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## 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-Detecter," etc.

"This is what I took out of it," said he. From his waistcoat pocket he produced a pointed bit of steel.

"That was broken short off in the lock," he explained, turning it in his wily fingers. "What do you make of it?"

"It looks like a paper-cutter or something of that sort," judged the cashier. "Now, if you could only find the rest of it, you'd have some mighty valuable evidence—evidence, I should say, that ought to convict."

"We have found it already," smiled Roadstrand.

As he spoke he drew the broken letter-opener from his upper vest pocket. "Now, whose is it?"

"Where did you find it?" would have believed.

"In a gray coat hanging near the assistant bookkeeper's desk."

"A gray coat?" Slayton exclaimed. "What's that? Homes? I never 'Don't get excited," cautioned Roadstrand, while the doctor intently rubbed his snarled chin. "The mere fact that it was in a certain man's pocket doesn't prove it belongs to that man. In fact, it might rather prove the contrary. The opener might have been dropped into that coat pocket as a blind. Look at it, please, and see if you can identify it."

He handed it to Slayton. As the cashier took it he felt his heart thump violently. Now that the first opportunity had arisen to make any direct accusation, he found his nerves were jumpy as a cat. Desire whispered: "Advance directly and with boldness."

Caution bade: "Not yet! Go slow!"

And caution won. Shaking his head, he answered:

"I can't tell whose it is. There are several in use here. They're all pretty much alike. Do you recognize it, Sheridan?"

He gave the broken opener to the teller. Sheridan scrutinized it beneath the handle here."

"What's that 'A. M.' scratched in bent brows, then looked up sharply.

"A. M.," demanded Slayton. "Is there an 'A. M.'?"

"See?"

Sheridan pointed. Yes, there the letters were rudely scratched, as with a penknife in an idle moment.

"A. M.," sure enough," said the cashier. "Why, there's Moore; but his first name is 'Edward,' and there's

there's nobody else except—well—"

"Mansfield?" demanded the doctor.

Slayton nodded.

"What's his first name?"

"Arthur."

The silence that followed was vast in its potentialities. Roadstrand broke it.

"I think," said he, "we'd better have a little talk with that young man."

### CHAPTER XII.

Slayton regarded the coroner for a pregnant moment without a word. Then, leaning forward across the table, he forced himself to look Roadstrand fair in the eyes.

"You mean—" he whispered, tensely.

"C. J. Mansfield?"

The cashier's heart surged with excitement. A dizzying sweep of joy surged over him. Already he had forgotten the accused possibilities dormant in those white hairs found in Mackenzie's stiffened hand. He motioned to Sheridan.

"Get Mansfield," he repeated the order.

The teller rose, stood there a moment beside the table, and, reading his knuckles on the wood, looked first at Roadstrand, then at Nelson.

"Gentlemen," said he slowly, "as far as that boy's concerned I'll take my oath—"

"No matter about your oath," snapped the coroner angrily. "Your oath isn't worth a cuss in this case. Here's evidence that points directly at him. His appearance this morning is damaging. Things would look black for the angel of Gabriel himself with that kind of proof against him. We want to talk with this Mansfield fellow. Bring him in here right away."

"All right; but you're making a fearful mistake, just the same," reported Sheridan with some heat. "That kid's as square and white as—"

"Can that?" exclaimed Roadstrand. Slayton snapped peremptory fingers.

"Are you going to get him, or shall I?" he demanded.

The teller, yielding to authority, turned and walked reluctantly toward the door. But he did not open it. Instead, he faced round, stood there motionless, and directed a keen, suspicious glance at Slayton—a glance by no means lost on the cashier.

"I'll be damned if I will!" he suddenly exclaimed. "That boy's got no more to do with it than I have. I'm not going to be the bearer of any such message to him. I won't be a party to any such accusation, even to the extent of summoning him in here."

Slayton laughed heartily.

"You're a fool, Sheridan!" he snarled out. "Suit yourself, though. It doesn't matter. But I tell you right now your attitude is liable to be misconstrued."

