

The YELLOW STREAK By Valentine Williams

SYNOPSIS.

Hartley Parrish, war millionaire, is found dead in the library of his country place, Harkings, with his revolver in his hand. Robin Greve, who had told Mary Trevett, Parrish's fiancée, he came when she admitted mysterious motives were back of her husband, is suspected of some connection with the apparent suicide. He finds a mysterious blue paper inside Parrish's body, and advances the theory Parrish was murdered. Bruce Wright, a former employee, tells him of Parrish's career in South Africa, of Victor Marbran, a possible enemy; of certain blue letters that Parrish feared, and of a Maxon airplane that disappeared from Parrish's automobile. Detective Manderton, who has been trailing Robin, declares Maxon and asks help. He reveals that Jeekes, Parrish's secretary, has tried to place Robin in a bad light before Mary. Robin declares Parrish probably was slain by blackmailers, who were responsible for the blue letters, after he had fired one shot from the silenced automatic. Mary visits Ernest Dullingham, solver of secret codes, with one of the blue letters. He sends her to William Schulz of Rotterdam, that the scores of the letters, *Bliss van der Spuyk & Co.*, may be hunted down. Jeekes deems knowledge of any blue letters, but later sends a mysterious telegram to Rotterdam, whether Robin flies by airplane. Robin is on his way to *Bliss van der Spuyk & Co.* when he is summoned to meet Jeekes. Mary receives a bogus message and goes to "William Schulz" country place, where a shadow-faced man of the name of Victor drags her. Robin, leading Jeekes and Victor's chauffeur, arrives just in time to rescue Mary. Hounding the shadow-faced man, he also is obliged to cow Jeekes, with Mary's help, before he escapes with her in a motor car to Rotterdam. There he finds a note from the real William Schulz, who is the head of the Parrish secret service, masquerading as a German. Schulz reveals that Dullingham has warned him that Victor Marbran, Parrish's old enemy, and his band probably are connected with Parrish's death.

TWELFTH INSTALLMENT. The Secret of the Blue Letters.

"MARBRAN!" said Robin, thoughtfully. "When I read Dullingham's letter just now I thought I had heard that name before. Of course—Victor Marbran! That was it! I remember now! He knew Hartley Parrish in the old days. Parrish once said that Marbran would do him an injury if he could. Who is Marbran, sir?"

All unconsciously he paid the tribute of "sir" to Herr Schulz's undoubted habit of command.

"Victor Marbran," replied the big man. "is Elias Van der Spuyk and Co., a firm which made millions in the war by trading with the enemy. In every neutral country there were, of course, firms which specialized in importing contraband for the use of the Germans, but Van der Spuyk and Co. brought the evasion of the blockade to a fine art. They covered up their tracks, however, with such consummate art that we could never bring anything home to them. In fact, it was only after the armistice that we began to learn something of the immense scope of their operations. There was a master brain behind them. But it was never discovered. It strikes me, however, that we are on the right track at last."

"By Jove!" exclaimed Robin impressively. "Hartley Parrish!"

The big man raised a hand. "Attendants!" he interposed suavely. "The chain is not yet complete. I wonder what this Van der Spuyk letter of Miss Trevett's contained that made Victor Marbran and the secretary chap so desperately anxious to get hold of it. For you understand, don't you," he said briskly, turning to Robin, "that they were after that and that alone? And they risked penal servitude in this country to get it."

Robin nodded. "To save their necks in another," he said. "I have the letter here," mildly remarked the doctor from his corner of the room. "Miss Trevett gave it to me!"

He produced a white envelope and drew from it a folded square of slate-blue paper. In great excitement Robin sprang forward. "You're a downy bird, doctor, I must say," he remarked, "fancy keeping it up your sleeve all this time!"

He eagerly took the letter, spread it out on the table and read it through whilst Herr Schulz looked over his shoulder.

"Code, eh?" commented the big man shaking his head humorously. "If it beats Dullingham it beats me!"

From his note case Robin now drew a folded square of paper identical in color with the letter spread out before them.

