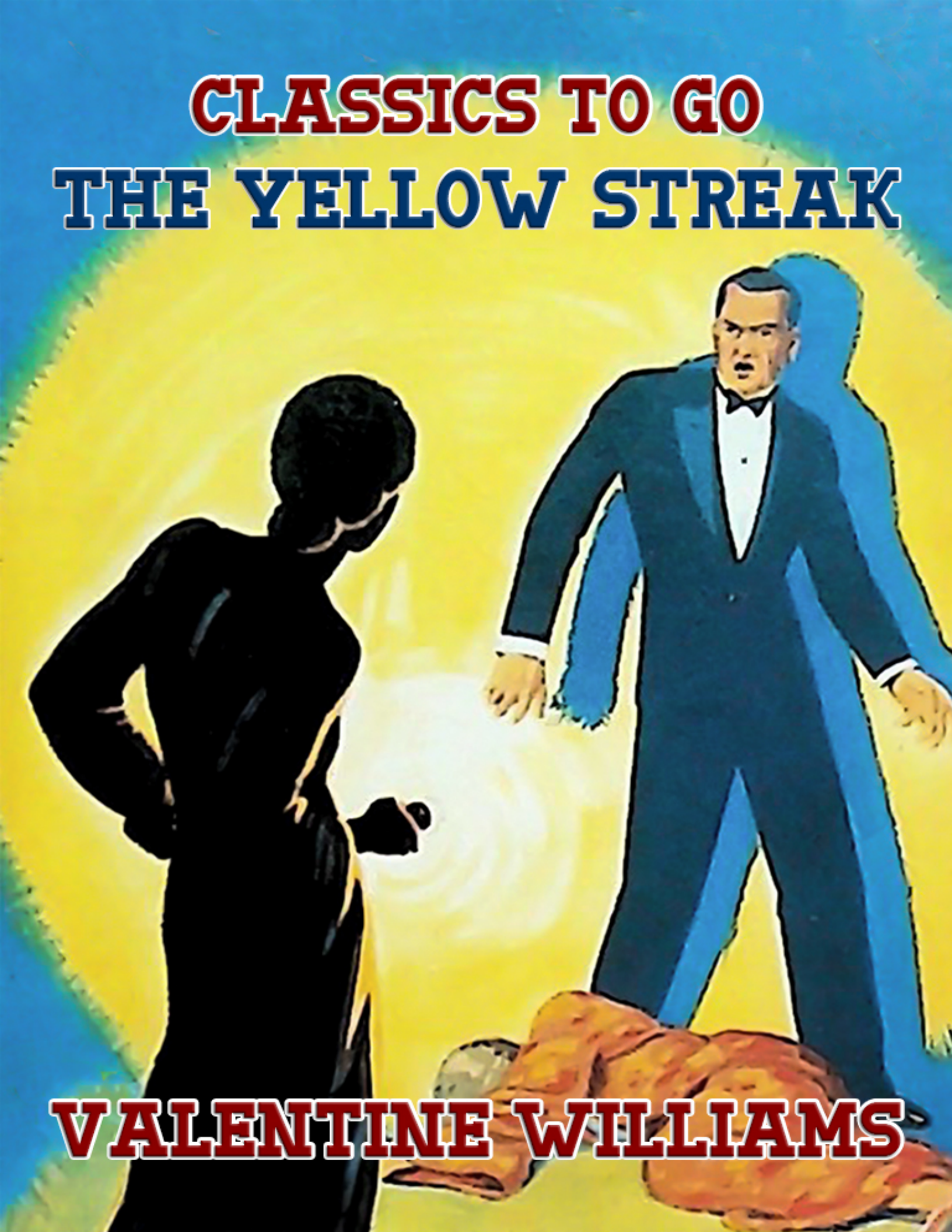
CLASSICS TO GO

THE YELLOW STREAK



VALENTINE WILLIAMS

THE YELLOW STREAK

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CHAPTER I

THE MASTER OF HARKINGS

Of all the luxuries of which Hartley Parrish's sudden rise to wealth gave him possession, Bude, his butler, was the acquisition in which he took the greatest delight and pride. Bude was a large and comfortable-looking person, triple-chinned like an archdeacon, bald-headed except for a respectable and saving edging of dark down, clean-shaven, benign of countenance, with a bold nose which to the psychologist bespoke both ambition and inborn cleverness. He had a thin, tight mouth which in itself alone was a symbol of discreet reticence, the hall-mark of the trusted family retainer.

