

MURDER IS HER HOBBY

FRANCES GLESSNER LEE and
the NUTSHELL STUDIES of UNEXPLAINED DEATH



Murder Is Her Hobby uncovers the unexpected intersection between craft and forensic science. Frances Glessner Lee (1878–1962) created her exquisitely detailed miniature death scenes, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*, to train homicide investigators in the 1940s and '50s to “convict the guilty, clear the innocent, and find the truth in a nutshell.” These dollhouse-sized dioramas of true crime scenes helped revolutionize the emerging field of forensics and are still used today. They reveal how Lee co-opted traditionally feminine crafts to advance in a male-dominated field—achieving the rank of first female police captain in the country and establishing herself as one of its leading voices.

Considered the godmother of forensic science, Lee constructed the Nutshells to teach students in Harvard’s Department of Legal Medicine how to effectively canvass a crime scene. A talented artist as well as criminologist, she masterfully crafted handmade and customized elements to render scenes in exacting detail, with each component a potential clue designed to challenge trainees’ powers of observation and deduction.

While Lee drew from real cases, she embellished the original scenes with elements from her imagination and the world around her. The cases she selected and details she chose provide insight into the mind of this remarkable woman, and a window into the domestic history of mid-twentieth-century America. As the first public display of all nineteen Nutshells, the Renwick Gallery allows Lee’s dioramas to be seen as works of art, and connects craft with a seemingly unrelated discipline.

As the Nutshells are still active training tools, the real cases behind each remain secret. However, Lee never intended these works as “whodunits” in the traditional sense. The purpose of the exercise is to encourage thoughtful inquiry and a scientific approach. Crime scene reports written by Lee and given to forensic trainees are presented alongside each diorama, encouraging visitors to act as the investigator, conjecturing: Was this death the result of a homicide, suicide, accident, or natural causes?

The exhibition is organized by the Renwick Gallery of the Smithsonian American Art Museum. Generous support has been provided by the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, the Elizabeth Broun Curatorial Endowment, and the James F. Dicke Family Fund.

Frances Glessner Lee (1878–1962)

Frances Glessner Lee was born in Chicago in 1878 to John and Frances Glessner and as heiress to the International Harvester fortune. From an early age, she had an affinity for mysteries and medical texts, spurred by the adventures of Sherlock Holmes, who first appeared in print in 1887.

Despite academic leanings, Frances did not attend college and at nineteen married a young lawyer named Blewett Lee. Assuming the role of affluent wife and mother, she pursued appropriate feminine pastimes, planned parties, and attended philanthropic events, but grew unhappy. After sixteen years and three children, the marriage dissolved, a split her son later attributed to Frances's "creative urge coupled with . . . the desire to make things—which [Blewett] did not share."

During and after her marriage, Frances's morbid fascinations persisted, and she found a kindred spirit in George Burgess Magrath, whom she met in the summer of 1898. Magrath studied medicine at Harvard, specializing in death investigation, and later became Medical Examiner of Suffolk County. He fueled her imagination with true tales of murder and mystery and delighted her with his respect. Recognizing her as an equal, he confided his concerns about the young field—like the poor training of investigators who often overlooked or contaminated key evidence at crime scenes.

When Frances's brother passed away in 1929, she made a gift to Harvard in his honor, helping to establish the first-of-its-kind Department of Legal Medicine. Later, in 1936, she inherited her fortune and was finally free to pursue her passion. No longer under the watchful eye of her parents and a society that disapproved of her interests, she began working with her local New Hampshire police department, earning the title of Police Captain—the first woman in the country to achieve that rank.

In 1943, at the age of sixty-five, she finally began work on her series of grisly dioramas, *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*. Proving an ingenious solution to the problem Magrath voiced years earlier, the miniatures not only taught investigators how to properly canvass a scene, but also challenged their biases. A pioneering tool for forensic teaching, they also testify to the determination of Captain Lee, as she liked to be called, who used her cunningness and craft to break the glass ceiling and advocate for others who did not have a voice.

"Convict the guilty, clear the innocent, and find the truth in a nutshell."

Reflections on Frances Glessner Lee

Though Frances Glessner Lee would never have considered herself an artist, she seems to have inherited a creative drive from her mother, an accomplished silversmith, and it is hard to deny the artistry that went into the Nutshells.

