

ORANGE CITY - As a funeral director, Mark **Villella** knows what do with a body.

And authorities say he put that expertise to work after fatally stabbing his wife in the chest.

He then stashed the body in his funeral home's cooler and later put her into a coffin beneath the body of an 89-year-old woman, they say.

But the crime was less than perfect.

Friends and family were suspicious, and investigators weren't buying **Villella's** story that his wife had just wandered off Aug. 5 and would probably be back.

Investigators confronted **Villella** on Thursday night and got a confession. On Friday morning, the bodies of 28-year-old **Exelee Louise Villella** and Marjorie Hutchison were exhumed from the Deltona Memorial Funeral Home's cemetery on Saxon Boulevard in Orange City.

Mark **Villella**, a licensed funeral director and embalmer, was charged with first-degree murder Thursday night after he confessed, investigators said.

Villella, described as an obsessively jealous husband, told investigators he and his wife had a rocky relationship. She was going to leave him and take their son. So he took a steak knife from the kitchen and stabbed her in the chest while she was sleeping.

Mark **Villella** is being held without bail at the Volusia County Branch Jail after a court hearing Friday.

``It was a very convenient setup," Investigator Bob Kelley said. ``He wasn't interested in reporting her missing. He said she'd probably turn up."

After some crafty investigative work, **Exelee Villella** did turn up. Investigators, co-workers, business associates and others tell what happened this way:

On Aug. 9, investigators got a call from one of **Exelee Villella's** co-workers at Gencor Industries in Orlando.

Debra Johnson told investigators Mark **Villella** was very evasive when she asked about his wife's whereabouts. He would only say he took Nyquil the night of Aug. 5, went to bed and awoke in the morning with his wife gone.

The 5-foot-11, 235-pound man was known to be jealous, calling his wife four and five times a day at work to track her every move, Johnson said. When his wife went to see movies with friends, Mark **Villella** demanded to see ticket stubs as proof. And sometimes **Exelee Villella** had bruises, but she would quickly pass them off as accidental, Johnson said.

Exelee Villella started selling asphalt production equipment when the couple moved to Florida from the Maryland area about two years ago. Co-workers saw her as a dedicated employee and mom. It seemed as if the red-haired, green-eyed woman had new pictures of her 18-month-old son, Anthony, every week.

``She wouldn't have left that child. She wouldn't have left that child, and she wouldn't have not called into work," Johnson said Friday afternoon.

After Johnson called investigators, they interviewed Mark **Villella**.

He first told them that on the night of Aug. 5, he and his wife had a disagreement about her desire to have another child, her work and her coming home drunk. He said they calmly agreed to get counseling through

the Roman Catholic Church.

After that, **Exelee Vilella** decided to make a meatloaf, so he went to the store and bought a green pepper. While there, he decided to get her a dozen roses, **Vilella** told investigators. When he returned home she was talking on the phone with her mom. He gave her the roses, and she started crying, telling her mother she would call her back. They talked some more, he took some Nyquil and Tylenol PM and went to bed. She stayed up to cook, he said.

Mark **Vilella** told investigators he got up shortly after midnight to go to the bathroom and his wife was gone; the meatloaf was in the refrigerator. She had taken nothing with her.

He didn't report her missing because his brother, an Orange County deputy sheriff, told him to wait a few days.

Other things bothered investigators. The missing woman's car was in the driveway, her keys in their DeBary home. She had left behind her jewelry and her son.

Investigators started tracking **Vilella's** moves.

They went to the crematorium at Deltona Memorial Funeral home and checked the cremation equipment. When they didn't find anything, Investigator Steve Willis started looking at the funerals that had been performed at Deltona Memorial since Aug. 5.

Willis realized only one funeral could have met Mark **Vilella's** needs.

Marjorie Hutchison died July 31 of natural causes in her backyard in Sumter, S.C., near the Georgia border. The 89-year-old homemaker from Lyndonville, N.Y., had moved to South Carolina to be with her son and daughter-in-law.

Don Odom, manager at Bullock Funeral Home in Sumter, said he picked up Hutchison's body at her home, embalmed and dressed it, and put it in a coffin. Three days later, on Aug. 3, he put the casket on a Delta Air Lines flight to Daytona Beach. There was no funeral service in South Carolina.

Odom said he and Hutchison's daughter-in-law were shocked by the news from Orange City. However, Odom said it was definitely possible to fit two people in Hutchison's casket.

“If she had been a big person, it might have been a tight fit,” Odom said. “But Mrs. Hutchison was a little lady.”

On Aug. 3, Mark **Vilella** picked up Hutchison's remains from the airport and took the body to the funeral home, investigators said.

On Aug. 9, there was a small closed-casket service at Deltona Memorial with a few of Hutchison's relatives attending.

Inside the white-and-chrome coffin underneath Hutchison's corpse was **Exelee Vilella's** 5-foot, 2-inch, 135-pound body, a sheet between them.

The day the bodies were buried in lot 15 of the cemetery's Eternal Light section, investigators learned the DeBary woman was missing. They interviewed Mark **Vilella** at his home.

On Aug. 10, investigators contacted Marc Camp of Longwood, a co-worker who confirmed he was “seeing the victim and had planned to meet with her that Friday and Saturday night at Daytona Beach,” the arrest report said.

Kelley said that on Thursday night investigators met with Mark **Vilella** and his brother. Kelley confronted Mark **Vilella**, saying they suspected he killed his wife and put her in the Hutchison casket. Mark **Vilella** confessed.

Mark **Villella** told investigators that the night of Aug. 5, **Exelee Villella** said she was leaving him and talking their son with her. They argued and went to bed.

Between 4 and 4:30 a.m. on Aug. 6, he killed her. A few hours later, Mark **Villella** took their son to the baby sitter, went to work and got the funeral home's white work van. He returned to the house and moved his wife's body to the funeral home. Later that day, he pitched the murder weapon from a bridge while on his way to Sanford.

Investigators said **Exelee Villella's** body, dressed in a T-shirt and boxer shorts, went unnoticed in the funeral home's cooler for several days.

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