

MURDER MYSTERY CHANGES GAY LITTLE FLAPPER INTO NEMESIS OF SLAYER OF MOTHER AND RECTOR

Charlotte Mills Turns Into Woman Over Night When Bodies of Parent and New Brunswick Minister Disclose Crime

Bobbed-Haired Youngster Who Grumbled at "Dumbbells" of "Nine-O'Clock-Town" Now Stalks Mysterious Murderer

THIS is the tragic story of the apotheosis of a flapper! A month ago she had no real ambition; lofty ideas annoyed her; her interest in life was intense but fugitive. Sweethearts she had, but they didn't inspire her; she loved rather to give her bobbed chestnut hair a little more of the enviable quality of flummage; she loved more a newly bought gay frock. She loved rather her pendant earrings, jet black or jade green as the spirit moved her or the color scheme required. She loved rather a bright ribbon to put to her hair.

She was such a little flapper, if weary of anything, weary of the drabness of her home, weary of the monotony of a small city and its small city ways.

Today she is transformed. A bitter tragedy has entered her life and swept out of it all its seeming inconsequence; swept out of the little flapper's mind all the frivolous nothings that swarmed it; swept out of her heart much of its bright and lovely flapper nonsense; swept the little flapper herself into womanhood!

Today she has one ambition—one determination. Everything she may have hoped for, everything she may have dreamed of, she now willingly forfeits. She pledges herself to one moving task: To find the murderer of her mother!

Tragedy Swept Laughter From Her Girlish Days

Charlotte Mills, barely sixteen years old, doesn't laugh any more now. Within her tense little body has been gathered the tears of tragedy, but they never rim her eyes. Today she is dry-eyed, a woman grown who cannot weep, obsessed with her single idea—to find who killed her mother, Mrs. Eleanor Reinhardt Mills, and the Rev. Edward Wheeler Hall, rector of the Church of St. John the Evangelist, one dark night in September.

Today she is a woman of resource, of mental clarity, of some forcefulness. The little flapper, killed by tragedy, is dead. A woman with a heavy heart lives!

And yet—and this is most bitter—flapperdom still clings to her. In her bobbed hair, in her chic little frocks, in her exotic pendant earrings, in her girlish conceits, lives the ghost of the little flapper who didn't want to die, beckons faintly like the fading memory of a well-remembered day.

The little ghost beckons and pleads for another brief moment of life. But it is only an incongruous little ghost, a pitiful intruder now—cut from the world forever.

"People point at me on the roads," says Charlotte. "They whisper, 'There is the daughter of that murdered woman.' But I hold my head high. My mother was the innocent victim of a jealous woman, and I am going to find her!"

In the little brown frame house—a kind of duplex apartment—on the second floor, Charlotte is now mistress. Her father, James Mills, stunned by grief, does her will. Grief and the suddenness of death have made his daughter the head of the household.

It isn't the most attractive of homes—but it is very clean. The kitchen, with its table and checker board in the center, and its stove, and its cupboard, and its innumerable bric-a-brac, is not only kitchen, but dining room and reception hall as well.

Charlotte, sitting by the table, in a white middie blouse and a short dark skirt, with her frizzled chestnut brown hair, is a startling figure in that kitchen. The atmosphere of the house is heavy, clear, like a hazy day with its dead lying in another room; somehow, like an empty house, it is hushed, sinister. And yet, in the midst of it, by the table, with an open book, sits the little girl, whose clothes proclaim "flapper," who seems as if she ought to be tripping along the gay streets in the sunshine, chatting nonsense with sleek-haired boys on the corner, swing brightly out of the prison of school, the day's lessons over.

Her Face Shows Strain of Days Since Murder

Only her face, strained and haunted, deny her clothes. Her blue eyes look out into the room, and see nothing there; they look out into the tragic litter of the past, into the hope of the future, grimly, constantly searching for the solution of a terrible problem never meant for children, never meant for flappers.

"Oh, I wanted to get away from this place from this four-roomed flat, from this life, before my mother—my mother, my mother—she made a half gesture with her hand, as though the words could not come to express the tragedy. "But now I must stay here. I must see things through. And I want to!"

"There was a time—it's gone now—when I planned to run away. My parents were good to me. They did their best. But these rooms were so dull, so drab, so monotonous. Sometimes I felt I must scream! I wanted to get away to see the real big things in life. I loved to read. I've read about the world and I wanted to go out to it. "My mother always went to bed early. Sometimes as early as 7 o'clock. Except on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays. On Tuesdays it was the guild; on Fridays, choir practice; on Sundays, she sang. All the other nights she went to bed early. She liked to read. She kept interested in things that were going on about the people here and the church and the war and politics. Over and over again, the church. But I wasn't interested in that stuff. I had to sit there, and the only interesting thing there was to do was to study my lessons—and that wasn't interesting either."



