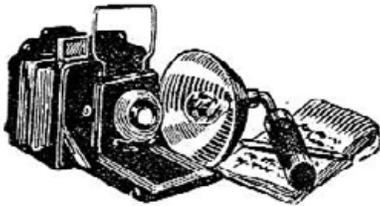


Death With Pictures

By JOHN L. BENTON

A press photographer gets some camera angles on murder

DAN WATSON is the name, and I'm the press photographer on the Clearview Morning News. I'm young, tough and willing to barge in where a newspaperman is likely to get socked in the eye. If you think that a newspaperman and a press photographer are not the same thing you would be right in most cases—but not in Clearview. When the city editor sent me out to get the pictures I was supposed to get the story, too.



Which is why when I stopped at the desk on showing up for work at three one afternoon Jeff Dawe, the city editor glanced up at me with his usual blank wall expression.

He was thin, bald and wore shell-rimmed glasses, and I suspected he tried to act like city editors he'd seen in the movies.

"Got a story I want you to cover, Watson," he snapped, in his snapping-turtle way. "Big feature yarn. Get plenty of pictures."

"Of what?" I asked. "I gave up mind reading last week. Found it embarrassed the neighbors."

"Very funny," Dawe said. "But I want a story on Martin Rawley."

I just looked at him. In my estimation a story on Martin Rawley would be as hot as last week's potatoes. In a city the size of Clearview—population 96,000 the last

census—we had a few quaint characters, and Rawley headed the list.

"Not another feature yarn on Martin Rawley, the millionaire recluse of this fair mountain city," I said. "The one we did on him last year was received by our readers with sensational apathy."

"Rawley is a year older now," Dawe said.

"So are we," I said. "And I hoped that much wiser—but I seem to be wrong."

"Don't argue," snapped Dawe. "Go see Rawley. Talk to him, get him to tell you the story of his life—"

"He did last year," I interrupted. "And it sure was dull."

Dawe looked as if he was going to make some pungent remarks when the phone rang. He picked it up.

"Dawe, *Morning News*," he said over the wire. "Oh, hello, Farley . . . What! . . . When did it happen? . . . Sometime early this morning or during the night. I see. Thanks for letting us know. I'll send a man right over there." He hung up and looked at me.

"Never send a man to do a boy's job," I said.

"I wouldn't if there was one around," he said. "We've got five reporters on this paper, and when we get a murder there is no one around but you."

SUDDENLY I was all interest.

"Who was murdered?" I asked. "Wasn't that Pete Farley calling?"

"Martin Rawley was murdered," said Dawe, "Yes, that was Pete Farley. He gets two dollars for tipping us off. You take it from here on in."

"I will," I said, grabbing up my .gadget bag with my camera and all the rest of the stuff in it. "Where did it happen?"

"At Rawley's house," said Dawe. "The police are there now. Phone in what you get on it, Dan."

I blinked. I had worked on the paper for over three years and this was the first time Dawe had ever called me by my first name. Could it be that beneath that hard shell there beat a heart of hammered brass?

"Why, Jeff," I said. "I didn't know you cared." He threw a hunk of lead he used for a paper weight at me as I went out of the door.

For a small city Clearview had quite an efficient police force. Chief of Police Ed Ryan, had risen from the ranks and he knew how to handle his men.

Martin Rawley lived out at the south end of the city in an old house that was pretty much of a wreck. Even if Rawley was supposed to be a millionaire, he certainly hadn't spent any of his money for repairs on the old homestead.

When I reached the place in my old coupe the police were all around. There were cops on guard in front and back of the house, and Chief Ryan met me at the front door. We were good friends.

"Hi, Dan," he said. "Hoped that you'd be the one Dawe sent. Just got the call on this about half hour ago. We're waiting for the coroner."

He led me into the house. When I had been out here a year ago to interview Rawley the place had been a mess. Old newspapers and magazines stacked up in every room, dust and dirt all around, and furniture that was falling apart.

