

# STRANGEST POISON MYSTERY IN CRIMINAL ANNALS

## The Elosser Case in Cumberland, Md., Makes a Commonplace Little City Memorable Among the Records of Unsolved Murder Cases.



Charles E. Twigg, Fiance of Grace Elosser, Found Dead on the Eve of Their Wedding.

THE recent tragedy at Cumberland, Md., when two sweethearts, to be married the next day, were found dead from cyanide of potassium in the room where they were exchanging lovers' vows, which startled the country from coast to coast, has now, at the end of a fortnight, crystallized itself into an enigma of crime whose details rival the utmost imaginings of the most melodramatic of novelists.

Its original setting, its gruesome development, its climax—if, indeed, the climax has been reached—and now its final resolution into a problem, National-wide in interest, without solution, or hope of solution, marks it as one of the most remarkable cases in the annals of American crime.

So replete is this tragedy with enthralling mystery that the very calendar, most prosaic of things, has lent itself to add dramatic effect to the dramatic deaths of Grace Elosser and Charles Twigg.

It was just as the last sun of the year 1910 was sloping slowly to the west that Grace Elosser, the bride-elect, and Charles Twigg, the bridegroom-to-be within a few short hours, were laid with folded hands in their eternal sleep.

Instead of the orange blossoms of the gala wedding feast their portion was the Immortelles and the sombre crepe of the funeral; instead of music and dancing and all the happy accompaniments of a joyous marriage feast there were but the trappings of death, made the blacker by the deep and sudden mystery of a dual tragedy.

Surely never has fiction imagined nor has fact recorded such pitiable contrast between the what-is and the what-might-have-been.

To the little City of Cumberland, nestling at the foot of the primeval hills, the pleasant holiday season came, with its midwinter playtime augmented in the pleasant surprise that its population had been found by the Government census increased beyond the expectation of the most optimistic citizen. Cumberland, on that last day of the old year, was care free and wholly happy. "If ever a community realized the holiday dream of an 'old-time resident of the town to the representative of THE TIMES," it was Cumberland on that last day of the year 1910."

And forth from out this general happiness like a lightning bolt from a silver cloud there leapt what may well be written down as the most tragic mystery of the present generation.

To realize in all its force the effect of the shock of this double death upon the people of Cumberland, it is necessary to note the characters and situation of the two victims.

First, a young woman in the full flush of womanhood; a young woman, according to the consensus of opinion in Cumberland, notably attractive and charming in person and temperament; young, but with the experience of twenty-three years overflowing with the glorious optimism that marks the healthy American girl, happy in living and loving, just on the eve of her marriage to the man who was the realization of her womanly ideals.

"Charlie is the best man that ever lived," she said to an intimate friend on the morning of the day of her death. "And I am the happiest girl in the world to get such a treasure."

