

# The YELLOW STREAK By Valentine Williams

### SYNOPSIS

Hartley Parrish, who has had a sudden rise to wealth as a result of the war, has several guests at his country house. Among them are Lady Trevert, her daughter, Mary, and her son, Horace, and Robin Greve, who is in love with Mary and she with him. When he proposes she tells him she has become engaged to Parrish. He accuses her of mercenary motives, which she admits and leaves her in anger. A few moments later she hears a shot and turns her brother and others, who have entered the library, which is locked from the inside, and find their host dead with a revolver in his hand. Apparently a suicide. Greve realizes Mary deceived him, and from a remark to the butler by the butler, Bude, that Greve was near the library when the shot was fired, that she knows the man who shot, and finally is closeted with Mary.

### THIRD INSTALLMENT.

THE swift tragedy of the winter afternoon had convulsed the well-organized repose of Hartley Parrish's household. Nowhere had his master grasp of details been seen to better advantage than in the management of his country home. Overwhelmed with work though he constantly was, accustomed to carry his business and often part of his business staff to Harkings with him for the weekends, there was the least confusion about the house. The methodical calm of Harkings was that of a convent.

But it was into a house in turmoil that Mary Trevert stepped when she left the drawing room and passed along the corridor to go to her room. Doors slammed and there was the heavy thud of footsteps on the floor above. The glass door leading into the garden was open, as Mary passed it, swinging in the gusts of cold rain. In the garden without there was a confused murmur of voices and the flash of lanterns.

In the hall a knot of servants were gossiping in frightened whispers with a couple of large, rather bovine country constables, who, bareheaded, without their helmets, which they held under their arms, looked curiously undressed.

When, about six months before, Mary and her mother had begun to be regular visitors at Harkings, Hartley Parrish had insisted on giving Mary a boudoir to herself. This in response to a choice remark of Mary's in admiration of a Chinese room she had seen at a friend's house, Parrish had had decorated in the Chinese style, with black walls and black and gold lacquer furniture. The room had been transformed from a rather prosaic morning room with old oak and chairs in the space of three days as a surprise for Mary. She remembered now how Parrish had left her to make the discovery of the change for herself. She loved color and line, and the contrast between this quaint and delightful room with her rather shabby bedroom in her mother's small house in Brompton had made this surprise one of the most delightful she had ever experienced.

She rang the bell and sat down listlessly in a charmingly lacquered armchair in front of the log fire blazing brightly in the fireplace. She was conscious that a great disaster had overtaken her, but only dimly conscious. For more poignantly than this dull sense of tragedy she was aware of a great aching at her heart and the thought, after hovering over the events of the afternoon, settled down upon her talk that afternoon . . . already how far off it seemed . . .

With Robin Greve in the library. Robin had always been her hero. She could see him now in the glow of the fire as he had been when in the holidays he had come and snatched her away from a home already drab and difficult for a matinee and an orgy of cream cakes at Gunter's afterwards. He was a tall, slender, handsome boy of irrepressible spirits and impulsive generosity, which usually left him after the first few days of his holidays in a state of lamentable impotency. All their lives, it seemed to her, they had been friends, but with a stronger feeling between them until Robin, having joined the army on the outbreak of the war, had come to say goodbye on being ordered to France.

But by that time money troubles at home with which, as it seemed to her, she had been surrounded all her life, had become pressing that, apart from Lady Mary's reiterated counsels, she herself had come to recognize that a suitable marriage was the only way out of their ever-increasing embarrassment.

She and Robin, she recalled, were in a feeling of relief, had never discussed the matter. He, too, had understood and had sailed for France without seeking to take advantage of the circumstances.

And now she was rich. Hartley Parrish's idea of "proper provision" for her, she knew, meant wealth for her beyond anything she had ever dreamed. The perpetual debasing struggle with poverty which she and her mother had carried on for years was a thing of the past. Money, the freedom, freedom to live . . . and to love . . .

She stretched her hands out to the blaze. Was she free to love? What had driven Hartley Parrish to suicide? Or who? She went over in her mind her interview with Robin Greve in the billiard room. He had spoken of other women in connection with Hartley Parrish. Had he used that knowledge to threaten his rival? What had Robin done after he had left her that afternoon with his final launtying?

A tap came at the door. Bude appeared. "I think you rang, miss," he said, in his quiet, deep voice. "I was with the inspector, miss, and I couldn't come before. Was there anything?"

"The girl turned round and the man saw fear in her wide open eyes. The butler put his hand on the back of her chair and leaned forward. "Better leave things where they are, miss," he said in a low voice. "Mr. Parrish, I dare say, had his reasons. He's gone to his last account now. What does it matter why he does it?"

