

GIRL FRIENDS DIE TOGETHER

Leaped From the Deck of a Camden Ferry Boat

POETIC IN SPIRIT, POETIC IN DEATH

End of the Strange Romance of Bessie Faust and Maud Hoffnagle Begun Six Weeks Ago

"Ah me, t'were sweet to die."

Yesterday morning two stylishly dressed girls, neither of whom appeared to be over 20, went into the Chestnut street ferry house of the Reading Railroad Company and purchased tickets for Camden. This was shortly after 10 o'clock. An hour later both were at the bottom of the Delaware and a score or more persons were dredging the river for their bodies.

During their wait in the ferry house there was nothing in the action of the girls to indicate that they had tired of this world and were about to penetrate of their own free will the unsolved mysteries of the unknown. They laughed and chatted with each other in the waiting room and while walking to the ferry boat City of Reading. It was 10.40 when the boat steamed away from the Chestnut street slip and headed for the New Jersey shore.

The two girls passed unnoticed among the many passengers on board the boat. It is probable that they intended to take the leap into the river which they afterward so successfully took while the City of Reading was on its eastward trip. If so, they evidently lost their nerve, for when the boat landed at Camden they were still on board. Although the ferry ticket seller at Camden does not remember them, it is certain that they purchased return tickets there and started back to Philadelphia on the same boat. There was a funeral on board and an unusually large number of people, and nobody paid any attention to the more than ordinarily pretty young women until the ferryboat was within 200 yards of the Chestnut street landing.

THE LEAP TO DEATH.

Here one of the deck hands opened a gate at the stern of the boat to attend to some duty connected with the landing at Chestnut street. No sooner had he done so than two girlish figures glided past him. Before he could open his lips to remonstrate the figures passed the deck hand and ran out on the narrow rail separating the deck of the boat from the surface of the river. Here they paused a moment and then leaped into the water.

The boat was then within two hundred feet of the landing. Although the machinery had been stopped before the suicidal leap was made the headway was such that the boat was half way into the slip before it could be stopped. Meanwhile the tide, which was flowing up the river had carried the girls still farther away. One of the two, a tall fair-haired young woman, was far out in the stream struggling with the current, having evidently repented of her attempt to kill herself. The other, shorter and darker, came to the surface but once, and then sank not more than a hundred feet from the end of the Chestnut street wharf.

The ferry boat Beverly had just left Market street and was headed directly for the first-named girl. The latter saw the boat and waved her hand as if to signal those on board that she was drowning and wanted to be saved. The tug boat Harry Scoville, Captain Evans in charge, was also steaming past at that moment and the pilot headed for the girl.

The latter boat came so close that Captain Evans almost grasped the suicide before she sank for the last time, the boat-hook with which he reached for her catching in the prettily trimmed hat which she wore and bringing it to the surface.

END OF A ROMANCE.

The tall, fair-haired girl was Bessie Faust, daughter of George Faust, of 721 Federal street, Camden. Her dark-haired companion was Maud Hoffnagle, whose widowed mother lives at 427 Reed street, this city. The story of their friendship and death is one as romantic as it is extraordinary.

The two girls had known each other for a short time. For the last month they had been inseparable companions. Both were talented and cultured and both had that measure of poetic composition in their make-ups that brings thoughts of self-destruction if the success which is striven for is not attained. Neither Miss Faust nor Miss Hoffnagle had been successful in the lives they had mapped out for themselves, and for several weeks they had talked of death.

Yesterday morning the two left the Hoffnagle home together. Miss Faust had spent the preceding night here, as was frequently her custom.

"Good by, Mrs. Hoffnagle," she called out as they started down the street. "You will never see me alive again."

INSEPARABLE FRIENDS.

Mrs. Hoffnagle paid no attention to the remark, however, as she considered it only a girlish joke. The girls must have come straight to the Chestnut street ferry. One wore a steel colored skirt with a pink waist and the other had on a pink dress. Their hats were of the summer girl sort and altogether they made such a happy, pretty picture as they laughed and chatted that more than one attache of the ferry house noticed them and commented upon their appearance.

The City of Reading left the Chestnut street ferry slip at 10.40 o'clock. There was a larger arrival on board and is likely that the two girls did not find the opportunity to jump overboard that they were seeking. At any rate they made the journey across and disembarked upon the Camden side with the remainder of the passengers. They came back upon the boat, however, before it started upon the return trip and took positions near the stern.

So many people were around that doubtless they concluded they would be stopped if they attempted to climb up the railing of the boat, and so they waited until the deck hands opened the gate. Then they

quickly took advantage of the opportunity thus offered them and leaped into the water. That the act was deliberate was proven by the fact that their pocketbooks were found lying on a seat a few feet away from where they jumped. The desperate leap of the girls was noticed by a number of passengers, and a woman screamed for some one to stop the boat.

It was too late, however, although several of the onlookers declare that Miss Faust at least might have been saved if the effort had been vigorous enough. The young woman was an expert swimmer and struggled to keep her head above the water, until her strength failed her. Then she went down to come up again no more.

POETRY FOUND.

