

**SMOKE T&B TACKETTS**



PLUG

# 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-Detector," etc.

"What — for Heaven's sake, what are you people trying to put over on me, anyhow?" he managed to exclaim huskily.

For the first time now some glimmer of suspicion had begun to dawn in his taciturn mind of the gaping abyss, the yawning pits and snarls laid ready for his feet.

"What are you driving at, anyhow?" he demanded again. "You — you aren't trying to — make out that —"

"Driving at?" smiled Roadstrand, dangerously suave all of a sudden. "Why, nothing except the truth. That's all we're striving for—to elucidate the truth from all this mass of confusing details. The truth, nothing less and nothing more. You surely can't take exception to that, can you?"

Speaking, he had fixed his eyes keenly on the boy's coat. He seemed to be studying the buttons there. A peculiar look came into his eyes.

"Just as I thought," he muttered. "Precisely as I thought!"

Arthur, too confused to answer anything, too violently shaken by the new and horrible suspicions that now, like sudden tempests, were whirling and ravaging about his head, stood there peering at him as a trapped rat will sometimes peer at its captor. His face twitched, especially the mouth, and on his forehead a few little glistening drops of sweat began to appear. He put out his left hand and took hold of the back of the chair where Sheridan, his only friend, had been sitting.

Thus for a moment silence came again upon that group of helms, between whom and around whom the lines of destiny were drawing with a savage, ever-increasing tension. And in that moment, through the revolving doors of the bank, two figures entered — entered, and came into the lobby; stopped there, looked about, and once again came forward.

**CHAPTER XIII.**

One was the Hon. Edward Bruce Chamberlain, president of the bank, a man of about sixty-five, gray and rather markedly wrinkled, yet of military bearing, keen of eye, alert of mind, confident of manner.

The other, Enid Chamberlain, gave one an impression of sunshine and spring, even on this dull, gray November morning, of warmth and life and happiness. One could hardly see her clearly as yet, for the screened windows of the bank shut out the daylight and the electric lights seemed but pale and ineffective; but one could

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Chamberlain laid a hand on the girl's arm.

"Sit down here, Enid," he bade her, "and wait for me. I'll find out about Arthur. Don't be troubled, my dear. Everything will be all right!"

Enid, nervously twisting her long white gloves together, sat down in a deep leather chair in the little alcove reserved for women, glanced about her, bit her lip, tapped her foot on the carpet, and in a dozen ways showed extreme distress. The glances of admiration that — despite their worry — two or three employees could not help leveling at her, fell unnoticed from her shield of indifference. Only one thought possessed her now:

"Where is Arthur?"

Where was Arthur, indeed? On the brink of the pit! On the sheer edge of the abyss that has no bottom and no end. There he was standing, clutching in desperation at any hold and finding none!

Out of the vague and formless vapors seeming to rise from that depth he seemed to hear a voice speaking to him again. And the voice said:

"Is that your letter-opener?"

He stared at a bright metal object, blinked, and made no answer.

"I examine that letter-opener, Mansfield," said the voice. "It is broken, you see. The broken end was found in the lock of Mr. Slayton's top drawer. That was where he kept the combination of the safe. On the handle of this utensil you will observe all right the initials 'A. M.' Kindly tell me — does that letter-opener belong to you?"

Mansfield nodded. Useless now to combat that even, horrible, betraying voice. Helplessly he looked at Roadstrand, whose face had now also emerged from the mists.

"Yes," he said in a flat tone. "It's mine. But how it got broken—"

"No matter about that. Later such matters can be discussed. It's yours; that's enough for now. Doctor, enter the data. Letter-opener acknowledged also before witness. Exhibit B."

"And now," the coroner continued, "now finally here is a button. This button was found near the body of Mackenzie. Do you recognize the button, Mansfield?"

He laid it on the table close before the shivering boy. Arthur stared at it unseeing.

"Off his sleeve," whispered Slayton, pointing.

The doctor, rising, pulled the sleeve around into full view under the electric cluster in the ceiling.

