably called her Peggy—which at once makes it plain to any discerning person that she was possessed of a gay and friendly disposition, that she was popular, and did not belong to the order of beings to whom "prunes and prisms" are as the breath of life.

Her mother, indeed, sometimes spoke of her as Margaret, but that was only on occasions of ceremony; her father, Colonel Willoughby, a retired cavalry officer, called her "Peg." He was an Anglo-Indian, "with a natural weakness for pegs," as she once saucily told him.

The young lady was twenty-five years of age, and of course had been "out" for some time. A younger sister, Mary, was married, but Peggy was not even engaged. Yet she was the more attractive of the two.

Peggy was a fair girl, somewhat above the medium height of women. Her features were rather irregular, but she had fine grey-blue eyes, the most beautiful color in the world, a charming figure, and the prettiest and most delightful manners. She had a lovely voice, and a trick of speech that was fascinating. Her admirers were legion—which perhaps was why she had not given her heart to anyone of them; it certainly was not their fault, for they had tried their hardest.

It may as well be admitted that she was a bit of a flirt (was there ever a Peggy who wasn't?), but in an open and innocent fashion. For the most part her young men were, in the slang of the day, "boys" at one or other of the 'Varsities or in the army; as might be expected the Willoughbys' set was an army set. Her boys were devoted to her, and fetched and carried for her with right good will; they took her to theatres and dances and wherever it pleased her to go, with an eager competition amongst themselves for her favour. And if in return she only gave them smiles and thanks and the sight of her evident pleasure, she had a way of making them think they were well repaid.

The truth was, Peggy had a very good time, and enjoyed it to the full. But both her mother, who pondered the matter seriously, and her father, who thought of it less urgently, being not specially desirous in his secret soul to part with his Peg sooner than was necessary, said now and again to each other that it was time she married. The Colonel, however, would remark to his wife apologetically, "Girls don't marry so early nowadays."

Unfortunate speculations had materially reduced the Colonel's income, and the Willoughbys were not well off for their position; the only son, who was in a cavalry regiment, was an expensive young gentleman. So a year or two ago they had moved from a fashionable part of London to one of its western suburbs, St. Anton's Park, the main and best residential street of which is St. Anton's Avenue.

Speaking of the change to his intimates, Colonel Willoughby frankly deplored the necessity for it, but said hopefully that the air was better out there, and trusted his friends would not forget him. He pointed out that his house was no great distance from

St. Anton's Park station on the North London Railway, and that that station was easily reached from Earl's Court on the Underground. And his friends did not forget him. His modest home was the scene of many happy little gatherings, particularly of people connected with the service. Though Peggy was often out for the evening, she had, no doubt, a good deal to do with the success of these affairs.

On a Saturday evening in the middle of January there was one of these pleasant reunions; two or three men and their wives had been invited, while others had dropped in, sure of a welcome. Colonel and Mrs. Willoughby, with ten of their friends, made up three tables at bridge, which they played for small stakes but with keen enjoyment. Peggy and two guests did not play, for a "fourth" was not to be found, in spite of her efforts. She had telephoned in vain.

Peggy had expected that Captain Hollander, a man whom she liked very much, would have put in an appearance, but she had rung up his number without response; he frequently turned up, when he was in town, on Saturday evenings; she came to the conclusion that he must be "off somewhere," as she phrased it indefinitely to herself, and dismissed him from her mind.

In any case she was quite content, for of the two men whom fate, as represented by "cutting out," had left for her to entertain, or rather to entertain her, one was Maxwell Hamilton, and the other Villiers Chase, the brother of an old school friend of hers. Chase was well over thirty, and she thought him a trifle dull, but she knew that he worshipped her and cherished a hopeless passion. She always was kind to him. She also knew, as women know these things, that Maxwell Hamilton, whom everybody called Max just as everybody called her Peggy, was deeply in love with her.

