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Maxwell Hamilton, editor

Len Kabatsky, art director

Pat A. FitzSimons, associate

Abel Russo, art associate

Barnee Breeskin, Washington Editor

Cover painting by Mel Crair

Advertising Representatives  
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## FICTION BOOK BONUS

- The Red, Red Flowers . . . . . M. E. Chaber 34  
*Fabulous Milo March, secret agent, parachutes in Russia to rescue a captured U-2 pilot—with unexpected results*

## FICTION

- Last Flight . . . . . Hank Searls 12  
*A washed-up Weekend Warrior takes off on his last hop for the Navy, and finds it his toughest decision*
- Epitaph For A Fast Gun . . . . . Andrew Robin 18  
*He swore never to kill again but that was before he met the trigger-happy gunslinger, Curly Bart*
- The Grasshopper Commandos . . . . . William Chamberlain 28  
*How to become—and remain—a sergeant in this here United States Army. An hilarious tale of the peacetime yardbirds.*
- “A Dark People Thing” . . . . . John D. MacDonald 30  
*A television film star learns that voodoo and the hex still operate in the Congo—but learns it too late*
- The Man Who Told The Truth . . . . . Pat Frank 40  
*He swore he'd killed her, and the cops wouldn't believe him.*

## CARTOON FEATURE

- Hic . . . The Same Old New Year's Eve Herbert Goldberg 38  
*Herb Goldberg examines tipping through the centuries*

## TRUE BOOK BONUS

- The Shame of Iwo Jima . . . . . Ladislav Farago 14  
*America's worst scandal of World War II, and the story behind it—told for the first time!*

## ARTICLES

- I'm Through With Fund Raising . . . . . William Pendleton 20  
*A corporation executive puts the blast on one of our most vicious modern evils*
- Death On The Loose . . . . . Jack Duncan 22  
*A true tale of horror that's guaranteed to give you the cold chills*
- What's Wrong With Our Athletes? . . . . . Jesse Owens 24  
*Our greatest living ex-Olympian comes up with some suggestions for winning the next world championship*
- Ordeal In Paradise . . . . . Tom Bailey 32  
*Every man's dream—to be cast away on a desert island with a beautiful girl—and what happened to one man who experienced it*

## SPECIAL FEATURES

- The Way We See It . . . . . 6
- Says You . . . . . 8
- Now You Tell One . . . . . 10
- The Gentle Giant . . . . . 37
- Blue Notes . . . . . 89

**"I killed her," he said. "It was like pulling a knife across her throat." But the cops just laughed at him; another nut. Sure—but that was before the facts came out**

# **the MAN who TOLD the TRUTH**

**By Pat Frank**

**N**othing in nature is so mysterious, complex, and formidable as the human brain, and no adventure more daring than its exploration. Some of these adventures the psychiatrist publishes as case histories, thereby enhancing his reputation. Others he keeps to himself, lest he be thought crazier than any of his patients, and his practice suffer. It is not always wise to be first into an untrodden corridor of the mind's labyrinth, which is why you will not find this story in the medical journals.

For many years I have been a consultant to the Miami Police Department. Every resort attracts odd people, from flying-saucer fans to compulsive gamblers, and in the winter season I am overworked. Knowing this, the police call me only in emergencies. At one o'clock one Saturday morning, Lieutenant Roper, of the Homicide Squad, phoned. "Doctor," he said, "can you come down to headquarters? We've got a rough one."

"What's the trouble?" I asked. I didn't want to fight the traffic downtown. I had been sitting in the Florida room, absorbing tranquilizers called moonlight, night-blooming jasmine, and frangipani.

"We've got a nut—a *real* nut. He walked in and gave himself up two hours ago. Said he'd just run down and killed a little girl on Twentieth Street."

"Isn't that a job for the coroner and the State's Attorney?"

"I don't think so," Roper said. "I think it's a job for you. You see, he didn't kill her at all. I don't think he killed anybody. As far as we can find out, he didn't even hit anybody."

"Put him in the tank," I told Roger. "He'll be sober by morning."

"This fellow isn't drunk," the lieutenant said. "We've

already given him alcohol and narcotic tests. Both negative. And that isn't all—" Roper's voice was muffled, as if he had cupped the phone mouthpiece. "His bride is here in the squad room. They're honeymooners. Mr. and Mrs. Alan Woodroffe, from Rochester. I think *she* may blow her stack too. You'd better bring something for her, Doc!"