Bude had spent his life in the service of the English aristocracy. The Earl of Tipperary, Major-General Lord Bannister, the Dowager Marchioness of Wiltshire, and Sir Herbert Marcobrunner, Bart., had in turn watched his gradual progress from pantry-boy to butler. Bude was a man whose maxim had been the French saying, "*Je prends mon bien où je le trouve*."

In his thirty years' service he had always sought to discover and draw from those sources of knowledge which were at his disposal. From MacTavish, who had supervised Lord Tipperary's world-famous gardens, he had learnt a great deal about flowers, so that the arrangement of the floral decorations was always one of the features at Hartley Parrish's *soigné* dinner-parties. From Brun, the unsurpassed *chef*, whom Lord Bannister had picked up when serving with the Guards in Egypt, he had gathered sufficient knowledge of the higher branches of the cuisine

to enable Hartley Parrish to leave the arrangement of the menu in his butler's hands.

Bude would have been the first to admit that, socially speaking, his present situation was not the equal of the positions he had held. There was none of the staid dignity about his present employer which was inborn in men like Lord Tipperary or Lord Bannister, and which Sir Herbert Marcobrunner, with the easy assimilative faculty of his race, had very successfully acquired. Below middle height, thick-set and powerfully built, with a big head, narrow eyes, and a massive chin, Hartley Parrish, in his absorbed concentration on his business, had no time for the acquisition or practice of the Eton manner.

It was characteristic of Parrish that, seeing Bude at a dinner-party at Marcobrunner's, he should have engaged him on the spot. It took Bude a week to get over his shock at the manner in which the offer was made. Parrish had approached him as he was supervising the departure of the guests. Waving aside the footman who offered to help him into his overcoat, Parrish had asked Bude point-blank what wages he was getting. Bude mentioned the generous remuneration he was receiving from Sir Herbert Marcobrunner, whereupon Parrish had remarked:

"Come to me and I'll double it. I'll give you a week to think it over. Let my secretary know!"

After a few discreet enquiries, Bude, faithful to his maxim, had accepted Parrish's offer. Marcobrunner was furiously angry, but, being anxious to interest Parrish in a deal, sagely kept his feelings to himself. And Bude had never regretted the change. He found Parrish an exacting, but withal a just and a generous master, and he was not long in realizing that, as long as he kept Harkings, Parrish's

country place where he spent the greater part of his time, running smoothly according to Parrish's schedule, he could count on a life situation.

The polish of manner, the sober dignity of dress, acquired from years of acute observation in the service of the nobility, were to be seen as, at the hour of five, in the twilight of this bleak autumn afternoon, Bude moved majestically into the lounge-hall of Harkings and leisurely pounded the gong for tea.

The muffled notes of the gong swelled out brazenly through the silent house. They echoed down the softly carpeted corridors to the library where the master of the house sat at his desk. For days he had been immersed in the figures of the new issue which Hornaway's, the vast engineering business of his creation, was about to put on the market. They reverberated up the fine old oak staircase to the luxurious Louis XV bedroom, where Lady Margaret Trevert lay on her bed idly smiling through an amusing novel. They crashed through the thickly padded baize doors leading to the servants' hall, where, at sixpence a hundred, Parrish's man, Jay, was partnering Lady Margaret's maid against Mrs. Heever, the housekeeper, and Robert, the chauffeur, at a friendly game of bridge. And they even boomed distantly into the far-away billiard-room and broke into the talk which Robin Greve was having with Mary Trevert.

"Damn!" exclaimed Greve savagely, as the distant gonging came to his ears.

"It's the gong for tea," said Mary demurely.

She was sitting on one of the big leather sofas lining the long room. Robin, as he gazed down at her from where he

stood with his back against the edge of the billiard-table, thought what an attractive picture she made in the half-light.

The lamps over the table were lit, but the rest of the room was almost dark. In that lighting the thickly waving dark hair brought out the fine whiteness of the girl's skin. There was love, and a great desire for love, in her large dark eyes, but the clear-cut features, the well-shaped chin, and the firm mouth, the lips a little full, spoke of ambition and the love of power.

"I've been here three whole days," said Robin, "and I've not had two words with you alone, Mary. And hardly have I got you to myself for a quiet game of pills when that rotten gong goes ..."

"I'm sorry you're disappointed at missing your game," the girl replied mischievously, "but I expect you will be able to get a game with Horace or one of the others after tea ..."

Robin kicked the carpet savagely.

"You know perfectly well I don't want to play billiards ..."

