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THE ALIBI

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

With some strange cynicism of mockery Fate had ordered that this cursed object should drop from the cashier's pocket and that it should now have fallen into the hands of the enemy. Probably at the moment when Slayton had drawn the searchlight from his pocket he had also pulled out the wig and let it fall.

Now there it was an absolutely damning bit of evidence against him. Without it some slight chance of escape by clever ruse and dodging might still have existed. With it no hope whatever could possibly be conceived. Slayton's whole salvation depended on the alibi that Mansfield could be forced to give him. But with that wig in evidence the entire defensive case would drop apart like a rotten fabric.

Slayton felt suddenly very sick. He could imagine the impending scene, the investigation, the disgrace, the anguish of his wife, the horrible penalties already surely hanging over him. He seemed as if meshed in the hideous complications of a nightmare; and yet he knew that this thing was only too terribly, to inescapably real.

Even at this minute if he could get out of the bank and away unseen that accused wig of his would damn him. Not only would it start a train of thought in Mansfield's active brain—a train that would be fatal to him—but it would inevitably start investigations that could only have one ending. The wig could not fail to be identified as his property. So long as that damnable wig were not recovered the future could mean absolutely nothing for Slayton except prison stripes, barred windows, utter ruin, endless and infamous years of torment.

Another and a different passion all

A NERVOUS BREAKDOWN

When the Blood is Out of Order the Nerves Are in a Starved Condition.

The nerve system is the governing system of the whole body, controlling the heart, lungs, digestion, and brain; so it is not surprising that nervous disturbances should cause acute distress. The first stages of nervous debility are noted by irritability and restlessness, in which the victims seem to be oppressed by their nerves. The matter requires immediate attention, for nothing but suitable treatment will prevent a complete breakdown. The victim, however, need not despair, for even severe nervous disorders may be cured by improving the conditions of the blood. It is because Dr. Williams' Pink Pills actually make new rich blood that this medicine has cured extreme nervous disorders after all other treatment had failed. The nerves thrive on the new blood made by these pills; the appetite improves; digestion is better; sleeplessness no longer troubles the former nerve-shattered victim, and life generally takes on a cheerful aspect. Every sufferer from nerve troubles, no matter how slight, should lose no time in giving Dr. Williams' Pink Pills a fair trial, thus regaining their old-time health and comfort. Mrs. Victor Booth, Parry Sound, Ont., offers proof of the value of Dr. Williams' Pink Pills in nervous troubles. She says: "Some years ago I was taken ill with typhoid fever. The attack was not a severe one and after a few weeks I was ground again. But I did not recover my former strength, and my nerves began to give me trouble. The trouble went on from one stage to another until finally St. Vitus dance developed. I was under the care of our family physician, but my condition appeared to be growing worse. It was at this stage I decided to try Dr. Williams' Pink Pills, and after taking a couple of boxes I could see they were helping me. I continued taking the pills until I had used eight boxes when my health was fully restored, and I have since continued to enjoy that blessing. I have recommended the pills to others, and I always keep them in the house, having proved their great value."

You can get Dr. Williams' Pink Pills through any dealer in medicine or by mail at 50 cents a box or six boxes for \$2.50 from The Dr. Williams' Medicine Co., Brockville, Ont.

at once was born in the cashier's chilled heart—the primal instinct, deepest rooted of any in the universe—self-preservation.

Now, all at once, a staggering choice had been flung up at Slayton—the choice of certain punishment or of some possibility in risking far, far more than he might win complete freedom.

And like cloud-wrack before the breath of tempest all the cashier's sympathy against murder vanished. He knew in a flash that Mackenzie must die.

Must die if he, Walter Slayton, were to live!

Once more his hand sought his pocket. It closed there on the corrugated butt of Mansfield's automatic. Frazzled his fingers clutched this harbinger of quick salvation.

He realized that the shot would be easy. The distance was not over twenty-five feet at the outside. He could fire through the big steel bars with perfect ease. He could not miss.

