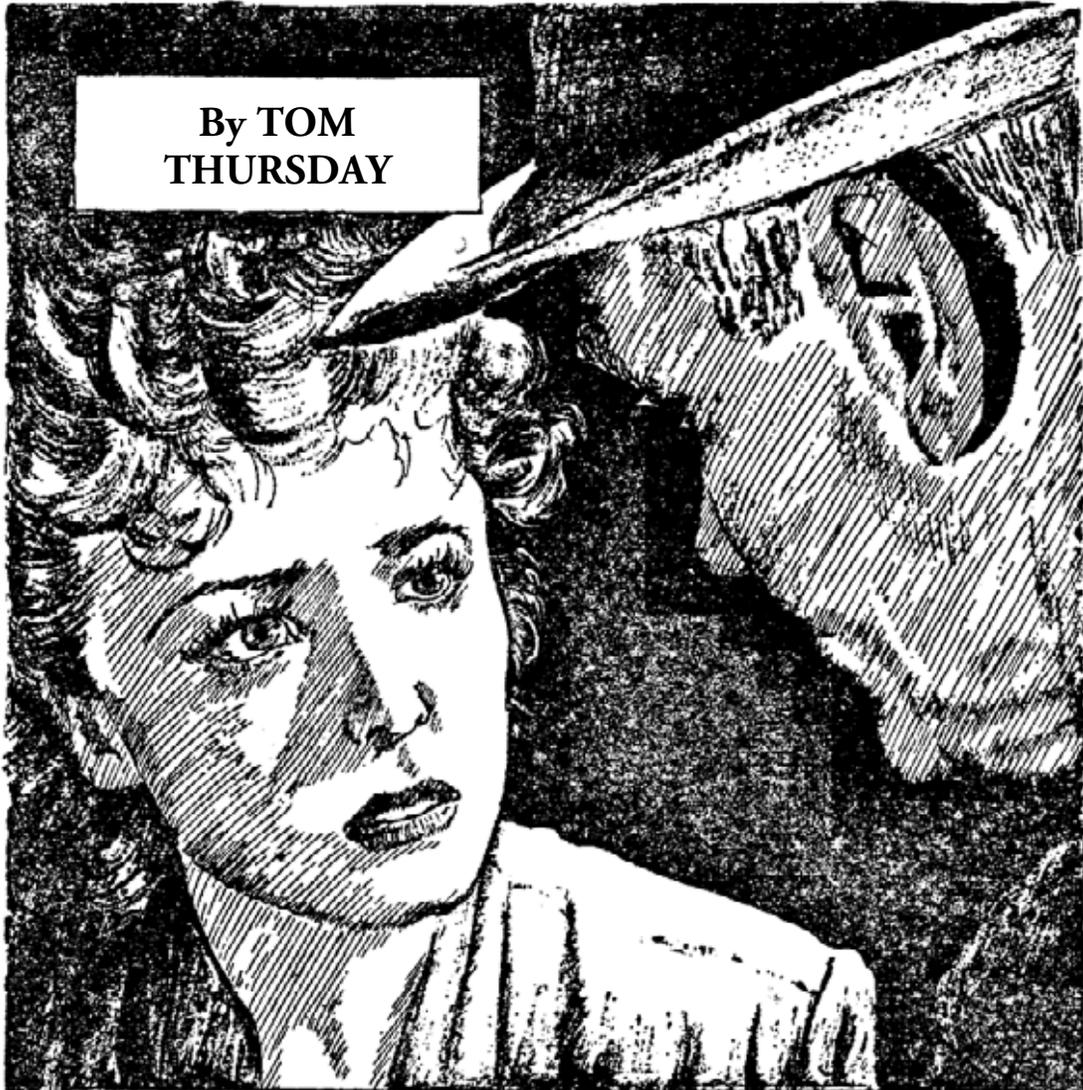


## Once Upon a Crime

By TOM  
THURSDAY



*"I've just done a terrible thing," she said.*

Blanche Harwood was just another teenager, bored with school and studying. Just another adolescent runaway. But unlike some of the others, she suddenly found herself a murderess.

THE headquarters clock registered 11:45 P.M. Captain Hardy Bryan looked up from reading an editorial in the *Herald*. If this were a movie about cops, he'd look up from studying the funny page or scanning photos of bathing beauties.

The soft, half-frightened voice of a girl came directly from above his desk. "I've just done a terrible thing!"

