



Nixon trained the parabola on the night club floor

# Murder on the Mike

By ARTHUR B. REEVE

*Craig Kennedy, scientific detective, planned a radio third degree for the suspects in the broadcasting studio murder*

**K**ENNEDY gently crinkled the cellophane wrapper of a cigar about two feet from the microphone. Slowly he moved it closer to the "mike" as his fingers crinkled it more vigorously.

From the loud speaker on the other side of the heavy plate glass window of the control room, where I was, came a marvelous imitation of arson.

"Some fire!" grinned Jim Barnes, the director, looking at me. "Craig is certainly there with new twists on sound effects. We'll use it in your speakeasy fire scene."

Barnes nodded enthusiastically

through the big picture window to Craig, out in the studio, and I pantomimed, clapping my hands. Craig saluted with a smile.

"I'll rehearse that fire scene with the cast. You stay in here and listen to it, Walter. Now— Just look at that; they're at it again!"

I followed the direction of Jim's eyes. Neville White, the movie star, was talking earnestly to Rita Flambeau, little blond blues singer, the "torch singer" of the Club Flambeau, just around the corner from the Plaza in the "Flaming Fifties."

Tom Fergus, Rita's husband, was

seated on a chair in the row by the door of Studio B. He rose as Harriet Moore, song and dance girl at the club, entered.

It was strictly pantomime to us, for the control room was practically sound proof to the studio, and they were at some distance from the mike.

"Did you get that dirty look La Flambeau gave Harriet Moore?" I commented.

Barnes nodded. "I was more interested in Neville and Fergus. That interchange was like the dotted lines which cartoonists draw to carry dagger looks. Whoopee! There goes little Jerry Shaw, butting in with Neville and Rita."

"More trouble!" I exclaimed. "Jerry's jealous of La Flambeau. But her crush on White won't last long. They never do. It's Harriet that's the deep one in this cast."

Barnes opened the padded door leading from the control room to the studio. "I'll put a spoke in their wheels for a time," he nodded. "I'll rehearse 'em all in that fire scene. Now you listen. Tell me if La Flambeau gets her scream in right when the fire in the speak is discovered."

Whatever might be the mutual cross-currents of their passions, the cast of the talking picture called "Synthetic Murder" certainly put over that scene with a bang. And Kennedy, as the fire, was a wow!

"How about it?" asked Barnes, coming back to the control room.

"Knock-out!" I reported enthusiastically.

"Well, you're the doctor," bustled Barnes. "Walter, do you have your copy of the script there with you? Do you want to get out in front of the mike and let me time you before I put the finishing touches on a few other

little things with the cast? We go on the air in fifteen minutes."

**G**RABBING my script, typed on the special soft paper that does not crackle before the mike, I passed through the padded door of the control room and into the studio. There I assumed my favorite position, just a bit diagonal to the mike because I have found that from that position I can dampen the tendency to be too sibilant in my speech.

"To-night," I began reading, "I am happy to take you with me, folks, on a personally conducted tour, as it were, to the sound picture studio of Liberty Pictures. They are producing there a mystery drama which I have written and titled 'Synthetic Murder.'

"We have with us to-night the members of the cast, and I have selected one of the highest dramatic points in the picture for reproduction on the air.—Remember, they're all here; even the continuity writer.—And we have just made a little radio drama for you of the taking of a sound picture drama, so that you will know not only what is done, but how it is done . . .

"Now, first let me paint a picture for you. It always interests me, the making of a talking picture. It's no one-man job. It takes a great many people to make a successful picture. Perhaps you think it rests with the star, or the cast, or with the story or the author. Far from it. I shall show you the skill of the director, of the adapter, the scenarist, the designer of sets and of costumes, and the research director, as well as of the art director, and the technical director, the camera man, the lighting expert, the sound expert, and even the crew, either on stage or on location . . ."

I paused a couple of seconds.

"Once you pass into the sound studio and the door closes, you are assailed, as it were, by the sensation of being cut off from the outside world. The great sign over the door which reads 'Silence' fairly screams at you.

"The door closes after you. You find yourself in a room where height seems limitless. People are bustling about and talking, but there is a strangeness about it all. Noises seem to die away instantly.

