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spies," cried Colonel Willoughby, passionately, "and we are not half careful enough of our secrets." He mentioned several "secrets" which had passed into the possession of the Germans—how, had never been ascertained. He then went on to say he could not possibly believe that Englishmen could be traitors. This led to some conversation on spies and espionage which Max thought somewhat dull. About half-past ten he telephoned to the office of his paper, as he had suggested, to see if there was any further news respecting the murder, and received a message in reply announcing what he saw at once was a startling development.

"A telegram has just come from Smiles, our correspondent in Berlin, said the voice at the other end of the 'phone,' "and he wires that the Von Nordheims state that they paid no annuity to Sylvia Chase—the denial comes from the Graf Von Nordheim himself."

Max's face was a strange study at that moment. After a short pause he inquired if there was anything more.

"Nothing," said the voice.

CHAPTER X.

A Strange Love Quest.

"SHALL I ring off?" asked the voice telephoning from "The Day" to Max Hamilton.

"Not yet, please," Max returned. "Wait a moment, or, better still, put me on to the managing editor, I suppose he is in."

"Yes, he is; I'll connect you at once—"

"Is that you, Max?" inquired a different voice—that of the great man himself.

"Yes. Have you heard a rumour that the German Army Staff have succeeded in getting some plans of the new gun we've been complimenting ourselves on inventing?"

"The new gun! You've heard that about it, Max?"

"I have to-night, and from a pretty good source. I thought you might like to ascertain if there's any truth in it."

"All right. I'll see what can be found out. Is that all?"

"Yes, good night."

"Good night."

Max rang off, but he did not immediately leave the telephone-box, a sort of cupboard, which stood in the hall; he was thinking, not of the rumour about the new gun, but of the startling development in the story of the murder of Sylvia Chase.

That unfortunate woman, it now was certain, had never had an annuity from the Von Nordheims. If she had actually told her brother, Villiers, that she was paid that annuity, she was intentionally deceiving him. It might be that she had not definitely told Villiers that, but had led him to suppose it was the case. Even so, she had deceived him.

What did this new fact mean? What light, if any, did it throw upon the murder? Max asked himself.

Now, while going over her flat with the Superintendent, Villiers Chase and Bertha Schmidt, Max had seen unmistakable evidences that Sylvia was in very prosperous circumstances. The finely furnished flat, the beautiful clothes, the costly furs, and the rare and expensive jewellery all spoke of her being in the enjoyment of a considerable income. He remembered that it had occurred to him, as he had noted these signs of her being very comfortably off, that as a literary woman, even of some standing, she could scarcely have made enough money to account for her having all these things, especially the jewellery, and even the annuity, of which her brother had spoken, hardly seemed to explain everything.

But there had been no annuity!

Whence, then, had she derived her income—the income which paid for the flat, the clothes, the furs, the jewels?

Instantly another question arose in his mind. Could the income have come to her from the man, who, he believed, had killed her?

He had been present throughout the inquest, and had followed all the proceedings thereat with the most sedulous care. He had heard the coroner

ask Villiers Chase if Sylvia had been engaged to be married—if she had a love affair. Max had thought the question rather a cruel one, but supposed the coroner deemed it necessary to put it. He had listened while Villiers had replied confidently, "I should answer, certainly not," and had gone on to state that his sister had never been engaged, and had never had, so far as he knew, a love affair. Max recalled perfectly all that Villiers and that Bertha Schmidt had said on this point.

Were Villiers and the maid wrong? Had there been a love affair after all—one of which both of them were ignorant?

It was possible, but somehow Max did not believe that there had been a love affair. What he had known and observed of Sylvia Chase agreed with the statements of her brother and of the maid; as Villiers had remarked of her, she was not a "flirtatious woman."

And if love had not been the tie which bound her to this unknown man, what had the tie been?

But Max could not stand any longer in the telephone-box; the Willoughbys would notice how many minutes he had been out of the drawing-room, and might be surprised; he could not stop in the box and go on making vague guesses as to the connection between Sylvia Chase and the man who had given her the money, and probably had murdered her.

"I suppose I must tell them," he meant the Willoughbys—"what the news is, though it's perhaps not exactly nice. Still, it's no good suppressing it, for it will be in 'The Day,' to-morrow and, very likely, in other papers too."

So when he returned to the drawing-room, and was asked if he had heard anything, he told them precisely what had been said to him over the 'phone.

"She had no annuity from the Von Nordheims!" exclaimed Colonel Willoughby. "Villiers distinctly said she had."

"He must have been mistaken," said Max. He went on to speak of the evidences he had noted of Sylvia's prosperity, and how he had thought that the amount she made by her literary work could hardly account for it. "If she didn't have this annuity, I can't account for it at all," he wound up by saying. "What one saw meant that she had a fairly large income—a really good income."

"Where did it come from?" asked Willoughby.

"Yes, that is the question," said Max. "I don't know what the answer to it can be unless you say it has something to do with the man who killed her, and yet the answer might not lie there at all. Still, that is the idea that comes naturally into one's head. What is sure is that the mystery steadily deepens."

"I am not so sure of that," objected Hollander. "There was a hint in the evening papers—or was it the coroner who gave it? suggesting that Miss Chase may have had a love affair—"

"The coroner asked Villiers Chase if Sylvia had been engaged to be married," said Willoughby; "I think that was it, but I'll look at one of the papers—please wait a moment."

HE went into his "den," and almost at once returned with a newspaper. The Colonel usually wore a cheerful and even confident air; he was the sort of man who is disposed to see and to make the best of people and things, which is a very excellent way of going through the world. As he came into the drawing-room his face was clouded.

"It was just that," he said. "The Coroner asked Villiers Chase if Sylvia had been engaged or had had some love affair, and Villiers replied that she had never been engaged and had never had a love affair—though how he could make the latter statement I don't quite see, for she might have had several love affairs without his knowing anything about them."

"Villiers said he had never heard of any love affair in connection with his sister," Max observed.

"She might have had more than one such affair without Villiers having