

# GANG WOMEN OF DRY ERA BID FOR SPURIOUS FAME

"Kiss of Death" Girl, "Blonde Alibi," and Sister Gun-Molls May Become Maids Marian of Folklore

By Joseph U. Dugan

HEROINES of the booze mobs, the gun-molls of a cock-eyed era labeled prohibition, some day may emerge as a composite, legendary figure in literary form worthy of becoming a permanent part of American folklore. This epic gun-moll will be the modern Maid Marian of rollicking songs in which her man, the hero, will be an amazing character, pictured as pirate, gorilla, and great lover, rolled into one. The story will tell how the hero's machine guns mowed down enemies like blades of wheat before a sickle until, one day, he was "taken for a ride." At this point the gun-moll will take the spotlight in a finale of tears, wailing before an officious but futile person labeled law.

In yellowed newspaper accounts of some or all of the real life gun-moll heroines pictured on this page, the poets of the future will find a rich store of material for such songs. These ladies all have had their brief and usually tragic moments in the public gaze.

The gun-molls represented a type, but their personalities varied widely. Some were baby-faced and soft. Some were as hard-boiled and bold as their men. All of them, for purposes of reader interest, were "beautiful." Or, when photographic evidence to the contrary could not be ignored, they were, at least, "striking." Regardless of feminine charms—and some of them had plenty—the gun-moll sisterhood possessed a mysterious fascination. The figure of the "widow" of the slain gang chief always gave to the inquest and to the newspaper accounts of the killing an electric atmosphere of glamour.

Most publicized of the gun-molls, for eight compelling reasons, was Margaret Mary Collins. The eight reasons were gangsters whom she kissed and who, almost immediately afterward, were killed. Margaret Mary was known as "The Kiss of Death." She wore mourning habits successively for Jack Sheehy, Johnny Phillips, Dean O'Banion, David (Jew) Bates, Irving (Sonny) Schlig, Eugene (Red) McLaughlin, Samuel Katz, and Thomas Somerio, whose notorious careers all were ended by bullets. Miss Collins had a ninth sweetheart, one Sol Feldman, a suspected fur thief, who, although shot and seriously wounded, managed to recover. Sol broke Margaret Mary's jinx—or, perhaps, he was the exception proving the rule.

When dapper Dean O'Banion, who conducted a florist's shop as a mask for his larger deals in booze, was slain among his flowers, his demise was mourned by two women. They were Margaret Mary Collins, who had been his close friend, and his wife. The latter, a buxom blonde, had her brief moment of publicity and then retired to obscurity. Not so retiring was another of the gun-molls, Florence Murphy Oberta. When her first husband, Big Tim Murphy, was killed by machine gunners in front of his north side home, Florence made the customary and appropriate gesture of wild grief. She next was mentioned on the front pages when she became the bride of another hoodlum whose name was familiar to newspaper readers, John "Dingbat" Oberta. Florence was no luckier than she had been, though, because within a few months Oberta was "taken for a ride."

Two gun-molls on whom public attention has been centered more recently are the fair Georgette



Margaret Mary Collins, the "Kiss of Death," whose strange jinx survives eight of her gangster sweethearts.



Above: Georgette Winkler, bullet widow, as she appeared at the inquest into the death of her gunman husband, Gus. He was killed by machine guns.



At left: Irma Sullivan Durkin, small town beauty contest winner, who became the moll of Marty Durkin, bad boy gunman who killed a federal agent.



Louise Rolfe, the "Blonde Alibi" sweetheart of Machine Gun Jack McGurn.

## HEROINES OF TAWDRY ROMANCE

TOO blatantly familiar to newspaper readers is the gun-moll. Most of these girls are or have been bullet widows. Three of them, Margaret Mary Collins, Louise Rolfe, and Kathryn Kelly, basked not only in the questionable "glory" attached to their gunmen sweethearts, but by personality, looks, and deeds drew considerable public attention to themselves as individuals.

As public figures created by the prohibition regime, the gangster gun-molls soon may fade from the contemporary scene to a richly deserved oblivion. The booze mobs are breaking up. Gunmen no longer have the wherewithal to give their molls the luxuries they once lavished with prodigal insouciance. Hence the dowdy ladies of the underworld no longer will be strutted before the public as an affront to decency.

Not all of the booze gang molls were bad, but few of them were other than sorry specimens produced by a gin-mad age of defiance and corruption of law. It can truthfully be said of the bullet widows, however, that they gave to the sordid story of gangdom a much needed, if usually phony, touch of romance. No one will deny that the diamonds and furs they wore and the capricious tears they wept in public were real—while they lasted. It was indeed a sorry play, but one suspects the actors deserved no better plot.



Kathryn Kelly, wife and partner in crime of Machine Gun George Kelly. Both recently were sentenced to life imprisonment for kidnaping a millionaire oil man. This picture was taken after Mrs. Kelly began her term and had announced she was "learning how to knit."



Mrs. Viola O'Banion, buxom widow of Dapper Dean O'Banion, north side gang chief, who was shot down in his florist shop by underworld enemies several years ago.

a north side beer depot and Georgette donned widow's weeds.

Eminently qualified for the adjective "beautiful" was the young and comely gun-moll who shared the companionship and publicity of Martin Durkin, the bad boy gunman who shot and killed a federal agent and later toured the country with his moll in an expensive automobile. She was Irma Sullivan Durkin, small-town girl, who had won a beauty contest. Her good looks failed to help Martin at his trial, however. He was sentenced to life imprisonment.

Another beauty who rose to unusual prominence as a gun-moll was blonde Louise Rolfe, girl friend of Jack McGurn, expert machine gunner of the Capone gang. It was shortly after the famous Valentine day massacre that Louise had her picture printed in all the papers. McGurn, suspected of taking part in the wholesale killing of the seven Moran gangsters, was discovered in a loop hotel with Louise. She told the police she had been constantly in Jack's company and that they were in the hotel when the massacre occurred. Thus Louise earned the nickname, "Blonde Alibi."

Later she and Jack were married. There was further publicity when the government attempted, and failed, to convict them for alleged violation of the Mann act. Jack's lawyers, after losing in the lower court, appealed to the United States Supreme court and won a reversal.

When last heard from, Jack, although accused of agency by the city authorities, was living happily with Louise in a suburban community. With prohibition ended and the booze mobs breaking up, it appears that Louise has a good chance of being one of the few gun-molls to escape bullet widowhood. Her husband has given up machine gunning, according to report, and has an ambition to win a golf championship.

There have been scores of other gun-molls, lesser lights in that strange, fearsome society, controlled by a fabulous stream of illicitly amassed wealth and by bullet vengeance. At times of their bereavements these somewhat sleazy heroines have been attended by a temporary claque of perverted admiration. Most of them obviously enjoyed this brief moment of clamorous attention, even though tears and exaggerated grief were in order.

It is more than probable that such a character as Kathryn Kelly, full fledged partner in crime of her notorious husband, sits today in her prison cell and thinks back fondly over the days of her trial, when she was appearing in news reels in movie theaters all over the country.