The dioramas are composites of real cases, but when details were lacking from the record, unimportant to the circumstance, or too easily identifiable, Lee enriched the scenes with her imagination. Many details came directly from her surroundings: A painting over the fireplace in *Living Room* depicts the Glessner family's estate; and a quaint motel called "Hy-Da-Way" that Frances once passed by makes its way into *Log Cabin* as the setting for an illicit tryst. Other details emerge from her creative tendencies, like the fish that swim surreally across the walls in *Pink Bathroom*. And scattered throughout the Nutshells, like in the scene playing out in *Saloon and Jail*, are moralistic lessons, symbols, and occasionally bits of humor.

One study, *Attic*, reads like a window into Frances's mind. An elderly woman appears to have hanged herself after reading a stack of old letters now strewn about the floor. Outmoded appliances, a doll in a wedding dress, and furnishings that have fallen into disuse fill the scene. A spinning wheel occupies one corner of the room, suggesting a spinster. Many might assume the woman's apparent loneliness presents an open and shut case for suicide. Appearances can be deceiving. We might consider that, on the contrary, a woman in her twilight years living alone, such as Lee, finds happiness and freedom.

Crafting the Nutshells

Lee knew the effectiveness of the Nutshells hinged on their believability and accuracy. To assist with the project, she hired the carpenter at her estate, Ralph Moser, full time. A typical study took the duo three months and cost \$3,000 to \$6,000 (equivalent to \$40,000 to \$80,000 today), with constant reworking in consultation with Harvard chair Alan Moritz.

Lee allotted duties between herself and Moser to suit their talents. Moser built the structures of the rooms and most wooden elements, like tiny working doors, windows, and chairs. He constructed every piece to Lee's strict specifications, so much so that Lee once rejected a rocking chair made by Moser because it did not rock the same number of times as the original. To achieve a realistic patina on the siding of *Barn*, Lee had Moser shave slender strips of wood from an aged shed on her estate and glue two pieces together for each board. For *Burnt Cabin*, Moser went so far as to build the entire model, only to scorch his masterpiece with a blowtorch to convey the effects of fire.

Other aspects were Lee's domain. She often fashioned murder weapons from bracelet charms, and she took great pains to render bodies and blood evidence with scientific accuracy. The most trivial detail could provide context and circumstantial evidence—a hint for a motive or a refutation of a witness's statement. She hand-knit tiny stockings with straight pins, addressed miniscule letters with a single-hair brush, and miniaturized the newspapers of the day. Lee would even wear clothes hopelessly out-of-date to attain the right level of wear befitting a scene.

Upending the Dollhouse

The dollhouse first appeared in Europe around the seventeenth century as a status symbol. As it was popularized, it became a tool to teach upper class young ladies the skills of managing a household. In light of this, gender and status become points of interest in the work of Lee, a wealthy divorcée for whom the role of the domestic never quite fit.

Among the best-known American examples in the dollhouse genre are the Thorne Rooms—a series of miniature rooms made by Narcissa Thorne, a contemporary and neighbor of Lee. Created for the Art Institute of Chicago, they predate the Nutshell Studies, and Lee was almost certainly aware of them when she began her own series. The idealized upper-class interiors convey a sense of harmony and grandeur that reinforces and elevates the dollhouse tradition.

By contrast, one of the first things evident in the Nutshell Studies, aside from the corpses, is their focus on gritty working-class interiors. Lee's scenes are caught interrupted, not in flawless tranquility but narrative disarray, teeming with the energy of their inhabitants evidenced by half peeled potatoes and crumpled papers. These scenes present a world far from the affluent society of Lee's youth. Instead, Lee put herself in the shoes of the lowliest members of society—prostitutes, drunkards, and the unfortunate—seeking justice for victims others often dismissed, and inducing investigators to overcome prejudices in search of the truth.

Of the twenty known Nutshells, seventeen portray deaths in the home, where victims should have felt safest. In one of her most disturbing scenes, *Three-Room Dwelling*, Lee depicts the household of a prosperous middle-class family. A white fence surrounds the home, toys are on the porch, and the table is set for breakfast. The scene is shattered by violence, questioning the illusion of domestic bliss.