Steadily now with nerves of ice and nerves of iron, steadily silently, rigid with purpose, he withdrew the weapon. He poised it, ready, waiting, eager; and as his fixed forefinger tightened on the trigger he smiled again. This time the smile was of joy.

Never had Slayton felt so great a thrill of happiness. The touch of that gun to his hand was a benediction. Down came the grim snout of the pistol—down, down, along the edge of the safe-door. Steady it held, and truly, perfectly aimed against that massive rest. The barrel, as it found its mark, froze to accurate position there.

Slayton's heart, which had been intruding rather wildly, now once more was beating with normal pulsation. An extraordinary calm, poised and highly efficient, had succeeded the cashier's earlier motion. With businesslike precision he drew a careful head on the dark blot of the old man's form, vaguely outlined by the reflection of the search-light's little beam.

His gloved finger tightened, tightened still more.

All at once Mackenzie made up his mind to act. He turned, ready to go. The crash of the report, though loud, seemed less so than Slayton had expected. Quick echoes snapped back at him. Then all grew still again.

Silent, eager, perfectly self-possessed, he waited, giving ear for any sound of danger. He heard none. Old man Mackenzie's form had vanished. No groan arose, no cry, no murmur. All was silent as the grave.

Ice-cold, calm, watchful, the cashier stood there, the pistol still in hand. Was Mackenzie merely shamming? Had the shot really taken effect? Or was some ruse in preparation? Slayton could not tell. But with wily astuteness he waited.

If no hollow man had happened to be in the vicinity he knew that a good chance existed that the single shot might have passed unnoticed. There was more than a good chance. The detonation, could not have carried far, bounded in, as it had been, by those thick walls of masonry.

A minute he remained there—two minutes—three; and each was an eternity.

Nothing.

No sound. Not a breath. Absolute silence still reigned, interrupted only by the nervous click! of the electric chronometer.

Then Slayton advanced. Through the door of the great steel cage he passed, and entered the gridded runway where Mackenzie had stood.

Suddenly he stopped.

"Get him!" he ejaculated.

The electric light, falling from Mackenzie's hand, and rolled to one side and stopped there. Now its single eye or radiance was fixed on a terrible something, motionless and grim. A something that, half-glimpsed, set the hair bristling along Slayton's nape, stopped his breath and racked him again with sudden chills.

A something of his making; a something that silently cried out against him with a terrible, still voice, never again to be put away or forgotten, never again to be shut out from him, any more.

A something that he trembled to approach; that he dared not see; yet which, with resistless force, grappled him toward itself.

A something—

Death!

Right in the light-circle of the lamp the dead face lay, appealing in its supreme helplessness, with glazing eyes uprolled, with gray hair blood-dabbled.

Slayton shoved his pistol back into his pocket. He felt a certain pride through it all that his shot had been so extremely effective. Yet horror overbore all other sensations. He moved mechanically. His staring eyes blinked strangely as he stood there peering in the dark.

Dazed, he drew nearer.

"Mackenzie! Oh, Mackenzie!" he whispered loudly.

He almost expected the inert clay to answer. He had known the old man so long, had talked with him so often and so often had brought him books—No, no! Mackenzie could not be dead!

Stooping, he shook the old Scot by the shoulder, now terribly limp.

Pale and scared, he stood up again. For a moment he remained there peering down at the body. Then he turned and kicked the search-light away. The sight of those dead eyes passed all human endurance.

The light went out. Now all things lay folded in curtains of velvet gloom. This was far worse than anything the rays could show. He produced his own light and cast its rays here and there, seeking the wig.

There it lay, still clutched in the old man's fingers. Slayton snatched it up and crammed it into his pocket.

He was safe now, at any rate—safe from the charge of robbery. Yes, but—the other, the vastly more terrifying charge?

All at once his teeth began to chatter violently. Full realization had just been borne in to him that he had killed a human being—that he was a murderer.

He had meant only to steal, not to take human life. He had not meant to kill. He, Walter Slayton, was not that kind of man. And yet he had killed! And there before him lay "the body of Mackenzie!"

