

THE ALIBI

—BY—

Geo. Allan England

Author of "Darkness and Dawn," "Beyond the Great Oblivion," "The Empire in the Air," "The Golden Blight," "The After-Glow," "The Crime-Detective," etc.

But how?
The answer came to him not half a second later than the question. Through Dr. Nelson the thing could be accomplished—Nelson, the medical assistant who had helped Coroner Roadstrand make the preliminary examination of Mackenzie's body; Nelson, whose cold, unimpassioned, scientific testimony had sealed the boy's fate.

Dr. Nelson, if anybody in the world could do it, would be able to convince him that Arthur was a murderer. Not in an hour, not in a day or a week or a month perhaps; but eventually. Once he could be brought in contact with her as his physician, the result was bound to follow.

The solution of the problem dawned on the cashier like a veritable inspiration. Involuntarily he slapped his hand on his knee.

Startled, Chamberlain looked up. "Eh, what?" he asked. "The consummate villain!" ejaculated Slayton indignantly. "If he had his just deserts he'd go to the electric chair!"

The old man nodded melancholy assent. Gradually a new conversation knit itself between them sporadically. Slayton leading Chamberlain deftly whither he would. It lasted more than an hour before Slayton—having even more securely fortified his position and improved his prospects—sensed that Chamberlain was growing weary, and took his leave.

Bit by bit he knew the old man was coming to lean more and more upon him. Bit by bit he knew his power was extending itself, increasing, deepening. And inwardly he smiled with evil satisfaction.

Many things he knew; but one thing he did not know—that Enid, standing tense and eager behind the brocade portiere between the library and the music-room, had keenly followed every word of the long conversation, and that new thoughts had come to her, fresh hopes been born, new suspicions awakened in her loyal and untiring heart.

Summer faded into fall, and fall died away into winter; and a whole year had worn itself away since Grossmith's words of judgment had fallen on the ears of Arthur Mansfield. Every legal means for obtaining his release had been tried by his friends. There remained the extralegal means. These Arthur meant to try by himself. In his soul burned ever more brightly the one consuming flame, the passion for escape.

Escape—either in the flesh or in the spirit. Either out of that Gehenna alive or out of it dead.

The end was drawing close. No 3265 had determined to go free. For he knew now—and, knowing, would not tolerate it longer—

That every prison that men build is built with bricks of shame, And bound with bars, lest Christ should see

How men their brothers maim. The vilest deeds, like poison weeds, Bloom well in prison air. It is only what is good in man That wastes and withers there. Pale Anguish keeps the heavy gates, And the Warden is Despair.

With bars they blur the gracious moon

And blind the goodly sun, And they do well to hide their hell, For in it things are done

That Son of God nor son of man Ever should look upon!

CHAPTER XXIII.

November once again. Just such another night once more as that frosty, moonlit one, two years before when Mansfield had sought the Judas help and friendship of Walter Slayton and when old man Mackenzie had fallen with Slayton's bullet in his brain.

Just such another night; and yet now much had come to pass since then! How very much was coming to

fulfillment in the swift course of events!

The minotaur bellowing of the penitentiary siren, hurrying its echoes against the high banks of the railway-cutting to eastward and far to the west over the sliding floor of the Hudson's big waters, screamed its warning and its menace to the whole countryside. It startled the slumbers of many a sleeping village up and down the river. Timid people shuddered in their beds or made doubly sure all doors and windows were carefully locked.

Already the news was spreading everywhere by telephone and telegraph. Already the net was reaching out. But the siren gave the alarm vocal expression, flung it to the winds and shrieked into the November night:

"Convict escaped!" Just where the river narrows somewhat opposite the stern, gray walls of the penitentiary a man was dragging himself more dead than alive out of the chill black waters that sparkled so eerily in the moonlight.

As his numb, bare feet touched the pebbled bottom of the west bank he staggered forward, fell splashing on hands and knees, and then sank exhausted with only his head out of the water. There he lay a few minutes, panting. Just his white face showed, ghostly in the wan changing light that waxed, that waned, as scudding clouds revealed and then obscured the burnished disk of silver in the black and frosty sky.

Presently, with reviving strength, he made another effort and succeeded in dragging himself up over the boulders, through the alders that fringed the stream, and so into a clump of bushes, where he once more fell inert and nerveless.