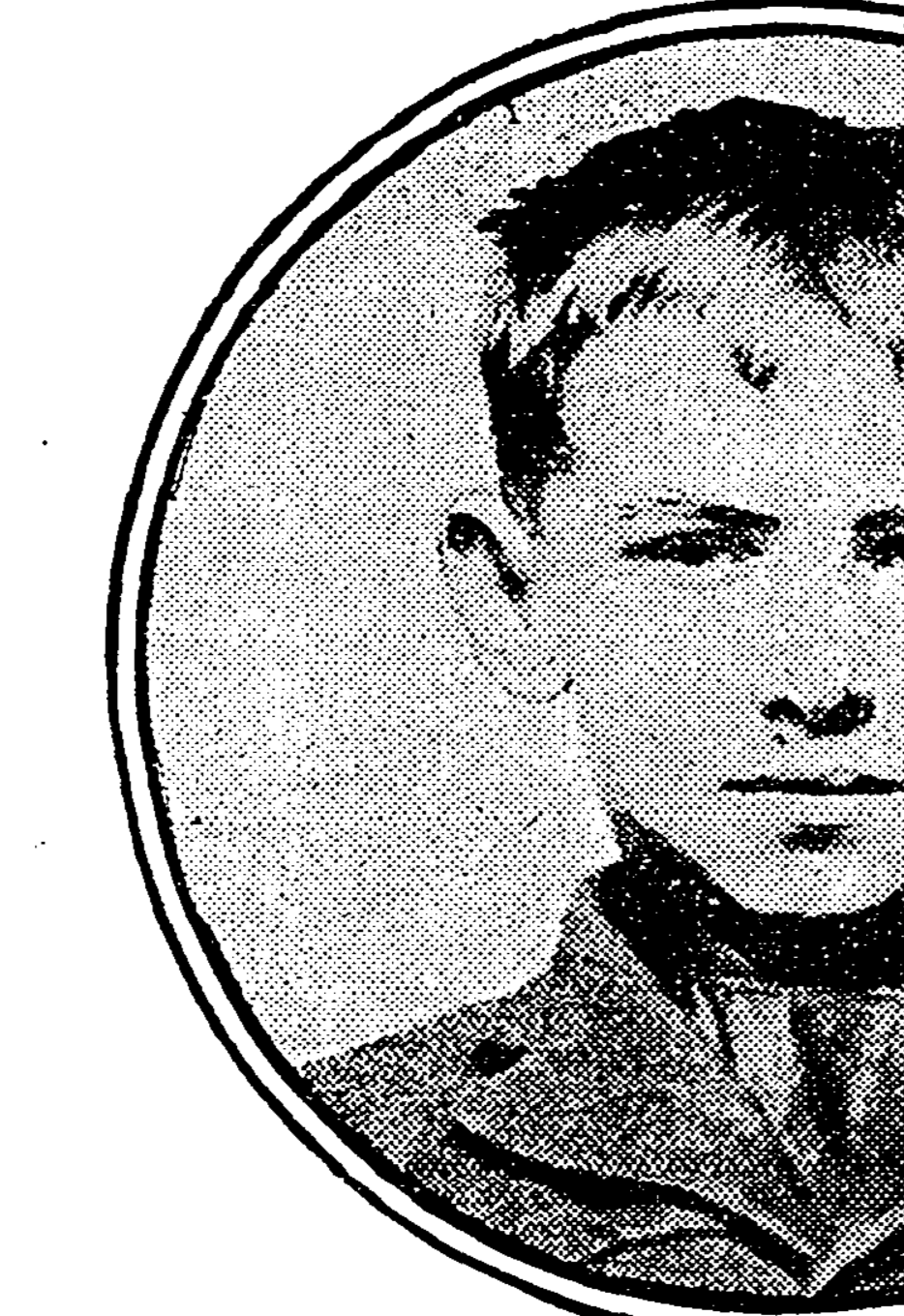
Such was Grace Elosser as she appeared to friends and acquaintances within two hours just preceding her mysterious death.

And a fitting complement to this attractive girl was the young man to whom she was so soon to be wedded, Charles E. Twigg. Losing his heart to her in the Indian Summer of the last Autumn, his impetuous wooing soon won her for himself.

His, too, was a sunny, ardent, energetic, optimistic nature—a nature that was more strikingly developed along these lines, by reason of his early struggles and his early and material success.

To these two victims of tragedy, with all that life holds dear to live for; with their dream of marital bliss on the very threshold of realization, to him

who had told an intimate friend that very morning that he could now ask nothing more of fortune; to her, who had said to a girl friend at the stroke of high noon that very day, "Tomorrow I will at last commence really to live"—to these two came "death's black camel" and bore their souls away, leaving their bodies as pale victims



Harlan Norris, Who Says He Saw Glasses in the Dead Couples' Hands.

dence of a hideous crime, committed—by whom?

It is a matter of interest to know who were these Elossers and Twiggs, whence they came, how long had been their acquaintance, what were the details of this acquaintance that finally ripened into the romance that was so tragically wrecked last New Year's Eve.

The Elossers, originally of Pennsylvania Dutch stock, settled some generations ago, in Winchester, Va. From there a score of years ago Mr. Elosser, father of Grace and May, removed to Flintstone, Md., and established a grocery business, from which he, for a number of years, derived a comfortable living.

