

Detective Harris investigates the murder of an assistant district attorney shot to death on the street in Springfield, Missouri. When other public officials are murdered, a theory emerges that people are being assassinated as revenge killings, but a jogger killed on a hiking path takes investigators in a new direction...

The Springfield Murders

by David Gatesbury

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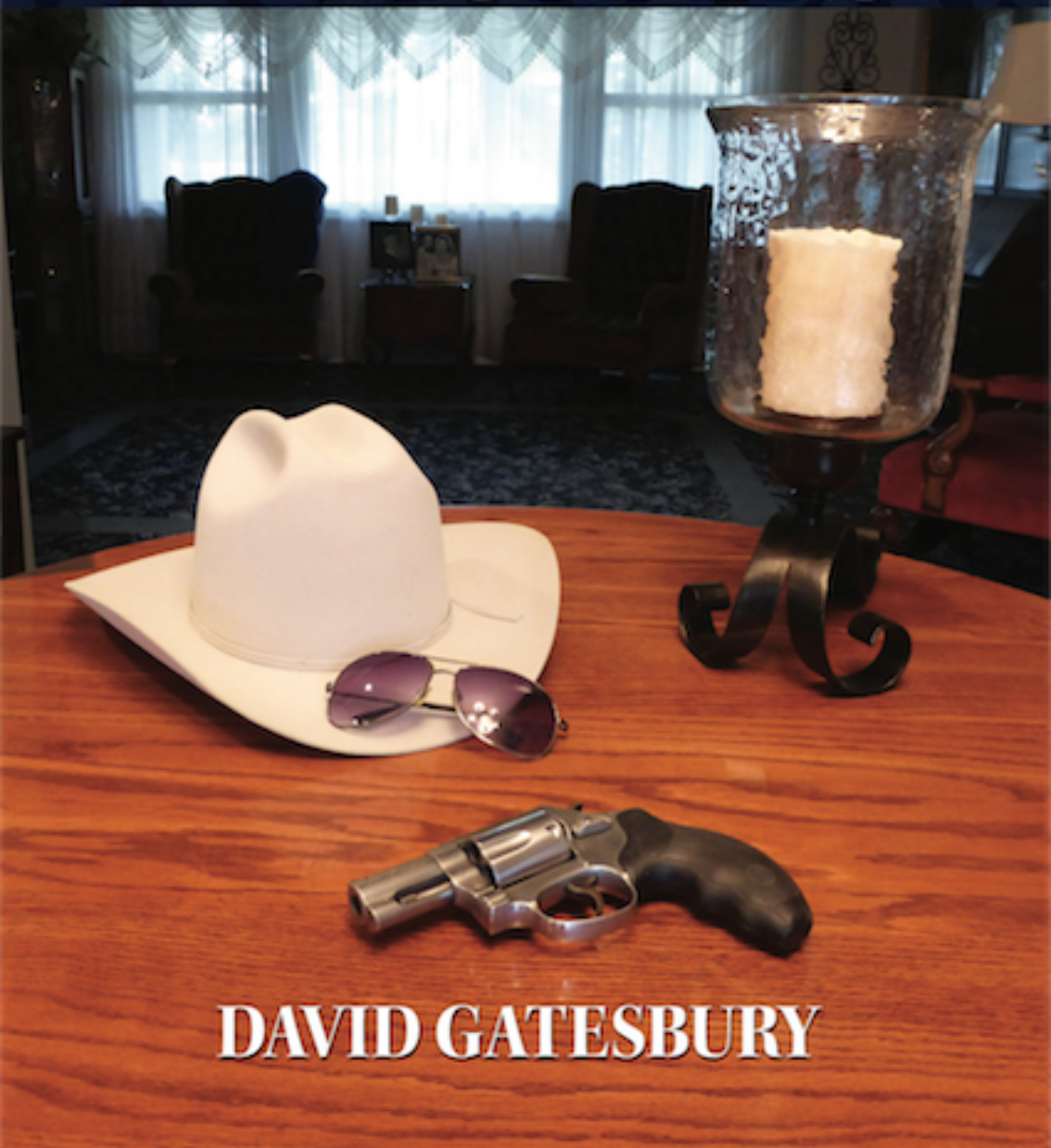
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Detective Leonard Harris Investigates...

THE SPRINGFIELD MURDERS



DAVID GATESBURY

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Chapter 3

An Assassination Possibly Linked to a Vendetta

After leaving the crime scene, Harris returned to the police station where Phalen and Beachum had been hard at it all evening long trying to hammer a confession out of Emmett Young. Harris soon found out that even though Emmett was given a lie detector test and passed, the two detectives took the approach that he'd failed, lying about the results to put more pressure on the kid to confess.

It wasn't long after arriving at the station that Harris saw Beachum looking as though he'd hit pay dirt when waving a signed statement in Emmett's mother's face.

Beachum loudly proclaimed, "He did it! We got a signed confession from Emmett, but the only thing he hasn't told us is who else was in on it with him."

Mrs. Young was in tears, shouting at Beachum in a fit of anger, "My son did not do this! He's not a killer! He cannot tell you who was with him because he wasn't there. He was only gone from the house about an hour—he couldn't have walked three blocks, killed those people and set their house on fire, and then returned home in that short of a span of time!" She screamed, "There's no way possible he could've killed that mother and child!"

She was steadfast and unwavering when sticking up for her son, demanding, "Did you find anything on him proving he'd been inside that house? Are you saying he killed with no reason, not taking anything from that house? And there's no sign he was in a struggle with anyone—wouldn't the deceased woman have put up a struggle?"

Beachum only just then noticed Harris, and was surprised to see he'd returned to the station. Harris signaled to let Beachum know he wanted to speak to him in private, and the two detectives met in a

connecting hallway where they conversed without being heard by others.

Harris explained, “I know the two of you want to nail the person responsible for the deaths of that mother and child, but I don’t think Emmett is your man.” He motioned for Beachum to look in the window of the door to the interrogation room. “Does he really look like a merciless, coldblooded killer?”

Emmett was barefoot and cloaked in a blanket either Beachum or Phalen had given him because they’d taken his clothing to be processed. All he had on underneath was underwear and he was shaking from nervousness.

“I’m only asking because he looks to me like a traumatized lost puppy incapable of doing harm to anybody. It’s plain to see he’s mentally challenged, and people of his mentality rarely commit brutal murders. I saw Phalen working on him—that interrogation is one of the most overbearing and stressful interrogations I’ve ever seen, and in my opinion, that’s the only reason you’ve extracted a confession out of him.”

“So what exactly are you saying? We got a confession from him, and regardless of what you say, he did it—why else would he say he stabbed that woman?”

“The best way to work a case is not to rely solely on a suspect’s confession, but to link evidence that can hold up under scrutiny that’ll back up and substantiate the subject’s confession. I examined the soles of the shoes he wore when he came in, and in my opinion they do not match shoe prints we saw in the upstairs of that house.”

“Okay, if this was your show and you were running it, how would you handle it?”

“Let’s give lab technicians time to see if they can come up with evidence proving he was at the murder scene. His mother said he was wearing the same clothes he wore earlier in the day, and if that’s true,

there's no way he could've battered the mother without getting blood spatter on himself."

Beachum had a disappointed look on his face. "Let me talk it over with Phalen and I'll see what he says."

Beachum entered the interrogation room and after signaling to Phalen, the two huddled and spoke without Emmett hearing what was said.

A minute later, Phalen barged through the door and into the hallway with Beachum behind him, a look of resentment on his face. "Okay, what difference does it make to you whether this kid is incarcerated tonight, tomorrow or a week from now? I've been working on him for hours to get him to admit to killing the mother."

"All I'm asking is for is that we give the lab time to produce evidence proving he was in that house. We saw two distinctive sets of shoeprints at the murder scene, and the murderer certainly didn't change shoes in the middle of killing the mother, so that means there had to be two people involved. Why would he admit to committing such a horrific crime, but then refuse to divulge the name of the person who was with him—it makes no sense. Should the lab provide evidence he was there, this is a slam-dunk case, but without anything else other than the confession, prosecutors may not move forward to put him on trial for winning a conviction."

Phalen shook his head showing disapproval, "Confessions carry a lot of weight in cases like this."

"Look, even with the confession, this may not be as *cut and dried* as you may think. Law enforcement has the right to question anybody, and here we undoubtedly have probable cause, but we're entering a grey area here that isn't clearly defined by law. When working as a detective in St. Louis, we often ran into situations like this where a borderline minor-to-adult was questioned. In my experience, most of the time circumstances surrounding the case factored into whether answers given in an interrogation could be suppressed in a court of law, but most of the time judges permit a minor's statement to be admissible. I don't know whether you've asked for advisement through

the prosecutor's office, but there may be legalities connected with how questioning is performed in an interview given the circumstances in this case, and state law supersedes local law.

“The way I see it, we have two ways to proceed: First, you can contact a prosecutor to find out what the proper protocol is for determining whether this kid's rights were violated. Second, we can let him go and give technicians time to provide us with the evidence needed to charge him. If the interrogation was mishandled, and I'm not saying it was nor wasn't, his defense attorney can file a motion to strike any of his alleged statements from being admitted and used against him. . . . The bottom line is that if you let him go, and the evidence proves him guilty, you'll still have the recorded interrogation and his signed confession.”