"When you speak, you feel a strange sensation of loneliness because your words vanish so quickly. Your syllables seem to decay. It is nothing like the old silent movie studio. The reason is obvious. Your voice is yours only when you are speaking. When you finish, your sound waves must not conflict with those of the next speaker.

"To me, there is something fascinating about every scene. It is silent drama; and it is also a dialogue drama. Yet it is something indefinably more, something still new, that we don't yet thoroughly understand. The science of acoustics has married the science of light. The offspring is a new art."

Jim Barnes snapped his stop watch, smiled and nodded as he made a notation of the elapsed time. In this manner he had gone through it all, piece by piece, until he knew by estimate, almost to the second, how long each sequence would take. If by chance some one who was an amateur slowed up, that was known as "mike fright." Barnes now knew where and how much to hurry up some one else in order to keep within the time limit.

**B**ARNES took about ten minutes polishing up the cast in various points which previous rehearsals had shown to be necessary. That kept them all too busy for further exhibi-

tion of their emotional cross-currents. Then came that tense two or three minutes when the studio itself is about to go on the air. . . . "This is a presentation of the American Broadcasting System," finished the announcer of the preceding period. The three notes of a little xylophone sounded. "WABS—New York," came the voice of another announcer.

A moment of silence—then the signal of Jim Barnes, his eyes on the clock—the clock with the red hand which swept once around the dial every minute. The orchestra began to play the opening signature of our period . . . We were on the air!

Another moment, and I was being introduced by the announcer over one mike as I stood ready and waiting with my script before another. I got as far as: "—Once you pass into the sound studio and the door closes, you are assailed, as it were, by the sensation of being cut off from the outside world . . ."

I never finished. At that instant a shot shattered through the plate glass picture window of the control room, and a steel-jacketed bullet pinged into the plaster over the head of the technician inside.

I started. That shot had been in this studio! It was not one of those revolver shots for the mike—a fingernail snapped against a piece of stiff cardboard. This one had been real.

"Ooh!—Look! Rita Flambeau!" came a sharp, staccato, terror-stricken scream from Barbara Brooks, an extra girl.

"Hold everything!" This was Kennedy's authoritative voice. "Walter, guard that door to the hall. Hold the door to the control room, Barnes.—Let no one out of this studio! I'll take charge here."

Instantly, Kennedy was beside Rita Flambeau. She had pitched forward, and he bent over her. A thin trickle of blood was slowly spreading upon the shiny cork floor of the studio, from the beautiful blond head now motionless against a shapely white arm. Wildly outstretched fingers seemed to grasp for something spectral in the thin air.

"Bullet passed clean through, and out at the base of the brain—death practically instantaneous," Craig muttered. "Here, get back there, you people! Hold everything, I say!—Barnes, call the police and an ambulance over that studio telephone extension beside you."

"Oughtn't I to call out into the hall, Craig, have the elevators held, and have Parks, on the ground floor, stop any one who leaves the building?" I queried excitedly.

"Hardly necessary," vetoed Craig. "The murderer is here in this room!"

I realized that since the shot no one could possibly have come in or gone out through the studio door, for on the doorknob outside in the hall hung the sign, "On the Air."

"Are we still on the air, Barnes?" asked Kennedy.

Barnes nodded negatively. "No. Nixon, in the control room, has seen to that. No, they've already put on some emergency program or other, probably something electrically recorded."

HE started to do his telephoning, while I was using my best efforts to keep back the alarmed and curious people who were already pressing against the outside hall door.

"Wh-what 'll we do at Liberty Pictures, Walter?" chattered frightened little Jerry Shaw. Jerry was not only

one of the cast, but also a headliner at the Club Flambeau. She added, "With the star—dead!"

I was too much in a whirl to answer. The question, of course, was just one of those strange practical twists the emotional mind sometimes takes under tense stress.

"You know—" This was from Harriet Moore, amateur in radio, but one of the featured professionals at the club and the picture studio. "All through the taking of the picture at Liberty, Neville White's been overplaying his love scenes with Rita!"

Involuntarily, I looked about to find Tom Fergus. Tom was not merely another in the cast. Tom was Rita Flambeau's husband, and the manager of the Club Flambeau. Of course I knew about the estrangement between Tom and Rita; knew well, too, how that overplaying by Neville White had fanned the flame.

