

Out of the Darkness

By CHARLES J. DUTTON

Illustrations by
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CHAPTER XIII

Out of the Darkness.

The butler seemed to expect us, and showed us at once into the large room in which the inquest had been held. Bartley placed his bag and the package of slates on a small table in the center of the room. Roche sat down heavily in a chair, and the rest of us stood until Miss Potter entered. She seemed to be expecting us also, and for the first time, since I had met her, seemed almost at her ease. As she greeted us, the bell rang, and a moment later the butler ushered in Doctor King. He glanced at Bartley, then gave us a word of greeting. We seated ourselves around the table with the exception of Bartley, who remained standing at one end. He was a different Bartley from the one who had laughed and joked with us during the past few days. His face was stern, and his tired eyes glanced from one to the other of us soberly. The butler brought in a glass of water and placed it on the table. Bartley waited until he had left the room again before he spoke, his voice low and hesitating:

"I have brought you here tonight at Miss Potter's request. She believes that it is possible to get in touch with the spirits of the dead, and that we may receive a message from Mr. Slyke that will tell us who killed him. She has asked us to be present as witnesses."

Currie looked at me as if he thought that Bartley had gone crazy. I was too surprised to offer an excuse. A glance at Bartley showed that he was in earnest, and I sank back in my chair bewildered. I knew that he did not believe in spiritualism, though he was familiar with the question from all sides and had made a special study of it. I was puzzled as to why he should stoop to this pretense. Doctor King seemed more surprised than any of us; after a startled look at Bartley, he shrugged his shoulders and whispered something to Roche, who in turn shook his head.

"While I was in New York," Bartley continued, "I arranged for a certain medium, who is claimed to have had wonderful results, to meet us here tonight. I did not tell him what we expected, or anything about the circumstances. He will be here in a few moments. Meanwhile I am going to try a little experiment of my own."

He paused, then continued: "You know it is believed by thousands that messages from the spirit world are written on slates by unseen hands. The test of the genuineness of such messages is the absence of an opportunity for fraud on the part of the medium, and the fact that it is in the handwriting of the person who is believed to be sending them. If these tests are met, we can then assume that the message was not the work of the medium, but comes from outside sources. I have a number of slates here, and am going to try to secure a message on them. I am not sure if I can do it, however."

Currie interrupted to say, "But, John, if the lights are turned out, how are we to know that you did not write those messages yourself?"

Without a smile on his face Bartley replied: "I did not intend to turn out the light. I am going to do what few mediums ever attempt to do; that is, to see if we can secure a message on these slates in full light. There have been so many frauds in slate-writing séances that a test made in the dark has no value."

As he spoke he tore the wrapping from the package and disclosed a number of ordinary school slates tied together with a string. When he had cut the string and placed the slates on the table before him, he added: "You might claim that these slates already have a message written on them, so I will wash the surface of each with water. If there was any writing on them, it will be wiped out."

With our eyes following every movement, he took a piece of cloth, dipped it into the glass of water, and carefully washed one side of a slate. As he was beginning to wash the other side, he paused and said to Currie: "You may think I have not washed the slate thoroughly enough; suppose, Currie, you take it and wash the other side yourself. Make a good job of it."

Currie's earnestness was almost laughable as he took the slate and turned it over and over, examining both surfaces. When he had finished he whispered to me, "There was not a darned thing on that slate."

The same method was employed with the other slates. First, Bartley would wash one side, then would call upon one of us to examine the slate and wash the other side. I was

until the last, and I examined my slate very carefully before I touched it with the cloth. On the side which Bartley had washed little drops of water still clung. The unwashed side was dirty but showed no traces of having been written on.

When I had finished my task, Bartley took one of the slates and said: "You have seen there was no writing of any kind on these slates. I am going to give one to each of you. Miss Potter should place hers under her feet; Currie might sit on his; the rest of you can place them under your coats."

He gave us each a slate, and we did as he suggested. I wondered, as I placed mine under my coat, just what Bartley expected to discover. Somehow the whole thing seemed so absurd. He was so serious about it, however, that I began to believe that he must expect to receive a message of some sort. We sat silent and expectant, I, for one, feeling a little foolish.

Bartley, who had glanced at his watch several times, waited for five minutes to pass before he said, "Suppose, Currie, you look at your slate."

Currie grinned, as if to say he considered it all foolishness, but did as requested. As he glanced at his slate, the smile left his face, his jaw dropped, and his eyes grew big with wonder. He looked at it several seconds as if he could not believe his eyes, then slowly passed it to me. I took it eagerly, glanced at it, and in my turn was startled. There, however, in a sprawling hand, running across the slate that had been blank a few moments before, was written, "Currie, people who steal whisky out of a vault at midnight will come to a bad end."