Now the junk was all gone. The house had been cleaned and most of the furniture had been repaired. In what had been the parlor of the old place Martin Rawley was sprawled back in a chair, dead from a bullet in his heart. He was thin, white haired and had been close to seventy. Usually he looked

like an old bum, but now he was clean shaven and wore a neat blue suit.

"Mind if I get some pictures, Chief?" I asked.

"Go ahead," said Ryan. "They might be useful."

I got out my camera and flash gun and took some shots of the corpse from different angles. By the time I had finished Doctor Grayson arrived. He was the local coroner, and a man who knew his business.

"Who found Rawley?" I asked Ryan as he moved away and I started packing up my stuff. "Far as I know he always lived all alone here."

"Tom Blake, the letter carrier who has this route, found him," the chief said. "Blake had some mail for Rawley this morning, so he stopped at the house. The front door was standing open, which was unusual, since Rawley always kept it closed. So Blake rang the bell. When no one answered he went in, and found the body, then phoned the police."

"Any suspects?" I asked. "And how about a motive, Chief?"

"Haven't found any suspects or motives yet," said Ryan. "But somebody must have had a reason for killing Rawley."

"I'd like to know why Rawley suddenly either had the house cleaned up or did it himself and got all slicked up," I said. "When I interviewed him for a feature story for the paper a year ago he told me he didn't have a relative left alive, and that he hated everybody. Why the sudden yearning for neatness?"

Ryan looked at me thoughtfully scratched his head. "I've been wondering about that myself, Dan," he said.

I was in no hurry to phone the paper until I had a complete story of the murder, and perhaps the identity of the killer. Since the *News* was a morning paper we wouldn't go to press until evening.

"Blake asserts he was bringing mail for Rawley," I said. "Have you checked on

that?"

"We checked it," said Ryan. "According to Blake, the postman, Rawley has been getting a letter in a woman's handwriting every two or three days for the last three months. At first the old man didn't seem particularly interested, and then he got excited about those letters."

"In the spring an old man's fancy, often turns romancy," I cheerfully misquoted. "That it, Chief?"

"That's it," said Chief Ryan.

HE DREW a letter out of his pocket. "Here's the letter that came for Rawley this morning. The one that Blake brought when the postman found the body. Read it, Dan."

I opened the letter and read:

Darling Cuddles:

You are so, so wonderful. You can never imagine how happy that crisp new thousand dollar bill made your little Bright Eyes when I opened your last letter and found it in the envelope. You are so darling and reckless the way you send me money like that. Never a check or a money-order but always cash, and of course it does make it much easier for me.

I can hardly wait until Thursday April 14th, when at last I will be with you. Just think then we will actually see each other for the first time—but I am sure neither of us will be disappointed. I am sure you look just like your picture, as I do mine. Always your Bright Eyes.

"So that's it," I said as I finished reading the letter and handed it back to the chief of police. "Pardon me if I feel a little seasick."

"This is Thursday, April the Fifteenth," said Ryan. "I suspect that 'Bright Eyes' is not going to be very happy when she arrives."

I was beginning to understand a lot of things now. Obviously Martin Rawley had started corresponding with some woman. They had sent each other their pictures, and apparently had fallen in love by mail. Evidently Rawley had been sending her

quite a lot of cash, though there was no way of knowing exactly how much.

"I'd love to see a picture of 'Bright Eyes,' " I said. "She must be quite a gal. When I talked to Rawley a year ago, he boasted that he hadn't left this place in ten years. Never went calling on anyone or to the movies. Had all his groceries delivered and paid cash for everything."

"I know," said the chief. "There a big steel safe in one of the other rooms where he keeps all his cash. The safe is locked now. We did find an additional clue. It was this." He showed me a little silver plated whistle. "I found it beside Rawley's chair."

Doctor Grayson finished examining the body, went over to Chief Ryan and gave him his report.

