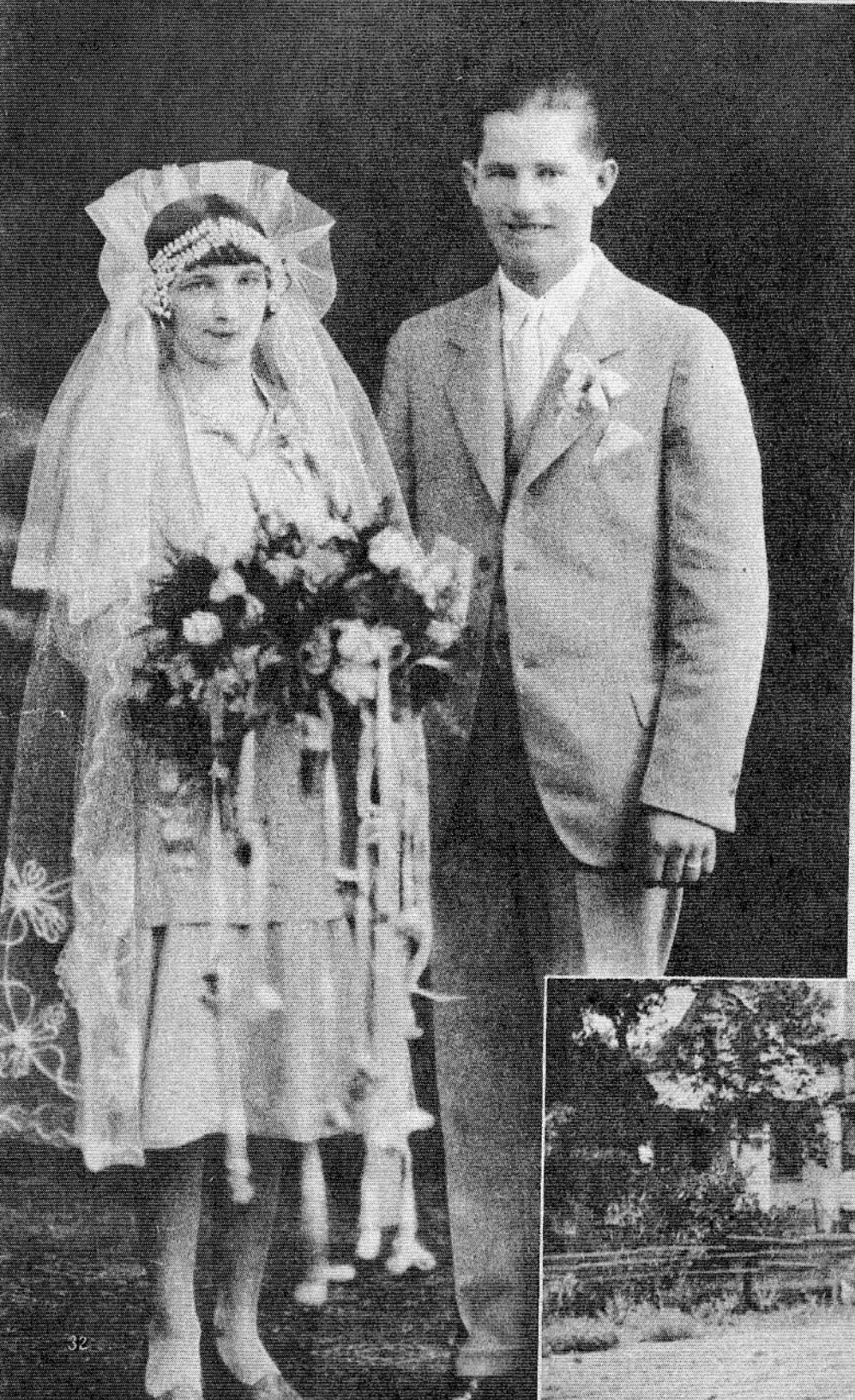


How We Trapped



THE long distance operator had scarcely ceased speaking when a man's voice came harshly over the telephone wire. I recognized the speaker instantly as John Forbes, large-scale farm operator and employer of my daughter and son-in-law. And I could tell that he was angry.

"Dreger," he said, "where are your daughter and her husband?"

I was startled by the abrupt question. "Rose and Ernie?" I stammered. "Aren't they at your farm? I haven't seen them for three weeks."

"Neither has anyone else," he retorted. "They were here one day, gone the next. I hired them to run my farm, not to traipse around the country."

"They mentioned a trip to South Dakota," I suggested lamely.

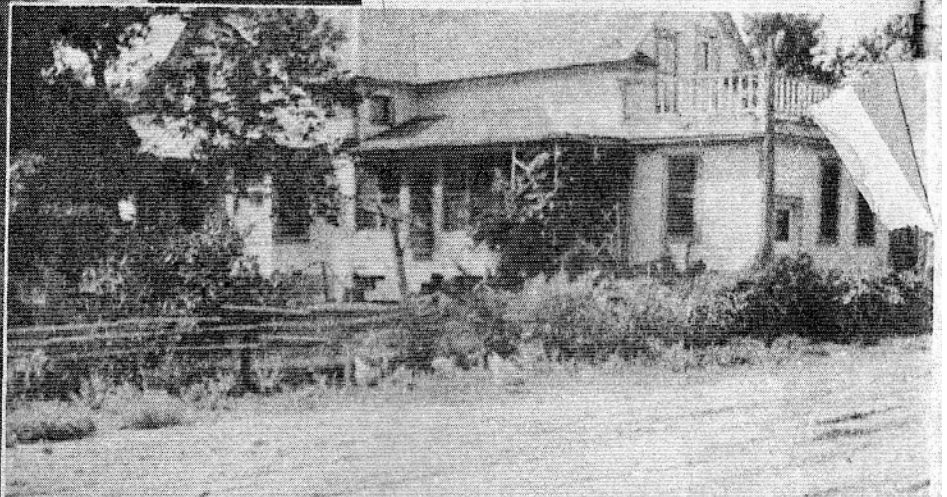
"Trip, nothing," Forbes scoffed. "Would they go without clothing? All their stuff is here—dirty dishes on the table and a lot of other funny business. You'd better look into it, or at least come up and get their stuff out of the way. I've hired another man."

"All right. I'll come today," I promised, feeling a little dizzy. "Be there in a couple of hours."

"I'll wait," Forbes said, and hung up.

When I turned from the telephone I didn't know what to say. My wife and two daughters, Hattie and Viola, had

Only a few months after they were married at the home of the bride's father, below, near Norfolk, Neb., Rose Dreger and Ernest Wittmer disappeared from the farm they had been selected to operate. Suspicion of double murder followed.