I live in Coral Gables. I said I'd be over in twenty minutes.

When I walked into the squad room, I saw a young woman who at any other time doubtless would have appeared poised and radiant. At that moment she was not only close to hysteria, but her hair was awry, she was painfully sunburned, and weeping miserably. She was a slight blonde, in her twenties. The tip of her nose was fiery red, matching her shoulders. I persuaded her to swallow a sedative, and then, as a diversion, suggested that she go out with a policewoman and find some sunburn lotion. Ordinarily, a woman's first thought is for her own appearance. Not Virginia Woodroffe.

"All I want is my husband!" she wailed, as if I personally had stolen him. A new shower of tears spattered down on the flowered, strapless Hawaiian gown that still showed suitcase wrinkles, and was so obviously part of a trousseau.

Roper drew me aside. "I've got him in the interrogation room across the hall," he said quietly. "Didn't want to slap him into a cell. Except that he's flipped, he looks like a respectable gent." Lieutenant Roper has been on the Homicide Squad fifteen years. He is solid of build and character, and I had always thought him beyond surprise. Now, he appeared a bit shaken.

We stepped across the (Continued on page 42)





### THE MAN WHO TOLD THE TRUTH *continued*

hallway and into the interrogation room. The Miami police are hospitable to guests, and solicitous to tourists, even those encountering the law. The room was clean and spacious, its decor modern and tropical. Rattan furniture was arranged in a semi-circle to form a pleasant conversation corner. The lighting was unorthodox. All the lights concentrated on one chair. Slumped in this chair, face buried in thin hands and dark hair hanging down, was a slender man. There was a detective behind the curved, free-form desk, and another standing, chewing on a cigar. The detective at the desk shrugged, and held up his palms in a gesture of defeat. Roper said, "Mr. Woodroffe!"

The young man raised his head. His eyes were red, but his face was not sunburned as badly as his wife's. "This is Doctor Saxe," Roper said. "He wants to talk to you."

I can identify terror and shock when I see it. I saw it then. Woodroffe glanced at my little black bag. I find that a psychiatrist inspires confidence by carrying this insignia of the medical profession, even when there is nothing in it except a box of aspirin, a wet swim suit, and last week's past performance charts at the track. "I guess you examined her," Woodroffe said, his voice flat and listless. "She is dead, isn't she?"

"She isn't dead," I said. "Didn't Lieutenant Roper tell you that so far as the police can find out, you didn't hit anybody?"

"I get it," Woodroffe said. "You're not a regular doctor. You're a psychiatrist. You all think I'm crazy! Well, I'm *not* crazy!" He looked around, angry and challenging. I glanced at Roper and he understood what I wanted. He motioned to his two detectives. They left. The lieutenant took the chair behind the desk.

I sat down next to Woodroffe and offered him a cigarette. "I'm here to help you," I told him. "That's

my only business. We all want to get this mess sorted out, don't we? I don't know whether you killed a child tonight or not, but I do know that you think you did. So we'll start from there."

I had made an impression. Woodroffe looked up, grateful, and pushed the hair back from his eyes. His face was unusually sensitive, grave, and intelligent. "Believe me, doctor, I killed her. She screamed, just once, and her scream was cut off right in the middle, like—like I'd pulled a knife across her throat." His eyes dropped. I could see that the memory was vivid, and awful.

I touched his shoulder. "You stopped immediately, of course?"

He shook his head. "No. That's the strange thing. I didn't stop until I got to the Seaboard station. That was two blocks west of where I hit her. Then I turned around and went back. The body was gone."

"You seem to know the town pretty well," I said.

"That's another strange thing. I *did* seem to know it well, but I've never been here before."

I said, "Alan, you'd better start from the beginning." I was beginning to be worried for him.

They had been married on Thursday—a high noon, high church wedding, I gathered, with bridesmaids, cutaways and striped trousers, all the trimmings. They had been engaged ever since Cornell. Her father was vice-president of a camera company. Alan Woodroffe was a research chemist for the same concern. They had flown to Miami Thursday evening, as the first stop on a three-week honeymoon that would extend to Trinidad. They had a suite in a Miami Beach hotel.

