

THE ACCIDENT (TOLD OBJECTIVELY)

Cynthia Robertson

Four-year-old Cynthia Baldwin was shot through the right temple as she played croquet on the lawn of her home yesterday. She is in critical condition at Doctors' Hospital. John S. Brown, 18, a neighbor, told police he was aiming at a rabbit in his back yard which adjoins the Baldwin's property, and, when he fired, the bullet must have glanced off of a rock. The next thing he heard was Cynthia's screams. Mr. Mitford, the boy's stepfather and Dr. Rubin, his family physician, rushed the child to the hospital. Neither of the girl's parents were home at the time of the accident.

Dr. Shagrue, the attending surgeon, issued the following statement: "The bullet entered the right side of the head, moved backwards and is lodged at the base of the brain. There has been no paralysis and there are no plans to operate at this time."

THE ACCIDENT: A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

Cynthia Robertson

It is a typically hot, heavy summer day in Washington. A group of us are playing croquet in the back yard. I am four years old. As I lean over to strike the shiny ball, I suddenly feel an impact. It is more of a push than a blow. It shoves my whole body. I look up and for a moment, all around me is like a still photograph. Everyone is staring at me and there is a look of horror on everyone's face. "Noni, your hair!" I look at my long blonde hair, but find it is bright red and wet with blood. People begin to scream and my legs are like rubber. I can see each blade of grass as I slide down on it. It feels cool and soft.

But now I am in the bathroom of my house and the door is closed. Two strange men are struggling with me—holding me. The water is running in the sink and there is blood everywhere—on the walls, on the floor, on their hands. Who are these men? What are they doing to me? Where is my mother?! I want to tell them how tired I am. Please leave me alone and just let me lie down. But I am crying and screaming so hard that I can't talk, I just struggle to be free. Finally they wrap me in a blanket and carry me to a car. I can rest.

I am in a hospital, whirling around on a gurney. I am dizzy. Everyone is hurrying. Suddenly the lights are in my eyes. People are standing around looking down at me. They are pulling and tugging at my hair. They are cutting off my hair! Mother is there now. I can see her behind my head, standing very straight in the shadow of the lights. "Mother!" I want her to hold me, but she remains motionless. I try to reach out to her, but my hands are tied down. Her voice sounds shrill, almost gay, as she answers, "I'm right here."

When I wake up it is dark in the room. A nurse is sitting beside me, with a flashlight in her lap. Mother is standing beside her, about to leave. I want her to stay with me and I beg her not to go, but in a weary voice she says that she must go. She can't stay all night.

"What happened to me?"

"You had an accident. You must lie still."

It is always dark in the room when I wake up. I am afraid of the dark. I want someone to comfort me, but somehow I am different now, and untouchable. People keep bringing me things; toys and flowers, but all I really want is for someone to hold me and tell me everything is all right. No one ever does.