Convinced of his guilt, Phalen looked as though he didn't want to turn loose the suspect.

Harris continued, “Listen, you saw the bloody tracks left on the second floor of that house. Do you really think he could've bludgeoned that woman without getting a speck of blood on himself? Emmett's mother says her son was gone about an hour, insisting he couldn't have walked three blocks, committed this murder and went back home in that amount of time. Could he have done it? Maybe so, but the mother was combative, putting up a fight defending herself and protecting her child and that confrontation for certain lasted for longer than five or ten minutes.

“Let's say forensics can't place him at the crime scene, but the district attorney pushes forward and gets a conviction solely based on the confession. After spending years in jail, one day new evidence could come to light showing this kid didn't do it. Or it might be that the real murderer is later imprisoned and confesses to a jailhouse snitch, providing the snitch with details only the real murderer could know, and the kid is set free. I did a study on false confessions and most interrogations average thirty minutes to two hours—when it's found that you interrogated this kid for over six hours to coerce a confession out of him, who's the villain now? He volunteered taking a lie detector test before the test was brought up in the discussion, and after passing it, you told him he failed, and that was all recorded—for me, that alone

puts doubt in his guilt. His family is going to hire a topnotch attorney and sue the city of Springfield for millions because this interrogation will show he was bullied into confessing.”

Harris looked Phalen in the eye, “Bob, for what it’s worth, I think you’re on the right track, that it was teenaged delinquents and not a hardened, experienced criminal that committed this crime. The people who did this weren’t thinking about the magnitude of their actions, but were likely motivated by the impulse to acquire quick cash or valuables. It appears obvious because there was poor planning, and so little was done to cover-up the crime, thinking a hastily lit fire could destroy all the evidence, which may have except that firefighters arrived quickly to extinguish the fire. However, a minute ago you asked me if it makes any difference whether he’s incarcerated tonight, tomorrow or a week from now. So I’m going to ask you the same question, what difference does it make? You want the charge to stick, and with evidence backing up the confession you’re going to come out a hero in this case, but let’s be absolutely sure we’re charging and convicting the person responsible for this crime.”

Beachum acted as though he was in agreement with Harris, wanting to wait and see what forensics came up with, but said nothing.

Phalen was defiant, “Why not place him in holdover until the lab work is completed?”

Not wanting to go on debating the subject, Harris said, “These people haven’t any money, so I don’t regard this guy as a flight risk. Something I’ve yet to mention is that I only just now returned after viewing technicians using luminol at the crime scene, and that second floor lit up like a Christmas tree. They’ve picked up additional blood evidence—a palm print and fingerprints, and if they match Emmett’s prints, the two of you can take credit for securing the arrest. If they don’t match, you can still discuss with prosecutors whether to move forward with a murder charge on just the confession.”

Beachum said, “I just gave that woman a bad time about her son confessing.”

Phalen still hadn't spoken, when Harris explained, "I'll simply let her know that for now we're releasing her son for lack of evidence and leave it at that."

Emmett was cloaked in a blanket when Harris ushered him to the lobby where they met with his mother. "We're releasing Emmett for now to your care on lack of evidence."

Mrs. Young had an imploring look of concern, "That other detective said Emmett gave a signed a confession. Do you think they'll arrest him again at a later date?"

Harris spoke reassuringly, "I'm not at liberty to say, but if forensic scientists can't provide more evidence than what they've got now, I don't think you have to worry. It'll be up to the district attorney to decide whether or not to press charges, but I don't think the confession alone is enough to get a conviction. My advice is to put your faith in the system."

Harris went home that night to find Rhonda had dinner waiting for him. He didn't believe Emmett Young to be a murderer, but considering he'd signed a confession, he understood prosecutors will be under public pressure to see the wheels of justice turn and insist he be put to trial. Because a mother and child lost their lives, this certainly would become a high-profile case, and the best way to keep Emmett Young from being convicted was to learn who the real murderers were.

Rising early the next morning, dressing and putting his shoulder holster on, Harris was already giving thought to the Pratt case. He soon stood at the front door awaiting his partner to pick him up, and he watched Robert Phalen swerve recklessly when pulling into the driveway.

Stepping out of the car, Phalen's face held a strange expression as he urgently flagged for Harris to hurry. "C'mon, we just got a call that Assistant D.A. Elliott Hobson was shot a few blocks away from the station."

Once together in the car, Phalen placed a rotating red light on the roof, switched on the car's siren and drove at high speed down city

streets. He exclaimed, "It's been reported that Hobson was gunned down outside a donut shop in broad daylight at 6:45 a.m."

The Swift Donut Shop was located two blocks from city hall and the police station outside of the government town square and upon their arrival sirens could be heard all around the area. They saw two police cruisers parked in an odd way with reference to traffic lanes, and additional squad cars were converging from every direction. The two detectives were quick to get out of their car to approach a body lying in the street encircled by a crowd, and Phalen acknowledged it was City of Springfield's Assistant D.A. Elliott Hobson.

A uniformed police sergeant and Phalen relayed information to the station through handheld radios, while a growing number of bystanders and onlookers tried to view the murder victim. Examining the lifeless body, Harris saw two bloody gunshot wounds in the victim's chest, leaving little chance he was still alive. From what he gathered, the gunman had left the murder scene only minutes before, and he had disturbing thoughts that this was the first time he'd ever encountered an assassination, but that's how it appeared. Policemen cordoned off the area to prevent access to or from the murder scene and an ambulance crew arrived. Paramedics quickly verified Hobson could not have lived but for a few minutes after being shot before pronouncing the man dead.

The two detectives began interviewing people who were present at the donut shop at the time the murder occurred. Two persons who viewed the killing told the same story of seeing a white Ford Crown Victoria pull up, which appeared to be an unmarked police car. The lean built driver, dressed in a tan police officer's uniform displaying a badge, exited the car wearing a wide brimmed Texas Ranger styled hat and sunglasses, and he left the car door open. After vacating the vehicle, the assassin unhesitatingly came around the car, drew what one person thought to be a revolver from a hip level holster and in plain view of witnesses, took aim at Hobson, cold-bloodedly firing twice. The bullets struck Hobson in the chest and he fell to the ground, and afterwards, the shooter promptly returned to his car seat and drove away. The incident happened so fast that those present were shocked and couldn't give a detailed description of the murderer except to say

that he looked much like a common law officer, clean shaven and standing over six feet tall. They didn't think to make a note of the license number, but police didn't believe there was much chance the vehicle had legal plates anyway.

After a photographer took photos of the victim lying in the street, the body was whisked away in an ambulance, but police kept questioning witnesses to acquire more information. The police were baffled why this had happened, but a theory quickly emerged that Hobson had been killed as payback for incarcerating someone who sought revenge by having him murdered. For concern this killer may be targeting others in the D.A.'s office, Harris phoned Rhonda to tell her not to leave the building, and protective procedures were put in place to step up security at city hall. It was soon determined that Hobson was shot with a .357-5 shot magnum revolver and law enforcement now had the job of determining exactly why he was targeted and who perpetrated this deadly act. Talk amongst detectives at the station was that Harris and Phalen would be pulled off the Hobson murder case for focusing on local investigations requiring their attention.

The assassin arrived home not long after succeeding at taking the life of Assistant D.A. Elliott Hobson. Feeling as though he'd accomplished what he'd set out to do, he plopped his light tan cattleman style fur felt hat on the dining room table with his sunglasses, and left the .357 revolver with them. Not bothering to change the tan police officer's uniform he'd worn or taking off the holster, after getting a cold beverage from the fridge, he sat down in front of the television. Using the remote to bring up a local news station, he saw he'd caused chaos in Springfield, and enjoyed watching the frenzy of police and squad cars parked near or in front of the donut chop. Getting gratification over the scene—reporters interviewing witnesses and police as they described a coldblooded murder, it was obvious investigators didn't have a clue about who killed Hobson. Smiling and letting out a short chuckle at some of the commentary of witnesses who were still shaken over what had taken place a short time ago, he had no conscience about taking a man's life.

The current D.A., Alfred Hoffmeyer, gave an interview to the press at noon. He vowed to capture those responsible for the murder of

Hobson, a highly respected man who'd served the public faithfully by prosecuting the area's worst criminals.

In the days ahead, there was much national media interest generated in the case, and it was reported that the FBI intended sending agents to Springfield for assisting in the investigation. Liam Clark Woodbury, a circuit judge and former sheriff of Greene County, which the City of Springfield is part of, was scheduled to retire in six months, and he was appointed to lead the investigation. Accepting the position, Woodbury set up a command headquarters in a warehouse and training center for specifically working this case, and city and state law enforcement officials put out a huge dragnet for bringing in potential suspects. In assembling a task force, hundreds of veteran investigators were drawn together from statewide agency sourcing to look into Hobson's murder under Woodbury's watchful eye.

