

Pete Flynt, the agency dick, thought that playing nursemaid to an eccentric artist on a pleasure yacht would be a swell vacation with pay. But Pete's serenity soon fled when a stowaway girl and lightning guns tangled him with the plot of a defanged bullet . . .

# Mystery on Shark Island



*By George Armin Shaftel*

**F**LYNT, I'm sendin' you on a job that'll take you down the coast of Lower California on a yacht," my boss told me that morning, and went on to explain about Jed Lorrimer. I listened close, thinking I'd found some compensation for being a private detective.

"Sounds like I'm to be a wet-nurse for this Lorrimer," I growled finally. "Just what's wrong with 'im, chief?"

"Here's the dossier . . . Lorrimer is an artist, one of these cubist birds who paints smells and music and flavors in shapes like dice and smoke rings, so of course he's nuts. Our

client is sending him on a fishing trip, hoping that a sea voyage will jar him out of a fit of seven-year blues he's in. You go along to see that he doesn't get mad at old debil world and sink the ship. Seems like his wife died, and he's been broodin' like a hen on a glass egg."

I glanced over the dossier . . . "Jed Lorrimer. Thirty-two. Six feet, 170 pounds. Curly black hair; dark eyes. Remarks: Artistic reputation is first class. Last year, had exhibitions of his work at the Stendhall Galleries, New York. Has won the Sorbonne Prize, the Vincente Medal, and a

number of honorable mentions. Talks well. Has great charm of manner. Suggest that he be closely watched; though moody and temperamental, he is careful to hide his spells of depression. The death of his wife was a shock from which he has never recovered."

"You'll like Lorrimer," the chief warned. "And if you're not careful, he'll have you running his errands. Don't. He may want to seize the yacht and turn pirate. Or he may want to start a nudist colony, or sail down to Devil's Island and free the prisoners. Whatever he wants, *humour* him. But don't let him go too far! You bring Jed Lorrimer back in good health and good spirits!"

I congratulated myself as I left. This job looked like a vacation on full pay. If I had known, then, what a setup of larceny, intrigue and mayhem it was, I'd have volunteered for a trans-Atlantic flight or something equally safe and comfortable.

**N**EXT day, I was standing beside Jed Lorrimer on the deck of the sixty-foot cruiser, *Cormorant*, as it sheered away from the San Diego wharf. Down the bay we chugged, past tuna and broadbill fishermen, past battleship row and Ballast Point and Loma and over the bar of the Silver Gate into the Pacific. It was sunset; sky and water were burning with color like a four-alarm fire. Even I thought it was grand, while Lorrimer—he stood there taut, gazing.

My first official act, later was to sift Lorrimer's baggage for any weapons with which he might hurt himself or somebody else. I found a .25 calibre automatic. I took it.

"Flynt, you're welcome to that pistol."

I whirled, startled. There was Lorrimer, leaning his loose-jointed frame in the doorway. I gawked at him.

He added: "Rest easy tonight. I promise you that I'll do nothing to cause you any concern."

And I believed him. I liked and re-

spected this Jed Lorrimer surprisingly quick. He compelled it. Personality? Yes. The erect way he carried himself: the firm, clean line of his jaw, the straightforward look of his dark eyes. You noticed those eyes; but they were brooding, sensitive. They told you this man had brains but that, in whatever he did, his feeling would count more than logic.

I asked: "Will your promise hold good after tonight?"

He shook his head. "No. I'm not returning from this trip. Whether I'll land at Mazatlan and go overland to Mexico City, or settle on some island along the coast, or—Well, anyway, neither you nor anybody else can prevent me. So don't lose any sleep over me. I'm sorry that I must cause you some annoyance, but I promise it'll be as little as possible."

**L**ATER, in the pilot cabin, I talked to our skipper, old Captain Burris. He knew all about Jed.

"I'll help watch him," Burris promised. "The world's full of men I'd let go sleep with the wolves, and welcome. But Jed is one of the few I want to keep with us."

