

Brooklyn's Mystery of the Phantom Lover

By Herbert Flint

Late last week this mystery remained altogether unsolved. It is one of the most extraordinary cases in recent years.

THRILLS for the lovers, plots for a Hawthorne, mystery for a Sherlock Holmes and psychological material for a Freud or a William James are all furnished by Brooklyn's "Phantom Lover" case. Nothing late last week lacking except a complete explanation, a hero or heroine, the identity of the villain and a motive.

The story covers a year's time. I began last November, when Miss Sophie Loderhose, of 1447 Dean Street, met and fell in love with a Dr. A. William Hoffmann, of Brooklyn, Millbrook, Long Island, and Pasadena, Cal., lieutenant in the Naval Medical Corps and a millionaire. Dr. Hoffmann was also possessed of a distinguished looking father, also a doctor, and a sister whom Miss Loderhose had known she says, six years ago, while both attended the Brooklyn Girls' High School.

Miss Loderhose lives with a much older sister, Miss Emilie. Another sister is Mrs. W. P. Phillips, of 817 Putnam Avenue, Brooklyn. Miss Loderhose's father, who died in 1915, left some \$20,000 to his widow and daughters, of which some \$3,000 went to each of the sisters. Mrs. Loderhose has since died.

For about ten years Miss Sophie alone of her family has attended Emmanuel Lutheran Church, of which the Rev. John C. Holthusen is pastor. She is twenty-six years old, blonde, with very dark eyes. She has always led a sheltered life of refinement and comfort, and, according to the neighbors, Mr. Loderhose was strict with his daughters. She was a regular church attendant and mixed socially in church affairs. She also wrote a little and read widely. A poem of hers, of more than amateurish quality, entitled "The Christ Face," was published last January in the church paper.

According to her sister Emilie, Sophie was anything but flashy in her dress and was not noticeably extravagant with jewelry. A quiet, home-loving, studious girl, who would shrink in horror from anything of an outé or morbidly sensational nature—that is the sister's picture of Sophie.

The Man

Then last November Dr. A. William Hoffmann came into her life and appeared to inspire love at first sight. In March Miss Loderhose announced her engagement and exhibited a handsome four-carat diamond ring valued, it is said, at \$1,500.

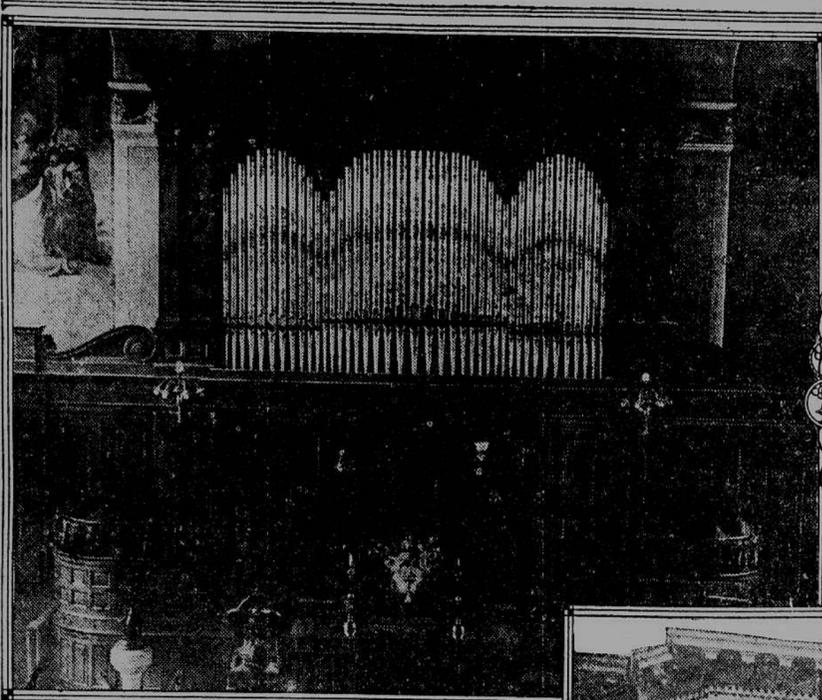
Hardly a day passed without some fresh evidence of her lover's wealth, refinement and devotion being shown. Orchids, candy, jewelry, telephone messages, some of them from Millbrook, others from the suitor's home in Pasadena, Cal., rarely failed. Sometimes the two would talk over the phone for an hour at a time.

Following a severe attack of the influenza in March, when he lay ill at his home in Millbrook, Dr. Hoffmann went to his home in California for his health, and also, it later turned out, to prepare his future bride's home. Before going he sent the engagement ring by his sister Edna, Miss Loderhose receiving it from the sister in Manhattan.

