

Out of the Darkness

By **CHARLES J. DUTTON**
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"THIS IS MURDER"

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. Bartley is asked, in view of recent developments, to establish the guilt or innocence of two men in the penitentiary for the crime. A miscarriage of justice is suspected. Rogers, chief of the central office, arrives as Bartley and his friend Felt, a newspaper man, are preparing to go on a fishing trip, and begins to describe the case. Bartley finds in it the restagings of an old case, is interested and agrees to solve the mystery. Bartley and Felt go to Circle Lake and call on Slyke.

CHAPTER II—Continued.

Currie rose and suggested we play a game of billiards; and the conversation about the burglary ended. While I play at the game, Bartley plays with uncanny skill, and both Currie and the doctor were almost equally good players. It was not until some hours later, when the doctor was called away by telephone, that we realized how late it was.

Bartley and I were tired after our ride and the long hours of visiting, and we went immediately to our rooms. Neither was inclined to talk, but Bartley did unburden himself enough to say he believed that Slyke knew who had committed the burglary, but for some reason wanted to hide the fact. Five minutes later, I was in bed and asleep.

I slept without dreaming, until someone aroused me by a vigorous shake. Bending over me, already dressed, was Bartley. I vaguely noticed a strange look in his eyes and traces of excitement on his face, but I was too tired to be interested and started to turn over and go to sleep again. He threw the covers off me, saying in an eager voice:

"Get up, Felt, get up quick! Doctor King has just phoned us to meet him at Slyke's house. They found Slyke in his bed—" he paused—"dead."

"Dead?" I questioned. "But why—how—"

Bartley did not wait for me to finish. "Shot. They told King it was suicide."

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 woman of about fifty rushed wildly to the doctor's side. She was far from an attractive woman, thin, with what is 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. C. J., 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 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."

She gave a start, wrung her hands,

and answered excitedly, "The butler found him. Mr. Slyke was going fishing today, and was to have been called early. The butler went to knock on his door and found it half opened and—"

Bartley interrupted, "Then, I take it, he usually kept the door of his room locked."

"He did. I do not know why. The butler saw it was open, looked in, called him, and got no answer. Then he came and told me. I was at breakfast. I went to his room, and there he was—" and her voice trailed off in horror.

Bartley's face was very grave as he said, "What did you do when you found he was dead?"

For the hundredth time she brushed the hair from her eyes. "I called the servants—Ruth was not here. Then I telephoned for the doctor."

Roche did not like Bartley's doing all the questioning, and he asserted his official position by saying that it was time we went up to the room where Slyke lay. Miss Potter led the way, walking like one weary and overwhelmed with grief. The room, thirty feet square, was larger than I had expected to find. It was furnished like a den. The bed in one corner was the only evidence that it was used for sleeping purposes. Under the white coverlet we could see the still form of a man huddled in a heap, lying on his back, his legs extending into the air a little beyond the foot of the bed. His face was half hidden by the bedclothes, which were closely drawn around his neck and over his chin. The doctor had taken his position at Slyke's head, and we all stood about him in silence until Bartley's voice broke the stillness.

"Miss Potter, when you came in did you touch the bedclothes at all?"

She hesitated a second, as if trying to think, then replied, "No, I gave

der! Why, that's foolish, Mr. Bartley. It's suicide. He has the gun in his hand."

Bartley gave him an amused glance as he answered, "It may be foolish, but it's murder. True, he has the gun in his hand; and that makes it look something like suicide, I agree; but that's just what someone wanted us to think."

This statement seemed to make Roche angry. His face flushed and he sneered, "Oh, come now, how do you expect to prove that?"

Bartley did not answer but simply pointed to the gun. "I think we all looked at it rather foolishly, as if we expected to find in it, by some miracle, a clue to his statement."

As we did not speak, he replied, "Roche, you think that the fact he is 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 medico-legalists 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 medico-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 died instantly, without even a struggle. A second after the shot was fired, this 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 his 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.

"I have grave doubts if he was even killed in this room."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)



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

a quick look, saw he was dead, and hurried from the room."

"And they are just as you found them—I mean, up around his chin this way?"