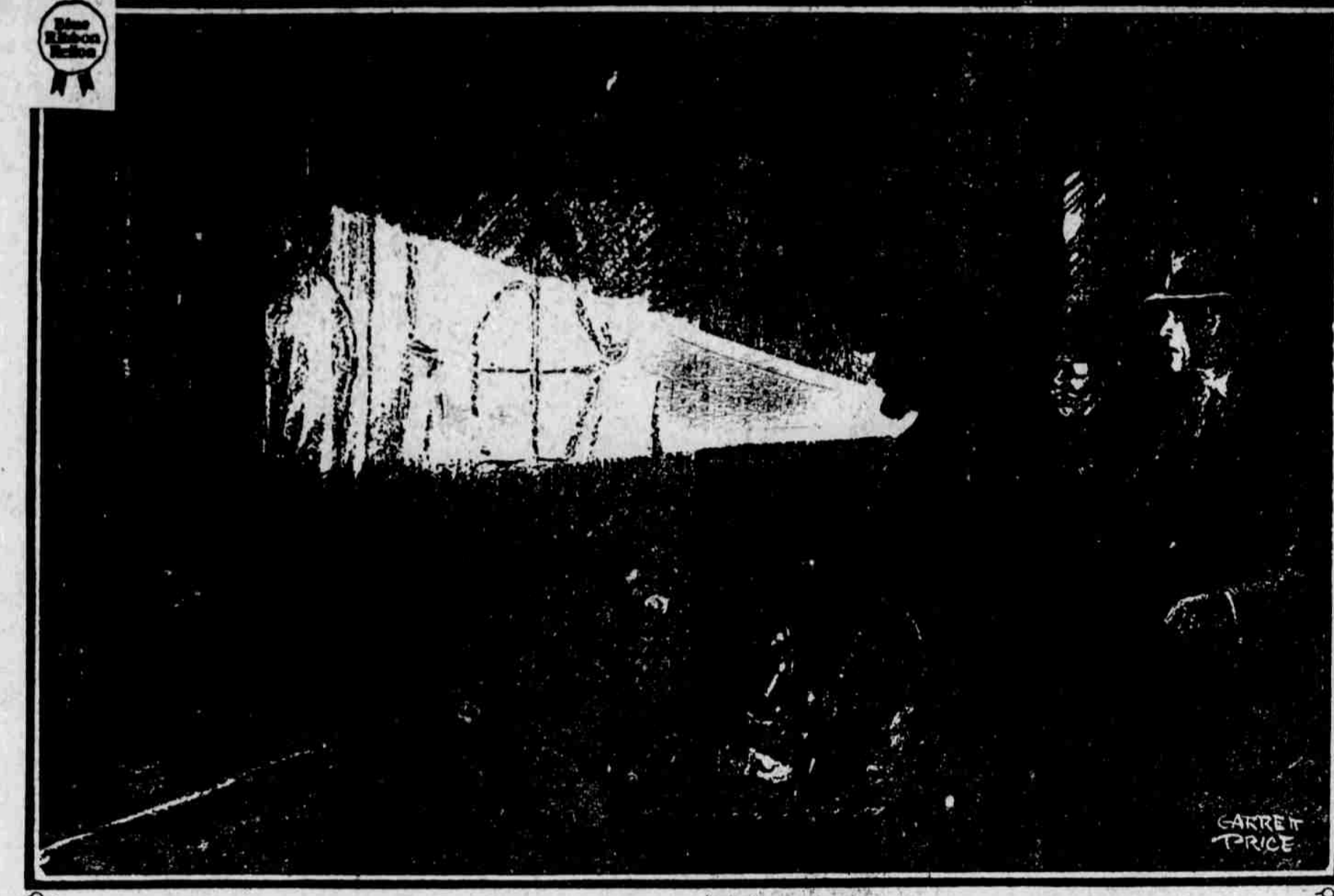
"I found this on the carpet beside Parrish's body," he said. "Look, it's exactly the same paper."

Behind the tortoise shell spectacles the big man's eyes narrowed down to pin points as he caught sight of the sheet which Robin unfolded and its series of sills.

"Aha!" he cried—and his voice rang out, clear through the room—"the grill, eh? Well, well, to think of that!"