Frances Glessner Lee in Pop Culture

With the rise of television crime dramas in recent years, forensics has seen a pop culture revival. It is no surprise that Lee has become something of a cult figure in this realm, and her influence can be found in literature and on screen. She is rumored to have been the inspiration for Angela Lansbury's title character, detective Jessica Fletcher, in the hit television series *Murder, She Wrote* (1984–96). In 2004, writer-photographer Corinne May Botz made Lee's life the subject of the compelling book *The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death*. Lee's work is explored in the 2012 documentary *Of Dolls and Murder* by Susan Marks, who launches a second documentary on Lee this winter. Lee has been the subject of numerous articles, blogs, and podcasts, and inspired several episodes of the television drama *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* featuring "The Miniature Killer," as well as a series loosely based on her story that was optioned by HBO in 2012.

Frances's work was made during the golden age of film noir and hard-boiled detectives, and in her lifetime her own story was featured in publications such as *Modern Mechanix*. She had relationships with a wide range of characters including Erle Stanley Gardner, known for his Perry Mason mysteries, and one of the few laymen allowed to attend Harvard seminars presided over by Lee. He dedicated his book *The Case of the Dubious Bridegroom* to her, proclaiming she was "one of the few women who ever kept Perry Mason guessing."

Object labels:

Three-Room Dwelling (ca. 1944–46)

Reported Monday, November 1, 1937

Robert Judson, shoe factory foreman, his wife, Kate Judson, and their baby, Linda Mae Judson, found dead by neighbor Paul Abbott.

Mr. Abbott gave the following statement:

Bob Judson and he drove to work together, alternating cars. This was Abbott's week to drive. On Monday morning, November 1, he was late—about 7:35 a.m.—so, when blowing his horn didn't bring Judson out, Abbott went to the factory without him, believing Judson would come in his own car.

Sarah, Paul Abbott's wife, gave the following statement:

After Paul had left, she watched for Bob to come out. Finally, about 8:15 a.m., seeing no signs of activity at the Judson house, she went over to their porch and tried the front door, but it was locked. She knocked and called but got no answer. She then went around to the kitchen porch, but that door was also locked. She looked through the glass, and then, aroused by the sight of the gun and blood, ran home and notified the police.

The model shows the premises just before Mrs. Abbott went to the house.

Dawn broke at 5:00 a.m.; sunrise at 6:17 a.m.; weather clear. No lights were on in the house. Both outside doors were locked on the inside.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Log Cabin (ca. 1944–46)

Reported Thursday, October 22, 1942

Arthur Roberts, local insurance salesman, found dead by police who responded to a call from a friend of the victim, Mrs. Marian Chase.

Mrs. Chase gave the following statement:

She met Arthur at the log cabin on Wednesday, October 21, about 5:15pm. They were in the habit of meeting there. Roberts was married and living with his wife. Mrs. Chase was also married but not living with her husband. Roberts told her at this meeting that the affair between them was ended. There was no quarrel. They were standing at the foot of the bunk. He turned toward the door, took a pack of cigarettes from his outside pocket, selected a cigarette, but dropped it. As he stooped over to pick it up—a shot was heard, he fell flat, and a gun dropped beside him. Mrs. Chase picked up the gun but then replaced it. It did not belong to her. She then ran out of the door, jumped into her car and drove to summon the police.

The gun was identified as belonging to Arthur Roberts. Mrs. Chase identified the handbag on the bunk as hers.

A single bullet passed entirely through Mr. Roberts's chest from front to back, and the powder around the entrance hole indicated it had been fired at a fairly close range.

The model shows the premises just after Mrs. Chase left, and before her return with the police officer.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Blue Bedroom (ca. 1944–48)

Reported November 3, 1943

Charles Logan, box factory employee, found dead by his wife, Caroline Logan.

Mrs. Logan gave the following statement:

On Tuesday night, November 2, she was alone in the house when Charles came home about midnight. He had been drinking and was in a quarrelsome mood. They had an argument but she was finally able to persuade him to go upstairs to bed. She waited downstairs for him to go to sleep before she also went to bed. After about half an hour, she heard him moving around and shortly thereafter heard a shot. She ran upstairs and found the scene as illustrated in the model.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Dark Bathroom (ca. 1944–48)

Reported by Desk Sergeant Moriarty of the Central City Police as he recalled it.

Maggie Wilson found dead by Lizzie Miller.

