

PROLOGUE



NEW YORK, January 27—The partly decomposed body of a middle-aged woman was discovered early this morning in the swamps of the Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge by two bird watchers. The woman had been strangled, and her fully clothed body stuffed into a plastic leaf bag. The Medical Examiner estimates that the woman had been dead for at least two months, although the persistent subfreezing weather has retarded decomposition. The woman is described as in her early or middle forties, 5'8", 115 pounds, red hair, hazel eyes, fair complexion. She was dressed in a blue suit, white nylon blouse and tan nylon stockings. The blouse was torn down the front but there was no evidence of a sexual attack. A badly rotted black seal coat and black fur-lined leather boots were found near the body in another leaf bag, but there was no purse. The body was removed to the City Morgue for further examination. Anyone able to identify the woman is asked to confidentially call Police at ME9-5627. (See photo.)



The photo showed the too obviously reconstituted face of a once handsome woman with short, curly hair and a thin, triangular face. The caption read: “Do you know this woman?” and repeated the invitation to impart information to the police.

Thus the *Daily News*. The *Times* apparently had not considered this news Fit to Print.

There were several people in New York City who could have identified the dead woman.

Señora Ramirez of West 126th Street had known her quite well. But the señora did not read the *Daily News*, which transcended her very limited knowledge of English. Señora Ramirez kept abreast of world affairs through *El Diario*, which, like the *Times*, had not considered the item newsworthy (“Middle-aged *gringa*, not even raped, so who the hell gives a damn?”).

Even if Señora Ramirez had possessed the necessary linguistic ability, she would certainly not have shared her knowledge with the police. Partly out of principle, but mainly because it might have meant explaining a certain twenty-one-inch TV console in her living room, the clothes with Bergdorf Goodman, Saks Fifth Avenue and Lord & Taylor labels, which looked so good on her daughter Margarita, and possibly also a Rolleiflex camera and a portable typewriter that had brought fifty-eight dollars at Goldman’s hockshop on West 125th Street...

The doorman of an apartment house on East End Avenue looked at the photo and mused, “Yeah, could be the poor lady...” He decided against calling police “confidentially.” Better not get involved. His duty to his family came first. What the duty to his family had to do with the dead woman

was not immediately apparent to him, but hell, the cops would make him go down to the morgue to identify a “partly decomposed” corpse that had been lying around Jamaica Bay for two months. Who needed that? Let someone else do it. Like that tall, skinny character who’d been so anxious to get hold of her forwarding address...

Unaware of the New York *Daily News’s* existence, Frau Katrin Peters, in Innsbruck, Austria, was trying to sort out her mementos into true keepsakes, to be taken to Vorarlberg, and trivia, for the trash can at her side. As is usual with such undertakings, she had got sidetracked by a box filled with old photographs. At the moment she was contemplating an eight-by-ten glossy. A square red stamp on its back said in Chinese and English: “Photography Department, Peking Medical School,” with an inked notation underneath: “March 2, 1941.”

The photograph showed a group of people posed stiffly against a carved balustrade. Frau Peters gazed fondly at the short, roly-poly figure of the Professor, front row center. This had been the last picture of him taken in Peking; a week or so later he and his wife had left for the United States. She herself stood between the Professor and tall, stooped Father Lorrain, who was smiling that sweet yet somewhat mischievous smile of his. The rest of the group were Chinese members of the staff, whose names and functions she had long since forgotten. Except Ch’en, of course, who flanked the Professor on the other side. Frau Peters wondered briefly how Ch’en had managed to survive in the People’s Republic. She decided to take the picture with her.

Frau Peters picked up a faded color print showing two tall uniformed young men—one dark, one blond—and two girls. One girl was tall, with short chestnut curls and long-lashed, slanted green eyes; the other was blue-eyed and chubby, her

round face framed by a lank brown pageboy bob. The notation on the back said: "Tom, Bill, Evvie and Kathy. Peking, September 1941."

Frau Peters grimaced a little. Chubby then, she was now downright plump. It was a good likeness of Evvie, though. The color of her face had faded to a pale ivory, more true to the living original than the crude orangy-pink of the fresh print. Color prints were still primitive in 1941 and faded easily... Joe had taken the picture. Both Joe and Tom were dead; poor Tom! She hadn't heard from Bill Snyder or Evvie in a long time. Martin had never met any of them...

Frau Peters dropped the print into the trash can.