**O**F all her admirers Peggy liked him the most, but her heart had not really been touched—as was shown her by her thinking sometimes that she preferred Hollander to him. Hollander had what is termed a magnetic personality and a certain distinction; he was handsome and good-looking, but he was a fair man, and she had a fair woman's instinctive predilection for dark men. Still she thought him interesting, and felt there was something subtle, something she could not explain about him. He was in a different class from her "boys."

So, too, was Max Hamilton. He was interesting undoubtedly. Just turned thirty, he had already made a mark among men, and had a life story behind him which impressed her imagination. As a subaltern he had gone through the South African War with honour, but with no more than that to which hundreds of other young officers were entitled. After the struggle was over, he resigned from the army, feeling that his career did not lie in soldiering, but he wrote the best book on the War, and soon after its publication his way was made plain before him. He was invited to join the staff of "The Day," the most widely-read of all English journals.

He speedily justified his appointment. As what Americans call the "star" Special Correspondent of that paper, he had done some wonderful things—things of which editors and newspaper men spoke with admiration and respect, tributes not easily gained in what is perhaps the most difficult field of human endeavour. The public, including Peggy Willough-

by, had heard of some of these things. Her father said Max was a fine fellow, as his father's son was bound to be, for was there ever a finer fellow than Major Hamilton? But Colonel Willoughby regretted that Max had left the army.

Peggy had known him for several years—it may have been that this fact was against him so far as her falling in love with him was concerned; sure it is that she was not in love with him that evening. She knew he was a successful man, and like most women she wanted success in the man for whom she would care. His appearance certainly was not against him, for he was tall, dark and striking-looking—rather than good-looking; perhaps it was that he had beautiful eyes under black brows set in an otherwise plain face which was apt to be serious and sometimes even stern. He and Peggy were excellent friends; with all his soul he wished that Peggy's friendship would be transmuted into love, such passionate love as he felt for her, but he was acutely conscious that friendship was all she gave him, and he longed for ever so much more than that!

Peggy was well aware of what was passing in his mind with respect to herself, and she thought of it with a sort of pensive amusement. She had never been in love; she had "never been swept off her feet by a man," as she phrased it, but she had seen this amazing yet quite common thing in the case of other girls; she had seen it with wonder not untinted with envy in the case of her sister, Mary, who had made a "love match," and whose happiness was patent to everybody. "Perhaps it is," she sometimes said to herself, "that I am not built that way."

When Peggy, Max and Villiers Chase were sitting together at one end of the drawing-room, chatting in low voices so as not to disturb the bridge players, she understood perfectly that Max wished the other man anywhere else in the world. But she seemed serenely ignorant of it, and though she liked Max much more than Villiers she did not like him to such an extent as to make it unmistakably plain to the latter that she would prefer his room to his company. To do so would, as matters stood, have been unpleasant to her, painful to him.

It was a few minutes past eleven o'clock when Max arose from his chair, and said he must catch the 11.24 from St. Anton's Park station for Earl's Court—the last train that night.

"You haven't much time," said Villiers glancing at a clock near them. "A bare ten minutes."

"I fancy I'll just do it," replied Max.

"You may have to run for it," said Peggy smiling, adding, "I'll say goodbye for you to father and mother—that will save you a minute or two."

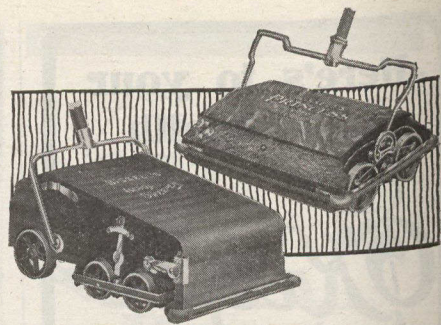
"Thank you," said Max, and Peggy walked with him into the hall where he put on his overcoat.

"When shall I see you again, Peggy?" he asked.

"Come when you like, Max," she responded; "you know we are always glad to see you."

"We," he said, with a faint note of reproach. He looked into her eyes, but they shone with nothing more than sheer friendliness, and on her face was a charming expression, but there was nothing special, nothing individual for him in it. He sighed, and turned away.

"You will lose your train unless you hurry," she reminded him. With a glance at a tiny watch she wore in a



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