He looked up and caught the girl's eye. For a fraction of a second he saw in it the expression which every man at least once in his life looks to see in the eyes of one particular woman. In the girl's dark-blue eyes fringed with long black lashes he saw the dumb appeal, the mute surrender, which, as surely as the white flag on the battlements in war, is the signal of capitulation in woman.

But the expression was gone on the instant. It passed so swiftly that, for a second, Robin, seeing the gently mocking glance that succeeded it, wondered whether he had been mistaken.

But he was a man of action—a glance at his long, well-moulded head, his quick, wide-open eye, and his square jaw would have told you that—and he spoke.

"It's no use beating about the bush," he said. "Mary, I've got so fond of you that I'm just miserable when you're away from me ..."

"Oh, Robin, please ..."

Mary Trevert stood up and remained standing, her head turned a little away from him, a charming silhouette in her heather-blue shooting-suit.

The young man took her listless hand.

"My dear," he said, "you and I have been pals all our lives. It was only at the front that I began to realize just how much you meant to me. And now I know I can't do without you. I've never met any one who has been to me just what you are. And, Mary, I must have you as my wife ..."

The girl remained motionless. She kept her face averted. The room seemed very still.

"Oh, Robin, please ..." she murmured again.

Resolutely the young man put an arm about her and drew her to him. Slowly, reluctantly, she let him have his way. But she would not look at him.

"Oh, my dear," he whispered, kissing her hair, "don't you care a little?"

She remained silent.

"Won't you look at me, Mary?"

There was a hint of huskiness in his voice. He raised her face to his.

"I saw in your eyes just now that you cared for me," he whispered; "oh, my Mary, say that you do!"

Then he bent down and kissed her. For a brief instant their lips met and he felt the caress of the girl's arm about his neck.

"Oh, Robin!" she said.

That was all.

But then she drew away.

Reluctantly the man let her go. The colour had faded from his cheeks when she looked at him again as he stood facing her in the twilight of the billiard-room.

"Robin, dear," she said, "I'm going to hurt you."

The young man seemed to have had a premonition of what was coming, for he betrayed no sign of surprise, but remained motionless, very erect, very pale.

"Dear," said the girl with a little despairing shrug, "it's hopeless! We can't afford to marry!"

"Not yet, I know," said Robin, "but I'm getting on well, Mary, and in another year or two ..."

The girl looked down at the point of her little brogue shoe.

"I don't know what you will think of me," she said, "but I can't accept ... I can't face ... I ..."

"You can't face the idea of being the wife of a man who has his way to make. Is that it?"

The voice was rather stern.

The girl looked up impulsively.

"I can't, Robin. I should never make you happy. Mother and I are as poor as church-mice. All the money in the family goes to keep Horace in the Army and pay for my clothes."

She looked disdainfully at her pretty suit.

"All this," she went on with a little hopeless gesture indicating her tailor-made, "is Mother's investment. No, no, it's true ... I can tell you as a friend, Robin, dear, we are living on our capital until I have caught a rich husband ..."

"Oh, my dear," said Robin softly, "don't say things like that ..."

The girl laughed a little defiantly.

"But it's true," she answered. "The war has halved Mother's income and there's nothing between us and bankruptcy but a year or so ... unless I get married!"

Her voice trembled a little and she turned away.

"Mary," said the young man hoarsely, "for God's sake, don't do that!"

He moved a step towards her, but she drew back.

"It's all right," she said with the tears glistening wet on her face, and dabbed at her eyes with her tiny handkerchief, "but, oh, Robin boy, why couldn't you have held your tongue?"

"I suppose I had no right to speak ..." the young man began.

The girl sighed.

"I oughtn't to say it ... now," she said slowly, and looked across at Robin with shining eyes, "but, Robin dear, I'm ... I'm glad you did!"

She paused a moment as though turning something over in her mind.

"I've ... I've got something to tell you, Robin," she began. "No, stay where you are! We must be sensible now."

She paused and looked at him.

"Robin," she said slowly, "I've promised to marry somebody else ..."

There was a moment's silence.

"Who is it?" Robin asked in a hard voice.

The girl made no answer.

"Who is it? Do I know him?"

Still the girl was silent, but she gave a hardly perceptible nod.

"Not ...? No, no, Mary, it isn't true? It can't be true?"

The girl nodded, her eyes to the ground.

"It's a secret still," she said. "No one knows but Mother. Hartley doesn't want it announced yet!"

The sound of the Christian name suddenly seemed to infuriate Greve.