My Daughter's Slayer

By
ALBERT DREGER
as told to
CHAS. R. SMITH

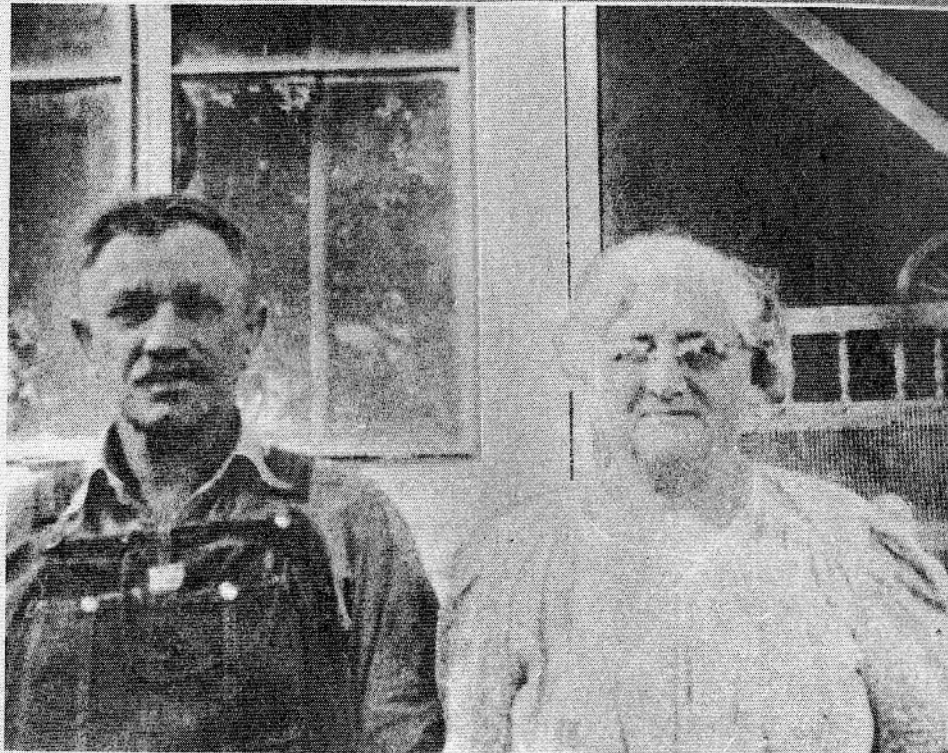
left the breakfast table and come to the living room.

"So that's why we haven't heard from Rose," Viola exclaimed. "They've left."

"I can't understand it," I replied. "Forbes says there is something wrong. We'd better start right away. You get ready while I do the chores."

It was almost 100 miles from my 320-acre farm four miles east of Norfolk to the Forbes farm near Brunswick, Neb. Our big house is a show place as modern as any home in the city. Here all ten of our children were born and grew to manhood and womanhood.

As I went to the garage to get the car I thought of the happy times we'd enjoyed during the half century we'd lived on those fertile acres. Only a few months



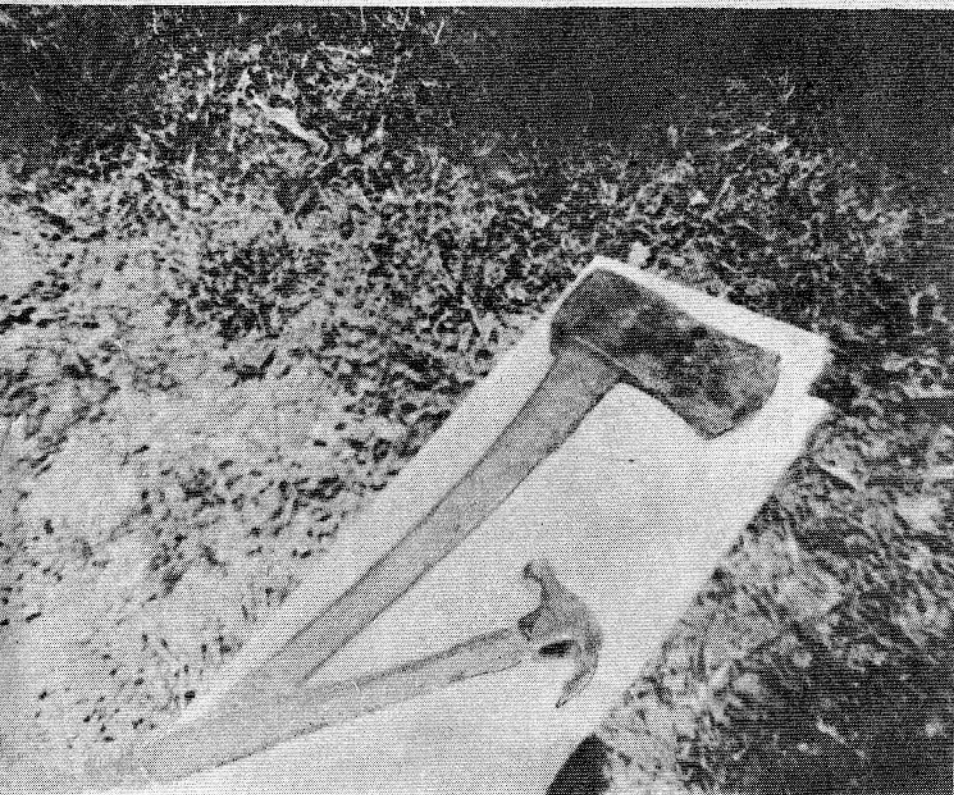
Albert Dreger, who tells this story, and his wife called upon the law to solve the grim riddle of the young folks' disappearance. Mr. Dreger took a full part in the heartbreaking investigation that turned into a murder manhunt. The murder weapons are shown at left.

