



Smithsonian American Art Museum and Renwick Gallery

Murder Is Her Hobby: Frances Glessner Lee and The Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death

Exhibition Checklist

Nutshell:	Case Text:
 <p>Frances Glessner Lee, <i>Barn</i> (also known as "The Case of the Hanging Farmer"), about 1943-44. Mixed media, appx. 27 x 23 1/2 x 29 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD</p>	<p>Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Saturday, July 15, 1939 Eben Wallace, a local farmer, was found dead by his wife, Imelda.</p> <p>Mrs. Imelda Wallace was questioned and gave the following statement:</p> <p>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 up 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 four o'clock, 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.</p> <p>The bucket usually stood in the corner just inside the barn door, but yesterday she had 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.</p>
 <p>Frances Glessner Lee, <i>Kitchen</i>, about 1944-46. Mixed media, appx. 17 x 25 1/4 x 24 3/4 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD</p>	<p>Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, April 11, 1944 Barbara Barnes, a housewife, was found dead by police who responded to a call from the husband of the victim, Fred Barnes, who gave the following statement:</p> <p>About 4pm on the afternoon of Tuesday, April 11, 1944, he had gone 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.</p> <p>The model shows the premises just before the police forced open the kitchen door. "</p>



Frances Glessner Lee, *Saloon and Jail*, about 1944-46. Mixed media, appx. 25 3/8 x 28 1/4 x 12 1/8 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Sunday, November 12, 1944 Frank Harris, a dock laborer, was found dead in a jail cell after having been found lying on the street by City Patrolman Dennis Mulcahy.

Patrolman Mulcahy stated that on Saturday night, November 11, 1944, at half past eleven o'clock, he was walking his beat on Dock Street. I 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. The patrolman 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 1/2 Walter Street. He appeared to be very drunk. There were no marks of violence on him.

On Sunday morning, November 12th at 7 o'clock, when rounds were made in Station 2, Mr. Harris was found dead in his cell, as represented by the model."



Frances Glessner Lee, *Log Cabin*, about 1944-46. Mixed media, appx. 14 1/2 x 18 1/4 x 23 5/8 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Thursday, October 22, 1942 Arthur Roberts, a local insurance salesman, was found dead by police who responded to a call from a friend of the victim, Mrs. Marian Chase.

Mrs. Chase was questioned and gave the following statement: She had met Arthur at the log cabin on Wednesday, October 21, 1942 about 5:15pm. We were in the habit of meeting there. Roberts was married and was living with his wife. Mrs. Chase was also married but was not living with her husband. Roberts had told her at this meeting that the affair between them was ended. There was no quarrel. Mrs. Chase and Mr. Roberts 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—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 had passed entirely through Mr. Roberts' chest from front to back and the powder around the entrance hole indicated that 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.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Three-Room Dwelling*, about 1944-46. Mixed media, about 12 x 32 1/2 x 32 7/8 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Monday, November 1, 1937. Robert Judson, a foreman in a shoe factory, his wife, Kate Judson, and their baby, Linda Mae Judson, were discovered dead by Paul Abbott, a neighbor.

Mr. Abbott was questioned and gave the following statement: Bob Judson and he drove to their work together, alternating cars. This was Abbott's week to drive. On Monday morning, November 1, he was late—about 7:35 am—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 Abbott, Paul Abbott's wife, was also questioned and gave the following statement:

After Paul had left, she watched for Bob to come out. Finally, about 8:15am, seeing no signs of activity at the Judson house, she went over to their porch and tried the front door, but it was locked and 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, thoroughly aroused by the sight of the gun and blood, she ran home and notified the police.

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

NB: Dawn broke at 5:00am. Sunrise at 6:17am. Weather clear. No lights were lighted in the house. Both outside doors were locked on the inside.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Blue Bedroom*, about 1944-48. Mixed media, 13 1/2 x 19 3/16 x 24 3/8 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, November 3, 1943.

