

# THE STANDING ALIBI OF H. STANLEIGH STORME

(By Wm. Hamilton Osborne)

(Continued)

Storme waited until she had calmed down.

"I beg your pardon, Helen," he began; "I had forgotten about the burglary. It is just that and the train of thought through which it carried me, about which I had desired to speak. It is that which has unerved you. Poor little girl! I would that I had been here to protect you."

"The girl raised her head and looked at him with wide open eyes.

"Henry," she exclaimed, "Stanleigh! No—don't look at me while I talk—I can't stand it. Look at the fire. Look anywhere but at me."

He obeyed her. She went on, quietly enough now but with a strange intensity in her voice.

"Stanleigh, tell me, why is that you have been doing these things? Why do you commit these crimes?"

"Do these things?" exclaimed Storme. "What things—what crimes? What do you mean, Helen?"

Miss Dumont did not answer.

"Where were you?" she asked in measured tones, "at half past two last night—this morning, rather?"

Storme looked at her in surprise.

"Why," he returned, "at the Iroquois. I was there until three."

She nodded.

"I know that," she returned. "I know that you were supposed to be there, but where were you really? Do you know?"

Storme looked at her in a puzzled way.

"I was at the club—that's all," he answered.

She continued looking at him for a time and then uttered a little sigh which sounded like a sigh of relief. But she went on, nevertheless, in a hard, cold voice.

"You were not at the club last night, at two or half past two, H. Stanleigh Storme. You were here in this very house!"

Storme looked at her curiously.

"I—was—here, in this house?" he repeated in a dazed sort of way. "Is this house?"

"In this house," repeated Miss Dumont. "I saw you here."

Storme put his hand up to his head. He caught her by the arm.

"Tell me," he said with a queer look. "Did I come back? What did I do? Did the others—your guests—see me? Were they still here? Tell me about it."

"They were not here," returned she. "They had gone. You came later. A—burglar visited us last night, and you—"

"Did I—did I shoot him?" queried the man.

"Shoot him!" exclaimed the girl. "You were the burglar yourself—it was you who broke in and entered the house."

Storme looked at her for a moment as though he thought she had gone crazy. Then he started forward as if shot, and with his eyes starting from their sockets, and his arms waving wildly in the air, he threw himself into a chair and covered his face with his hands.

"Good God," he exclaimed brokenly, after a long while, "is that the thing I've come to—is that the secret of my life—my livelihood?"

### CHAPTER XIII.

#### A Dinner at the Club.

Livingstone Dreddlington was the swiftest thing in town. He was the spendthrift millionaire of the place. He flattered himself that he kept up the pace with the best of them.

"When I do a thing, Storme," he would say, "I do it, and don't you forget it."

But if Dreddlington kept up the pace, it was clear to him that Storme made it.

Storme had many admirers. Dreddlington of all those was the most ardent. He did the things and said the things that Storme did and said.

Storme, to him, was the essence of all that was chic and dashing and exclusively fashionable.

Some weeks now had elapsed since the great trial of the people versus H. Stanleigh Storme.

No one was more enthusiastic over the outcome than Dreddlington himself. It supplied him with an all-engrossing topic of conversation, and it furnished him with a mighty inspiration.

He would give a dinner on the most magnificent scale. Storme should be the guest of honor. It would be the talk of the town.

He consulted Storme about it. Storme acquiesced with delight.

He was appreciative and became enthusiastic about the thing. He even suggested some of the details of the affair.

It was to be a freak dinner on a breakfast scale; and more than all, a dinner unobscured by the great trial.

The invitations, which of course came out two weeks ahead of time, were freaks in themselves. They were in the shape of subpoenas to testify, with big read seals, and even the genuine signature of the county clerk.

The sheriff, a personal friend of both of the men, volunteered the services of one of his deputies to serve the invitations personally on the invited guests. This idea, as may be guessed from the weak, sickly humor it involved, was the idea of Dreddlington.

The newspapers, when they finished roasting the police department, took up the freak dinner for all it was worth.

They lauded it to the firmament. They printed facsimiles of the invitations and also of the menu, which had been designed in advance by Canon, the caricaturist. Canon was a member of the club; nevertheless he sent in his little bill to Dreddlington, and Dreddlington paid it on the spot.

Canon fixed up highly illuminated copies of the indictment, and the verdict of the jury, and the menu—the whole inclosed in a magnificent cover representing on the front the prisoner, Storme, in the act of breaking into a bank in a full dress suit, and on the back a striking likeness of the same gentleman in prison garb, ruefully contemplating the outlines of a nearby penitentiary.

