

The YELLOW STREAK By Valentine Williams



SYNOPSIS

Hartley Parrish's guests at Harkings, his country home, include Louise Margaret Trevett, her daughter Mary and son Bruce, and Robin Greve. When Mary, in answer to Robin's proposal, tells him she is engaged to Parrish and admits necessary non-Grave, Greve leaves in anger. Mary hears a shot and Parrish is found dead in his library, with his revolver in his hand. Bruce is directed toward Greve as a factor in the apparent suicide when Robin tells of hearing a noise in the library. He finds a mysterious trap of blue paper inside the body, and taking a bullet wound on an upright in the rose garden. He leaves Harkings at Mary's request, made through her brother Horace, Detective Inspector, on the charge of the case. He tells Mary the verdict will be suicide, but she can see he is not satisfied with this. Jeekes Parrish's secretary, informs Mary of French woman in Parrish's life. While they are talking a door is found ajar, as though there had been an intruder. Robin is started by hearing a noise in the library. He tells of the latter's career in South Africa—of one Victor Marlow, an enemy of certain Miss Trever's that roused Parrish's anger. Robin sends Wright to Harkings to get the blue paper that arrived just before Parrish's death. Wright is about to search Parrish's desk when some one enters the library, and he hides. Parrish is seen to enter by Mary Trevett. He confronts her.

SEVENTH INSTALLMENT. The Maxim Silencer.

"O!" cried the girl, "you frightened me! You frightened me! What do you want here . . . in this house!"

She was trembling. One arm had plucked nervously at her dress. Her breath came and went quickly.

"I saw the curtain move. I thought it was the wind at first. But then I saw the outline of your fingers. And I imagined it was him . . . come back . . ."

"Miss Trever," said the boy, abashed, "I must have frightened you terribly. I had no idea it was you."

"But why are you hiding here? How did you get in? What do you want in this house?"

She spoke quickly, nervously. Some papers she held in her hand shook with her emotion. Bruce Wright stepped to the desk and turned the bulb of the reading lamp down into its normal position.

"I must apologize most sincerely for the fright I gave you," he said. "But, believe me, Miss Trever, I had no idea that anybody could gain access to this room. I climbed in through the window. Bruce told me that the police had taken away the key . . ."

The girl made an impatient gesture.

"But why have you come here?" she said.

"What do you want?"

"The boy measured her with a narrow glance. He was young, but he was shrewd. He saw her frank eyes, her candid, open mien, and he took a rapid decision.

"I think I have come," he answered slowly, "for the same purpose as yourself!"

And he looked at the papers in her hand.

"I used to be Mr. Parrish's secretary, you know," he said.

The girl laughed—a little fluttering sigh—and looked earnestly at him.

"I remember," she said. "Hartley liked you. He was sorry that he sent you away. He often spoke of you to me. But why have you come back? What do you mean by saying you have come for the same purpose as myself?"

Bruce Wright looked at the array of letter trays. The marble paperweight had been displaced. The tray in which it had been empty. He looked at the sheet of papers in the girl's hand.

"I wanted to see," he replied, "whether there was anything here . . . on his desk . . . which would explain the mystery of his death."

The girl spread out the papers in her hand on the big blotter.

She laid the papers out in a row and leaned forward, her white arms resting on the desk. From the other side of the desk the boy leaned forward and scanned the lines of papers.

At the first glimpse his face fell. The girl, eying him closely, marked the change which came over his features.

There were seven papers of various kinds, both printed and written, and they were all on white paper.

The boy shook his head and swept the papers together into a heap.

"It's not there!" queried the girl eagerly.

"No," said Bruce, absent-mindedly, glancing round the room.

"What isn't?" flashed back the girl.

"Bruce Wright felt his face redden with vexation. What sort of a confidential emissary was he to fall into a simple trap like this?"

The girl smiled rather wistfully.

"Now I know what you meant by saying you had come for the same purpose as myself," she said. "I suppose we both thought we might find something, a letter, perhaps, which would explain why Mr. Parrish did this dreadful thing, something to relieve the awful uncertainty about . . . about his motive. Well, I've searched the desk . . . and there's nothing! Nothing but just these prospectuses and receipts which were in the letter tray here. They must have come by the post yesterday morning. And there's nothing of any importance in the drawers . . . only household receipts and the wages book and a few odd things like that. You can see for yourself . . ."