"The man was agitated and in his emotion he carefully studied English was forsaking him. But the girl broke in insistently. "Please explain what you mean?" she commanded.

"Why, miss," replied the butler, "we know that Mr. Greve had no call to like Mr. Parrish, seeing how things were between you and the master. . . .

"You mean the servants know that Mr. Parrish and I were engaged. . . .

"Bude made deprecatory gesture. "Know, miss? I wouldn't go so far as to say 'know.' But there has been some talk in the servants' hall, miss. You know what young female servants are, miss. . . .

"And you think that Mr. Greve went to Mr. Parrish to talk about . . . me?" Mary Trevert's voice faltered a little. She looked eagerly at the other's fat, smooth face. "I presumed as much, miss. I must confess. . . .



As he came into the lounge he instinctively realized that he had entered an unfriendly atmosphere.

The butler raised his hands in a quick gesture of denial. "God forbid, miss!" he ejaculated in horror. "What, then, do you know that is likely to get anybody here into trouble?"

The butler hesitated an instant. Then he spoke. "That Inspector Humphries has been asking me questions, miss, in a nasty, suspicious sort of way. I told him what I told him already, that just after I'd done serving the tea Mr. Greve crossed the hall and went down the library corridor. . . .

"The butler took a step nearer. "O, miss," he said, lowering his voice, "if you'll pardon my frankness, but I know as how you and Mr. Greve are old friends and I wouldn't take it upon me to tell the police anything as might. . . .

"Bude," said she, "Mr. Parrish was your master, a kind and generous master as he was kind and generous to every one in this house. We must clear up the mystery of his death. Neither you nor I nor Mr. Greve nor anybody must stand in the way. Now tell me the truth!"

She dropped back into her chair. She gave the order imperiously like the mistress of the house. The butler, trained through life to receive orders, surrendered.

"There's nothing much to tell, miss. When Mr. Humphries asked me if I were the last person to see Mr. Parrish alive I made sure that Mr. Greve would say he had been in to tell him tea was ready. But Mr. Greve, who heard the inspector's question and my answer, said nothing. So I thought, maybe, he had his reasons and I did not feel exactly as how it was my place. . . .

"Mary Trevert tapped with her foot impatiently. "But what grounds have you for saying that Mr. Greve went in to Mr. Parrish? Mr. Greve declared quite positively that he went out by the side door and did not go into the library at all. . . .

"But, miss, I heard him speaking to Mr. Parrish. . . .

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"But what did you hear Mr. Greve say?" "I heard nothing, miss, except just only the sound of voices. After Mr. Greve had crossed me in the hall I took the salver I was carrying into the butler's pantry. I stayed there a minute or two and then I remembered I had not collected the letters

from the box in the hall for the chauffeur to take to the post, the same as he does every evening. I went back to the hall and just as I opened the green baize door I heard voices from the library. . . .

"I cannot say, miss. It was just the sound of voices, rather loud like. I caught the sound because the door leading from the hall to the library corridor was ajar. Mr. Greve must have forgotten to shut it. . . .

"What did you do?" "Well, miss, I closed the corridor door. . . .

"Why did you do that?" "Well, miss, seeing the voices sounded angry-like, I thought perhaps I would be better not to let any one else hear. . . .

Mr. Greve looked upset-like when he passed me. He gave me quite a turn, he did, when I saw his face under the hall lamp. . . .

"Did you stay there . . . and listen?" Bude drew himself up. "That is not my 'abit, miss, not 'ere nor in many of the 'ouses where I 'ave seen service. . . .

"The butler broke off. The "h's" were too much for him in his indignation. "I didn't mean to suggest anything underhand," the girl said quickly. "I mean, did you hear any more?"

"No, miss. I emptied the letter box and took the letters to the servants' hall. . . .

"That," said Mary in a puzzled way, "why do you say it was Mr. Greve if you didn't hear his voice?" Bude spread out his hands in bewilderment. "Who else should it have been, miss? Sir Horace and the doctor were in the lounge at tea. Jay and Robert were in the servants' hall. It could have been nobody else. . . .

The girl's head sank slowly on her breast. She was silent. The butler shifted his position. "Was there anything more, miss?" he asked after a little while. . . .

"There is nothing further, thank you, miss," replied Mary. "About Mr. Greve—I am sure there must be some mistake. . . .

"He cannot have understood Mr. Humphries' question. I'll ask him about it when I see him. I don't think I should say anything to the inspector about it at any rate, not until I've seen Mr. Greve. He'll probably speak to you about it himself. . . .