"What do you mean?" demanded the teller, clenching his fist. "Are you insinuating—"

"Sit down and shut up!" commanded Slayton. "Or else get out!"

Their eyes met angrily. Sheridan, ever desirous of being present in Arthur's behalf at the interrogation, subsided. He came back and sank down into his chair by the table again.

"That's all right," he growled. "But I know Arthur, and I know he's straight. And if you mean to infer that I—"

Slayton reached out and pressed a push-button at the side of the table. A buzzer sounded outside. Parker the messenger, started up as if the current had passed through his body and came to the door of the directors' room. He opened it and stood there, pale and scared—but no more frightened than every living soul out there in the offices and cages, waiting in terror for the catastrophe that might strike where it would like lightning.

"Tell Mansfield we want him," bade Slayton.

"Yes, sir!"

And Parker departed, vastly relieved that the finger of accusation had not been levelled at him. He stopped by Mansfield's desk.

"They want you in there," said he with rare tact. "I guess you're in bad."

"What?" asked Mansfield dully. "Who wants me?"

"They do—in there!"

Parker jerked his thumb over his shoulder.

"What for?"

"Search me!"

"They didn't say what for?"

"Go on, sez," the messenger answered coldly. "guess you know, all right, all right!"

A confused murmur rose in the bank. With a suspicion everybody was eying Mansfield. He stood up, blinked for a moment, and looked first one way, then the other. Somewhat dazed, he turned to Parker.

"In there, you mean?" he queried.

"In the directors' room?"

"Uh-huh! An' you better be on your way, too. They don't act as if they was very patient."

Mansfield, moving as if in a dream, slowly started toward the room down the gridded passageway. A score of hostile eyes followed his every step with cold analysis and condemnation.

"Thumbs down!" the verdict was already before a single bit of evidence had been given them.

The boy, his mind wholly occupied with the disaster that had come upon him through Slayton's treachery—for no slightest suspicion of any greater peril had even so much as occurred to him—lunged his head and sagged along, pallid, disheveled, haggard. Eagerly the others watched him as he passed that grim, sawdust-covered spot on the tiles.

No sign there? He gave none. He showed no repulsion, quivered not with horror of the place.

"The sounder!" muttered Parker, frowning blackly. "Hard as a rock! There's a nice, mild character for you: what a guilty as sin, and never bats an eye!"

Mansfield, oblivious to all this hostility—or, if subconsciously noting it, attributed it only to his theft, which now must surely be known—reached the door of the directors' room. He paused there a moment to gather himself together, a little. Then, very pale, but with his jaw hard-closed, his eyes half questioning, half defiant, he swung the door and entered.

"You sent for me?" he questioned huskily. "Well, I'm here."

"Yes, so we observe," Mansfield, answered Roadstrand with a grim smile. "Come in and shut the door. We want to ask you a few questions."

"All right! I'm ready."

"What is it you want to know? I'm ready. I won't hide anything. It wouldn't do any good, anyhow. Mr. Slayton here knows all about it. I thought he was going to help me—"

He closed the door and advanced the cashier. "I warn you now you'll gain nothing by lying."

"But you did promise! Last night! You won't deny that, will you?" demanded Arthur, amazed. "If you'd kept your word I could have—"

"No more of that now!" interrupted the coroner. "This isn't a wrangling match or a joint debate."

He turned to Slayton.

"In a word, what's this he says about you? What are the facts?"

Sheridan, an odd look in his eyes, leaned forward eagerly. The doctor squinted interrogatively through his spectacles. Slayton smiled with a glint in those white teeth of his.

"Mansfield called on me last night at about eleven-thirty," said he. "at my house in Oakwood Heights. He told me he was twelve hundred and fifty dollars short in his accounts, and asked me to lend him enough to cover the deficit. I refused and—"

"That's a lie!"

"Silence!" shouted the coroner. "You, Mansfield, keep still!"

"But he said—" persisted Mansfield.

"Sh-h-h-h, Arthur!" cautioned Sheridan, clapping him on the shoulder. "One at a time. Don't get excited. The facts will all come out in due course. Let him speak."

