

Christmas Eve Tragedy of the Bride-to-Be

Whose Hand Fired That Pistol Bullet Into Miss Elizabeth Griffith's Heart in the Private Office of Doctor Schott?

WHOSE hand pulled the trigger that sent a bullet tearing its cruel way through the heart of pretty young Elizabeth Griffith on the eve of what was to have been the most joyous Christmas of her life?

What man or woman could have nursed a hate so bitter that it could be satisfied only with the murder of the girl who was about to become a gallant army captain's bride?

And what was the reason for this overpowering hate—a hate that reached its wicked climax while the Christmas bells were ringing out their message of peace and good will?

Was it jealousy, greed, fear of exposure or some entirely different motive that impelled the mysterious assassin to steal into the doctor's office where Elizabeth Griffith was employed and relentlessly shoot down the bride-to-be while she begged on her knees for mercy?

These are the questions which are puzzling the police of Louisville, Ky. On them depends the clearing up of one of the strangest murder mysteries of recent years. If the police are able to answer them—if they succeed in bringing this girl's slayer to justice—there is every promise that the real life drama which will be revealed will be as amazing as anything that novelist or playwright ever imagined.

It was the day before Christmas. The streets of Louisville were gay with holiday cheer and thronged with last-minute shoppers. The crowds hurried on, little dreaming that only a few steps away—in the office of Dr. Christopher G. Schott, at No. 2103 West Walnut street—a grim tragedy was being enacted.

There an hour or so later Elizabeth Ford Griffith, who had been employed as an office assistant by Dr. Schott, was found lying dead in a pool of blood. By her side was a .45-calibre army automatic revolver. A bullet from one of its chambers had gone straight through her heart.

Elizabeth Griffith shot—a suicide—murdered! As the news spread through the holiday throngs none of the dead girl's wide circle of friends and acquaintances could quite credit the news. She was the last person they would have thought likely to meet such a fate.

Only seventeen years old, well educated, refined and of unusually winsome appearance, she was a girl who apparently had everything to live for. That she should have killed herself seemed incredible. And it seemed still more incredible that anybody could have had any reason for thus shooting her in cold blood.

Since leaving school eighteen months ago she had been employed by Dr. Schott as office assistant. Her intelligence and willingness to oblige, her pretty face and charming manner quickly made everybody who visited the doctor's office her friend.

"It's impossible!" said Elizabeth's girl friends when they heard the shocking news. "Why, to-morrow is her wedding day!"

And it is true that Christmas morning was the time set for the dead girl's marriage to Captain George K. Jordan, of the Seventh Field Artillery, First Division, stationed at Camp Zachary Taylor. At the last minute, however, the captain's army duties had necessitated a change in the plans.

Captain Jordan had visited Louisville the night before the tragedy and arranged with his fiancée to postpone the wedding until New Year's Day. She was, he says, in the best of spirits, and if she had then any intimation of impending disaster she gave her lover no hint of her fears.

Many others who saw her during her last hours of life—even as late as the morning of the tragedy—bear out Captain Jordan's testimony that so far as any one could see she was quite her normal light-hearted self. She was apparently delighted with the gifts her lover had brought her, and was all wrapped up in joyful preparations for her wedding day.

But there is contradictory evidence on this point, as there is on almost every feature of this truly remarkable case. A woman patient of Dr. Schott's swears that she talked with Elizabeth Griffith over the telephone about an hour before the girl was found dead. Miss Griffith said, according to this witness, that she was feeling unutterably sad—"so sad to live."

What was this shadow which so suddenly enveloped the bride-to-be, and a few minutes later swept her over the brink of the grave? This the detectives have thus far been unable to establish, but they have what they expect will prove an important clue in a newspaper clipping found in the dead girl's pocket.

The clipping is an article giving advice to fallen girls and is headed: "Paying the Debt in Full." A lead pencil had been used to set off a sentence reading: "Who was it that took the pains to tell your husband about the one awful mistake you made in your life?"

And on the margin of the clipping, opposite this question, some one had pencilled the words:

"The man who persuaded you to make it."

Is this clipping evidence that Elizabeth Griffith was the victim of a "poison pen" plot against her happiness?

Was it sent her by some man whose love she had refused or by some woman whose place she had taken in her sweetheart's affections?

Did she brood over this threat against her happiness and finally kill herself in a fit of remorse over some real or fancied misdeed?

This theory would have much to recommend it but for one thing—the fact that the nature of the wound which killed Miss Griffith leads the police to believe that it never could have been self-inflicted.

One reason for this belief is that no powder burns were found on the body, as there would have been had she fired the revolver. Another is that the bullet took a downward course through the heart—exactly as it would have done had the girl been on her knees and the person who fired the fatal shot standing over her.

There are those who think that Dr. Schott, the dead girl's employer and former fiancé, could throw much light upon the "poison pen" clipping as well as upon the reason for Elizabeth Griffith's death. Others stoutly maintain that he is utterly innocent of any knowledge of the tragedy other than what he found when he returned to his office on Christmas eve and saw the girl's silent, blood-stained body lying on the floor.

