

The Smile That Led to Murder

A Lesson for Thoughtless Girls in the Brazen Confession of an 18-Year-Old "Vamp" Who Progressed Step by Step from Little School Girl Indiscretions Until It Brought Her to Wanton Murder

WHEN the black-jack, pistol and monkey wrench had finished their work and the body of Henry Peirce, the wealthy Philadelphia manufacturer lay still and lifeless on the floor of his secret apartments that Sunday of November 21st—a quite remarkable young woman crept out into the darkness, wearing a smile.

It was Marie Williams-Phillips-Rodgers-Ross-Treadway, a girl of eighteen, and in her brief but busy career she had taken on and thrown off more "husbands" than she could recall.

"When I smile something always happens," she said. And that fatal smile has led this girl on, step by step, from the indiscreet flirtations of a school girl to the conquest of men of money or criminal pursuits until she arrived at a partnership in a murder—a hardened, heartless adventuress at eighteen.

When the police followed the clue that led them to her and her companion, Peter D. Treadway, in Wheeling, West Virginia, and they seized her, she smiled. She smiled and called the detective "Dad." On the train coming back with the officers she told the police to cheer up and danced about the car as she sang and acted "Lead Me to the Land of Jazz." And when the girl and her companion were brought into the solemn presence of the court in Philadelphia and were charged with murder the young woman laughed so merrily that Treadway, too, gave way to her infectious merriment.

The reader may turn to the photograph on this page and study the pair, sitting almost under the shadow of the gallows, the blood of the dead victim hardly dry on Treadway's knees, the struggle still vivid in memory of the onlookers—and ponder what manner of creatures they can be to laugh, nervously, hysterically, but with whole-souled amusement as if they were enjoying the jokes of a vaudeville comedian.

"When I smile something always happens," she repeated to a reporter for this magazine. "I learned that when I was a kid in short skirts. I can always 'vamp' men."

"But you're charged with murder now—"

"I'm not afraid to be tried by a jury of men. I can vamp them. But it takes a lot of experience," the girl sagely remarked with a twinkle in her brown eyes and the inevitable smile. "There isn't any rule to go by if you want to learn. You are either a vamp or you aren't. I've always gotten along fine with men. Now, coming over on the train I didn't know anybody's real name, but several were quite attentive to me. I don't know how it is—but it is."

"But women—ugh! I hate women. The first thing I said when I was arrested was that if I was convicted of anything it would be a bunch of women who would do it. But the men—now, they're different. I don't think any man would convict me, do you?"

"I'm a jazz baby from head to foot. I like to hit the high spots and I always get along well with men. But deliver me from women—they can't stay too far away from me! I'd prefer staying behind the bars to taking a chance with a jury of women."

"I don't know why it is, but whenever I see a good-looking fellow I just naturally have to look at him and maybe smile or something. Of course I don't think I'm really a vamp, but everybody has that idea, so I should worry. There's nothing to it but experience and I've had that all right. I don't do anything but smile; it's the fellows that do things when I look at them."

On her trip from Wheeling through Pittsburgh to Philadelphia on Thanksgiving Day, as a prisoner, Marie deliberately "vamped" thousands who mobbed the station to see her.

"Gee, I had more people out to see me than the Prince of Wales did," Marie exclaimed in triumph. "I guess they thought they were going to see something. It was a great reception. I had a regular time. Didn't mind it a bit. But I had to smile at so many people when I came down the platform that I would have tripped if 'Dad' (the detective) hadn't pulled me along."

"Dad" is detective James Mulgrew of the force who escorted the girl from Wheeling. It is doubtful whether any other prisoner ever had the temerity to call Mulgrew "Dad," but Marie had them all named.

The girl organized a theatrical troupe on the train. Some of the detectives were actors with her, while Detective Healey was the manager and one of the reporters the press agent.



Marie, the "Vamp."
From Police Photograph Showing Her Face, Features and Smile—but in a Better Costume Than She Wore When Arrested.

As part of her act, Marie grabbed Treadway's manacled hand with her free ones and sang "Lead Me to the Land of Jazz."

"Am I a jazz baby? Y'll say I am," she laughed. "I like to see and be seen, so as to let people know I'm alive. I like the bright lights and I like to hit the high spots. Above all, I love to jazz—oh, tra la bra-a-a!"

"You see, it was this way. I ran away from school when I was real young. Liked my studies all right, but there wasn't enough excitement. I never was very obedient, so I beat it. I knew a girl in a chorus and I asked her to get me a job. She saw the manager and asked him if he could hire any more girls. He said he had enough."

"So I went down to see that manager, and got the job with my little smile. It wasn't even necessary to give him the wink. He just said I would do. I played in a Cleopatra costume."

"I sang 'Mammy o' Mine' and songs like that."

"Did you dress as Cleopatra to sing 'Mammy o' Mine'?" she was asked.

"Oh, no. Cleopatra was the original vamp. Don't you know Ray Goetz's 'I Am Cleopatra' song?"

"I am a Queen of Egypt, known to fame; No doubt you've very often heard my name, Or perhaps my face you've seen On a local movie screen, Where I led the double life of love and shame."