Next day, Lorrimer brought me a map, and showed me our route down the long leg of Lower California. He showed me where to fish, listed the kinds I'd catch and what tackle and bait to use. He acted as if he felt personally responsible for my comfort. He spoiled it all for me, however, by saying: "You'll need this—" and—"You'll find that—" as if he weren't going to be along at all! That second night I lay in my bunk, listening to his easy breathing, afraid to sleep for fear he'd do a Houdini through the port hole.

"Flynt! Get up, man! Come alive!"

Like a fire alarm that shout jackknifed me out of sleep. It was daylight. Jed leaned over me, all excited.

"Flynt, old Cap' Burris is nowhere on the boat!"

"Overboard?" I snapped, reaching for my pants.

"Afraid so. The launch is in place at the stern, and no lifebelts are missing, so it's either an accident, or—"

"A knife in the back!"

We ran out on deck. I noticed that the cruiser was wallowing in the swells. By the pilot house our engine man, Swenson, and the cook, Clancy, were standing, bug-eyed, tense. I whipped questions at them. Both claimed to have slept like dead. Swenson had risen finally to relieve the skipper, had found no one at the wheel and, scared, had roused Clancy and Lorrimer from sleep. They had no idea of what had happened to Cap' Burris. Neither had I. It wasn't likely that an old seaman like him would fall overboard. Still less likely that 190 pounds of hard-fisted, bull-throated skipper would evaporate into thin air without raising a yell.

"Swenson!" Lorrimer ordered, quietly taking command. "Start the diesel and swing us back over our course."

Then Jed Lorrimer, Clancy and I, went through the cruiser like a pick-pocket through a drunk. Didn't take us a minute to realize that Burris, unless he was hid under the wallpaper, wasn't in the cabins or on deck.

"Maybe he went down into the hold," I suggested.

"But the hatch is still fastened down, from above."

"Maybe it's a trick," I insisted. "Let's make sure."

So we opened the hatch.

For a stunned moment, when the cover was lifted back, the three of us gawked in unbelieving, drop-jawed surprise at somebody who stammered "H-hello!" at us. It wasn't the captain. A stowaway. And a girl, at that!

A young girl of twenty or so. A slim young girl in a gray tweed suit and smart little hat, whose face was very pale, strained, beautiful and tired. She tried to smile at us, but the sunlight stung her blue eyes so that she had to lower her long lashes over them. She flushed, then, under our popeyed wonder at her. Uneasily she

patted silky wisps of blonde hair under her hat brim and straightened her jacket about her youthful throat.

"I thought nobody would ever open," she said. "I didn't scream, did I? I fell asleep, once . . . ."

"Why didn't you yell to be let out?" I demanded.

"I was afraid you'd take me back to San Diego."

I realized that she knew nothing about Cap' Burris.

Jed reached her a hand and helped her to the deck.

AS she stood in the light before us, my amaze at finding a stowaway like her sharpened like a fever. She was nobody you'd want to hide, anywhere! Tall for a girl, but shapely, with grace and vitality in the way she carried herself. She took off her hat; and with her shining yellow hair framing her face, her loveliness was like a lamp switched on.

Stowaways aren't uncommon; they're found even on trans-Atlantic planes. But why, I wondered, should a girl who looked like some artist's idea of Miss Universe be hiding in the smelly hold? Why *our* boat? Why this particular trip?

I noticed, then, that our cook, Clancy, was staring at her with the queerest jumble of amaze, recognition and annoyance that I ever saw scrambled on one human pan. He caught my eye and froze, pronto. I started questioning the girl.

Her name? Anne Michaels. What was she doing here?

"I'm sorry, but I can't answer any questions," she insisted. Naturally, this put my back up. But before I could read the riot act to her, Jed cut in.

"You're tired and hungry. Go into our cabin."

I ushered her into our cabin, and left. Clancy brought her some breakfast. Then I put my ear against the door.

I couldn't make sense of their low words. But he was bawling her out

something fierce! Her own voice was pleading, yet defiant and obstinate at the same time. Looking through the port hole, I saw that her arms were about his neck. She was kissing him.

"Jed," I asked, finding him in the pilot house, "what do you know about our cook, Clancy?"

