

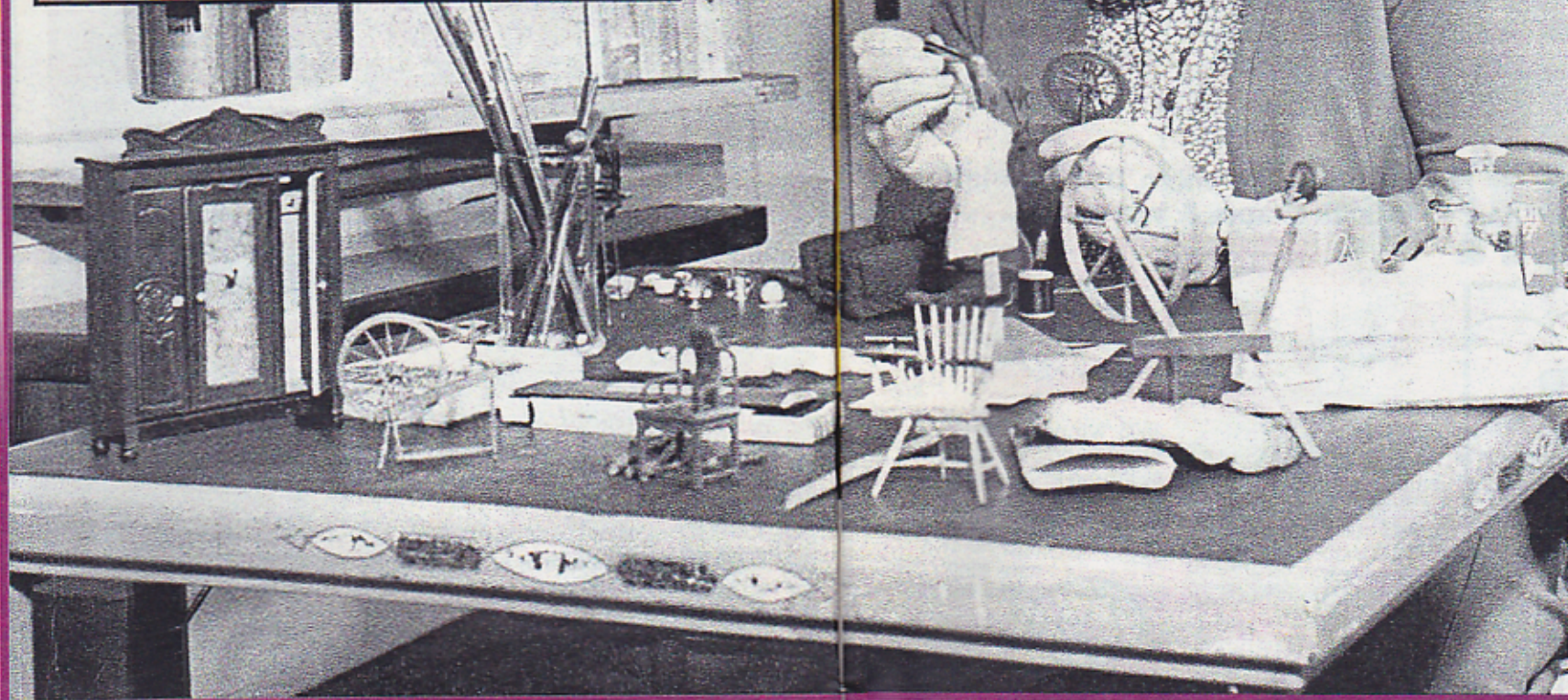
# WELCOME TO THE DOLLHOUSE OF DEATH

Heiress created perfect mini replicas of **CRIME SCENES** to help cops



A corpse in the kitchen

Bloodstains and an overturned rocker — OK, whodunit?



Frances Glessner Lee poured meticulous detail into her crime scenes. Her story is told in a new book, *The Nutshell Studies*



The Dark Bathroom diorama has a dead girl in the tub



The cigarettes are a vital clue in this scene

Dollhouse photos courtesy of Bellwether Gallery and Corinne May Botz

Photo courtesy of The Glessner House Museum, Chicago, IL

**S**TEP into Barbie's worst nightmare! A Chicago heiress spared no expense at creating 19 dollhouse rooms in the 1940s, each scene depicting a real murder with obvious and hidden clues as a teaching tool for detectives.

Frances Glessner Lee, whose father founded the International Harvester Co., called her creations Nutshell Studies of Unexplained Death, and they helped train so many detectives that she is the first woman to become a member of the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Now, a new book — *The Nutshell Studies*

Of Unexplained Death by Corinne May Botz (Monacelli Press) — details Lee and her fantastic dioramas of death.

The mini-murder scenes are painstakingly packed with bitten, hanged, shot, stabbed and poisoned mini-corpses, along with perfectly depicted mundane items, like canned foods, furniture, bottles, burned cigarettes and the signs of mayhem, like bloodstains, bullet holes and lipstick smudges. All these amazingly realistic rooms are still used today to give would-be detectives a model whodunit to solve as if they were 12 inches tall!

"People take them as seriously as they

would any other crime scene," says Dr. David R. Fowler, Maryland's chief medical examiner. "I've never seen anybody make jokes because of the degree of intricacy and detail."

### Hand-made props

"The quality is stunning. I have never seen any computer-generated programs that even come close."

A divorced mom of three, Lee set up her Nutshell Laboratories on her sprawling 1,000-acre estate in Bethlehem, N.H., after being enthralled by the work of Harvard-trained medical examiner George Burgess Magrath. Basing her rooms on real cases with

names changed, the pint-size depictions are filled with hand-made props.

In one scene, half-peeled potatoes sit by a sink. Keys turn in locks, tiny pencils actually write and a wee whistle can actually be blown. The collection resides at the Maryland state medical examiner's office in Baltimore.

One big fan of the often blood-splashed scenes is eccentric movie director John Waters.

"When I saw these miniature crime scenes I felt breathless over the devotion that went into their creation.

"Even the most depraved Barbie Doll collector couldn't top this."

