



SYNOPSIS

CHAPTER I—John Bartley, noted criminal investigator, recently returned from Secret Service work during the war, is asked by the governor of New York to investigate a mysterious attempted robbery of the Robert Slyke home at Circle Lake, near Saratoga. Facts of the case interest Bartley, and he accepts.

CHAPTER II—With his friend Pelt, Bartley goes to Circle Lake, the pair becoming the guests of Bob Currie, an old friend. The three visit the Slyke home, Slyke apparently resenting Bartley's coming, saying he is satisfied the two men in prison for the attempted robbery were guilty. Bartley is not. Next morning Slyke is found dead in bed, apparently having shot himself.

CHAPTER III

Suicide or Murder.

I was out of bed in a moment, and getting into my clothes as rapidly as I could. Fully dressed, I followed Bartley out onto the lawn, which was still wet with the morning dew. We crossed the field and went through the woods in silence. At last I ventured to ask what it was that he had heard regarding Slyke's death.

"About five minutes before I woke you, King, phoned to say that he had been called to Slyke's house—that he was dead. He was told that he had committed suicide."

"Why should he have killed himself?" I asked. "He did not look to me like a man who had nerve enough for that."

In a moody tone Bartley replied, "I don't think he did," and left me to puzzle out his meaning. When we reached the house there was no outward evidence that anything unusual had taken place. Doctor King's car was coming up the drive as we neared the front of the house. With him was a short, red-faced Irishman in police uniform, whom he introduced, a moment later, as Roche, the chief of the local police force.

Bartley turned to the doctor. "Just what did they tell you over the phone?" he asked.

"Only what I told you. I had just gotten out of bed, when the bell rang and an excited voice asked me to come at once, as they had just found Slyke dead and thought he had killed himself."

Before we could ring, in fact before we could reach the top step of the piazza, the door was flung open and a



"It's Come, Doctor, It's Come, Just as I Expected—He's Killed Himself!"

woman of about fifty rushed wildly to the doctor's side. She was far from an attractive woman, thin, with what was called a hatchet face. Her shrill voice broke as she grabbed the doctor's arm and cried:

"It's come, doctor, it's come, just as I expected. He's killed himself. Oh, I knew there would be trouble. Night after night I have had a message on the ouija board. It said again and again, 'Trouble, trouble coming.' And again, 'Trouble, trouble coming.' And I have dreamed that he was dead; too. It's come. He is dead."

Bartley gave me a look. This, he knew, was Miss Potter, the sister of Slyke's dead wife and an ardent spiritualist.

It was some time before the doctor could get her calmed down enough to introduce us.

By the time the introductions had been completed, we were all in the big room in which we had met Slyke the day before. Currie had told us the previous evening that Slyke was to have a card party that night, and the room showed that there had been one. In the center were three card tables, with the chairs pushed back from them, evidently left as they were when the party broke up.

After a quick glance around, Bartley turned to Miss Potter. "Suppose you tell us how Mr. Slyke was discovered dead with the gun in his hand,

found dead with the gun in his hand, proves that he committed suicide. But to me, that gun and the way it is held, proves murder. Not only murder, but that the gun was placed in his hand after death. Look at the way the hand grasps the revolver. It is not held so firmly but that with some effort it can be removed. The testimony of all medical-legallists is that in cases of suicide or of accidents, the attitudes and acts of the person whose life is suddenly ended are continued for some seconds after death.

Roche was listening attentively, but Bartley's last words were a little over his head. Perceiving that he did not understand, Bartley explained at greater length:

"What I mean by that is simply this: In cases of suicide or where a man shoots himself by accident and dies suddenly, the hand-clutches the weapon so tightly that after death it is almost impossible to loosen his grip. There is a muscular spasm that follows death which causes the hand to grip the weapon even more tightly than in life. Most medical-legal books agree that a weapon so held is the best evidence of suicide."

Roche was not willing to accept this statement. "That's a fine theory," he sneered. "Just the sort of a thing you city detectives dig up. You have got to have more than that to make me think he was murdered."

Bartley gave a little shrug of his shoulders, as if bored by the whole thing. "As you wish! I had an idea you might want more evidence than that." He paused, and we waited breathlessly for his next words.

