

SOCIETY DEBUT ENDS IN DEBACLE!

Rhode Island social circles are agog at the dreadful events of this past weekend! Repercussions have extended as far as New York, Philadelphia, Washington, and westward. On Saturday evening Miss NA was presented to society in a Winter Ball setting at the Squantum Club. Daughter of HSR and PA of Providence and Cowesett, RI, her lineage extends back to the founding fathers of Rhode Island. Her great aunt, ACAB, a leader of Providence society, has guided her through the fall social events. Miss A's escorts for the evening included friends of her brothers from Yale and Harvard; and her parents' friends from Providence, Newport, New York, and points farther afield flocked to the club to welcome Miss A into Providence society. Attired in a dress of silver tissue with a shoulder to hemline drape of brilliants and matching silver shoes, acquired in Paris during her Grand Tour this previous summer, Miss A greeted guests with her parents in the midst of a winter wonderland of snowy trees and sparkling icicles in the ballroom of the Squantum Club overlooking the dark waters of the Providence River and the shining city skyline of Providence.

Someone – perhaps the handsome young Coast Guard Lieutenant who has been seen escorting Miss A on boating and yacht racing occasions over the summer season? - alerted Miss A to the possibility of a raid by Federal Prohibition agents during her party. Certainly, a disconcerting possibility for a young lady at the most important moment of her life, so far. Not only did Miss A rise to the occasion, preserving a charming and composed demeanor throughout the evening – she even found opportunities to slip away and check for anyone unknown amongst those filling the comfortable rooms of the Squantum Club. Most unfortunately, someone eluded this intelligent young debutante's surveillance; suddenly, Federal agents poured through the rooms of the club, and her father, PA, was placed under arrest. Worse yet, photographers accompanied the raiders into the club and obtained photos of such well-known people as the JDRs enjoying champagne and cocktails.

As if to add insult to injury, there were further calamitous occurrences on the following evening. A large number of out-of-state guests stayed in Rhode Island until Monday morning, and the As had opened their summer home, Cedar Hill, in Cowesett, to accommodate many of them. On Sunday evening, while guests were preparing for excursions to dinner or the opera, or enjoying the expansive comforts of Cedar Hill, disaster struck the stately granite home overlooking Greenwich Bay from the top of Drum Rock Hill. Not only were several guests robbed of money and jewels by two bold criminals who had somehow secreted themselves within the house, but it turned out that house staff had become involved with one of the "rum-running" operations which claim Greenwich Bay and cove as home port. An elaborate plan to reveal a "double agent" under the cover of the bustle of house guests going in and out was concocted by the rum-running gang and the Cedar Hill butler! Evidently the two crooks and the "rummies" were unaware of each other's plans.

What should have been a quiet evening and a time to offer moral support to Mrs. A, devastated after seeing her guests unceremoniously hustled about and questioned by the Feds and her husband under custody of those same Federal agents, turned into a further debacle! Mrs. A was relaxing in her room with her best friend Bette sitting with her, when suddenly the door burst open and Mrs. JDR rushed into the room. Thinking that she had come to say goodbye, since the JDRs were returning to New York that evening, Mrs. A, leaned cordially over to wish her a safe trip. Instead, Mrs. JDR flung herself at Mrs. A., screaming "You have ruined our reputations! JD and I will never be able to hold up our heads in New York, again." Alarmed, Bettie grabbed Mrs. R and pulled her away. In the struggle, Mrs. R. fell heavily, striking her head on the bedpost. The ladies were able to raise her from the floor and stretch her out on the windowsill until she recovered.

In the blue bedroom on the same floor, Miss MJM had retired early, assisted by her maid. Miss M has always traveled alone and is competent at defending herself from any adverse situations encountered during her travels about the world. Her maid had left her side to unpack a suitcase which had been separated from the rest of her luggage during her trip to Rhode Island, and only just arrived at Cedar Hill. As she bent over and opened the suitcase, a giant rat bolted from it. The maid screamed and fell heavily. Miss M coolly sat up in bed, drew a pistol that she keeps by her side from under the pillow, and shot the rat!

Meanwhile, in the adjacent large bedroom, the heiress to one of the largest fortunes on the east coast (who MUST remain nameless) was preparing her evening toilette before an intimate dinner with the son of one of Rhode Island's Tycoons of Industry. Stepping out of the adjoining bathroom to don her evening gown and FABULOUS JEWELS, she fainted at sight of her jewelry box open with jewelry strewn about. The robber had rushed from the room into the hallway and vanished through the rear door of the hall into the ell.