"By God!" he cried, "it shan't be! You must be mad, Mary, to think of marrying a man like Hartley Parrish. A fellow who's years older than you, who thinks of nothing but money, who stood out of the war and made a fortune while men of his own age were doing the fighting for him! It's unthinkable ... it's ... it's damnable to think of a gross, ill-bred creature like Parrish ..."

"Robin!" the girl cried, "you seem to forget that we're staying in his house. In spite of all you say he seems to be good enough for you to come and stay with ..."

"I only came because you were to be here. You know that perfectly well. I admit one oughtn't to blackguard one's host, but, Mary, you must see that this marriage is absolutely out of the question!"

The girl began to bridle up,

"Why?" she asked loftily.

"Because ... because Parrish is not the sort of man who will make you happy ..."

"And why not, may I ask? He's very kind and very generous, and I believe he likes me ..."

Robin Greve made a gesture of despair.

"My dear girl," he said, trying to control himself to speak quietly, "what do you know about this man? Nothing. But there are beastly stories circulating about his life ..."

Mary Trevert laughed cynically.

"My dear old Robin," she said, "they tell stories about every bachelor. And I hardly think you are an unbiassed judge ..."

Robin Greve was pacing up and down the floor.

"You're crazy, Mary," he said, stopping in front of her, "to dream you can ever be happy with a man like Hartley Parrish. The man's a ruthless egoist. He thinks of nothing but money and he's out to buy you just exactly as you ..."

"As I am ready to sell myself!" the girl echoed. "And I *am* ready, Robin. It's all very well for you to stand there and preach ideals at me, but I'm sick and disgusted at the life we've been leading for the past three years, hovering on the verge of ruin all the time, dunned by tradesmen and having to borrow even from servants ... yes, from old servants of the family ... to pay Mother's bridge debts. Mother's a good sort. Father spent all her money for her and she was brought up in exactly the same helpless way as she brought up me. I can do absolutely nothing except the sort of elementary nursing which we all learnt in the war, and if I don't marry well Mother will have to keep a boarding-house or do something ghastly like that. I'm not going to pretend that I'm thinking only of her, because I'm not. I can't face a long engagement with no prospects except castles in Spain. I don't mean to be callous, Robin, but I expect I am naturally hard. Hartley Parrish is a good sort. He's very fond of me, and he will see that Mother lives comfortably for the rest of her life. I've promised to marry

him because I like him and he's a suitable match. And I don't see by what right you try and run him down to me behind his back! If it's jealousy, then it shows a very petty spirit!"

Robin Greve stepped close up to Mary Trevert. His eyes were very angry and his jaw was set very square.

"If you are determined to sell yourself to the highest bidder," he said, "I suppose there's no stopping you. But you're making a mistake. If Parrish were all you claim for him, you might not repent of his marriage so long as you did not care for somebody else. But I know you love me, and it breaks my heart to see you blundering into everlasting unhappiness ..."

"At least Hartley will be able to keep me," the girl flashed out. Directly she had spoken she regretted her words.

A red flush spread slowly over Robin Greve's face.

Then he laughed drily.

"You won't be the first woman he's kept!" he retorted, and stamped out of the billiard-room.

The girl gave a little gasp. Then she reddened with anger.

"How dare he?" she cried, stamping her foot; "how dare he?"

She sank on the lounge and, burying her face in her hands, burst into tears.

"Oh, Robin, Robin, dear!" she sobbed—incomprehensibly, for she was a woman.

CHAPTER II

AT TWILIGHT

There is a delicious snugness, a charming lack of formality, about the ceremony of afternoon tea in an English country-house—it is much too indefinite a rite to dignify it by the name of meal—which makes it the most pleasant reunion of the day. For English country-house parties consist, for the most part, of a succession of meals to which the guests flock the more congenially as, in the interval, they have contrived to avoid one another's companionship.

And so, scarcely had the last reverberation of Bude's measured gonging died away than the French window leading from the lounge-hall on to the terrace was pushed open and two of Hartley Parrish's guests emerged from the falling darkness without into the pleasant comfort of the firelit room.

They were an oddly matched pair. The one was a tubby little man with short bristly grey hair and a short bristly grey moustache to match. His stumpy legs looked ridiculous in his baggy golf knickers of rough tweed, which he wore with gaiters extending half-way up his short, stout calves. As he came in, he slung off the heavy tweed shooting-cloak he had been wearing and placed it with his Homburg hat on a chair.