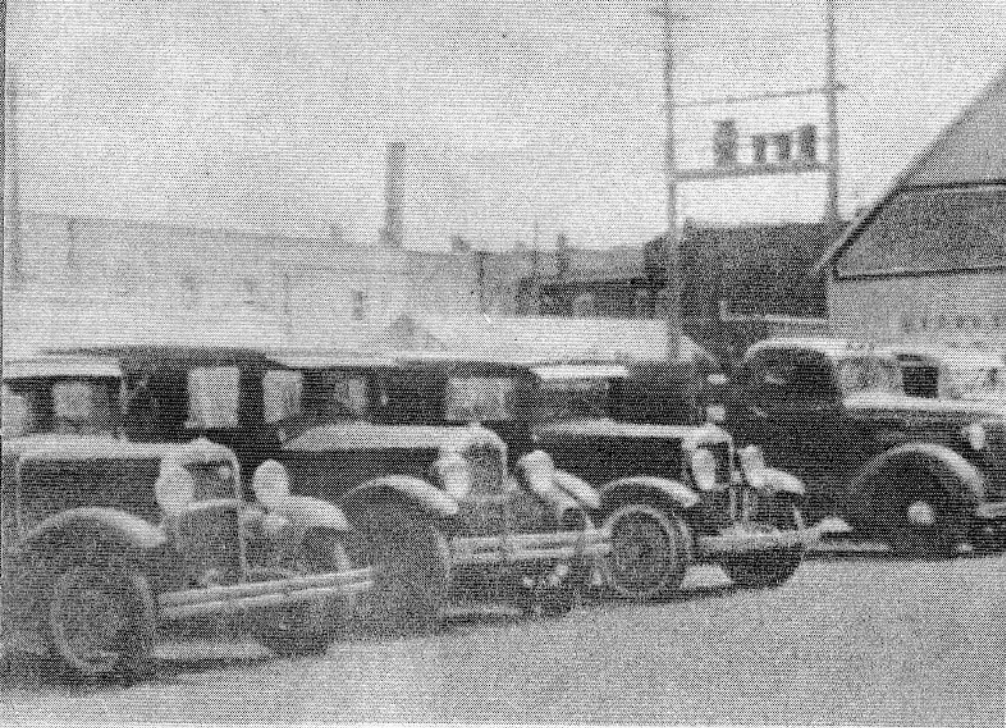
had passed since a hundred neighbors had gathered to celebrate the wedding of Rose and Ernie.

Ernest Wittmer was the oldest son of a well-to-do pioneer family at Pender, Neb. He was tall, powerful, handsome and though only 25 was known as a thrifty, ambitious, honest young fellow. Rose was 22 and everyone said she was beautiful. I knew she was a good housekeeper, a fine cook and able manager. They were very much in love and ideally suited to each other.

When John Forbes had chosen them to manage his new farm, it seemed they were well on the way to success. Now they were gone and he had said: "A lot of funny things have happened."

While the women made ready for the trip I put in a call for the Wittmer home at Pender, thinking Ernie's folks might know why he and Rose had left the Forbes farm. But the operator reported there was no answer.





The first good clue to the killer's flight blew up when the young couple's Model T Ford was found lined up in this car lot in Norfolk, where the clever slayer had abandoned it without being seen.

As I drove into Norfolk I thought of Forbes' strange comments. "Queer business—Funny things have happened—You'd better look into it." What if something was wrong? Maybe I needed help to find Rose and Ernie.

I went to the Norfolk police department and explained my predicament to Chief of Police Frank Flynn. He detailed Detective John Pofahl to accompany us. Pofahl was an old friend of the family, knew Ernie and Rose intimately, and had been a guest at their wedding. "It's out of our territory," Flynn explained, "but John can advise you and if anything is wrong, you'll take it up with Sheriff Sutton at Neligh." He turned to Pofahl. "Stay on it until they're found."

John Forbes met us at the farm when we arrived shortly before noon and led the way to the corn crib. "They lived here," he explained. "The house was not finished."

"When was the last time you saw them?" Pofahl asked.

"September twenty-sixth. I gave Ernie a check for his wages that night."

And it was now Oct. 15, 1929! "Why did you wait so long to call Dreger?" Pofahl continued.

Forbes frowned. "Why should I call him. If they'd taken their belongings I'd never have called. I need this crib and want their stuff removed."

POFAHL moved around the interior of the crib. A double bed and dresser were at one end of the driveway between the crib sections; a table and four chairs in the center; a three-burner oil stove, a cupboard and work table near the door and a small washstand beside the stove. The concrete floor was spotless.

"Most of their furniture is stored in the house," Forbes explained.

"You saw them on the twenty-sixth," Pofahl commented. "When did you miss them?"

"The next day. My son came over to work on the fences. At noon he went to

the crib for lunch but there was no one around. He found a note. It's on the bed," Forbes pointed.

A shoe box cover lay on the pink spread. A message had been written on the inside: "Going to a dentist. Back this afternoon." Pofahl handed it to me.

"I'm sure it's not Ernie's writing," I said.

"Did they say anything about a trip when you saw them?" Pofahl asked Forbes.

"No. It was about five-thirty in the evening. Rose was getting supper and Ernie and I walked to the west field and I showed him what I wanted done. He asked for his check and I told him to come to Brunswick after supper."

"Neither one complained about a toothache?" Pofahl insisted.

"No. He came to town about eight o'clock and I gave him a check for forty dollars. He said he had to buy some things and hurry back. Rose expected him."

"They couldn't travel far on forty dollars," I suggested.

"They had more than that," Forbes explained. "Ernie sold two hundred chickens for sixty dollars that night."

"A hundred dollars altogether," Pofahl muttered. "That's different."

"I wonder what happened to the rest of their chickens," Forbes cut in. "They had about two hundred and fifty. All of them were gone on the twenty-seventh. So was Rose's pet dog."

"What did you do when you missed them?" Pofahl asked.

"Nothing. There was no work until corn picking and I thought they'd be back. The place is just as they left it, even to the dirty dishes on the table."

"Rose would never leave dirty dishes!" my wife cried.

"You told Dreger they left their clothes. Where?" Pofahl asked.

Forbes opened the door of a grain bin. "Here."

"Check those things," Pofahl told the women. "You know what Rose and Ernie

had. See if anything is missing there."

While they did this, Pofahl and I examined the other articles in the crib. He picked up the washbasin, examined its edges, bent over and moved the soap dish to one side. I heard him mutter an exclamation and he turned quickly to shield an object from the others. Between thumb and forefinger he held a gold wedding ring. On the inside was inscribed the name "Ernest."

Rose and Ernest had been married in a double ring ceremony and this was his ring. I'd heard him say time and again he never took it off his finger. Had he forgotten it after washing his hands? Why had it been removed from his hand? My throat suddenly felt tight.

OUTSIDE the crib entrance stood a washing machine. Pofahl tilted it, heard the swish of water and lifted the cover. The water had a peculiar green color.

"Rose had put clothes to soak and planned to do a washing," Pofahl commented. "It's a cinch they had no plans for a trip until after the washing was done."

There were bed sheets, pillow cases and towels in the tub and at the bottom of the pile, a silk slip and house dress I recognized as Rose's. I also saw a pair of blue bib overalls and some men's work socks. All of these articles were blotched with brown stains. Pofahl tossed them to one side.

Viola came to the door and glanced at the dripping garments. "Colored clothes put to soak with white," she scoffed. "Rose would never do that, nor leave dirty dishes on the table." She added, "All of her clothing is here except a pair of silk hose, a slip and panties. Ernie's clothes are here too."

"You're sure about it?" I asked.

She nodded. "We've checked everything."