"I am Cleopatra, Cleopatra the vamp, Cleopatra the scamp, With an eye full of Mascara, a la Theda Bara I wield a very, very wicked lamp, On all and sundry if you have a hubby, or a sweetie."

"You'd better never ever let him meet me, For I am Cleopatra, Cleopatra, the home wrecker of the Nile."

"And I sang 'You Can't Keep a Good Woman Down' in my Cleopatra costume. That was my favorite song. I was also a soubrette in an act called the 'Baby Doll Burlesque.'

tattooed the name "Boots" and below the design appears the name "Ross." The whole arrangement is done in red and blue ink.

"I had it done in Brooklyn," she explained. "There is a place over there where they do it. You don't have to have your leg done. They'll tattoo anything anywhere you tell them to."

"What does the Ross stand for?" she was asked.

"Oh, that's my hubby's name."

"Which hubby?"

"I have called so many people 'hubby' that I can't remember. Anyway, Ross is my real husband. I'm through with Treadway."

A man by the name of Ross Rodgers made his appearance in the detective bureau a few days ago and claimed to be Marie's husband. He talked with her for four hours and then went out and bought her some silk underwear and some food. The man is in the merchant marine and had been away for some time. When his ship docked at Baltimore he saw accounts of the Peirce case in the papers and, recognizing Marie as the girl he married in New York a year and a half ago, he hurried to Philadelphia.

"Ross still loves me," the girl said confidently. "He doesn't care what I do. You see, after I had been on the stage awhile I met Ross and we were married about a year and a half ago in New York City. We had an apartment."

"Where did you meet Ross?"

"That wouldn't look very well in print. We met, that's enough. I didn't run around when I was with Ross. Of course, I always had lots of friends. Ross went away because he figured he could save three times as much money at sea than he could on land with me around. When he got paid I always got the money, but when he wasn't there to give it to me he could save it."

"Then got lonesome and met Treadway one day on the Parkway. I smiled at him,

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"When I smile something always happens."



Photograph of the Pair, Sitting Almost Under the Shadow of the Gallows, the Blood of the Dead Victim Hardly Dry on Treadway's Knees, the Vision of the Death Struggle Still Vivid in the Memory of the Girl, Laughing with Whole-Souled Amusement, as if They Were Enjoying the Jokes of a Vaudeville Comedian.

Someone present remarked that Marie looked like a girl who could easily take the watch out of a man's pocket.

"I do better than that," she quickly answered, not at all offended. "I'd take the works out of the watch."

He took me to live with him and we both said we would consider ourselves married."

Never for a moment has the smile left the girl's face since she was arrested. In an effort to sound for some serious depths in the girl's nature, the reporter asked: "Are you not afraid of punishment for your part in the murder of Mr. Peirce—the gallows or at least a jail sentence?" "I'm not afraid of anything in the world," she replied, with her engaging smile. "What's the use of worrying about those things you speak of before they happen? If they don't happen then I have been sad all for nothing! That's me. I never worry about anything."

"You know I'm a Methodist," she exclaimed, suddenly changing the subject. "Oh, yes, I went to church when I was a little girl before I went on the stage. That is why I could sing all the hymns so well at the Sunday Service in the cellroom in the prison last Sunday."

And as soon as the service was over the girl conducted a little show of her own. Somebody in a neighboring cell shouted "Sing us a song, Boots." So Marie obligingly sang "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles" and other popular melodies.

Pressed as to her real name and early

home and parentage, the girl smiled cheerily but dodged the questions.

"Where do you live?" "Looks as if I lived in jail," she answered.

"What is your name?" "Which one?" she asked. "I've got lots of names."

"I was born in Margarettsville, New York," the girl eventually admitted. "My mother died twelve years ago, and two years after that I was left alone in the world when my father died. An aunt took me to live in the Catskill Mountains. I won't tell where she lives or give her name."

When she was six years old the child was taken to Brooklyn, where she went to the public schools.

"When I was sixteen I went on the stage—that is two years ago. Since then I have been kicking around in a lot of different places. I never had a girl friend—oh, yes, I had one," she corrected herself.

"I was while I was on the stage. I was crazy about her and loaned her my costume and everything. Then when my back was turned she finally stole all my clothes. That is one reason why I don't like women, they never gave me a square deal. I get along with men much better."

Jumping about from one thing to another the girl suddenly began to talk about the all-night trip in the crowded automobile when the murder party hurried away from Philadelphia to West Virginia.

"My, it was so crowded, with those two big men in the back seat and all the legs I nearly died." Then, with an attempt at humor, this worldly-wise girl added, "Really, it was such a close quarters I was embarrassed."

When the detectives finally overhauled the fugitives and they asked her to sit down for an examination, the girl quickly answered a question or two and then, with her smile, held out her hand and said:

"I've said all I care to now and besides, it is getting late for you to be sitting up. And, honest, I'm tired myself. Think I'll jump into my Billie Burkes and get my beauty sleep. I know you will excuse me! Nighty night. See you in the morning." So little did the shadow of the crime weigh upon her.

What a picture of brazen, boastful defiance of everything a young woman should hold sacred. At eighteen a hardened, conscienceless adventuress. Thoughtless young girls whose smiles seem harmless may well ponder the career of Marie, the "vamp," and her fatal smile.