

OUT OF THE DARKNESS

(Continued from Last Week)

"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, Pett.' 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, Pett. You can aid me a good deal by solving it.' '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.

...sly 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. We will have 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 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 herself. 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 said suddenly, "Was it over his selling whisky?"

She started and her face paled, then she said in a low voice she demanded, "How did you know?"

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

She gave him an appealing look, but he glanced back at the floor. At last she regained her composure, and, looking her eyes, answered, "Yes, that was what the butler heard us saying about. It was not a quarrel, but 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?"

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

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

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

"And you quarreled over his selling it?"

Rather warmly she answered, "We never quarreled. It was not my affair. I felt had, 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 \$25,000 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 Briffeur.

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 Briffeur."

"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.

CHAPTER XII

In Which the Robbery is Solved.

I had intended to spend the next morning in either fishing or playing golf. Bartley had left in such a hurry that he had given me no instructions as to what I was to do in his absence. But when I came down to breakfast, by my plate was a telegram from him, reminding me to see the boy in the garage and learn from him what he knew of the robbery. I had entirely forgotten the chauffeur's dying statement.

After a late breakfast, I took the

car and drove once more to the Slyke house.

Leaving the car in the driveway in front of the house, I went around to the rear. The house appeared deserted, although it was the day of Slyke's funeral.

The garage was some yards from the house, half hidden among the trees. It was two stories high, built of stone, the upper story being used as living quarters for the men employed in it. The door stood open and I entered. Coming from the bright sunlight into the darkened

room, it was several moments before I could see clearly enough to make out that it was occupied by a large touring car, two small runabouts and a large truck. There was no one in sight, and after waiting a moment, I called loudly. The boy I wished to see slouched out from a back room.

He was about eighteen, with heavy figure, red face and unbrushed hair. His suit was dirty with oil from the cars. If he wondered what I wanted, he gave no sign of it. His eyes met mine clearly and honestly, as if he had no secrets to hide.

At first he stoutly denied that he knew anything at all about the robbery. He seemed to have the idea that I thought he was implicated in it. All he admitted knowing was a bit of gossip that he had picked up around the house at the time it was



The Boy I Wanted to See Slouched Out From a Back Room.

committed. The more I questioned him the more he insisted that he knew nothing about it, and I almost believed him. But the chauffeur, at the point of death, had said, "Ask the boy." It stood to reason then that he must know something of importance. At last I told him that the chauffeur had insisted that he knew, and asked if anyone had ever told him anything about the crime. A startled look came into his face; and he turned to me excitedly, his words tumbling over each other.

"Maybe that's what he meant. But, good Lord, I thought it was a joke, darned if I didn't. I thought he was kidding me; he was drunk, you know."

"Who was drunk?" I asked.

"Briffeur. He was very drunk, sir. You see, you asked me did I know anything about those men breaking into Slyke's, and I didn't; but Briffeur told me one night—"

He paused.

"Go on," I commanded.

"It was one night soon after the trial. Briffeur came drifting in here, pretty well lighted up. When he was that way, he used to talk a lot; but he never told the truth at such times, as I'd often found out. He never knew afterward what he had been saying. He would tell awful yarns about women, and the like. No one ever believed him."

I brought the boy to the point by asking what it was the chauffeur had told him. He hesitated, then in a voice that showed that he thought what he was going to say was almost too foolish to mention, he added, "He got to talking about that robbery, and said it was to laugh, the way the trial had gone. That no one knew that he had committed the robbery—no one except himself and one other. I thought, of course, it was one of his wild yarns, and laughed at him. When I asked him why he did it, he said Slyke owed him lots of money, and that he was after it."

It was natural that the boy should have thought this conversation of no more importance than many others of the chauffeur, when he was drunk and boasting about things that had never happened.

The chauffeur, he said, had come into the garage. "It up like a battleship." The talk had veered around to the robbery, and he had boasted that the two men were in jail for the robbery that he himself had committed. Who had helped him, he did not say. He claimed that Slyke owed him "lots of money." It seemed absurd that a wealthy man like Slyke should owe his chauffeur money and not pay it. He had even boasted that the evidence against the men in prison was arranged by himself.

It seems that the morning after the robbery he had gone to the post office for the mail, and a copy of the Boston Evening Times, a paper to which Slyke did not subscribe, had been handed to him by mistake. He had been reading a book only a few days before, "filled with murders and the like," and he remembered the account of a robbery in it and how the evidence was manufactured. On his way home he stopped at the police station for information, and offered to drive

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