He took the slotted sheet of paper from Robin's hands and laid it over the letter so that it exactly covered it, edge to edge and corner to corner. In this way the greater part of the typewriting in the letter was covered over and only the words appearing in the slots could be read. And thus it was that Robin Greve, Herr Schulz and Dr. Collingwood, leaning shoulder to shoulder, read the message that came to Hartley Parrish in the library at Harkings.

"Elias Van der Spuyk & Co.
General Importers.
Rotterdam. Rotterdam 25th Nov.
Codes.
A. B. C.
Liebler's.
Personal.
Dear Mr. Parrish,
Your favor of even date to hand and contents noted. THE LAST delivery of steel was to time but we have had WARNING from the railway authorities that labor troubles at the docks are likely to delay future consignments. IF YOU DON'T mind we should prefer to SETTLE the question of future delivery BY NOV. 27TH as we have a board meeting on the 30th inst. While we fully appreciate your own difficulties with labor at home, YOU will understand that this



The light flashed across the room, blazed for an instant upon a windowpane, then picked up a man's form swaying in the doorway.

is a question which we cannot afford to adjourn sine DIE.
Yours faithfully,
pro ELLIAS VAN DER SPUYK & CO.

"The last . . . warning!" Robin read out. "If you don't . . . settle . . . by Nov. 27 . . . you . . . die . . .!"

He looked up. "Last Saturday," he said, "was the 27th, the day that Parrish died."

"The grill," remarked the big man authoritatively, "is one of the oldest devices known to the secret service. It renders a conventional code absolutely undecipherable as long as it is skillfully worded as it is in this case. You send your conventional code by one route, your key by another. I make no doubt that this was the way in which Van der Spuyk & Co. transacted their business with Hartley Parrish. They simply posted their conventional code letters through the post in the ordinary way, confident that there was nothing in them to catch the eye of the censor's department. The key might be sent in half a dozen different ways, by hand, concealed in a newspaper, in a parcel."

"So this," said Robin, pointing at the letter, "was what caused Hartley Parrish to make his will. It would lead one to suppose that it was what induced him to commit suicide were not the presumption so strong that he was murdered. But who killed him? Was it Jeekes or Marbran?"

Herr Schulz picked his cigar stump late an ash tray.

"That," he said, "is the question which I am going to ask you gentlemen to help me answer. You will realize that legally we have not a leg to stand on. We are in a foreign country where, without first getting a warrant from London we can take no steps whatever to run these fellows in. To get the Dutch police to move against these gentry in the matter of the small sum Miss Trevett would waste valuable time. And we have to move quickly—before these two lads get away. I therefore propose that we start this instant for the Villa Bergendal and try, if we are not too late, to force Marbran or Jeekes or both of them to a confession. That done, we can hold them if possible until we can get the Dutch police to apprehend them at the instance of Miss Trevett. Then we can communicate with the English police. It's all quite illegal, of course! You have a car, I think, Mr. Greve! You will come with us. Dr. Collingwood? Good! Then let us start at once!"

Robin intervened with a proposal that they should call en route at his hotel to see if there were any telegrams for him.

"Manderton knows I am in Rotterdam," he explained, "and he promised to wire me the latest developments in the inquiry he is conducting."

"Miss Trevett should be fully recovered by this time," put in the doctor. "Apart from a little sickness she is really none the worse for her disagreeable experience. If there was anything you wanted to ask her—"

"There is," said Robin promptly. "Her reply to one question," he explained, turning to Herr Schulz, "will give us the certainty that Parrish was murdered and did not commit suicide. It will not delay us more than five minutes to stop at her hotel in passing. We will then call in at my place. We should be at the villa within half an hour from now."

"Gentlemen," said Herr Schulz, as they prepared to go, "I know my Mr. Victor Marbran. You should all be armed."

Robin produced the pistol he had taken from Jeekes. Herr Schulz slipped a Browning pistol into the breast pocket of his jacket and producing a long barreled service revolver, gave it to the doctor.

"There are three of them, I gather, counting the chauffeur," commented the big man, pulling on his overcoat, "so we shall be equally matched."