Ms. Miller gave the following statement:

Ms. Miller roomed in the same house as Maggie Wilson but knew her only as they met in the hall. She thought Maggie was subject to “fits” (seizures). A couple of male friends came to see Maggie regularly. On Sunday night in early November 1896, the men were there and there was a good deal of drinking going on. Some time after they left, Lizzie heard the water still running in the bathroom. Upon opening the door, she found the scene as set forth in the model.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Burned Cabin (ca. 1944–48)

Reported Sunday, August 15, 1943

Daniel Perkins was missing and presumed dead.

Phillip, Daniel Perkins’s nephew, gave the following statement:

On Saturday evening, August 14, he came to spend the night with his uncle, as he frequently did. In the middle of the night, he was wakened by the smell of smoke and ran outside to find the house on fire and the fire engines arriving. He said he had been very confused and could not remember any other details.

Joseph McCarthy, driver of fire engine #6, gave the following statement:

The call to the fire was received at 1:30 a.m., Sunday, August 15. Upon arrival, the fire was quickly extinguished before the building was completely destroyed. He noticed Phillip, fully clothed, wandering around near the house.

The model represents the premises after the fire was extinguished and before the investigation.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Unpapered Bedroom (1949–52)

Reported Monday, June 4, 1949

An unknown woman found dead in a rooming house (registered as Mrs. John Smith).

Mrs. Bessie Collins, the landlady, gave the following statement:

She keeps a rooming house, and on Saturday, June 2, early afternoon, the deceased and a man rented this room until Monday morning, registering as Mr. and Mrs. John Smith. On Monday morning, June 4, the man left early—about 6:30a.m. He paid for the room up to 6:00 p.m. and said not to disturb his wife, as she wanted to sleep late.

About 3:00 p.m. on Monday afternoon, Mrs. Collins told Stella Walsh, the maid, to try to get into the room to make it up. Just before 5:00 p.m., Stella told Mrs. Collins there was something wrong. She tried twice but couldn't wake the woman, so Mrs. Collins and Stella entered the room, the door of which was not locked, and found the woman was cold—evidently dead. They left the room without disturbing anything, closed and locked the door, taking the key with them, and notified the patrolman on the beat. The model shows the conditions in the room as the two women found them.

This case presents two problems:

Who was this woman? The means of identification is clearly visible.

What was the cause of her death? The medical examiner found the clue.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Pink Bathroom (ca. 1943–48)

Reported Tuesday, March 31, 1942

Mrs. Rose Fishman, a widow, found dead by janitor Samuel Wiess.

Mr. Weiss gave the following statement:

Several tenants complained of an odor and on March 30 he began looking for the source of the odor. Mrs. Fishman didn't answer her bell, and upon checking with other tenants he learned that she had not been seen recently. Therefore, he looked in her mailbox and saw that her mail had accumulated for several days. He entered Mrs. Fishman's apartment, found it in order but the odor was very strong. The bathroom door was closed. When he tried to open the door, he could only get it opened a little way, and the odor was much stronger. He immediately went downstairs and climbed the fire escape to enter the bathroom through the window. He could not remember if he found the window open or closed.

The model, however, shows the premises as he found them.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Attic (ca. 1946–48)

Reported Tuesday, December 24, 1946

Jessie Comptom found dead in her house by Harry Frasier, a milk delivery man, who gave the following statement:

On the morning of Tuesday, December 24, about 6:00 a.m., he stopped at Miss Comptom's kitchen door to deliver the milk. The weather was very cold and he was surprised to find the door open. He put his head inside and called, but received no answer so he then went in to see if anything was wrong. There seemed to be nobody about. After looking the house over, he went part way up the attic stairs and saw Miss Comptom's body hanging there, so he went downstairs and telephoned the police.

