

a material witness, after both the bartender and the porter identified him as the man who had been drinking beer with Walker.

"All right," said Long. "I want to see George Coston."

George Coston, a muscular six-footer, had been Orlando's chief of police, but had resigned to open his own private detective agency; his business had prospered. Now he came to the jail to see Long. After a short conference, he told Deputy Fields that he was convinced Long was telling the truth and that he knew nothing of the poisoned whiskey. But Fields wasn't sure and Long was held.

A quick check of the records revealed that Long had had several brushes with the law. But this didn't prove he had poisoned the whiskey. A motive was still lacking.

FIELDS SET OUT to find who had purchased potassium cyanide. He checked all the drug stores in Orlando and only one had a record of a recent sale of the poison. A quarter of a pound had been purchased by a local physician.

The physician confirmed this; he said he had bought the cyanide at the request of George Coston, but that it was for Donald Long, who was making an insecticide which Coston planned to market.

Coston was arrested. He readily admitted that he and Long planned to put an insecticide on the market, but scoffed at the idea of killing the girl. "I never even saw this Myerly girl," he said. "Why should I want to kill her?"

Fields didn't know. Why would anybody kill her?

He went back to the records and pored over them for days. Finally, he came up with the name of Edward Mosely, 17, who lived in Jacksonville. On a hunch, Mosely was picked up and brought to Orlando. Frightened, he began to talk. Then he was confronted with Long, who talked more. Long admitted Mosely was his cousin. The two told a strange story:

They first got acquainted with George Coston when he was police chief and they were arrested for a car theft. Later, they went to work for Coston in his detective agency. Still wielding a lot of power in Orlando, Coston had signed contracts with numerous large firms to protect them against burglary.

But, said Long, the detective agency was a blind. Coston had visions of a crime syndicate with himself as the master mind. He had plotted many thefts, based on his knowledge of local stores.

Coston had counted on Long and Mosely to be the nucleus of his criminal organization. Because they feared him, they at first promised to go along. But they stalled him and, finally, he revealed his full plan: Deputy Fields and the sheriff must be murdered. Long balked at this and young Mosely returned to Jacksonville.

It was an amazing story, but it still didn't account for the murder of Dolores Myerly.

"Did you give Walker that bottle of bourbon?" Fields asked.

"Yes," Long replied. "But I had no idea it was poisoned. I've since figured it out, though."

He said that, following the quarrel, Coston's attitude had suddenly changed. He had proposed that they forget about the criminal syndicate and go ahead with their plans for the insecticide. Long was relieved and quite willing to do this. Coston, who had been drinking heavily, suggested they celebrate the new relationship with a toast. Coston tossed off the contents of one bottle and reached for another, which he handed to Long. But Long refused, telling Coston he had been drinking beer and didn't like to mix it with whiskey. "Okay," said Coston, "take the bottle along for later."

Long had put the bottle in his pocket. Then he met Walker, whom he knew casually and who seemed a congenial fellow. As a gesture of friendliness, he had given the bottle to Walker.

There was a horrified expression on his face as Long finished his story. "That poisoned liquor was really meant for me," he said. "Coston wanted me out of the way so I wouldn't talk!"

The girl had become an innocent victim of Coston's plot.

Coston was convicted of second-degree murder and in 1940 was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Mosely and Long were freed, and Walker was exonerated.

Questioned as to why he had brought Mosely into the case, Deputy Fields said: "Long had been an auto thief, and usually car thieves don't work alone. I discovered from the records that Mosely had been charged with the same offense. Then I made discreet inquiry and learned that Mosely was Long's cousin. I had a hunch he could tell something, though I had no idea what it would be. But I was convinced that Walker was telling the truth, and I didn't want to see an innocent man convicted."

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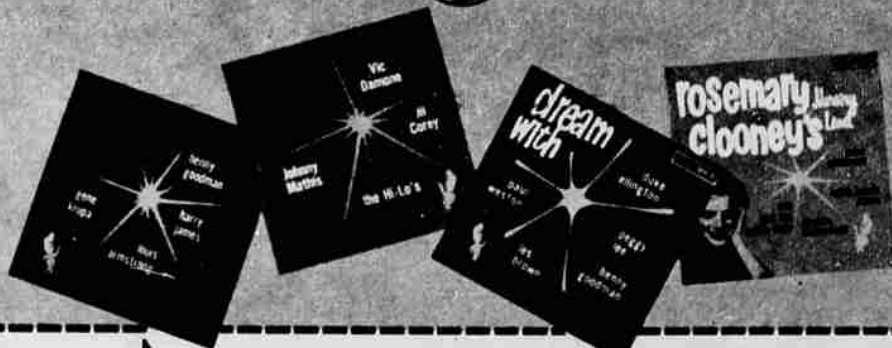
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