"So far as I know. The butler says he never went near the bed at all."

Without a word, Bartley pulled back the covers as far as the man's chest. Slyke's nightshirt had not been buttoned. His face was calm, showing not the slightest sign of a death struggle; his eyes closed; his mouth partly open. As Bartley pulled the clothes still further down, we saw that the right hand held a revolver. Then we noticed the wound, that had caused his death. It was under his left ear, half hidden by the pillow, on which were a few drops of blood.

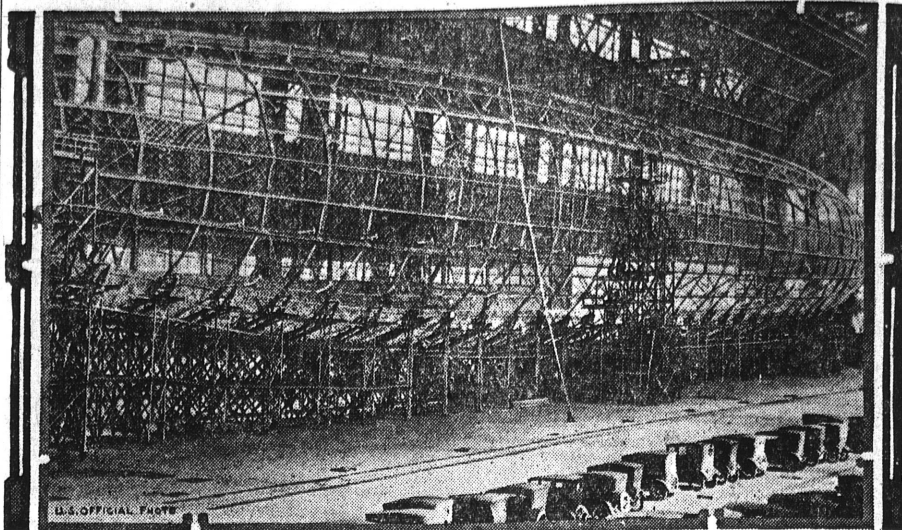
The doctor knelt and examined the wound closely, then rose to his feet. Bartley in turn bent over the body, but he turned his attention to the hand holding the revolver. It lay close to the side of the body with the fingers gripping the butt firmly. Bartley moved it a little, but did not attempt to loosen their clutch. With another glance at the pillow and the face upon it, he rose, his lips compressed, his face grave.

Roche turned to us with a half smile. "It's such a simple case, Mr. Bartley, that it won't need any of your skill to solve it. The doctor won't need to hold a long inquest. It's as clear a case of suicide as I have ever seen. He undressed, got in bed, and then shot himself. There is the gun in his hand. Not much in this case, is there?"

The doctor half nodded in agreement; but Bartley, as if he had not heard, bent again over the bed, his face stern, and examined the revolver. When he straightened up, he said simply, "It's serious enough, Chief. Murder always is, and this is murder."

At his words Miss Potter, who had been standing beside me, eagerly watching everything that was done, gave a little cry. As for myself, I was not greatly surprised at his words. His manner had been so serious that I had been expecting something of the sort. Roche grunted in amusement, and turned to King. "Do you hear the man now! Mur-

Huge Dirigible Is Almost Completed



The ZR-1, great dirigible being constructed at Lakehurst, N. J., for the United States navy, is ready for the outer covering or gas bag. The ZR-1 is being built to replace the ill-fated ship which was destroyed near Hull, England, on the day of its trial flight, with a large loss of life. The new ship will be operated with helium gas in the bag, which is non-inflammable.

WON PRIZE FOR BEAUTY



Miss Frances E. Williams of Burlington, Iowa, who carried off the beauty prize for which students and faculty of the University of Iowa voted.

