

after a moment's thought. "Shortly after eleven," he added.

"What would you say was the cause of her death?" asked the constable, who had been listening.

"I imagine you will find she has been shot or stabbed through the heart," said the doctor.

CHAPTER III.

The Fatal Telegram.

THE station-master also had been listening to Dr. Wagstaff, and though he was much upset by the tragedy, the railway and its interests were, quite naturally, most prominent in his mind even at that moment.

"She's been shot or stabbed through the heart—on the line!" he said with a quaver in his voice. "It's a terrible thing to happen—on the line!" And still thinking of the "line," he asked the doctor, "When did you say you thought Miss Chase's murder—death," he corrected himself, "must have taken place?"

"Shortly after eleven o'clock," said Dr. Wagstaff, who had been considering the matter of the time as exactly as he could.

"Shortly after eleven," repeated the other. "In that case the train would be about Hampstead Heath station or perhaps Finchley Road. It's due at Hampstead Heath at 11.2 and three minutes later or so at Finchley Road."

The constable said, "That's important," and made a note in his pocket-book. Then he addressed Maxwell Hamilton, "You stated that you got into the compartment at St. Anton's Park about 11.24?"

"Thereabouts," Max replied. "A minute or two later, I fancy."

"Have you your ticket, or have you given it up?"

"I have it," said the station-master.

"Give it to me," said the constable.

"It's important too." Then he turned again to Max and said, "Everything so far bears out your statements, Mr. Hamilton. Still—" He paused.

Max understood his difficulty.

"You wish me to go with you to the police station, is that it?" he asked the officer. "It is what I should prefer to do. As I have come into this sad affair, I should like to see it through—on personal as well as journalistic grounds."

LITTLE did Max foresee what "seeing it through" was to mean to him, and how it was to affect his whole life—most of all his love for Peggy Willoughby.

"Right," said the constable, rather relieved. He did not wish to arrest Max Hamilton, but duty compelled him to keep in close touch with him until they had reached the station where Max would be "detained" pending the arrival of a superintendent from Scotland Yard.

Max read what was in the constable's mind, and knew that after what Dr. Wagstaff had said he would not be detained long. Besides his interest had been excited to the highest pitch; he said to himself that never had he taken part in anything so deeply dramatic.

Before the body was placed on the stretcher he gazed on Sylvia's face, striving, as it were, to penetrate its dreadful secret. Until that terrible look had come upon it, it had been a beautiful face. "Who could have killed her?" he kept on asking. "And why?" But he could see no answers to these questions. He thought, however, that they must soon be answered, that everything would be quickly brought to light.

When the body was moved, there was disclosed a small pool of blood where Sylvia's feet had rested; her dress had completely covered it. A small bag, such as ladies carry nowadays, was found; it had been lying between the body and the side of the compartment. Somewhat to Max's surprise the constable did not remove the bag.

"They," he explained, "like everything to be left exactly as it is." By "they" he meant his superiors at Scotland Yard.

"Why not leave the body also?" asked Max.

"That's a matter for the doctors at once," replied the man. "How can

they make a thorough examination of the body here?" he inquired.

"That is so," said Dr. Wagstaff approvingly.

Next the constable sealed up the compartment, remarking to the station-master that in an hour or two a superintendent or other senior officer would come and unseal it.

"I suppose the carriage will be quite handy," he went on, "and the station must be kept open till he comes."

"Certainly," said the station-master. "I shall stop here myself, for I am as anxious as you are to get at the truth. I shall have to make a report to my head office," he added, "and I should like it to be as full as possible."

A small procession, composed of Max, the doctor, the constable, the porter who had seen Max try to arouse Sylvia Chase, and a few others accompanied the stretcher along the platform and up the steps into Earl's Court Road, where a crowd, mainly made up of people returning to their homes from the theatres, had gathered, notwithstanding the bitter cold of the night. Already a report had got about that a young and beautiful woman had been murdered on the North London line from Broad Street to Earl's Court. Many of the crowd followed the body to the police-station of the district, which is in High Street, Kensington, and hung about its entrance eager for news, but speedily dispersed as none was vouchsafed.

The constable at once telephoned to Scotland Yard, and in less than an hour Superintendent Johnson, one of the ablest heads of the Criminal Investigation Department, and the police surgeon on night duty, drove up in a taxi. It was now about a quarter past one on Sunday morning, a little more than two hours after the time when, according to Dr. Wagstaff, Sylvia Chase had been murdered. Max, who with the doctor had been given a seat in the office beside a roaring fire, observed that it was an excellent demonstration of the efficiency of the organization of the London police.

THE superintendent and the surgeon came into the office, and the former immediately spoke to Max, whom he knew very well, while the surgeon fraternized with Dr. Wagstaff.

"I gathered, over the 'phone," said Johnson to Max, "that you were mixed up in this affair quite accidentally."

"That is exactly how it came about," Max replied.

"Tell me the story," said Johnson, and Max did so, in much the same words as those in which he had told it to the station-master and the constable in Earl's Court station; he also referred to what Dr. Wagstaff had said as to the time about which the murder had been committed.

"So, you see, I could have nothing to do with it," said Max, by way of conclusion.

"I never supposed that you could have," said Johnson; "I know too much about you to imagine anything of the sort," he went on with great cordiality. "Of course, as a matter of form, I shall want some proof of your statement regarding your being at Colonel Willoughby's and the time when you left his house, but I dare say that will be forthcoming."

"No doubt of it," said Max with a smile. "Miss Willoughby can tell you that as I said goodbye to her I had barely seven minutes left in which to catch the train; she told me that I should have to run to catch it."

"I shall see her presently," said the superintendent, in a kind tone. He was a man of some imagination, and he scented a little romance in Max's saying goodbye lingeringly to Miss Willoughby. Then he asked some questions respecting Miss Sylvia Chase and her brother, Villiers.

"Queer coincidence your leaving him, and then getting into the very compartment in which his sister was," remarked the superintendent, "but life is full of coincidences; we see a great many of them in the course of our investigations—coincidences, many of them, which beat fiction hollow."

"That is true," agreed Max. "I will admit to you that I felt a little uncomfortable—about myself, I mean my being suspected—when I realized who



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