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

Witness: Caroline Logan, wife

Mrs. Logan gave the following statement:

On Tuesday night November 2, 1943, 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.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Dark Bathroom*, about 1944-48. Mixed media, appx. 11 3/8 x 15 1/4 x 20 7/8 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories by Desk Sergeant Moriarty of the Central City Police as he recalled it. Maggie Wilson was found dead by Lizzie Miller. Ms. Miller was able to supply the following information: 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 fairly regularly. On Sunday night in early November in 1896, the men were there and there was a good deal of drinking going on. Sometime 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.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Burned Cabin*, about 1944-48. Mixed media, appx. 13 1/2 x 23 5/8 x 17 1/6 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Sunday, August 15, 1943 Daniel Perkins was missing and presumed dead. Phillip Perkins, Daniel Perkins's nephew, gave the following information: On Saturday evening, August 14, he had come to spend the night with his uncle, as he frequently did. In the middle of the night he was awakened 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, was questioned and gave the following statement: The call to the fire was received at 1:30am, Sunday, August 15. Upon arrival of the fire engine the fire was quickly extinguished before the building was completely destroyed. He noticed Phillip Perkins, fully clothed, wandering around near the house. The model represents the premises after the fire was extinguished and before the investigation was started or any part of the premises disturbed.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Pink Bathroom*, about 1943-48, mixed media, appx. 19 1/4 x 14 1/2 x 20 3/4 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Tuesday, March 31, 1942 Mrs. Rose Fishman, a widow, was found dead by Samuel Wiess, the janitor. Mr. Weiss was questioned and gave the following statement: Several tenants complained of an odor and on March 30th, he began looking for the source of the odor. Mrs. Fishman didn't answer her bell when he rang it, and upon checking with other tenants he learned that she had not been seen recently. Therefore, he looked into 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.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Striped Bedroom*, about 1943-48. Mixed media, appx. 13 3/8 x 19 5/8 x 25 1/2 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Monday, April 29, 1940 Richard Harvey, a foreman in an ice-cream factory, was found dead by his mother, Mrs. Mary Harvey Mrs. Harvey provided the following information: On Saturday night, April 27th, 1940, 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 had gone 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.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Living Room*, about 1943-48.
Mixed media, appx. 11 3/8 x 25 3/16 x 24 1/2 inches.
Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA,
courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner,
Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Friday, May 22, 1941
Mrs. Ruby Davis, a housewife, was discovered dead on the stairs
by her husband, Reginald Davis
Mr. Davis was questioned and gave the following statement:
He and his wife spent the previous evening, Thursday, May 21,
1941, quietly at home. His wife had gone upstairs to bed shortly
before he had. This morning he awoke a little before five
o'clock 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.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Red Bedroom*, about 1944-48.
Mixed media, appx. 12 5/8 x 24 3/4 x 24 5/8 inches.
Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA,
courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner,
Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Thursday, June 29, 1944.
Marie Jones, a prostitute, was discovered dead by landlady, Mrs.
Shirley Flanagan.
Mrs. Shirley Flanagan was questioned and gave the following
statement:
On the morning of Thursday, June 29, 1944, 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, had come in with Marie the afternoon before. Mrs.
Flanagan didn't know when he had 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.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Woodman's Shack*, about 1945-48. Mixed media, about 18 7/8 x 14 3/16 x 15 15/16 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories: Thursday, February 8, 1945
 Ruby Jenks was found dead in a woodman's shack she lived in with Homer Cregg and Carl Stebbins
 On Tuesday, February 6, 1945, about 5:00pm, High Field Village Chief of Police Lawrence W. Farmer was notified by Dr. George Barbour of Highfield Village that there was a dead woman in a lumberman's camp on the 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. Copies of Chief Farmer's and Dr. Dombey's reports are available. The model shows the premises found by Dr. Barbour upon his arrival at 4:25pm on Tuesday, February 6. Mr. Stebbins is lying on the bed—also Ruby. Mr. Cregg is seated on the chair. US Weather Bureau Report. Weather clear, temperature 17*. Sunset 5:03pm. EST.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Attic*, about 1946-48. Mixed media, appx. 21 11/16 x 17 1/8 x 12 7/8 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories: Tuesday, December 24, 1946.
 Miss Jessie Comptom was discovered dead in her house by Mr. Harry Frasier, a milk delivery man who gave this statement: On morning of Tuesday, December 24, 1946, about 6 o'clock, 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 my 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 down stairs and telephoned the police.
 Policeman John T. Adams received the telephone call at 6:43 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.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Garage*, about 1946-48. Mixed media, about 28 1/2 x 27 x 27 1/16 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Monday, January 7, 1946
Hugh Patterson, Vice-President, Suburban Bank, was found dead in the garage by his wife, Sue Patterson
Mrs. Patterson was questioned and gave the following statement:

