

WHAT HAS HAPPENED

Dreams of Adventure Brought a Girl One That Puzzles Police

By RUTH REYNOLDS

GEOGETTE BAUERDORF called herself "the doll with the shoebutton eyes." She dramatized herself, her life, and all the world. In her day dreams she was the heroine of exciting adventures.

But in neither her life nor her multicolored dreams could there have been a hint before Oct. 11, 1944, that this 20-year-old was about to embark upon a real and most tragic adventure. On that day she came to sudden death, mysterious and cruel. She left behind her a half-dozen smudged fingerprints and a red leather-bound diary which listed a number of names.

You might think from her steady self-dramatization that Georgette was some plain, mousy-haired Miss Missed It, with no chance for a life of glamor. That was far from the case.

The fact is that she had the very things for which most day-dreaming girls yearn.

Georgette was attractive and no end of young men admired her. From her father, George Bauerdorf, a wealthy oil and mine executive, she had an allowance to spend as she pleased on clothes, night clubs, airplane trips, a sports coupe, fun.

She even had a beautiful duplex apartment almost to herself. Her father, stepmother and sister traveled considerably and were seldom in the El Palacio Apartments at 8493 Fountain Ave., West Hollywood.

The El Palacio Apartments are really connected houses. When, at 11:10 the morning of Oct. 12, the apartments' maintenance couple finished their chores in one dwelling, Fred C. Atwood looked at his watch.

"Lulu, do you think we have time to do the place next door?"

His wife nodded and led the way across the vestibule to the Bauerdorf apartment, her husband trailing her with mop, pail and conversation.

Woman Makes Gruesome Find

"I guess Miss Bauerdorf's staying alone now. Her pa and ma and sister have gone to New York City. She isn't home herself much any more. Been working for that Hollywood Canteen. She's a mighty nice young lady. She thanked me real nice yesterday afternoon for taking a box to the basement."

"Hmmm—somebody's here," said Lulu Atwood, pointing to the apartment door standing ajar. "Maybe it's Mr. Bauerdorf's secretary—Miss What's-Her-Name. She usually gets here about this time. Oh, well, come on—we can clean around her."

Mrs. Atwood was in a hurry for there was much to be done. A large, luxuriously furnished living room with a dining room behind it and a kitchen off to the left needed attention on the first floor. Upstairs there were two bedrooms, each with a private bath.

"Anyone here?" Lulu called up the stairs. Silence except for the sound of water dripping in one of the baths.

"Hmmm... that's funny... door open... water dripping... nobody home... I'll go up and see... you start down here," directed the efficient Mrs. Atwood. She went up to the bedroom at the head of the stairs and, entering, peered through the open bathroom door and screamed. Atwood ran up the stairs, two at a time.

The couple stood transfixed, staring through the shower curtains. Georgette Bauerdorf, a rag clenched

examined the body, and studied details in bedrooms, bathrooms, living room, dining room, kitchen and hallway.

Georgette Bauerdorf had not fainted in her morning bath. She had been killed—choked on the rag in her throat as the autopsy later showed—and her body thrown into the tub.

Within the next 24 hours Inspector William J. Fenprase, who took charge of the case for the Sheriff's Bureau of Investigation, learned much about Georgette, her day dreams, her impetuosity, her generosity.

In spite of wealth which made limitless leisure and play possible for her, Miss Bauerdorf had burned with ambition to do something worth while.

For six months after graduation from finishing school Georgette sought to be a newspaper reporter. She got as far as a job as copy girl on the Los Angeles Times.

Someone suggested she could be useful as a junior hostess at the Hollywood Canteen, entertainment center for thousands of military men from nearby camps and ports.

The Canteen had rigid specifications for girls who served as junior hostesses, stringent requirements which Georgette easily fulfilled. Easily she accepted the ruling that no junior hostess would be permitted to leave the Canteen with a service man.

But, like many another canteen hostess the country over, Georgette realized that there was nothing in the rules to say she couldn't make dates with the boys away from the Canteen.

Being pretty, gay and young, she attracted many a homesick, lonely GI Joe. And being good-hearted, generous and fun-loving, she accepted many of their requests for dates. Nor would she let any one of them spend his \$50-a-month service pay on her.