There he lay shivering, absolutely spent, but free, free, free! Coatless and bareheaded he lay, clad only in striped gray and black trousers and a worn shirt. Around his neck, held by their knotted cords, hung a pair of coarse, heavy prison shoes. Sudden with drizzling water, shaken by agonizing chills, he could make no further effort for awhile. To be still alive, alive and outside the walls of Sing Sing—that was enough.

After a certain time the man roused up a little and began to take note of his environment. He peered about him in the cold, hard moonlight that filtered down through the network of leafless branches all about and over him.

"Made it, didn't I?" he muttered. As if reaching out to lash him back into servitude and horror, the flails of the siren struck his senses. He smiled bitterly and spat toward the far prison.

"Blow and be damned to you!" he gibed. "You can burst your boilers blowing, but you'll never get me back there alive!"

Arthur Mansfield, heartened by this thought, found that in spite of his extreme exhaustion and the biting chill in the air his forces were returning. His body was still hard and strong. No excesses had ever sapped his great natural vigor. Though far below his normal condition he still had reserves of latent strength to call on. Even after the terrific struggle that had landed him on the west bank of the river a mile down town from the pen, he felt he still had force to get up again soon and fight his way along.

Peering through the bushes, he carefully observed the river and the eastern shore, took note of his surroundings, and began laying his plans for the next step toward complete liberty.

Far across the liquid barrier glimmered the lights of Ossining. Dominating them a searchlight whipped impatiently across the flood. A few little sparks were moving on the black waters. Mansfield smiled contentedly. Not with searchlights or with motor-boats would they ever find him now!

The first step, the hardest step of all, had successfully been taken. It had come sooner than he had quite expected, but he had recognized the opportunity and had grasped it; nothing simpler.

He smiled at thought of all the excitement that had exploded in the penitentiary when the ash-gang had been locked in. Eighteen men in stripes had loaded the scow. Only seventeen had gone back from the wharf. The eighteenth had seen the moment's chance, had slid noiselessly into the water, crawled under the piling, and there had left his hampering coat of woolen stuff. The early winter dark had favored him.

Before the alarm had been given he had been half way across, swimming strongly with his shoes slung about his neck. The simplicity of the thing had given him tremendous satisfaction, to add to the wild, maddening exultation of being once more—at last!—outside the numbing walls of granite, free, free, free!

That had been a fearful swim; the latter part of it a frantic fight for life

itself in the inky, freezing waters, which he had lashed to foam with gasping struggles to keep the pinpricked stars and sliding moon in sight. Toward the end desperation alone had kept him up. He had given himself up for lost; but even in that supreme moment the dominant thought had been:

"Liberty!" Enid had come as a transitory image; and his mother, too—now dead a year and resting from her sorrows; but neither of these had usurped that one wild surge of exultation:

"Liberty!" Let death come now if come it must. It would not find him in prison walls, at any rate. It would be out there under the sky, out in the free wind and water, merciful and well-beloved.

Then he had sunk—had struggled up again and thrashed his way along blindly, gasping and choking, but game to the end—and all at once his feet had touched the boulders of the shelving shore.

Arthur dismissed the struggle from his mind, and put the prison all away as if beneath contempt. He peered about him, rising on hands and knees to make reconnaissance of his present situation. So far as he could see no sign of human life or habitation was visible on the west shore. His entire prospect on the landward side of the clump of bushes was a sparse tract of woodland—birches, maples, and a few poplars, sloping gradually up from and away from the river.

No sign of man. And yet Arthur understood perfectly well that he was now in a rather densely populated section of New York State, networked with roads and wires, dotted with towns, villages and hamlets, highly organized for the pursuit and capture of just such fugitives as he—a dangerous locality, in short, far more perilous in all its seeming wildness than the crowded thoroughfares of New York City.

Arthur took counsel with himself. His plan so far had been successful. What next? Taving reached the west shore of the river somewhere in the vicinity of Rockland Lake what must yet be done to bring him to Staten Island, to Oakwood Heights, to the house of Walter Slayton, to the payment of the one great debt that he had sworn must and should be paid at once—at once, before any evil chance might possibly take from him all hopes of ever being able to pay it?

What was to be done? Arthur pondered. His present equipment was most inadequate for travel. In those striped trousers and that flannel shirt he could not hope to reach his goal. Wet through and chilled to the bone, cold alone would defeat him even did not arrest threaten him at every point.