Officials understood Assistant D.A. Elliott Hobson had accumulated a long list of enemies he'd indicted, and investigators had to undertake the job of sifting through past cases. At least for now, this seemed to be their best chance for learning who most wanted to see this man dead. While interviewing hundreds of suspects, seasoned investigators also looked into whatever other leads that turned up, and most involved in the case believed that someone who the law had come down hard on had committed the murder. It could have been someone who Hobson had given a stiff sentence to, but it could also be in connection with a group of people law enforcement could've been focused on and who may have been hounded for the purpose of seeking convictions.

Members of the district attorney's office had often pledged to bring down crime statistics by prosecuting drug pushers and many detectives suspected white supremacists or people involved in drug trafficking and distribution could have targeted the public prosecutor. Hobson had prosecuted members of the Kaufman and Singer families, and investigators first targeted their family relations and others affiliated with their crime related activities.

The Kaufman's were into selling hard drugs of all types, cocaine and crack cocaine, Xanax, benzos, methamphetamines, ecstasy, heroin, LSD and PCP, and, of course, opium and marijuana. They and their

partnering members had cornered the drug market in southwest Missouri by eliminating their competitors and were eventually convicted of murdering four people. Three years ago, the Kaufman Empire had reached their height as drug sales spiked in the area, but the brutal murders of contentious rivals in the drug trade led to their downfall. The heads of the Kaufman family were now in prison, placing them high on the suspect list for moving to retaliate against the office of the district attorney.

Hobson prosecuted three Kaufman family members for murder who were given life sentences, and three others were given stiff sentences for drug possession and distribution. A judge, found to be giving these people assistance, had thrown out past cases worthy of prosecutorial action, and as a result was given ten years imprisonment. Two associates of the Kaufman family who were in line for prison time received lighter sentences for aiding prosecutors in charging the judge. On several occasions they wore wire taps when discussing privately what the judge could do to help them avoid hard time for an exchange of a large sum of money. However, this drug ring had been decimated after the law came down on them, and even though a half dozen were taken in and questioned about Hobson's murder, it seemed little chance they were involved in this merciless homicide.

In addition, Hobson had previously made out arrest warrants for George and Dan Singer, and an acquaintance of theirs named Gary Rickerman. The three were part of a white supremacist group that had built a reputation for hate crimes and, collecting long felony rap sheets, among the worst crimes they were wanted for was armed robbery. The Singer brothers were also wanted for an assault charge whereby they'd severely pistol-whipped a girl's father who'd forbidden his daughter from seeing them, and the man barely survived the brutal attack.

Investigators' efforts to trace the Crown Victoria took them to view closed-circuit video surveillance cameras attached to commercial buildings with street views. A bank's camera and a gas station's camera provided photos of the white Ford leaving town as it traversed southward on Campbell Street. It drove past Battlefield St., Walnut Lawn, and the James River Freeway before heading southbound on State Highway 160. The last video camera to sight the vehicle was

affixed to the exterior and eaves of a residential home and it showed the Crown Victoria still running south on 160. Technicians tracked it in times recorded to know these sightings coincided with the Hobson's killing, but these surveillance recordings provided them practically nothing to help identify the murder suspect.

Authorities had set up a *phone call tip line* for allowing people fearing retaliation to call in and leave messages regarding information about the murder of Hobson on an anonymous electronic messaging system. In the meantime, a trace of listings for registered White Crown Victoria's showed there to be a few hundred licensed in the state of Missouri, but running down these vehicles produced little results. Law officers maintained that this particular Crown Victoria may have been purchased somewhere out of state and the perpetrator of this crime in all probability had attached stolen license plates to it. State and local patrolmen were still on the lookout for such a car and commonly pulled over vehicles fitting this description, but so far had turned up nothing on this phantom Ford.

In their probe, police turned to investigating a maintenance chief in charge of servicing public schools who was prosecuted by Hobson. The official, Sam Kohler, had stolen plumbing supplies adding up to a worth of almost twenty thousand dollars. An auditor running down costs for such supplies discovered a deficit in plumbing equipment that couldn't be accounted for, and this expensive loss sparked an investigation. A motion activated camera was placed in the warehouse, and one evening after midnight Kohler was recorded loading a truck with supplies. He had a metal storage building on his property and with a search warrant in their possession police discovered he was using the building for storing the stolen plumbing supplies while having sold about twenty percent of it. Most of the supplies were recovered and Kohler was tried for violating the public trust while serving the county, and was found guilty. Given five years in jail for the theft, Kohler was released after doing three-and-a-half years of his sentence, but they found no link between this former official and the Hobson murder.

Harris turned his concentration to the house fire and the deaths of that mother and child, as he kept trying to convince Phalen that Emmett Young wasn't the culprit who'd committed these crimes. At the station,

he'd arranged for a section of the city showing the location of the house fire and surrounding area to be projected on to a sprawling whiteboard in the conference room. This was the same whiteboard he'd listed facts pertaining to the Reena Newcomb case using an erasable marker, but the part of the board used as a projection screen did not interfere with those notations he'd written before.

He addressed Phalen when gazing at the illustration of the city blocks projected on the screen. "Suspecting the murderers are teenaged and living close to the location of the residence where the deaths occurred, I've done some checking on Delores and Dylan Hutzinger, who live across the street from that house fire. Dylan has a record as a small time drug dealer, and he's had various other scrapes with the law. Delores, or Dee, whom she's better known as, has no record, but when phoning the high school principal to get information on their backgrounds I learned a few things about her. She has a reputation as a bully, and she punched out her gymnastics teacher for making an unflattering remark about the poor effort she made when playing in a basketball game. Dee wasn't kicked out of school over this incident, but she was taken off the team, and since then she's suspected of acts of vandalism made on the gym teacher's car. This brother and sister are known to be the worst troublemakers living in a six block radius of the crime scene."

He and his partner discussed taking Delores Hutzinger and her brother Dylan in for questioning, and the detectives made plans to be waiting for them at the time they got off the school bus that afternoon.

Chapter 4

Squeezing information out of two murder suspects

Waiting in their car when Dee and Dylan Hutzinger got off the school bus that afternoon, Harris wanted very much to interview the two. Wanting to interrogate the siblings separately, and while he questioned Dee, Phalen should try to pin down Dylan's whereabouts for yesterday afternoon for checking his alibi. He also mentioned Dee had told him that her brother intended going over to a friend's house after school at the time of the house fire, and this was a story that could easily be verified.

Watching the two stepping down off the bus, Harris leaned towards Phalen, "Notice the sneakers Dee is wearing and the boots her brother has on. They could be the shoes that left those shoe tracks at the murder scene."

Phalen gave acute attention to the sneakers Dee wore, red with white laces and soles, and the black military style boots Dylan wore. At that moment, he came to realize he may be looking at a pair of murderers that very well could have killed that mother and child, and he closely watched the two walking down the street towards them.

Dylan was first to spot them sitting in the car, and smart enough to think the men watching them were detectives, he appeared shaken, as though he was thinking about fleeing.

"Let's go," said Harris, and he exited the car, stepping onto the sidewalk, while Phalen came from the driver's side to close in on the teenagers, leaving them little chance at success running to escape them.

Harris spoke in a friendly manner, "Hi, Dee. I think you remember me—I'm Detective Harris and I spoke to you on the day of the fire that occurred across the street from your house. This is my partner Bob Phalen and we want to take you and your brother down to the station to ask you a few routine questions. You may not know it, but that house fire is for certain now regarded as a murder and arson investigation. It

occurred to me that since the two of you got home from school at about the same time the fire started yesterday that you might have seen something suspicious.”

Brother and sister had dumbfounded expressions as they looked at each other, and Harris added, “In all probability, this won’t take a whole lot of time. Questioning potential witnesses pertaining to a crime is simply a matter of procedure, and in this case it’s to help us establish a timeline. So why don’t we get in the car and we’ll take a short ride to the station.”

The two young people had hardly spoken a word when hesitatingly getting in the backseat, and Dee appeared pale. They looked even more surprised when Phalen leaned across Dylan to handcuff them together, Dylan’s right wrist to Dee’s left wrist.

Knowing his partner cuffed them for concern the brother might bolt, Harris remarked, “Don’t let the bracelets worry you. It’s a common practice to cuff witnesses together.”

Dee explained, “But like I already told you, after getting off from school I went downstairs to listen to music and wasn’t aware of the fire until later, and my brother wasn’t even home.”

Harris nodded, “Yeah, I know, and I apologize for the inconvenience, but it can’t be helped.”

At the station, Dee and Dylan were escorted into separate interrogation rooms, and in the room Dee was held, Harris recited to her the Miranda warning in a straightforward manner.

Dee innocently remarked, “You’re treating me as though I’m going to be arrested.”

Now, speaking frank and candidly, Harris coldly commented, “Do you understand your rights as I’ve just given them to you?”

Showing she was nervous in how she could hardly sit still, Dee blurted out her reply, “Yes, but why are you treating me like I’m a criminal?”

“Dee, I’m afraid this is a lot more serious than I’ve been letting on. We have strong reason to believe you and your brother were at the Pratt home yesterday when the fire started.”

“No, I haven’t entered the Pratt’s house in over a week.”

“If what you just told me is the truth then you haven’t anything to worry about, but there were two people who Mrs. Pratt either allowed into her house, or they forced their way in. There is no sign of forced entry, so we believe she let these people into her home, leading us to believe she knew who it was. We think whoever it was had come there for the purpose of acquiring money, and they brutalized the woman to force her into giving them cash she kept in the house. One of the intruders stabbed the mother with a kitchen knife, and afterwards they set the house on fire, which resulted in the death of her child.”