"All right," answered the boy. "But I know what I know!"

"I refused, of course," continued Slayton. "He entreated, but in vain. He even threatened me with an automobile pistol; but I held firm, and—"

"My Heavens, what infamy!"

"If you don't keep still, young man, I'll have you gagged!" roared the coroner in a passion. "Not another word till I tell you to speak! Understand?"

"Shall I continue or not?" demanded the cashier. "You understand, naturally, I can't give a connected narrative with these crude interruptions."

"Go on," directed Roadstrand. "Interruptions, eh? I'd like to hear him interrupt again. Go on!"

"I refused, and held to my refusal. He left me at about eleven-fifty. I think, and caught the midnight train to St. George. I read a while and then went to bed. That's all the direct testimony I can give. The rest is up to you."

"Thank you," said Roadstrand. "Very clear and very concise. That explains a number of things."

He turned to Mansfield.

"Now, then," he interrogated, "you admit the shortage?"

"Yes, sir. I'm not going to try to hide that, or anything."

"Is that amount correct—twelve hundred and fifty dollars?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why did you take it?"

"I—I can't tell."

"You refuse?"

"Positively!"

"Put that down, Nelson," directed

the coroner. "Make a note of that. He refuses to tell why he stole."

"Merciful Heavens, Arthur!" exclaimed Sheridan, in deep distress.

"What's this you say? You—you're really short? You took that much?"

"It's a fact, Mr. Sheridan. I admit it. Only I thought Mr. Slayton here was going to help me out. He promised to, but for some reason or other changed his mind. So now I'm in bad—right up against it."

He paused. Slayton's sneering laugh was more effective than an angry outburst. That laugh said:

"Oh, yes, indeed! I, Walter Slayton, the respectable—I would be likely to compound a felony, would I not? As likely as to commit a murder!"

Tense silence held the room in thrall. One could hear the boy's quickened breath. The ticking of the little alabaster clock on the mantel sounded strangely loud. For the space of five seconds no man spoke. Then all at once the coroner leaned forward, jabbing a finger at Mansfield.

"Remember now," said he, sharply, "anything you say here may be used against you. I'm a judge ex-officio. This is an official preliminary hearing."

"In that case," interposed Sheridan, "this boy must have counsel."

"Sit down and keep still," directed Nelson. "We're running this interrogation, not you."

"I'm within my rights as his friend to insist that he say nothing until he had been advised by a competent lawyer. I volunteer to produce such a one inside of five minutes."

"If you can't keep out of this, Sheridan," exclaimed the cashier, angrily, "you'd better leave the room."

"Order, here!" cried Roadstrand, rapping the table vigorously with his knuckles. "Now then, Mansfield, you needed money badly?"

"No, sir. Not any more than the twelve hundred and fifty dollars. And I'd have put that back all right, and made good if he hadn't double-crossed me."

"No more of that!" exclaimed the coroner, sternly. "We'll leave out all accusations. Don't bring anybody else into this. We're dealing with you, and you alone. You admit being at Oakwood Heights and having a pistol?"

"I—"

"Arthur!" exclaimed Sheridan, taking him by the arm. "See here! You don't know what you're saying. You're all balled up. They'll tangle you up here inside of five minutes so tight that Satan himself couldn't untangle you. You keep still now! I'm going to phone for a lawyer, and—"

"Silence!" shouted Roadstrand, turning quite purple in the face. "I simply will not and cannot have these interruptions! I've got authority here as much as I'd have in a court room. This interfering with a witness can't be tolerated, and shan't be. Go on now, Mr. Sheridan. Leave the room, and don't let's have any trouble about it."

Sheridan gasped with rage and clenched his fists, but Slayton now had risen and was facing him.

"Are you going to obey the legally constituted authorities of New York county, or shall we have to use force?" demanded Slayton. "There are two or three officers outside there. It's up to you!"

Sheridan turned on him with a snarl of passion, of loathing, of intense suspicion.