Almost unable to credit my eyes, I stared at the slate. Both sides had been so thoroughly washed that when Currie had taken it they were still wet. How the writing had gotten on the slate, I could not imagine.

Miss Potter gave a sudden cry. She had risen to her feet with shining eyes. Holding her slate in one trembling hand, she tried to speak, failed, then cried triumphantly: "It's a message—a message from Mr. Slyke! I knew it would come," and sank back into her chair, adding, as if unable to believe the evidence of her own senses, "It's in his own handwriting, his very own, and he tells me what to do."

Bartley took the slate from her trembling fingers, a curious expression on his face. He placed it on the table, and we crowded round to examine it. This time the entire surface of the slate was covered with writing, in the same sprawling hand that had written on Currie's and mine. The letters were large and looked as if the person who had written the message had been very weak. Too astonished to speak, we bent and read:

"All will be well with me if you aid those who are trying to discover who injured me. For my peace, do this: listen to the medium—and the message trailed off in a large S.

"It's Mr. Slyke's writing," Miss Potter cried excitedly. "I recognize it. There was nothing on the slate when I placed my feet on it."

Bartley faced her gravely, with something in his manner that gave me the impression that he was not at all surprised at what was happening. "Then you are absolutely sure it is in his writing?" he asked.

Not trusting herself to speak, she simply nodded. At that moment the bell rang, and the butler passed through the room on his way to the door. In the second before his return, I saw Doctor King steal a look at his slate, and, from the startled look on his face, I knew that he, too, had received a message. Meeting my eyes, he gave me a faint, wondering smile and shook his head doubtfully.

The man whom the butler ushered in was the medium that Bartley had secured in New York. He was very tall and thin, dressed in black, with white, unhealthy face, shifty eyes, and hair a bit too long.

After he had been introduced, Bartley told us that we were to begin the séance at once. The first thing to be done was to place the medium in a chair in the corner and tie his hands and feet firmly. Roche was selected to draw the rope through the rungs of the chair, tie his hands behind his back, and place a gag in his mouth so that he could not speak. He performed his task with the thoroughness of a police officer trained in the work; and when he informed us that the medium could neither move nor speak, I believed him.

At Bartley's suggestion we seated ourselves around the table. It was a small one, not very heavy in construction. We placed our hands on its surface as directed, and linked them together by hooking the thumb and little finger of each hand around the finger of the hand next to it. We were told that under no circumstance were we to break this circle.

Bartley spent some time in making sure that we were arranged in the proper manner. I was seated with Currie on my left, my little finger clasped around his thumb, and Bartley himself on my right. He rose and turned off the lights, then groped his way back to my side, and a second later his finger closed around mine.

I confess that I felt a bit like a fool as I waited there in the pitch darkness. What we were doing seemed childish; yet back of it all there was such a general air of expectancy that I was tense with excitement. The great draperies had been drawn over the windows, and not even a ray of light penetrated the room. Just what

it was that we were waiting for I did not know. Something might or might not take place, the medium had said. We sat in silence for a number of minutes, minutes that dragged endlessly. I must confess that to me they were not the most pleasant I had ever spent.

Someone drew a deep breath, and I thought the table had started to move. Then a silence followed, so deep that I could not hear even my neighbor breathing. I felt as if I were all alone in the darkness. Only the reassuring touch of the fingers on each side of me drew me back to reality.

Suddenly, when I was least expecting it, I felt the table under my fingers sway back and forth for a second, then fall back upon the floor with a little bang. Currie breathed hard, as if afraid; and his eyes on my fingers tightened. Then without warning came a series of ten knocks, faintly, as if someone were knocking at a distant door. I could not tell where they came from. They seemed to be in the air, on the floor, everywhere but on the table. One thing was sure: they did not come from the direction in which the medium sat. Besides, he had been tied too tightly in his chair to have been able to make them.

Silence again, then more raps, quick little running raps, never very loud, that would start and stop a second, then trip away like little feet running to and fro.

"Are you there?" Bartley's voice asked, hesitatingly.

Almost before his words had died away, there came a series of loud raps, almost falling over each other.

Then Bartley's voice again, cool but low, "Can you communicate with us?"

I had expected that the raps would reply at once, but instead there was a long silence. Several times Bartley repeated the question, and still no answer.

At length he asked, "Shall we try some other method?"

Raps answered, tumbling over each other in their eagerness, and the table tipped so violently that I expected it would fall over. It returned to an upright position with a bang, then silence again. A deep moan from the direction of the medium startled me, then more moans interspersed with sighs.

A shrill, thin voice, ghostly and far away, said brokenly, "Oh—oh—I—feel you; I know—you are there—there—"

A silence, in which I hardly dared to breathe. The table tipped a second time and a deep voice which seemed familiar, though I could not place it, said, "I am here—here, though you do not see me. I was murdered by—"

What it might have added we never knew. Miss Potter suddenly cried out, not in fear but in joy, "It's Mr. Slyke—his voice—"

Bartley, afraid that she might rise in her excitement and break the circle, whispered to her, and she settled back.