Soon after the tragedy Dr. Schott was arrested. But the fact that he was quickly released on bail indicates how weak the case against him must be. The only things to connect him with the girl's death would seem to be the fact that he was at one time engaged to her, his ownership of the automatic revolver with which the shooting was done, the fact that the shooting occurred in his office and some conflicting testimony as to exactly when the girl was killed and where the doctor was at that time.

Although Dr. Schott's engagement with Elizabeth Griffith had been broken they remained friends, as is proved by the fact that she continued to work for him and was planning to do so until the very day of her marriage.

And even if Dr. Schott had had some good reason for wanting his former sweetheart out of the way why did he choose shooting instead of one of the far more ingenious methods of murder which are within such easy reach of every physician?

Dr. Schott and his attorneys claim a complete alibi for him. At the time that the tragedy is believed to have occurred he declares that he was delivering Christmas gifts in company with a thirteen-year-old neighbor of his, Laurie Gardner. The little girl corroborates his statements.

The police, however, claim to have at least one or two witnesses who will swear to having seen Dr. Schott leaving his office at a time perilously near to the minute when the fatal shot was fired. Whether this evidence is strong enough to upset the doctor's alibi is a question which it will probably take a jury to decide.

How the tragedy in the doctor's office was finally revealed is dramatically told by one of Dr. Schott's patients as follows:

"On the afternoon before Christmas I arrived at Dr. Schott's office about 2:30 o'clock. I knocked on the door and there was no response. I then sat down a while on the bench in front of the office. After sitting there a few minutes, I went to a grocery across the street.

"It was not long until I saw Dr. Schott coming in his automobile. He and the little girl were together. They evidently did not see me, and I followed as they went up the steps into the office. I came in behind them. I remonstrated with him because there was no one at the office when I called. Dr. Schott said:

"Didn't the girl let you in?"

of Doctor Schott?



Little Thirteen-Year-Old Laure Gardner, the Chief Alibi for Doctor Schott, Who Has Been Arrested Charged with the Murder of Miss Griffith.



Miss Elizabeth Ford Griffith, the Seventeen-Year-Old Office Assistant of Doctor Schott, of Louisville, Ky., Whose Body was Found in the Back Office of the Doctor on Christmas Eve, Just Before She Was To Have Become the Bride of an Army Officer.

"He then said: 'She shouldn't have gone away without letting me know.' He tried to open the folding doors, but they were closed. He called several times for Miss Griffith, but, receiving no answer, he stuck a knife or key through the crack and lifted the wire latch.

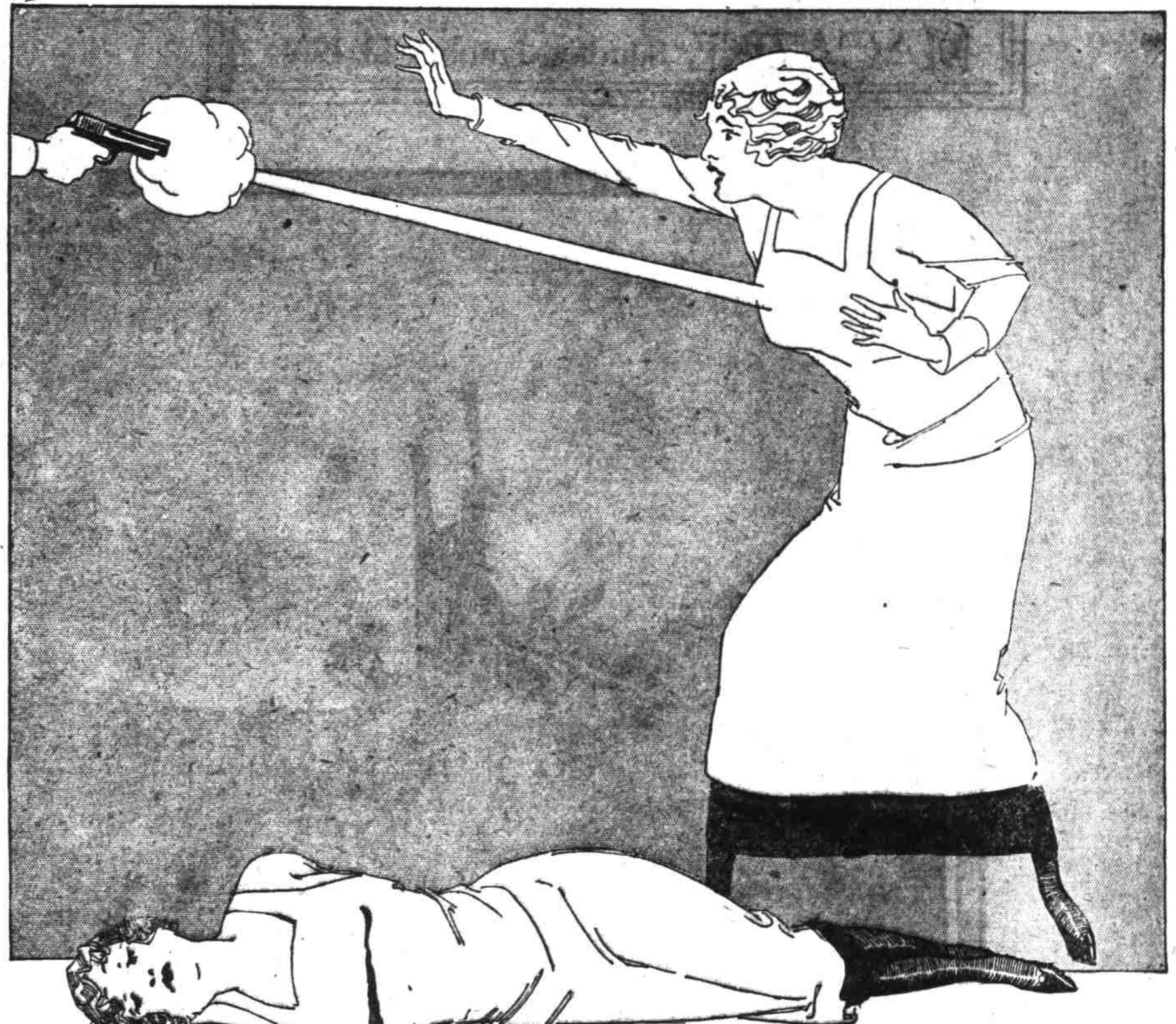
"He was filled with the Christmas spirit. He was laughing and wishing me a Merry Christmas. He and the little girl entered

