

Case of the Gullible Gangster

by William T. Brannon

DUTCH SCHULTZ stared across his desk at the meek little man who stirred restlessly on the edge of his chair. It was natural enough for the visitor to be nervous; he was in the presence of New York's most feared killer, kingpin of the city's racketeers.

"Relax," Schultz said. "I ain't going to hurt you. What have you got on your mind?"

"My name is Merrill Lynch. Possibly you may have heard of me."

"Yeah." The name was vaguely familiar to the gangster, but he couldn't recall just where he had heard it. "Go on."

Lynch explained that he was a family man, that he had a wife and three children who had become accustomed to a high standard of living. This was now threatened because he had made some bad investments and had been wiped out. He needed money badly.

"Yeah, yeah," Schultz said impatiently. "Where do I come in?"

"I am private secretary to J. P. Morgan."

Schultz sat up in his chair. To him, as to many others throughout the world, Morgan was a synonym for millions.

"What do you want me to do?" the gangster asked suspiciously. "Stick up his bank?"

"No, no," Lynch protested. "I am offering you an opportunity to make a lot of money—provided I get a 20 percent commission."

From his briefcase, Lynch withdrew a letter written on Morgan stationery that explained the whole proposition. J. P. Morgan and other investment bankers were competing for control of a Western mining property. Key to control lay in a block of 1,000 shares of stock.

This block was held by a farmer in New Jersey and Morgan was trying to buy it for \$50,000, though he would go as high as half a million if necessary. "I am supposed to see this farmer and get an option on the stock. I have a check here for \$5,000 from my employer. If you're interested, I'll let you make the deal—and reap the profit."

"What will you tell Morgan?" the gang chief asked, still not convinced.

"Simply that somebody got to the farmer before I did," the little man explained.

Schultz's eyes gleamed as he looked at the check and the flourishing signature, "J. P. Morgan." Though the gangster had accumulated millions from the numbers racket and other crooked enterprises, he wanted more.

Schultz ordered his armored car. With a bodyguard in the front seat, the gangster and Lynch got in the back. Following directions from Lynch, they drove to a farm house in rural New Jersey.

Schultz and Lynch went to the front door. They could hear the doorbell echoing through the house, but there was no other sound. Schultz pounded on the door, but still there was no response.

"Maybe he's moved," Lynch said fearfully.

Plainly irritated, Schultz strode back to the car and was about to get in when the farmhouse door

As he talked, the farmer coughed frequently. Dutch decided he was dying fast.

Illustration by Charles W. Moser