"Ernie had a big wad when he left town to come back to the farm," Pofahl said, turning to Forbes. "Think he might have been robbed or run into some foul play?"

"He had trouble with a fellow in Brunswick who made some passes at Rose," Forbes said slowly. "I saw him on the street after I paid Ernie. He might know something."

"You said other things struck you queer," Pofahl said. "What?"

The wealthy landowner pointed toward the barn and corral. "The way the mules act."

"Mules? What have mules got to do with this?"

At that moment Forbes' two sons drove into the yard and Forbes called them.

"Tell them about the mules," he instructed.

"Come out to the barn," the older son invited. When we got there he said,

Ray Forbes, son of County Commissioner John Forbes, employer of the young couple, points to the spot where Rose Dreger Wittmer was clubbed to death. When the Forbes mules refused to drink from the water tank, below, investigators read dreadful meaning in the actions.

"Look at the stalls. We've kept the mules here since Rose and Ernie left. They've pawed at the dirt until they've dug a hole a foot deep. Mr. Dreger, you know horses and mules do that when they're afraid of something."

"When we take them to the home place," his father interrupted, "they stand still, eat their hay and grain and behave themselves."

"And they won't drink from the water tank," young Forbes said. "I'll show you."

He ran to the wagon, unhitched the mules and led them toward the tank. When they were within 15 feet of it they lunged back against the lead lines, reared, snorted, seemed crazed with fear.

Pofahl turned slowly to me and said, "I've seen horses and mules go loco when they smelled human blood."

I nodded dumbly. He was telling me Rose and Ernie were dead. Now I had to break the news to the women.

A few minutes later Pofahl issued terse orders: "Forbes, you and the boys dig up the earth in the barn. Go down four or five feet. If you don't find anything in the barn, move the water tank and dig there. The mules may have tipped us to the hiding place."

"What about the crib and house?" Forbes asked.

"Dreger will move their things." He turned toward our car. "Come on, Albert. We'll see Sheriff Sutton and then go to Norfolk."

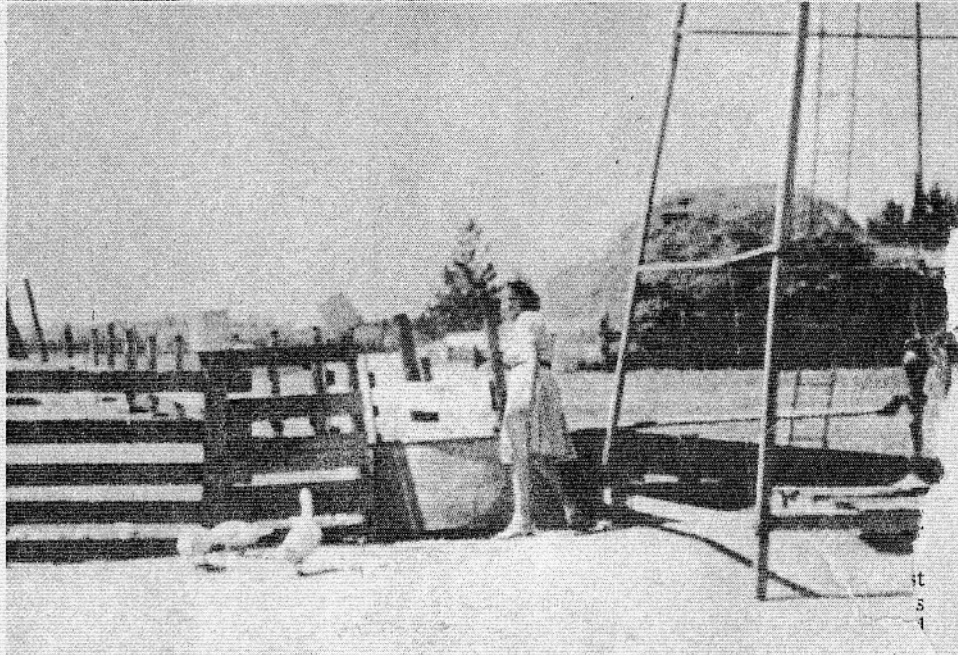
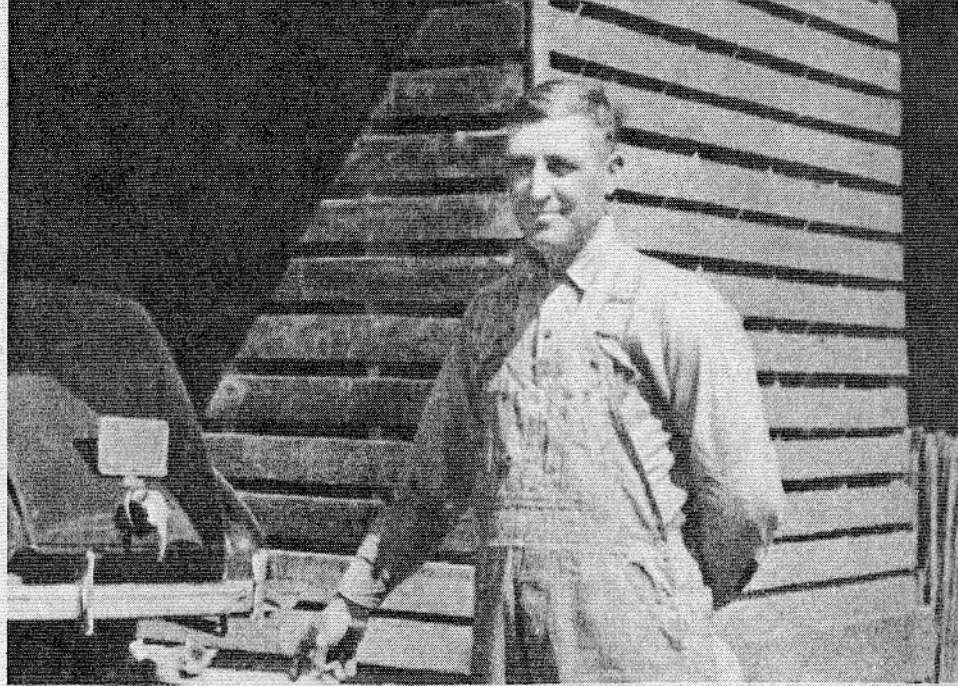
We were a sorrowful group as we drove to Neligh, the county seat, 12 miles from the farm. Ordinarily I'd have admired the beauty of the autumn coloring, the bountiful corn crop, the hundreds of sleek, well fed cattle. But now every brush heap, gully and side road suggested a possible burial place for Rose and Ernie.