Dee pleaded, “I know the Pratt family, and I’d never do anything like that.”

“We got a break in that firefighter’s efforts to put out the fire didn’t destroy near as much evidence as one might expect. Forensic technicians came up with a palm print and fingerprints, and the two of you will be printed to see if we can come up with a match. Detective Phalen is having an officer take Dylan’s fingerprints right now, and you’ll be next.”

He looked down at her feet, and calmly said, “Dylan was required to remove his shoes, and I’m now going to ask that you remove yours. The reason for that is because we’ve acquired footwear impressions from the crime scene that are presumably a close match for the shoes the two of you are wearing.”

Hit hard with the crushing, stark reality that she and her brother were caught in committing the crime of murder, from what Harris had told Dee she expected there’d be evidence to prove their guilt. Knowing it was her shoes and her brother’s that left the shoeprints, tears began streaming down Dees cheeks, dripping onto her blouse, and after removing her shoes, she handed them over to Harris.

Watching Harris examine the outside of her shoes, he said nothing when detecting what he thought might be barely visible droplets of

blood. However, seeing a steady stream of tears draining from her eyes was enough to convince him of her guilt.

“How much money could that young mother have possibly been carrying for the two of you to consider murdering her? This was a young couple probably living work check to work check to pay bills—the mother didn’t have a job for trying to raise her children, and you’d babysat for them. . . . What’s most surprising to me is that the shoeprints show the person who exerted the most control over the mother was the one who struck her numerous times in the head with a pry bar. The person who wielded the pry bar wore sneakers that left a distinctive pattern, and we also took a shoe impression from the backside of the sweatshirt the woman wore.”

Dee clasped her hands over her face for feeling shame for what she’d done, recalling the time she placed her foot on the dazed woman’s back to stop her from getting up off the floor.

Afternoon ran into the early evening, and the guilt of Dee and Dylan was established when fingerprint experts matched theirs to those found at the murder scene. The bloody footwear impressions matched the soles of Dee and Dylan’s shoes, and tiny blood droplets on their shoes belonged to the mother. There was no doubt the pair committed this crime, and before being formally placed under arrest the two confessed to the crime of murder and arson. They weren’t eighteen-years-of-age as yet, but it was thought they’d be tried as adults, and they were expected to receive life sentences. Their mother arrived at the station and unable to comprehend the reality that her children were murderers, the woman fainted when detectives told her what events had transpired at the Pratt residence.

Arriving home late, Rhonda had dinner ready for Len, and he told her they’d made an arrest in the Pratt case, where a mother and two-year-old child had been murdered. He also made mention that it was a sister and brother who lived across the street that committed the murders.

Rhonda had already eaten, but sat down and began spooning at a bowl of pudding that served as her dessert. “What did their parents say when they learned what happened?”

“Perhaps their parents are divorced because I only saw the mother, and she fainted after being told the news.”

Rhonda then said, “I’ve always had a yearn to study criminal justice, and I was giving thought to taking classes next semester at the university to extend my education and career opportunities.”

Len didn’t know where Rhonda was getting the ambition to pursue a career in law, but believed it had something to do with her brother’s death and that her sister was kidnapped and for a time held captive against her will. He was aware that Rhonda thought our society was on the decline and she wanted to see criminals justly punished for their crimes. Knowing he’d married a sensible woman, he wasn’t sure how serious and determined she was about acquiring a law degree.

“I know you have a college degree in language arts, but that’s far different from gaining a legal education and state licensure to become an attorney. If you’re serious about this, I suggest you research the licensing requirements. And if you still want to do this then you may not want to bother with the secretarial job you’ve just started, but commit to the required courses needed to obtain a degree in law.”

Considering his wife worked in the district attorney’s office, he believed she was primarily interested in the prosecutorial side of the law, and thought this idea may be connected to the recent murder of Assistant D.A. Elliott Hobson. He asked her, “How well did you know Elliott Hobson?”

“I worked in his office, but didn’t know him all that well, although it was understood he handled the toughest cases coming through the department. He had a wife and three young children, and I think we should go to his funeral.”

Len nodded, “I’ve grasped that he was a dedicated defender of the law, and an accomplished trial lawyer. Responsible for reviewing evidence for determining whether they should put the accused on trial, and then using the law to incarcerate the criminals, it’s that which made him a target. . . . If that’s what you want to do, then you can count on my support, but in all likelihood it’ll take years to obtain a degree.”

Finishing his meal, he dabbed his mouth with a napkin. “I don’t know how far you’ll go with this idea, but prosecutors must have vast knowledge of law legislation and investigation procedures. District attorneys are successful trial lawyers who’ve been elected to office. They are active in the political arena and volunteer time to campaigns. It means comprising a guarded rapport with your opponents who’ll debate you while opposing your views and your legal knowledge will be put to the test. Those holding positions as assistant D.A. are not elected, but acquire their position by being aligned with influential people rather than by their knowledge of law. Administrative officials upholding the law may look to hold an admirable position, but it’s a constant juggling act, and it may or may not interest you to know that there are many lawyers who’ve regretted their career choice.”

Len got up from the table and went into the living room to switch on the television for watching the local news, and the killing of Assistant D.A. Elliott Hobson was the program’s lead story. The big mystery stifling law enforcement was identifying the assassin that pulled up in front of the donut shop wearing what witnesses described as a policeman’s uniform displaying a badge and then shot Hobson with a pistol. Law officers had no idea who could’ve murdered Hobson, and there was much speculation on the subject. The next news story gave attention to the Pratt case, and in the presentation Delores and Dylan Hutzinger’s photos were shown while a newswoman explained how the two suspects became the focus of the investigation.

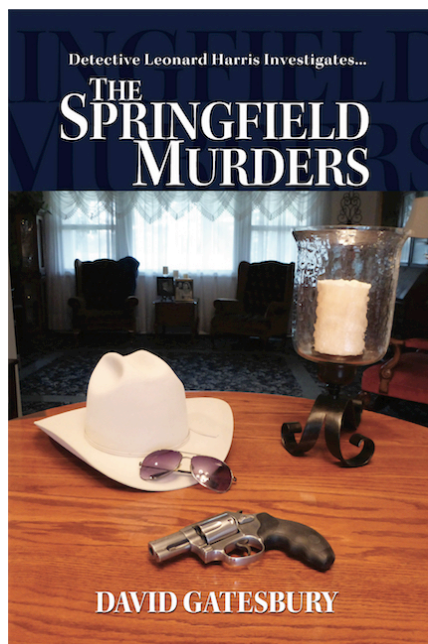
Rhonda entered the room and joined Len in watching the evening newscast, and when the anchorwoman made mention of her husband’s name, she said, “You may become a celebrity in Springfield.”

Not amused by the statement that included his name, Len shook his head for knowing the seriousness of the charges the two teenagers were facing. “Those two killed that woman and her child and for what? She didn’t even have a hundred dollars in her purse and a little jewelry—murdering two human beings and throwing their lives away for next to nothing.”

Len then used the remote to change the channel for being disgusted, and seeing the brooding mood he was in, Rhonda thought it was for the best that they not continue watching the news.

When it came to the funeral and burial of Elliott Hobson, many of the citizens of Springfield turned out in giving support to his family. Len and Rhonda Harris attended the services where the mayor, the chief of police and other upstanding public servants took the pulpit to speak a few words on Hobson's behalf. In doing so, Len kept a watchful eye, scanning the people for believing the murderer could be someone in the crowd, and scrutinized the faces of men who remotely stood a chance at being Hobson's killer. It seemed appropriate in a sinister way that whoever committed this crime might be on hand to proudly witness these observances in the assistant district attorney's honor, taking gratification and self-satisfaction in believing he'd gotten away with murder. The thing was that the general description they'd gotten of the killer fit a great many males in attendance, and it occurred to him that any one of them could be the murderer. In contemplating these thoughts, he took a moment to dwell on the white Ford Crown Victoria driven by the assailant. While the search for this vehicle had thus far brought about no results, it was one of the few clues investigators had to go on for identifying who it was that ended Hobson's life.

The Ford Motor Company held a near-monopoly on the market for police cruisers in the United States and Canada with Crown Victoria's produced from 1992 through 2011. The vehicle's conventional rear-wheel drive, V8 power, and body-on-frame construction made them ideal for police use, and they came equipped with many heavy duty parts such as a revised transmission. With a body style and chassis related to other Ford models, the durable body construction made for inexpensive repairs after collisions and rear-wheel drive provided better maneuverability over front drive rivals. The Ford Crown Victoria Police Interceptor was not sold directly to the general public, but is widely available in secondhand sales after no longer in service in law enforcement fleet duty. Stripped of any police decals, computer equipment, police radios, and emergency lights before being sold or auctioned to the public, they became quite popular for consumers. Regarded as a safe, inexpensive car designed with a bench seat, which can comfortably take three passengers in the back, they were also in high demand by taxi companies.