She took them riding in her car. She entertained them in night clubs and picked up the checks. She even took the lads home with her when they grumbled about overcrowded conditions in Los Angeles, complained that they had no place to sleep.

"Be careful, Georgette," her friends warned.

"Oh, I am. But I think if these boys are willing to fight for us we ought to do anything we can for them," Georgette retorted.

All this she noted in the red leather diary which she kept scrupulously. It was the one thing, incidentally, she did keep scrupulously. She was always losing her keys, having to have duplicates made; she was always letting her car stand at curbs instead of parking it in lots or garages; she was always leaving dishes about; ripping her clothes—in general behaving carelessly.

It must not be thought, however, that Georgette had no well-defined idea of propriety. Her best friend, June Zeigler, another junior hostess at the Hollywood Canteen, told police:

"Yes, she had lots of dates, but I know for a fact that she made it a practice never to admit a man to her apartment unless there were others present."

Planned to Leave On Trip to Texas

The Bauerdorfs, the police discovered, had gone east on Aug. 28, leaving Mrs. Rose Gilbert, Bauerdorf's secretary, as Georgette's unofficial chaperon. Mrs. Gilbert and Georgette saw each other daily, spent much time together. Still, Georgette did pretty much as she chose.

She told Mrs. Gilbert that she intended to leave Los Angeles on Oct. 13, to attend the graduation of her friend, Jerry W. Brown, at Fort Bliss, near El Paso, Texas.

Jerry was a lad she had met once at the Canteen in June. After that meeting, Jerry, an air cadet, was transferred to the Texas station and Georgette corresponded with him.

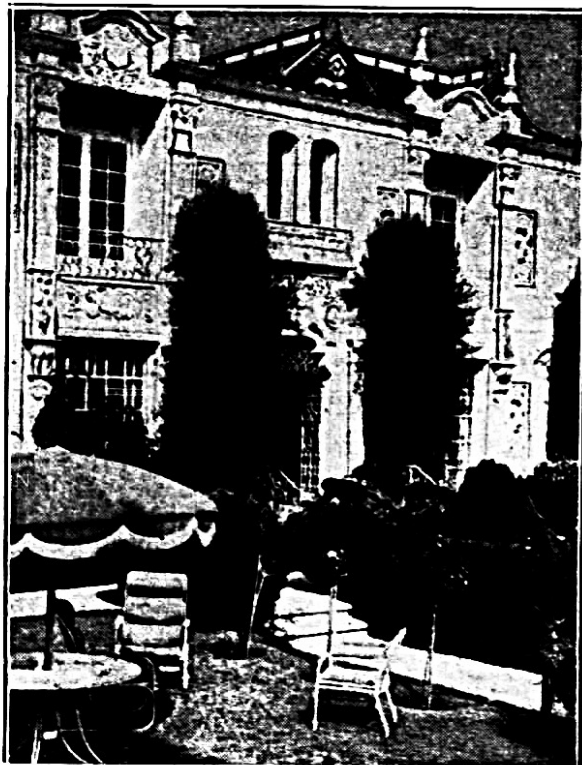
On Wednesday—the day of her death—Georgette, accompanied by Mrs. Gilbert, drew \$175 from her bank, purchased a round-trip airplane ticket to El Paso, did some shopping and had her hair done. When her errands were completed, Georgette had about \$75 left in her purse, according to Mrs. Gilbert. The girl seemed in the best of health and spirits.

Georgette told Mrs. Gilbert she was going home. That she did go home the police are certain, because, according to Atwood, the maintenance man, it was that late afternoon that she thanked him for carrying down her box. But how long did Georgette remain at home? Did she have company there?

At 6:30 she kept an appointment with June Zeigler at the Canteen. In her diary the police found the notation: "Oct. 11—June and I—Canteen."

Did Georgette scribble that as a reminder several days before? Did she write it for the record many hours later and shortly before her death?