Quickly I picked Tom out of the excited crowd. He was coming over toward Harriet Moore. Yes, I thought, there had been plenty of gossip during the taking of the picture about Neville's grating on Tom, and about Harriet's crush on Tom.

I ran my eye over the members of the cast to get a line on Neville White, half expecting now to find little Jerry Shaw with him, for Jerry's jealousy had been another underground topic of conversation at Liberty Pictures. They were not together, were rather at almost opposite ends of the studio room.

Suddenly Kennedy, searching the room, picked up Rita's white evening wrap, trimmed with fluffy white fur. It had been lying on a chair near me, over near the wall and beside the door. Quickly Craig ran his hand through the coat until he found a pocket. His

face showed no surprise as he drew out a crumpled note.

I bent over with him as he read:

RITA, DEAR:

You are a real sport! With your permission, as soon as we finish this radio stunt I'm going to announce that everybody's invited over to the club. And, after that, I'm planning one of our old-time Love Fests to celebrate getting together again.

XXXXXXXXXX (kisses) TOM.

"So!" I whispered to Craig. "They'd patched it up again!"

Kennedy turned, still holding the note. "How about this, Fergus?" he asked, catching the eye of the dancing man whose marriage to the torch singer had elevated him to fame.

"It's true, Mr. Kennedy," he nodded back with grave face. "We were going to announce it to-night.—But now—" He seemed to choke off the rest with suppressed emotion, an ominous scowl on his face.

I confess I did not like the man. He was one of those men whom other men do not like, as a rule. To my mind, he had been nothing but a cheap gigolo before La Flambeau took him up. Yet I could not help having a sneaking sympathy for him. Evidently he had been planning to do the right thing after all.

Just in time, I swung around to catch an interchange of hateful glances between Tom Fergus and Neville White. The hatred in the glance of each was like a rapier thrust.

"MR. KENNEDY!" The interruption was from Bob Gillen, the page boy who had been in charge of the hall door.

Craig turned. "Yes, Gillen?"

Gillen was holding something between his thumb and forefinger. "I just picked this up from the floor."

It was an exploded and ejected shell.

Kennedy took it. "High-powered cartridge, smokeless powder," he muttered, examining it.

"Craig," I whispered, "why not line them all up and search them now?"

"Just a moment, Walter. Not too sudden." He continued searching the few chairs on which had been carelessly tossed the wraps which some of the artists had not had time to leave at the check-room outside.

One wrap of rose-colored velvet had fallen in a heap on the seat of a chair. He started to lift it, but just as suddenly he let the wrap fall as it had been before, in a crumpled heap.

"Whose is this?" he asked, sharply.

"Oh, that's Jerry Shaw's present from the big butter-and-egg man from the West who was at the club last week," shrilled Harriet.

"Yes?" Craig's tone was one not so much of surprise as of putting on a show.

He lifted the wrap again. In the rose velvet folds lay one of those tiny fountain-pen guns that hold only one cartridge!

"Don't touch it!" cautioned Kennedy. "I can be sure that whoever dropped it there was too clever to leave even a little finger-print on it—but I'll keep it intact just on a chance."

"Well, of all things!" Jerry Shaw edged her way forward. "Of all the nerve! I hope you don't think that's mine, Mr. Kennedy. Why, I never saw one of the things before! Ugh!"

"Common enough in the white-light underworld, though," commented Craig.

"Why—yes—I have heard of them."

"Oh, Barnes," said Craig quietly, "take that drape off the wall over

there. Just drop it over the body. It won't destroy any evidence—and at least it will show a little respect for the dead."

"Right-o, Mr. Kennedy."

"Jim," I asked as Barnes finished covering lightly the tragic, beautiful form, "have you finished with the telephone?"

"Yes. It wouldn't surprise me if the police were here any minute now. Headquarters put the news on the air, and any second now they'll pick up one of the cars equipped with radio."

"All the more reason for me to get busy. Won't you take this door for me while I call up the *Star*? I can't miss an opportunity to scoop the other papers."

"Now, let's see." Kennedy wheeled suddenly. "Who's here? Will you all please line up, ladies and gentlemen—along that wall over there, where the empty chairs are? You may be seated, if you please."

