



Six Inches Deeper: The Disappearance of Hellen Hanks

William Rawlings

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Thorough and meticulous, William Rawlings's *Six Inches Deeper* chronicles the disappearance and discovery of a murdered woman, the murder investigation, the trial, and its aftermath.

This journalistic work concerns the August 1972 disappearance of Hellen Hanks. Her boss, Keller Wilcox, claimed he returned to his advertising office to find his secretary missing, but her car still in its spot. When her husband reported that she hadn't come home, Hanks was considered a missing person, and remained one for more than eight years.

That changed when a farmer plowing his new property found a makeshift coffin housing what was identified as Hanks's body; had the body been buried six inches deeper, it would never have been found. Her former boss was a prime suspect, and the trial drew a lot of regional attention.

The book takes a chronological approach to the crime, tracing the investigation's steps, beginning with initial reports of Hanks's disappearance and the conflicting stories of Wilcox and his associates. While the prosecution was able to win a murder conviction on circumstantial evidence, Wilcox was later freed by a judge. He finally admitted to the murder in a 2006 letter; his history of sexually harassing Hanks, and his elaborate attempts to create an alibi, are chronicled as well.

Much space is given to recapping the murder trial in detail, in the prose of a newspaper chronicle. Sources, including news accounts and trial transcripts, help to recreate events; witness testimonies, questions about race and police interrogation, and the high-profile defense attorney's courtroom theatrics fill in the gaps regarding what really happened.

Six Inches Deeper is a scrupulous exploration of a tragic case that illustrates how small coincidences, like a plow hitting a shallow grave or a witness revealing a key mistake, ensured that a perpetrator paid for his crime.

JEFF FLEISCHER (March / April 2020)

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