Dr. Hoffmann's illness and departure for California prevented other members of the family, except Miss Emilie, from seeing anything of him. According to Miss Emilie, he called three times at their home. On one occasion he was accompanied by his father, a distinguished looking physician with a gray beard, and the sister Edna. The father and sister were entirely in keeping with the wealth and culture of the millionaire son. The Pasadena home, a picture of which Miss Sophie kept in a scrapbook, tore out this view.

From March to October 29 Miss Sophie spent preparing for her wedding on November 11. In every detail it promised to be that of a millionaire's. Elaborate wedding gowns were proposed and expensive invitations issued. The wedding reception was to be held in the most exclusive hotel in Brooklyn. Attend-

The Strange Case of a Wedding Which Failed at the Eleventh Hour



The altar at which the ceremony was to have been performed. It was planned to cut through the four front pews so that the bridal procession could use the middle aisle. This picture shows the present organ, which Dr. Hoffmann, the "phantom lover," was to replace with a \$50,000 instrument

ants were to be Miss Marie A. Shay and Miss Edna Hoffmann and the four bridesmaids, Miss Anna Schriever, Miss Evelyn McKay, Mrs. John Jay Gould (Marjorie McKay) and Mrs. Charles Evers, of Boston. Marion Hoffmann and Rita Vollmer, a sister and cousin of the bridegroom, were to be flower girls. Harry N. Schriever, of Manhattan, was named as the groom's best man, and the ushers were to be Dr. John Cochrane, of Baltimore; Richard Vollmer, Henry Haase, John Obermayer and Robert McKay, of Manhattan. All of these persons, it has since developed, were unknown to the Loderhose family except Miss Anna Schriever.

Ready for Wedding

While showers and parties in honor of Miss Loderhose were given, Emmanuel Lutheran Church became the center of the wedding preparations. Though the church has a good pipe organ, it was the wish of the groom to give it a new \$50,000 pipe organ. The offer was conveyed to the pastor, who took it up with his parishioners. The church was also to be elaborately decorated, \$2,000 worth of flowers being used, and songbirds were to be released during the ceremony.

An unusual alteration in the church, which Miss Loderhose desired, served to impress the wedding plans upon the church leaders. The church was built after plans which won the first prize at the Chicago World's Fair. It so happened that the first four rows of seats extended clear across the room, so that there was no center aisle for the bridal procession.

What would a wedding be without an unobstructed passageway for the wedding party to the altar? So it was planned to saw through the four offending pews.

Then, on October 29, with the wedding set for November 11, the crash came. Miss Sophie got a long-distance phone call from French Lick, Springs, Ind. It told her that Dr. John Cochrane, the best man, and his chauffeur had been instantly killed in an automobile accident, and that Dr. Hoffmann himself was seriously injured. The following day a call came saying Dr. Hoffmann's condition had taken a serious turn. Later came a message saying he was dying, and finally a third announcing his death.

Miss Loderhose was prostrated with grief. She donned mourning, refused herself to callers, and had

her brother-in-law insert a death notice in "The Brooklyn Daily Eagle." It told of her fiancé's death, adding that the Mayo brothers, of Rochester, Minn., had been about to operate on Dr. Hoffmann when he died.

At this point the strain on the credulity of Miss Loderhose's church friends, who had witnessed the wedding preparations without ever seeing the groom-to-be, proved too much. Dr. Holthusen was deluged with phone calls from anonymous persons calling attention to the death notice and characterizing it as part of a gigantic hoax. "The Brooklyn Daily Eagle" was similarly deluged.

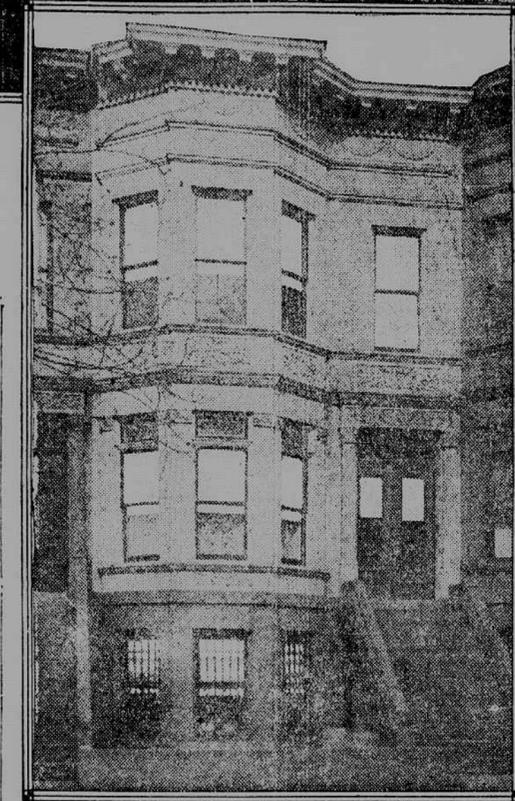
It had already happened that in the summer, while on his vacation, Dr. Holthusen had met a prominent resident of Millbrook, Long Island, and had learned on casual mention of Dr. Hoffmann that no such man was known in Millbrook. Dr. Holthusen, with "The Eagle," promptly started an investigation, which speedily showed:

1. That Dr. Hoffmann and family were not known at his supposed home, at 379 Clinton Avenue, in Millbrook, or in Pasadena.
2. That no automobile accident causing the death of three persons occurred in French Lick Springs, Ind.
3. That no such man was known to the family at whose home Dr. Hoffmann was said to have met Miss Loderhose.
4. That no one had ever known of or seen Dr. Hoffmann's father, sister or cousin, or any of the wedding attendants except Miss Anna Schriever.

Telegrams

In spite of this seeming fraud, the mystery deepened immediately after the death announcement. Some 250 telegrams of sympathy began to pour into the Loderhose home over the telephone from Western Union. Many of them were signed by distinguished persons, such as William Howard Taft and Vincent Astor. Mrs. Phillips was present with her two prostrated sisters when many of these messages arrived. No address was given on the messages.

Then followed telephone calls from some unknown person saying that all would be explained in time. Then a note was slipped under the door saying, among other things: "We are very sorry we had to do all this. If you do as we say



—Photos by Kaplan Service

No. 1447 Dean Street, Borough of Brooklyn, where the Loderhose girls live. It was here that Miss Sophie Loderhose received the many long-distance telephone calls from the suitor who is now looked upon as a myth

the sun will shine through the clouds again—sit tight and do not trouble us and we will see that you are not troubled."

What makes the case the more baffling is that from the start the natural tendency of outsiders to charge a hoax on the part of Miss Loderhose has been recognized by the Loderhose sisters and the brother-in-law, Mr. Phillips, and was frankly faced. In a statement on this point Miss Emilie said:

"I want to clear up the absurd idea that my sister faked the romance from start to finish. If she did this, then how can any one account for the telephone calls which I and others know actually were received? There was nothing mythical about these calls. The bell would ring and my sister would answer. I seldom answered the phone because of my difficulty in hearing over it."

Miss Emilie Loderhose was equally frank in explaining the loss of about \$4,000 worth of jewels last December. "It is true I lost these," she said, "but it is ridiculous to look for a connection between this loss and the engagement ring received by my sister in February. The loss, which was annoying but not serious, occurred while I was riding in a motor car with my brother-in-law on Christmas night. I assumed that the jewelry, which was in a pocketbook, simply fell

from the car. All efforts to find it failed."

At the same time no motive for such a cruel hoax could be suggested by Miss Loderhose or her friends. Was it money? She was not wealthy. On the contrary, the author of the hoax must have spent several thousand dollars upon Miss Loderhose.

Was it notoriety? What is the good of notoriety if no one knows who you are? The unknown joker certainly had failed in that.

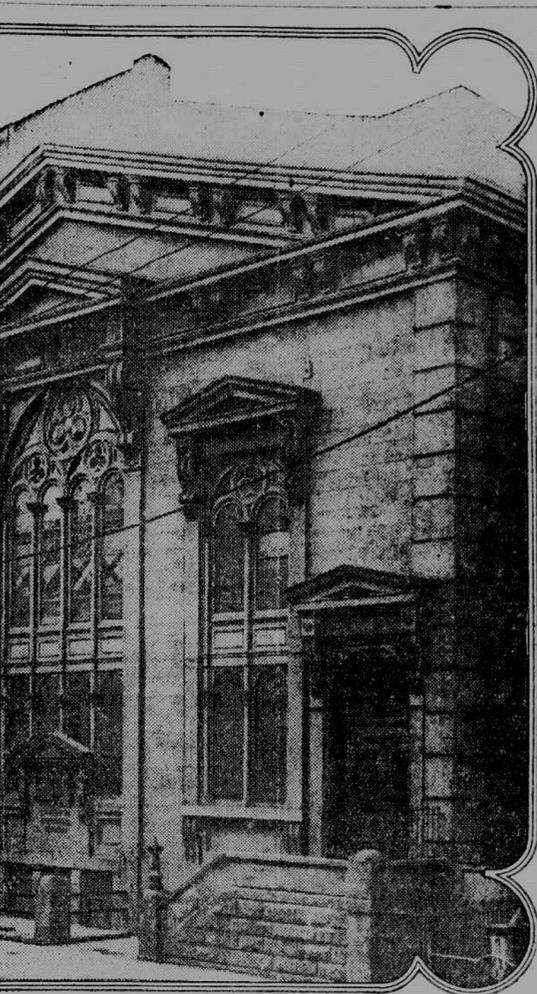
Was it simply the hoax of some rich person with an ironical, diabolical sense of humor? What could be more cruel than to raise a girl's hopes in marriage and then crush her before family and friends at the steps of the altar?