Evidently, there was a pair of thieves at work in the house, for almost simultaneously, a second man came rushing down the third floor stairs with a bag of money which he had just taken by force from the gentlemen playing billiards in the third floor billiard room. In his haste to escape, he missed a step and precipitated himself headfirst down the staircase.

Four of the younger guests were gathered in the second floor hall enjoying a glass of champagne before an evening out. The shock of the gunshot, followed by the fall down the staircase, and the sight of a second man disappearing through the hall's rear door must have been too much for one young lady – or perhaps, she had imbibed too much. Young people often think champagne can be drunk like water!

ACAB, who had arrived from Providence that afternoon to help Mrs. A deal with her house-full of guests was in the library with her nephew, PA, and the family attorney who had just secured his release. The group was discussing their predicament when they heard a scuffling behind the huge desk and found a reporter from the local paper, the East Greenwich Pendulum, had concealed himself there to overhear any juicy scandal he could get! He had done an admirable job of lying motionless, for he was not discovered until late in the evening.

Perhaps he might have gotten better "grist for his mill" had he chosen the dining room for his spot of concealment; for two Philadelphia matrons, former classmates of Mrs. A at Miss Porter's School in Connecticut, were gathered at the end of the dining table for a cup of "tea" and a spot of gossip, as they waited for the chauffeur and car taking them to the Philharmonic performance this evening. Speculations about last evening's occurrences flowed freely back and forth, some of them extremely "catty"! On the floor lay a young waitress with a silver tray by her side. According to the ladies at the table, she was just removing dishes when the chauffeur entered to tell the ladies that their car was ready – the butler was nowhere to be found. She took one look at the chauffeur, shrieked and turned to flee, tripped and fell heavily. The auto had been hired for the evening, so the chauffeur was unknown to the assembled ladies – but obviously NOT to the maid!

In the parlor, the handsome Newport millionaire, PM, who was escorting two of the New York guests – Diane, comtesse de Castor, and Mlle. Lorena Di Turchetti, to a private party at the Narragansett Hotel in Providence, was waiting for his town car to be brought to the door, when he discovered his chauffeur lying behind one of the huge parlor doors, unconscious and without his jacket and cap. Evidently, the thieves in the house had accosted him, stripped him of his uniform and stuffed him behind the nearest door. The audacity of the plan was that, not only would they have a motorized means of escape, but once PM and the ladies were ensconced in the town car, it could be driven to a secluded spot where the occupants could be relieved of their valuables. After all, how many people really LOOK at their servants as they are helped in and out of a vehicle.

But it was in the flowered bedroom on the second floor that the worst possible event of the evening occurred. Here was revealed the devilish plot of none other than the BUTLER. As the true facts were disclosed, the nefarious actions of a trusted family servant rocked the family. In the bedroom was staying a young Naval officer-pilot, who had served during the Great War. This young man had assisted in the testing of the Gallaudett Aircraft Corporation's "flying boats", which were heavily used during World War I. Here, he had met PA, who befriended him. He became a regular at Cedar Hill and a good friend of PA, Jr. (who was also a World War I Naval pilot). After the armistice, he was at loose ends and gravitated back to Cowesett. The Volstead Act had just been signed, and he realized that Narragansett Bay was a rum-runner's paradise.

Meanwhile, Luther the butler, had fallen into the hands of the "rummies". Whether it was a weakness for drink, loss of money from gambling or betting, or just wanting part of the thrill – Luther had been masterminding a plan which used Cedar Hill, during the season that the house was closed, (and daringly, once in a while even with a few

members in residence!) as a storage and distribution point for much of what came ashore on the west side of Greenwich Bay! It was a short run from the shore to the top of the hill, and the vast cellars under the house offered storage for many cases of contraband liquor.

On one visit, the Naval officer casually asked the butler if he could procure a case of good “hooch” for him. The butler must have recognized that here was a perfect candidate to join the gang of “rummies” – young, bored, daring, and without ties to anyone. In short order, he was introduced to Carl Rettich, the local leader, and became part of the rum-running operation. And now, his time had come. Recognizing the cover offered by the round of comings and goings in and out of Cedar Hill as guests for the debut of the daughter of the house enjoyed the weekend, the “boss” had instructed the young officer (one of the invited guests, which made an even better opportunity!) to meet with an operative who was felt to be a “double agent”. With the butler sneaking him into the house and to the young man’s room where he would be questioned, this operative’s life depended on his answers. Unfortunately, he gave the wrong ones, and was swiftly deprived of life!

Certainly, when this reporter set out to cover the entrance into society of one of Providence’s most talented and charming young ladies, she never expected to be drawn into a house of mayhem. The As will have a lengthy “row to hoe” to rise above what has certainly been one of the most astounding debutante balls and aftermaths of 1928 – or any other year!

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