

Story of the Crime Charged to Shillitani

Here is the story of the murder for which Shillitani is under sentence of death:

Late on a Saturday night, May 3, 1913, three shots rang out in the heart of the New York Italian quarter. The reserves of the Mulberry street police station raced down the street to find one of their number lying dead in a gutter and another dying nearby, while in a dark hall a gangster was coughing to his death from a bullet wound in his chest. The slayer had made a clean get-away.

Out of the tangled ways of gangdom, through the maze of the hatreds and records of sudden and puzzling deaths of the young Italian gunfighters the police endeavored to track the murderer. The old leaders, because of the Rosenthal case, were in the open, and the younger men were coming up.

Sought Leadership.

Leadership of one of the rapidly dissolving organizations was the dream of 21-year-old Oresto Shillitani. He had been at odds with the law since he was 11 years old, when he was sent to the house of refuge for two years for burglary. In 1909 he was sent to Sing Sing for receiving stolen goods, and stayed there until 1911.

The "Paper Box Kid," as he was called, had swaggered through the East Side, boasting that he carried a gun, and how he would use it. He had consumption, anyway, and said he preferred a sudden death.

But there was Rizzo—"John" Rizzo, they called him—who had a greater reputation. He led a group of flashily dressed young Italians, who had found that guarding strike-breakers in East Side shops was easy and profitable. It also presented an opportunity for approaching the very girls they were paid to protect.

Bought Pistol From Shillitani.

Rizzo one day shot Isador Streier, a striker, and was out on bail for that shooting when he was killed. He had bought the revolver from Shillitani, but hadn't paid him. Rizzo only laughed when the "Paper Box Kid" asked for the money.

That night (the night of the triple murder), so a neighborhood story ran, but which was not fully told at the trial, Rizzo, flushed with drink, was in a poolroom. Shillitani sneaked quietly in and slapped his open hand on the table where Rizzo sat, with a demand in a loud voice for a payment. Rizzo raised his eyelids slowly and then laughed.

Shillitani cursed, and wheeling about walked out. A few minutes later a follower of Rizzo dashed into the poolroom and whispered to the drunken gangster that Shillitani was outside waiting for him. Rizzo laughed and said:

"That kid's on his last legs. I might as well finish him up."

The Murder Is Committed.

With his coat half on he staggered out into the street. Then came the shots.

Upon learning of the poolroom episode the police disregarded all other theories and fixed upon Shillitani as the slayer.

Then a countrywide search for Shillitani was instituted. The alarm was sent out on the afternoon of May 5.

On May 14 it was announced that an Italian girl of 16 had seen Shillitani do the shooting.

Nellie di Carlo was the star witness. She told how she looked out of a window of her home and saw the elder Shillitani hand something shiny to his son, who slipped it up his right sleeve; how Rizzo came out of a poolroom eating a sandwich, and upon reaching the curb was shot by Oresto; how the latter ran with Patrolman Henry after him; how Oresto turned and shot him; how she shut the window and went to bed so that she did not see the shot.