Darkness had fallen upon Rotterdam and the lights from the houses made yellow streaks in the water of the canal as the car, piloted by Robin, drove the party to Mary Trevett's hotel. They found the girl, pale and anxious, in the lounge.

"Well, now," cried the doctor broadly, "and how are you feeling? Did you take my advice and have some tea?"

"What has happened?" asked the girl. "I have been so anxious about you."

Her words were addressed to the doctor but she looked at Robin.

"Mary," said Robin, "we are very near the truth now. But there is one thing you can tell us. It is very important. When you heard the shot in the library at Harkings, did you notice any other sound—before or after?"

"The girl paused to think. "There was a sort of sharp cry and a thud," she said. "I know. But was anything else? Do try and remember. It's so important."

The girl was silent for a moment. Then she said, slowly:

"Yes, there was, now I come to think of it. Just as I tried the door—it was locked, you know—there was a sort of hiss, harsh and rather loud, from the room . . ."

"A sort of hiss, eh? Something like a sneeze?"

"Yes. Only louder and harsher."

"Now, answer me carefully. Was this before or after the shot?"

"Oh, before! Just as I was rattling the door handle. The shot broke in upon it."

"Robin turned to Herr Schulz who stood with a frown on his face.

"The silence, you see, sir," he said. Then, to Mary, he added:

"Mary, we are going off now. But we will be back within the hour and—"

"Oh, Robin!" the girl broke in, "don't leave me alone. I don't feel safe in this place after this morning. I'd much rather come with you."

"Mary, it's quite impossible," Robin began. But the girl had turned to a table and taken from it her hat and fur.

"I don't care," she exclaimed, wilfully. "I'm coming anyhow. I refuse to be left behind!"

She smiled at Herr Schulz as she spoke and that gentleman's rather grim face relaxed as he looked at her.

"I'm not sure I wouldn't say the same!" he remarked.

The upshot of it was that, despite Robin's objections, Mary Trevett accompanied the party. She sat on the back seat, rather flushed and excited, between Herr Schulz and the doctor while Robin took the wheel again. A few minutes' drive took them to the big hotel where Robin had booked a room. They all waited in the car whilst he went to the office.

He was back in a minute, an open telegram in his hand.

"I believe I've got it in my pocket," he cried, "the actual weapon with which Hartley Parrish was killed!"

And he read from the telegram:

"Masterson's gunsmiths sold last July pair of Browning automatics identical with that found on Parrish to Jeekes, who paid with Parrish's cheque."

"Did you have the wire from the Yard saying I was coming?" he asked. "Probably I beat the telegraph, though. I came by air!"

Then he tipped his hat respectfully at Herr Schulz.

"This is Detective-Inspector Manderton of Scotland Yard, sir," said Robin.

The big man beamed a smile of friendly recognition.

"Mr. Manderton and I are old friends," he said. "How are you, Manderton? I didn't expect you to recognise me in these days."

"I'd know you anywhere, sir," said the detective, with unwonted cordiality.

"Have you got your warrant, Manderton?" asked Herr Schulz.

"Aye, I have, sir," replied the detective, "and I've a colleague from the Dutch police who's going along with me to effect the arrest."

"Jeekes, eh?"

"That's the party, sir, charged with wilful murder. This is Commissary Boonjes, of the Rotterdam Criminal Investigation department."

A tall man with a short, black beard had approached the car. It was decided that the whole party should proceed to the Villa Bergendal immediately. Manderton sat next to Robin and the Dutch police officer perched himself on the footboard.

"And where did you pick him up, I'd like to know?" whispered Manderton in Robin's ear, with a backward jerk of the head as they glided through the brightly lit streets.

"D'you mean the doctor?" asked Robin. "No, your other friend!"

"Miss Trevett had a letter to him. Something in the secret service, isn't he?"

Mr. Manderton smiled.

"Something in the secret service!" he repeated, disdainfully. "Well, I should say he was. If you want to know, Mr. Greve, he's the head!"

The rain was coming down in torrents and the night was black as pitch when, leaving the lights of Rotterdam behind, the car swung out on the main road leading to the Villa Bergendal. Thanks to a powerful headlight Robin was able to get a good turn of speed out of her as soon as they were clear of the city. As they slowed down at the gate in the side road, Herr Schulz tapped him on the shoulder.