Policeman John T. Adams received the telephone call at 6:43 a.m. Tuesday morning, December 24, and went at once to Miss Comptom's house. The snow on the path to the kitchen door was somewhat trampled and no distinct footprints could be recognized. There were unwashed dishes for one person on the kitchen table. The house downstairs was neat. The bed was made and undisturbed. However, he found the attic as represented in the model.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Woodman's Shack (ca. 1945–48)

Reported Thursday, February 8, 1945

Ruby Jenks found dead in a woodman's shack she lived in with Homer Cregg and Carl Stebbins

On Tuesday, February 6, about 5:00 p.m., High Field Village Chief of Police Lawrence W. Farmer was notified by George Barbour of Highfield Village that there was a dead woman in a lumberman's camp on Pine Grove Road. Medical investigator Chester W. Dombey, Deputy Sherriff Thomas Gorman, photographer Adam Stanhope, and Chief Farmer went over at once. They found Mr. Cregg and Mr. Stebbins there, both very drunk, and the body of Ruby Jenks on the bed entirely covered up, including her head and face. Chief Farmer pulled the blanket down and Stanhope took a picture. Dr. Dombey made an examination of the body and ordered it removed to Coffin & Graves Funeral Parlor. Mr. Stebbins then lay down on the bed and photographer Stanhope took a picture of him, and also one of the outside of the shack. At the funeral parlor, Dr. Dombey again examined the body and found no marks of violence. Adam Stanhope took another picture here. The two men were questioned that night and again the next day.

The model shows the premises found by Dr. Barbour upon his arrival at 4:25 p.m. on Tuesday, February 6. Mr. Stebbins is lying on the bed—also Ruby. Mr. Cregg is seated on the chair. U.S. Weather Bureau Report: Weather clear; temperature 17°F; sunset 5:03 p.m.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Barn or The Case of the Hanging Farmer (1943–44)

Reported Saturday, July 15, 1939

Eben Wallace, local farmer, found dead by his wife, Imelda.

Mrs. Imelda Wallace gave the following statement:

Mr. Wallace was hard to get along with. When things didn't go the way he wanted, he would go out to the barn, threatening suicide. Mr. Wallace would stand on a bucket and put a noose around his neck, but she would always manage to persuade him not to do it. On the afternoon of July 14, about 4:00 p.m., they had a dispute. Mr. Wallace made his usual threats, but she didn't follow him to the barn right away. When she did go to the barn, she found the premises as represented in the model.

The bucket usually stood in the corner just inside the barn door, but yesterday she used it and left it out by the pump. The rope was always kept fastened to the beam just the way it was found—it was part of the regular barn hoist.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Saloon and Jail (ca. 1944–46)

Reported Sunday, November 12, 1944

Frank Harris, dock laborer, found dead in a jail cell after found lying on the street by Patrolman Dennis Mulcahy.

Patrolman Mulcahy stated that on Saturday night, November 11, at half past eleven, he was walking his beat on Dock Street. He saw a man lying sprawled out on the sidewalk in front of Pat's Place, a saloon. The man was breathing and smelt strongly of liquor. Mulcahy called the wagon which took the man to Station 2, where he was locked up in a single cell. His union card bore the name of Frank Harris, address 27 ½ Walter Street. He appeared very drunk. There were no marks of violence on him.

On Sunday morning, November 12, 7:00 a.m., when rounds were made in Station 2, Mr. Harris was found dead in his cell, as represented by the model.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Striped Bedroom (ca. 1943–48)

Reported Monday, April 29, 1940

Richard Harvey, foreman in an ice-cream factory, found dead by his mother, Mary Harvey

Mrs. Harvey gave the following statement:

On Saturday night, April 27, Richard came home for supper as usual and after supper went back to work. He always worked late Saturday nights to get ready for the Sunday trade. She didn't know when he came in as she went to bed early. Sunday morning she let him sleep while she went to church and then, as usual, proceeded to her sister's for the day. When she returned home Sunday evening, Richard wasn't around so she opened his door and found the premises as represented by the model.

Richard was married about a year ago and brought his wife home to live. She was a nice girl and they were very happy. His wife was away now visiting her parents for a few days in another state. Richard was a good boy but sometimes he had a little too much to drink, especially on Saturday nights. The dishpan belonged in the kitchen. She didn't know how it came to be in Richard's bedroom.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Living Room (ca. 1943–48)

Reported Friday, May 22, 1941

Mrs. Ruby Davis, a housewife, found dead on the stairs by her husband, Reginald Davis

Mr. Davis gave the following statement:

He and his wife spent the previous evening, Thursday, May 21, quietly at home. His wife had gone upstairs to bed shortly before he had. This morning he awoke a little before 5:00 a.m. to find that his wife was not beside him in bed. After waiting a while, he got up to see where she was and found her dead body on the stairs. He at once called the family physician who, upon his arrival, immediately notified the police. The model shows the premises just before the arrival of the family physician.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Two-Story Porch (ca. 1948)

Reported Monday, April 5, 1948

Mrs. Annie Morrison, a housewife, found lying on the ground below a second story porch.