He frowned, ran long fingers through his curly dark hair.

"Nothing much, Pete. Clancy was hired just before we left San Diego. The regular cook had had an accident."

"Uh-huh," I grunted, and reflected that Mister Clancy had picked the job he wanted, removed its incumbent in some post-impressionist manner, then stepped into the job himself.

I gumshoed into the cabin Clancy shared with Swenson.

Fingering through Clancy's belongings, I found a pair of twenty-five dollar goggles and a box of .38 calibre cartridges. Evidently he adorned himself with a gat. But why the goggles?

Barging into the galley, I questioned Clancy about old Burris's habits. Meanwhile, I studied Clancy's map.

A lanky six-footer, this Steve Clancy, with a hawk nose and underslung jaw, and black hair that looked too Indian in contrast to his gray eyes and blond, freckled skin. Seemed to me that he ought to have sandy hair, a light mustache on that pale upper lip. He was as out of place here as a social register name in the rogue's gallery. The man had poise, confidence, wits that clicked over on all nine cylinders.

I thought of those goggles I had seen in his luggage. Aviation goggles. I looked at Clancy and imagined him in a helmet, smiling his tight-lipped grin, showing his Viking profile. And damned if he didn't seem familiar! I connected him, vaguely, with films or newspapers. Front page stuff. . . .

For hours we traveled back over our course, hunting Burris, but found no sign of him. We did meet some whaling vessels, a mother ship and

three "killers." Jed went aboard the mother ship and radioed to the *Cormorant's* owner in San Diego. Answer came back, eventually, to continue our cruise. Swenson had papers qualifying him as skipper.

That evening I had a long palaver with Jed Lorrimer. I insisted: "Burris was murdered! Can you figure out why?"

Jed said he couldn't. Obviously the motive was desperate. And he asked me could I explain why a lovely girl like Anne Michaels should stowaway on the *Cormorant*. No, I said; again, obviously, the motive was desperate. I told him about Clancy. Did he, I asked, have any notion why a headlining daredevil like Clancy should stuff himself into the hot galley of our boat? Once more the motive, obviously, was desperate.

"Jed," I wound up, "Burris's disappearance, Anne Michaels' appearance and Clancy's masquerade are all links in the same chain. Shall we work together on it?"

He said yes, a glint in his dark eyes. We shook hands on it, and he agreed that for the present it would be wisest not to question Anne, nor to let Clancy know he was suspected. We would just watch, alert for trouble.

One fact I held out on Jed. He liked Anne; and I hated to tell him of seeing her in Clancy's arms. For not mentioning this the time came, later, when I cursed myself for a blundering fool.

**A**NNE MICHAELS toned our party up. She had a quick smile and appealing. She was sensitive to Jed's moods and careful of them. Of an evening, when we were anchored in some land-locked harbor, she would sing for us or listen like a wide-eyed grandchild while I told some crook-catching yarn.

Often she fished with us. In San Quintin Bay we caught tuna up to a hundred pounds; also barracuda with jaws like an alligator's. Off the Cedros Islands I hooked onto a 14-foot shark that gave me more excitement than a

Michaelmas massacre. Rounding San Lucas, at the toe of Baja California, I harpooned a sea-bat as big as a trimotor plane, and twice as active! He whipped my little launch along behind like a can tied to a dog's tail. Luckily, the rope broke.

Jed spent a lot of time painting Anne. I guess beauty fires an artist's imagination like a mystery killing does a detective's.

By the hour Anne posed for him in her smart tweed suit; in a loose robe he gave her that made her look like a dancing figure on an old, old vase; in a bathing suit she made over from one he found in a locker. She would sit with her little head thrown back, her yellow hair rippling over her shoulders and the sun bright on the youthful line of her throat, a dreamy half-smile on her soft lips.

Jed thrived on hard work; his face filled out and his eyes lost their look of black, aching misery. Until we reached Concepcion Bay, things ran along smoothly.

"Jed," Anne asked at breakfast "don't you tire of painting me?"