The lower part of the desk consisted of three drawers fastened on either side by cupboard doors. Mary Trevett pulled out the drawers and opened the cupboards. Two of the drawers were entirely empty and one of the cupboards contained nothing but a stack of cigar boxes. One drawer held various papers appertaining to the house. There was no sign of any letter written on the slaty-blue paper.

The boy looked very hard at Mary.

"You say there was nothing in the letter tray but these papers here?" he asked.

"Nothing but these," replied the girl.

"You didn't notice any official looking letter on blue paper?" he ventured to ask.

"No," answered the girl. "I found nothing but these."

The boy thought for a moment.

"Do you know," he asked, "whether the police or anybody have been through the desk?"

"I don't know at all," said Mary, smoothing back a lock of hair from her temple. "I daresay Mr. Jeekes had a look round, as he had a meeting with Mr. Parrish's lawyer in town this afternoon."

She had lost all trace of her fright and was now quite calm and collected.

"Do you know for certain whether Mr. Jeekes was in here?" asked Bruce.

"O, yes. The first thing he did on arriving last night was to go to the library."

"I suppose Jeekes is coming back here tonight?"

No, she told him. Mr. Jeekes did not expect to return to Harkings until the inquest on Tuesday.

Bruce Wright picked up his hat.

"I must apologize again, Miss Trever," he said, "for making such an unconventional entrance and giving you such a fright. But I felt I could not rest until I had investigated matters for myself. I would have pre-

sent myself in the ordinary way, but as I told you, Bruce told me the police had locked up the room and taken away the key . . ."

Mary Trevett smiled forgivingly.

"So they did," she said. "But Jay, Mr. Parrish's man, you know, had another key. He brought it to me."

She looked at Bruce with a whimsical little smile.

"You must have been very uncomfortable behind those curtains," she said. "I believe you were just as frightened as I was."

She walked around the desk to the window.

"It was a good hiding place," she remarked, "but not much good as an observation post. Why you could see nothing of the room. The curtains are much too thick!"

"Not a thing," Bruce agreed rather ruefully. "I thought you were the detective!"

He held out his hand to take his leaving with a smile. He was a charming looking boy, with a remarkably serene expression, which went well with his close cropped golden hair.

Mary Trevett did not take his hand for an instant. Looking down at the point of her small black suede shoe she said shyly:

"Mr. Wright, you are a friend of Mr. Greve, aren't you?"

"Rather," was the enthusiastic answer.

"Do you see him often?"

The boy's eyes narrowed suddenly. Was this a cross-examination? "Every now and then."

Mary Trevett raised her eyes to his.

"Will you do something for me?" she said. "Tell Mr. Greve not to trust Manderton. He will know whom I mean. Tell him to be on his guard against that man. Say he means mischief. Tell him, above all things, to be careful. Make him go away . . . go away until this thing has blown over . . ."

She spoke with intense earnestness, her dark eyes fixed on Bruce Wright's face.

"But promise me you won't say this comes from me! Do you understand? There are reasons, very strong reasons, for this. Will you promise?"

"Of course."

She took Bruce's outstretched hand.

"I promised," he said.

"You mustn't go without tea," said the girl. "Besides, she glanced at a little platinum watch on her wrist—there's not another train until six. There's no need for you to start yet. Besides, I don't like being left alone. Mother has one of her headaches and Horace and Dr. Roman have gone to Stevehals. Come up to my sitting room!"

She led the way out of the library, locking the door behind them, and together they went up to the Chinese boudoir, where tea was laid on a low table before a bright fire. In the dainty room with its bright colors they seemed far removed from the tragedy which had darkened Harkings.

They had finished tea when a tap came at the door. Bruce appeared. He cast a reproachful look at Bruce.

"Jay would be glad to have a word with you, Miss," he said.

The girl excused herself and left the room. She was absent for about ten minutes. When she returned she had a little furrow of perplexity between her brows. She walked over to the open fireplace and stood still for an instant, her foot tapping the hearth.

"Mr. Wright," she said presently. "I'm going to tell you something that Jay has just told me. I want your advice . . ."

The boy looked at her interrogatively. But he did not speak.

"I think this is rather important," the girl went on, "but I don't quite understand in what way it is. Jay tells me that Mr. Par-

rish had on his pistol a sort of steel fitting attached to the end . . . you know, the part you shoot out of. Mr. Parrish used to keep his automatic in a drawer in his dressing room and Jay has often seen it there with this attachment fitted on. Well, when Mr. Parrish was discovered in the library yesterday this thing was no longer on the pistol. And Jay says it's not to be found . . ."