This was Dr. Romain, whose name thus written seems indecently naked without the string of complementary initials indicative of the honours and degrees which years of bacteriological research had heaped upon him. His companion was a tall, slim, fair-haired young man, about as

good a specimen of the young Englishman turned out by the English public school as one could find. He was extremely good-looking with a proud eye and finely chiselled features, but the suggestion of youth in his face and figure was countered by a certain poise, a kind of latent seriousness which contrasted strangely with the general cheery *insouciance* of his type.

A soldier would have spotted the symptoms at once, "Five years of war!" would have been his verdict—that long and strange entry into life of so many thousands of England's manhood which impressed the stamp of premature seriousness on all those who came through. And Captain Sir Horace Trevert, Bart., D.S.O., had gone from his famous school straight into a famous regiment, had won his decoration before he was twenty-one, and been twice wounded into the bargain.

"Where's everybody?" queried the doctor, rubbing his hands at the blazing log-fire.

"Robin and Mary went off to play billiards," said the young man, "and I left old Parrish after lunch settling down for an afternoon's work in the library ..."

He crossed the room to the fire and stood with his back to the flame.

"What a worker that man is!" ejaculated the doctor. "He had one of his secretaries down this morning with a car full of portfolios, blue-prints, specifications, and God knows what else. Parrish polished the whole lot off and packed the fellow back to London before mid-day. Some of Hornaway's people who were waiting went in next, and he was through with them by lunch-time!"

Trevert wagged his head in admiration.

"And he told me he wanted to have a quiet week-end!" he said. "That's why he has no secretary living in the house."

"A quiet week-end!" repeated Romain drily. "Ye gods!"

"He's a marvel for work," said the young man.

"He certainly is," replied the doctor. "He's done wonders with Hornaway's. When he took the place over at the beginning of the war, they were telling me, it was a little potty concern making toy air guns or lead soldiers or something of the sort. And they never stop coining money now, it seems. Parrish must be worth millions ..."

"Lucky devil!" said Trevert genially.

"Ah!" observed the doctor sententiously, "but he's had to work for it, mark you! He's had the most extraordinary life, they tell me. He was at one period of his career a bartender on the Rand, a man was saying at the club the other day. But most of his life he's lived in Canada, I gather. He was telling us the other evening, before you and Mary came down, that he was once a brakeman on the Canadian Pacific Railway. He said he invested all his savings in books on engineering and read them in his brakeman's van on his trips across the Dominion. Ah! he's a fine fellow!"

He lowered his voice discreetly.

"And a devilish good match, eh, Horace?"

The young man flushed slightly.

"Yes," he said unwillingly.

"A dam' good match for somebody," urged the doctor with a malicious twinkle in his eye.

"Here, Doc," said Horace, suddenly turning on him, "you stick to your bugs and germs. What do you know about matchmaking, anyway?"

Dr. Romain chuckled.

"We bacteriologists are trained observers. One learns a lot watching the life and habits of the bacillus, Horace, my boy. And between ourselves, Parrish would be a lucky fellow if ..."

Trevert turned to him. His face was quite serious, and there was a little touch of hauteur in his voice. He was the 17th Baronet.

"My dear Doc," he said, "aren't you going a bit fast? Parrish is a very good chap, but one knows nothing about him ..."

Sagely the doctor nodded his grizzled head.

"That's true," he agreed. "He appears to have no relatives and nobody over here seems to have heard of him before the war. A man was saying at the Athenaeum the other day ..."

Trevert touched his elbow. Bude had appeared, portly, imperturbable, bearing a silver tray set out with the appliances for tea.

"Bude," cried Trevert, "don't tell me there are no tea-cakes again!"

"On the contrairey, sir," answered the butler in the richly sonorous voice pitched a little below the normal register which he employed abovestairs, "the cook has had her attention drawn to it. There are tea-cakes, sir!"

With a certain dramatic effect—for Bude was a trifle theatrical in everything he did—he whipped the cover off a dish and displayed a smoking pile of deliciously browned scones.

"Bude," said Trevert, "when I'm a Field Marshal, I'll see you get the O.B.E. for this!"

The butler smiled a nicely regulated three-by-one smile, a little deprecatory as was his wont. Then, like a tank taking a corner, he wheeled majestically and turned to cross the lounge. To reach the green baize door leading to the servants' quarters he had to cross the outer hall from which led corridors on the right and left. That on the right led to the billiard-room; that on the left to the big drawing-room with the library beyond.