The tone was low, half-scared, half-defiant, and wholly dramatic. She began to cry. They were hardly tears of terror but, rather, small drops of remorse and injured ego. Captain Bryan, veteran of twenty-five years—up from rooky—dropped the editorial with some regret. It was a scathing denunciation of postwar juvenile delinquency, blaming the cops for most of it.

The good, gray captain wondered why they blamed the police. He had a long-held theory as to what one of the main troubles was. He knew from experience that you rarely found juvenile jerks without parental jerks. If the captain had his way he'd toss some of the night-cruising parents into the clink until they learned to pay more attention to their only begotten sons and daughters.

"Well?" said the captain, peering into a seventeen-year-old face. "Just what is this terrible thing you've done?"

The slim blonde dabbed her over-painted face with a handkerchief and replied, "It was an accident!"

"Will you please state the nature of the accident?"

"I've killed my sweetheart," said the girl.

"Now *that*," said the captain, "is quite illegal. Come around here and sit down. But remember whatever you say may be held against you."

The youngster sat beside the captain's desk. "I didn't mean to do it," she went on. "I know I shouldn't have done it. I'm sure he loved me!"

"You really think he did?" asked the captain, with a slightly arched left eyebrow. "Continue, please. Love fascinates me; I often wonder what it is."

"We were standing in the middle of the Fifth street bridge over the Ami river," she said, "leaning on the rail. It was a wooden rail. He got a little—well, fresh. I got mad and gave him a hard push. The wooden rail broke and he fell into the river."

"Couldn't he swim?"

"I don't know. I waited around for about ten minutes but I couldn't see him. It is very dark out there. So I decided to come to the police and make a confession."

"What was the young man's name?" asked Captain Bryan.

"Harry Jollay. He was about a year older than

me."

"Where does or did Harry live?"

"I—uh—really don't know. I never did know. You see, I just met him at a dance a week ago. Three days later he said he would marry me."

"Nice long courtship," mused the captain. "Happen to know his parents or anything about his past life?"

"Well, he had red hair, some freckles, and I think his eyes were blue."

"I CAN see you knew him very well, indeed. A young lady can't be too careful about the man she marries." The captain had the reputation of being cynical and hardboiled. He wasn't; he was just practical from long experience. Underneath, he was a softie, highly emotional at times, and still romantic. After 24 years of married life, he still thought his wife was the finest woman in the world.

"He said he was a college man," went on the young lady.

"Amherst or Alcatraz?" asked the captain, who never could resist a witticism. She said she didn't know which college.

"Where is your home?" went on the captain.

"Brooklyn. I just came down for a little vacation."

"I suppose your parents know you're in Ami City?"

"Well, not exactly. You see, I just left them a note, saying I was bored and was going to lead my own life. I was tired of going to college. It was very boring." She gave out with a pout.

"Young ladies should never be bored. I imagine the college was out of date. They should have a class in jitterbugging and teach cocktail mixing. They seem to be out of touch with the modern youngsters. You mean they actually wanted you to study and nonsense like that?" The captain's face was so straight that she didn't know whether she was being kidded or not.

"What are you going to do with me?" asked the girl.

"First, I shall notify your parents, during which time you will become a non-paying guest of our city jail. It's a nice, clean clink. You will find a wide variety of girls there and I trust their society won't bore you. Never a dull moment, what with hair-pulling matches, which the matron referees in fairness to all. The lights go out at 9 P.M. but the inmates can't go out with them. This saves you the

trouble of tip-toeing in at 3 A.M., so Mom and Pop can't hear you."

"You mean that you are going to put *me* in jail?" asked the girl, her eyes opening like a drawbridge. "I just won't go!"

"What did you expect, after a confession of murder—a cabana at Ami Beach, complete with maid service?"

"Well, anyway, I won't give you the name and address of my parents. So there!"

"My goodness, what a temper." The captain picked up the phone and said, "Matron, please." Then, after a moment, "Miss Albury, I have a new guest. Come and get her, please; I'm afraid I'm beginning to bore her."

**T**HE city jail was on the 22nd floor of the county courthouse, directly across the street from Headquarters. The "guests" were mostly Barroom Bessies, sailor-snatchers up for a VD check, and assorted antisocial women who could prove to you in one minute, flat, that all cops were bums and should mind their own business.

"If I'm not being too inquisitive," went on Captain Bryan to the girl, "would you be gracious and kind enough to tell me your name?"