Bude made a motion as though he were going to say something. Then apparently he thought better of it, for he made a little formal bow and in his usual slow and dignified manner made his exit from the room. . . .

The house telephone, standing on the long and gracefully designed desk with its elaborately lacquered top, whirled. Mary started from her reverie in her chair by the fire. By the clock on the mantel shelf she saw that it was a quarter past eight. She remembered that once her mother had knocked at her door and bidden her come down to dinner. She had refused the invitation, declined to unlock the door. . . .

"That you, Mary?" Robin was speaking. "May I come up and see you? Or would you rather be left alone?" His firm, pleasant voice greatly comforted her. Only then she realized how greatly she craved sympathy. But the recollection of Bude's story suddenly interposed itself like a barrier between them. "Yes, come up," she said. "I want to speak to you!"

Her voice was dispirited. "I don't want to see him," she told herself as she replaced the receiver, got up and unlocked the door, "but I must know!" A gentle tap came at the door. Robin came in quickly and crossed to where she stood by the fire. "My dear," he said, and put out his two hands. Her hands were behind her back, the

fingers nervously intertwining. She kept them there and made no sign that she had observed his gesture. He looked at her in surprise. "This has been terrible for you, Mary," he said. "I wish to God I could make you realize how very, very much I feel for you in what you must be going through. . . .

The phrase was formal, and he brought it out irresolutely, chilled as he was by her reception. She was looking at him dispassionately, her forehead a little puckered, her eyes a trifle hard. . . .

"Won't you sit down?" she said. "There is something I wanted to say." He was looking at her now in a puzzled fashion. With rather feigned deliberation he chose a chair and sat down facing the fire. A lamp on the mantelpiece—the only light in the room—threw its rays on his face. His chin was set rather more squarely than his wont and his eyes were shining. . . .

"Mary," he leaned forward towards her—"please forget what I said this afternoon. It was beastly of me, but I hardly knew what I was doing. . . .

Robin stared at her in amazement. "But I was not in the library?" he answered. "The girl dropped her hands sharply to her side. "Don't quibble with me, Robin," she said. "What did you say to Hartley Parrish after you left me this afternoon in the billiard room?"

He was still staring at her, but now there was a deep furrow between his brows. He was breathing rather hard. "I did not speak to Parrish at all after I left you. . . .

His answer was curt and incisive. "Do you mean to tell me, Mary, that after you left me and went down the corridor toward the library you neither went in to Hartley nor spoke to him?"

"Then how do you account for the fact that almost immediately after you had crossed Bude in the hall he heard the sound of voices in the library?" Robin Greve stood up abruptly. "Certainly," you say, makes this statement?" "To whom may I ask?"

He spoke sharply and there was a challenging ring in his voice. It nettled the girl. "Only to me," she said quickly, and added: "You needn't think he has told the police." Very deliberately Robin plucked his handkerchief from his sleeve, wiped his lips, and replaced it. The girl saw that his hands were trembling. "Why do you say that to me?" he demanded rather fiercely. Mary Trevert shrugged her shoulders. "This afternoon," she said, "when I told you of my engagement to Hartley you began by abusing him to me, you rushed down the room, making straight for the library, where we all know that Hartley was working, and a few minutes after Bude hears voices raised in anger proceeding from there. The next thing we know is that Hartley has been shot and looked away. . . .

"Mary"—Robin's voice was grave and he had mastered all signs of irritation, "you and I have known one another all our lives. You ought to know me well enough by now to understand that I don't tell you lies. When I say I haven't seen or spoken to Hartley Parrish since lunch this afternoon, that is the truth!"

"How can it be the truth?" the girl insisted. "Horace and Dr. Romain were both in the lounge. Bude was in the hall, the other men servants were in the servants' hall. You are the only man in the house not accounted for and a minute before Bude heard these voices you go down the corridor towards the library. I can understand you wanting to keep it from the police, but why do you want to deceive me?"

"Mary," answered the young man sternly, "I know you're upset, but that's no justification for persisting in this stupid charge against me. I tell you I never saw Parrish or spoke to him, either, between lunch and when I saw him lying dead in the library. I am not going to repeat the denial. But you may as well understand now that I am not in the habit of allowing my friends to doubt my word!"

Mary flamed up at his tone. "If you are my friend," she cried, "why can't you trust me? Why should I find this out from Bude? Why should I be humiliated by hearing from the butler that he kept this evidence from the police in order to please me because you and I are friends? I am only trying to help you, to shield you. . . .

"That will do, Mary," he said. "No, you must hear what I have to say. If you insist on disbelieving me, you must. But I don't want you to help me. I don't want you to shield me. I shall make it my business to see that Bude's evidence is brought before the detective inspector from Scotland Yard who is being brought down here to handle the case. . . .