"That's rather strange," commented Bruce. "But what was this steel contraption for, do you know? Was it a patent sight or something?"

"Jay doesn't know," answered the girl. "Would you mind if I spoke to Jay myself?" asked the young man.

In reply the girl touched the bell beside the fireplace. Bude answered the summons and was dispatched to find Jay. He appeared in due course, a tall, dark, sleek young man wearing a swallow-tail coat and striped trousers.

"How are you, Jay?" said Bruce amiably.

"Very well, thank you, sir," replied the valet.

"Miss Trever was telling me about this appliance which you say Mr. Parrish had on his automatic. Could you describe it to me?"

"Well, sir," answered the man rather haltingly, "it was a little sort of cup made of steel or gun-metal fitted closely over the barrel . . ."

"And you don't know what it was for?"

"No, sir!"

"Was it a sight, do you think?"

"I can't say, I'm sure, sir!"

"You know what a night looks like, I suppose. Was there a head on it or anything like that?"

"Yes, sir, I'm sure, sir. I never gave any particular heed to it. I used to see the automatic lying in the drawer of the wardrobe in Mr. Parrish's room in a wash-leather case. I noticed this steel appliance, sir, because the case would not shut over the pistol with it on, and the bell would stick out."

"When did you last notice Mr. Parrish's automatic?"

"It would be Thursday or Friday, sir. I went to that drawer to get Mr. Parrish an old stock to go riding, as some new ones he had bought were stiff and hurt him."

"And this steel cup was on the pistol then?"

"O, yes, sir!"

"And you say it was not on the pistol when Mr. Parrish's body was found?"

"No, sir!"

"Are you sure of this?"

"Yes, sir. I was one of the first in the room and I saw the pistol in Mr. Parrish's hand and there was no sign of the cup, sir. So I've had a good look among his things and I can't find it anywhere!"

Bruce Wright pondered a minute.

"Try and think, Jay," he said, "if you can't remember anything more about this steel cup, as you call it. Where did Mr. Parrish buy it?"

"Can't say, I'm sure, sir. He had it before ever I took service with him!"

Jay put his hand to his forehead for an instant.

"Now I come to think of it," he said, "there was the name of the shop or the maker on it, stamped on the steel. 'Maxim,' that was the name, now I put my mind back with a number . . ."

"Maxim," echoed Bruce Wright. "Did you say Maxim?"

"Yes, sir! That was the name," replied the valet impassively.

"By Jove!" said the boy half to himself. Then he said aloud to Jay:

"Did you tell the police about this?"

Jay looked somewhat uncomfortable.

"No, sir!"

"Why not?"

Jay looked at Mary Trevett.

"Well, sir, I thought perhaps I'd better tell Miss Trever first. Bude thought so, too. That there Manderton has made so much unpleasantness in the house with his pryings ways that I said to myself, sir . . ."

Bruce Wright looked at Mary.

"Would you mind if I asked Jay not to say anything about this to anybody just for the present?" he asked.

"You hear what Mr. Wright says, Jay," said Mary. "I don't want you to say anything about this matter just yet. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Miss. Will that be all, Miss?"

"Yes, thank you, Jay."

"Thanks very much, Jay," said the boy. "This may be important. Mum's the word, though!"

"I quite understand, sir," answered the valet and left the room.

Hardly had the door closed on him than the girl turned eagerly to Bruce.

"It is important!" she asked.

"Don't leave me in the dark like this, the girl pleaded. "This horrible affair goes on growing and growing and at every step it seems more bewildering . . . more ghastly. Tell me where it is leading, Mr. Wright! I can't stand the suspense much more!"

He-voice broke and she turned her face away.

"You must be brave, Miss Trever," said the boy, putting his hand on her shoulder. "Don't ask me to tell you more now. Your friends are working to get at the truth. . ."

"The truth!" cried the girl. "God knows where the truth will lead us!"

Bruce Wright hesitated a moment.

"I don't think you have any need to fear the truth!" he said presently.

The girl took her handkerchief from her face and looked at him with brimming eyes.

"You know more than you let me think you did," she said brokenly. "But you are a friend of mine, aren't you?"

"Yes," said Bruce, and added boldly: "And of this, too!"

She did not speak again, but gave him her hand. He clasped it and went out hurriedly to catch his train back to London.