"Death was caused by a bullet, apparently a twenty-two lodging in the brain of the deceased," said the doctor. "Rawley must have died instantly."

They talked a few moments longer. Grayson gave his permission for the body to be removed. Some of the men from a local undertaker had arrived and they took the corpse away in a basket. The doctor left.

CHIEF RYAN led the way up to the second floor of the house and I followed him. We were looking for a picture of 'Bright Eyes.' On the old fashioned bureau, in what was apparently Rawley's bedroom, we found a big picture. It was the picture of a very pretty girl, and scrawled across one corner of it was written in ink, *To Cuddles, with love from Bright Eyes.*

"A little young for him, wasn't she?" asked Ryan dryly as he looked at the picture. "Strange—she seems rather familiar."

"You've probably seen her before," I said. "That's a picture of Rita Hayworth, the movie actress. Looks like somebody has been taking Martin Rawley for a sleigh-ride." An idea struck me. "Let's go see, that postman, Tom Blake. Maybe he can give us

some more information, Chief.”

Ryan agreed to that. We drove to Blake’s house on the other side of town. The mail carrier had just come in from his route. He was a stocky, dark haired middle-aged man. A widower who lived alone. I knew he had a sister who lived in big city a hundred miles from Clearview.

“Why, hello,” Blake said when he saw us. “Want me to tell you some more about the way I found Martin Rawley, eh?”

“That’s right,” I said. “Tell us why you killed him and put an end to such a good racket, Blake. You dropped your whistle when you shot him.”

“Huh?” Blake stared at me, an expression of surprise on his face. “What are you talking about, Watson?”

“The ‘Bright Eyes’ gag,” I said. “Evidently Rawley got lonesome some months ago, and wrote a letter to some correspondence club. Since you collect the mail on that route as well as deliver it, you must have seen the letter. You got curious and opened it, and it gave you an idea of a way to get dough out of Rawley.”

“Go on, Dan,” said Chief Ryan as I paused. “This is very interesting.”

“Just how you worked the correspondence I’m not sure,” I went on. “Maybe your sister in Philadelphia helped you out on that. But I’m willing to bet that every time Rawley got reckless and sent money—always cash—to Bright Eyes, you got it.”

The postman’s face had changed. It had grown grim and unpleasant.

“Oh, yeah,” said Blake, his voice harsh. “You can’t prove any of that stuff. And if I was working a racket like that, why would I kill Rawley?”

“Probably because he suspected you,” I said. “Yesterday Rawley got all spruced up

because he expected Bright Eyes to arrive—didn’t she have any other name but that?”

“Miss Mary Marshall,” said Blake, before he thought.

“All right—Mary Marshall. And where would Rawley go to get all spruced up? A barber shop, of course. Maybe he had to wait his turn in the chair, glanced through a movie magazine and saw a picture of Rita Hayworth. Remember he never went to the movies and seldom read papers and magazines. The ones he used to have stacked around his place were all old.” I glared at Blake. “But your biggest mistake lay in killing him when he refused to open his safe last night so you could get the rest of his money.”

“I’ve got a letter here that proves I had nothing to do with it,” said Blake, reaching into his mail bag. “I’ll show you.”

At the same time I reached into my gadgetbag, which I was carrying strung over my shoulder, and grabbed my camera and flash gun.

Blake’s hand came out of his mail pouch and he was covering Ryan with a .22 automatic. My flash gun went off. The bright light blinded Blake for an instant and the chief flung himself at him and brought Blake down in a flying tackle. The gun went flying out of the postman’s hand and I grabbed up the automatic.

“Foolish move, Blake,” I said. “You were right. We didn’t have any proof against you, but the picture I just made of you threatening us with the gun won’t help you a bit in court.”

It didn’t, and Blake finally broke down and confessed the whole thing. He had worked it just the way I had said.

As a city editor Jeff Dawe is getting to be a pest. He actually expects me to discover and solve a murder every day!