"Look at his eyes. They are tightly closed. It is a recognized fact by all medical men that, when death comes by violence, the eyes of the victim are wide open and staring. On the other hand, in cases where death comes slowly, they may be half shut. In neither instance are they ever fully closed. When we find a case where the eyes are tightly closed, we know that someone has closed them, and that it was done after the man was dead."

"Here we find the eyes closed. If he committed suicide, they would be open. If he had been murdered, they would be open also. Though the fact they are closed does not help us to decide between murder and suicide, it does point to the fact that someone has been in the room and closed them after he died. May we not suppose that the same person that placed the gun in his hand to make his death appear to be suicide, was also the one who closed his eyes, not knowing that they should have remained open, no matter how he died?"

He paused, as if waiting for someone to speak, then as no one did, he continued:

"But that is not all, Roche. You should use your common sense. Here is Slyke, dead, with both hands by his sides, and the bedclothes up

around his neck and over his chin. You don't expect me to believe that he could have shot himself, pulled the clothes around his neck, and then placed his arms by his sides. He did not have time enough for that; he was dead."

Roche, without even a struggle, second after the shot was fired, the world was over as far as he was concerned. It was someone else who arranged those things. Someone who wished his death to appear to be suicide, and in trying to do that rather overdid the whole thing. No, I do not think there is the slightest doubt in the world but that he was murdered."

Roche had long since lost his confident air. He said nothing, though, even when Bartley had finished. The doctor, too, had listened with interest, yet I was not altogether sure that he wholly agreed with Bartley's reasoning.

"But, if Slyke was murdered," the doctor asked, "why should all this trouble have been taken to make it look like suicide?"

Bartley, who was bending over the bed examining the body, did not answer until he straightened up again. "King," he said in a grave voice, "I am sure this is murder, not suicide. The person who killed him wished us to believe he killed himself. Moreover, he was not killed in bed."

Both the doctor and Roche looked as if this last statement were too unbelievable, and even I who had long since ceased to be surprised at anything that Bartley might say, wondered a little.

"When you look at the pillow," he explained, "on which his head lies, you will find only one or two spots of blood. The shirt, in fact, has none at all. The wound must have bled some—not much, it is true, but far more than it seems to have done from the appearance of the bed. He was killed elsewhere and placed in this bed afterwards. I doubt if he was even undressed at the time of his death."

Miss Potter, who had remained silent although obviously very nervous, asked if she might go to her room and leave the doctor in charge. This delegating of her authority to the doctor did not appeal to Roche; and he told her that if her brother-in-law had been murdered, it would be the police and not the doctor who would take charge of things. The ordeal through which she had passed must have been more than she could stand, for she made no comment on his challenge but started to leave the room.

"Miss Potter," Bartley asked, as she reached the door, "did you ever see this revolver in Mr. Slyke's hand?" She hesitated a moment and then replied, "It's Mr. Slyke's; he was in the habit of keeping it in a drawer of his desk. The gun was found soon after the burglary, but he

as I know, he had never used it."

Although her statement that the revolver had belonged to the dead man made the suicide theory plausible, yet I could not quite see how the facts that Bartley had brought forward to disprove the suicide could be overthrown.

"What makes you think, Mr. Bartley," Roche asked, "that Slyke was dressed at the time he was killed?"

Bartley answered: "If Slyke had been killed in bed there would have been more blood on the bedclothes than the few drops we see on the pillow. His nightshirt, too, if it had been worn at the time he was killed, would have had some traces of blood on it. There are no such stains. This, and the fact that death must have been instantaneous, makes me feel sure that he was undressed after he was killed and then placed on the bed in the position in which we have found him."

Bartley began a search of the room, using a small glass once or twice as



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Slyke's clothes were hung over a chair, and one of his stockings had fallen to the floor. The way the gray suit lay on the chair made me wonder if Bartley was right when he said the murderer had undressed him after the crime. It looked so much as if it had been carelessly flung there by a man preparing for bed.

After going through Slyke's pockets Bartley said slowly, "I have grave doubts if he was even killed in this room."