THERE is a possibility that on her drive to the Canteen Georgette offered a ride to Sergt. Gordon R. Aadland of Boeing Field, Seattle. When Sergt. Aadland read of the murder he wrote to the police to say that on Wednesday, Oct. 11, shortly before 6:30, a girl motorist who answered the descrip-



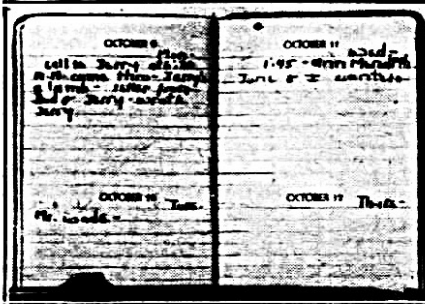
Spent Last Hours Here

Miss Bauerdorf spent much of her time alone in this beautiful West Hollywood duplex apartment, and it was here that she met her death.



Clue?

The diary [A] of Georgette Bauerdorf [A] had two important entries, one on the day before her death and one on the day of her death. Police wanted to know the identity of "Mr. Wade."



TO JUSTICE?



tion of Georgette gave him a ride a short distance along Sunset Boulevard.

"This girl was nervous," wrote Sergt. Aadland.

Said June:

"I was late for the appointment. Georgette said she was nervous, but she didn't say why. She asked me to spend the night with her, but I couldn't do it."

Georgette was nervous. The police made a note of that. But why? What had she to fear?

"Maybe she had a date with someone and was apprehensive about keeping it," Inspector Penprase suggested.

Georgette's evening at the Canteen on Oct. 11 was not as pleasant as usual, according to June and other hostesses who were watching her. A slim, laughing Army sergeant insisted that she jitterbug, a style of dancing which she disliked intensely.

"But she danced with him once so as not to make trouble," June told Penprase.

The girls left the Canteen about 10:30 P. M., saying good-night to the guard at the side door, who was there to see that no junior hostess violated the rule forbidding her to leave with a service man. June went to her home in Eagle Rock, a suburb of Los Angeles. As far as June knew, Georgette planned to drive directly to her West Hollywood home on Fountain Ave. At least if Georgette had an after-Canteen date she didn't take June into her confidence.

Heard Girl Walking About During Night

The post-mortem examination showed that some time between 10:30 P. M. and 4 A. M., Georgette ate string beans and canteloupe. The probability is that she ate them at home, for there was a canteloupe rind in her garbage can, a soiled fork, spoon and dish in her sink.

At midnight, according to Atwood, the maintenance man, who lived in a basement apartment directly below the Bauerdorfs, he was awakened by noise.

"It sounded like a woman's high heels clicking back and forth on the kitchen floor upstairs," he said. "A little later there was a crash as if somebody dropped a tray or something. Then everything was quiet."

Was that the moment, then, when the killer seized Georgette? Perhaps. Or maybe not.

A Bauerdorf neighbor—after exacting a promise that his name would be withheld—told Detective Ray T. Hopkinson, who sought to solve the mystery, that he was awakened between 2 and 3 A. M. by a woman screaming, "Stop it! You're killing me!"

Although such screams did not often sound in the night that shrouded the sedate El Palacio Apartments, the man who heard this turned over and went to sleep.

Was Georgette the one who screamed?

THE frightened Atwoods assured the police they had touched nothing in the apartment—except the water in the tub.

One look at the rag in Georgette's clenched teeth inclined Los Angeles County Deputy Sheriff A. L. Hutchins, first on the scene, to a belief Georgette might have been an epileptic who had died during a seizure. His belief was quickly altered by the report of County Autopsy Surgeon Frank R. Webb.

Georgette had not been an epileptic and the rag, folded diamond shaped, had been shoved four inches down the girl's throat. She died of asphyxia (choking), not by drowning.

Dr. Webb's examination showed that Georgette had been intimate with some man after 10:30 o'clock Wednesday night, but there was nothing to indicate that the intimacy wasn't voluntary. The doctor was certain that Georgette's right shoulder and right eye bruises came when her body hit the tub with force, such force that, her

nose began to bleed and discolored the water. He believed the scratches about her mouth were incurred when her lover, finding she was dead, sought to rip the rag from her teeth.

It was later discovered that this rag, 9 by 9 inches, was part of an elastic bandage similar to those manufactured abroad before the war. None like it had been imported to this country since August, 1939. Conceivably, Georgette could have had the bandage in her possession. Or it could have been owned by a soldier returned from overseas. There were no identifying marks or numbers on the cloth by which to trace it to surgical supply house or military camp.

