

Clue of the Mismatched Eyes

*It was a small detail—but enough
to catch and convict a murderer.*



Two pairs of men had been seen running near the scene of the crime. Which were the holdup men?

BETWEEN 5088, the hysterical cashier, Dorothy Green, told what had happened. Sgt. John Norton, commander of the Chicago Homicide Squad, listened attentively.

As usual, the box office of the movie theater had closed at 9:30 p.m. and Miss Green had prepared the day's receipts, rolling the coins in wrappers and strapping bands around the currency. William Mills, the manager, had come by about 10 and chatted with her while she balanced the money against tickets sold.

Suddenly, the door opened and a man with a gun said: "Give me your money." Another man stood behind him.

Mills, the manager, turned to face the gunman, who opened fire. The manager sank to the floor, fatally wounded, and the two men fled without the money.

"What did these men look like?" Sgt. Norton asked.

The girl said both were about the same age and size: in their early 20s, average height and medium build. Both had dark hair.

"The man with the gun," she added, "had eyes that didn't match. One was brown and one was green."

Sgt. Norton ordered detectives to spread out and make a quick canvass of the neighborhood. "Try to find somebody who saw those men running away."

They found two witnesses—with conflicting accounts. Miss Aileen Oswald had seen two men running from the direction of the theater. They had entered a cab which sped away. She had noted the cab's number, 61, on the back.

Mrs. Frances Duffy said she had been crossing an intersection near the theater when two men almost knocked her down. They ran across the street and hopped onto a northbound streetcar.

This was the sort of thing that made a policeman's life interesting—and frustrating. Two pairs of young men had been seen running at approximately the same time within a half block. Which were the holdup men?

Detectives quickly found the streetcar. The conductor remembered the young men because one wanted to get off at Chicago Avenue and the other argued with him. They eventually left the car at Division Street.

Canvassing that area, the detectives soon found the men, Ray Barnhart and Glenn Kitzke, who shared a furnished room. At headquarters, they denied any knowledge of the theater shooting.

"If you were going home," Sgt. Norton said, "why did you argue about getting off at Chicago Avenue?"

"We haven't lived on Division Street long," Kitzke replied. "Ray had been drinking and he thought we were there."

The two men were viewed by the three witnesses. Mrs. Duffy said they were the men who almost collided with her. Miss Oswald said she had never seen them before. Dorothy Green merely glanced at them. "No, those are not the men," she said.

Meanwhile, detectives located cab 61. The driver told of picking up two men and bringing them near the theater. They had paid him and asked him to wait. A few minutes later they ran back to the cab and gave him another destination.

"When I got there, the cab was empty," he said. "They must have got out when I stopped for a red light."

He said the men were in their 20s, average height and build, with dark hair. He hadn't noticed the color of their eyes.

The cashier, Dorothy Green, was invited into Norton's office. "You knew one of these men, didn't you?" he said.

After a long silence, she sighed and nodded. She said the man who fired the fatal shot had first appeared at the theater two weeks earlier and had posed as a newspaper reporter. She had accepted his offer to walk her home. Since then, he had come around every night.

The cashier realized now that he had pumped her for information, though it all seemed casual enough. She said she knew him only as Eddie, though he had given her a phone number. This was traced to Eddie Brislane, whose eyes were mismatched; one was blue, one brown. Brislane confessed and implicated Robert Carter, who also confessed.

Brislane said the theater manager normally got the box-office receipts at 10:30. For some reason, he had been half an hour early on the fatal night. Brislane became panicky and fired.

Both men were convicted of murder on May 11, 1920. Brislane was executed and Carter was sent to prison for life.

John Norton advanced to Chief of Detectives. After his retirement years later, he was asked: "Why were you so sure Dorothy Green was acquainted with the gunman?"

"Because of her description" he replied. "From the start she was hysterical. Yet she told me about his mismatched eyes. An hysterical woman wouldn't have noticed them. There could only be one answer—she already knew the murderer."