Harry Morrison, the husband of Annie Morrison, gave the following statement:

On Monday morning, April 5, at about 11:00 a.m., he was in the kitchen of the top story apartment where he and his wife lived. Mrs. Morrison had done the week's washing and was standing on a chair on the porch hanging it out on the line to dry. Mr. Morrison heard a noise, went to see what it was, and found conditions as represented by the model. He had a job on the late shift but was up earlier than usual that day, as he hadn't worked the day before, which was Sunday.

Mrs. Agnes Butler, a neighbor, gave the following statement:

She lived in the apartment below the Morrisons. She bathed the baby on Monday morning, April 5, and put him in his carriage. She had done his wash and hung it out to dry. She was cleaning up the kitchen when she heard a crash and rushed out onto the porch and saw Mrs. Morrison lying on the ground below. The Morrisons quarreled a lot and Mr. Morrison didn't treat his wife very well. He drank some and Mrs. Butler guessed he had lady friends. She heard the Morrisons quarreling that morning.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Kitchen (ca. 1944–46)

Reported April 11, 1944

Barbara Barnes, a housewife, found dead by police who responded to a call from the husband of the victim, Fred Barnes, who gave the following statement:

About 4:00 p.m. on the afternoon of Tuesday, April 11, he went downtown on an errand for his wife. He returned about an hour and a half later and found the outside door to the kitchen locked. It was standing open when he left. Mr. Barnes attempted knocking and calling but got no answer. He tried the front door but it was also locked. He then went to the kitchen window, which was closed and locked. He looked in and saw what appeared to be his wife lying on the floor. He then summoned the police.

The model shows the premises just before the police forced open the kitchen door.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Garage (ca. 1946–48)

Reported Monday, January 7, 1946

Hugh Patterson, Vice President, Suburban Bank, found dead in the garage by his wife, Sue Patterson. Mrs. Patterson gave the following statement:

Hugh went out alone in the car after dinner on Saturday, January 5. He often did this, especially lately, and would stay out very late. Sunday morning when he hadn't come home by breakfast, Mrs. Patterson went to the garage to see if the car was there. She looked in the left-hand door and saw Hugh hanging out of the car. She then telephoned the local police station for help as she couldn't reach the doctor. When the patrolman arrived, he went around to the back, broke the glass, climbed in the window and opened both doors. He left, again through the window so as not to disturb footprints in front. He found the garage full of gas fumes, the car's ignition turned on, and the gas tank empty.

Hugh had seemed troubled for some time and money hadn't been as plentiful as it once was. Some time ago he told her that he carried heavy life insurance, with the double indemnity clause for accident, in her favor, and about that time he deeded the house to her. He had begun to drink a good deal lately. The model shows the premises just after the patrolman left the garage by way of the window.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Parsonage Parlor (ca. 1946–48)

Reported Friday, August 23, 1946

Dorothy Dennison, high school student, found dead after reported missing by her mother, Mrs. James Dennison.

Mrs. Dennison and gave the following statement:

On Monday morning, August 19, about 11:00 a.m., Dorothy walked downtown to buy some hamburger steak for dinner. She didn't have much money in her purse. When she failed to return in time for dinner, her mother telephoned a neighbor who stated she saw the girl walking toward the market, but had not seen her since. Mrs. Dennison also telephoned the market and the proprietor said he sold Dorothy a pound of hamburger some time before noon, but didn't notice which way she turned upon leaving the shop. By late afternoon, Mrs. Dennison, thoroughly alarmed, notified the police.

Lieutenant Peale's investigation report stated that on Monday afternoon, August 19, at 5:25 p.m., he received the telephone call from Mrs. Dennison at police headquarters, and at once took charge of the matter personally. The customary inquiries began and by Wednesday, August 21, a systematic search of all closed or unoccupied buildings in the vicinity was undertaken. It was not until Friday, August 23, 4:15 p.m., that he and Officer Patrick Sullivan entered the parsonage and found the premises as represented in the model.