Flintstone is a small settlement about twenty miles from Cumberland. It was here, while attending the public school, that May and Grace Elosser first met Charles E. Twigg. It was here also that the girls became acquainted with Willison, who appears to have been a friend of Twigg's, and who subsequently was Grace Elosser's first husband.

These four were intimate as playmates during their school days at Flintstone, but when Mr. Elosser removed later to Cumberland, where he established a grocery business, and Charles Twigg located at Keyser in West Virginia, twenty miles away, these youthful intimacies were broken up—all except that between Willison and Grace Elosser. This continued and subsequently ripened into courtship and marriage about eight years ago.

Willison, who was the owner of a prosperous livery stable in Cumberland, was a man of convivial habits. About three years after marriage his wife, Grace, became aware of what had long been known to the gossips in Cumberland—that Willison was paying marked attention to another young woman of the town. The scandal culminated in the elopement of Willison and the girl in question.

Grace Elosser Willison, however, was a young woman of determined character. Hurriedly obtaining a horse and buggy, she intercepted the fleeing couple by taking a byroad. Blocking the way with her vehicle, she halted the pair and, with whip in hand, ordered them to get out of their carriage. Then, with their vehicle in tow, she made them walk to a neighboring villa, and there called witnesses to observe the faithfulness of her spouse.

On this evidence she obtained a divorce from Willison, who later married his partner in the elopement.

Grace Elosser returned to her father's house after the divorce, retaining as the only memento of her unfortunate marriage venture a horse and buggy which Willison had given to her—the one through whose ready speed she had felled her husband's elopement. Under order of court her maiden name was restored to her.

All of this was four years ago. Meantime Charles E. Twigg, the playmate of her youth, who had cast his fortunes in the West Virginia town of Keyser, had faded from her memory.



Miss Grace Elosser, Who Died Seated at Her Fiance's Side, Just Before Their Wedding.

Now a word about this young Charles E. Twigg and his boyhood. He was a youth of humble parentage, possessed, when he located at Keyser, of only a common school education. Also, he brought along with him a shrewd capacity for getting along in the hard, workaday world where he had cast his fortunes.

Starting literally at the bottom, he beat and buffeted his way up in that primitive community, where men still had the bark on. He supplemented his common school education with learning in the stern school of the mountain plow, and coal mines, and the lumber camps—learning, saving, gathering such polish as he might from casual business acquaintances; gathering more polish and more money as the years brought success.

His were wide open eyes and wide open ears, and his hands had learned to grasp the opportunity that the eyes saw and the ears heard. They grasped a small country store, out of which, under Twigg's shrewd management, the smallness rapidly faded until two years ago, he proudly stuck his thumbs in the armpits of his vest and boasted himself the leading merchant of Keyser and all the countryside round about.

A man of attractive personality was Twigg, both in business circles and in a social way—a man of naturally commanding temperament.

Starting with neither money nor social nor business influence, he had, at the age of thirty-five, become the leading citizen of his community, and he had achieved this in what was practically his home, for his birthplace, at Flintstone, "only a few miles from Keyser."

It is no secret among the good folk of both Cumberland and Keyser that Twigg followed an unconventional manner of living. He had been interested in a former wild matrimonial venture, and his lesser romances among the maidens were not only many but extensive in the geographic extent, counting his sweethearts, as he did, from the Missouri River to Boston Harbor.

He was fond of fast horses, and also

affected a craving for the automobile which in that mountainous country marks the last word in luxurious living.

Such was Charles E. Twigg, when in October of 1909 fortune threw him across the path of his former playmates at Flintstone, the Elosser girls, whom he had meantime all but forgotten. They met at the annual fair held at Cumberland in the month of October. The gawky children of the Flintstone Public School had blossomed out, on the one hand, into two attractive young women, on the other, to a highly successful young man of most pleasing presence and the possessor of a swift automobile.

