

stared at the ceiling. Dear God, I prayed, what should I do?

I was still lying on the cot when I began remembering. It was like a curtain being drawn back. I saw Jack running into the store again, that look of terror on his face. But this time I did not run outside immediately! I ran past him toward a storeroom. A man stood in the passageway to the kitchen, pointing a gun.

I panicked and ran into the storeroom, thinking Jack was following. Then I heard two shots. How long I was in the storeroom I don't know. I remember Jack standing by the bathroom door, clutching his throat. "Get help!" he gasped. It was then I ran by him—and got blood on my shoes.

No wonder the police had been suspicious! In some sort of amnesia or shock, I had blacked all this out of my mind. Tremendously excited, I called my lawyer. "We'll try to get you free tomorrow on a writ," he said, echoing my excitement.

WHEN I WENT into court, I firmly believed my ordeal was over. But instead of a writ of habeas corpus, I heard: "The State of Nevada . . . Belva Griffis . . . for the murder of Clarence (Jack) Griffis. . . ." I fainted.

On March 11, Jack was buried in Chico, Calif., where he had lived until 1957. I pleaded without success to attend the funeral; I never saw Jack again after that last terrible glimpse in the kitchen. That night, however, I had two unexpected callers, attorney Jack McPherson and his wife Norma. We had been friends in Chico when he was district attorney of Butte County.

"Belva," he said, "you have many good friends in Chico who believe in you. They want me to represent you with a local attorney, Douglas Busey. Before I do, though, I have to ask you a hard question." He leaned forward. "Did you kill Jack?"

"Absolutely not!"

"I'll represent you then," he said, and that was a turning point in my life. On April 3 detectives testified at a preliminary hearing that I had told conflicting stories and lies. I was held without bail.

MEANWHILE, police were searching for the murder gun they were certain I had hidden. They ripped up our apartment and pulled out all our groceries, leaving them to spoil. "We'll tear that building apart brick by brick," one assistant district attorney said, "until we find that gun." Mr. McPherson pointed out that not only was there no time to hide a gun, but there was no reason for me to use one. Nobody listened.

My trial was set for July 17. I tried to tell authorities all my story—including the parts I had just recalled—but they would not talk to me any more. My attorneys had me write a statement about the events of March 3 and sign it under penalty of perjury, but nothing happened.

Finally Mr. McPherson visited me one day. "Belva," he said, "the only way I can get the officers to talk to you is to agree to another lie-detector test. But they demand that you sign an agreement allowing

either side to use the results in court.

"As far as I know, this has never been done before. If something went amiss, as it did last time—well, Belva, it could wreck our case. If you say so, though, we'll give it another try. And for your protection, we'll hire Dr. LeMoyné Snyder to supervise the test."

I suppose all "crime fans" know Dr. Snyder, a member of the Court of Last Resort and a great criminologist. He has been called in on many celebrated cases, including some studied by Erle Stanley Gardner who writes the Perry Mason stories.

The test was given July 5. The night before, I felt apprehensive. My life depended on what it would indicate.

Dr. Snyder and a police official were ready with the polygraph when I entered the police station the next morning. Again the questions—but this time my answers would determine whether I would go free or to prison. The moments were agonizing, but finally Dr. Snyder and the police were ready to check their results—and this time I had reacted perfectly!

The next morning, amid apologies and even tears by one official, I was released. I had spent four months and three days in jail. Worse, though, was the idea that anyone could have believed me capable of killing my husband.



Attorney McPherson, Mrs. Griffis confer.

"Well, it's all over now," a well-wisher said as I stepped into the sunshine a free woman. But it wasn't. I knew some people would never forget that Belva Griffis had been accused of murdering her husband.

So I fled Reno almost as if I were a criminal. Ashamed and embittered, I went to the shelter of my friends in Chico.

Then on July 11 I got a call from Jack McPherson. "Belva," he said, "you're really free now—they've caught the killers!"

The Reno police, working on the slimmest of clues from an informer, had done a wonderful piece of detective work and tracked down three teen-agers. Police said the boys confessed to the shooting and had discarded their .22 caliber gun in the nearby foothills. Later it was found.

Now I am free both of the state's charges and the cloud of suspicion. Some day I hope I will be free of the bitterness. I think I will. I just have to remember my family and friends who came to my aid when things were seemingly hopeless. Jack and I were very lucky to make friends like that.

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