Temperature during that week ranged between 86°F to 92°F with high humidity.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Red Bedroom (ca. 1944–48)

Reported Thursday, June 29, 1944

Marie Jones, prostitute, found dead by her landlady, Mrs. Shirley Flanagan.

Mrs. Shirley Flanagan gave the following statement:

On the morning of Thursday, June 29, she passed the open door of Marie's room and called out "hello." When she did not receive a response, she looked in and found the conditions as shown in the model. Jim Green, a boyfriend and client of Marie's, came in with Marie the afternoon before. Mrs. Flanagan didn't know when he left. As soon as she found Marie's body, she telephoned the police who later found Mr. Green and brought him in for questioning.

Mr. Green gave the following statement:

He met Marie on the sidewalk the afternoon of June 28, and walked with her to a nearby package store where he bought two bottles of whiskey. They then went to her room where they sat smoking and drinking for some time. Marie, sitting in the big chair, got very drunk. Suddenly, without any warning, she grabbed his open jackknife, which he had used to cut the string around the package containing the bottles. She ran into the closet and shut the door. When he opened the door, he found her lying as represented by the model. He left the house immediately after that.

Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Sitting Room & Woodshed (ca. 1953)

Reported October 25, 1947

Eugene Black, town drunkard, found dead.

David Jackson, a roomer in Black's house, gave the following statement:

Jackson has a large room over the woodshed. Coming home about 8:00 p.m. on Friday, October 24, he found Gene Black lying on the couch in the sitting room, very drunk and apparently asleep. On the floor beside him was an uncorked bottle of whiskey and Gene's .22 rifle, which usually hung on two spikes on the woodshed wall. Knowing that Gene was dangerous when drunk, Jackson, deeming it unsafe for him to have a gun so handy, took the .22 and replaced it in its accustomed place, the shed. He then went up to his room, read a while, and went to bed.

Winifred, Eugene Black's daughter, gave the following statement:

Her mother was a bedridden invalid who never came downstairs. Winifred did all the work of the house and took care of her mother. She also has a job as a clerk in the local 5&10. This was necessary, as her father had no job and couldn't get one because of drink. On the evening of October 24, she and her father had finished supper and he went out again. She was upstairs with her mother and they had the radio going, tuned in to a Western with lots of shooting. About 9:00 p.m., they turned off the radio and about a half hour later were startled to hear groans, apparently downstairs. Winnie went down and found her father on the couch, evidently dying. She at once telephoned for Dr. Monroe, the family doctor, who happened also to be the deputy medical investigator. Upon his arrival, he made a brief and (*con't.*)

hasty examination of Black, who was dead by this time, and ordered the body taken to Coffin & Graves Funeral Parlor. At the same time, Dr. Monroe signed the death certificate, giving as cause of death "acute alcoholism."

Collection of the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, courtesy Bethlehem Heritage Society, NH

Sitting Room & Woodshed, nicknamed "the lost nutshell," was rediscovered around 2003 in the attic of The Rocks, the Glessner family's former estate in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Frances may have sent the Nutshell to her estate from Harvard for a photo shoot with *Modern Mechanix* around 1953. For some reason, it was never returned.

Though only nineteen completed Nutshell Studies are known to survive, evidence from articles indicates there may be more. Fragments from works in progress can be seen at the Bethlehem Heritage Society, and one partially completed study, *The Boiler Room*---absent its report and conspicuously missing a corpse---resides at The Rocks, where Frances lived and worked for many years.

Archival image labels, top to bottom:

Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death, photograph of exhibition, ca. 1948, Harvard University Archives, UAV 605 (SC353), olvwork382461

Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death, photograph of model depicting two interiors, ca. 1948, Harvard University Archives, UAV 605 (SC354), olvwork382462

In 1945, Captain Lee presided over what became a prestigious, biannual seminar in homicide investigation at Harvard to teach police how to gather clues from a crime scene. The Nutshell Studies were at the heart of this program.

The first ten Nutshell Studies in the series were formally donated to the University in 1946, with more added in 1948, bringing the total to around twenty. A special mezzanine was built above the Magrath Library to house the models.

These images provide a record of how the Nutshell Studies were installed at Harvard. Seen in the foreground is *Two Interiors*, which shows the same scene both before and after investigators arrive. *Two Interiors* is believed to have been destroyed during the move from Harvard to Baltimore in 1966.