WITHIN half an hour after we left Forbes and his sons, we were closeted with Sheriff Jess Sutton. Pofahl explained why he was certain there had been foul play. "Everything we've found is contrary to the known habits of Rose and Ernie," he concluded. "They had no reason to leave the farm. They've never failed to visit Mr. Dreger once a week and Rose always wrote to her mother twice a week. And now overnight they're gone."

Sutton summed up the situation in a few terse sentences. "We've got three leads, then. The note about the dentist, the fifty chickens not sold in Brunswick on the twenty-sixth, and the car."

"It's a Model T Ford sedan," I offered. "Ernie tipped over a month ago and ripped off the top. The license number began with a seven. It was registered in Madison county."

"Good," Sutton reached for the tele-



phone. "I'll get the number from the county treasurer. I'll also ask police in other towns to check on dentist offices." He turned to Pofahl. "John, you might make a round of produce dealers and see if you can locate one who bought fifty chickens on the twenty-seventh."

Police and sheriff officers in all towns within 50 miles of Neligh reported that neither Rose nor her husband had visited a dentist on Sept. 27, or any time subsequent to that date.

"That clears up one point," Sheriff Sutton declared. "We know the note was phony. Whoever planned this disappearance was careful about details."

"But why?" I protested. "What could be the motive?"

Sutton shrugged. "Robbery, maybe. A car and one hundred dollars in cash might be the answer. Then there's the possibility some tramp went to the farm, found Rose alone and attacked her. Then

Ernie came home and both were killed."

Pofahl returned to the sheriff's office. "Your hunch was right," he told Sutton. "I found a dealer who bought forty-eight white Leghorns from a fellow by the name of Earl Mortz early on the twenty-seventh. Mortz was already there when the dealer opened his store. He paid him twenty dollars for the chickens. Mortz had a Model T sedan without a top and told the dealer he was on his way to Norfolk to have it fixed."

"Ernie's car," I exclaimed. "How did this Mortz get it?"

"Stole it, just as he did the chickens."

Sheriff Sutton referred to some figures on a pad. "Wittmer's license was 7-2894. If we can locate the car we'll have a line on Mortz. I don't know anyone by that name around here."

"He was a big, blond fellow, dressed in new overalls, and seemed to know the country around here," Pofahl added.

By early afternoon searching parties were on their way to the Forbes farm with instructions to beat the brush for miles around. A radio broadcast offered a reward for information about the Model T Ford and the blond stranger. Sutton promised to keep in touch with us at Norfolk, and Pofahl was anxious to get the bundle of stained clothing into the hands of a skilled chemist.

When we arrived in Norfolk I drove to police headquarters and let Pofahl out of the car. "I'll take the women home but I'll be back and stay here until we've found the answer," I told him.

"It may take a long time," he warned. "The trail is three weeks old."

"I don't care how long it takes or how much it costs," I snapped. "Not when my daughter is involved."

Less than 12 hours had elapsed since Forbes shouted his question, "Where is your daughter and her husband?" We'd driven 200 miles, knew that searchers were at work, and police in all parts of the state were on the lookout for a Model T Ford and Earl Mortz.

When I returned to headquarters Pofahl shoved a telephone across the desk. "Call Mrs. Wittmer at Pender," he instructed. "You better break the news."

ONCE again the operator told me it was impossible to complete a call.

Hour after hour passed and it seemed every effort to get some information about the mysterious Mortz was to fail. Pofahl and I waited impatiently for some bit of news. At 9 o'clock Sutton called.

Forbes and his sons had found nothing in the barn or under the water tank.

Then a lone searcher picked up a bloody ax near a telephone post two miles south of Brunswick and five miles north of the Forbes farm. The handle was stained and the sharp blade covered with dried blood to which clung wisps of black hair. Forbes identified the ax as his. A Neligh physician declared the stains were caused by human blood.

Another group of searchers found a bloody pair of overalls and a jumper coat hidden in a plum thicket along the highway between the farm and Neligh.

How did this discovery dovetail with what we had found earlier in the day? What relation was there between the bloody ax, the stained garments in the plum thicket and the stained clothing we took from the washing machine? Why was there so much distance between them? Had the killer deliberately scattered this incriminating evidence?

To complicate matters still more a druggist in Neligh heard the broadcast asking for information about Earl Mortz and reported to Sheriff Sutton that he had sold a quantity of strychnine to Mortz on Sept. 26. Mortz had identified himself as a farmer and said he wanted to get rid of some rats.

Detective John Pofahl, above, trailed the cunning slayer through four states and finally heard him confess that he had concealed evidence of the murder for hours in the thicket, right.

What connection did the poison purchase have with my missing daughter and her husband? Had they been poisoned, their bodies dismembered and parts buried here, there, everywhere? It was a horrible conjecture but I remembered the strange antics of the team of mules and it added strength to the theory. The bodies might have been dismembered in the barn, the cutting implements cleansed in the water tank. But how could Mortz give Rose and Ernie poison?

A resident of Brunswick telephoned Sheriff Sutton after he heard a broadcast and told of seeing lights flash on and off several times in the Brunswick cemetery on Sept. 26. He was sure of the date because he'd mentioned the strange sight to friends. Sutton sent a searching party to the cemetery with instructions to probe every fresh grave but this search was fruitless.

"Everywhere we turn we run into this fellow Mortz," Pofahl said, frowning. "He knew Rose and Ernie, that's plain.

Maybe some of their friends can give us a lead. We'll try that angle."

While we discussed this plan a Norfolk automobile dealer came to Pofahl's office.

"I've got your Model T," he announced.

