

# THE BLACKWOOD TIDE



ANDREW BARTON

## **DETECTIVE SHORT STORY**

### **The Blackwood Tide**

*By Andrew Barton*

**Genre:** Classic Detective / Noir

**Setting:** Oakhaven, Maine, USA

---

#### **ABSTRACT**

The story unfolds in the foggy coastal town of Oakhaven, Maine. Detective Elias Thorne arrives at the Pendelton estate to investigate the murder of Arthur Pendelton, a renowned but deeply unpopular maritime historian.

At first glance, the scene suggests a botched burglary: a window broken from the outside, muddy fisherman's boot prints, and a door locked from the inside. However, the detective's keen eye catches glaring inconsistencies: red clay in the boot treads that does not exist on the coastal cliffs, and a crime scene staged with almost theatrical carelessness.

As the investigation progresses, Thorne narrows down a short list of suspects, each with a compelling motive: a debt-ridden nephew, a rival historian, and a loyal housekeeper with a hidden past. The story is an atmospheric noir detective tale featuring sharp dialogue, meticulous deduction, and a poignant twist, proving that old family secrets and greed can be far more dangerous than the relentless Maine tide.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Abstract .....	1
2. Detective Short Story: "The Blackwood Tide" .....	2
2.1. Part I: The Crime Scene .....	2
2.2. Part II: The Suspects .....	3
2.3. Part III: The Resolution .....	4
3. About the Author .....	6

## **The Blackwood Tide**

*By Andrew Barton*

### **Part I: The Crime Scene**

The fog in Oakhaven, Maine, doesn't just roll in; it settles over the coastal town like a guilty conscience. It was a Tuesday in late November when Detective Elias Thorne got the call. The salt-heavy wind was already rattling the panes of his cruiser as he drove up the winding cliffside road to the Pendelton estate.

Arthur Pendelton, a reclusive maritime historian and the town's most prominent, albeit unpopular, citizen, was dead.

The local deputy, a young kid named Miller who still looked like he belonged in high school, met Thorne at the wrought-iron gates. "Study's this way, Detective," Miller said, his breath pluming in the frigid air. "Door was locked from the inside. We had to break it. Looks like a break-in gone wrong, but... I don't know. Something feels off."

Thorne stepped into the study. The room smelled of old paper, pipe tobacco, and the faint, metallic tang of blood. Pendelton lay sprawled on the Persian rug, a heavy brass astrolabe resting near his head, its edges dark and sticky. The large bay window overlooking the churning Atlantic was shattered, glass glittering across the floor like frozen sea foam.

"Window was broken from the outside," Miller offered. "Muddy boot prints lead from the window to the body, and back out. Size ten, deep lug sole. Fisherman's waders, maybe."

Thorne knelt, pulling a pair of latex gloves from his coat pocket. He examined the boot prints. They were deliberate, almost too perfectly spaced. He leaned closer, sniffing the mud caked in the tread. It wasn't the dark, loamy soil of the cliffside. It was reddish, dense, and smelled faintly of iron.

"Red clay," Thorne muttered.

"Sir?"

"There's no red clay within five miles of this cliff, Miller. The nearest deposit is down by the old abandoned shipyard in the harbor."

Thorne stood and surveyed the room. The locked door, the shattered window, the conveniently placed murder weapon. It was a stage play, and the director had been careless.

### **Part II: The Suspects**

He spent the afternoon interviewing the short list of suspects. First was Martha Higgins, Pendelton's housekeeper of twenty years. She was a stern woman with calloused hands and eyes that had seen too much. She claimed she was in town buying groceries, a fact verified by a crumpled receipt in her apron.

Next was Julian Pendelton, the victim's estranged nephew. Julian was a slick, debt-ridden man who had arrived in Oakhaven two days prior, demanding an advance on his inheritance. He wore expensive loafers, not size-ten waders, and his alibi was a bartender at the local pub who remembered him drinking heavily from eight until midnight.

Finally, there was Captain Elias Vance, a rival historian who had publicly accused Pendelton of stealing his research on a lost 19th-century schooner. Vance lived near the old shipyard. When Thorne visited him, the captain was abrasive, but his boots were clean, and his alibi checked out: he had been on a scheduled Coast Guard auxiliary patrol all evening.

### **Part III: The Resolution**

Thorne returned to the estate as dusk bled into the black Maine night. The fog had thickened, swallowing the sound of the crashing waves below. He walked the perimeter of the house, his flashlight beam cutting through the mist. He stopped at the base of the study window. The ground was soft, dark loam. No red clay.

He then walked to the edge of the property, where a steep, overgrown path led down to a small, private cove. There, hidden beneath a tarp, was a wheelbarrow. Thorne pulled back the canvas. Inside were gardening tools, a pair of size-ten rubber waders, and a clump of drying red clay.

Thorne smiled, a cold, humorless expression. He walked back to the main house and found Martha in the kitchen, methodically polishing silverware.

"Arthur wasn't just your employer, was he, Martha?" Thorne asked softly, leaning against the doorframe.

Martha didn't look up. "I don't know what you mean, Detective."

"I ran a background check. Deep dive. Twenty-two years ago, a woman named Martha Gable gave birth to a son in Portland. The father's name was listed as 'unknown.' But the timing matches Arthur Pendelton's sabbatical in the city perfectly. Arthur never acknowledged the boy. He never acknowledged you."

Martha's hands stilled. The polishing cloth hovered over a silver fork.

"You came to him last week," Thorne continued, stepping into the room. "You asked for help. For your son, maybe. He refused. He threatened to have you evicted. So, you decided to take what was owed. You killed him with the astrolabe. But you knew Julian would be the perfect patsy. You broke the window from the *inside*, threw the pieces outward, and made the muddy prints using waders you filled with red clay you'd dug up from your garden bed near the old shipyard path. You wanted the police to trace the clay to Vance, or at least create enough confusion to point away from the house."

Martha slowly turned to face him. Her eyes were dry, but they held a profound, exhausting sorrow. "He was going to sell the estate, Detective. He was going to bulldoze the cove to build a resort. My son's home. Arthur cared more for dead ships than living people."

"Justice doesn't work like that, Martha," Thorne said, his voice gentle but firm. "You don't get to be the judge, jury, and executioner."

"Isn't that what you do, Detective?" she whispered. "You just wear a badge while you do it."

Thorne didn't answer. He pulled out his handcuffs. The metal clicked sharply in the quiet kitchen, a sound that cut through the fog, the wind, and the relentless, indifferent tide of the Maine coast.

Outside, a lone buoy bell tolled in the harbor, marking the rocks, warning the living, and mourning the dead.

---

© *Andrew Barton*

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

**Andrew Barton** is a contemporary author of detective fiction, specializing in atmospheric noir stories set against the rugged, unforgiving landscapes of New England. His writing style is characterized by meticulous attention to detail, deep psychological characterization, and masterful suspense building. "The Blackwood Tide" is a prime example of his signature style, blending classic "locked-room" mystery tropes with sharp moral and social dilemmas.