The dinner cost Dreddlington one hundred dollars a cover, and there were fifty covers. The whole thing was stupid and boyish enough, but the newspapers considered it excruciatingly funny.

The town laughed at it and talked about it, and waited for it. To cap the climax, the host invited every man on the jury panel to attend—and every man attended.

The judge also was invited. These were Storme's suggestions—and he had good reasons for them.

The thing began at 10 o'clock. Everybody was on hand but Storme. He turned up five minutes late.

He had had an engagement he explained, and had had to hurry. He seemed breathless and out of sorts. The company sat down—fifty men in all.

"You're looking pretty pale tonight, Storme," remarked the sheriff in the middle of a course. "Are you ill? You look as pale as you did that night the bank was robbed, when you lost that five hundred to the judge."

Storme smiled and shook his head.

"I'm all right," he said. "I'm tired tonight—that's all."

"Well, your's most awful pale," repeated the sheriff. "And so you were that night."

There were few speeches. The guests, being all sorts and conditions of men were inclined to be a bit boisterous.

The sheriff, who didn't enjoy speech-making, rose from his chair and walked up and down the room. The dinner, of course, was about over. Storme was called upon. He rose, and as he did so his face grew paler than before.

"Gentlemen," he began in a hesitating voice, "there's something I have to say to you. Something of serious import. I—I have been, in a measure, sailing under false colors. I—"

He stopped, for the jury members at the other end of the table were squabbling among themselves and he could not make himself heard.

"Go on! Go on!" somebody cried. "Bully for Storme!"

"They had not comprehended the import of his words or what he meant. They took it for the start of one of Storme's usually witty speeches.

"Gentlemen," he resumed, "I—"

He stopped. The sheriff, roving restlessly around, had strolled over to the ticker. He held the tape listlessly in his hand for a short space of time.

Suddenly the instrument began to tick away like mad.

"Great Scott!" exclaimed the sheriff. "Hold on there, Storme. Say, you fellows, listen here. The First National was cracked tonight and four hundred and fifty thousand stolen from the vaults. That's a fact—look here if you don't believe it. Wait a minute."

He sprang to the telephone and called up headquarters.

"Tell us about it," he said to the man at the other end of the line. "It's the sheriff talking to you."

"It's that man Burke," he explained to the crowd, with his hand on his mouthpiece, the receiver at his ear. "Yes, tell us about it, Burke."

"Well," said Burke at the other end of the line, "it was done the same as down at Mordant's Bars sawed clean off. Window pane cut. Combination beat—an' four hundred an' fifty thousand gone. The coin was lyin' there to be sent out tomorrow. And so—"

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"Go on," responded the sheriff.

"Say," continued Burke. "I've got the man that did it clean to rights this time, sheriff, let me tell you that."

"Have you actually got him?" yelled the sheriff.

"No," said Burke, "I haven't actually got him, understand, but I saw him at work all right. He got away this time, too—how he did it is more than I know—but there's no mistake about the man, all right, all right—and there wasn't any mistake before, either, let me tell you."

"And the man?" queried the sheriff.

"Well," responded Burke, "if it ain't the devil—and I'm saying it ain't this time—if it ain't the devil, it's H. Stanleigh Storme."

The sheriff winked upon the crowd, who had not heard a word. "Good for you, Burke," he replied, "and I hope you jug him, too."

The sheriff rang off.

"Gentlemen," he exclaimed to the waiting crowd about him, "I have the honor to inform you that the First National Bank was cracked at ten minutes after one o'clock this morning to the tune of four hundred and fifty thousand dollars, and the man that did it—honor bright now, gentlemen, this is from Burke at headquarters—the man that did it is the man that's sitting there—H. Stanleigh Storme, forsooth."

A great shout of laughter went up from the guests.

"Speech! Speech!" they cried in glee.

But H. Stanleigh Storme, the guest of honor, did not join the general merriment.

He turned pale—much paler than at any time before.

"Great Scott," he muttered to himself, "how could I have foreseen this thing this time—how could I have guessed this would occur tonight?"

"Speech! Speech!" again they cried, his lips and began to speak. Suddenly he fell crashing across the table among the dinner plates—he had fainted dead away.

"By George," said the sheriff to the rest, "that's the only time I ever saw Storme take too much—but he's gone one this time allright."

He laughed and the crowd laughed with him.

**CHAPTER XIV.**  
The Second Charge.

Ridiculous as it seemed, and notwithstanding the whole town knew that H. Stanleigh Storme was at the great dinner at the time, the police proffered the second grave charge against the man.

And the grand jury, as in duty bound, indicted him once more.