"Why should I?"

"It's just an old police custom," explained Captain Bryan. "Hopelessly out of date, of course, but we always like to know the names of our clients. Quaint; don't you think?"

"It's—eh—it's Maude Mansfield," she said, hesitantly.

"Nice alliteration and it's too bad it isn't yours. But it will do until further notice. Last week we had Lana Turner and Hedy LaMarr, direct from Hollywood, Florida."

After the police matron escorted the girl to the city jail, Captain Bryan called Serg. Bob Yancey, known among brother officers as "Admiral" Yancey. The sergeant was chief and entire crew of the water division of the police department.

"Meet me at the Fifth street bridge as soon as possible," said Bryan to Yancey. "Get ready for a grappling job. It appears that a young lady pushed her boyfriend off the bridge. She says he went down but never bothered to come up. Make it speedy."

During the first half-hour of dragging the river Sergeant Yancey netted everything but a manatee. He hauled up part of old cars, tin cans and a bushel

of empty booze bottles.

"Tide's going out," said Captain Bryan. "Let's try about fifty yards south."

Less than twenty minutes later the big hooks grabbed something weighty and rather solid.

"This may be it," said Yancey. "Pull easy and careful, captain."

Slowly, expertly, the hooks were drawn toward the surface. Soon a human form split the top of the water. It was a male form and as soon as it rose above the ripples, Captain Bryan knew that the girl had told the truth. At least, part of the truth.

"Is this the boyfriend?" asked Yancey.

"Very likely. Lay 'im on the desk and radio Captain Barker to come down and get some prints."

**J**IM BARKER, Supervisor of the Bureau of Criminal Identification, arrived ten minutes later. The corpse was young, well-built, had some freckles and blue eyes. It was the boyfriend, no doubt. After Barker had taken the fingerprints the body was sent to the police morgue. Then Barker returned to his bureau and studied the prints. That completed, he checked the prints with his files.

"I don't know who he is," said Barker to Bryan, "but I'll bet his name isn't Harry Jollay. I have a hunch I'm going to find out."

"I'm not taking your bet," said Captain Bryan. "If his name's Harry Jollay, I'm Harry Truman." He turned to the phone, contacted Matron Albury, and said, "Please bring Miss Smarty Britches down here." She was at the captain's desk a short time later.

"Now, young lady," began the captain, "it appears that you have been telling the truth. Some of it, at least. Which means we shall be obliged to hold you for murder—not willful and premeditated, but nevertheless technical murder. According to the law, which may be very old-fashioned and silly in your eyes, it is strictly illegal to push men off bridges."

"Oh, this is terrible!" she said. "I loved Harry. Don't you understand? I *loved* him!"

"Love," suggested the captain, "comes in peculiar packages. Some times you can't believe the labels. Did you ever happen to hear of a great writer and poet named Oscar Wilde? Of course he wasn't as great as Frank Sinatra and Van Johnson, but anyway he once wrote a poem in which he said, '*Each man kills the thing he loves.*' You seem to have reversed that part of the poem, young lady."

“What shall I do? What *can* I do?” The voice was plaintive, tamed, frightened. As if a solid, serious thought had hit her brain for the first time since birth.

“You can’t do much right now. I would suggest that you go back to your cell and do some heavy thinking. Keep thinking until you discover that there’s several things more important than rug-cutting and the thought that your life should be just a round of doubtful pleasures. Incidentally, your real name is Blanche Harwood, of Atlanta, Georgia. That will be all, Maude Mansfield.”

A long pause. Then, “How did you find out my right name?”

“It was very difficult,” said the captain. “In fact, it required great scientific deduction to solve it. I had to look into your pocketbook to get the answer. Police are remarkable people, don’t you think?”

Late that evening Captain Barker phoned Captain Bryan. “The prints check perfectly,” said Barker. “It’s giddy dames like her that do us a favor without knowing it.”

“Fine,” said Bryan. “I’ll call on the little darling early tomorrow morning and have a chat. Another night in the can will do her no harm and might give her a notion that life can be serious as well as beautiful and dumb.”

**T**ED SMILEY, police reporter for the *Herald*, walked in with a slight fuzz of foam on his upper lip.

“I observe,” greeted the captain, “that you have just imbibed your favorite brand of buttermilk.”

