

## DARKNESS

Charles J. Dutton

Illustrations by  
Irwin Myers

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## SYNOPSIS

**CHAPTER I.**—John Bartley, noted criminal investigator, recently returned from Scotland Yard, was called by the editor of the Boston Evening Times to investigate a mysterious disappearance of the Robert Slyke case at Glens Falls, near Saratoga. Bartley was called to the case at the last moment, and he accepted.

**CHAPTER II.**—With his friend Pelt, Bartley went to Glens Falls, the scene of the disappearance. The case was a mystery. Slyke was a young man who had been seen in the city of New York, and he was believed to be in the city of New York. Bartley was called to the case at the last moment, and he accepted.

**CHAPTER III.**—Bartley and Pelt went to the scene of the disappearance. They found a room which had been recently occupied by a man. The room was in a house which was owned by a man who was believed to be the man who had disappeared. Bartley was called to the case at the last moment, and he accepted.

**CHAPTER IV.**—A boy named Pelt, who was a friend of Bartley's, was called to the scene of the disappearance. He was called to the case at the last moment, and he accepted.

## CHAPTER V

In Which I Hear More About the Burglary.

Currie was sitting on the piazza when I reached the house. He got up hurriedly and advanced to me.

"Where in the devil is John?" he asked.

He apparently knew that we had called over to Slyke's, but he did not know the reason. I answered, "He is over at Slyke's. Slyke was murdered last night."

His large red face grew purple. "Murdered?" he gasped. "My G—, who did it?"

I told him all I knew. He listened with intense interest and growing horror. When I ended by saying that Bartley would be back to dinner, he shrugged his shoulders.

"There goes my visit with John. I have been after him for a long time to come up here; and when he does, he finds a murder right on my doorstep." He paused, then added, "I wonder who killed Slyke. I never liked him very much, but I know of no reason for his being murdered."

I went to the garage and backed out his little runabout, and started for town. In front of the post-office I stopped the car and got out. I knew that if the postmaster would give me the addresses of the men who had been at the card party, it would save me a lot of time. Upon explaining my errand, he gave me the desired information. One of the first names on the list was that of the editor of the local newspaper, and it suggested an idea to me.

Arriving at the newspaper office, I found the man I sought just going out to luncheon. When he learned that I had come to ask him some questions about Slyke, he invited me to lunch with him.

We went to his club, and in the small dining room found a table set for ourselves. When I mentioned the list of names, he told me all that he knew. A few men, mostly old friends, met every week or so to play poker. They went to Slyke's usually because, as he put it, "Slyke had more booze than the rest of us." The games were friendly affairs and the stakes low. When I asked him if Mr. Lawrence stayed after the others had gone home, he replied that he had and that he thought Slyke himself had asked him to remain, though he did not know for what reason. Suddenly it occurred to him that what he had said might place Lawrence in an awkward position.

"Jim Lawrence," he said, "could have had nothing to do with Slyke's death. Lawrence is so darned nervous himself that he would never have dared to fire a gun. It's too bad he stayed behind last night."

As I wanted to interview Lawrence next, the editor accompanied me in his car to point out the building where Lawrence had his office. Here he left me, saying that if I would call at his office in about an hour, he would have the back files of the newspaper I wanted ready for me.

Lawrence's office was on the second floor of a brick building, and his door bore the sign "Law Office." At a desk, reading a newspaper, was a man of about forty-five, with a very thin, pale face. He threw down the paper and eyed me questioningly. When I told him that Slyke was dead and that I had come to learn about his interview with him, he moved uneasily in his chair; but when I added that we believed that Slyke had been murdered, and that as far as we knew he was the last person to see him, he was absolutely unmoved. I could see that, until I mentioned the word murder, he had thought that a young man had committed suicide. For a moment I wondered if, after all, he had

not had something to do with the crime.

Taking a chair by his side, I said, "You were the last person, so far as we can discover, to see Mr. Slyke alive. We know that you stayed for a few moments only, and that he himself asked that you remain. As you were the last one to see him alive, we are much interested in what you can tell us of how he acted. Did he seem nervous or upset?"

My question did not make the man by my side any easier. He answered quickly, in a high-pitched voice that broke several times, "I did stay; but the other men will tell you that I was going home with them until Slyke asked me to wait a moment. I had no idea beforehand what he wanted. I went to bed I had gone with the rest. Some d—d fool will say I killed him."

It was just what some people would say, when it became public that the butler had not heard Slyke's voice again after Lawrence's departure. But for myself, I could not connect with this, nervous figure beside me.