The day of trial approached. Another judge had been selected—the first judge had declined to preside at a trial which in his opinion was little better than a farce.

The authorities were prosecuting and persecuting Storme with a vigor and persistence which puzzled the newspapers and the town.

The district attorney meant business this trip—that was clear. He was moving heaven and earth to convict his man.

And yet he was not altogether certain. Left to himself, as a public officer, it was a question whether he would have pushed the case in the face of public opinion. But it was a serious matter with the banks, and they were putting up a lot of money, and he could well afford to push the thing for all that it was worth.

The prosecution made a secret of its information and its movements. But this much leaked out—that the man who robbed the bank had been positively identified by two policemen, a county detective, and a private man employed by the Bnk—as no other than H. Stanleigh Storme.

He had, however, as on the prior occasion, skillfully eluded them. His operations from start to finish had been cleverly executed.

In fact, the man was a wonder from every standpoint. He seemed to understand the very essence of success.

He always worked alone, and he never left any trace. All that he did was to pounce suddenly upon a bank, rob it, and then disappear.

He had no accomplices to "peach" upon him—he laid no plans to betray him. When the police were at one end of the town he was at another.

He seemed naturally to know just the time to strike—he was a born burglar in every sense of the word.

Of course there was a mystery—the district attorney was making allowances for that. The city was a large one, and a mystery was a difficult thing to solve.

One half the town did not know the other half—the task would have been simple in a small place, but in a great city it was stupendous.

There was one thing, however, that the county prosecutor was determined to do if he could not convict H. Stanleigh Storme, he proposed at any rate to follow the mystery and to convict some one.

The counsel for the defence needed the little preparation. To him the whole thing was even more preposterous than on the former occasion. And the popular sentiment was with him from the start to the finish.

But H. Stanleigh Storme, who, of course, was out on bail, shut himself up for a few days and prepared his own defense in his own way. Saug and sanguine as he had been at every other time, he seemed worried now.

"Damn that fellow," he muttered to himself, "I'll get even with him if he tells. If he'd only keep his mouth shut. But he won't."

How serious the matter was to him, and how thoroughly he prepared himself for the ordeal, will be developed later. Day after day he sat by himself behind closed doors, mapping and planning out everything to suit himself.

He appeared at his club as usual—they had the utmost faith in him there.

He was careful to be seen in public places, and the smile never once left his face. His predicament made him more popular than ever.

The sheriff and the judge and the urymen would run across each other in the street.

"Well," one would say, "I suppose you're going down to prove an alibi for Storme."

Storme did not confine himself to inside preparation. He made a move that puzzled many people.

Quietly he called upon each tradesman with whom he kept an account and paid his bill, no matter what it was. He drew checks on all his bank accounts and delivered them to trust-brokers with instructions to draw out his accounts on a certain day and hour.

He carefully examined all his private papers and destroyed everything. The last thing he did before the day of the trial was to purchase a revolver of the very finest make. It was a seven shooter.

"I've never shot a man in my life," he muttered to himself, "but, by George, if I get caught like a rat in a trap, I'll shoot, not one, but seven, and then—"

And then he went to bed and slept all night—slept like a child.

**CHAPTER XV.**  
The Second Trial Begins.

The trial that the district attorney really intended to have was not until the day before the understood the situation.

He had been mystified before although he had put up a bold front and kept a stiff upper lip. But on the day before the trial he received a bulky letter many pages long, written in a masculine hand.

It was signed "Wesley Warburton," a name hitherto unknown to him.

The prosecutor shut himself up in his private office and read the letter. It took him more than half an hour. When he had read it once, he turned back to the first page and started in again.

It occasioned him considerable surprise, and more delight. He buttoned it up in his breast pocket and kept mum, very mum, about it.

The courtroom, as was to be expected, was packed to the doors. The crowd was on hand long before any of the actors in the drama that was to be played.

The jurors in the former trial, and in fact all the fifty guests of the Dreddlington dinner, occupied a large space in the center of the room. Each man among them had been subpoenaed by the defense.

It was not until five minutes of ten that Storme appeared. His countenance was ruddy, and he glanced around and smiled as though he were naught but an interested spectator.

He never looked to better advantage than he did on this occasion. Notwithstanding his unconcern, however, he kept anxiously glancing toward the door from time to time.

The district attorney followed, shook hands with the prisoners counsel, and bowed formally to the prisoner.

The judge was the last to enter. When he entered everybody rose. "Morning, gentlemen," he responded curtly, with a sprt of side nod to the assembled audience.

"Call the case," he commanded before he had even reached his seat. "People against H. Stanleigh Storme," the clerk announced.

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