Hugh had gone out alone in the car after dinner on Saturday, January 5, 1946. He often did this, especially lately, and would stay out very late. Sunday morning when he hadn't come home by breakfast time, Mrs. Patterson went to the garage to see if the car was there. I 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 over 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.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Parsonage Parlor*, about 1946-48. Mixed media, appx. 14 x 22 x 20 1/4 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Friday, August 23, 1946
Dorothy Dennison, a high school student, was found dead after being reported missing by her mother, Mrs. James Dennison.
Mrs. Dennison was questioned by Police Lieutenant Robert Peale, and gave the following statement:

On Monday morning, August 19, 1946, about eleven o'clock, Dorothy had 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 had seen the girl walking toward the market, but had not seen her since. Mrs. Dennison also telephoned the market and the proprietor said he had 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, 1946, at 5:25pm, 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 at 4:15pm, that he and Officer Patrick Sullivan entered the Parsonage and found the premises as represented in the model.

Temperature during that week had ranged between 86° and 92° with high humidity.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Two-Story Porch*, about 1948. Mixed media, about 41 1/4 x 27 x 23 1/2 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Monday, April 5, 1948 Mrs. Annie Morrison, a housewife, Was found lying on the ground below a second story porch. Harry Morrison, the husband of Annie Morrison, relayed the following:
On Monday morning, April 5, 1948, at about eleven o'clock, 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 out on the porch hanging it out on the line to dry. Mr. Morrison heard a sort of noise and 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 of the Morrises, gave the following statement:
She lived in the apartment below the Morrises. She had 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 I heard a crash and rushed out onto the porch and saw Mrs. Morrison lying on the ground below. The Morrises 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 Morrises quarreling that morning.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Unpapered Bedroom*, about 1949-52. Mixed media, appx. 11 3/4 x 24 1/8 x 18 15/16 inches. Collection of Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, courtesy of the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, Baltimore, MD

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, Monday, June 4, 1949 An Unknown Woman was discovered dead in a rooming house (registered as Mrs. John Smith). Mrs. Bessie Collins, the landlady of the rooming house, was questioned and gave the following statement:
She keep a rooming house, and on Saturday, June 2, 1949, in the early afternoon, the deceased and a man rented this room until Monday morning, registering as Mr. and Mrs. John Smith. On Monday morning, June 4th, the man left early—about six thirty am. He paid for the room up to six o'clock that evening and said not to disturb his wife, as she wanted to sleep late. About three o'clock on Monday afternoon, Mrs. Collins told Stella Walsh, the maid, to try to get into the room to make it up. Just before five o'clock, Stella told Mrs. Collins there was something wrong. She had 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.



Frances Glessner Lee, *Sitting Room and Woodshed*, about 1953. Mixed media, appx. 12 x 33 1/2 x 27 3/16 inches. Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, courtesy of the Bethlehem Heritage Society

Reported to Nutshell Laboratories, October 25, 1947

Eugene Black, town drunkard, was found dead by David Jackson, a roomer in Black's house, who gave the following statement: He had a large room over the woodshed. Coming home about eight o'clock 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 also 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 then went to bed.

Winifred Black, Eugene's daughter, was also questioned, and 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 had a job as 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 had gone out again. She was upstairs with her mother and they had the radio going, tuned in to a Western with lots of shooting. About nine o'clock, 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. James Monroe, the family doctor, who happened also to be the deputy

Medical Investigator. Upon his arrival, he made a brief and hasty examination of Black, who was dead by this time, and ordered the body taken to Cofrin & Graves Funeral Parlors. At the same time, Dr. Monroe signed the death certificate, giving as cause of death "Acute Alcoholism."