Georgette's bedroom, Hutchins noticed, was the room of a careless girl—but there was little in it to mark it as the scene of recent violence, of murder.

A blanket had been tossed to the foot of the bed and there was an indentation in the pillow. But the sheets were neither turned down nor rumpled. A folded newspaper lay beside the pillow.

The bureau was cluttered with valuable jewelry and pictures of soldiers. Georgette's pocketbook lay open, contents spilled out. It contained no bills, none of the \$75 which Georgette was known to have had a few hours before.

The girl's clothes lay scattered where she dropped them. Her pink pajama trousers, badly torn, lay at the foot of the bed. The pajamas may have been ripped when someone stripped them from the girl, but the police were inclined to think that the tear was an old one.

On the carpet there was a wet spot. Had someone, then, rubbed away signs of blood? Or had Georgette spilled something and sought to wipe it up?

In the living room Hutchins found a number of cigar stubs, each snubbed out by being rubbed on the floor. Who did that? Georgette was not a smoker. Was there, then, some friend with uncouth manners awaiting her return from the Canteen? Or did she bring a man home with her?

There was no evidence of drinking in the apartment. Georgette was not a drinker.

It should be explained here that the apartment door had an inside locking device which the Bauerdorfs, including Georgette, kept in operation. Of course, when the house was empty, any one with a key could enter through the vestibule door. But when the inside lock was fastened, no key could unlock the door from the outside. Furthermore, the door had a peephole through which the Bauerdorfs could identify their callers.

The police decided that there were four possible ways for the killer to enter the apartment.

(1) He could have entered with a duplicate key while Georgette was at the Canteen and the inside locking device was not in operation. Then where did he get the duplicate?

(2) He could have arrived with her as a friend, or he might have been lurking in the vestibule when she unlocked the door. Then why did she make no outcry? Or how could she have been moving about the kitchen at midnight as Atwood thought she had been?

(3) Georgette could have forgotten to put the inside catch on the door and the killer, with a duplicate key, could have entered after her return. Again, where did he get the duplicate key?

(4) She might have admitted him as a friend.

In the vestibule a single clue was found. The loose electric bulb could not be operated by the light switch. It may have been shaken loose by an earthquake tremor. Or—it may have been unscrewed by the murderer. For on the bulb glass was a single fingerprint.

Georgette's car was missing.

THE vacationing Bauerdorfs, apprised in New York that Georgette was dead, could not believe that the girl died from other than



"Weapon"

Detective Lieut. Garner Brown examines the 9x9 inch piece of rag which had been shoved four inches down Miss Bauerdorf's throat.

natural causes. Nor did they return West to help the investigators. Georgette's uncle, Sam Wolff of Los Angeles, acting for the family, sent Georgette's body to New York after the autopsy and coroner's inquest.

At the inquest Deputy Sheriff Hutchins said that the absence of signs of struggle in the apartment supported the police theory that the girl was killed by an acquaintance admitted by her after her return home.

"Neither robbery nor rape appears to have been the motive," said Hutchins. "During intimacy, she may have cried and the slayer, intending only to stop her cries but not to choke her, may have shoved the cloth in her mouth and down her throat. He may have taken the \$75 to make it look like robbery. But he did not take her jewelry and police feel that a bona fide robber doesn't stop for rape. Furthermore, this wasn't rape."

"The police think the killer left in her car. Unless he was an acquaintance, or unless he was watching her as she stepped from her car, how did he happen to take her coupe?" the deputy asked.

Now the names in Georgette's red leather diary occupied police attention.

There were dozens of them and, when their owners were questioned, each had an alibi which could be substantiated by camp records.

There was "Oct. 10—Mr. Wade."

Who was Wade? Did Georgette have a date with him on Oct. 10? Or on the night of Oct. 11 after 10:30 P. M.? Wade never came forward to say.

One man who did come forward voluntarily—but quaking in his polished boots—was 24-year-old Sergt. Cosmo Volpe, Air Forces mechanic from New York.

"I'm the guy who wanted to jitterbug in the Canteen that night," he said. "I didn't mean any harm. I didn't know she was angry. But I just love jitterbugging."