CIRCLE GLOBE BY AIR



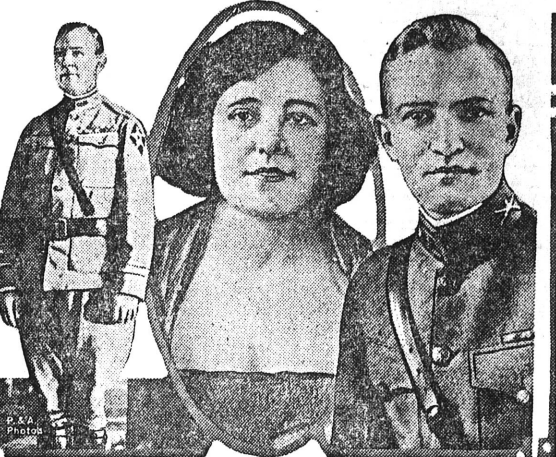
Five planes piloted by French air-men will leave Paris shortly for an aerial tour in an attempt to circle the globe in fifteen flying days. The world-tour by air has been organized by the undersecretary of state for air. This photograph shows Captain Marcel Madon, famous war pilot, who will command the escadrille.

HUNGER TAMES DEER



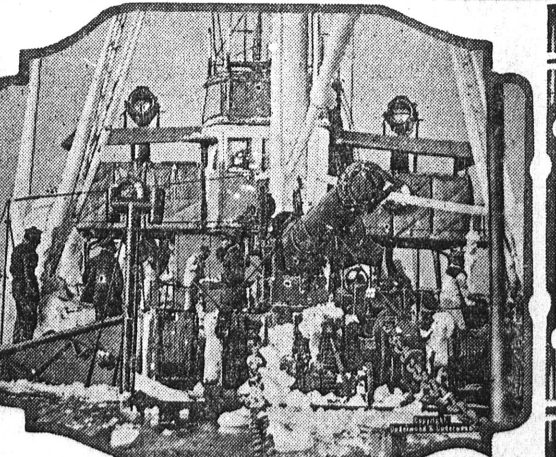
A deer in the vicinity of Yellowstone National park driven to the very doorstep for food because of one of the most severe winters that section of the country has known.

Army Scandal to Be Investigated



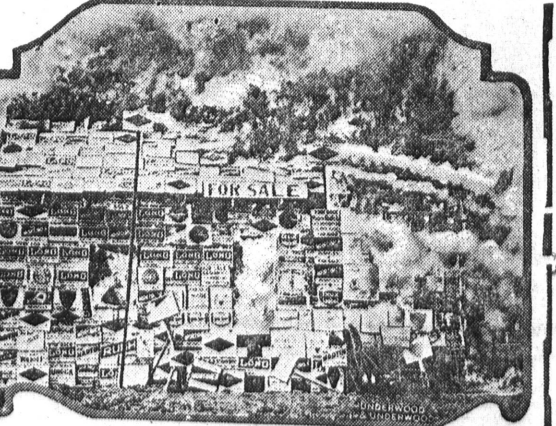
Mrs. Agnes Karnes Randle with her husband, Capt. Edwin H. Randle (right), have taken their case against Col. Arthur L. Conger (left), all of Fort Sam Houston, Tex., to the highest authorities in army circles. The secretary of war has ordered a thorough investigation of the charge of Captain and Mrs. Randle that Colonel Conger defamed Mrs. Randle's character. It is alleged Colonel Conger read his estrangement of the captain and his wife before the whole regiment.

French Cruiser Visits New York



The French dispatch cruiser, Regulus, from Rochefort, France, laid anchor in the Hudson river, New York, for a 12-day visit. The small cruiser made its way into New York harbor after a battle with heavy seas and was covered with ice. The ship left its port in France last October and so far has visited the ports of West Indies, French Guiana, Morocco and Bermuda.

Making Berkeley a "Signless City"



Berkeley, Cal., a spotless and "dry" town—even before Vtstead—now proclaims itself the nation's only "signless city." Members of the real estate board removed all their "For Sale" signs, a house was built of them, and then the house of signs was burned to the ground, amid wild cheers. The photograph shows the conflagration.

INTERESTING FACTS

- In India girls are often betrothed at birth.
- Ordinarily there are 686,000 seeds to a pound of white clover.
- Women lawyers, Judges and Justices in the United States number 1,738.
- A speed plane in France flew at the rate of 193 miles an hour.
- A solid cutglass bedstead is among the possessions of a Calcutta millionaire.
- The Chinese word for "hash" is the longest and most difficult word to pronounce in the language.