"No." And he added something that must've come from a book: "Time cannot wither, no custom stale her infinite variety." She must have read that book, for she blushed like a peony. Jed said: "Anne, we're starting home today. I don't want you to think that this has been just a ship-board acquaintance. I'll be asking for your address, phone, and visiting hours."

She looked confused, startled. "Starting back today?"

"Yes, after lunch."

At mid-morning, Anne and Jed and I went for a swim. Anne got out first, went to her cabin. After a bit Jed and I walked to ours. I opened the door.

Anne was in *our* cabin.

I was surprised, at first; then positively thunderstruck to see that my grip was open and the key—taken from my clothes—in the lock. Anne was holding in her hands Jed's .25 calibre automatic and my own short-barreled .38!

"Anne, what're you up to?" I burst out.

She was pale, tense. Instead of answering me, she shot a bullet through the open port hole. I started for her.

The starboard door flung open and Clancy lunged in, a .38 police special in his hand. He snapped:

"Jack 'em up! Quick, both of you!"

Well, there were no two ways about it, for us. We raised our hands. I swore under my breath. Jed looked at Anne with such a shock of amaze in his dark eyes that she couldn't face him. She thrust the two guns into Clancy's free hand and stumbled out of the cabin.

"Swenson!" Clancy bawled.

"What's your game?" I demanded. "Don't you know this is mutiny! You'll rot in prison for this job!"

Swenson stalked in. Clancy had him tie us hard and fast in our bunks. I went wild. I swore at Clancy like the Irish drunk I sometimes am. "You dirty masquerading crook," I finished, "I'll show you up! I'll see you hang for the murder of old Cap' Burris!"

His thin hawk's face went white. He whipped at us: "Neither of you men will ever swear to a charge against me. Now shut up, or I'll stuff your jaws with oily waste!"

He locked the port door, then went out the starboard door and locked it. Almost at once we heard the diesel cough and bark into action. The cruiser moved out of the bay and into the gulf, headed north—not south—the way he had come, into the Pacific, but north up the Gulf of California.

"Jed, do *you* know what this is all about?" I asked.

"No, I don't. But I do know that Anne is not to be blamed for her share in this business. Clancy has forced her to help him. She's straight, she's fine, she's honest."

Of course, he *would* defend Anne. I thought of seeing her with her arms around Clancy's neck; but I said nothing.

Thinking aloud, Jed gritted: "If it's the last thing I ever do—" He caught

my eye, then, and shut up. But I knew what was in his mind. As plainly as if he had drawn it for me, I could see a portrait of Clancy he'd like to paint—of Clancy drawn and quartered and boiled in oil!

**W**E tried hard to get loose. I strained till the veins bulged on my forehead, but couldn't work out of my ropes.

Time agonised past like a cripple. Puzzling over events of this trip, I stared out my port hole. I could see the far-off yellow hills of Sonora, for we were still chugging northward up the Gulf. Occasionally an island, jutting a reddish peak into the heat-glazed sky, drifted into my vision.

The Sea of Cortez was hot with a sort of breathless, fertile heat that seemed to quiver with life. Fins of huge fish cut the smooth mirror of the gulf. Out of the water popped tiny flying fish, humming bird size. School after school of small fry were marked by clouds of birds circling over them, by the fast-moving ripples of wolfing fish that swam in pursuit. Everywhere were birds.

All afternoon, and all night, the diesel kicked along without stop. Cramped by the ropes, I slept in jerks.

Looking out the port hole, at day break, I saw that we were driving onto a long island that jutted from the sea like the top of a mountain range. Straight for the cliffs the cruiser headed, then arrowed through a narrow channel into a cove of smooth water flanked by steep hills. As we neared the shore a hail came from a man who ran along the beach, excited, waving one arm at us. The other, I noticed, was wrapped in a clumsy bandage.

Anchor was dropped. Clancy opened our door and Swenson untied us. While we stretched our muscles and groaned from the cramp, Clancy warned: "You two will hop to my orders, or be left on this island. Come out!"

