

GIRETH, Leslie Bela

murderer

1942

BOUQUET AND PHOTO PLACED BESIDE BODY

San Francisco, Cal.

Slayer Listens to Sentimental Music After Shooting *NEWS* July 17 1942

"I've murdered a woman. . . It's a long story and people wouldn't understand—"

Those words, spoken calmly by Leslie B. Gireth, 37, wealthy and respected Glendale jeweler, led Alameda County officers at dawn today to the bullet-riddled body of his sweetheart, attractive Dorena Hammer, 21, meteorology student at the Boeing School of Aeronautics, Alameda.

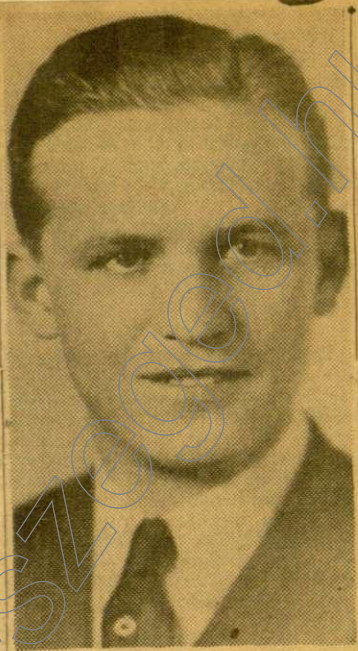
As carefully as he gave directions for finding Miss Hammer's body, Gireth shielded the motive for the tragedy that ended a romance of nearly a year, possibly longer.

He made his sketchy confession in a long-distance call from the Hotel Fresno, in Fresno, to Oakland police, promised he would remain at the hotel until Fresno officers arrived, and kept that promise.

Shot in Bed

Miss Hammer had been shot to death—either while asleep, or while she lay on a bed chatting with Gireth—in a cabin of the sumptuous Casa Del Monterey Motor Court, between Hayward and San Leandro.

From the large amount of baggage in their cabin at the auto court, officers believed that Miss Hammer and Gireth had planned an elopement. Then, after more than 24 hours at the court, something shattered their plans, and—



LESLIE B. GIRETH.

①

ekor

Miss Hammer was slain as she lay in bed, clad in the upper half of an expensive pair of green pajamas. Around her head was a gayly colored bandeau. Other than bullet wounds in the right temple and left breast, there were no marks of violence on her body.

And, as she lay there in death, the slayer had gone out, purchased a dozen red carnations and a vase, then returned, arranged the bouquet near her body, propped his photograph against the bouquet, and played a phonograph record of Debussy's sentimental "Claire de Lune" over and over.

On the back of the photograph was this, in a man's writing:

"Dorena, My Darling:

"Humble words could never express how I love you, how I adore you. Always remember that.

"Your Les . . . Sept. 15, 1941."

Bed clothing had been carefully placed over Miss Hammer's body. The room was orderly, the baggage piled neatly at one end of it. There was no indication a struggle had preceded the tragedy.

Decided to Yield

It was 4 a. m. when the slayer telephoned from Fresno. Officers believe Miss Hammer was shot early yesterday afternoon, and that Gireth drove to Fresno in his Cadillac sedan last evening, thought over the crime during the trip, and decided to give himself up.

Patrolman Harold J. Rossi, on duty at Oakland Central Station, received the call.

"I've murdered a woman in San Leandro," began Gireth.

"Where are you?" broke in Patrolman Rossi.

"At the Fresno Hotel, in Fresno," Gireth went on. Patrolman Rossi switched the call to the detective bureau, and the voice continued:

"You'll find her in Cabin No. 10, of Casa Del Monterey. She is Dorena Hammer, of 138 So. 11th-st, San Jose, and I am Leslie B. Gireth, a jeweler, of 229 No. Brand-bldg, Glendale."

While Sheriff Jack Gleason and deputies sped to the auto court, Fresno police were contacted, and took Gireth into custody.

"It's a long story and people wouldn't understand," he said listlessly, to Sergeant Harold Maddocks of the Fresno police. "All I wanted before surrendering was a little sleep."

He declined to discuss the slaying or his romance with Miss Hammer. But from Glendale came reports that Miss Hammer at one time had worked in the jewelry store he had operated there for 18 years, that they had been friendly, and that Miss Hammer's

mother had sought to discourage their friendship.

Gireth, a native of Hungary, received his citizenship papers several months ago. His wife, Mary, recently sued him for divorce, asking custody of their two children, 6 and 11.

Mrs. Gireth's complaint demanded that Gireth give her half control of the store. She said the store was started and owned by her father, Imre Bokor, and that Gireth worked himself into control.

Gireth's cross-complaint charged Mrs. Gireth "ran around with other men, that she frequently served him greasy foods, drank to excess and even hid his safety razor."

Miss Hammer was born in Tacoma, Wash., reared in Glendale, where she attended junior college.

'A Very Nice Girl'

More recently she had attended San Jose State College, resided at the home of Mrs. R. A. Sadler, 148 So. 11th-st. She left about a month ago to enroll in the Boeing School at Alameda.

"She was a very nice girl," said Mrs. Sadler. "A few nights ago she visited me in San Jose. She seemed very happy in her work at the school, and I remember she spoke of having 'a new blond boy friend.'"

Officials at the Boeing School said she was studying to be a clerk in United Air Lines' meteorology department, "and ranked high in her class."

In Alameda Miss Hammer lived at the Hotel Alameda with Jean Franklin of San Mateo, also a student at the Boeing school. Miss Franklin said she last saw Miss Hammer in the lobby Wednesday noon. Miss Franklin was leaving to spend the night at her home in San Mateo. Miss Hammer spoke of having a date with a "John Atchison" of Alameda. But she left a note for him at the hotel desk, breaking the engagement.

Miss Franklin, returning to the hotel from San Mateo last night, found her roommate missing, with all her baggage. There was no note of explanation. Miss Franklin consulted with another Boeing student living at the hotel, Betty Thompson. She, too, was unable to explain Miss Hammer's absence. At 2:20 a. m. today the two girls asked Alameda police to search for Miss Hammer.

Frank McH. Campbell, proprietor of the auto court said Gireth and the girl registered at the court on Tuesday.

"Gireth had stopped there before," said Mr. Campbell. "I'm not sure, but I believe Miss Hammer had been with him. While they were at the court Gireth spoke of her as 'Mrs. Gireth'."

Shortly after noon yesterday, said Mr. Campbell, Gireth stepped in at the auto court office and said:

"Please tell the maid not to disturb Mrs. Gireth, she's very tired and needs rest."

About 2 p. m. Gireth returned. He stopped in at the court office once more, to return some plates he had borrowed from Mr. Campbell. Apparently watermelon had been served on the plates, said Mr. Campbell.

Officers believed that Gireth killed Miss Hammer before asking that she not be disturbed, then went out and purchased the carnations for his death tryst with his sweetheart.

In Miss Hammer's baggage Sheriff Gleason found letters from her parents, living at 702 So. Harvard av, Glendale. One letter from her father referred to \$2 he was sending as a birthday present—"buy yourself some handkerchiefs—I'm sorry it isn't more."



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