He continued to examine the room, searching the floor, looking into the drawers of the desk, examining the walls even, then he came back to the clothing. Picking up the blue silk shirt from the chair, he examined it

a second time before he said: "I was right. He was not killed in this room. Here is the suit he wore. You will notice that all his clothing is placed on this chair in the manner that a man would naturally place it if he was undressing for bed. But there

is no button in the front of his shirt to hold his collar, and one stocking is missing. Any man may lose a collar button, but if he does, that button will be dropped at the place where he was undressed. No button is in this room. It was lost in the room in which he was undressed. We find his shoes here but only one stocking, and we naturally ask where is the other stocking. Then, too, there are no blood stains anywhere in this room. Though his wound did not bleed much, it must have bled some. These are the reasons why I say he was not killed in this room, or even undressed here."

His explanation seemed reasonable enough, yet somewhat mystifying. Why had the murderer taken all this trouble to undress Slyke, and why had he done it in some other room? The next question was just as puzzling. If next question was just as puzzling. If he had read my thoughts, Roche suggested that as there was another room in the tower, we might see what could be found there.

The butler, who entered at this moment, did his best not to glance at the bed. He was holding with great difficulty a half-grown fire-eater that growled fiercely when he saw us. The butler motioned to the doctor to come to him. As he reached his side, Doctor King placed his hand upon the dog's head and it ceased to show its teeth and licked his fingers. For several moments he and the butler held a low conversation, then King turned to us to say that he had just been called to the hospital for an operation and would have to leave at once.

Bartley scribbled something on a piece of paper, and handing it to the doctor said, "I think there ought to be a picture taken of the body so it can be used at the inquest."

The doctor agreed and went out, accompanied by the butler. As the door closed behind them Bartley went to look it, but the key was missing. After a moment's hesitation he decided it would do no harm to leave it unlocked while we were gone, and we all started for the floor above.

The room we entered was of the same size as the one in which we had found Slyke. Here, too, there was a little furniture—three chairs grouped around a little table in the center of the room, a lounge in one corner, a small desk in another. It was the table that attracted Bartley's attention. On it stood a half-emptied bottle of Scotch whisky, and beside the bottle three glasses, one of them holding about a spoonful of liquor. Near one of the glasses was a half-smoked cigarette and a magazine, and on the opposite side of the table the stub of a cigar. Bartley looked at both of them with keen interest and finally placed them in an envelope.

The cigarette must have been a very high-priced one, for the end was of the finest straw. The appearance of the table suggested that three men had been present, and that two of them had been smoking. A coffee

can, perhaps, at which a bottle of whisky had been set. Aside from the table, there seemed to be nothing of interest in the room.

While Bartley was still gazing at the table, I walked over to the large window and drew aside the heavy curtain that reached to the floor. At my feet was a playing card that had been concealed by its folds. Glancing



around to see if there were any others and finding none, I brought the card to Bartley.

As I stepped to his side, I saw that he was examining the magazine. Like many magazines, the back carried a gaudy advertisement that covered the entire page. This one had an unusual amount of unused white space. Bartley pointed silently to where someone had idly amused himself by drawing on it with a pencil, a habit many people have. The design was simple, only a mass of scribbles, with a little figure here and there, and lines running through them.

(To be continued)

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Pursuant to an order of Hon. Bernard B. Ackerman, the Surrogate of the County of Allegany, in Surrogate's Court, notice is hereby given that all persons having claims against Charles S. Davis, late of the Town of Andover, in said County of Allegany, deceased, are required to exhibit the same, with the vouchers therefor, to the undersigned, the Administratrix of said deceased, at the office of James T. Foody, Opera House Block, in the City of Hornell, County of Steuben, on or before the 1st day of July, 1928.

Dated, December 16, 1927.

ANGIE A. DAVIS,

Administratrix.

JAMES T. FOODY,

Attorney for Administratrix,

Hornell, N. Y.

ANOTHER FREAK BILL

Albany, Jan. 24. — Every sleigh in the state will be sent to the junk pile in the event of the passage of a bill introduced in the assembly today by Webber A. Joiner, Republican, of Wyoming. The Joiner measure would require that on January 1, 1925, the runners of the sleighs must be four feet, eight inches apart, or the same width as automobiles. Abolition of the proposed statute would be made a misdemeanor punishable by a fine of ten dollars. The species of sleigh has runners about three feet apart.

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