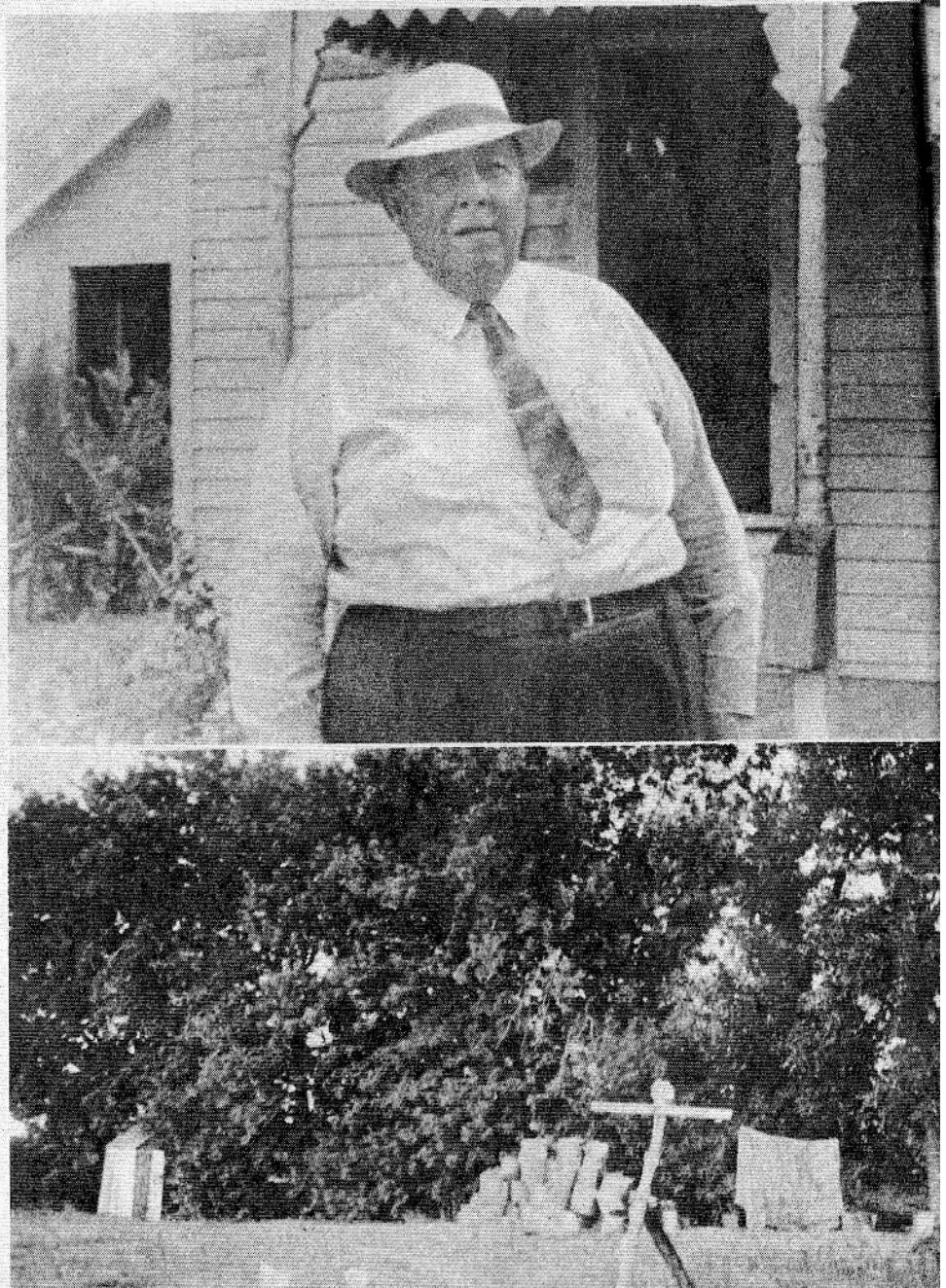
"Where did you get it? What about the driver?" Pofahl started to his feet.

"I can't tell you a thing about it," the dealer replied. "Come on, I'll show you why."

He led the way across the street from police headquarters to a line of wrecked cars in a vacant lot back of his garage. A floodlight illuminated the parking lot. "There it is," he said, pointing. "Half way down the line. I made an inventory of this junk a few minutes ago and noticed the number. Your man Mortz drove it here, parked it in the line, left the keys in the switch and walked away."

"It's Ernie's car," I whispered to Pofahl.

"Mortz is smart," Pofahl admitted.





The men at top point to the corn row down which the killer went to dig the grave, marked out above with four upright ears of corn. The grave defied detection until the murderer followed detailed plans and pointed it out.

"He's planned every move from the time he bought the poison, wrote the message on the shoe box, sold the chickens and parked this car."

We examined the interior of the car and found several brown stains on the upholstery beside the driver's seat. I wondered if this had been Rose and Ernie's funeral car? Were the stains caused by the bloody ax?

"Tow it into the garage and keep everyone away from it," Pofahl told the dealer. "We'll examine it for fingerprints. This is as close as we have been to Mortz. It may be the break we need."

Another surprise awaited us when we returned to Pofahl's office. The owner of a car renting company was there. "You're after Earl Mortz?" he demanded.

Pofahl nodded.

"So am I," the dealer snapped. "Here, look at this. It's a rental agreement signed by Mortz on the twenty-seventh of September. He deposited ten dollars and drove out a Model A Ford sedan and

promised it back that night. I'm still waiting."

"You waited three weeks and didn't report the theft?" Pofahl said, incredulously.

"He's rented cars before," the dealer explained. "I received a telegram from him on the twenty-eighth, from Sioux City, and he said he'd be delayed a day or two. I turned the whole business over to the insurance company. They're on his trail."

"And what is their report?" Pofahl demanded.

"He disappeared in Sioux City."

I studied the signature on the rental agreement. "Is this the same writing as on the shoe box cover?" I asked.

Pofahl pulled the shoe box cover out of a desk drawer and compared letters in the signature with those in the message on the cover. "Written by the same person!" he exclaimed. "This ties Mortz in with Rose and Ernie." He whirled back to the car dealer. "You rented him cars before. Describe him."

"He's big, blond, blue-eyed, careful about his dress. He wore new overalls when I last saw him. He had plenty of money and told me he worked on a farm."

"I suppose the insurance company has his description in all police departments but we'll add that he's wanted on suspicion of murder. Maybe it will help. The car was a Model A Ford sedan, you said."

The man nodded. "Maroon color, license 7-D19-1."

It was midnight when Pofahl leaned back in his chair and brushed a hand wearily across his face. "That's all tonight, Dreger," he announced. "We'll start again in the morning."

"Start where?"

"The telegraph clerk in Sioux City where Mortz filed the message to the car dealer on the twenty-eighth."

A telephone call from Pender, Neb., early the next morning changed our plans. I'll remember that call to my dying day. It was from Mrs. Wittmer, Ernie's mother.

She wanted to know, she said, what had happened between Ernie and my Rose.

Not quite understanding what she meant, I said they had disappeared.

This, in turn, puzzled Mrs. Wittmer. Rose was in South Dakota, Ernie in Minnesota, she told me. But what did I know about their estrangement?

BY THIS time my mind was in a complete whirl. How did she know Rose was in South Dakota and Ernie in Minnesota? What did she mean estranged?

Then it came out. Ernie had come home and told her that he and Rose had broken up. He was on his way to a job in Minnesota, he had said. Rose had taken their car and gone to South Dakota. Ernie had given her all their furniture when they broke up—so he had told her on Sept. 27—adding that he had rented a car in which to go to Minnesota!

I reeled under the impact of that last item. It meant that Ernie Wittmer was Earl Mortz! He had lied when he said Rose and he had "broken up." He had lied when he said she had their car, for we had it in a garage near police headquarters. I knew then that only Rose was dead; that her husband had killed her and escaped in a rented car.