I now recognized the voice as that of Slyke, a little changed, it is true, but enough like it to be easily identified. I was too dazed to think; the raps, the darkness, the voice, and the fear that was creeping into my heart, were almost more than I could bear.

Silence again, broken only by the uneasy moans of the medium. Then, without warning, someone cried in terror, "Look! The stairs, the stairs!"

Almost in front of us was the stairway leading to the tower room. There upon the top step, was a tiny light, unlike any light that I had ever seen. It was hardly larger than a silver dollar, of an unearthly whiteness; then it began to grow larger and larger, until it changed into a luminous arm floating in the air. I heard someone gasp in fear, then all was silence again. The light continued to change. Now there were two arms, then the trunk of a body, and then out of nothing, an entire human figure appeared, glowing with a soft, pale light in the darkness. A misty figure with ghostly, shining feet and hands but no head! It began to float down the stairs, a step at a time, seemingly upon the air.

Currie's hand trembled under mine; and I controlled my own fear with an effort, as I pressed it reassuringly.

Half way down the stairs a head appeared above the body. One moment there was nothing there; the next, a face with burning eyes and tangled hair. I knew instinctively whose it was. It belonged to Slyke, the murdered man. A voice that seemed to come from the mouth said, "I have come back to place my hand on the person that killed me."

The figure took a step towards us, the table before us fell over on the floor with a crash, and a voice almost at my elbow cried in terror, "For God's sake, turn on that light. Don't let that damned thing touch me."

As suddenly as it had appeared, the figure vanished, and we were left in the darkness.

(To be continued)

Marriages

Miss Irene Jones, of Bolivar, and Richard Fairbanks, of Little Genesee, were united in marriage, Tuesday, April 10th.

Miss Leona Studley, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E. D. Studley of Cuba, and Roy D. Glask, of Fillmore, were married Thursday, April 5th. They will reside in Rochester.

OUR CHURCHES

BAPTIST

A. D. Shepard, Pastor.

Morning worship, 10:30; subject: "From Darkness to Light." Junior talk precedes the sermon.

Bible School, 12 M. Don't miss securing your coupon for a Bible. Y. P. S. C. E. at 6:15. Topic: "Train for Leadership." Leader, Miss Amelia Tubbs.

Evening worship, 7:30. Theme: "Seven Indispensable Things."

Monday and Tuesday evenings are given over respectively to the boys and girls.

Thursday evening is mid-week Bible study, prayer and testimony.

Saturday evening is examination for all members of the Teacher Training Class at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Tubbs.

PRESBYTERIAN

Royal E. MacGowan, B. D., S. T. B. Pastor

Sunday, April 22nd.—

Morning service, 10:30 a. m. At our morning service we will hold a service in memorial of Miss Fannie Ensworth, a beloved member of our church, who recently passed away.

After the memorial service, the Rev. M. J. Congdon, Field Secretary of the New York State Civic League, will speak on "Law Enforcement and the Present Crisis."

Evening service at 7:30, sermon by the pastor.

Sunday School immediately following the close of the morning service. There are classes for all and everyone is invited to attend and join one of our classes.

Junior Christian Endeavor meeting at 4 o'clock in the afternoon.

Senior Christian Endeavor meeting at 6:45 in the evening. Topic: "Train for Leadership." Ex. 3:7-12; 4:10-12.

Mid-week service every Thursday evening, continuing our study of the Life and Teachings of Jesus.

We welcome YOU to all the services of OUR church.

Deaths

Edward Colligan, formerly of Belmont, died at the Memorial Hospital, in Olean, from bronchial pneumonia, Wednesday, April 11th.

Edward Sawyer, of Bolivar, a Civil War veteran, died at his home in that place, Monday, April 9th.

Henry C. Hasley, of Cuba, died Friday afternoon, April 6th, at his home in that village, aged 78 years.

Michael O'Connor died at his home in Wellsville, Monday, April 16th, aged 81 years. Mr. O'Connor had been in the employ of the Erie Railroad for over 50 years.

Aunt Ada's Axioms: "When we spend as much time and money on fostering a spirit of love as we have on war, we shall begin to have a reign of peace and good will."

If you intend to buy different things to-day, you can probably save money on two of them by reading.

Births

April 8th, to Mr. and Mrs. David Rogers, of Friendship, a son, Eugene Johnson Rogers.

April 5th, to Mr. and Mrs. Harold Halbert, of Friendship, a daughter, Laura Jean.

April 9th, to Mr. and Mrs. E. F. Geffers, of the Vandermark, a daughter.

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 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.

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.

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