“If you and the other brass hats would observe the crooks and murderers around town,” sniffed Ted, “you might get some place. What gives? The city editor just asked me what you taxpayers-burdens were doing, besides leaving footmarks on the desks.”

“Confidentially,” said the captain, “most of the great detectives are only found in detective stories. That’s why folks read so many of them. For instance, a cop who has luck is very apt to be a better sleuth than a lad with brains.”

“Which means,” said Ted, “that this whole department depends on luck, being fresh out of the other. And that reminds me of the Jerome murder case. Is that entirely closed or just conveniently forgotten?”

“Ah, yes; the Jerome case. Glad you mentioned it, Theodore. That may soon be solved, but not

wholly by the police.”

“Naturally not by the police—and don’t call me Theodore. I wouldn’t be surprised if the guy who cooled Jerome was right in Ami City now, playing the dog and horse tracks. He feels assured that the nice police won’t annoy him.”

“Well,” said the captain, “if you will follow me, perhaps we can clear up a little item that will be of interest to you, the taxpayers and even the police.”

“No gag?” asked Ted, knowing the good gray captain had a peculiar sense of humor, especially directed toward police reporters.

“No gag. On the contrary, it sounds like something written by the Brothers Grimm or that other fairytale writer, Hans Christian Andersen.”

“Don’t tell me you been reading books,” grinned Ted.

“Why not? Just because I’m a cop I don’t have to be illiterate. Well, come on, Sugar Plum.”

**R**EACHING the jail, Captain Bryan asked the matron to bring out Miss Blanche Harwood, nee Maude Mansfield. When she appeared the captain observed a changed young lady. Her eyes were red from crying and her demeanor was docile and modest.

“Good morning,” began Captain Bryan. “I trust you are well although I can see that you are not too happy.”

“I didn’t sleep all night,” she said. “I couldn’t stop crying. I’m scared.” She began to pull at her handkerchief. “I tell you I didn’t mean to drown Harry Jollay. It was all an accident! It was—”

“It *is* a beautiful morning,” went on the captain. “The warm sun is shining in January; the temperature is 72, and young ladies should not be too sad.”

“Hey, look,” fumed Ted Smiley, “if this is going to be a social visit I’ll go down and get a beaker or two of buttermilk.”

“Have patience, Theodore. Remember, Sherlock Holmes wasn’t built in a day.” He turned to Blanche Harwood and continued, “Now, young lady, I’m going to tell you a little story. It may sound like a fairytale but I assure you that it’s true.”

“Do me a favor, Cap,” said Ted, “and condense it. I hate long novels.”

“Once upon a time,” went on the captain, ignoring Ted, “there was a very romantic young lady, who considered her parents old-fashioned and

quaint. So she made up her mind to quit college and make her own way in the world. She thought she knew everything only it turned out she knew about five percent.”

“Listen,” said Ted, “I have no time for love and romance. What else have you got in stock?”

“Will they put me in the electric chair?” asked Blanche Harwood.

“I doubt it,” said the captain. “Besides, capital punishment doesn’t work. Maybe the reason it doesn’t work is because it has never been tried. Last year, out of forty-three convicted murderers, only three went to the chair. So, how can we tell if capital punishment works?”

“All of which,” said Ted, “I wrote in the *Herald* four months ago. Come on, Cap; forget the phonus-balonus and let’s have the lowdown.”

“Patience; the foam on your—er—buttermilk will still be there. Now, as I was saying, a short time ago a man named Jack Jerome, a racetrack habitue from Boston, was found dead in his hotel room. Evidence indicated that it was positive murder. A .32 bullet crashed into his right temple, and there were not the powder-marks to show a self-inflicted shot. The motive was robbery. It happened in the late afternoon and the hotel clerk informed Captain Barker that, just before Jerome went to his room, he asked for \$2000, cash, he had left in care of the hotel.”

“All of which,” sniffed Ted, “I likewise wrote in the *Herald*.”

“All except the end,” pointed out Captain Bryan. “Of course, if you don’t think you’d be interested in the end—”

“Oh, *please* go on!” begged the young lady.

“You mean you got an end?” demanded Ted.

“Now,” continued the captain, “when Captain Barker examined the room for fingerprints he found several, including that of the chambermaid, a bellhop and even the night clerk. All of them were checked and accounted for—except one print.”

“Which same,” snorted Ted, “upon investigation, turned out to be that of a dumb dick who had messed up the joint before Barker got there.”