Or is the case simply a psychological study fit for a William James or a Freud—where not one person but several are bound up in a psychological tangle?

Testing various solutions of a mystery by the process of elimination is one way of solving a problem. For example, test the fact of Dr. Hoffmann's existence.

Dr. Hoffmann was described as wearing a naval lieutenant's uniform, but his picture, which has been destroyed, showed him in a sack suit. Those who saw it describe it as a theatrical looking picture of a man with a thin face.

Why was the picture destroyed?



Exterior of Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Brooklyn, where the wedding of Miss Loderhose and Dr. Hoffmann was scheduled to take place. This structure, by the way, took a prize at the Chicago World's Fair

It might be thought of as the first and most obvious means to find the impostor. Published broadcast it might have resulted in his being recognized under his true name and exposed. Were humiliation and disappointment stronger to Miss Loderhose than the desire to publish the picture and punish the author of her unhappiness?

Other slight inconsistencies have perplexed those who have been following Miss Loderhose's story. She let it be known in one announcement that she had been to a girls' school in Baltimore, which it is not known she ever attended. She also told church friends that gown-fitting for the bridal party would not start until a week before the wedding. This would have prevented the gowns being ready in time, it is argued, because of the extravagant scale on which the wedding was planned.

More Mystery

The fact that, so far, the places where the ring, the flowers, the candy and other gifts sent Miss Loderhose were purchased have not yet been found adds to the mystery of the case. The arrival of messages after the death announcement, which would tend to show that the hoax is not yet completed, further complicates the mystery.

If, as Miss Emilie Loderhose says, her sister has not invented the whole story; if phone calls and messages continue to arrive even when the third sister is present, then some one has spent a lot of money on a cruel hoax for no apparent motive.

As a love mystery, as a Hawthorne tale, and as a Sherlock Holmes case for detectives, the case as it stands to-day depends upon finding the unknown sender of gifts, phone calls and so on.

What of the problem as a study for Freud or William James?

Some light is thrown on the case by Dr. Robert T. Morris, the eminent New York surgeon and writer. Dr. Morris takes the view that this may be a borderland case of type where one person's seeing, hearing and believing things which others do not credit is a part of reality. Dr. Morris feels sure that Miss Loderhose's fiancé and family never existed, although some persons by

whom they were suggested may have.

"In scientific psychology nothing is abnormal," said Dr. Morris, in prefacing his comments to a Tribune reporter. "Apparently this case is like many others, where sincere, honest people, speaking with the words of mystery and also conviction, were believed for a time, because mystery and conviction, suggesting action, are positive."

"Both Miss Sophie and Miss Emilie say they have seen Dr. Hoffmann and his family, but no one else has. I do not doubt for an instant that the two sisters saw the Hoffmanns. Let me illustrate:

"People see and believe as they desire. The wish is the father to the object seen. If Miss Sophie Loderhose, all her life inclined to lead a solitary life, should have secretly desired to have a beau like other girls, it is not impossible that out of her dream desires in time the real love emerged, and she saw him in real life, though others may not have done so.

"Let me illustrate again. A man perhaps has eaten apples during his whole lifetime, yet he probably cannot tell you how many seed compartments there are in an apple. He has perhaps bought or caught codfish all his life, but cannot tell the number of fins a codfish carries. This same man may be ready to give quite an accurate description of the hoop-snake, which never existed. From the tales told at the country store his imagination has pictured a concrete form of snake which is imperishable because there are no facts to be entered in denial of his picture.

"But," it was objected to Dr. Morris, "you are leaving the sister Emilie out of the case. All this year she has been witness to her sister's love affair, the presents, the telephone calls. If Dr. Hoffmann did not really exist is it not reasonable to suppose that Miss Emilie would have discovered that fact? Would it be possible for Miss Sophie's belief in a lover to be taken up by the sister and acted out also?"