"I'll be over to see you," I managed to tell Mrs. Wittmer. I could scarcely grasp the import of this change in the picture. Ernie, a killer. Why? What had Rose done to deserve such a fate? Where was her body? Where was he?

"Get me a picture of Wittmer," Pofahl said, slamming a big fist on his desk.

We had half a dozen wedding pictures of Rose and Wittmer at the house. Within half an hour Pofahl and I were on our way to Neligh. The produce dealer identified Wittmer as the man from whom he had purchased the chickens. The druggist was certain Wittmer was the buyer of an ounce of strychnine who had signed the poison register "Earl Mortz."

[Continued on page 60]

How We Trapped My Daughter's Slayer

[Continued from page 37]

Sheriff Sutton promised to continue the search for Rose's body and placed the resources of his office at our disposal.

The car-for-rent operator glanced at the picture and said, "That's Mortz."

Our next stop was the Wittmer home in Pender, where relatives told us about Ernie's visit. "I thought something was wrong," one woman said. "Rose was such a fine girl. It didn't seem possible she'd leave with another man."

"So that was his excuse!" roared Pofahl. "He was here on the twenty-seventh?" he asked.

"Yes. He came in the afternoon, stayed for supper and then he and another fellow took two girls to a dance in South Sioux City. Next morning Ernie said he was going to Minnesota to pick corn."

"And he drove a dark red Ford?" I asked.

"A rented car," she explained.

Wittmer's dance companion could add nothing to the information we had. "Ernie's probably on a farm somewhere. He could make six or seven dollars a day picking corn," the youth said.

The girls who had gone to the dance told us Wittmer had a gallon of whisky in the car and drank quite a bit. "He danced, sang, joked about everything and had plenty of money. There must be a mistake about his killing his wife. He wasn't worried about a thing."

"A pretty faint trail," Pofahl declared as we headed for Sioux City. "Three weeks since he came to Pender, three weeks since he wired that car renter. He's in circulation but on which one of the half-million farms in the Middle West will we find him?"

"He killed Rose," I interrupted. "He's a sub-human brute. I don't care how long it takes. Get him."

Only 48 hours had elapsed since we went to the Forbes farm to investigate things which seemed queer. Now we were on our way to see the last person who had talked to Ernest Wittmer so far as we knew—the telegraph clerk in Sioux City.

"That's the man," the clerk said after he studied Wittmer's picture for several minutes. "He was drunk and I wondered what would happen if he wrecked the car."

"And from here on we're on our own," commented Pofahl. "His one hundred dollars wouldn't last long. He's had to go to work—but where? If he lied to his mother about Rose, it stands to reason he lied about his plans. He knew we'd talk with her."

The cooperation of the Sioux City police was enlisted and a score of experienced officers began a check on taverns and dance halls while Pofahl and I visited employment agencies which specialized in farm labor. We had no luck but the detectives were more fortunate. They showed Wittmer's picture to bartenders, hostesses, dime-a-drink girls and finally located a tavern where he had spent several days and nights.

"He was drunk most of the time," the bartender reported. "Seemed to have something on his mind. The last time he was here he had a good-looking brunette and said they were leaving for Minneapolis."

Tediously we traced the couple to Laverne, Minn., and on to Pipestone on Highway 75. We stopped at every filing

station, tavern and roadside inn and asked owners and employes to look at Wittmer's picture. "He was in a dark red Ford sedan, Nebraska license, and had a pretty girl with him," we repeated.

A filling station owner at Pipestone told us the pair had quarreled in his place and separated. The girl caught a ride back to Sioux City while Wittmer went on toward the Twin Cities.

Pick-up orders had been wired ahead and traps were set to stop him but we were much too late. In Minneapolis, the detective bureau helped us locate a tavern where he spent a week end. One of the bartenders identified his picture and mentioned a telephone conversation.

"He quarreled with a doctor who owns a farm near St. Paul," he reported. "I took down the telephone number when I heard him threaten to get even."

The number led us to a well-known physician. "I hired this man to pick corn," he explained. "He worked for three days and demanded his check. I paid him what my manager told me was due him and he accused me of cheating. What has he done?"

"Murder," Pofahl said bluntly.

"He may be in Illinois," the doctor suggested. "He said they paid more for good pickers over there."

WE FOLLOWED the trail of the sedan and the blond killer through Minnesota and into Illinois. This was possible only because Wittmer stopped at every tavern he could find to buy a drink, and it was a mystery to me why he wasn't arrested for drunkenness on some occasions. Gradually we gained on him. He'd run out of money and would have to pick corn to get more. At a farm a short way across the Iowa-Illinois border we learned that Wittmer had quit his job three days before and gone back into Iowa. "Webster City," the farmer declared. "I'm sure he went there."

Again police traps were set and again he slipped through. As Pofahl and I drove past the tremendous cornfields in Iowa and watched the husking wagons with the high bang boards move along the rows I wondered whether the man tossing the yellow ears could be the object of our search. Never before had I realized how great an army of men was needed to harvest the corn crop.

At Webster City, two days separated us. At Mapleton, Ia., only one day. "We've got him now," Pofahl exclaimed. "He's shaky, can't stay in one place more than a few hours. It's only fifty miles to Sioux City, seventy-five to Omaha, less than a hundred miles to his home at Pender. We'll scare him into the open."

"How?" I asked hopefully.

"Radio and newspapers," was the reply. "He can't stand publicity. We'll have his picture in every paper and offer a reward. We'll buy time, if necessary, on all the radio stations in this area."

"Make the reward worth while," I said.

On Nov. 2, two weeks after Pofahl and I began the long search which covered a winding trail of 2,000 miles through five states, we returned to Norfolk to wait for developments. Pofahl was confident. "Wait and see, Albert," he grinned grimly. "Within twelve hours some police department will call and say, 'We've got Wittmer.'"

But he was wrong. We waited 12 hours, then 24. Every time the telephone rang he snatched the receiver, a look of anticipation on his face. The quick change in expression told me the call was not about Wittmer.

Shortly before noon on Nov. 3, Chief of Police Frank Flynn received a telephone call. "Listen, Flynn," his caller said. "Give Pofahl this message. Tell him Ernest Wittmer will come in to see him as soon as he gets a shave and something to eat."

Half an hour later an overall-clad figure walked into police headquarters and Flynn's office. I wasn't there. Pofahl wouldn't let me stay. Ernest Wittmer grinned at Pofahl, thrust out a big hand and shook hands with Chief Flynn. He tossed a bag of candy on the table.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked Pofahl.

The two officers stared at him in open-mouthed astonishment. It was fantastic that this man, suspected of murder, hunted throughout the Middle West, should surrender so casually.

"What made you come in?" Pofahl asked.

"You were too close," he replied. "I heard the radio broadcast yesterday and saw my picture in the papers. I knew it was no good to run any more."