"What did he want to see you about?" I asked.

Lawrence flushed, then half grinned, as he answered, "He asked me if I wanted to buy some Scotch whisky."

"Buy some whisky?" I repeated in astonishment.

"Yes, it seems foolish, doesn't it? But that's what he wanted to see me about. He said he had lots more than he needed, and that he could let me have five cases."

I said nothing, trying to digest this astonishing information. I had been wondering what it was that Slyke wanted to see Lawrence about, and had even made several guesses; but never in my wildest imagination had I supposed that it was about whisky.

I could understand why Lawrence should want to buy it, for good whisky is hard to get; but why Lawrence, presumed to be a rich man, should want to sell five cases was beyond my comprehension.

He saw my surprise and said, "It does seem strange. I was surprised myself. I had heard that he had a lot of booze; but we were not the closest of friends, and nowadays a man lets his liquor go only to his pals. The man who will let you have five cases of whisky is a pretty good friend."

I smiled at his answer. He was right. People with imported liquor were not giving it away. And what was more, few men of Slyke's position were selling their private stock.

"He told me," Lawrence continued, "that he had a great deal more than he could use, and that he would sell me some for one hundred dollars a case. That's pretty cheap for imported stuff."

"And then you left him?" I asked.

"Yes. He told me he was not going to bed yet. Said someone was coming in about half-past one."

Here was a new piece of evidence. Slyke, then, had not gone to bed after Lawrence left, but had waited up for some other visitor. It was curious, to say the least. One o'clock in the morning is not a usual hour for receiving callers.

"Have you any idea who it was?" I asked, shaking his head. "I haven't the least idea. As I was starting to go he said, 'Stay awhile. I am expecting a man about two, and I have to wait up for him.' That's all I know about it."

It was not much of a clue, still it was better than nothing. It did establish the fact that there had been someone else with Slyke that night. That is, if he were telling the truth. The burning question in my mind was, who was the second person? Was he who had killed Slyke? The odds seemed to favor it. Lawrence had little further information to give me. He said that Slyke had not been especially nervous, nor had he acted like a man afraid of anything.

I rose to go, but paused at a new thought.

"Oh, Mr. Lawrence, did Slyke give you a drink?"

He had accompanied me to the door, and paused, one hand on the knob. "Yes, he did, up in the room over his sleeping room. He got out a bottle and two glasses and we had a drink."

"You did not see three glasses, did you?"

"No," he answered, surprised at my question. "No, only two."

Thanking him, I said goodnight and left.

When I returned to the newspaper office, I found the files of the past year awaiting me. The story that Rogers told us in Bartley's library, and the account of the crime in the paper were substantially the same. There were, however, one or two slight differences that seemed to me important. I had understood Rogers to say that the step-daughter, Ruth, had positively identified the man now in prison; but somewhere in the story

paper was it stated that this had been the case. What she had actually said was, 'I think one of these is the man I saw in the room.' There had been no positive identification of the man by her, or by anyone else, for that matter. Slyke himself had testified that he did not know whether they were the men or not.

Three things had convicted them. First, the piece of paper found in the room, where the burglary had taken place, and which fitted into a torn corner of a newspaper discovered later in the rest of one of the men.

Second, the piece of cloth said to have been found on a rose bush beneath the window of the room entered, and which fitted the torn place in a pair of trousers belonging to one of the men—there was some doubt as to whether the trousers had been torn at the time the men were arrested—and last of all, the footprints under the window. Thus their conviction rested on a piece of torn newspaper and a hole in a man's trousers—rather feeble evidence, it seemed to me.

Moreover, the police had not discovered any of it until some days after the crime. The more I thought of it, the more I agreed with Bartley that the case was remarkably like that of old burglary case in England.

Leaving the newspaper office, I called on some of the other men who had been at the card party. They all agreed that it was Slyke who had suggested Lawrence's staying, and laughed at the idea that he knew anything about his death. One of them told me that, several weeks before, he had bought three cases of whisky from Slyke. I could not understand why a man of Slyke's position should wish to sell whisky to his friends. To this man also he had given the excuse that he had more than he needed for his own use.

As I passed the court house on my way home, I noticed the words "District Attorney's Office" on a window, and it occurred to me that stored away somewhere in there would be the exhibits in the burglary case. I entered and asked to see the torn piece of paper and the bit of cloth. The only person in the room was a boy of eighteen, who went into a back room, and returned with a box under his arm. Opening it, he shook out on the desk before me a newspaper, saying, "This is the paper they found in the man's pocket. You can see the torn edge."