"A detective from Scotland Yard?" the girl repeated. "Yes, a detective. Humphries is puzzled by several points about this case and has asked for assistance from London. He is right. Neither the circumstances of Parrish's death nor the motive of his act are clear. Bude's evidence is sufficient proof that somebody did gain access to the library this afternoon. In that case. . . .

"In that case," said Greve slowly, "it may not be suicide. . . .

Mary put one hand suddenly to her face as women do when they are frightened. She shrank back. "You mean . . . Murder?" He nodded.

The girl gave a little gasp. Then she stretched out her hand and touched his arm. "But, Robin," she spoke in quick gasps, "you can't give the police this evidence of Bude's. Don't you see it incriminates you? Don't you realize that every scrap of evidence points to you as being the man that visited Mr. Parrish in the library this afternoon? You're a lawyer, Robin. You understand these things. Don't you see what I mean?"

He nodded curtly. "Perfectly," he replied coldly. "Bude will do what I tell him," the girl hurried on. "There is no need for the police to know. . . .

"On the contrary," said the other imperiously, "it is essential they should be told at once. . . .

"The girl grasped the lapels of his coat in her two hands. Her breath came quickly and she trembled all over. "Are you mad, Robin?" she cried. "Who should have wanted to kill poor Hartley? Why should you put these ideas into the heads of the police? Bude may have imagined everything. Now you'll be sensible and promise me. . . .

"Very gently he detached the two slim hands that held his coat. His mouth was set in a firm line. "We are going to sift this thing to the bottom, Mary," he said, "no matter what are the consequences. You owe it to Parrish and you owe it to me. . . .

The telephone trilled suddenly. Robin picked up the receiver. "Yes, Bude," he said. "There was a moment's silence in the room broken as the clock on the mantelpiece chimed nine times. Then Robin said into the telephone: "Right! Tell him I'll be down immediately!"

He put down the receiver and turned to Mary. "A detective inspector has arrived from London. He is asking to see me. I must go downstairs. . . .

Mary, her elbows on the mantelpiece, was staring into the fire. At the sound of his voice she swung round quickly. "Robin?" she cried. "But she spoke too late. Robin Greve had left the room. . . .

A quality which had gone far to lay the foundations of the name which Robin Greve was rapidly making at the bar was his strong intuitive sense. He had the rare ability of correctly "sensing" an atmosphere, an uncanny flair for driving instantly at the heart of a situation, which rendered him in the eyes of a detestable advocate and a redoubtable opponent. . . .

Now as he came into the lounge from the big oak staircase he instantly realized that he had entered an unfriendly atmosphere. Greve's attention was immediately attracted toward the stranger, whom he surmised to be the detective from Scotland Yard. He was a big, burly man with a heavy dark mustache, straight and rather thin hair, and coarse features. "This Mr. Greve?"

The detective had a trick of dropping his eyes to his boots. When he raised them he seemed to alter his whole expression. His eyes, well open, keenly observant, in perpetual motion, lent an air of alertness, of shrewdness to his heavy, florid countenance. "That is my name," said Robin, answering his question. "I am a barrister. I have met some of your people at the Yard, but I don't think. . . .

"Detective-Inspector Manderton," interjected the big man, and paused as though to say, "Let that sink in!" Robin knew him well by repute. His qualities were those of the bulldog, slow moving, obstinately brave, and desperately tenacious. He was a name to conjure with among the criminal classes, and his career was starred with various sensational tussles with desperate criminals, for Detective-Inspector Manderton, when engaged on a case, invariably "took a hand himself," as he phrased it, when an arrest was to be made. A bullet-hole in his right thigh and an imperfectly knitted right collarbone remained to remind him of his propensity of his. His motto, as he was fond of saying, was "What I have I hold!"

"Well, Mr. Greve," said the detective in a loud, hoarse voice, "perhaps you will be good enough to tell me what you know of this affair?" Robin flushed angrily at the man's manner. But there was no trace of resentment in his voice as he replied. He told Manderton what he had already told Humphries, how he had gone from the billiard room across the hall and down the library corridor to the side door before tea, but finding that it was threatening rain, had returned to the house by the front door. . . .

The detective scanned the young man's face closely as he spoke. When Robin had finished the other dropped his eyes and seemed to be examining the brilliant polish of his boots. He said nothing, and again Robin became aware of the atmosphere of hostility toward him which this man radiated. "It is dark at five o'clock," Manderton turned to Bude. "Getting on that way, sir," the butler agreed. "Are you in the habit, sir," the detective turned to Robin now, "of going out for walks in the dark?" Greve shrugged his shoulders. "I had been sitting in the billiard room. It was rather stuffy, so I thought I'd like some air before tea. . . .