"Better leave the car here and put the lights out," he counseled. "And Miss Trevett should stay if the doctor here would remain to look after her."

"You think there'll be a scrap?" whispered the doctor.

"With a man like Marbran," returned the chief, "you never know what may happen."

"Zero will be no fight," commented the Dutch police officer in lugubrious accents "my friends, we are too late."

But the chief insisted that Mary should stay behind and the doctor agreed to act as her escort. Then, in single file, the party proceeded up the drive, Robin in front, then the Dutchman, after him the chief and Mr. Manderton in rear.

They walked on the grass edging the avenue. On the wet turf their feet made no sound. When they came in view of the house they saw it was in darkness. No light shone in any window and the only sound to be heard was the melancholy patter of the rain drops on the laurel bushes. When they saw the porch blinking black before them they left the grass and stepped gently across the drive, the gravel crunching softly beneath their feet. Robin led the way boldly under the porch and laid a hand on the door knob.

The door opened easily and the next moment the four men were in the hall.

As Robin moved to the wall to find the electric light switch, a torch was silently thrust into his hand.

"Better have this, sir," whispered Manderton. "I have my finger on the switch now but we'd best wait to put the light up until we know where they are. Where do we go first?"

"Into the sitting room," Robin returned. Switching the torch on and off only as he required it, he crept silently over the heavy carpet to the door of the room in which that morning he had come upon Mary. Manderton remained at the switch in the hall whilst the other two men followed Robin through the door.

The room was in darkness. It struck chill; for the fire had gone out. The beam of the torch, flitting from wall to wall, showed the room to be empty.

"I don't believe there's a soul in the house," whispered the chief to Robin.

"We are too late; I have said it!" muttered the Dutchman.

"There is another room leading out of this," replied Robin, turning the torch on to the blue curtain covering the door leading into the office. "We'll have a look in there and then try upstairs. Manderton will give us warning if anybody comes down."

So saying he drew the curtain aside and pushed open the door. Instantly a gush of cold air blew the curtain back in his face. Before he could disentangle himself the door slammed to with a crash that shook the house.

"That's done it!" muttered the chief. The three men stood and listened. They heard the dripping of the rain, the sighing of the wind, but no sound of human kind came to their ears.

"The place is empty," whispered the chief. "They've cleared."

"It is too late; I have said it." The Dutchman spoke in a hoarse bass.

"We'll go in here anyway," answered Robin, lifting up the curtain again. "They may have heard us and be hiding."

He opened the door, standing it with his foot. The curtain flapped wildly round them as they crossed the threshold. The broad white beam of the electric torch swung from window to desk, from desk to safe.

"The door over there is open," exclaimed the chief. "That's the way they've gone."

Suddenly he clutched Robin's arm.

"Steady," he whispered, "look there . . . in the doorway. There's somebody moving. Quick, the torch!"

The light flashed across the room, blazed for an instant on a windowpane, then picked out a man's form swaying in the doorway. He had his back to the room and was rocking gently to and fro with the wind, which they felt cold on their faces.

"It's only a coat and trousers hanging in the door," began Robin.

Then, with a suddenness which pained the eyes, the room was flooded with light. The Dutch detective stepped from the electric light switch and moved to the open door. "Too late!" he cried, shaking his head. "Have I not told you?"

Suspended by a strip of colored stuff, the body of Mr. Jeekes dangled from the cross-beam of the door.

The corpse oscillated in the breeze, silhouetted against an oblong of black sky, turning this way and that, loose, unnatural, horrible, and as the body, twisting gently, faced the room, it gave a glimpse of starting eyes, swollen, empurpled features, protruding tongue.

Without the least trace of emotion the black bearded detective picked up a rust

bottom chair and, gathering up the corpse by its collar, hoisted it up without an effort so that the feet rested on the chair. Then, producing a clasp knife, he mounted the chair and with a vigorous slash cut the colored strip which had been fastened to a staple projecting from the brickwork above the door on the outside of the house.

He caught the body in his arms and laid it face upwards on the matting which covered the floor. He busted himself for an instant at the neck, then rose with a twisted strip of colored material in his hand.