Doctor Christopher G. Schott, Who Has Been Arrested for the Murder of Miss Griffith and Released on Bail.

the office first. It was a few seconds before we recognized the girl lying on the floor at the doorway of the next room. Dr. Schott cried out:

"My God, it looks like she's taken poison. What can I do? Please come here and help me. Speak to me, Elizabeth. I believe she is still alive. She's killed herself!"

"All signs of the doctor's Christmas joy



Straight at Her Heart the Pistol Must Have Been Aimed and the

Bullet Sped to Its Mark—But the Pistol was Held in a Hand Far Enough Away So That There Were No Powder Marks on the Dress or on the Body of Seventeen-Year Old Elizabeth Griffith.

After patiently going over all the ramifications of this tangled web of mystery the detectives return again and again to the significant newspaper clipping found in the dead girl's pocket. If they could lay hands on the man or woman who sent or gave Elizabeth Griffith that clipping they might not find her slayer, but they would undoubtedly find some one who could throw important light on the reasons for her murder.

Doctor Schott's Office, with View Through the Doorway, into the Rear Room, Where the Tragedy Occurred.

had vanished. He behaved like one distracted.

"The girl wore a house dress. She had fallen forward in the doorway. The pistol was on the other side of her body. I first noticed it and told the doctor she had probably shot herself. A small amount of bloody foam was coming from her mouth. There were great splashes of blood on her dress. A bucket was overturned on the floor. The water had not dried.

"I listened myself for heart beats and told the doctor there was nothing to do but call the Coroner after he had vainly tried with his stethoscope to find signs of a heart beat."

Strong as Dr. Schott's claims of innocence appear, there are a number of things

connected with his relations to Elizabeth Griffith which are hard to understand. Since the tragedy, for example, it has been said that during the period of their engagement he employed a detective to shadow her whenever she was not with him. And a girl friend has said that Elizabeth used to say that she was afraid of the doctor, but that still she could not resist continuing to work for him.

In other "poison pen" cases it is often the girl's fiancé who does her violence in his rage over some real or fancied blot on her purity. But in this case such a possibility is eliminated. Captain Jordan was on duty at Camp Zachary Taylor throughout the day of the tragedy, and his grief and mystification over the death of his bride-to-be are too genuine to admit of a suspicion that he knows anything to explain it.

A doctor's office is a place of secrets. Is it possible that the pretty assistant had come into possession of some bit of information which a patient deemed vital to his or her happiness and that this supplied the motive for the murder?

It is hard to understand why the person who put Elizabeth Griffith in possession of the "poison pen" clipping should have felt it necessary to commit murder. If this man or woman did the shooting perhaps it was accidental—the weapon having been aimed only with the intention of frightening the distracted girl into acceding to still further demands.

More probable than this is the theory that Elizabeth Griffith—a high-spirited, courageous girl, as all her friends say—snatched the weapon from the doctor's table and wielded it first herself in an effort to force her tormentor to cease the threats to go to her sweetheart with the stories of her past. A struggle followed and the weapon was wrested from Elizabeth's hands. She fell to her knees pleading for mercy, but her prayers went unheeded, for a mad rage at this unexpected show of resistance nerved the hand that now held the automatic.

The trigger was pressed, the muzzle spat fire and the ill-fated little bride-to-be was suddenly transformed into a ghastly bleeding corpse.