The atmosphere was too charged with tension for any one of them to sit down, however, and unconsciously they remained standing.

Telephoning the desk at the *Star* made it a bit easier for me to discover just who was present; besides, I could study their faces better. I muffled my voice, while continuing to scan them all—actors in the picture, some of them performers at the club, all members of the cast of this radio drama.—One of them was a murderer—or murderess! What I would have given to be a mind reader or to have had second-sight. What a beat!

I have covered a great number of the really big murder cases. It is one thing to write a murder mystery in a story, but to handle a real case—aye, there's the rub! You can't be wrong. For, if you are, it's going to be just too

bad—for you. There are lawyers and courts and libel suits, to say nothing of your own job and your reputation. Here was a real mystery, right in the midst of my own fiction drama mystery!

Who was guilty? Was it Tom Ferguson or Neville White? Cold, calculating Harriet Moore or impulsive, flighty little Jerry Shaw? One false move, and it might be I who would be penalized!

I TELEPHONED in a story with plenty of color—but I studiously left the deductions to Kennedy.

"Walter! — Where's Walter?" I heard Craig saying as I finished putting in my preliminary flash to the *Star* and was hanging up.

"Here I am," I called. "Over by the telephone, Craig."

"Oh, I see.—The police and an ambulance surgeon have arrived. In the control room. Will you let them in?"

Through the glass I could now see them, and I sprang to open the heavy door which Barnes had bolted and at which they were now tugging angrily.

"Watsamatter here, anyway?" growled a voice as I opened up. "Who's calling for the police and then barring the door? I've a good mind to take you all up!"

"Oh, that's all right, we— Why, it's Barney O'Connor! How are you, inspector?"

"Well, I'll be— Say, it's you, Jameson, is it? And Kennedy, too!" It was our old friend, Inspector O'Connor. "Now what're you all doing with a dead girl on the floor and the rest of them all lined up by the wall?"

"Hello, O'Connor!" greeted Craig. "Well, you are God's gift to a scientific detective at just this moment! You bring me just the authority and the organization I need most!"

Quickly, under his breath, Craig launched into a brief account to O'Connor and the young surgeon, Dr. Kenney. He recited what had happened. They moved over, lifted the piece of drapery from the prostrate form. At the same moment, Dr. Leslie, the medical examiner, arrived.

"Well, doctor," commented Kennedy, "your presence lets us out of any further official responsibility for the body. Now I can go on with the case, and I propose to do so before it gets cold!"

"By the way, Mr. Kennedy," interrupted Harriet Moore, "what about the midnight program—if you're going to hold us all here?"

"Midnight program?" repeated Craig.

"Yes—the dance music from the Club Flambeau. You'll find it posted on the bulletin board in the hall, in case you don't know anything about it—midnight to twelve-thirty."

Kennedy looked over at Barnes, and Barnes nodded back. He smiled absent-mindedly. "Harriet's just beginning to get over as an artiste there. She would think of that!"

Somehow, I wondered if it was that.

"Harriet's a good business woman," returned Craig. But his remark left me wondering if Craig was getting the same implications out of it that I was.

Across the studio I caught a glimpse of Tom Fergus, his back to us. He was with little Jerry Shaw. Was that a look of blue dejection on Jerry's face, or was it fear? How I wished there was only some way to hear these whispered asides! Kennedy saw them, too.

Neville White, nervously giving his hands a dry wash, was pacing up and down, unable to stand still in his place in Craig's line-up. I saw him pause when he thought perhaps he was not

observed. He gazed for a moment at the face of the dead girl while Dr. Leslie and Dr. Kenney compared notes for their respective reports. I fancied there was a peculiar sharpness in his look, as if he wished he had a telescopic eye that could discern what they were writing. Then he shot a quick glance at the flirtatious rival of La Flambeau, Jerry Shaw. His face clouded. At that instant he caught a glimpse of me watching him. He shrugged, and continued his tragic Thespian pacing of the floor.

ANYTHING you wish to add to your statement just now to Mr. Kennedy, Neville?" I suggested.

He drew himself up with theatrical dignity, but I could not help feeling that he was really drawing himself into a professional shell, by which he might best conceal himself.