The tug Scoville and the police-boat Stokley cruised around in the vicinity for an hour or more in the hope that the bodies would come to the surface. The Stokley continued the search until late in the evening, but the tide had evidently carried the unfortunate girls up stream quite a distance and neither had been recovered at a late hour last night.

The contents of the two pocket books left in the ferryboat revealed nothing as to the identity of the suicides, although they did furnish a key to the motive the girls had for killing themselves as well as a key to their character. Newspaper clippings of poetry of the sentimental order and several verses written in a pretty feminine hand formed a part of the collection. One of the verses scribbled with a lead pencil on the back of a sheet of letter paper read as follows:

We can but own our life is vain;
A desert void of peace.
We missed the goal we sought to gain
We missed the measure of the strain
That lulls fame's fever on the brain;
And but earth's turmoil cease
Ourselves. Alas! for theme is poor.
A theme but rich in fear.
We stand a wreck on God's shore,
A spectre not within the door;
A houseless shadow evermore,
An exile lingering here.

This was signed Maude and Bessie, and followed by a line saying: "We find we are utterly unfit for the world, and will try another." Another verse cut from a newspaper ran thus:

We start to conquer fortune,
Yes, and fame, but time reveals
That we learn to be contented
If we get our clothes and meals."
"SWEET TO DIE."

A second clipping contained a poem of eight verses beginning with the line quoted at the beginning of this story, "Ah, me, t'were sweet to die. A third clipping contained a short prose article of advice to girls about to enter the theatrical profession, while a fourth which gave the only clue to the identity of the two girls, was from a newspaper that publishes a "Pastimes column." The clipping contained a letter written by "Miss Bee, 421 Federal street, Camden," in which she described herself as a comely girl and told how she loved music and dancing, and disliked making beds and washing dishes. The writer stated that she was a good violinist and had been a member of an orchestra in New York.

The federal street address was evidently a misprint, 721 being meant. Miss Faust was not known at 421. On two sheets of letter paper in both pocket-books were measurements of female figures, undoubtedly those of Miss Faust and Miss Hoffnagle. An acquaintance of both young women explained these last night by saying that the girls had theatrical ambitions and that the measurements were for stage costumes. Miss Faust, he declared had gone out on the road not long ago with an amateur dramatic company, but the venture had proved a failure.

"Since then," her acquaintance said, "she has been melancholy, and Miss Hoffnagle as well. I saw both girls last Sunday in Philadelphia and had a long talk with them. Miss Faust was particularly downcast.

"What do you consider the greatest of all sins?" she asked me.

"Murder, of course," I replied.

"And what next?" she persisted.

"Why do you ask?"

"Well," she replied hesitatingly, "I was thinking of suicide. Do you consider that a sin?"

"I told her that I did, when she retorted by saying that she believed that any person had a right to make way with his or herself."

"I wouldn't like drowning, though," she added. "It makes one look so."

"The last thing I said to her as I helped the girls on the car was to cheer up and not to do anything rash until I saw her again. We parted with the understanding that we were to meet Friday next, but as soon as I heard of the suicides and learned of the contents of the two pocket books found on the ferryboat I knew at once that the appointment would never be kept."

A brother of Miss Faust called at City Hall late last night and told the authorities there that one of the suicides was his sister. He also identified the hat recovered as that of Miss Faust. He refused to talk at any length regarding the relations between the two girls, and seemed heart broken over the tragedy.

All yesterday afternoon and until late last night a crowd of the morbidly curious thronged the vicinity of the Chestnut street ferry slip in the hope of being on hand when the bodies were recovered. The crowd became so large in fact that the police were compelled to rope off the greater portion of the pier.

Deputy Coroner Woodrow has charge of the case, but nothing can be done by him until the recovery of one or both of the bodies.

BESSIE'S FATHER TALKS.

Bessie Fause was the daughter of George Faust, of 721 Federal street, Camden. Mr. Faust learned of his daughter's suicide through reading a newspaper story of the tragedy. "I knew it was she the moment I saw the article," said he last evening, "for the pink gown and hat worn by the one girl corresponded exactly with those of my daughter.

"Bessie and Miss Hoffnagle were inseparable. They had known each other but a few weeks. The two met at a tableau given by the Red Cross Society, and since then they have not been apart a single day, for they loved each other as a man and woman would.

"The last time I saw Bessie was Sunday evening. Then she went to Miss Hoffnagle's home. It was their custom to spend three days here and three days in Philadelphia in alternate periods. If separated for a day each would pine for the other.

"When they left Mrs. Hoffnagle's this morning Maud turned to her mother and said 'You will never see us again,' but no attention was paid to the remark, as it was not taken seriously.

LIFE SEEMED SWEET:

"As soon as I saw the article in the paper I sent my son to notify the Hoffnagles. They, too, discovered it about the same time and realizing its significance were about to send word to us. Mrs. Hoffnagle, I understand, is prostrated and my wife has been obliged to take to her bed. I do not understand why Bessie should want to die, for she had a good home and everything she wanted in the world."

Mr. Faust requested the City Hall officials in Camden to notify him the minute the body of his daughter was recovered.