"One button is gone, you see," the cashier remarked. "And — well, you can see for herself; this one matches the other two, there."

Unable to make any answer, on the ragged edge of collapse, Mansfield stood there, hanging on to the chair.

"It's yours, isn't it?" leaped Slayton, with malice. "Maybe you can explain how it came to be found beside the body of the murdered man, and—"

"Gentlemen! Gentlemen! What is this? For Heaven's sake, what does this mean?"

Slayton, half starting from his chair, faced the door, on oath on his pale lips. In the doorway stood President Chamberlain, peering at the strange scene with eyes that, unable to believe their testimony, seemed to understand nothing.

"What does this mean, gentlemen?" repeated the old man.

He raised a trembling forefinger, pointing it at Mansfield.

"What is this? What—?"

"My dear Mr. Chamberlain!" exclaimed the cashier, and flung a protesting hand outward at him. "I beg you—"

"You aren't accusing Arthur, are you?" demanded the old gentleman, taking a step forward. "Not that! Not that!"

Roadstrand stood up so suddenly

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**TORONTO**

that his chair clattered over backward.

"Mr. Chamberlain," he cried, "we are accusing nobody! If there is any accusation, the hard, cold facts of the case are making it!"

"They're all lies, lies, lies! Foul, horrible lies!" cried Mansfield, turning toward Chamberlain. "They've got some — some kind of frame-up on me here!"

His voice rose wild and trembling; his hand vibrated at the table.

"Look at that there, will you? They say I broke into Slayton's desk with that letter-opener and took the cipher of the combination! They say I shot Mackenzie!"

"Shot Mackenzie!" cried Chamberlain. "You? Father above! You — shot—"

"They say so! They—"

"The facts say so!" interposed the doctor, also rising.

"Fact, be damned!" cried the boy in a wild outburst of passion. "I know what I know! I never was in this bank last night! I went home to my room—"

"After threatening to kill me in my house if I didn't give him money to make good his thefts!" shouted the cashier, in a white heat.

"Arthur! You—you've been stealing!"

"Yes, by Heavens! I have! But murdering? No, no, no! But they're trying to put it over on me, just the same. They've got one of my gloves and put blood on it, and they've put a button off my coat beside the body, and — and now they're claiming—"

"Arthur!"

At the girl's cry of anguish everybody faced the door. They got a glimpse of a pale, wild face, of outstretched hands, of eyes that stared in terror. Then the old man whirled toward his daughter, arms outspread, to shut away the sight of that terrible room from her.

"No, no, Enid!" he cried. "You mustn't come in here! You mustn't—"

"Arthur! Arthur! What are they doing to you? Oh, what are they doing—"

"Enid! You believe me, anyhow, don't you? As I live I never killed Mackenzie!"

"Killed him? Killed him? They say you—"

"No, no, no, no!"

And the old man, seizing his daughter by the wrists, held her back as she would have run to Arthur with open arms of trust and comfort.

"None of that now, Enid! No scene here!"

He forced the girl back, away, out of the room. The door closed behind them both. From without came sounds of anguished sobbing.

Three or four men started toward Chamberlain and Enid. Pale with rage and resentment, Sheridan ran to the old man.

"Of all the rotten frame-ups ever spawned," he cried, "this is the—"

Chamberlain raised a trembling hand in protest.

"Water, quick!" he entreated. "I think Enid's going to faint!"

Inside the room sudden battle had flamed into fire. Now Arthur was smashing into all three men.

"Go on! Arrest me!" he shouted. "You, Slayton, perjure your infernal soul! But I'll give you something to remember first!"

His fist cracked like a pistol-shot on Slayton's lantern jaw. The murderer, cursing, plunged headlong across the table, strewing the exhibits right and left.

"Come on, you!" defied Arthur, the lust of battle in his blue eyes, which now had cleared again. "You've got me framed up, all right—but I'll land a few good wallops before you get me!"

Roadstrand lunged at him just as the doctor closed in from behind. Arthur parried the blow and drove home hard with his left. Before he could swing on the doctor that wiry person had flung an arm about his neck, unbalancing him and dragging him down.