Camp records showed Volpe had checked into his quarters before Georgette was killed.

Hoping to get descriptions of any service men who had paid particular attention to Georgette, police questioned 100 hostesses at the Canteen. The questioning was fruitless.

Next the Sheriff's investigators, with military authorities cooperating, checked the names, identities and alibis of all men absent from the nearby military posts between midnight and the early morning of Oct. 11-12. This, too, proved fruitless.

Georgette's automobile, gas tank empty and keys dangling from the ignition lock, was found the day after the slaying abandoned in a Negro section of Los Angeles more than 10 miles from the



June Ziegler, who met Georgette on the evening of Oct. 11, 1944.



Dancer

Sergt. Cosmo Volpe danced with Georgette a few hours before she was killed.

Fountain Ave. address. Badly smeared fingerprints were found on keys, wheel and door handle.

Fingerprint experts in the Federal Bureau of Investigation and in the War Department examined these prints and the one on the light bulb. (It is a police secret whether car and bulb prints are similar.) The prints, said the experts, did not belong to any known criminal. Nor did they belong to any service man, all of whom had fingerprints on record in Washington.

UPON the receipt of that news, the police began to wonder whether they had, naturally enough in view of Georgette's interest in service men, wasted valuable time hunting for a soldier-killer instead of a civilian slayer.

Now the police asked themselves if the killer was a Negro who left the car in his own neighborhood? Or had the slayer abandoned the car in a Negro neighborhood for the purpose of throwing investigators off the track? Or did he abandon the machine there simply because it ran out of gas?

The questions led the police to two Negroes, both of whom had worked at the El Palacio Apartments as janitors from May until September, 1944, four weeks before the murder. Both had Bauerdorf apartment pass keys from which duplicates could have been made. Both knew Georgette's habits. They had similar stories to tell.

One, Ernest Tate, 30, a second-rate prize fighter, said he and his wife quit as a maintenance couple at the El Palacio Apartments because they had to travel too far to get to and from work. It was 25 miles to West Hollywood from their home in Watt. Tate took a job with a steel company. On Oct. 11, he said, he worked a 4 P. M.-to-midnight shift, and was in his own home in Watt soon after.

He could, police figured, have raced by automobile from his work to the Bauerdorf apartment, killed the girl, and then rushed back to Watt. But obviously he could not



Happy

Georgette, in a happy mood, was snapped on a California beach a few months before she came to sudden death.

have driven both his car and Georgette's coupe away simultaneously.

The other, George Baker, 45, had also worked in the apartment with his wife, had also lived in Watt, had also quit because of the long distance they had to travel to and from work. He also had found a job nearer home. On the night of the murder Baker worked until 3 A. M. and then went home to Watt.

The fingerprints of neither Tate nor Baker matched those on the car or on the light bulb.

For two months the investigation lagged.

Psychopath Makes Fake Confession

Then in December, 1944, a youth, John Lehrman Sumter, 23, slouched into the FBI office in San Francisco and mumbled:

"I killed Georgette Bauerdorf." Sumter, a psychopath, later admitted he had fabricated the confession because, "I wanted to die in the chair because I had nothing to live for. I was afraid to commit suicide."

Nine more months passed.

In September, 1945, a 14-year-old school girl found an unsigned typewritten note lying in the street near her Los Angeles home. Picking it up, she read in part:

"Sept. 21, 1945. 'To the Los Angeles police—' 'Between now and Oct. 11—' a year after her death—the man who murdered Georgette Bauerdorf will appear at the Hollywood Canteen. The murderer will be in uniform."

Although the note was obviously a hoax—dark brown smears which resembled bloodstains on the paper were made with iodine—police kept a close watch on the Canteen during the period specified and for many days thereafter. Again, their vigilance proved futile.

In the Spring of 1946, Ernest Tate, former janitor at the El Palacio Apartments, was charged with molesting girls, and found sexually abnormal by a psychiatrist. He was again questioned about the Bauerdorf case—and again released.

And there the matter stands. Whose fingers bear prints similar to those found on the car and the light bulb? Who is Wade?

Those are two of pertinent questions asked by the police today—21 months after Miss Bauerdorf's mysterious death. The authorities still expect to find the answer to each and every question. They insist that justice will triumph.