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the newspaper of the Monday had imparted every scrap of information that was possible.

One thing, however, must be noted afresh. Villiers Chase, in giving a biographical account of his sister, repeated the statement which he had made to Superintendent Johnson with respect to the annuity which she had enjoyed from the Von Nordheims. He said he did not know its amount, but had always thought it was something substantial. He was under the impression that she had told him that was the case, but could not remember exactly.

The coroner, an elderly gentleman of benevolent aspect, but an extremely shrewd judge of mankind, asked both Villiers Chase and Bertha Schmidt if they had no suspicion who had killed Sylvia. He put the question most pointedly to the maid. Both replied that they did not suspect anyone; they could think of no one as likely to be guilty of such a crime.

"The evidence points to Miss Chase having met a man, a man who was wearing a fur coat, at Hampstead Heath station late at night," said the coroner to Villiers. "One imagines that she must have known this man pretty well," he observed, "and, while I do not desire in the least to pain you, Captain Chase, it is my duty to enquire into this matter, and I must ask if your sister was engaged to be married—did she have a love affair?"

"I should answer, certainly not," said Villiers. "I never heard of anything of the kind. She was never engaged, so far as I know. If she had been or was engaged surely I should have been told of it. She was not the kind of woman to have love affairs. She was a proud girl, and not at all the sort of person to fall in love readily. Besides, she was too much interested in her work, which was her life."

The coroner thanked Villiers, and then asked if he had ever heard of her having any love affair during her residence in Germany.

Villiers had heard of nothing of the sort, nor did he believe there had been any. With sternness he declared that his sister was not a "flirtatious person."

BERTHA SCHMIDT was even more positive than Captain Chase in asserting that Miss Chase had had no lover.

"She was a cold, reserved woman, my mistress," said Schmidt. "Men did not come very frequently to see her, and when they did it was generally in connection with business—so I understood. Whenever I heard any part of the conversation, and made it out, it was always on grave and serious subjects relating to the fraulein's literary work."

"You have no notion who was the man in the fur coat?" asked the coroner.

"No, sir; none," said Schmidt.

The coroner looked at Superintendent Johnson and then at the jury before making his charge. He was thinking he had never come across a more mysterious case. Here was a young and pretty woman, well connected, highly educated, of some literary distinction, meeting a man late at night who had sufficient influence over her to make her "do that kind of thing," as the coroner phrased her action in his thoughts. Had there been some clandestine love affair, unknown to her brother or her maid? But what need that it should be clandestine? So he asked himself. It was a perfect puzzle.

He ended by directing the jury to return an open verdict, remarking that no doubt the police would continue to prosecute their investigations with the utmost assiduity.

"That a cruel and dastardly murder has been committed there is no doubt whatever," he said. "What evidence there is leads us to suppose that it was perpetrated by the man in the fur coat who bought the tickets at Hampstead Heath station, but there is no direct evidence. An open verdict, therefore, will be best in the circumstances of this most mysterious case."

After the inquest Max and the superintendent exchanged a few words. "What do you think?" asked Max.

"I don't know what to think," said Johnson, simply. "Still, it's early days yet! I don't admit that I am beaten."

#### CHAPTER IX.

##### A Startling Development.

FULL accounts of the inquest appeared in all the evening papers of that Tuesday; the murder was a subject of universal interest, and the journals were bought in enormous quantities and eagerly read; nowhere were they more eagerly read than in the house of the Willoughbys. None of them had been present at the inquest which, they soon saw, had disclosed little or nothing that was not known to them already. Still, as was perfectly natural, they discussed it.

"It all comes just to this," said the colonel; "an open verdict, with a presumption against the man in the fur coat, but no clue as to who he was or is. The coroner rather hinted that love might enter into the tragedy, but it seems a mere guess, with nothing to warrant it."

"Yes," said Mrs. Willoughby, "and how unlikely it is in itself! If she had a lover, why should he kill her? From jealousy? But jealousy of whom? But even if she had had a lover, and had made him jealous, why should he have murdered her? One reads of that sort of thing happening among the passionate races of the south, but surely never in England!"

"That's exactly what I think," said Colonel Willoughby. "I do not believe the solution of the mystery lies in that direction at all; it must be looked for elsewhere."

"I agree with what Villiers Chase said," remarked Peggy, who had been listening to the conversation of her parents. "Sylvia was too proud a woman to have love affairs, and certainly far too proud to have some secret love affair."

"Too proud for love!" exclaimed Mrs. Willoughby. "What an idea, Peggy!"

"I did not perhaps express myself well," replied Peggy, smiling. "Of course, love is a far greater thing than pride. I meant that she was a cold creature, absorbed in her work, as her brother said. She did not take much interest in men. I never heard of her name being coupled with that of any man."

"That confirms what Villiers and the maid stated," said Colonel Willoughby. "But don't you see how all that adds to the mystery? For there was a man—we know that; the man she met, and who must have had some hold over her."

"I have been wondering if it could have anything to do with her life in Germany," said Peggy.

"With her life in Germany—that's an idea if you like!" said Willoughby. "Well, the police, we may be sure, will make all sorts of inquiries respecting it."

"But it's nearly five years ago since she left Germany and came to live in London," said Mrs. Willoughby, by way of protest.

Colonel Willoughby made no reply, and at that moment Captain Hollander was shown in, and was made welcome.

"We were talking of poor Sylvia Chase," said Willoughby. "The inquest has disclosed nothing new; there's no hint even of who her murderer was."

"So I understand," said Hollander, briefly. "I have seen the papers."

"There seems to be no clue whatever," said Willoughby. "But Peggy was saying a moment ago that perhaps the murder may in some way be connected with her life in Germany."

"That strikes me as a far-fetched notion," said Hollander, without hesitation. "She was governess-companion to the Von Nordheims, and her life with them was not marked, I should imagine, by anything out of the ordinary. I knew the Von Nordheims, and I met Miss Chase for the first time at their place in Prussia. But that is a long time ago," he said. "six or seven years ago at least."

"You had known her all that time?" asked Willoughby.

"Yes," replied Hollander. "You see, I knew her brother, Villiers, some time before I met her, and when I did meet her she spoke of him. The Von