"You left Miss Trevert in the billiard room?" "Yes." "Why?" Greve put a hand to his throat and eased his collar. "The gong had sounded for tea," the detective went on imperturbably, "surely it would have been more natural for you to have brought Miss Trevert with you?" "I didn't wish to." "Mr. Manderton cleared his throat. "Ah!" he grunted. "You didn't wish to. I should like you to be frank with me, Mr. Greve, please. Was it not a fact that you and Miss Trevert had words?" He looked up sharply at him with contracted pupils. "You took a certain interest in this young lady?"

"Mr. Manderton"—Robin spoke with a certain hauteur—"don't you think we might leave Miss Trevert's name out of this?" "Mr. Greve," replied the detective bluntly, "I don't." Robin made a little gesture of resignation. "Before the servants. . . .

"Come, come, sir," the detective broke in, "with all respect to the young lady and yourself, it was a matter of common knowledge in the house that she and you were . . . well, old friends. It was remarked, Mr. Greve, I may remind you, that you looked very upset like when you left the billiard room to be paused perceptibly, 'to go for your stroll in the dark.'" Robin glanced quickly round the group. Jay averted his eyes. As for Bude, he was the picture of embarrassment. "You seem to be singularly well posted in the gossip of the servants' hall, Mr. Manderton," said Robin hotly. "It was a foolish remark, and Robin regretted the moment the words had left his mouth. "Well, yes," commented the detective slowly, "I am. I shall be well posted on the whole of this case presently, I hope, sir." His manner was perfectly respectful, but resorted almost to a tone of menace. "In that case," said Robin, "I'll tell you something you don't know, Mr. Manderton. Has Bude told you what he heard after I had passed him in the hall?" Interest flashed at once into the detective's face. He turned quickly to the butler. Robin felt he had scored. "What did you hear?" he said sharply. Bude looked round wildly. His large, fish-like mouth twitched and he made a few feeble gestures with his hands. "It was only, perhaps, an idea of mine, sir," he stammered. "Just a sort of idea. . . . I dare say I was mistaken. My hearing ain't what it was, sir. . . .

"Don't you try to hoodwink me," said Manderton, with sudden ferocity, knitting his brows and frowning at the unfortunate butler. "Come on and tell us what you heard, Mr. Greve, know, and I mean to get it out with it." Bude cast a reproachful glance at Mr. Robin. Then he said: "Well, sir, a minute or two after Mr. Greve had passed me I went back to the hall, and through the open door of the corridor leading to the library I heard voices!" "Voices, eh? Did you recognize them?" "No, sir. It was just the sound of talking!"

"You told Miss Trevert they were loud voices, Bude?" Robin interrupted. "They were loud in a manner of speaking, else I shouldn't have heard them!" "Why not?" The detective rapped the question out sharply. "Why, because the library door was locked, sir!" "How do you know that?" "Because Miss Trevert and Dr. Romain both tried the handle and couldn't get in!" "Ah!" said Manderton, "you mean the door was locked when the body was found. Now as to these voices. Were they men's voices?" "Yes, sir. I should say so." "Why?" "Because they were deep like!" "Was Mr. Hartley Parrish's voice one of them?" The butler spread out his hands. "That I couldn't say! I just heard the murmur like, then shut the passage door quickly. . . .

"Why, sir, I thought . . . I didn't want to listen. . . .

"You thought one of the voices was Mr. Greve's, eh? Having a row with Mr. Parrish, eh? About the lady, isn't that right?" "Aren't you going rather too fast?" said Robin quietly. "But the detective ignored him. "Come on and answer my question, my man," he said harshly. "Didn't you think it was Mr. Hartley Parrish and Mr. Greve here having a bit of a dust-up about the young lady being engaged to Mr. Parrish?" "Well, perhaps I did, but . . . now is that upon this evidence of Bude's depends the vitally important question of how Mr. Parrish met his death. Though he was found with a revolver in his hand, note of us in this house know of any good motive for his suicide. I put it to you that the man who can furnish us with this motive is the owner of the voice heard by Bude in conversation with Mr. Parrish, since obviously nobody other than Mr. Parrish, and possibly this unknown person, was in the library block at the time. And would further remark, Mr. Manderton, that until the butler has been extracted we do not know that Mr. Parrish killed himself. . . .

"No," said the detective significantly, "we don't!" (Copyright, 1921, by Arthur Somers Roche) (Continued Next Sunday)