"You know what we want," Flynn said.

Wittmer nodded. "Rose. I killed her." For all the emotion he evinced he might have talked about the weather.

"Where is she?"

"In the cornfield east of the house."

Chief Flynn called a stenographer. "Tell us the story," he said.

Wittmer leaned back in his chair, selected a piece of candy and munched it slowly.

"It happened on September twenty-sixth. I came in from the field and met Forbes about five o'clock. We talked about the fall work and went to the corn crib where Rose and I lived. After Forbes went home Rose and I sat down at the table. She noticed the water bucket was empty and went to the pump. I opened a bottle of beer, poured half of it in a glass for her and took the other half myself." He turned toward Pofahl. "You know about the strychnine?"

Pofahl nodded. "A quarter's worth. You bought it in Neligh."

Wittmer grinned. "Right. I dumped it into her beer and when she came back from the pump I told her to drink. She took a couple of swallows and said it didn't taste right. I took the glass, pretended to swallow a couple of times and said it was all right. She drank some more."

"She died from poison?" Flynn interrupted.

"Of course not." Wittmer was coldly impatient at the interruption. "She got dizzy and went outside the crib door. I picked up a hammer and hit her on the head. It knocked her down but I couldn't pull the hammer away because it was sunk in her skull. The ax lay nearby so I held her down with one hand and beat her head in with the ax."

The experienced officers shuddered as they listened to the cold-blooded matter of fact way in which the killer described the murder of his wife, a bride of only a few months. "This happened early in the evening," Pofahl prompted.

"Yes, about six o'clock. I dragged her body to a thicket east of the house, went back to the crib and scooped up the blood soaked gravel and threw it into the barn. I washed the concrete driveway and dumped bloody water into a posthole near the water tank."

"That's why the mules acted up," Pofahl exclaimed. "Then you went to town, got your pay from Forbes, sold your chickens and framed the phony note about the dentist."

"You missed part of it," grinned Wittmer. "I put my bloody overalls and socks in the washing machine. Some blood splattered on clothes she had in a pile near the machine and I put those in too. Then I started to Brunswick. I hid the ax near a telephone pole and threw the hammer into the field. After I sold the chickens I went to the Brunswick cemetery and tried to find a new grave. I planned to bury her there but I couldn't find one so I dug a hole in the cornfield and dragged her to it. I got all bloody again and put on new overalls and hid the others in a bush near Neligh."

"How about the name 'Earl Mortz'?" Chief Flynn asked. "And when did you start to drink?"

"I've used the name a lot, even before I was married," Wittmer explained. He added with obvious relish, "I met a lot of women under that name. And I never drank in public until after this happened. It was always when I was home."

"Exactly where is Rose buried?" Flynn interrupted.

"A block and a half east of the house between some corn rows. I marked her grave with foxtail weeds."

Wittmer was transferred to the Antelope county jail while a posse went to the Forbes farm to recover the body of my daughter. For two hours they tramped about looking for the place Wittmer described. Finally Sheriff Sutton, County Attorney R. H. Rice and Pofahl decided to bring Wittmer to the farm.

"He's the only one who can find her," Sutton declared. "We'll have to take a chance."

When Wittmer stepped from the sheriff's car he nodded to acquaintances in the crowd, walked briskly to the rear of the house and studied the line of trees bordering the cornfield. He pointed to a piece of cloth fastened to the third tree from the end of the row.

"I put it there to mark the spot. Give me a shovel."

He walked into the field, his lips moved as he counted the steps, 100, 110, 120, 123. "Right here," he announced and thrust the shovel into the sandy loam. Suddenly he bent forward and pointed to a silken clad foot. "There she is," he said with satisfaction. "I told you I could find her."

He was charged with first degree murder and County Attorney Rice completed arrangements for a speedy trial. "I'll plead guilty," Wittmer told him. "I killed her because she quarreled with me about my drinking and wouldn't stand for my playing around."

And that was the only reference to his murder motive this hypocritical secret drinker, secret lecher ever made.

He never came to trial. On Nov. 15, 1929, he was found writhing on the floor of his cell. He'd planned his own death just as he had planned the death of Rose. He had secreted a capsule of strychnine, wrapped in oil paper, in a seam of his overalls. Though the garment had been searched and laundered after his arrest, the capsule remained intact. Before he died, he boasted to Sheriff Sutton how he had cheated the electric chair.

KEEP 'EM LAUGHING!



SEND THESE HILARIOUS MAGAZINES TO YOUR PALS IN CAMP



These are grim days for our Soldiers, Sailors and Marines. You can make things pleasanter for your pals in camp by sending them one of the hilarious, fun-packed books shown on this page. Crammed with the funniest of cartoons, fascinating all-male stories, and beautiful photographs, these books will be received with cheers and gratitude by any man in the armed forces.

And they're only 25 cents apiece!

No matter which book you choose—**SQUADS RIOT**, **HOOEY** or **WHIZ BANG ANNUAL**—you can be sure that it will afford hours of much-needed entertainment for your friends in uniform. Send one or more today and keep 'em laughing!

Just clip the coupon below and fill in the name and address of the person to whom you want the book sent. Write your own name at the bottom of the coupon. We do the rest.

We will send the book promptly, postpaid, together with a note announcing who the gift is from. (If you prefer, we will mail the book to you and you can enjoy it yourself before sending it on to your service pal.) Take your pick:

SQUADS RIOT—Here's a sure-fire gift for any doughboy! Edited and published expressly for service men, this book is full of Army, Navy and Marine cartoons, jokes and poetry. Also, swell stories for soldiers and a beautiful photograph section titled "Gallery of Gals." A riot of fun for everyone!

HOOEY—Here's a whirl of merriment from the ultra novel cover to the very last page. The cover, alone, will be a source of unending amusement to you and your pals, presenting a bevy of beautiful James Trembath show gals whose costumes do tricks when you rotate the cover. It's a daring, dizzy delight! And that describes the whole **HOOEY**!

WHIZ BANG ANNUAL—Dozens of the most rib-shattering, belly-laugh cartoons ever collected between covers. America's finest funny artists have shot a brilliant barrage of rousing humor into **WHIZ BANG**, combining their talents for drawing gorgeous gals and creating grand guffaws. And there are some super special photos of lovely lassies with lovely chassis. Every page a treat!

Country Press, Inc., Greenwich, Conn. FMG-H-7

Enclosed please find 25 cents in money order, check or cash for the book (or books) I have checked below. Send it to the following address, with a card announcing it's from me.

SQUADS RIOT WHIZ BANG ANNUAL HOOEY

My Name Is.....

(CANADIAN ORDERS NOT ACCEPTED)

July 1942