In the silent house Charlotte sits, when it "seems she ought to be tripping along the gay streets in the sunshine"



"So drab, so monotonous," Charlotte found life in this "9 o'clock town" that she often longed to run away



Mrs. Eleanor Reinhardt Mills, the mother, whose murder Charlotte vowed to solve



Study is about the only pleasure Charlotte Mills has these days, and it isn't a pleasure

with my mother. My mother was a much different kind of person from daddy; they didn't have much in common, but she never complained. They never even talked much together. But they never quarreled. "If any one questions her mother's fidelity the girl's eyes flash and the strength of her resentment and indignation makes her whole body tremble. Words fly to her lips, and cut the thoughtless person who insinuates like glistening, keen steel.

Knows What to Say and Just How to Say It

Strangely enough, this child—now a woman grown—is unusually articulate. Her nonsense, when the little flapper-doll lived, must have been hugely delightful. Her womanhood expresses itself in the pathetic-

ally girlish conceits which linger and echo in it, coolly and clearly. "My mother," she insists, "was injured to her death. She was the victim of a woman who was jealous of her in a church way." As a small girl, Charlotte didn't like dolls long. Just as soon as she could read she threw away her toys. "When I thought I was going away I didn't mind leaving daddy and mother and brother Daniel. They could have kept things going. Daddy even can clean the house. I hate housework. And even now I know that daddy or Grandma Mills will take care of the house."

Dolls, dusting the furniture, rearranging pictures, have never appealed to her. Here was a "gadding-about" nature, that suffers under restraint. But today she lives under restraint imposed not only by her tragedy but by her own deliberation, her own wish. She still attends school—the New Brunswick High School—and will graduate this coming June. She still stud-

ies her lessons, perhaps more than usual, because there is nothing else to do, but to remember, to watch and to wait.

Was "Wide-Awake Girl" in "Nine O'Clock Town"

Consequently Charlotte has come to hate the neighborhood of her home more than she ever did. Of late she has been going from relative to relative, who live in or in the vicinity of New Brunswick, to spend her nights. And her courage is something to be proud of. To have conspired all her

mer interests for her all-engrossing fore, I am appealing to you to come to New Brunswick at once."

If prosecution has been hushing up the case, as has been rumored, then this letter heaped coals of fire on the prosecution's head. If prosecution hasn't been hushing up the case, the letter was a stimulating reminder to renewed or increased activity.

Any way the letter is regarded, it is ingenious and scarcely the work of a flapper. It and the other letters are products of a sincere mind deeply stirred.

At the kitchen table Charlotte sits, cuddling her brains—and she has them—for a way out of the confusing maze that confronts her. Her friends used to say of her that she was like a car going 100 miles an hour and that she was the one girl who led while the others followed.

It may or may not be true. Today her most visible characteristic is a sorrow that weakens slowly but surely, that doesn't show itself in tears, along with a strong determination.

"If they ever find the murderer," she promises herself, "maybe I will go away. Maybe I will see the big things I've always wanted to see."

They say, after days of observation, that she is much older and wiser than her years or appearance would indicate. Troubled by the delay in the investigation by detectives, Charlotte indicated a number of tactical letters; one to Governor Edwards, petitioning assist-

ance from him; another to Ellis Parker, the famous detective of Mount Holly.

And both letters have brought results. Governor Edwards immediately ordered the State troops to examine the mystery, and Ellis Parker promised that as soon as his present work is ended he would assist the little girl.

The letters were simple and direct; the last was the most tragic, for it placed the local Prosecutor in a compromising position.

To Ellis Parker she wrote: "I am appealing to you to come to New Brunswick to arrest those responsible for the murder of my mother. More than two weeks have elapsed since the crime was discovered, yet nothing apparently has been done to apprehend the guilty person or persons. I know that you will not lose any time in clearing up the mystery surrounding the cruel slaying of my dear mother. There-

fore, I am appealing to you to come to New Brunswick at once."

And one looks at her with a curious twitching of the heart strings. If she were hysterical one might easily forget her. But she isn't. One wants only to help her, to make her life happy and inconsequential again.

"Have you never had boy friends? Couldn't they come now? Wouldn't they make these days a whole lot pleasanter for you?" she was asked.

Charlotte didn't smile, as the questioner hoped she might.

"They don't mean anything—now. Of course, I've had boys. Plenty of them. But they don't mean anything."

"Wouldn't you like some day to be married?" Her reply to that was rather amazing—but it was only the little pathetically gay flapper-ghost who squeezed in the answer.

Admits She Is a Flapper and Glories in Title

"I don't believe in marriage. I am inclined toward the free-love idea."

One doesn't smile at that—perhaps a little smile, a wistful smile. It sounded like the long bright feather looks on a rain-soaked picture hat. That is a flapper-ghost!

"If you met a real, nice man—a wouldn't you think maybe if you loved him you'd be glad to marry him?" The question was hesitant, as such a question, under the circumstances, must be.

But her reply came, clear and incisive.

"No, I wouldn't."

And the plaintive flapper-ghost holding out her slim white hands made one last plea.

"I am a flapper," said Charlotte almost violently. "I am just a flapper, I admire flappers!"

But, actually, she isn't a flapper any more. One could see that with half an eye. Flappers do not have dry eyes, which are more heartrending than tears. Flappers do not have such a haunted wistful face. Flappers weep easy tears—this little girl cannot weep at all.