They'd spent all Friday swimming and sopping up the sun. "I guess we both got too much," Woodroffe said.

"A common error that wrecks a lot of vacations, and even honeymoons," I told him. "Go ahead."

"Everything went along fine until about 10 o'clock tonight," Woodroffe said. "Then I had to go to the airport. There was some sort of a mixup about our tickets, and I thought I'd better straighten it out, personally, instead of trying to do it on the phone. We had a hired car. I made Virginia stay at the hotel, and I drove across from the beach alone. I was driving across the causeway—" He frowned, and hesitated.

"Yes," I prompted him.

"It was on the causeway that I noticed that the wind was rising. It was so strong that the gusts made the car sway."

I concealed my surprise. It was a clear and balmy winter night, with only the slightest breeze from the south. I was afraid that Roper's first estimate had been right. This was clean-cut hallucination.

"The wind got worse," Woodroffe went on. "The palm trees were bent right over. I figured it was some sort of a squall. I stepped on it until I got to the mainland. Actually, I guess I was pretty scared. I turned right on Biscayne."

"You didn't have to ask directions?"

Woodroffe looked bewildered. "It's funny, but I didn't. I remember that the gear shift on the car bothered me. I couldn't get used to it. And I remember that I had to swerve, near the park, to miss hitting the sloop."

"Say that again," I said.

"I swerved to miss hitting the sloop. There was a dismasted sloop with its bowsprit poked out into the middle of the road. It was crazy—I guess I shouldn't use that word—it was like a nightmare. And then there was that big building. It was twisted and coming apart."

"Wait a minute," I said. I leaned back in my chair and closed my eyes and (Continued on page 77)

# The Man Who

Continued from page 42

concentrated. Not since the great hurricane of 1926 had there been such a sight in Miami. But in '26, skyscrapers had been twisted, as if by giant hands, and ships driven onto the streets. "How old are you, Alan?" I asked. "Thirty," he said. "Why?"

Thirty-four years had passed since the big blow of 1926. I said, "Go ahead."

"I turned up Twentieth to go to the airport. The wind was so bad I had trouble controlling the car, and I think it was raining. It was raining, wasn't it? Anyway, it happened so fast there wasn't anything I could do about it. She must have run out from behind some bushes in the park. I didn't see her at all until I was right on top of her. She was about 10 years old, I guess. I hit her, and heard her scream, and I wanted to stop but I just couldn't seem to turn around until I got to the station. Then I made a U-turn and came back.

"There wasn't any crowd. There wasn't any excitement. There wasn't any body.

"I figured somebody must have picked her up right after I hit her and rushed her to a hospital. So I came here, to police headquarters. I told the lieutenant what had happened, and then I called Virginia. Doctor, don't you think I ought to have a lawyer?"

"I hope not," I said. "I hope I'm all you'll need."

"When can I see Virginia?"

"In just a minute. First, I want to talk to her."

I rose, and he reached out and touched my arm. "You believe me, don't you, doctor?"

I said, "I believe you are telling the truth absolutely, to the best of your ability. Now, take it easy for just a minute."

Virginia was composed, now. She had combed her hair and fixed her face, and was talking to a police-woman. I said, "Mrs. Woodroffe, has your husband ever suffered from hallucinations?"

"My husband," she said, "is one of the most logical, sane, and clear-thinking people I have ever met. We have known each other for ten years. Alan is a scientist. He has never had anything approaching an hallucination. And he tells the truth—always."

I believed her. I said, "You can see him now." I led her into the other room.

Roper and I watched while they embraced. Roper said, "Mrs. Woodroffe, we have no reason to hold you. The Traffic Squad has gone over your hired car. Honestly, you haven't hit anything."

Woodroffe looked at me, his eyes desperate, demanding an answer that I could not, on the instant, give. They had a right to an explanation, and I, as a psychiatrist, had the duty to provide one for the sake of their

mind's security and the stability of their marriage. It was necessary that I find a corridor to this secret locked in Woodroffe's brain. "Lieutenant," I said to Roper, "do you believe in reincarnation?"

Roper smiled. "Nope. But my wife does. We made a trip to England a few years ago, and she said that everything about Windsor Castle looked familiar. Now she's convinced herself that in a past incarnation she was a lady-in-waiting to Queen Victoria. But me, I don't believe in it."

