

Sylvia's Secret

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

SYLVIA'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 V.

A Proud and Clever Woman.

FROM St. Anton's Park Max and the superintendent motored to the telegraph office at Charing Cross—to find that clerk who had taken in the fatal telegram, had gone off duty at eight o'clock in the evening. The original of the despatch was exhibited to them, but though they both examined it carefully it told them nothing. It was written in a round and flowing "hand," which was so characteristic that one could not have said positively whether it was the calligraphy of a man or a woman.

Ascertaining that the clerk, who had received the telegram across the counter, lived in Kentish Town, the two drove thither, and saw this official whom they awoke from sleep. But he could say very little; it had been a busy time of the day, and while he thought he was "almost certain" that the message had been handed in by a man, he was quite unable to describe him.

"Do you not remember selling him the stamp?" asked Johnson. "Can you not recall him at all?"

"No, I can't," replied the man. "I wish I could, but there was a rush of telegrams at the time."

"You didn't ask him for his name and address?"

"No; in any case, we hardly ever do that now. The telegram would be passed over to me; I would count the words to see what it would cost; it would be stamped by the person handing it in, and then sent by me to the telegraph room. It's always the same procedure, or nearly so."

"Unless I suppose your attention is drawn in some special way? And there was nothing of that sort here?"

"There was nothing special about it at all," said the clerk. "If there had been, I must certainly have observed it."

"I was rather afraid the telegram would not be of much use in the case," said the superintendent to Max, who recalled that Johnson had told Colonel Willoughby that it might not be easy to find out anything by means of the despatch. "All that we have learned is that it was handed in by a man—probably."

"Which agrees, at least, with my assumption that the murder was committed by a man," said Max. "What do you think of doing now?" he asked Johnson, as they were leaving the clerk's room.

"Well, I shall see the booking-clerk at Hampstead Heath station as soon as I can, but it's no good going there for an hour or two. I think I shall return to High Street."

"What about Miss Chase's brother? May I suggest that we should call on him and tell him what has taken place?" asked Max. "Besides, he may be able to throw some light on the tragedy. I know where he lives."

"No doubt, he ought to know as soon as possible. Yes, I shall see him now," assented the superintendent. "You are coming with me?"

"I should like to; then I know him, which may help matters a little, though in any case the shock will be cruel."

"He is connected with the War Office, is he not?"

"His position there is rather important," said Max. "He is private secretary to General Robinson, the Master of the Guns."

"The artillery department?"

"Yes, and he must be aware of everything that goes on in it; he has

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.

been General Robinson's secretary for some years."

"He is older than his sister?"

"I should say he is thirty-four or thereabouts; she was a good deal younger. I fancy her age was twenty-six or so."

"About twenty-six or twenty-seven, I guessed," said Johnson. "But Captain Chase will probably be able to tell us exactly."

They were now on their way to Villiers Chase, whose rooms were in one of the streets which run out of Berkeley Square. On their arrival, the night porter in charge of the house made some demur to their admission—until he learned who Johnson was. They experienced no difficulty in arousing the Captain. Needless to state, he was greatly surprised, when he saw Max—he did not know the superintendent.

"Hamilton!" he cried. "What is it?" Then more calmly he asked, "Has something happened?" A few hours before he had seen Max leave the Willoughbys, and it was of Peggy Willoughby he was thinking when he asked the question.

"Yes, something very terrible, Captain Chase, I deeply regret to have to tell you. I am more sorry than I can say, but I am the bearer of sad news," said Max, in tones of deep sympathy.

"I was afraid that was the case," said Chase. He looked at Johnson, and Max introduced the superintendent.

Briefly, tenderly Max told him what had happened; at first he could hardly make Chase understand—the thing was so sudden, so utterly unexpected; when Chase did understand, his grief was intense. He broke down completely, sobbing like a child.

"I was very much attached to her," he said, growing calmer after some minutes. "She was very dear to me—and to think of her dying in this awful way! We must have been talking to Peggy Willoughby," he said to Max, "at the very moment when she was struck down."

Max bowed his head silently.

"**S**YLVIA murdered!" murmured Chase. "It seems utterly beyond belief! What can I do to help you?" he asked the superintendent.

"I should like you to come to the police station in High Street, Kensington, to identify the body; it may not seem necessary, but it is, as a matter of form," responded Johnson.

"Certainly," said Chase. "I'll come."

"And if you would tell us about your sister's life, captain? That may be of the greatest assistance."

"You may be sure I'll tell you all I know."

Here Max interposed.

"Perhaps you would rather that I should not be present, Villiers. You would like to be alone with the superintendent?"

"Not at all," said Chase promptly. "I quite realise that this sad matter cannot be kept out of the papers, and as you are a leading journalist, Max, and a friend, I should much prefer you to hear all I have to say about poor Sylvia; I know we shall not suf-

fer at your hands. Besides, there is nothing to be said about her that might not be said to the world; there is nothing that one need hide." He spoke with an accent of pride.

"Of course not," said Max to whom Chase had been addressing himself.

"You knew Sylvia?" returned Chase simply.

"Slightly."

"She was a proud and clever woman," said her brother, and there had now come into his voice and bearing an expression of the utmost indignation. "Oh, I cannot imagine who can have killed her, who could have desired and planned her death—the infamous wretch!" His grief had passed from him; he was burning with rage. He turned to Johnson, and asked him where he should begin with his sister's life, adding, "There really is not much of a story."

"There must be some story of an unusual kind," thought the superintendent, mentally echoing words that had been spoken earlier that night. Aloud, however, he said to Chase, "I should like you to tell me anything you can, and just as it occurs to you."

"**I** DARESAY it is best to begin at the beginning," Chase replied. "I don't know if you knew my father?" he asked Max.

"No, I don't think so."

"He was a 'gunner'—which is why I am one too, I suppose—and he was a comparatively poor man," said Chase, curbing his emotions and speaking slowly and thoughtfully. "Our mother predeceased him. At the time of his death I was in the army, and Sylvia was at the Royal College for the daughters of officers at Bath; Miss Willoughby was there at the same time." Chase glanced at Max as he said the last sentence.

"I know that," said Max.

"My father left about a thousand pounds to me, charging me to see to the finishing of Sylvia's education. I did see to it; I should have done so in any case. I was fond of her—very fond," he said with sorrow and pain, and was silent for some seconds.

"When she was seventeen there came an opportunity for her," he resumed. "She was at the College, but I had determined to give her a year or two abroad. She had very good abilities—still I often thought with anxiety of what might happen after her education was completed; she would be penniless, and the world is a hard place for penniless ladies. You see I had nothing but my pay, and I wasn't on the staff then." He paused reminiscently.

"You were speaking of an opportunity," Johnson reminded him.

"Yes, and it was Sylvia herself who brought it to my notice," said Chase. "An English governess was required for the family of a Prussian noble—the Graf von Nordheim; he offered excellent terms, stating the engagement, if satisfactory to all parties, would last for four or five years; he postulated that she should be a lady, and said she would be treated like a member of the family. No doubt it was a very favourable opportunity, and Sylvia, who was high-spirited and of a very independent character—I told you she was a proud and clever woman—was determined to take advantage of it. I represented to her that she was rather young for such a post, but as I did not positively forbid her to accept it she went to Germany. She was already something of a linguist, and the prospects of a long residence over there delighted her. She remained with the Von Nordheims



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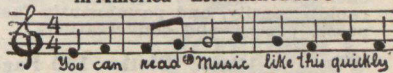
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