And yet he made no change of clothing. No accomplice outside the prison had cached a handy bundle of raiment, as in the story-books. Such things always happened most conveniently in novels; but this was stern reality.

Arthur Mansfield now found himself shivering and freezing in a thicket by the river bank, on a frosty night of late November. The prospect was appalling. Yet his plan stood firm. His overmastering passion—revenge on Slayton—did not waver for a second. Long ago he had given up every hope of rehabilitating himself of ever seeing Enid again of ever re-entering the ranks of society as a normal man. Even to approach the girl would now be fatal. Identified, he would be instantly seized and rushed back to that living death, that inferno whose lights now flared the river, searching for him. Reincarcerated, terrible punishments would be meted out to him. He would be placed under special restraints and forever lose all hope either of pardon or escape again.

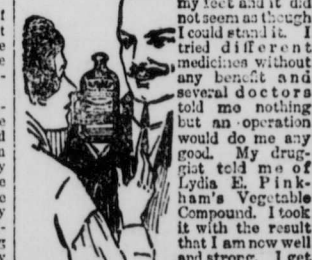
No! Come what might he must remain for all time a hidden, lurking, fleeing creature. Never again could

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he reappear as Arthur Mansfield. Disguises, ruses, flight might save him. Sufficient ingenuity and skill might keep him free. But it must be only as a vagabond, a hunted thing. Arthur Mansfield was dead. Another man was born in his place—another man, No. 3265, Escaped.

That man would live and die in the open. Living, he would never re-enter Sing Sing. With an oath Mansfield once more affirmed that determination. It steeled him against all contingencies. And beside it stood another—Slayton's death. That, too, was fully determined. Now that he was a fleeing, fugitive, lurking creature with "Murderer" written against his name, nothing remained to deter him from exacting with his own hands the justice that society had denied him. Swiftly he would take full payment for old Mackenzie's death and for the irreparable wrong Slayton had wrought on him.

Arthur put on his shoes, stood up and peered about him, still shivering. He saw nothing but woods to westward. Yet there, he knew, ran the West Shore Railroad, not very far away. His location was quite clear to him. Under a guise of studying geography in the prison he had long pored over maps of New York State and New Jersey; and as if photographed on his mind, he could behold the exact lay of the land.

To east of him spread the reaches of Tappan Sea. Two miles to westward was the railroad. But no stations on that line lay nearer than Haverstraw, ten miles north, or Orangeburg, twelve miles south. Between stations he could not hope to jump a freight. So far as the main line was concerned there was "nothing doing."

On the Nyack branch, however, Nyack itself the terminus—lay only three miles down the river. The place would certainly be watched and watched would be kept for him, but it was his only opportunity. By holding through the woods or striking into the road he knew must be a little distance west of him he could not miss the town. Darkness favoring, he might possibly raid some house or store for clothing and find the friendly shelter of a box-car. A desperate chance indeed—but his only one.

Arthur, peering intently, advanced slowly through the thicket down-stream. Everything spoke of calm, peace and quietude—everything save that infernal bellowing of the siren, echoing across the bosom of the river. No breeze stirred the black and leafless twigs and branches of the wood. A little crisp snow crunched here and there underfoot. The moon, more obscured by thickening clouds, now showed only as bright a blur in the heavens, once and again glimpsing forth only to be quickly hidden by the drifting vapors that, moved by some current high in air, lagged toward the open sea. A light or two moved silently on the waters; and far away, mirrored in long lines, other lights from the habitations of men at peace, men unafraid, not hunted like wild animals, vaguely streaked the surface.

A star whistled caught Arthur's ear. He stopped, looked, saw a speeding string of little bright dots—a train, racing down the east shore to New York.

"That'll be in New York in an hour or less," he pondered with bitterness. "I wonder if I'll ever see it."

The thought infused fresh energy into his shivering body and chilled heart. Yes, by heaven! He would make his goal—Staten Island—if it cost him his life! With new strength and courage, though with the most extreme caution, he once more crept forward.

Some few minutes he thus made his way through the forest. Still nothing threatened. At this rate, he knew, inside of an hour he would come upon the cleared land, the farms, the outlying suburbs he knew must fringe the town. By seeking a road to westward he could advance much faster; but caution kept him to the woods. Every country road and lane might already be guarded. They were all bound to present greater dangers than the forest. Lacking any confederate to pick him up in a motor car or in a launch and hurry him away to safety, he must depend on his own wits and energy.