He pointed to the front sheet of the newspaper, one corner of which had been torn away. Lifting another piece of paper from the box, this time a small one, he fitted it into the torn edge.

"That's enough to prove those men had nothing to do with the burglary. You know the Times is an evening paper, and is not sold on the news-stands far from Boston—not up here, at any rate. If a copy of the paper had been mailed here, as it would have to be, it could not have reached Saratoga until hours after the robbery had taken place. Such being the case, the men that broke into the house could not have had it with them, nor could the police have found a piece torn from it in the room the next morning."

I saw his point and was eager to learn what he thought of the other things I had discovered. Above all, I wanted to know what his opinion would be of Lawrence's statement that Slyke was expecting some one to call after he left. To my surprise he was much more interested in the fact of Slyke's having offered the whisky for sale. I had expected, when I had finished with my story, that he would tell me what he had discovered after I left him at Slyke's. But as he did nothing of the sort, I finally found courage to inquire.

"Well, Pelt," he said with a quizzical smile, "there are two things that I want very much to discover. The first thing I would like to know is, what has become of Slyke's chauffeur?"

Seeing I did not understand, he went on: "You know we sent for him but they could not find him. Up to the time I left the house they were still looking for him. Not only that, but the chauffeur and Slyke had a quarrel yesterday afternoon."

"A quarrel?"

"Yes. No one was near enough to hear all that was said, but the cook heard the chauffeur say, 'I don't dare to do it,' and Slyke reply, 'I should have done it before.' The butler, you remember, told us that while we were in the tower he saw the chauffeur on the steps leading to the second story.

The chauffeur has disappeared, no one knows where. The police are looking for him and may get him. I hope so. There are a few things I should like to ask him."

"Maybe it was he who took the revolver," I suggested.

Bartley agreed. As he did not continue, I asked him what were the other things that he wanted to know.

"Has it occurred to you that it is a strange thing that a man like Slyke should spend most of his time up here? For the past two years he has lived here almost entirely. His office in New York is closed, and he is rumored to have lost money. Why did he only leave the year round?"

Bartley suddenly changed the subject. "Miss Peltter cleared up one thing for us today. I knew that, if the murderer was shrewd enough to go to the trouble of placing Slyke in bed, he knew enough to know how the area should look. Their being closed puzzled me. I wondered how he had made such a mistake. But when Miss Peltter told us it was she who had closed them, I knew that I had not been mistaken. Whoever killed Slyke knew what he was doing. There was only one chance in a thousand that he would not get it across."

"It was well planned," I suggested.

"It was not planned at all. It was a sudden impulse, a quarrel. I don't believe that, when the murderer went into that tower room to see Slyke, he had the least idea of killing him."

"But think of the pains he took. It must have been planned."

"No," he replied, "the planning was done afterward."

"After he was killed?"

"Yes. Look at the facts, Pelt. Slyke was killed on the balcony of a tower, fifty feet above the ground. A man who planned a murder would not pick out such a place. It was the last place in the house he would have chosen. Just suppose that some one had heard the shot and investigated. The murderer would have been trapped with the dead body of his victim. To escape he had to go down two flights of stairs and through the big room. Let us say that Slyke invited the man to go upon the balcony—for what, we cannot say—and then they quarreled and the person killed him on the impulse of the moment. The next thing to do was to get rid of the body. Finding the cook

Currie, who had been listening curiously, broke in with, "I presume you will solve this Slyke affair quickly."

Bartley was silent, watching the smoke of his cigar curl expressionless. His face was expressionless when he replied: "Oh, I can't tell. Bob, I have not found anything of importance yet."

I glanced at him in surprise. It seemed impossible that he could have spent a whole day at Slyke's and not have discovered something of value.

Mrs. Currie turned to her husband. "Bob, what are you men going to do this evening? You know this is the night of my musicale."

Currie gave such a green that we all laughed. "There is a long-haired fellow coming here tonight, and a crowd of women who will roll their eyes at him and like the devil, murmuring 'How beautiful! It's no place for us. We'll go to Saratoga and come back when it is all over.'"

Before we started Currie said he had to give some orders to his men, and Bartley and I went to our rooms. I gave him a brief outline of what I had discovered in Saratoga. He did not ask any questions until I mentioned that the newspaper from which the corner had been torn was a copy of the Boston Evening Times, then he asked the date of the day before the robbery, he took his cigar from his mouth, grimaced, and threw out his hands in an expressive gesture.

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