The Flintstone acquaintance, with its childhood memories bearing just enough of romance to flavor it, was renewed with energy. Twigg became a frequent caller at the Elosser home, and it was a common sight in the streets of Cumberland to see him in his car with one of the girls beside him, while the other was in the tonneau with some male acquaintance.

It was in the automobile rides that the gossip of Cumberland found tongue. Keen-eyed folk who made a specialty of attending to other people's business observed that during the first week of this renewed intimacy, evidenced by automobile excursions, the seat next to Twigg was always occupied by May Elosser. Then these same keen-eyed gossips observed that Grace Elosser had supplanted her sister in the seat of honor beside the attractive Twigg. Finally the presence of Grace became a settled thing, and in a few weeks it was an open secret that the successful merchant of Keyser was her accepted lover.

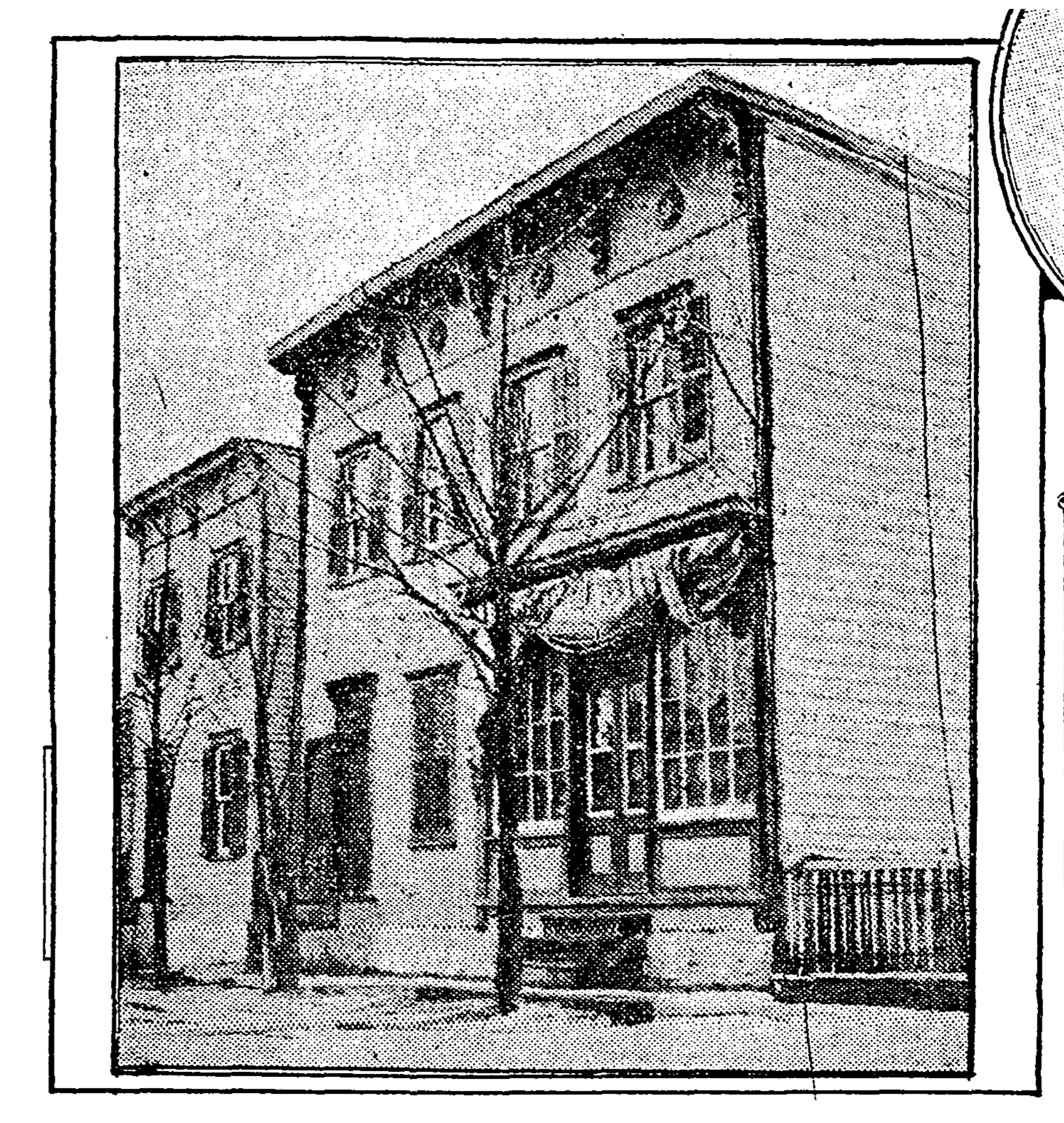
It was not gathered, however, from Twigg, who was widely known as a man who never confided his personal matters even to his closest friends. Grace Elosser, however, told those most intimate with her family that she was to marry Twigg on the first day of the New Year.

