

Out of the Darkness

By CHARLES J. DUTTON

Illustrations by
Irwin Meyers

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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. Peculiar circumstances 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 resents 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.—Miss Potter, the dead man's sister-in-law, the village police chief, Roche, and the family physician, Doctor King, all agree Slyke killed himself, but Bartley insists he was murdered. Investigating, Bartley finds evidence that Slyke, after a card party he had given, was shot on the tower of the house, undressed, and placed in bed. During his absence from the room someone removes the revolver from Slyke's hand.

CHAPTER IV.—A boy working in the garage asserts he heard a shot during the night, apparently "in the air," of course really on the tower.

CHAPTER V.—Pelt starts out to interview the members of the card party. He finds to his surprise that Slyke, apparently wealthy broker, had offered to sell his friends whisky. He finds evidence that the men in jail for attempted robbery of Slyke were framed.

CHAPTER VI.—Returning from a visit to Saratoga, Bartley, Pelt and Currie come upon a large motor truck, without lights and off the road. They are discovered and arrested. Apparently the truck is new, and Bartley picks it. They find the vault stored with whisky, and also the revolver which had been found in Slyke's hand. A man, seemingly well acquainted with the place, arrives, and they detain him. It is Slyke's missing chauffeur. A detective, working for the revenue department, arrives and takes charge of the vault.

CHAPTER VII.—After considering all the mysterious angles of the case, Bartley apparently reaches no conclusion as to the murderer. He is satisfied that deals in whisky have something to do with it. Miss Potter's firm belief in the "ouija board," and spiritualism also seems to interest him.

CHAPTER VIII.—Bartley continues his search for evidence, and apparently finds some things he considers of value. The inquest opens. Doctor King, who is the coroner, a war veteran, and who had been shell-shocked in the war, is in a thunderstorm in his progress. Doctor Webster, called in consultation, testifies he believes Slyke was murdered.

CHAPTER IX.—The storm increases in intensity as the inquest progresses. Briffleur, the chauffeur, is called to the stand. Before he commences his testimony a stroke of lightning having broken the circuit. During the confusion the party is horrified by the utterance of a sudden terrifying shriek.

CHAPTER X.—With the restoration of the lights it is discovered that Briffleur has been stabbed. He had been seated directly in front of Doctor King. No one in his vicinity had noticed anything unusual before the man's shriek. Fatally wounded, Briffleur manages to convey the information that Slyke was murdered, refers to the "boy's" knowledge of the robbery, and tries to point out the person who had stabbed him, but dies before he can do so. The inquest is adjourned. How Briffleur had been stabbed without any one being aware of the movements of the murderer seems unexplainable.

CHAPTER XI

In Which We Begin to Find a Motive. Bartley had some work for me to do, and I did not dine until the others had finished. While I was eating, Currie wandered into the dining room and sat down beside me. The murder had taken all the life out of him. It was the first time that he had come so close to a crime. He seemed unable to forget the cry and those awful moments in the darkened room. We discussed the affair for a while; then I excused myself and went in search of Bartley.

I had been thinking for hours of the latest crime, and no solution had come to me. I could not understand how, in those few moments of darkness, the murderer had been able to approach the chauffeur near enough to kill him, nor why the people next to him had heard nothing.

When I told Bartley of my bewilderment, he answered with a little grin: "I agree with you, Pelt, it's very mysterious. It's the first time I ever heard of murder taking place at an inquest and in a room filled with people. There are no clues, apparently. To my mind, however, the real reason for the murder was to prevent Briffleur from testifying. Whoever killed him knew about what he would say, and feared that he would tell who had killed Slyke."

Breaking in on him, I said, "But he could not have foreseen that the lights would go out and give him a chance? I thought that it was the storm that extinguished them."

He nodded. "That's true enough. It was that last flash of lightning. Darkness was just what he needed, and he took advantage of it. He had several moments in which to act. There were not many people near enough to the chauffeur to have killed him in that short time."

He rose, went over to his bag and brought back the knife with which the murder had been committed. For

several moments he examined it, then he asked as he passed it over to me, "What do you think of it?"

It was a rather odd knife. It resembled a hunting knife, and the edge showed it had had a good deal of use. The blade was very dull except at the point. It was too large to be carried in a man's pocket, but a woman could have hidden it some where in the folds of her clothing.

As Bartley seemed to expect some comment from me as I handed it back to him, I said, "Save for the fact it's not very sharp and seems to have been used a great deal, I can learn nothing from it."