That faithful servant of Fleet Street, the Law Courts clock, had just finished striking seven. It boomed out the hour, stroke by stroke, solemnly, inexorably, like a grim old judge summing up and driving home, point by point, an irrefragable charge. The heavy strokes broke in upon the fitful doze into which Robin Greve, stretched out in an armchair in his living room, had dropped.

He roused up with a start. There was the click of a key in the lock of his front door. Bruce Wright burst into the room.

The boy shut the door quickly and looked at him. He was rather pale and seemed perturbed.

"On seeing Robin he jerked his head in the direction of the courtyard."

"I suppose you know they're still out-side?" he said.

Robin nodded nonchalantly.

"There are three of them now," the boy went on. "Robin, I don't like it. Something's going to happen. You'll want to mind yourself . . . if it's not too late already!"

He stepped across to the window and, bending down, peered cautiously round the curtain.

Robin raised his eyebrows.

"Does he?" he said. "Now I wonder who told you that . . ."

"Friends of yours at Harkings asked me to warn you . . ."

"My friends are scarcely in the majority there," retorted Robin. "Whom do you mean exactly?"

But the boy ignored the question.

"Three men watching the house!" he exclaimed. "Don't you think this looks as though Manderton meant business?"

He returned to his post of observation at the curtain.

Robin laughed cynically.

"Manderton doesn't worry me any," he said cheerfully. "The man's the victim of an *idée fixe*. He believes Parrish killed himself just as firmly as he believes that I frightened or bullied Parrish into doing it . . ."

"Don't be too sure about that, Robin," said the boy, dropping the curtain and coming back Robin's chair. "He may want you to think that. But how can we tell how much he knows?"

Robin flicked the ash off his cigarette disdainfully.

"These promoted policemen make me tired!" he said.

Bruce Wright shook his head quickly with a little gesture of exasperation.

"You don't understand," he said. "There's fresh evidence . . ."

Robin Greve looked up with real interest in his eyes. His bantering manner had vanished.

"You've got that letter?" he asked eagerly.

"No, not that," he said. Then, leaning forward, he added in a low voice:

"Have you ever heard of the Maxim silencer?"

"I believe I have, vaguely," replied Robin. "Isn't it something to do with a motor engine?"

"No," said Bruce. "It's an extraordinary invention which absolutely suppresses the noise of the discharge of a gun."

"Go on," he said.

"It's a marvelous thing, really," the boy continued, warming to his theme. "A man at Havre had one when I was at the base there, during the war. It's a little cup-shaped steel fitting that goes over the barrel. You can fire a rifle fitted with one of these silencers in a small room and it makes no more noise than a fairly loud sneeze . . ."

"Ah!"

Robin was listening intently now.

"Parrish had a Maxim silencer," Bruce went on, impressively.

"Parrish had?"

"It was fitted on his automatic pistol, the one he had in his hand when they found him . . ."

"There was no attachment of any kind on the gun Parrish was holding when he was discovered yesterday afternoon," declared Robin, positively. "I can vouch for that. I was there almost immediately after they found him. And if there had been anything of the kind Horace Trevett would certainly have mentioned it . . ."

"I know Jay, who came in soon after you, was surprised to see that the silencer was not on the pistol. And he made a point of looking for it . . ."

"But how do you know that Parrish had it on the pistol?"

"Well, we don't know for certain. But we do know that it was permanently fitted to his automatic. Jay has often seen it. And if Parrish did remove it he didn't leave it lying about anywhere. Jay has looked all through his things without finding it . . ."

"When did Jay see it last?"

"On Thursday!"

"But are you sure that this is the same pistol as the one which Jay has been in the habit of seeing?"

"Jay is absolutely sure. He says that Parrish only had the one automatic, which he always kept in the same drawer in his dressing room . . ."

Robin was silent for a moment.

Very deliberately he filled his pipe, lit it, and drew until it burned comfortably. Then he said slowly:

"This means that Hartley Parrish was murdered, Bruce, old man. All through I've been puzzling my mind to reconcile the unquestionable circumstance that two bullets were fired—I told you of the bullet mark I found on the upright in the roastery—with the undoubted fact that only one report was heard. We can therefore presume either that Hartley Parrish first fired one shot from his pistol with the silencer fitted and then removed the silencer and fired another shot without it, thereby killing himself, or that the second shot was fired by the person whose interest it was to get rid of the silencer. There is no possible or plausible reason why Parrish should have fired first one shot with the silencer and then one without. Therefore, I find myself irresistibly compelled to the conclusion that the shot heard by Mary Trevett was fired by the person who killed Parrish. Do I make myself clear?"