As Bude reached the great screen of tooled Spanish leather which separated a corner of the lounge from the outer hall, Robin Greve came hastily through the glass door of the corridor leading from the billiard-room. The butler with a pleasant smile drew back a little to allow the young man to pass, thinking he was going into the lounge for tea.

"Tea is ..." he began, but abruptly ended the sentence on catching sight of the young man's face. For Robin, habitually so self-possessed, looked positively haggard. His face was set and there was a weary look in his eyes. The young man appeared so utterly different from his wonted self that Bude fairly stared at him.

But Robin, without paying the least attention either to the butler or to the sound of voices in the lounge, strode across the outer hall and disappeared through the glass door of the corridor leading to the great drawing-room and the library.

Bude stood an instant gazing after him in perplexity, then moved across the hall to the servants' quarters.

In the meantime in the lounge the little doctor snapped the case of his watch and opined that he wanted his tea.

"Where on earth has everybody got to? What's become of Lady Margaret? I haven't seen her since lunch...."

That lady answered his question by appearing in person.

Lady Margaret was tall and hard and glittering. Like so many Englishwomen of good family, she was so saturated with the traditions of her class that her manner was almost indistinguishable from that of a man. Well-mannered, broadminded, wholly cynical, and absolutely fearless, she went through life exactly as though she were following a path carefully taped out for her by a suitably instructed Providence. Somewhere beneath the mask of smiling indifference she presented so bravely to a difficult world, she had a heart, but so carefully did she hide it that Horace had only discovered it on a certain grey November morning when he had started out for the first time on active service. For ever afterwards a certain weighing-machine at Waterloo Station, by which he had had a startling vision of his mother standing with heaving bosom and tear-stained face, possessed in his mind the attributes of some secret and sacred shrine.

But now she was cool and well-gowned and self-contained as ever.

"What a perfectly dreadful day!" she exclaimed in her pleasant, well-bred voice. "Horace, you must positively go and see Henry What's-his-name in the Foreign Office and get me a passport for Cannes. The weather in England in the winter is incredibly exaggerated!"

"At least," said the doctor, rubbing his back as he warmed himself at the fire, "we have fuel in England. Give me England, climate and all, but don't take away my fire. The sun doesn't shine on the Riviera at night, you know!"

Lady Margaret busied herself at the tea-table with its fine Queen Anne silver and dainty yellow cups. It was the custom at Harkings to serve tea in the winter without other illumination than the light of the great log-fire that spat and leaped in the open hearth. Beyond the semi-circle of ruddy light the great lounge was all in darkness, and beyond that again was the absolute stillness of the English country on a winter's evening.

And so with a gentle clatter of teacups and the accompaniment of pleasantly modulated voices they sat and chatted—Lady Margaret, who was always surprising in what she said, the doctor who was incredibly opinionated, and young Trevert, who like all of the younger generation was daringly flippant. He was airing his views on what he called "Boche music" when he broke off and cried:

"Hullo, here's Mary! Mary, you owe me half a crown. Bude has come up to scratch and there are tea-cakes after ... but, I say, what on earth's the matter?"

The girl had come into the room and was standing in the centre of the lounge in the ruddy glow of the fire. Her face was deathly pale and she was shuddering violently. She held her little cambric handkerchief crushed up into a ball to her lips. Her eyes were fixed, almost glazed, like one who walks in a trance.

She stood like that for an instant surveying the group—Lady Margaret, a silver tea-pot in one hand, looking at her with uplifted brows. Horace, who in his amazement had

taken a step forward, and the doctor at his side scrutinizing her beneath his shaggy eyebrows.

"My dear Mary "—it was Lady Margaret's smooth and pleasant voice which broke the silence—"whatever is the matter? Have you seen a ghost!"

The girl swayed a little and opened her lips as if to speak. A log, crashing from the fire into the grate, fell upon the silence of the darkening room. It seemed to break the spell.

"Hartley!"

The name came hoarsely from the girl. Everybody, except Lady Margaret, sprang to his feet It was the doctor who spoke first.

"Miss Mary," he said, "you seem frightened, what ..."

His voice was very soothing.

Mary Trevert made a vague gesture towards the shadows about the staircase.

"There ... in the library ... he's got the door locked ... there was a shot ..."

Then she suddenly screamed aloud.

In a stride both the doctor and her brother were by her side. But she motioned them away.

"I'm frightened about Hartley," she said in a low voice, "please go at once and see what ... that shot ... and he doesn't answer!"

"Come on, Doctor!"