"I don't believe, or disbelieve, anything until proven," I said. "But I always try to find a physical reason, even for the apparently supernatural." I turned to Woodroffe. "You're sure you've never been in Miami before?" "I'm positive."

"Did your father ever live here?"

"No, doctor. My father has been dead six years. Our family has never lived anywhere except in upstate New York."

I said, "But he must have visited Florida. Try to remember."

Woodroffe was silent, head lowered, thinking. "Yes," he said finally. "He was down here. He was here during the big hurricane of September, 1926. He often mentioned it, when storm warnings were up along the coast."

*The way to be nothing is to do nothing—Hale.*

"Did he ever tell you about driving across the causeway in the storm, and running over a little girl?"

"No."

"You're positive?"

"Certainly! If my father had ever told me he killed a child, would I be likely to forget it? All he ever said about the hurricane was that he never wanted to go through another."

I asked Lieutenant Roper: "Would the department have records of a child run down and killed during the storm?"

Roper shook his head, no. "We had chaos here, that time. Four or five hundred people were killed—drowned, pinned under buildings, crushed by trees. To this day we don't know the exact number, or even the names of all of them."

Woodroffe grinned for the first time. "You aren't suggesting, are you, that I am the reincarnation of my father?"

"No," I said. "I am not. But I will give you a scientific explanation. You can believe it if you want. I suggest that your father *did* run down a child on Twentieth Street during the big blow. I suggest that it was the most traumatic experience of his life, that he never spoke of it, but that he never forgot it—and that he passed the memory of it on to you through genes and chromosomes."

I think Roper snickered; the Woodroffes both looked at me skeptical-

ly. I said, "Every cell in our bodies—and many mental traits and quirks—we inherit from our ancestors. Genes and chromosomes determine the color of our hair and skin, and whether we have freckles or are susceptible to sunburn. Our capacity for learning, quickness of mind, the shape of head and fingers, *all* these are inherited. Is it not possible that we might also inherit a bit of memory? Is it not possible that the strongest memory in a man's mind can be passed on to his son?"

I was watching Woodroffe. He said nothing, but I could see that he did not reject my theory, which was all I could hope for. I said, "You two kids go on back to your hotel and get some sleep. And stay out of the sun tomorrow."

After they were gone, Roper said, "You don't *really* believe that, do you?"

I said, "It doesn't matter, does it, so long as I rationalized this episode for those two young people?" I picked up my bag and drove home.

I didn't see Roper again until the following Thursday. He came charging into my office, looking triumphant as if he had solved some dusty murder. "I found it!" he said. "It kept worrying me. So I went through our old arrest and accident reports. Nothing there, like I expected. Then I went to one of the papers. The City Editor is an old friend. Honestly, doctor, I spent two days in their library, reading through the old files. And I found it!"

He laid on my desk the photostatic copy of a newspaper clipping, dated October 12, 1926. It was headed, "STORM AFTERMATH," and it read:

"Police are searching for a motorist who during the height of the September hurricane reported that he had run down and killed a young girl on Twentieth Street. The man said that at the time he had two injured women in his car, and was rushing them from the beach to the emergency medical center set up in the Seaboard station. After leaving the women at the aid center, he returned to the scene of the accident but couldn't find the body.

"Police have now learned that the child was not seriously injured. She was taken to her home and quickly recovered. In the confusion, the identity of the driver was not obtained, but his car bore New York plates. Parents of the girl feel that the driver will be relieved to learn of this, if he can be found."

I laid the photostat on my desk. I believe my fingers trembled.

Roper said, smiling, "Like to keep that, doctor?"

"Just for today," I told him. "I would like to read it over a few times more. Then I'm going to send it to the Woodroffes, in Rochester. It'll be waiting for them when they get home. I'll tell them it's your wedding present, lieutenant."

"Better make it from both of us," Roper said. ●

# Blue Notes

*Some assorted background facts  
on who wrote what, and why, in  
this issue of Bluebook*

**A**nother guy who has played around in his day with the stuff dreams are made of is Pat Frank, author of "The Man Who Told The Truth" (pages 40-42). Pat will be remembered as the celebrated writer of "Mr. Adam," the best-seller of some years ago which concerned a chap who turned out to be the . . . er . . . last man on earth who could produce young. As you can imagine, Pat's hero in that one was a guy who could be said to have it made.