We all went ashore in the launch. The man with the bandaged hand

waited for us. I looked close at him as we stepped onto the sand, and swore in sudden surprise. I watched him as he gave Clancy a handshake, pounded him on the back, grinned and swore at him in a tone that made congratulations out of insults. In spite of this man's ragged beard and more ragged clothes I recognized him. He was Bill Cantillon, a pilot who'd recently made a record-breaking flight from Los Angeles to New York. The papers had made a nine days wonder of him. "What sort of a tail wind blew him here?" I asked myself.

"Hike up the canyon!" Clancy rapped at us.

My back crept as Jed and I marched up the trail. Would we be shot down from behind?

We climbed into a valley that stretched down the middle of the island. Toward the left wall Cantillon directed us to the wreckage of a plane covered with leafy branches of laurel and scrub oak. A big trimotor amphibian it was, with "Pacific Air Service" painted on the side.

Then I remembered newspaper headlines of a mystery, a long search. Then I recalled who Clancy really was.

Clancy ordered: "Carry all the freight out the plane and stack it over here. Hop at it!"

He and Cantillon stood, guns in hand, watching us while we worked, hauling the plane's cargo out and piling it at their feet. But, while Jed and I pried into the wreckage side by side, lifting smashed struts and wing sections, I managed to whisper snatches of the story to him.

"Jed, you know what this freight is?"

"No—but it's heavy as a thief's conscience!"

"It's gold. The boxes are full of coin. These bars are gold and silver melted down and coated with lead." And I told him, in snatches, about the liner *Comet* bound from Panama to San Diego, that had gone aground on Point Tosco at Santa Margarita Island. That had been six weeks ago.

The ship's strong box had carried a consignment of specie and bullion valued at two hundred thousand dollars.

It had been gotten safely ashore. The liner captain had radioed news of the wreck and, afraid of being hijacked, had asked for a big plane to ferry his gold shipment to San Diego.

Pacific Air Service had sent a trimotor piloted by Cantillon and Walters—or Clancy, as we knew him. The treasure had been loaded aboard. When last seen, the P. A. S. amphibian had been headed north over the mainland. A storm had come up and the plane had never reached its home port.

"Obviously that ship cracked up here in a forced landing," I sidemouthed to Jed. Days had passed. Clancy and his partner realized finally that the search for them was given up. They realized, also, that they had a chance to keep their valuable cargo for themselves! While Cantillon stayed to guard the loot, Clancy had beat his way home. Hiked along the shore until he met a Seri Indian, or was picked up by some fishing boat. He had shaved off his mustache, dyed his hair black, called himself Clancy; hung around San Diego until he got a chance to ship as cook on a boat headed toward the Gulf. He must have killed our skipper and pirated our cruiser to use in rescuing his partner and the loot!

"Pete, we're in a tight place," Jed whispered to me. "They know we're wise to them. They'll never take us back to San Diego!" He lifted a bullion bar from the plane, carried it to the stack. I followed suit. As we pried into the wreck again, he hissed: "We've got to disarm 'em. Watch me close old-timer. I'll make a chance to clip these buzzards' wings!"

A little later I caught a queer, brooding look on Jed's lean face. I didn't have to go into a trance to guess what was throbbing in his brain. He was thinking of Anne Michaels. Wondering how-come she was

tangled up with such thieves as Clancy and his partner. The same question had me stumped. I had sized her up as a fine person in some kind of a jam—but not a *crook*; I wondered if I couldn't trust my intuitions any more.

**W**E carried the loot to the motorboat and ferried it to the cruiser in two trips, unloading while Cantillon sat in the stern of the launch, pistol in his good hand. Anne Michaels—on Clancy's orders—stood by the rail holding that .25 automatic of Jed's. I passed the specie and bars to Swenson, who handed them to Jed on deck, who reached them to Clancy. He stored the first load in his cabin. When we came with the rest, Clancy ordered Jed to clear our luggage out of our cabin, as if we'd never use it any more . . . .

"Jump, damn you!" he snapped venomously.

Jed stalked into our cabin. The door swung shut behind him.

"Hey!" Clancy yelled suspiciously, jumping to that door. It was locked from inside. "Open, blast you!" He rammed the panels with his shoulder. It didn't give. Then, plainly, from the port side of the boat, we heard the other door slam—and a heavy splash in the water!