He shrank away from it. Before him seemed to rise a vision of the death-house, the narrow door, the pitiless cement chamber under its glaring reflectors, and in the midst of all, a terrible thing, black, ominous, waiting—the Chair.

Cowering, striking the horrid apparition away from before his eyes, he retreated. Back he recoiled from that corridor of death. Haggard, he peered about him. What now?

With a kind of desperation he realized that something must be done at once to lay the guilt of this, as of the other crime, onto other shoulders than his own. At once or it would be eternally too late. He must get back to Oakwood Heights, change his clothes,

Rheumatism Entirely Gone

AFTER TWENTY-SEVEN YEARS OF SUFFERING—SWELLING AND PUFFINESS HAS DISAPPEARED—NOT A PAIN OR AN ACHE LEFT.

A most astonishing cure of rheumatism and eczema has been reported here, and Mrs. Ray is enthusiastic in telling her many friends how cure was effected.

Rheumatism and eczema frequently go together, and in this case caused the most keen distress imaginable. All the swelling and puffiness resulting from many years of rheumatism have disappeared, and there is not a pain or an ache left.

Mr. G. H. Ray, R. R. No. 1, Kincardine, Ont., writes: "Mrs. Ray has been using your Kidney-Liver Pills. She was very bad with rheumatism and eczema, and had had that fearful itchy for twenty-seven years. It was simply terrible what she suffered. I persuaded her to try \$1.00 worth of Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills. She is now on the last box, and let me tell you she scarcely knows herself, she is so free from both these diseases. All the swelling and puffiness caused by the rheumatism has gone away, and she has gone down in weight 18½ pounds. She never has an ache nor pain, biliousness nor sick headache all these months. She often says herself: 'How glad I am that I know what to do instead of paying doctors so much to make me worse.'"

There is only one way that the poisons in the blood can be cleaned away and the cause of pains and aches removed, and that is by the healthful action of the kidneys, liver and bowels. Because Dr. Chase's Kidney-Liver Pills act directly and specifically on these organs and insure their activity they remove the cause of rheumatism and other dreadfully painful and fatal diseases. One pill a dose, 25 cents a box, all dealers or Edmondson, Bates & Co., Limited, Toronto.

Look for the portrait and signature of A. W. Chase, M. D., the famous Receipt Book author, on the box you buy.

conceal the money and be ready—fresh, shaven, alert—to return to New York on his usual train.

Not one iota of variation must be observed in his conduct. He must prepare himself for an ordeal of acting such as would tax the abilities of a consummate artist. And time was growing now so terribly short!

With a violent effort the miserable man pulled his nerves together. He went over to the water-cooler, drank two brimming glasses of ice-water and felt a trifle relieved. Then he stood there, pondering.

Obviously there could be no use in locking up the safe again. Now that the old man was murdered there could be no delay in the discovery of the theft. Nor would there be any advantage in putting back the money. That would only bring about his bankruptcy and help fix suspicion on him. No, as he had begun, so he must go through to the end—to the very end, whatever that might be.

He shuddered, and for a moment leaned against the steel bars of the vault-cage to steady himself.

Once more he thought. His only way, he decided, would be to prove a perfect alibi. He had left no tracks, not even a finger-print; nothing. Let them suspect him all they pleased, they could prove nothing. He must remove every possibility of proof. He must fasten the crime on somebody else. Some other man must take this medicine; not he!

"Somebody else!" said the cashier. "Somebody else must take this. But who?"

Pondering, he once more began to rummage his disguise. As he reached into his pocket for the wig, which he had stuffed in there, his hand fell in contact with metal. It recoiled as from the touch of a viper. The automatic!

Slayton grunted wordlessly. The feel of that cold, murderous thing, which only five minutes before had flicked out a human life, sent shudders of repulsion rippling through his unnerved flesh.

But almost at once a different thought possessed him. Again his hand sought the weapon.



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"Well!" said he. "It's his, isn't it? It's Mansfield's?"

Startled by the wide-flung possibilities all at once opened out before him, he stared as if petrified.

"It is his!" he exclaimed. "His! And so—and so—why not?"