Detective Harris investigates the murder of an assistant district attorney shot to death on the street in Springfield, Missouri. When other public officials are murdered, a theory emerges that people are being assassinated as revenge killings, but a jogger killed on a hiking path takes investigators in a new direction...

The Springfield Murders

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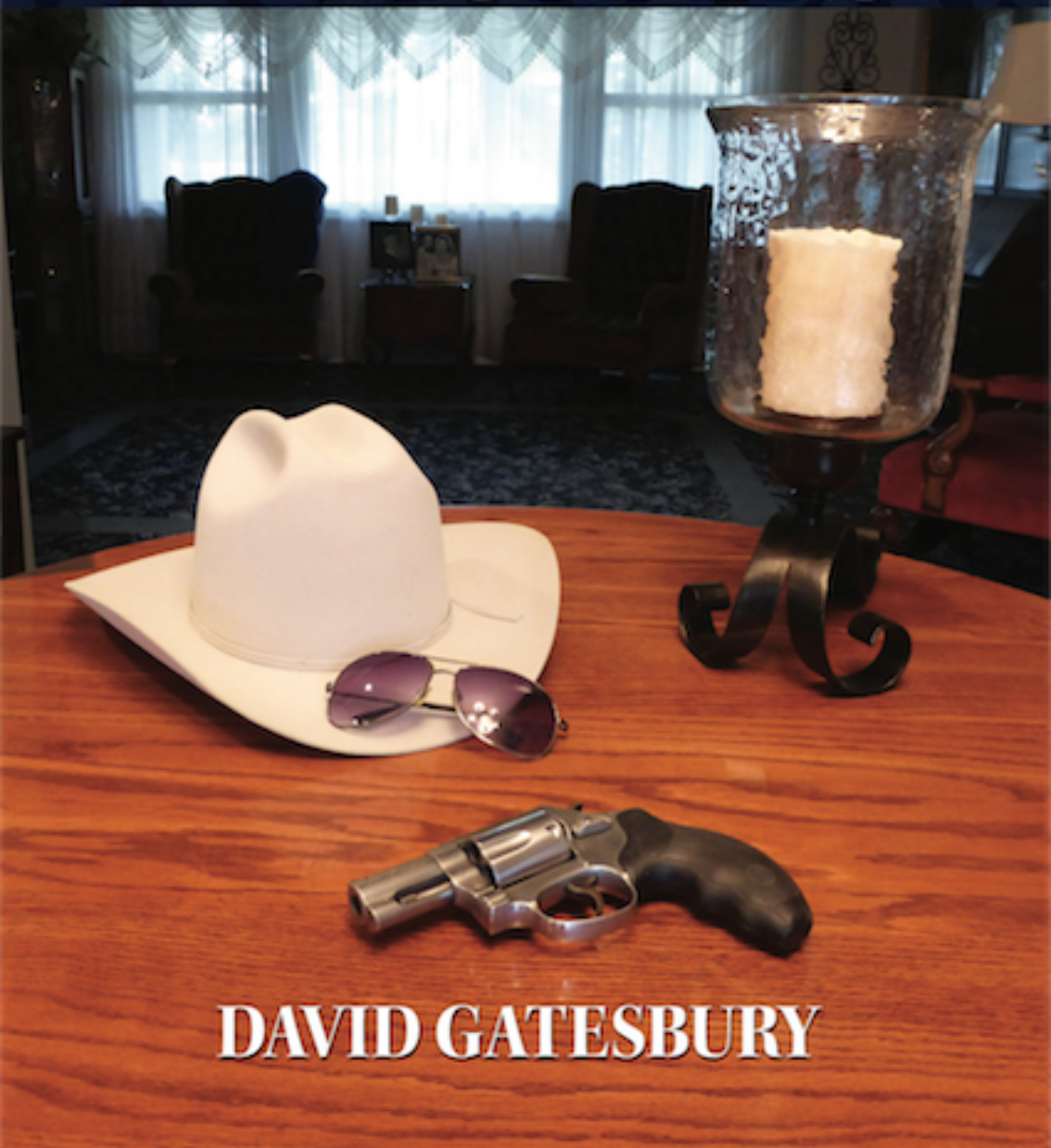
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Detective Leonard Harris Investigates...

THE SPRINGFIELD MURDERS



DAVID GATESBURY

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Chapter 3

An Assassination Possibly Linked to a Vendetta

After leaving the crime scene, Harris returned to the police station where Phalen and Beachum had been hard at it all evening long trying to hammer a confession out of Emmett Young. Harris soon found out that even though Emmett was given a lie detector test and passed, the two detectives took the approach that he'd failed, lying about the results to put more pressure on the kid to confess.

It wasn't long after arriving at the station that Harris saw Beachum looking as though he'd hit pay dirt when waving a signed statement in Emmett's mother's face.

Beachum loudly proclaimed, "He did it! We got a signed confession from Emmett, but the only thing he hasn't told us is who else was in on it with him."

Mrs. Young was in tears, shouting at Beachum in a fit of anger, "My son did not do this! He's not a killer! He cannot tell you who was with him because he wasn't there. He was only gone from the house about an hour—he couldn't have walked three blocks, killed those people and set their house on fire, and then returned home in that short of a span of time!" She screamed, "There's no way possible he could've killed that mother and child!"

She was steadfast and unwavering when sticking up for her son, demanding, "Did you find anything on him proving he'd been inside that house? Are you saying he killed with no reason, not taking anything from that house? And there's no sign he was in a struggle with anyone—wouldn't the deceased woman have put up a struggle?"

Beachum only just then noticed Harris, and was surprised to see he'd returned to the station. Harris signaled to let Beachum know he wanted to speak to him in private, and the two detectives met in a

connecting hallway where they conversed without being heard by others.

Harris explained, “I know the two of you want to nail the person responsible for the deaths of that mother and child, but I don’t think Emmett is your man.” He motioned for Beachum to look in the window of the door to the interrogation room. “Does he really look like a merciless, coldblooded killer?”

Emmett was barefoot and cloaked in a blanket either Beachum or Phalen had given him because they’d taken his clothing to be processed. All he had on underneath was underwear and he was shaking from nervousness.

“I’m only asking because he looks to me like a traumatized lost puppy incapable of doing harm to anybody. It’s plain to see he’s mentally challenged, and people of his mentality rarely commit brutal murders. I saw Phalen working on him—that interrogation is one of the most overbearing and stressful interrogations I’ve ever seen, and in my opinion, that’s the only reason you’ve extracted a confession out of him.”

“So what exactly are you saying? We got a confession from him, and regardless of what you say, he did it—why else would he say he stabbed that woman?”

“The best way to work a case is not to rely solely on a suspect’s confession, but to link evidence that can hold up under scrutiny that’ll back up and substantiate the subject’s confession. I examined the soles of the shoes he wore when he came in, and in my opinion they do not match shoe prints we saw in the upstairs of that house.”

“Okay, if this was your show and you were running it, how would you handle it?”

“Let’s give lab technicians time to see if they can come up with evidence proving he was at the murder scene. His mother said he was wearing the same clothes he wore earlier in the day, and if that’s true,

there's no way he could've battered the mother without getting blood spatter on himself."

Beachum had a disappointed look on his face. "Let me talk it over with Phalen and I'll see what he says."

Beachum entered the interrogation room and after signaling to Phalen, the two huddled and spoke without Emmett hearing what was said.

A minute later, Phalen barged through the door and into the hallway with Beachum behind him, a look of resentment on his face. "Okay, what difference does it make to you whether this kid is incarcerated tonight, tomorrow or a week from now? I've been working on him for hours to get him to admit to killing the mother."

"All I'm asking is for is that we give the lab time to produce evidence proving he was in that house. We saw two distinctive sets of shoeprints at the murder scene, and the murderer certainly didn't change shoes in the middle of killing the mother, so that means there had to be two people involved. Why would he admit to committing such a horrific crime, but then refuse to divulge the name of the person who was with him—it makes no sense. Should the lab provide evidence he was there, this is a slam-dunk case, but without anything else other than the confession, prosecutors may not move forward to put him on trial for winning a conviction."

Phalen shook his head showing disapproval, "Confessions carry a lot of weight in cases like this."

"Look, even with the confession, this may not be as *cut and dried* as you may think. Law enforcement has the right to question anybody, and here we undoubtedly have probable cause, but we're entering a grey area here that isn't clearly defined by law. When working as a detective in St. Louis, we often ran into situations like this where a borderline minor-to-adult was questioned. In my experience, most of the time circumstances surrounding the case factored into whether answers given in an interrogation could be suppressed in a court of law, but most of the time judges permit a minor's statement to be admissible. I don't know whether you've asked for advisement through

the prosecutor's office, but there may be legalities connected with how questioning is performed in an interview given the circumstances in this case, and state law supersedes local law.

“The way I see it, we have two ways to proceed: First, you can contact a prosecutor to find out what the proper protocol is for determining whether this kid's rights were violated. Second, we can let him go and give technicians time to provide us with the evidence needed to charge him. If the interrogation was mishandled, and I'm not saying it was nor wasn't, his defense attorney can file a motion to strike any of his alleged statements from being admitted and used against him. . . . The bottom line is that if you let him go, and the evidence proves him guilty, you'll still have the recorded interrogation and his signed confession.”