"No, Jameson," he replied quickly and positively. "I had nothing of value to give him. I have nothing to give you, either. In my case, nothing plus nothing equals—nothing!"

"I thought you might possibly have seen," I suggested, "or might have suspected something, that's all."

"I have seen nothing, and I suspect nothing," he explained with that same tone of finality that betrays plainly the desire not to be quizzed.

I knew now that Neville White had seen something and had suspected much. But it was plain notice he would not talk. How I longed for a piece of mental rubber hose in order to give this actor a third degree that would be within the law! My hunch was that it was within Neville White's power to clear this case—but at what expense? Was he silent on his own account—or was it because of someone else?

Kennedy beckoned Nixon from the control room, and the radio engineer joined Kennedy and me. He seemed perturbed.

"We're getting nowhere this way," muttered Craig, "and we probably won't get anywhere!"

He paused a moment, and we could hear the futile questions of the inspector, as he interrogated one after another.

"George," whispered Kennedy to Nixon, "take Walter—get a taxi. Take the parabola to the Club Flambeau, and set it up wherever you can, under cover. How long do you think it will take?"

"Not more than half an hour after we get there."

"Good! Then I'll hold them here until half-past eleven. By twelve they will all be there, ready for the midnight program. Get busy!"

Allowed to pass out by O'Connor's say-so, we went into the corridor that led from one control room to another. I glanced at Nixon.

"The parabola? What does he mean, the parabola?"

Nixon smiled. "Oh, just a new invention we have been perfecting. You'll understand it better when you see it set up and at work."

We had come to the engineers' room, a hive of mystery to me. Nixon opened a door and switched on the light. He paused near what seemed to be a standard, built solidly of metal. On top of this, on a peculiar swivel, was what looked like a huge chopping bowl, mounted vertically. From the frame that supported this silvered chopping bowl there projected four rods, forming a square of about five or six inches, and pointed right at the center of the concave bowl.

Fastened to these rods was a square

box, exactly the same as the microphones we had been using in the studio. The diaphragm, however, was pointed not outward but inward, toward the center of this chopping bowl, and some thirty inches from it.

"WALTER, you and I can carry this thing out to one of the back elevators," said Nixon, coiling the cables out of the way around the standard. "I'll get one of the page boys to lug along a couple of those boxes of tools and so forth."

We picked it up between us. It was heavy, but we lugged and panted our way with it to the elevator, rang the bell, and waited for the night man to bring it up.

"We'll make the taxi driver put his top back. I think we can steady this thing on the seat between us. That's the quickest way. We can't get any other conveyance this time of night."

The excitement being all in the front of the ABS Building, we managed to get to the street without being observed by any one except the page boy whom we had pressed into service.

"Just what is this thing, George?" I asked as we now sped through traffic toward the club. "What's it supposed to do?"

"This?" Nixon replied, holding the thing steady, with the loving embrace of an engineer. "Why, it's an electric ear. I guess that's what you might call it. We developed it here; Kennedy's been helping us put some improvements on it."

"Yes. But what does it do?" I persisted, looking up at the mike, which was pointed right into the bowl.

"You remember the political conventions this year?" replied Nixon. "Remember how some one in one of the delegations would get up, out on that

howling floor, and make an address to the chair?"

"Yes I do. Distinctly. You couldn't hear him above the bedlam—and then all of a sudden you did hear him. Surely. It's one of the things that made those conventions different from any I'd ever listened into before. And a good many people have mentioned it to me for the same reason."

Nixon smiled and patted our inanimate fellow-passenger. "Well, this is the guy that did that—this electric ear on the radio. That big sound collector that looks like a huge bowl gathers waves from one particular point, and then reflects and concentrates them all on that mike that faces the collector. Just you wait till you hear us use it for broadcasting from the top of the Stadium or the Bowl in the football games this fall.—We'll pick up the signals down on the field, while Princeton's giving a locomotive on one side of the field and Yale's singing the 'Boola' on the other! It's great—this parabolic reflector microphone that you can focus on any sound you want to pick up!"

THE Club Flambeau was quiet. Its crowd was always the after-theater crowd, and we were ahead of it.