"That mucker dived overboard!" Cantillon yelled.

Swearing, Clancy yanked out his .38 and sprinted around the deck house to the port rail. Anne darted around the bow of the cruiser. Cantillon lowered his gun arm to the thwart and started to stand up.

I dropped the bar of bullion I held onto his lap. He sat down with a thump, yelling, and I pounced onto him like a panther. My idea was to grab that gun out of his hand before Swenson could reach us from the bow of the little launch.

But Cantillon was tough. I held his good arm back so that bullets exploding out of his pistol spat over my shoulder. Swenson lunged for me.

The door which Jed had locked be-

hind him, swung open. Jed shot out of the cabin. He'd only *pretended* to escape out the opposite door, throwing something into the water. One jump, and he was at the rail. He leaned forward over the launch alongside. As Swenson reached for me, unawares, Jed's fist caught him behind the ear and tumbled him into the water as smartly as if a shell had hit him.

"Clancy!" bawled Cantillon. "Come a-running!"

Jed sprang back, flattened himself in the doorway. Clancy came tearing around the cabin, fell over Jed's out-thrust foot and sprawled flat on deck. Jed kicked the gun out of his hand. Clancy bounced up with a rush, fainted, drove a one-two punch to the heart and a left to the midriff that staggered Jed, and turned to snatch up his pistol. But Jed bore in, crossed a vicious right to the chest, hooked a left to the chin that off-balanced Clancy and smashed his right to the plexus.

Clancy shook himself and waded in for more. Toe to toe they stood, slugging, arms lashing out like pistons, fists landing with a bony smack-smack-smack. Clancy wrapped Jed in a clinch. Brought his knee up into Jed's stomach with terrific force. Jed gasped, reeled away. Clancy rammed his fist to Jed's chin, and Jed slumped to his knees. Clancy whirled, reached his pistol in a jump, stooped as Jed gamely lurched toward him, and snatched up that .38.

"You mug, I warned you!" he yelled, and levelled the gun.

Jed halted, turned to escape—but blocking his way to the bow stood Anne, her automatic held in her white-knuckled fist.

Two shots followed one on the heel of the other. Splinters spat from the deck at Jed's feet. Clancy staggered, arms contorted, fingers writhing, staggered, slumped against the rail; pitched face-down to the deck. Then Jed was at my side, tearing the gun from Cantillon's grip. I darted a look at Anne. She was bent over Clancy tears streaming down her face . . .

We hauled Swenson aboard, bandaged Clancy's shoulder, and locked them with Cantillon into a cabin.

ANNE told us the whole story. Clancy was her half-brother. He had come to her after returning to San Diego; and she had found out about his crack-up on Shark Island and his plan to steal a boat and rescue his partner and the loot. She had tried to argue him out of the robbery. He wouldn't listen. In desperation she had stowed away on the *Cormorant*, hoping that, rather than entangle her in his lawbreaking, he would give up his scheme. But he hadn't. Instead, he had forced her to help him. Rather than let him shoot us in the back, she had promised to disarm us when the chance came.

"Now I've shot him!" Anne wept. "I didn't want him to kill you, Jed. I've shot him, and he'll go to jail."

Jed put his arm about her, comforted her.

"You mustn't blame yourself, Anne. We can't change other people. What a person does comes from something deep inside himself or herself."

On the trip home, I got full confession from Clancy. He shouldered most of the guilt, admitted bribing Swenson and knocking Burris overboard. He asked, considering that the loot was recovered, that Cantillon and Swenson get lenient treatment.

"Pete," said Jed, as we docked at San Diego, "here's a present for you." He handed me a fountain pen. I stared. He went on: "Remember, first day of our trip, I told you that any time I wanted to go off the deep end, I had a way you couldn't block? This pen was my hole card. It's a gun. Bank tellers have 'em. You can keep it now. I haven't any more use for it."

He grinned and walked off. I opened the trick gun. Yes, it held a bullet which proved, when I pried the lead off, to contain no powder. It was the same bullet I had de-fanged the second night of our trip . . .