

Blonde Rattlesnake: Burmah Adams, Tom White, and the 1933 Crime Spree that Terrorized Los Angeles

Julia Bricklin

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Julia Bricklin's *Blonde Rattlesnake* is the true crime account of the 1933 spree of robberies and assaults committed by Tom White and his wife, Burmah. The couple terrorized the Los Angeles area for eight weeks, springing out of nowhere like rattlesnakes and demanding cash and valuables from victims.

Tom White met nineteen-year-old Burmah Adams at a dance, pursuing her with forceful charisma and plenty of cash. Following a whirlwind courtship, their small wedding was held at Burmah's parents' home, noted in the *Santa Ana Register* as being a "lovely" flower-filled affair with a buffet supper. Almost immediately after, the couple began their rampage of theft, in one case shooting and permanently blinding a schoolteacher.

While Tom's criminal career ended in a hail of LAPD bullets, Burmah was put on trial and eventually convicted. The press called Burmah the "Blonde Rattlesnake" because of her platinum-tinted hair, and she was the subject of much media coverage due to her youth, good looks, and unnerving transformation from a seemingly kindhearted, hardworking girl to a getaway driver and gun moll.

Extensively researched, *Blonde Rattlesnake*'s compilation of police records, photos, trial transcripts, and newspaper and magazine articles provides a colorful, factual backdrop for Tom and Burmah's crime wave. The text also includes historical and sociopolitical context regarding Depression-era California.

Burmah's attraction to the abusive White—perhaps influenced by money, drugs, intimidation, or just thrill-seeking—remains unclear. After Burmah's release from prison, the brief wildness of her marriage continued to shadow her life and ultimately led to her despondence and alcoholism.

Blonde Rattlesnake offers a dark and captivating look at the morally conflicted "Dirty Thirties," serving as a cautionary tale regarding impulse, allure, crime, and generally inevitable punishment.

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