Convinced of his guilt, Phalen looked as though he didn't want to turn loose the suspect.

Harris continued, “Listen, you saw the bloody tracks left on the second floor of that house. Do you really think he could've bludgeoned that woman without getting a speck of blood on himself? Emmett's mother says her son was gone about an hour, insisting he couldn't have walked three blocks, committed this murder and went back home in that amount of time. Could he have done it? Maybe so, but the mother was combative, putting up a fight defending herself and protecting her child and that confrontation for certain lasted for longer than five or ten minutes.

“Let's say forensics can't place him at the crime scene, but the district attorney pushes forward and gets a conviction solely based on the confession. After spending years in jail, one day new evidence could come to light showing this kid didn't do it. Or it might be that the real murderer is later imprisoned and confesses to a jailhouse snitch, providing the snitch with details only the real murderer could know, and the kid is set free. I did a study on false confessions and most interrogations average thirty minutes to two hours—when it's found that you interrogated this kid for over six hours to coerce a confession out of him, who's the villain now? He volunteered taking a lie detector test before the test was brought up in the discussion, and after passing it, you told him he failed, and that was all recorded—for me, that alone

puts doubt in his guilt. His family is going to hire a topnotch attorney and sue the city of Springfield for millions because this interrogation will show he was bullied into confessing.”

Harris looked Phalen in the eye, “Bob, for what it’s worth, I think you’re on the right track, that it was teenaged delinquents and not a hardened, experienced criminal that committed this crime. The people who did this weren’t thinking about the magnitude of their actions, but were likely motivated by the impulse to acquire quick cash or valuables. It appears obvious because there was poor planning, and so little was done to cover-up the crime, thinking a hastily lit fire could destroy all the evidence, which may have except that firefighters arrived quickly to extinguish the fire. However, a minute ago you asked me if it makes any difference whether he’s incarcerated tonight, tomorrow or a week from now. So I’m going to ask you the same question, what difference does it make? You want the charge to stick, and with evidence backing up the confession you’re going to come out a hero in this case, but let’s be absolutely sure we’re charging and convicting the person responsible for this crime.”

Beachum acted as though he was in agreement with Harris, wanting to wait and see what forensics came up with, but said nothing.

Phalen was defiant, “Why not place him in holdover until the lab work is completed?”

Not wanting to go on debating the subject, Harris said, “These people haven’t any money, so I don’t regard this guy as a flight risk. Something I’ve yet to mention is that I only just now returned after viewing technicians using luminol at the crime scene, and that second floor lit up like a Christmas tree. They’ve picked up additional blood evidence—a palm print and fingerprints, and if they match Emmett’s prints, the two of you can take credit for securing the arrest. If they don’t match, you can still discuss with prosecutors whether to move forward with a murder charge on just the confession.”

Beachum said, “I just gave that woman a bad time about her son confessing.”

Phalen still hadn't spoken, when Harris explained, "I'll simply let her know that for now we're releasing her son for lack of evidence and leave it at that."

Emmett was cloaked in a blanket when Harris ushered him to the lobby where they met with his mother. "We're releasing Emmett for now to your care on lack of evidence."

Mrs. Young had an imploring look of concern, "That other detective said Emmett gave a signed a confession. Do you think they'll arrest him again at a later date?"

Harris spoke reassuringly, "I'm not at liberty to say, but if forensic scientists can't provide more evidence than what they've got now, I don't think you have to worry. It'll be up to the district attorney to decide whether or not to press charges, but I don't think the confession alone is enough to get a conviction. My advice is to put your faith in the system."

Harris went home that night to find Rhonda had dinner waiting for him. He didn't believe Emmett Young to be a murderer, but considering he'd signed a confession, he understood prosecutors will be under public pressure to see the wheels of justice turn and insist he be put to trial. Because a mother and child lost their lives, this certainly would become a high-profile case, and the best way to keep Emmett Young from being convicted was to learn who the real murderers were.

Rising early the next morning, dressing and putting his shoulder holster on, Harris was already giving thought to the Pratt case. He soon stood at the front door awaiting his partner to pick him up, and he watched Robert Phalen swerve recklessly when pulling into the driveway.

Stepping out of the car, Phalen's face held a strange expression as he urgently flagged for Harris to hurry. "C'mon, we just got a call that Assistant D.A. Elliott Hobson was shot a few blocks away from the station."

Once together in the car, Phalen placed a rotating red light on the roof, switched on the car's siren and drove at high speed down city

streets. He exclaimed, "It's been reported that Hobson was gunned down outside a donut shop in broad daylight at 6:45 a.m."

The Swift Donut Shop was located two blocks from city hall and the police station outside of the government town square and upon their arrival sirens could be heard all around the area. They saw two police cruisers parked in an odd way with reference to traffic lanes, and additional squad cars were converging from every direction. The two detectives were quick to get out of their car to approach a body lying in the street encircled by a crowd, and Phalen acknowledged it was City of Springfield's Assistant D.A. Elliott Hobson.

A uniformed police sergeant and Phalen relayed information to the station through handheld radios, while a growing number of bystanders and onlookers tried to view the murder victim. Examining the lifeless body, Harris saw two bloody gunshot wounds in the victim's chest, leaving little chance he was still alive. From what he gathered, the gunman had left the murder scene only minutes before, and he had disturbing thoughts that this was the first time he'd ever encountered an assassination, but that's how it appeared. Policemen cordoned off the area to prevent access to or from the murder scene and an ambulance crew arrived. Paramedics quickly verified Hobson could not have lived but for a few minutes after being shot before pronouncing the man dead.

The two detectives began interviewing people who were present at the donut shop at the time the murder occurred. Two persons who viewed the killing told the same story of seeing a white Ford Crown Victoria pull up, which appeared to be an unmarked police car. The lean built driver, dressed in a tan police officer's uniform displaying a badge, exited the car wearing a wide brimmed Texas Ranger styled hat and sunglasses, and he left the car door open. After vacating the vehicle, the assassin unhesitatingly came around the car, drew what one person thought to be a revolver from a hip level holster and in plain view of witnesses, took aim at Hobson, cold-bloodedly firing twice. The bullets struck Hobson in the chest and he fell to the ground, and afterwards, the shooter promptly returned to his car seat and drove away. The incident happened so fast that those present were shocked and couldn't give a detailed description of the murderer except to say

that he looked much like a common law officer, clean shaven and standing over six feet tall. They didn't think to make a note of the license number, but police didn't believe there was much chance the vehicle had legal plates anyway.

After a photographer took photos of the victim lying in the street, the body was whisked away in an ambulance, but police kept questioning witnesses to acquire more information. The police were baffled why this had happened, but a theory quickly emerged that Hobson had been killed as payback for incarcerating someone who sought revenge by having him murdered. For concern this killer may be targeting others in the D.A.'s office, Harris phoned Rhonda to tell her not to leave the building, and protective procedures were put in place to step up security at city hall. It was soon determined that Hobson was shot with a .357-5 shot magnum revolver and law enforcement now had the job of determining exactly why he was targeted and who perpetrated this deadly act. Talk amongst detectives at the station was that Harris and Phalen would be pulled off the Hobson murder case for focusing on local investigations requiring their attention.

The assassin arrived home not long after succeeding at taking the life of Assistant D.A. Elliott Hobson. Feeling as though he'd accomplished what he'd set out to do, he plopped his light tan cattleman style fur felt hat on the dining room table with his sunglasses, and left the .357 revolver with them. Not bothering to change the tan police officer's uniform he'd worn or taking off the holster, after getting a cold beverage from the fridge, he sat down in front of the television. Using the remote to bring up a local news station, he saw he'd caused chaos in Springfield, and enjoyed watching the frenzy of police and squad cars parked near or in front of the donut chop. Getting gratification over the scene—reporters interviewing witnesses and police as they described a coldblooded murder, it was obvious investigators didn't have a clue about who killed Hobson. Smiling and letting out a short chuckle at some of the commentary of witnesses who were still shaken over what had taken place a short time ago, he had no conscience about taking a man's life.

The current D.A., Alfred Hoffmeyer, gave an interview to the press at noon. He vowed to capture those responsible for the murder of

Hobson, a highly respected man who'd served the public faithfully by prosecuting the area's worst criminals.

In the days ahead, there was much national media interest generated in the case, and it was reported that the FBI intended sending agents to Springfield for assisting in the investigation. Liam Clark Woodbury, a circuit judge and former sheriff of Greene County, which the City of Springfield is part of, was scheduled to retire in six months, and he was appointed to lead the investigation. Accepting the position, Woodbury set up a command headquarters in a warehouse and training center for specifically working this case, and city and state law enforcement officials put out a huge dragnet for bringing in potential suspects. In assembling a task force, hundreds of veteran investigators were drawn together from statewide agency sourcing to look into Hobson's murder under Woodbury's watchful eye.

Officials understood Assistant D.A. Elliott Hobson had accumulated a long list of enemies he'd indicted, and investigators had to undertake the job of sifting through past cases. At least for now, this seemed to be their best chance for learning who most wanted to see this man dead. While interviewing hundreds of suspects, seasoned investigators also looked into whatever other leads that turned up, and most involved in the case believed that someone who the law had come down hard on had committed the murder. It could have been someone who Hobson had given a stiff sentence to, but it could also be in connection with a group of people law enforcement could've been focused on and who may have been hounded for the purpose of seeking convictions.