"It would," said Dr. Morris. "Nothing is commoner. Unconscious suggestion would do all that. If the two sisters were of the same type what one believed would be so strongly suggested to the other that both would believe, see and hear the same things. I know of many cases like that, and the persons who so believe what others know to be absurd are otherwise as sensible as you and I.

"Suggestion is much stronger than people realize, and is unconsciously communicable. If Miss Emilie had rejoiced in her sister's coming marriage she would have received the suggestion all the more readily.

"Why is it if you call a Bedford number on the Bryant telephone exchange the operator is likely to give you a Bryant number? Because she is unconsciously ready to hear Bryant."

"Images have been actually placed upon the retina from behind by disturbed brain cells. These are quite as real as images placed upon the retina from in front.

"The imaginative child actually 'sees' things. When one man shoots another for a deer in the woods it is probable that the image of the

deer has appeared from the brain side (from behind) upon the retina of the over-eager sportsman, in response to suggestion made by movements of bushes.

"Images of relatives are often placed upon the retinas of searchers at the morgue, so strongly that attendants have to be constantly on guard against false identification of people who have lost their lives.

"Sincere members of the clergy have actually seen liquefaction of the blood of St. Januarius, which is said to occur on a certain date at the famous Bleeding Heart of Pitou. Thousands of pilgrims have been attracted to the shrine and cured (by suggestion) of many ailments when touched by the miraculous blood.

"In this case there is not a primary retinal impression of liquefying blood, but the retina received that impression from brain cells which are stimulated by the psyche to place an earnestly wished-for impression upon the retina. The retina in such a case actually sees liquefaction of blood and produces a primary retinal image.

"The spiritualist actually sees departed friends. The negro who is fearful while approaching a graveyard in the full of the moon to secure the hind leg of a rabbit actually sees the ghost. He sees the kind of ghost he was expecting to see.

Captain Kidd

"This case is not half so strange as the case of a New Jersey farmer I noticed in the paper last week. If you recall, a negro woman dreamed that \$2,000,000 in gold had been buried on a farm by Captain Kidd. The owner of the farm sold it to another man, who paid a part of the purchase price contingent on the treasure being found. They turned in and tore up the entire farm without success. The court has ruled the buyer is released from his bargain. Can you imagine anything more absurd? Yet those people are like the rest of us, and voters.

"As I said, in scientific psychology nothing is abnormal. As a matter of fact, strange actions are more often the result of physiologic conditions than psychic conditions.

"A certain psychosis is the result of activity of a certain toxin. When, for example, do we think nothing of the ravings of a typhoid patient but confine other raving persons in sanatoriums? Given a certain microbe in excess in a certain case and the bacteriologist of the future will tell the psychologist what emotion he is to anticipate in that individual. Psychologists will then predict the course and influence of that particular emotion and its sociological bearings.

"Hysteria is not to be used as a terrible reproach. It is merely a common form of demonstration of toxic sensitization of protoplasm. It is characteristic of the hysteric to deceive, to produce startling results, to mystify, and to remain concealed—all at the same time.

"Some hysterics appear to simulate purposely and they have such craving for sympathy that elaborate plans are sometimes laid by them for the purpose of engaging sympathy. Deception by the hysteric represents a compensation. The keen insight and remarkable scope of vision which these morbidly sensitized people sometimes have would lead us far astray were it not for our knowledge of their uncanny desire to deceive being a matter of classified fact."

"But," it was objected to Dr. Morris, "you are leaving the sister Emilie out of the case. All this year she has been witness to her sister's love affair, the presents, the telephone calls. If Dr. Hoffmann did not really exist is it not reasonable to suppose that Miss Emilie would have discovered that fact? Would it be possible for Miss Sophie's belief in a lover to be taken up by the sister and acted out also?"

"It would," said Dr. Morris. "Nothing is commoner. Unconscious suggestion would do all that. If the two sisters were of the same type what one believed would be so strongly suggested to the other that both would believe, see and hear the same things. I know of many cases like that, and the persons who so believe what others know to be absurd are otherwise as sensible as you and I.

"Suggestion is much stronger than people realize, and is unconsciously communicable. If Miss Emilie had rejoiced in her sister's coming marriage she would have received the suggestion all the more readily.

"Why is it if you call a Bedford number on the Bryant telephone exchange the operator is likely to give you a Bryant number? Because she is unconsciously ready to hear Bryant."

"All of which does not solve the 'phantom lover' mystery of the Loderhose drama.