On a dais in one corner was the band. Not far from it, in a clump of potted palms commanding every angle of the club was a spotlight. Between the two was the ABS microphone.

Nixon went to work immediately, setting up his electric ear back of this clump of potted palms where it would be well concealed. With the name lettered on it, the instrument looked merely like more ABS equipment.

"Kennedy has been working with us lately, adding a contrivance by which you can listen in through earphones,"

remarked Nixon. "I can't imagine what his idea is, but I brought along three or four of them, and I'll hook them up in this alcove. I suppose he thinks some of those in the show may do some talking. He can be so inconspicuous there that he'll be practically invisible."

"I guess you're right, Nixon," I agreed. "But in my opinion, what those birds need is a good third degree. No rough stuff, but something that will *make* them talk!"

It was almost twelve o'clock by the time Nixon completed his set-up. Only a few moments later, the entire cast arrived, headed by Kennedy and with Inspector O'Connor bringing up in the rear.

They were a sobered and worried group. By this time the club was moderately crowded with patrons. There was nothing in the atmosphere conducive to success; in fact I would never have guessed the turn events were to take.

"I want you to stay out there, pointing that parabola and operating it, Nixon," Kennedy quickly directed. "The way you've installed it is fine; they'll never suspect anything with an ABS engineer here, and I can keep under cover back in the alcove. Just keep Neville and Jerry Shaw covered, when they're together. Also, cover Harriet and Jerry and Harriet and Fergus whenever you get a chance."

"I get you."

Nixon took his position beside the parabola, where he could focus its exact center on any desired point on the club floor.

Promptly at midnight the club went on the air.

"Angel-Face" Jerry Shaw, row in costume, concluded what was usually her snappiest number with the kick of

one wand-like leg over the head of a gentleman with jowls—a kick so unwontedly spiritless that it almost failed to miss the victim's head. Mr. Jowls started back suddenly, and overturned his glass.

The saxes wailed the finale of a rollicking ditty that should have romped *allegro vivace*, but they literally crept along, *adagio lamentoso*. That was the spirit of the occasion. It was more like an unusually dispirited wake than the liveliest mirth emporium that had so far escaped a padlock. How could it have been otherwise, when the attendance of every one of the performers had been commanded by Inspector O'Connor, who refused pointblank to allow any member of the cast to leave until he gave permission?

Unobtrusively, Kennedy took me with him into the alcove; and as yet, no one had an inkling that anything was different at the club to-night from any other night, as far as the mikes were concerned.

"I think it's a wonderful thing, this parabola," I whispered to Kennedy as Nixon spotted here and there, so that our ear phones could pick up a conversation even above the blare of the band. "But these people are just going to build a wall of silence about themselves."

He raised his hand for me to be quiet.

"YOU'RE terribly ragged to-night, Jerry."

Jerry Shaw had flopped into a chair across the table from Harriet Moore, alone in the rear.

"Hnf!" Jerry sniffed, impatiently, throwing back her cherubic little head and taking a deep pull on the cigarette that drooped so daintily from her fingers. "Oh, it's all right for you to

hand out that line, Harriet," she retorted petulantly. "I guess you're sitting pretty, with Tom Fergus stuck on you—and he's boss now!... But how would you feel if you had just been told by that same boss that you were through?"

"Through?" Harriet appeared to be surprised. "I don't get you, kid."

"Why, in the hall of the dressing rooms just now he tells me I'm through! And when I ask why, he says he isn't going to have any more business spoiled by my coarse work.—Coarse work! Why, you know, Harriet, there isn't an entertainer in the place half as clever as I am. I can't make it out."

"Well, even if I don't agree with him," purred Harriet, "I think I can see his point."

"Point? Why, there isn't any one in the place who has brought in more customers than I have—and you know it!"

"You bring 'em in," admitted Harriet. "That's okay. But you also drive 'em out. It ain't getting 'em that counts—it's holding 'em!" Harriet paused. "Kid, even these saps are human. You can trim a guy to the bone, as long as you only assault his pocketbook. But when you soak him wherever it is that his romantic pride is located—why, that's different!"

"Rave on!" exclaimed Jerry. "You can sure shovel the chatter!—Maybe you're right. But I don't get you."

