

sleepy yet irate voice. It was as if he had said, "How dare you wake me up in the middle of the night?"

"It's I, Max Hamilton, sir," Max replied. "I am sorry to disturb you in this manner and at this hour, but you may be sure the matter is a very serious one. Will you kindly come down and let us in?"

Max spoke in a quiet, clear voice, and it had an instant effect on Willoughby.

"Bless me!" he ejaculated. "You Max, my boy! A very serious matter, you say. Well, well!"

"Very serious indeed." The Colonel withdrew his head, and they could hear him speaking to Mrs. Willoughby; the night was exceedingly still and sounds carried far. The window was closed, in a few minutes the door was opened, and Max and the superintendent went in. Willoughby looked at the latter, and started somewhat when he saw his uniform.

"This is Superintendent Johnson of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard," Max explained. "I know him very well."

Colonel Willoughby stared, and wondered what was coming.

"I have told him," Max continued, "that I was here this evening, and left in time to catch the 11.24 to Earl's Court."

"That is the case, superintendent," said Willoughby. "Peggy, my daughter Peg, said to us that you might very likely miss it, as you were very late in starting from here," he went on turning to Max. "My daughter Peg" had been thrown in for the officer's information. The Colonel's face, however, wore a mystified expression.

Max now looked at the superintendent. "I think you mentioned Miss Willoughby's name," said Johnson to Max. "I should very much like to see the young lady, Colonel," he said to Willoughby.

"If it is necessary, certainly," cried Willoughby, with sudden fierceness. "Can't you tell me, Max, what it's all about? You spoke of something very serious indeed. In what way can it possibly affect my Peg?"

As briefly as he could Max recounted the circumstances, but the story took some time, for the Colonel, who was at first dumbfounded, asked many questions. As they were talking, there was the noise of movements in the house.

"I'll see if Peg is up," he said, and left Max and Johnson.

PRESENTLY the young lady and her mother came in with her father. It was evident they had been told the main facts.

"Oh, Max, how awful!" exclaimed Mrs. Willoughby. "Sylvia Chase murdered in the train! And you to find her!" Her voice was agitated and her eyes were humid.

"Sylvia!" said Peggy, "Sylvia murdered. It seems so impossible. And I knew her so well once; we were at school together in Bath—and we were always friends. You must tell us everything, Max," she entreated in tremulous tones.

"Yes, Peggy," said Max, gazing at her, his eyes sparkling; they were beautiful eyes, as has been recorded, and more than redeemed the plainness of his face.

In vivid, dramatic language, with hardly a pause, he told her the story from beginning to end, and told it in such a way that not only Peggy but the other listeners hung upon his words in breathless silence; the magic of his craft was upon him as on them, and so he told the story as he would have written it, only far more powerfully, because of its inspiration. Remember, he spoke to her, and as he spoke she saw him in a new light—this was another Max, not exactly a stranger, but different. When he began she was thinking of poor, dead, murdered Sylvia Chase, but he had not gone far before she was thinking more of him.

How does love come? Surely, in many ways. At first sight, or after prelude short or long? Is there always the conscious moment of its birth, or does it come subtly and as if by scarce perceptible degrees—till the faint form described in the far distance turns into the strong man armed and in posses-

sion of the house? However it may be, it was on this occasion and in this manner that Peggy Willoughby discovered for the first time that Max Hamilton touched a chord of emotion in her heart that vibrated to him alone—was wholly personal to him; she listened as Desdemona to the Moor. No doubt, the unusual circumstances had something to do with it, clothing both the man and the occasion with that mystical, glamorous, wonder-working thing, romance.

Max finished his story with the finding of the fatal telegram in Sylvia's handbag. There was a pained silence. The Colonel looked at his wife; Peggy looked away; like Sir Bedivere, they were "revolving many things." Then Willoughby uttered a horrified exclamation. The superintendent relieved the tension somewhat by producing the telegram and showing it to the Colonel, who read it and without remark passed it back to him.

"Who could have sent it? What does it all mean?" asked Mrs. Willoughby, in a deeply shocked voice.

"That's what I must find out, ma'am," said Johnson. "If I can lay my hands on the person who sent the despatch—"

"That may be easy," broke in the Colonel.

"Or it may not," said the superintendent, soberly. Then he addressed Peggy. "I came here, Miss Willoughby, to have a statement made to me by Mr. Hamilton, confirmed by you. He said that he left here to catch the 11.24 train to-night at St. Anton's Park for Earl's Court, and that you saw him out of the house. Can you tell me the exact time or as exactly as possible?"

"Fortunately, yes," replied Peggy, who understood the importance of the question as it affected Max's position. "Just as he was going out I looked at my watch—I was wearing it on my wrist in a bracelet at the moment—and saw that he had just seven minutes, that is, it was seventeen minutes past eleven."

"Thank you, Miss Willoughby," said the superintendent. "You can swear to it?"

"Yes." "May I see the bracelet or rather the watch?"

"Yes, I'll fetch it," said Peggy. When she had brought it to him, Johnson compared its "time" with that of his own watch.

"Quite all right," he said. Then he made a note in a book, and after thanking the Willoughbys and apologizing for disturbing them, said to Max that they "must get on."

"Where?" asked the Colonel, blandly.

"To the telegraph office at Charing Cross—it is open all night, sir," Johnson replied.

"Oh, yes! That telegram," sighed Willoughby.

WHILE Max said good-bye to Peggy he looked into her eyes, as he had done some hours before, and he was rather put out when he observed that they seemed to be veiled—never suspecting what lay beneath the maidenly veiling. Yet afterwards he thought it rather odd that her expression was not as frank as usual, but put it down to her being tired. Still later, he wondered if she were thinking of him, and what it was she was thinking.

Peggy was not fully aware of all that had happened to herself, but she was intensely conscious that, however sorry she was for the dreadful fate of Sylvia Chase, and however much she occupied herself in guessing at the man who had sent the telegram, her thoughts would come round to Max Hamilton.

She kept on remembering how he looked—mainly at her—while he was telling the story, and how his appearance and words had thrilled her with a strange persistence. "Dear old Max," she said to herself, and at once knew in her heart that the words were adequate no longer; the words of affection and comradeship were not enough. She felt curiously happy, and went to sleep in a dream.

(To be continued.)



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