Members of the district attorney's office had often pledged to bring down crime statistics by prosecuting drug pushers and many detectives suspected white supremacists or people involved in drug trafficking and distribution could have targeted the public prosecutor. Hobson had prosecuted members of the Kaufman and Singer families, and investigators first targeted their family relations and others affiliated with their crime related activities.

The Kaufman's were into selling hard drugs of all types, cocaine and crack cocaine, Xanax, benzos, methamphetamines, ecstasy, heroin, LSD and PCP, and, of course, opium and marijuana. They and their

partnering members had cornered the drug market in southwest Missouri by eliminating their competitors and were eventually convicted of murdering four people. Three years ago, the Kaufman Empire had reached their height as drug sales spiked in the area, but the brutal murders of contentious rivals in the drug trade led to their downfall. The heads of the Kaufman family were now in prison, placing them high on the suspect list for moving to retaliate against the office of the district attorney.

Hobson prosecuted three Kaufman family members for murder who were given life sentences, and three others were given stiff sentences for drug possession and distribution. A judge, found to be giving these people assistance, had thrown out past cases worthy of prosecutorial action, and as a result was given ten years imprisonment. Two associates of the Kaufman family who were in line for prison time received lighter sentences for aiding prosecutors in charging the judge. On several occasions they wore wire taps when discussing privately what the judge could do to help them avoid hard time for an exchange of a large sum of money. However, this drug ring had been decimated after the law came down on them, and even though a half dozen were taken in and questioned about Hobson's murder, it seemed little chance they were involved in this merciless homicide.

In addition, Hobson had previously made out arrest warrants for George and Dan Singer, and an acquaintance of theirs named Gary Rickerman. The three were part of a white supremacist group that had built a reputation for hate crimes and, collecting long felony rap sheets, among the worst crimes they were wanted for was armed robbery. The Singer brothers were also wanted for an assault charge whereby they'd severely pistol-whipped a girl's father who'd forbidden his daughter from seeing them, and the man barely survived the brutal attack.

Investigators' efforts to trace the Crown Victoria took them to view closed-circuit video surveillance cameras attached to commercial buildings with street views. A bank's camera and a gas station's camera provided photos of the white Ford leaving town as it traversed southward on Campbell Street. It drove past Battlefield St., Walnut Lawn, and the James River Freeway before heading southbound on State Highway 160. The last video camera to sight the vehicle was

affixed to the exterior and eaves of a residential home and it showed the Crown Victoria still running south on 160. Technicians tracked it in times recorded to know these sightings coincided with the Hobson's killing, but these surveillance recordings provided them practically nothing to help identify the murder suspect.

Authorities had set up a *phone call tip line* for allowing people fearing retaliation to call in and leave messages regarding information about the murder of Hobson on an anonymous electronic messaging system. In the meantime, a trace of listings for registered White Crown Victoria's showed there to be a few hundred licensed in the state of Missouri, but running down these vehicles produced little results. Law officers maintained that this particular Crown Victoria may have been purchased somewhere out of state and the perpetrator of this crime in all probability had attached stolen license plates to it. State and local patrolmen were still on the lookout for such a car and commonly pulled over vehicles fitting this description, but so far had turned up nothing on this phantom Ford.

In their probe, police turned to investigating a maintenance chief in charge of servicing public schools who was prosecuted by Hobson. The official, Sam Kohler, had stolen plumbing supplies adding up to a worth of almost twenty thousand dollars. An auditor running down costs for such supplies discovered a deficit in plumbing equipment that couldn't be accounted for, and this expensive loss sparked an investigation. A motion activated camera was placed in the warehouse, and one evening after midnight Kohler was recorded loading a truck with supplies. He had a metal storage building on his property and with a search warrant in their possession police discovered he was using the building for storing the stolen plumbing supplies while having sold about twenty percent of it. Most of the supplies were recovered and Kohler was tried for violating the public trust while serving the county, and was found guilty. Given five years in jail for the theft, Kohler was released after doing three-and-a-half years of his sentence, but they found no link between this former official and the Hobson murder.

Harris turned his concentration to the house fire and the deaths of that mother and child, as he kept trying to convince Phalen that Emmett Young wasn't the culprit who'd committed these crimes. At the station,

he'd arranged for a section of the city showing the location of the house fire and surrounding area to be projected on to a sprawling whiteboard in the conference room. This was the same whiteboard he'd listed facts pertaining to the Reena Newcomb case using an erasable marker, but the part of the board used as a projection screen did not interfere with those notations he'd written before.

He addressed Phalen when gazing at the illustration of the city blocks projected on the screen. "Suspecting the murderers are teenaged and living close to the location of the residence where the deaths occurred, I've done some checking on Delores and Dylan Hutzinger, who live across the street from that house fire. Dylan has a record as a small time drug dealer, and he's had various other scrapes with the law. Delores, or Dee, whom she's better known as, has no record, but when phoning the high school principal to get information on their backgrounds I learned a few things about her. She has a reputation as a bully, and she punched out her gymnastics teacher for making an unflattering remark about the poor effort she made when playing in a basketball game. Dee wasn't kicked out of school over this incident, but she was taken off the team, and since then she's suspected of acts of vandalism made on the gym teacher's car. This brother and sister are known to be the worst troublemakers living in a six block radius of the crime scene."

He and his partner discussed taking Delores Hutzinger and her brother Dylan in for questioning, and the detectives made plans to be waiting for them at the time they got off the school bus that afternoon.

Chapter 4

Squeezing information out of two murder suspects

Waiting in their car when Dee and Dylan Hutzinger got off the school bus that afternoon, Harris wanted very much to interview the two. Wanting to interrogate the siblings separately, and while he questioned Dee, Phalen should try to pin down Dylan's whereabouts for yesterday afternoon for checking his alibi. He also mentioned Dee had told him that her brother intended going over to a friend's house after school at the time of the house fire, and this was a story that could easily be verified.

Watching the two stepping down off the bus, Harris leaned towards Phalen, "Notice the sneakers Dee is wearing and the boots her brother has on. They could be the shoes that left those shoe tracks at the murder scene."

Phalen gave acute attention to the sneakers Dee wore, red with white laces and soles, and the black military style boots Dylan wore. At that moment, he came to realize he may be looking at a pair of murderers that very well could have killed that mother and child, and he closely watched the two walking down the street towards them.

Dylan was first to spot them sitting in the car, and smart enough to think the men watching them were detectives, he appeared shaken, as though he was thinking about fleeing.

"Let's go," said Harris, and he exited the car, stepping onto the sidewalk, while Phalen came from the driver's side to close in on the teenagers, leaving them little chance at success running to escape them.

Harris spoke in a friendly manner, "Hi, Dee. I think you remember me—I'm Detective Harris and I spoke to you on the day of the fire that occurred across the street from your house. This is my partner Bob Phalen and we want to take you and your brother down to the station to ask you a few routine questions. You may not know it, but that house fire is for certain now regarded as a murder and arson investigation. It

occurred to me that since the two of you got home from school at about the same time the fire started yesterday that you might have seen something suspicious.”

Brother and sister had dumbfounded expressions as they looked at each other, and Harris added, “In all probability, this won’t take a whole lot of time. Questioning potential witnesses pertaining to a crime is simply a matter of procedure, and in this case it’s to help us establish a timeline. So why don’t we get in the car and we’ll take a short ride to the station.”

The two young people had hardly spoken a word when hesitatingly getting in the backseat, and Dee appeared pale. They looked even more surprised when Phalen leaned across Dylan to handcuff them together, Dylan’s right wrist to Dee’s left wrist.

Knowing his partner cuffed them for concern the brother might bolt, Harris remarked, “Don’t let the bracelets worry you. It’s a common practice to cuff witnesses together.”

Dee explained, “But like I already told you, after getting off from school I went downstairs to listen to music and wasn’t aware of the fire until later, and my brother wasn’t even home.”

Harris nodded, “Yeah, I know, and I apologize for the inconvenience, but it can’t be helped.”

At the station, Dee and Dylan were escorted into separate interrogation rooms, and in the room Dee was held, Harris recited to her the Miranda warning in a straightforward manner.

Dee innocently remarked, “You’re treating me as though I’m going to be arrested.”

Now, speaking frank and candidly, Harris coldly commented, “Do you understand your rights as I’ve just given them to you?”

Showing she was nervous in how she could hardly sit still, Dee blurted out her reply, “Yes, but why are you treating me like I’m a criminal?”

“Dee, I’m afraid this is a lot more serious than I’ve been letting on. We have strong reason to believe you and your brother were at the Pratt home yesterday when the fire started.”

“No, I haven’t entered the Pratt’s house in over a week.”

“If what you just told me is the truth then you haven’t anything to worry about, but there were two people who Mrs. Pratt either allowed into her house, or they forced their way in. There is no sign of forced entry, so we believe she let these people into her home, leading us to believe she knew who it was. We think whoever it was had come there for the purpose of acquiring money, and they brutalized the woman to force her into giving them cash she kept in the house. One of the intruders stabbed the mother with a kitchen knife, and afterwards they set the house on fire, which resulted in the death of her child.”