"It's this, Jerry." Harriet was leaning confidentially over the table. "Jerry, you're mercenary! I don't mean that's such a bad thing in itself—but you don't hide it. You knock 'em for a goal like nobody's business; you get 'em crazy about you—and then you give 'em an emotional kick in the slats."

"I never noticed that you were back-

ward about taking them across, Harriet—even the boss!”

“Maybe not. But, Jerry, sometimes your work is awful crude. I’m not speaking of Neville White, just now. That’s just a plain crush. Maybe it’s all right; maybe not.”

“Well, what *do* you mean, then?”

“Just this; what crabs it all is that just as soon as you’ve collected from a guy, you lose interest. He feels so humiliated he’s ashamed to come back.—No wonder the boss don’t want you to come along!”

“Look here, Harriet, that’s just conversation.” The angel-faced one helped herself to another cigarette. “Maybe he’s afraid of me!” She paused. “Talk of the future—what am I going to do?”

“I’m coming to that, kid.” Harriet’s voice was confidential. “The thing for you to do is to look for a fat bankroll and quit looking for eyes like Neville’s. Don’t get so vicious if any one comes between you and a boyfriend. Go after an annuity!”

“Yes! A bankroll with two rolls under the chin and three under the vest!” Jerry was scornful. “He should die, I should cry—and so on!”

“Baloney, Jerry! Marriage is a business. You got a front. You got a line of talk that’s ritzy like the talkies.”

“Well, what’s it getting me—even there?”

“**N**OTHING yet, Jerry. But it could. Never mind what the boss says—or why. I’ve a marvelous idea for you, Jerry. You’re going to connect with the bankroll in a swell Florida resort I know of—where money’s as common as corn in Kansas.”

“Don’t make me laugh!” jeered Jerry. “I can’t pay the room rent I owe, let alone—”

“But I’m going to fy-nance you, dearie!—I like you, kid. I’m not forgetting for a minute how you stayed away from Tom Fergus when I was surrounding him. Of course you didn’t know all I know about this Neville White—but, you let Tom alone, and I’m grateful.”

“Harriet, you’re immense!” It didn’t take a hammer to get an idea into Jerry’s pretty head. “I can get away from here. I can play the modest little girl at some swift Florida resort, and—”

“Not so fast, Jerry! Not the swift resorts. Remember, the harder the arteries, the softer the mind!”

The orchestra was tuning up for Jerry’s next number.

“If you’ll stake me, Harriet, I’ll go. I’ll grab some gay old dog who either wants to forget a misspent life or is aching to start out on one.”

“It’s a push-over for you, honey!” urged Harriet. “Why, one week down there and you’ll come out with a bankroll the size of a wrestling star’s neck!”

The prelude to Jerry’s dance was ending. “Okay, Harriet!” she called back as she rose. “I’ll pack to-night!”

As for me, I was studying Kennedy’s face. “Do you get that?” I inquired. “Why is she so anxious to go? Did you know that Liberty’s next picture starring Neville White is to be made at Palm Beach, and that they’re starting to work on it next week?”

Craig did not respond, other than to raise his hand again to adjure me to silence. Through the earphones from the parabola there now came a man’s voice.

“Say! Did you know that Neville’s signed up with Liberty Pictures for their next production in Florida? He just told me. He’s worried for fear

he can't get away in time." The voice was Tom Fergus's.

"Sure, I knew it." Harriet lowered her voice. "Do you suppose Kennedy and O'Connor know it? Jerry Shaw's going down there, too. That 'll give Kennedy something to think about—both of 'em on their way to Florida at once! Say, Tom, I haven't had a chance yet to ask you; but that note was in your own handwriting, wasn't it?"

"Sure it was."

"Nothing on a typewriter or anything like that?"

"Certainly not! Think I'm dumb?" And then Fergus was leaving her table.

Kennedy quietly beckoned to O'Connor, and whispered to him. O'Connor walked away nonchalantly.

**N**IXON switched the parabola and picked up the voices of Neville White and Tom Fergus.

"What's on your mind now, Neville? I thought I caught you signaling to me with your eyes while I was talking to Harriet."

"Yes." Neville was nervous. "What's become of this Kennedy person and that yes-man of his, Jameson?"