He still had many hours of night ahead of him. The cold was numbing his very heart, but somehow he did

not mind it much. The fires of his purpose and his hate kept him warm. And the intensity of his listening, peering through the gloom, watching for every sound or sign of discovery, prevented him from dwelling on his physical distress.

Thus Arthur advanced. Twenty minutes passed—half an hour perhaps. Silence reigned. The bellowing of the prison siren had stopped, its cessation seeming to leave a vast, grateful emptiness in the night.

Arthur felt much stronger now, and more confident. Even the moderate exercise of moving through the wood had warmed his chilled blood. Hope of success began to loom big in front of him. Yes, surely he would make Staten Island; he would come to grips with Slayton; he would drink his fill of justice. After that—what could anything matter?

Suddenly he stopped. Ahead of him, vague, dim, and black, loomed something through the trees.

A house, was it? Yes; certainly a house.

Inhabited? No telling. Arthur crouched down amid the bushes, peering, listening, spying. Not a sound. No light. No sign of any life.

After a while the fugitive crawled forward slowly on hands and knees through the snow, through the dead dried ferns and crackling weeds and bushes. Every few feet he stopped to batten and to watch. But still nothing seemed to threaten. And thus, after a pretty long time, he came close up to the building and recognized quite surely that it was abandoned of men.

Cautiously he crept about it, inspecting it from all sides by the uncertain light of the moon, now very wan and

Again fortune favored him. In a corner he found a pair of trousers. Grouping on hands and knees, he discovered this precious boon. The trousers were worse than the coat; but at any rate they were not striped with the black and gray of penal servitude. Lying close beside them was a greasy derby with liberal ventilation through the crown. Arthur crammed it on to his clipped head and laughed for joy.

He understood now the prison-warden's shutter, the remnants of muck in the kettle, the cast-off clothing, and the absence of any better ones.

"Heaven bless the hobo that snatched here!" he exclaimed with inexpressible gratitude.

(To Be Continued)

THE BUSINESS WOMAN

To-day, more than ever before, is woman's opportunity. Many new occupations are now opened to her, which, before the war, she was deemed unfitted to fill. And truth to tell she has risen to the opportunity, and now shares many business responsibilities in former times confined to men. But, as women are subject to more frequent fluctuations of health than men, many will be handicapped early, if they regard their health requirements too lightly.

The nervous strain, long hours and prolonged mental or physical fatigue thin the blood and weaken the nerves. Such conditions as women are now called upon to undergo can only be endured by a full-blooded constitution. This is as true for men as for women, only weaker women suffer sooner. The woman worker, in any line, requires her blood replenished frequently. She needs new-rich blood to keep her health under the trying conditions of business life, and to fortify her system against the effects of overwork. This applies also to the woman in the home, who, perhaps, has more worries and anxieties than usual. So let all girls and women take heed and renew their blood promptly at the first approach of pallor, lack of appetite, headache or backache. This can be best and most effectively accomplished by taking Dr. Williams' Pink Pills, which make new, rich blood and thus help woman kind so perfectly. No women need fear failure of health if they take these pills occasionally to keep them well, or give them a fair trial if they find themselves run down.

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Holds the Carbon Paper.

The carbon sheet enters so largely into the accounting systems at the present time that there has been a demand for some means of handling it without getting its sticky coating on the fingers and clothing. There is hardly a store of any importance where the use of the carbon paper is not resorted to as a means of keeping tabs on the activities of the salespersons, but these sheets are generally noted as a nuisance, because they are heavily loaded with the transfer material, they leave their mark on everything with which they come in contact. The new idea contemplates securing the sheet on a roller in order that it may be cut off the way when arranging the sheets on which the copy is to be made, and when the copying sheet is desired, it may be pulled into place. The carbon sheet is always under entire control in this manner, and it is also maintained in good condition for use when there is demand for its services.

Monkeys Use Flies.

Braebm, in his "Thierleben," tells how certain kinds of monkeys emphasize their feelings by striking with their fists, when angry or excited they bring their fists down upon the ground with all their might. They are not quite as foolish as the men who hammer the table with their fist. They have this excuse; they are looking for a stone or stick with which to crack the skull of their dissembling fellow-monkey.

Th high-bred fear of giving offence is of all fears the noblest.—Blackmore.

It is fine for cleaning cans—says the dairyman

Comfort Lye