Horace Trevert was halfway to the big screen separating the lounge from the outer hall. As he passed the bell, he pressed it.

"Send Bude to us, Mother, when he comes, please!" he called as he and the doctor hurried away.

Lady Margaret had risen and stood, one arm about her daughter, on the Persian rug spread out before the cheerful fire. So the women stood in the firelight in Hartley Parrish's house, surrounded by all the treasures which his wealth had bought, and listened to the footsteps clattering away through the silence.

CHAPTER III

A DISCOVERY

Harkings was not a large house. Some three hundred years ago it had been a farm, but in the intervening years successive owners had so altered it by pulling down and building on, that, when it passed into the possession of Hartley Parrish, little else than the open fireplace in the lounge remained to tell of the original farm. It was a queer, rambling house of only two stories whose elongated shape was accentuated by the additional wing which Hartley Parrish had built on.

For the decoration of his country-house, Parrish had placed himself unreservedly in the hands of the firm entrusted with the work. Their architect was given *carte blanche* to produce a house of character out of the rather dingy, out-of-date country villa which Harkings was when Hartley Parrish, attracted by the view from the gardens, first discovered it.

The architect had gone to his work with a zest. He had ripped up walls and ceilings and torn down irrational matchwood partitions, discovering some fine old oak wainscot and the blackened roof-beams of the original farmstead. In the upshot he transformed Harkings into a very fair semblance of a late Jacobean house, fitted with every modern convenience and extremely comfortable. Furnished throughout with genuine "period" furniture, with fine dark oak panelling and parquet floors, it was altogether picturesque. Neither within nor without, it is true, would a connoisseur have been able to give it a date.

But that did not worry Hartley Parrish. He loved a bargain and he had bought the house cheap. It was situated in beautiful country and was within easy reach by car of his town-house in St. James's Square where he lived for the greater part of the week. Last but not least Harkings was the casket enshrining a treasure, the realization of a lifelong wish. This was the library, Parrish's own room, designed by himself and furnished to his own individual taste.

It stood apart from the rest of the house at the end of the wing which Parrish had constructed. The wing consisted of a single ground floor and contained the drawing-room—which was scarcely ever used, as both Parrish and his guests preferred the more congenial surroundings of the lounge—and the library. A long corridor panelled in oak led off the hall to the new wing. On to this corridor both the drawing-room and the library gave. Halfway down the corridor a small passage ran off. It separated the drawing-room from the library and ended in a door leading into the gardens at the back of the house.

It was to the new wing that Horace Trevert and Dr. Romain now hastened. They hurried across the hall, where the big lamp of dulled glass threw a soft yellow light, and entered the corridor through the heavy oak door which shut it off from the hall. The corridor was wrapt in silence. Halfway down, where the small passage ran to the garden door, the electric light was burning.

Horace Trevert ran down the corridor ahead of the doctor and was the first to reach the library door. He knocked sharply, then turned the handle. The door was locked.

"Hartley!" he cried and rapped again. "Ha-a-artley! Open the door! It's me, Horace!"

Again he knocked and rattled the handle. Not a sound came from the locked room. There was an instant's silence. Horace and the doctor exchanged an interrogatory look.

From behind the closed door came the steady ticking of a clock. The silence was so absolute that both men heard it.

Then the door at the end of the corridor was flung open and Bude appeared. He was running at a quick ambling trot, his heavy tread shaking the passage.

"Oh? sir," he cried, "whatever is it? What has happened?"

Horace spoke quickly, incisively.

"Something's happened to Mr. Parrish, Bude," he said. "The door's locked and he doesn't answer. We'll have to break the door down."

Bude shook his head.

"It's solid oak, sir," he began.

Then he raised his hand.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said, as though an idea had struck him. "If we were to go out by the garden door here, we might get in through the window. We could break the glass if needs be!"

"That's it!" exclaimed Horace. "Come on, Doctor!"

He dashed down the corridor towards the little passage. The doctor laid a hand on Bude's arm.

"One of us had better stay here," he said with a meaning glance at the closed door.

The butler raised an affrighted face to his.

"Go with Sir Horace, Bude," said the doctor. "I'll stay!"

Outside in the gardens of Harkings it was a raw, damp evening, pitch-black now, with little gusts of wind which shook the naked bushes of the rosery. The garden door led by a couple of shallow steps on to a gravel path which ran all along the back of the house. The path extended right up to the wall of the house. On the other side it flanked the rosery.