"They're sitting just back of those palms in the alcove, with O'Connor at the table in front of them. I'm going to send a waiter in to get a line on—"

"The devil you say! There's O'Connor—he's got Harriet by the arm, taking her out into the lobby! She's putting up a bit of a fight against going, too!"

"The big flatty! What's he care how he treats a lady? I'd love to be able to give the waiters the signal for the flying wedge and out on the sidewalk for him!"

"Oh, this is awful!" groaned the actor. "It 'll all be in the papers and— Say, do you really think I ought to charter a plane and hop off down to Florida to protect Liberty Pictures? It's just going to be too bad for them, with one star dead and another held as a—a material witness, or whatever they call it!"

Kennedy poked his head out of the alcove at Nixon. "George," he whispered, "spot me when I'm talking to Tom Fergus in a minute!"

"Okay."

Craig rose, taking off his earphones. "I'll leave this end in your charge, Walter. O'Connor 'll be back in a minute." He was off.

I watched Craig worming his way through the crowd toward Tom Fergus. Nixon was rambling all over the place with the parabola.

"Move over a bit, Walter." O'Connor had slipped in before I noticed him. "There—sit there, Miss Moore. Now, girlie, just slip that thing on your head like a good little telephone operator."

He had brought Harriet Moore along with him, defiant yet afraid to disobey.

"Hello, Fergus!" That was Kennedy's voice.

"Hello."

"So—I haven't had a chance yet to ask you. But that note was in your handwriting, wasn't it?"

"What in the hell do you mean by that?"

"Nothing on a typewriter or anything like that?"

"Say—er—er—" Fergus's voice was startled because of Kennedy's verbatim repetition of his own words to Harriet.

"Certainly not," repeated Kennedy. "Think I'm dumb?"

Fergus sputtered and stared.

"So—you're not so dumb, eh?" pursued Craig relentlessly.

"The — little — double-crossing—tart!" ground out Fergus. "So—she squealed, eh? I s'pose you think you're gointer burn me for this, eh, Kennedy? Well, I'll see myself in hell first, you—!"

"Not so fast, Fergus!" Kennedy's iron grasp had Fergus's wrist. "You're going with me in a patrol wagon—not an ambulance or a basket.—Drop that deck of poison before—"

Harriet, by my side, had torn the earphones from her head, had sprung from O'Connor's side, overturning a

palm as she did so. She was across the floor before I knew it.

"Yes—you *will* burn!" she screamed. "I squeal—? A little, double crossing tart—me? I've got your number, Tom Fergus! I heard it all! You—rat!"

"You—you heard it?" Fergus was stunned.

"Yes," ground out Kennedy, "she heard it! Murder on the mike this time is caught on the mike! I've been giving you all a third degree on the parabola over there! It 'll save you faking any charges about rubber hose against O'Connor!"

THE END.

U                      U                      U

## *The World's Oldest Tree*

THE sacred Bo-tree in the Maha-mego Gardens of Anarajapoor, Ceylon, is in all probability the oldest historical tree in the world. It is said to have been a branch of the identical fig tree under which Gotama Buddha reclined when he underwent his deification. It can be traced to the remotest periods of Buddhism, and ancient Singhalese records bear witness to the fact that it was planted in the year 288 B. C., and hence it is now more than two thousand years old. Age after age these sacred annals record the works which successive sovereigns erected for the preservation of the Bo-tree, and the story of its vicissitudes has been preserved in a series of continuous chronicles, among the most authentic that have been handed down by mankind.

Compared with it the Oak of Ellerslie and the venerable redwoods of California are but saplings; and the Conqueror's Oak in Windsor Forest barely numbers half its years. The yew trees of Fountains Abbey are believed to have flourished there 1,200 years ago; the olives in the Garden of Gethsemane were full-grown when the Saracens were expelled from Jerusalem; and the Cypress of Soma, in Lombardy, is said to have been a tree in the time of Julius Cæsar; yet the Bo-tree is older than the oldest of these by a century, and would almost seem to verify the prophecy pronounced when it was planted, that it would "flourish and be green for ever."

*Kenneth P. Wood.*

---

Eleven strong stories in next week's all-star

**Fiftieth Anniversary Issue**

*Get your copy early*

---