Unmindful of discipline, bookkeepers, clerks, and reporters came crowding. In the door appeared a policeman, stick in hand.

Holding his dazed head, which rang and echoed with Arthur's blow, Roadstrand shouted:

"Officer! Your duty!"

The stick, descending, crashed a shower of sparks through Arthur's hair. All strength Enid abandoned his tense body. His head drooped forward; his arms relaxed; his legs, doubling beneath him, let him slip down to the carpet of the disordered room.

Then consciousness lapsed. Insensibility drew the mercy of its pall across his agony.

The trap so cleverly, so malevolently set by Walter Haynes Slayton, cashier, had sprung at last.

And in its jaws—mangled, helpless, doomed—lay Arthur Mansfield.

**CHAPTER XIV.**

Only three persons in a whole world of accusers arose to defend Arthur Mansfield. One was the boy's mother, one, ex-Teller Sheridan, of the bank, the third, Enid Chamberlain.

Of all strength Enid proved the only effective force to stay the torrent of prejudice and falsehood now sweeping him away to death. In spite of all her father's protests, she stood boldly for his champion. Chamberlain's arguments fell broken before her absolute faith in the accused man.

On the evening of the day after the arrest the old banker returned home to the big house on Riversdale Drive after a long and painful conference with the brilliant criminal-law firm of Hillis & Ballantyne—a conference that convinced him more than ever that the criminal could not possibly be any other than Mansfield himself.

Up in Enid's warm, firelit bedroom, where the girl felt most at home and where she loved best to sit, the banker found her. As she came to meet him he saw with a pang how

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white her face had grown. A picture of Arthur on her dressing-table, a withered flower, a few mementoes of happier days, told Chamberlain much.

His heart went out to her in pity and love. The blow of this crime, the horrible campaign of sensationalism, it had engendered, the shattering of Enid's happiness, had staggered him. And yet he felt that truth was truth, and that to face it honestly with her was best.

"Enid," said he, laying a hand on her shoulder. "I've just come from talking with Hillis & Ballantyne. I've got a deal to tell you. I want you to listen to me sensibly and bravely, as your mother would have done. We must see where we stand and what's to be done. We're facing a sad problem, my girl—a sad, heavy problem."

The girl looked at him understandingly with pity that for a moment lessened her own suffering. Chamberlain's shoulders had drooped into an unaccustomed curve. In the two days since the murder ten years seemed to have weighted him with a burden that never grows lighter—old age. His eyes showed dull and lifeless in the glow from the fireplace, and under them the skin was pouched as never before. For the first time in his active, vigorous life Edward Bruce Chamberlain looked his years.

He sat down heavily in a big leather chair, and motioned the girl to sit down, too. For a minute he kept silence, soothed and rested by the warm light of this upper room.

"Horrible affair!" he exclaimed suddenly. "Wreckage of everything! And the infernal publicity and sensationalism—brutal, hideous!"

"Nothing matters, father," she answered, "so long as Arthur is innocent."

He shook his head.

"He isn't, Enid. He isn't!"

"You mean you think—"

"I mean, Enid, if you insist on asking me in plain words, that I believe Arthur is guilty. And in saying so I am voicing the opinion of two of the best criminal lawyers in New York. For three hours to-day they went over all the available evidence with me. At the end of that time I could reach no other conclusion than that Arthur really did it, and that in all probability he will have to pay the full penalty."

"You don't mean—they can—"

"The evidence is conclusive."

She looked defiantly at Chamberlain.

"The evidence! What does that matter? You may know all about that and everything, but I—I know Arthur!"

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear," he protested, "that attitude is irrational and can only harm both Arthur and yourself. Much as I have liked the boy and built upon your happiness and his, nevertheless, I can use my reasoning faculties. The facts prove Arthur guilty, and justice must be done. Why, my dear, they've found the very gun that killed old Mackenzie! They've even recovered the bullet. The gun is Arthur's, and—"

"It can't be!" she denied, passionately.

(To be continued.)

Possibly the aviator is called an ace because he is the high card.

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