The glass door was banging to and fro in the night wind as Bude, his coat-collar turned up, hurried out into the darkness. The library, which formed the corner of the new wing, had two windows, the one immediately above the gravel path looking out over the rosery, the other round the corner of the house giving on the same path, beyond which ran a high hedge of clipped box surrounding the so-called Pleasure Ground, a plot of smooth grass with a sundial in the centre.

A glow of light came from the library window, and in its radiance Bude saw silhouetted the tall, well-knit figure of young Trevert. As the butler came up, the boy raised something in his hand and there was a crash of broken glass.

The curtains were drawn, but with the breaking of the window they began to flap about. With the iron grating he had picked up from the drain below the window young Trevert smashed the rest of the glass away, then thrust an arm through the empty window-frame, fumbling for the window-catch.

"The catch is not fastened," he whispered, and with a resolute thrust he pushed the window up. The curtains leapt up wildly, revealing a glimpse of the pleasant, book-lined room. Both men from the darkness without saw Parrish's desk littered with his papers and his habitual chair beyond it, pushed back empty.

Trevert turned an instant, a hand on the window-sill.

"Bude," he said, "there's no one there!"

"Best look and see, sir," replied the butler, his coat-tails flapping in the wind.

Trevert hoisted himself easily on to the window-sill, knelt there for an instant, then thrust his legs over the sill and dropped into the room. As he did so he stumbled, cried aloud.

Then the heavy grey curtains were flung back and the butler saw the boy's face, rather white, at the open window.

"My God," he said slowly, "he's dead!"

A moment later Dr. Romain, waiting in the corridor, heard the key turn in the lock of the library door. The door was flung open. Horace Trevert stood there, silhouetted in a dull glow of light from the room. He was pointing to the open window, beneath which Hartley Parrish lay on his back motionless.

CHAPTER IV

BETWEEN THE DESK AND THE WINDOW

Hartley Parrish's library was a splendid room, square in shape, lofty and well proportioned. It was lined with books arranged in shelves of dark brown oak running round the four walls, but sunk level with them and reaching up to a broad band of perfectly plain white plasterwork.

It was a cheerful, comfortable, eminently modern room, half library, half office. The oak was solid, but uncompromisingly new. The great leather armchairs were designed on modern lines—for comfort rather than for appearance. There were no pictures; but vases of chrysanthemums stood here and there about the room. A dictaphone in a case was in a corner, but beside it was a little table on which were set out some rare bits of old Chelsea. There was also a gramophone, but it was enclosed in a superb case of genuine old black-and-gold lacquer. The very books in their shelves carried on this contrast of business with recreation. For while one set of shelves contained row upon row of technical works, company reports, and all manner of business reference books bound in leather, on another were to be found the vellum-bound volumes of the Kelmscott Press.

A sober note of grey or mole colour was the colour scheme of the room. The heavy pile carpet which stretched right up to the walls was of this quiet neutral shade: so were the easy-chairs, and the colour of the heavy curtains, which hung in front of the two high windows, was in harmony with the restful decorative scheme of the room.

The massive oaken door stood opposite the window overlooking the rosery—the window through which Horace Trevert had entered. Parrish's desk was in front of this window, between it and the door in consequence. By the other window, which, as has been stated, looked out on the clipped hedge surrounding the Pleasure Ground, was the little table with the Chelsea china, the dictaphone, and one of the easy-chairs. The centre of the room was clear so that nothing lay between the door and the carved mahogany chair at the desk. Here, as they all knew, Parrish was accustomed to sit when working, his back to the door, his face to the window overlooking the rosery.

The desk stood about ten feet from the window. On it was a large brass lamp which cast a brilliant circle of light upon the broad flat top of the desk with its orderly array of letter-trays, its handsome silver-edged blotter and silver and tortoise-shell writing appurtenances. By the light of this lamp Dr. Romain, looking from the doorway, saw that Hartley Parrish's chair was vacant, pushed back a little way from the desk. The rest of the room was wrapt in unrevealing half-light.

"He's there by the window!"

Horace was whispering to the doctor. Romain strode over to the desk and picked up the lamp. As he did so, his eyes fell upon the pale face of Hartley Parrish. He lay on his back in the space between the desk and the window. His head was flung back, his eyes, bluish-grey,—the narrow, rather expressionless eyes of the successful business man,—were wide open and fixed in a sightless stare, his rather full mouth, with its clean-shaven lips, was rigid and stern. With the broad forehead, the prominent brows, the bold, aggressive nose, and the square bony jaw, it was a fighter's face, a fine face save for the evil promise of that sensuous