He smiled as he turned the knife over and over in his hand. "Oh there's more than that. It tells a great deal. The knife is unusual in shape and length. There was a time when it was used a great deal, and the owner kept it very sharp and clean. But for some time now he has neglected it. There is one very important thing that you have overlooked. You remember those little drawings I found on the magazine in Slyke's room, the row of connected circles? I find the same thing here."

I gasped, and, reaching for the knife, looked at the wooden handle. There, faintly scratched on the wood, were a number of circles running one into the other.

"Do you think," I asked in excitement, "that it is the sign of some secret society?"

"No. It's simply this—that most of us, if we have a pen or pencil in our fingers, draw figures on whatever happens to be at hand. We do it without thinking, because it is a subconscious act; and, as a rule, we draw the same set of figures each time. Some one, having nothing to do, idly scratched these figures on this knife handle, hardly conscious of what he was doing. I believe the same person made the figures on the magazine and on the knife."

"Why do you think that?" I asked.

"It had been scientifically proved that when a person plays with a pencil and idly draws figures, he always draws the same ones; and that they are symbols of something deep in his subconscious mind. These circles are so much alike that I think they were drawn by the same person."

I had a dim idea I had heard something similar to what he was saying in college, but just what it was I could not remember. As I started to hand him the knife, it slipped through my fingers and fell to the floor and stood quivering, its point imbedded in the wood. With a sudden exclamation, Bartley picked it up and, to my astonishment, let it fall again and again. Each time the point stuck upright in the floor. Then he balanced it on his hand, smiling to himself. As he replaced it in his bag, he said, "I am glad you dropped that knife, Pelt."

It seemed to me such an insane thing to say that I made no comment. "We are going over to Slyke's again," he continued, "to see Miss Potter. By the way, there's another thing, Pelt, you can aid me a good deal by solving."

"What's that?" I said.

"Find out why that dog did not bark the night of the murder. It's a puppy."



He Smiled as He Turned the Knife Over and Over in His Hand.

noisy and active, and does not like strangers. The person that killed Slyke, as far as we know, had to come down those long stairs and pass through the living room where the dog was. If it was some one from outside, that dog should have barked. But as far as we can find out, he never made a sound."

"It looks to me," I suggested, "as if the murder were committed by some one in the house."

Bartley did not answer until he had opened the door into the hall, then he paused to say, "There seems to be no motive for any of the family to have killed Slyke. The little difficulty between Miss Potter and Slyke does not seem important enough to consider. The will has been found and all the property is accounted for. His lawyer, you remember, discovered a large sum of money in the safe when it was opened." Then he proceeded downstairs.

It was only a short drive in Bartley's fast car to the Slyke house. He offered no explanation of our call, and I hid my curiosity as well as I could. As soon as the butler had gone, Bartley came at once to the object of his visit.

"Miss Potter," he said, "the butler testified this afternoon that he overheard words between Mr. Slyke and

yourself. Would you mind telling me what they were?"

Her face flushed, but she kept her eyes on Bartley as she replied coldly: "The butler was mistaken. Mr. Slyke and myself never quarreled."

"Oh, I don't mean that you actually quarreled, but that you had some words."

Her eyes dropped under his searching gaze, and it was not until he had repeated his question a second time that she answered rather reluctantly: "There was no—no trouble. What the butler spoke of had nothing to do with Mr. Slyke's death."

Bartley noticed her hesitation, and asked suddenly, "Was it over his selling whisky?"

She started and her face paled, then flushed. In a low voice she demanded, "How did you know?"

"That is not of much importance, is it? I am right; that was what the words were about, wasn't it?"

She gave him an appealing look, then glanced back at the floor. At last she regained her composure, and, raising her eyes, answered, "Yes, that was what the butler heard us talking about. It was not a quarrel. I told him he would get into trouble over the whisky, and he told me it was none of my business."

"When did he start to sell it?"

She thought for a moment. "I am not sure. You see, I know very little about it. But before the prohibition law came into effect he bought a great quantity of whisky. He told me that a man who had whisky could make a lot of money. He got several truck loads, but where he kept it I don't know."

"And after prohibition, did he buy any more?" Bartley asked.

"I think so. I think it came from Canada. He told me once or twice that he was making a great deal of money out of it."

"And you quarreled over his selling it?"

Father warmly she answered, "We never quarreled. It was not my affair. I felt bad, of course, that he should do a thing like that. I warned him that he would get into trouble, and he told me it was none of my business if he did. That must have been what the butler heard."

Bartley glanced sharply at her. "Have you any idea who helped him in it?"

"No—that is—I never knew. I did think that maybe—"

She stopped and Bartley suggested, "You thought it was the chauffeur?"