Dee pleaded, “I know the Pratt family, and I’d never do anything like that.”

“We got a break in that firefighter’s efforts to put out the fire didn’t destroy near as much evidence as one might expect. Forensic technicians came up with a palm print and fingerprints, and the two of you will be printed to see if we can come up with a match. Detective Phalen is having an officer take Dylan’s fingerprints right now, and you’ll be next.”

He looked down at her feet, and calmly said, “Dylan was required to remove his shoes, and I’m now going to ask that you remove yours. The reason for that is because we’ve acquired footwear impressions from the crime scene that are presumably a close match for the shoes the two of you are wearing.”

Hit hard with the crushing, stark reality that she and her brother were caught in committing the crime of murder, from what Harris had told Dee she expected there’d be evidence to prove their guilt. Knowing it was her shoes and her brother’s that left the shoeprints, tears began streaming down Dees cheeks, dripping onto her blouse, and after removing her shoes, she handed them over to Harris.

Watching Harris examine the outside of her shoes, he said nothing when detecting what he thought might be barely visible droplets of

blood. However, seeing a steady stream of tears draining from her eyes was enough to convince him of her guilt.

“How much money could that young mother have possibly been carrying for the two of you to consider murdering her? This was a young couple probably living work check to work check to pay bills—the mother didn’t have a job for trying to raise her children, and you’d babysat for them. . . . What’s most surprising to me is that the shoeprints show the person who exerted the most control over the mother was the one who struck her numerous times in the head with a pry bar. The person who wielded the pry bar wore sneakers that left a distinctive pattern, and we also took a shoe impression from the backside of the sweatshirt the woman wore.”

Dee clasped her hands over her face for feeling shame for what she’d done, recalling the time she placed her foot on the dazed woman’s back to stop her from getting up off the floor.

Afternoon ran into the early evening, and the guilt of Dee and Dylan was established when fingerprint experts matched theirs to those found at the murder scene. The bloody footwear impressions matched the soles of Dee and Dylan’s shoes, and tiny blood droplets on their shoes belonged to the mother. There was no doubt the pair committed this crime, and before being formally placed under arrest the two confessed to the crime of murder and arson. They weren’t eighteen-years-of-age as yet, but it was thought they’d be tried as adults, and they were expected to receive life sentences. Their mother arrived at the station and unable to comprehend the reality that her children were murderers, the woman fainted when detectives told her what events had transpired at the Pratt residence.

Arriving home late, Rhonda had dinner ready for Len, and he told her they’d made an arrest in the Pratt case, where a mother and two-year-old child had been murdered. He also made mention that it was a sister and brother who lived across the street that committed the murders.

Rhonda had already eaten, but sat down and began spooning at a bowl of pudding that served as her dessert. “What did their parents say when they learned what happened?”

“Perhaps their parents are divorced because I only saw the mother, and she fainted after being told the news.”

Rhonda then said, “I’ve always had a yearn to study criminal justice, and I was giving thought to taking classes next semester at the university to extend my education and career opportunities.”

Len didn’t know where Rhonda was getting the ambition to pursue a career in law, but believed it had something to do with her brother’s death and that her sister was kidnapped and for a time held captive against her will. He was aware that Rhonda thought our society was on the decline and she wanted to see criminals justly punished for their crimes. Knowing he’d married a sensible woman, he wasn’t sure how serious and determined she was about acquiring a law degree.

“I know you have a college degree in language arts, but that’s far different from gaining a legal education and state licensure to become an attorney. If you’re serious about this, I suggest you research the licensing requirements. And if you still want to do this then you may not want to bother with the secretarial job you’ve just started, but commit to the required courses needed to obtain a degree in law.”

Considering his wife worked in the district attorney’s office, he believed she was primarily interested in the prosecutorial side of the law, and thought this idea may be connected to the recent murder of Assistant D.A. Elliott Hobson. He asked her, “How well did you know Elliott Hobson?”

“I worked in his office, but didn’t know him all that well, although it was understood he handled the toughest cases coming through the department. He had a wife and three young children, and I think we should go to his funeral.”

Len nodded, “I’ve grasped that he was a dedicated defender of the law, and an accomplished trial lawyer. Responsible for reviewing evidence for determining whether they should put the accused on trial, and then using the law to incarcerate the criminals, it’s that which made him a target. . . . If that’s what you want to do, then you can count on my support, but in all likelihood it’ll take years to obtain a degree.”

Finishing his meal, he dabbed his mouth with a napkin. “I don’t know how far you’ll go with this idea, but prosecutors must have vast knowledge of law legislation and investigation procedures. District attorneys are successful trial lawyers who’ve been elected to office. They are active in the political arena and volunteer time to campaigns. It means comprising a guarded rapport with your opponents who’ll debate you while opposing your views and your legal knowledge will be put to the test. Those holding positions as assistant D.A. are not elected, but acquire their position by being aligned with influential people rather than by their knowledge of law. Administrative officials upholding the law may look to hold an admirable position, but it’s a constant juggling act, and it may or may not interest you to know that there are many lawyers who’ve regretted their career choice.”

Len got up from the table and went into the living room to switch on the television for watching the local news, and the killing of Assistant D.A. Elliott Hobson was the program’s lead story. The big mystery stifling law enforcement was identifying the assassin that pulled up in front of the donut shop wearing what witnesses described as a policeman’s uniform displaying a badge and then shot Hobson with a pistol. Law officers had no idea who could’ve murdered Hobson, and there was much speculation on the subject. The next news story gave attention to the Pratt case, and in the presentation Delores and Dylan Hutzinger’s photos were shown while a newswoman explained how the two suspects became the focus of the investigation.

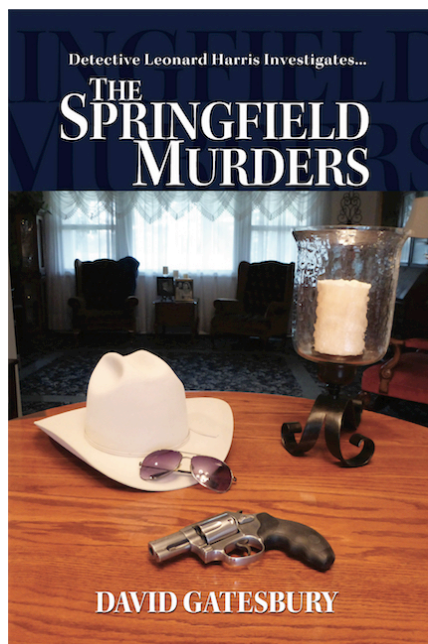
Rhonda entered the room and joined Len in watching the evening newscast, and when the anchorwoman made mention of her husband’s name, she said, “You may become a celebrity in Springfield.”

Not amused by the statement that included his name, Len shook his head for knowing the seriousness of the charges the two teenagers were facing. “Those two killed that woman and her child and for what? She didn’t even have a hundred dollars in her purse and a little jewelry—murdering two human beings and throwing their lives away for next to nothing.”

Len then used the remote to change the channel for being disgusted, and seeing the brooding mood he was in, Rhonda thought it was for the best that they not continue watching the news.

When it came to the funeral and burial of Elliott Hobson, many of the citizens of Springfield turned out in giving support to his family. Len and Rhonda Harris attended the services where the mayor, the chief of police and other upstanding public servants took the pulpit to speak a few words on Hobson's behalf. In doing so, Len kept a watchful eye, scanning the people for believing the murderer could be someone in the crowd, and scrutinized the faces of men who remotely stood a chance at being Hobson's killer. It seemed appropriate in a sinister way that whoever committed this crime might be on hand to proudly witness these observances in the assistant district attorney's honor, taking gratification and self-satisfaction in believing he'd gotten away with murder. The thing was that the general description they'd gotten of the killer fit a great many males in attendance, and it occurred to him that any one of them could be the murderer. In contemplating these thoughts, he took a moment to dwell on the white Ford Crown Victoria driven by the assailant. While the search for this vehicle had thus far brought about no results, it was one of the few clues investigators had to go on for identifying who it was that ended Hobson's life.

The Ford Motor Company held a near-monopoly on the market for police cruisers in the United States and Canada with Crown Victoria's produced from 1992 through 2011. The vehicle's conventional rear-wheel drive, V8 power, and body-on-frame construction made them ideal for police use, and they came equipped with many heavy duty parts such as a revised transmission. With a body style and chassis related to other Ford models, the durable body construction made for inexpensive repairs after collisions and rear-wheel drive provided better maneuverability over front drive rivals. The Ford Crown Victoria Police Interceptor was not sold directly to the general public, but is widely available in secondhand sales after no longer in service in law enforcement fleet duty. Stripped of any police decals, computer equipment, police radios, and emergency lights before being sold or auctioned to the public, they became quite popular for consumers. Regarded as a safe, inexpensive car designed with a bench seat, which can comfortably take three passengers in the back, they were also in high demand by taxi companies.



Detective Harris investigates the murder of an assistant district attorney shot to death on the street in Springfield, Missouri. When other public officials are murdered, a theory emerges that people are being assassinated as revenge killings, but a jogger killed on a hiking path takes investigators in a new direction...

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