"His brace," he remarked, "very common. The stool what he has stood upon and knocked away, she lies outside! My friends, we are too late!"

The doctor, fetched in haste by Manderton, examined the body. The man had been dead, he said, for several hours. Mary remained in the hall with Manderton while Robin and the Dutch detective went over the house. There was no trace either of Marbran or of the chauffeur. In the two bedrooms which showed signs of occupation the beds had been made up, but the wardrobes were empty.

"Marbran's made a bolt for it," said Robin, coming into the office where he had left the chief, "and taken everything with him."

"I gathered as much," answered that astute gentleman, pointing at the fireplace. A pile of charred paper filled the grate. "There's nothing here, and I think we can wipe Mr. Victor Marbran off the slate. I doubt if we shall see him again. At any rate we can leave him to the tender mercies of our black bearded friend here. As for us, I don't really see that there is anything more to detain us here. . . ."

"But," remarked Robin, looking at the still figure on the floor, the face now mercifully covered by the doctor's white handkerchief, "surely this is a confession of guilt. Has he left nothing behind in writing? No account of the crime?"

"Not a thing," responded the chief, "and I've been through every drawer. Even the safe is open—and empty!"

"But how does it happen, then," asked Robin, "that Marbran has legged it while Jeekes is here?"

"Marbran left him in the lurch," the chief broke in decisively. "I think that's clear. While you were upstairs with our Dutch friend I went through the dead man's pockets. He had no money, Greve, except a few coppers and a little Dutch change. He had not even got a return ticket to London. Which makes me think that Master Jeekes had left old England for good."

"Another thing that puzzles me," remarked Robin, "is how Jeekes knew that Miss Trevett had a letter to you, sir. Or, for the matter of that, how he knew that she had gone to Rotterdam at all?"

"That's not hard to answer," said Mr. Manderton, who had just entered the room. "On Sunday night Jeekes rang up Harkings from his club and asked to speak to Miss Trevett. Bude told him she had gone away. Jeekes then asked to speak to Sir Horace Trevett, who told him that his sister had gone to Rotterdam. Jeekes takes the first available train in the morning, recognizes Miss Trevett on the way across, and tags her to her hotel in Rotterdam. The next morning he follows her again, shadows her to this gentleman's rooms, and there, as we know, contrived by a trick to see to whom she had a letter."

"But why did he not attempt to get the letter away from her as soon as she arrived? Miss Trevett never suspected Jeekes. She might have shown him the letter if he'd asked her for it!"

The detective shook his head sagely. "Jeekes was pretty cute," he said. "Before letting the girl know he was in Rotterdam he wanted to find out what she wanted here and whom she knew. Remember, he had no means of knowing if the girl suspected him or not."

"So he devised this trick of impersonating Mr. Schulz on the telephone, eh?"

"Bah!" broke in the chief. "I bet that was Marbran's idea. Look at Jeekes' face and tell me if you see in it any feature indicating the bold, ingenious will to try a bluff like that. I never knew this fellow here. But I know Marbran, a resolute, undaunted type. You can take it from me, Marbran directed—Jeekes merely carried out instructions. What do you say, Manderton?"

But the detective had retired into his shell again.

"If you will come to Harkings with me the day after tomorrow, sir, I shall hope to show you exactly how Mr. Parrish met his death."

"No, no, Manderton," responded the chief. "I can't leave here for a bit. There are bigger murderers than Jeekes at liberty in Holland today."

The detective stapped his thigh. "I'd have laid a shade of odds," he cried merrily, "that you were watching the gentleman at Amerongen, sir."

"Tut, tut, Manderton," said the chief, raising his hand to silence the other. "you run on too fast, my friend. I wish," he went on, changing the subject, "I could be with you at Harkings tomorrow to witness your reconstruction of the crime, Manderton. You'll go, I suppose, Greve."

"I certainly shall," answered the barrister. "I have had some experience of criminals, but I must say I never saw one less endowed with criminal characteristics than little Jeekes. A strange character!"

The chief laughed sardoniously. "Any way," he remarked, "he had a dam good notion of the end that befitted him."

Continued Next Sunday.
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