"Yes, I did. I know that Mr. Slyke bought a truck, and that the chauffeur would have long talks with him in his room, and then take the truck and be away for several days. In the last year or so he became overbearing, and I wondered why Mr. Slyke kept him—unless there was something between them."

I was not surprised. Everything had seemed to lead up to this revelation. What I could not understand was why a man in Mr. Slyke's position should be engaged in the illegal selling of whisky, and take this chauffeur into his confidence. Whisky bought in any quantity, since prohibition, had to come from Canada, and passed through the hands of a number of men. Was his engaging in selling whisky a problem in itself, or had it some bearing on his death?"

Miss Potter had little more to tell us, and we rose to take our leave. As Bartley took his hat, he asked her if she had been using the ouija board. She was at once excited, her eyes gleamed, and her voice rose as she responded: "Yes, I received a message from Mr. Slyke. I know it was from him. He has written twice, 'You will hear from me,' and I know I will. I am going to get a good medium to come and see what he wants to communicate to me."

To my surprise Bartley listened gravely, almost reverently. When she had finished, he said he knew of a very good medium and would try to arrange for him to come to the house for a seance if she desired. This proposal pleased Miss Potter very much, and she accepted at once. She told us that many people in Saratoga believed in spiritualism, including Doctor King. For a while they discussed various manifestations; and I listened to Bartley in astonishment, as he told of receiving messages from the dead, for I knew he did not believe in them.

We were interrupted by a knock, and the butler entered with a telegram for Bartley. It had been sent first to Currie's, and he had directed the boy to follow us to Slyke's.

Bartley tore open the envelope and ran his eyes over the paper. I saw him start, then without a word he handed it to me, and I read:

Arrested in New York one o'clock this morning Jacob Asher with truck load of whisky. Claims he paid Slyke \$23,000 for it afternoon before his death. Saw him about five o'clock. Did not know Slyke was dead till he read papers. Story seems to be true. ROGERS.

No wonder Bartley had started. Here at last might be a motive for the murder. Perhaps the man in New York could tell us what had happened that night.

With grave face Bartley took the telegram from my hand, and reread it; then he asked Miss Potter if Slyke had had a visitor the afternoon before his death. She said she did not know whether he had or not, as she had been away most of the afternoon. After a few more questions, we bade her good-night. In the doorway Bartley paused to say something to her, in so low a tone that I could not catch his words; but I did hear her eager answering "Yes."

As we climbed into the car and started down the road, I said that I did not suppose she knew anything

about the \$23,000 whisky deal. His answer was as quick as a flash: "I never thought she did. The strange thing is that in the safe, after his death, his lawyer should find \$10,000, and that he should have made a deposit of \$13,000 that same afternoon."

We rode in silence for a while. Then he started me by saying that he was not going back to Currie's, but to New York to interview the man arrested with the whisky, and that he would not be back until the next afternoon. "It was not until we were at the station, waiting for his train, that I interrupted his preoccupation to ask if he thought it would ever be discovered who had killed Briffleur."

The flickering lights above us cast weird shadows over his face, and it seemed to me that behind his half smile was a look of great sadness as he replied, "I know now who killed Briffleur."

"You do?" I gasped.

He answered slowly: "Yes. That was easy enough to discover. But to prove it before a jury will be almost impossible."

Just then the train came in and he said no more. On my way back to the house I pondered deeply over his last remark, but could find no clue to his meaning.

(To be continued)

NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Pursuant to an order of Hon. Bernard B. Ackerman, Surrogate of the County of Allegany, notice is hereby given to all persons having claims against the estate of Orange Smith, late of the Town of Andover, N. Y., deceased, to present the same with proper vouchers thereof to the undersigned Executors, at the Law Office of Crayton L. Earley in the Village of Andover, N. Y., on or before the 8th day of September, 1923.

Dated February 26, 1923.
HARRY G. SMITH,
EUGENE SMITH,
Executors.

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NOTICE TO CREDITORS

Pursuant to an order of Hon. Bernard B. Ackerman, Surrogate of Allegany County, notice is hereby given to all persons having claims against Roxana B. Burrows, late of Andover, in the County of Allegany, deceased, that they are required to present the same with the vouchers thereof, to Frank W. Burrows, the executor of the last will and testament of the said deceased, at the Burrows National Bank in the Village of Andover, N. Y., on or before the fifteenth day of July, 1923.

FRANK W. BURROWS,
Executor.
Robbins, Phillips & Robbins,
Attorneys for Executor,
Hornell, N. Y.

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NOTICE!

My wife, Martha M. Coats, having left home without just cause or provocation, all persons are hereby forbidden to harbor or trust her on my account.

ELMER COATS.
Dated March 28, 1923.

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