Twigg kept this a secret even from his family. When he started from Keyser on Dec. 31 on that last journey to Cumberland, he avoided the questions of his friends, even those of his mother, as to his marital intentions. He did not deny, but he did not admit to any one his expectation of being married the following day.

He arrived in Cumberland shortly after noon that 31st day of December. And it is now that the mystery commences, a mystery so baffling that now, after the lapse of nearly a fortnight, the officials of Cumberland are compelled to admit they are as much

in the dark as they were when they first grappled with the case.

"When he reached Cumberland, he, with all the ardor of a young and eager lover, sought his sweetheart over the telephone. She laughingly told him that she was up to her eyes in the work of preparation for their marriage on the next day, and did not have a moment's time for him that afternoon. Upon which Twigg, as any devoted lover might do, begged for a quarter



The Home of the Elossers. The Close d Shutter Is at the Parlor Window, Where the Tragedy Occurred.

hand hung down by the side of the sofa, listless and dead.

"I rushed up to her, calling her name; then I grasped her arm, calling loudly, 'Grace, Grace, speak to me! What's the matter?' Then for the first time I looked into her eyes, and there I had answer; it was death.

"I looked in the face of Mr. Twigg and saw on his face the same horrible expression. I do not know how long I stood there gazing at them. It all seems a horrible, hideous nightmare to me now. I know that for a time I was too paralyzed by the horror of it all to move a single muscle; they refused to obey my will.

"I do remember that I rushed from the other door that opens out on the street. The cold air revived me for the moment, and I gave vent to shriek after shriek. I then returned to the parlor just as Mrs. See, my married daughter, who lives next door, rushed in, attracted by my screams.

"I had then again lost my voice from the fright, and could only point to the bodies on the sofa. My daughter ran crying hysterically, but she preserved her presence of mind enough to hurry away for a doctor.

"No, there was no glass or glasses, no bottle or any other thing that could be used as a receptacle for any liquid in the room. Everything remained just as it was until Dr. Ford, whom my daughter, Mrs. See, went for, arrived. I know that there could have been nothing moved from the room after my discovery of the bodies without my knowledge, or certainly without my having noticed it."

In cases evoking such widespread and mysterious interest as the tragedy of Cumberland there are always born freaks who rush to the assistance of those officially engaged in solving the mystery with all manner of unique suggestions. "Have you gotten any freak letters on this case?" asked THE TIMES representative of Prosecuting Attorney Robb as he sat in his office in Cumberland. "Have I?" ejaculated Mr. Robb. "Just look at this bunch; all accumulated in ten days," and the Prosecuting Attorney pulled out a bulky packet of letters. Following are some characteristic excerpts from the collection:

They are exact copies, retaining the errors in spelling, grammar, &c.:

Montrose, Ia Jan 7th 1911.  
Mr. Robb, State's Attorney.  
In reading the constitution Democrat I see that the Elosser family was responsible for the death of miss grace elosser and charles e twigg. I will tell you of a discovery I have made that might help solve the mystery asking you as a gentleman not to tell my name. They might meet this death by hypnotism suggestions or controlling powers maybe given out on their clothes a month or 48 hours before their death. And the suggestions made upon them when they were together being the stomach in a spasmodic condition as it is called a slow poison. I am very urgent to go to the house, could be caused by such suggestions and he did not get to come could be caused from a feeling made by hypnotism used by the third party prompted by jealousy to do so they tell me the these misable powers can be proven against any body but if you have the letters read them and see if you can't get some thing out of them. I don't believe May dun that job I can't see it.  
Yours very truly,  
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Atlantic City, 1-8-1911.  
Mr. Robb,  
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Now I think you need some help on this mystery was this mother jells of this man and did not want Grace taken away from her. Or was she afraid Grace would make another bulk of it her marriage and disgrace the family a gain. Or was she jealous of her Grace was court the wright daughter to suit that old woman. Didn't it appeal to you that she had have letters read them and see if you can't get some thing out of them. I don't believe May dun that job I can't see it.  
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Prosecuting Attorney David A. Robb of Cumberland, Md., Who is Investigating the Mystery.

to mother and sister and one brother—where was his mother that night. If he married the will would be changed to his wife that leaves the mother out perhaps you have no father in dream—when I read about the murder, I cried and cried I felt so bad. It was on my mind and I dreamed that the young man and young lady was poisoned by wine. It seemed a middle-aged person. I don't know much about dreams being true, but I thought I would write and tell you don't give up I hope the guilty one's conscience will bring them to justice and god bless you to find the one. The peculiar feature was the two doors and the paper to-night stated that was so. Don't leave nothing undone and God bless you in your undertakings.  
(signed) UNKNOWN.

This is romantic. I married a young man who had not met his mother in ten years. I brought his mother to his side. She took from me his love, my home and all—leaving me with a few months old baby. Today I am married to a good man—my baby is eight years old a beautiful little girl her real papa has come wa all hope to heaven for he sleeps his eternal sleep. What do you think of that—this is a cruel world.

It was with some difficulty that THE TIMES representative obtained an interview with the family of the Elossers. Startling and sensational accusations made by unscrupulous journalists had wrought them up to a state of general hostility toward newspapers.

But, when once assured that they could safely speak without danger of misrepresentation, the entire family uttered. That they are "weary-weary" was plain from the haggard lines that marked their faces of them all. If there is one common characteristic that stands forth salient in the Elosser family it is this—gentleness. From the patient, long-suffering, and aged father to the bright-tempered Mrs. See, they show distinctively that quiet gentleness that reminds one of the patient nun. Even when explaining why they had at first been loath to meet THE TIMES representative on account of the sensational misrepresentations with which some conscienceless correspondents had abused their confidence they spoke in sorrow more than in anger. The quiet grief of Mrs. Elosser was pitiable. From time to time she would cry out in anguish to Coroner Beall, forgetting in her word that she had but lately asked the question, "Oh, Mr. Beall, haven't you found out anything? Haven't you found who did it?"

But, of all members of the Elosser family, May is the most striking. She is a woman (say, rather, a girl; for, despite her dignified bearing, she has a frank, girlish presence) about 25 years of age. Her face is pretty, but it is more than pretty; it is the face of one who if given artistic advantages would, if not easily he imagined, develop into an enthusiastic painter, writer, or musician. In short, the artist is written in every lineament of her features, clouded and obscured as her face was on that day from ten days' strain and grief.

She was very quiet, talking but little, but listening, with face alight with interest to the current conversation. One could readily imagine the agony she has been compelled to endure in reading the dark suspicious many papers over and over again, with reference to her connection with the double tragedy.

And what of the crime? Who is guilty? The man who goes to Cumberland and spends a day in investigating can leave that night feeling perfectly content that he has in those few short hours arrived as near a solution of the mystery as would a host of "Fingerprint" detectives were they to devote a year to the task.

For there is nothing but darkness there. "There is only one thing more difficult in this mystery," says THE TIMES representative of Prosecuting Attorney Robb as he sat in his office in Cumberland. "Have I?" ejaculated Mr. Robb. "Just look at this bunch; all accumulated in ten days," and the Prosecuting Attorney pulled out a bulky packet of letters. Following are some characteristic excerpts from the collection:

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