"Don't worry!" he exclaimed. "I'll go, all right. And, what's more, my resignation from this bank takes place immediately. No more job for me in a place that tolerates a skunk like you! So much for that."

"But there's another thing. You won't be through with me when I go out of that door. I'm going to watch this case right through to the end. I see how it's drifting and I'll watch it never fear. You're smooth, Slayton; you're oily, slick and suave. But you can't put anything over on me. So now you know. That's all for you!"

"Arthur!" and he seized the boy by the hand; "you take my advice. Don't let anything. Don't admit a single thing! Don't speak a word till you've seen a lawyer. That's within your constitutional right. Remember now—Heaven help you! Remember!"



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He released Arthur's hand and strode to the door.

"See here, you!" cried Roadstrand. "I think you'll bear a little watching. Not a step outside this building do you stir till the thing's settled. So don't try it. Now get out of here and stay out!"

"Don't you worry about my leaving," asserted the teller. "Next thing I know you'll be trying to put this over on me! All right; so to it. I'll stick till hell freezes, but I'll see justice done that boy!"

The door closed vigorously behind him. Pale with consuming anger, he returned to his desk, leaving Mansfield in the hands of the inquiry.

"Heavens! If he only remembers what I've told him!" muttered the teller. "If he only remembers and keeps still!"

Roadstrand, meanwhile, was exchanging a significant glance with the doctor.

"Extraordinary actions, I must say," he remarked, swabbing his face with his handkerchief—for anger always made him sweat. "That fellow will bear watching, believe me. It wouldn't surprise me if he—"

"You think so?"

"It's possible—as an accessory, you understand. We'll have tabs kept on him, at any rate. Now then!"

Arthur hesitated. His eyes sought the glass door through which Sheridan could now be seen, seated at his desk. Should he answer questions, or should he refuse, as Sheridan had told him?

"Come on, Mansfield! Speak up!" directed Slayton. "What did you do with that automatic after you left me?"

The boy gaped at him, amazed.

"What—what did I do with it?" he stammered, trapped into the damaging admission. "Why, nothing of course. Seeing that you took it away from me and put it in your desk drawer and kept it, how—how could I have done anything with it?"

The cashier smiled triumphantly.

"Don't lie, Arthur," he cautioned. "It can do no possible good. After you threatened me with that gun, in case I wouldn't help you—"

"After I—what?"

"You deny having threatened me?" demanded Slayton, rudely.

"It's a lie! I never!"

"You see, gentlemen," said the cashier, turning to the others, "we can't get anywhere with this fellow. He's more devious than an eel, he—"

"A rotten lie! I never so much as thought of threatening you!" exclaimed Arthur, stung into action by the lash of the false accusation. "You know it's a lie, too! I only said I'd kill myself if you couldn't help me out, and your promise—"

"Order!" cried the coroner. "This is no debating society. Let obvious you had a gun, anyhow. Now, where is it? What are you going to do with it?"

"He's got it!"

And Arthur jabbed an angry finger at the smiling cashier.

"He took it away from me. Told me not to be a fool, and all that. Put it in his desk drawer, and—"

"Nothing of the kind, gentlemen," affirmed Slayton. "When he left me he took it along. It's his word against mine. Choose for yourself. He came to me, confessed his theft, menaced me, and then when I had pacified him took himself off with the gun in his overcoat pocket—the right-hand pocket. I remember seeing him slip it in there."

A moment's silence, while Arthur, gasping with rage, could find no word to lay his tongue to. Then subtly a change of expression came across his features. His eyes narrowed slightly, his mouth hardened, and a dangerous glitter came into his pupils.

(To be continued.)

**TORONTO FAT STOCK SHOW**

The premium list for the Toronto Fat Stock Show which is held yearly at the Union Stock Yards, Toronto, will be ready on August 1st. It will be sent to applicants if they will write to the Secretary at the Stock Yards. This year large premiums are offered for classes of three steers, must be fed ninety days by the owner. The premium list is a most attractive one and a long list of entries is expected. This show is always a big success. This year the show will be held on December 5th and 6th.

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