"Perfectly," answered Bruce.

"Now, then," the barrister proceeded, thoughtfully puffing at his pipe, "one weak point about my deductions is that they all hang on the question as to whether, at the time of the tragedy, Parrish actually had the silencer on his pistol or not. That is really the acid test of Manderton's suicide theory. You said, I think, that a rifle fired back the silencer attachments makes no more noise than the sound of a loud sneeze."

"That's right," agreed Bruce, "a sort of harsh, spluttering noise. Not so loud, either, Robin. Ph-t-t-t! Like that!"

"Loud enough to be heard through a door, would you say?"

"O, I think so."

Robin thought intently for a moment.

"Then Mary is the only one who can put us right on that point. Assuming that two shots were fired—and that bullet mark in the roastery is, I think, conclusive on that head—and knowing that she heard the loud report of the one, presumably, if Parrish had the silencer on his automatic Mary must have heard the muffled report of the other. What it comes to is this, Mary heard the shot fired that killed Parrish. Did she hear the shot he fired at his murderer?"

"By Gad!" exclaimed Bruce Wright, impressively. "I believe you've got it, Robin! Parrish fired at somebody at the widow—a silent shot—and the other fellow fired back the shot that Mary Trevett heard, the shot that killed Parrish. Isn't that the way you figure it out?"

"Not so fast, young man," remarked Robin. "Let's first find out whether Mary actually heard the muffled shot or if so, when . . . before or after the loud report."

He glanced across at the window and then at Bruce.

"I suppose this discovery about the silencer is responsible for the dupatation waiting in the courtyard," he said, drily.

"The police don't know about it yet," replied Bruce. "At least, they didn't when I left."

Robin shook his head dubiously.

"The police know it. Manderton will worm it out of them. Haast'll be cross-examined Jay?"

"Yes," said Bruce. "But he got nothing out of him about this. Manderton seems to have put everybody's back up. He gets nothing out of the servants . . ."

"If Parrish had had this silencer for some time, you may be sure that other people know about it. These silencers must be pretty rare in England. You see, an average person like myself didn't know what it was, yet cleared up in this. Supposing we are right in believing Parrish to have been murdered, how do you explain the fact that the bullet removed from his body fitted his pistol?"

"That's a puzzle, I must say!" said Bruce. "There's only one possible explanation, I think, Robin went on, "and that is that Parrish was shot by a pistol of exactly the same caliber as his own. For the murderer to have killed Parrish with his own weapon would have been difficult without a struggle. Manderton heard no struggle. For a murderer and his victim to have pistols of the same caliber argues a rather remarkable coincidence, I gather you. But then life is full of coincidences! We meet them every day in the law. Though, I admit, this is a coincidence which requires some explaining . . ."

He fell into a brown stupor which Bruce interrupted by suddenly remembering that he had had no lunch.

For answer Robin pointed at the sideboard.

"There's a cloth in there," he said, "also the whisky, if my landlord has left any, and a siphon, and there should be some clear—Mrs. Bragg doesn't care about red wine. Set the table and I'll take a root 'round in the kitchen and dig up some tinned stuff."

"They supplied off a tinned tongue and some paté de foie gras. Over their meat Bruce told Robin of his adventure in the library at Harkings."

"Jeekes must have collected that letter," Bruce said. "Before I came to you I went to Lincoln's Inn Fields to see if he was still at Barty's. Parrish's solicitor, you know. But the office was closed and the place in darkness. I went on to the Junior Pantheon—that's Jeekes' club—but the porter told me. He hadn't been there all day, he wasn't in. So I left a note asking him to ring you up here . . ."

"The case reads of blackmail!" said Robin through his teeth. "But I am wondering how much we shall glean from this precious letter when we do see it. I am glad you asked Jeekes to ring me up, though. He should be able to tell us something about these mysterious letters on the blue paper that these myrtle-leaf letters in such a stew . . . Hullo, who's that?"

An electric bell thrilled through the flat. It rang once . . . twice . . . and then a third time, a long, insistent peal.

"See who's there, will you, Bruce?" said Robin.

"Suppose it's the police . . .?" began the boy.

Robin shrugged his shoulders.

"You can say I'm at home and ask them in," he said.

He heard the heavy oaken door swing open, a murmur of voices in the hall. The next moment Detective Inspector Manderton entered the sitting room.

(Continued Next Sunday.) (Copyright, 1921, by Arthur Somers Roche)