A laugh a triumph rose to his pallid lips.

"Yes!" he gulped. "It can be done! It can—it shall!"

CHAPTER VII.

Slayton's mind now definitely made up to foist the guilt of this black murder upon a perfectly innocent man, he proceeded with his usual well-calculated coolness to carry the infernal plan into execution. With intelligence of a high order and with the deliberation he now felt was essential to success, he faced the problem, adjusted himself to the new conditions that had so unexpectedly arisen, and prepared to meet them.

In the cashier's personality there lay nothing of the hysterical. His nerves could not be stamped into any rash or ill-considered action. Everything he did was done with reason, care and purpose. Now that he had become a murderer and a criminal he had suddenly developed into the most dangerous of all kinds—the cold, intellectual, scientific type.

Facing the body of the dead watchman, not yet stiffened in death, but still warm and limp, he thought how best to fasten the accusation of the murder on young Mansfield. He must build up a rather elaborate structure of circumstance, he understood. By no word of his, by no accusing finger must the charge be brought. The unanswerable testimony of the facts and nothing else must make the charge of "Guilt!"


Slayton did not go to work at once. He understood that a moment's calm reflection might now win the whole battle. So, he reflected. He even brought a chair, sat down, rested his elbow on his knee and his chin on his hand, and deeply pondered the case. Not until the outlines of the process should have been worked out in his incisive mind would he so much as move a finger to execute his plan.

One single false step now might not only ruin his scheme, but also rot the charge of murder on his own head. At all hazards he must proceed with caution and intelligence. So he sat there scheming as Dante pictures Satan ruminating darkly in the depths of the lowest Pit.

Finally, light in hand, he got up and approached old Mackenzie's body. The scent of blood was highly distasteful to him—for Slayton was a man of peculiar refinements and easily offended—but he did not draw back. He turned the old man over to

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see where the bullet had struck. At sight of the wound behind the right ear he critically pursed his thin lips. Then he let the limp head fall back again. With the greatest care he avoided staining his gloves with blood.

Light still burning, he proceeded, in a businesslike manner, to carry out his plan. First, he went noiselessly to Mansfield's desk, looked it over and tried the drawers. None was locked. The young chap in his extreme perturbation had neglected to turn the key.

Slayton examined the drawers one by one. He found a pair of gloves, and took them out. In another drawer he came upon a box of paper-clips, with a few pins and trifles mixed in. Among these he saw a button. At sight of it his eyes brightened with satisfaction.

He recognized this button. It matched the boy's usual business suit. Evidently it was one of the little sleeve buttons. A few threads still adhered in the holes. Slayton took this button in his gloved fingers and studied it closely, turning it under the rays of the lamp, which cast ghostly shadows up over his thin, pale face, masklike and sinister.

"The threads, he thought, had been cut off by a knife or scalpel. He figured that the button worked loose, and that Mansfield, careful and prudent, had cut it off and put it into that box against such time as he could have it sewn on by a tailor—perhaps even by Edith Chamberlain who could tell? Slayton's satisfaction was large. The importance of this button, if rightly used, might be tremendous.

With the gloves and the button he knew he had enough in his hands to convict the boy. He must avoid too great profusion of proofs. He might add one or two more bits indeed, but he must be careful not to overplay the game. Just a few pieces of unimpeachable evidence, he felt, would prove far more effective than a dozen, which, by their very abundance, might prove a frame-up.

Slayton listened a moment for any possible sounds of peril. He heard none. Beyond the usual dull night-murmur of the city all was still. And yet he knew the patrolman would be along now in a few minutes. He had no time to waste. It was imperative that he get to work immediately.

He pulled the threads out of the button and tucked even this tiny bit of material into his waistcoat pocket. Broken threads formed part of his scheme, but cut threads did not. His mind grasped even this detail; and so he kept the threads.

With the gloves and the button he returned to the body—having closed the drawers of Mansfield's desk—and crooked the button near the corpse. The tiny bit of bone rolled round a couple of times and finally came to rest near the grillework. So far, so good.

(To be continued.)

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