“As to that missing, baffling print,” went on the unperturbed captain, “it has now been accounted for.”

“**N**OW I *know* it’s a fairytale,” said Ted. “Or has the age of miracles reached the police

department?”

“Now, then,” said the captain, “a young lady enters the case. Of course, she never knew she was in it. She was full of love and romance—of the wrong kind.”

“What other kind is there?” demanded Ted.

“Well,” smiled the captain, “this young lady came into Headquarters the other day and confessed that she had killed a man. This young lady gave me a very phony name. I placed her in jail to await developments. Meantime, the Ami river was dragged and the body of a young man was found.”

“I don’t suppose this guy was able to tell you his name; huh?” asked Ted.

“I regret to say that he was not in a conversational mood,” said the captain. “However, it was the same fellow that the young lady said she had pushed off the bridge. She said his name was Harry Jollay. And the only reason she said his name was Harry Jollay is because he told her his name was Harry Jollay.”

“Which leads one to deduce that a guy named Harry Jollay was in the Ami river, and that he was all wet,” interrupted Ted. “Okay; okay! So could you please give out with a few informative words about this Harry Jollay?”

“The main trouble with this Harry Jollay,” said Captain Bryan, “is that his real name was not Harry Jollay.”

Blanche Harwood began to fidget nervously. She remained silent—a kind of stunned silence.

“Well,” continued the captain, “after the fingerprints of the dead man were taken and compared with those found in Jerome’s hotel room, they matched perfectly. Next, the official files were checked, and they proved that the name of the drowned man was Harry Sanders, not Harry Jollay.”

Miss Harwood gasped and daubed her forehead with her handkerchief.

“You mean Harry Jollay was *really* named Harry Sanders?” she asked.

“Quite so,” said the captain. “As I told you, we had Sanders on our records, and quite a long and involved record of crookedness it was. We did some very boring and unimaginative searching and checking, and discovered that Mr. Sanders had a safe deposit box under the name of Harry Jollay, and—would you believe it, Miss Harwood?—we found the cash taken from the late Mr. Jerome in

this box. To round things up, we further discovered that Mr. Sanders was in possession of a gun, unregistered, by the way, which fired the bullet that cut short the promising career of the late Mr. Jerome.

“And now, Miss Harwood, since you are responsible for the death of this sterling citizen, Mr. Harry Sanders, what do you think we should do with you?”

“You might put her on probation—in my charge,” suggested Ted.

“That,” mused the captain, “would be similar to ten years at hard labor.” He turned to Blanche Harwood and continued. “Young lady, you are not in so terrible a position as you feared. It was not really you, but the shoddy bridge construction which killed the late Mr. Sanders; no doubt, he could sue the city for a princely sum, but I am not sure that the courts would accept a civil suit from a corpse. Besides, what would the late Mr. Sanders do with money he couldn’t use where he now reposes?”

“You’re not going to hold her for manslaughter, are you?” asked Ted.

“If I wanted to be a Javert, I suppose I could,” the captain replied. “Now there is something you can do, Miss Harwood. When you get back to college, look up a fellow by the name of Victor Hugo—I’m afraid you won’t find him quite as exciting as Clark Gable—and get acquainted with a policeman by the name of Javert. The book is *Les Miserables*.” He coughed good-naturedly. “So, I

am going to place you on probation, in care of your mother and father. I sincerely hope you have learned something valuable from this experience. I’ve wired your father in Atlanta, and he will plane in and take you home tonight. And I’d like to suggest that the *best* husbands are not always picked up in cheap dancehalls. Goodbye, good luck, and good sense.”

She got up dazedly and walked toward the door where the matron was waiting. She turned around, trying to say something.

“Don’t thank me, Miss Harwood—not now, in words, anyway. Of course, if you’d like to write me a letter some time, telling me what you think about Inspector Javert—and if you think our present day police methods are any improvement, I’d be glad to hear from you.”

Blanche Harwood nodded speechlessly as she went out.

Captain Bryan took Ted Smiley by the arm and departed for Headquarters.

“Magnificent detective work,” said Ted. “I can see the headlines—*Jerome Murder Solved By Scientific Police Deduction*. Gluckity-gluckity-gluck. Haw!”

“Don’t forget what I told you,” grinned Captain Hardy Bryan. “Most of the great detectives are found only in detective stories. It’s the outside breaks that really do the work. Don’t quote me, Theodore.”

“Don’t call me Theodore!”