

# The Short Arc of a Falling Starr

By R. Marc Kantrowitz, *Lawyers Weekly*, December 5, 2024

When Starr Faithfull went missing from her New York City home, her stepfather, Stanley, earnestly told the police that the attractive 25-year-old was virtuous, naive, and innocent.

Officers quickly discovered that little of what Stanley revealed was accurate. Before long, the trail led to a major politician who, at various times, had been a congressman, assistant Treasury secretary, and mayor of Boston.



*A beauty who died far too young.*

That was the least controversial part of Starr's story, for it is not known even to this day whether she was murdered, committed suicide, or accidentally drowned. What is known is that while neither she nor her stepfather, mother or younger sister Tucker ever worked, they managed to get by.

Marian Starr Wyman, born in 1906, came from a once-wealthy family who now relied, in part, on the generosity of a cousin who was married to the politically prominent and well-off Andrew James Peters. In 1919, Peters, then Boston's mayor, oversaw the police strike that helped launch then-Governor Calvin Coolidge to the White House.

Peters and his wife were most generous, paying for the upscale educations of Starr and Tucker while also providing money, gifts, and vacations for the family.

In 1924, Starr's mother, Helen, divorced and one year later married Stanley Faithfull, a widower. The children took Stanley's last name and suffered through his continuous business failings.

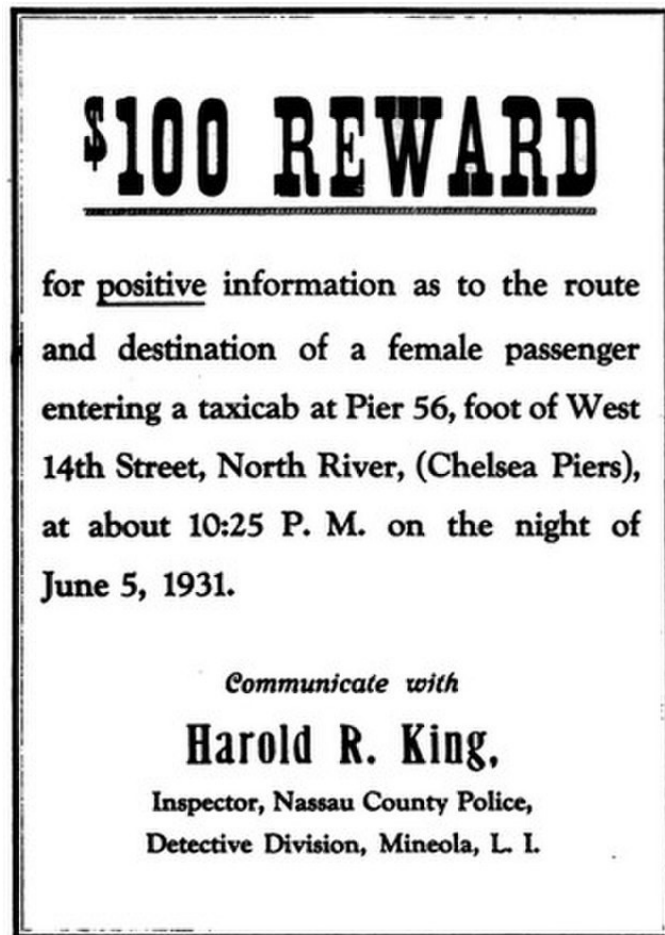
Initially settling in New Jersey, they moved to Greenwich Village after their house landed in foreclosure. Needing money, the bright and devious Stanley turned to the courts and generated income by bringing various lawsuits. He hit pay dirt though when an older, emotionally disturbed Starr revealed to her mother that Peters had been sexually assaulting her since she was 11. The shakedowns began.

To address Starr's trauma, her parents enlisted the services of an expert, who oddly advised hiring a "sex tutor" to teach her how to have "a normal sexual relationship." Edwin Megargee, an artist, unsurprisingly jumped at the opportunity.

To further "treat" Starr, using hush money from a bribed Peters, she was sent on a series of international cruises, mainly to England. Before these launches, gala parties were thrown that Starr eagerly attended. Once out to sea, alcohol that was banned ashore by Prohibition flowed openly. Exposed to a party life, Starr immersed herself in all the vices the high seas and New York had to offer with speakeasies, nightclubs, drugs, sex, and alcohol mixing with people from all levels of society.

### **Body washes ashore**

In March 1930, Joseph Collins, who apparently had entered and departed Starr's life in one short evening, checked himself and "his wife" (Starr) into a hotel, where she was later found beaten, naked and drunk.



*A police poster asking for information that never came.*

Fifteen months later, on June 8, 1931, she was found dead, her body washed up on Long Island's Long Beach. While her body had many bruises, inflicted



*Dr. Carr, who did not return Starr's love.*

before death, her stockings, dress, and girdle remained essentially intact.

The death of the attractive socialite tantalized the newspapers and public. The police launched an investigation into how she died, sadly coming up with many unclear and contradictory stories. One of the more scandalous details came when her diary was located. In it, she detailed many sexual exploits with 19 men, including "AJP," which led the police to Boston and Peters.

The police did their best to trace Starr's last days and discovered that, on May 29, she attended a launch party on the ocean liner Franconia to see a man with whom she was in love, the ship's doctor, George Jameson-Carr, who did not return her affections. Having neither money nor a ticket, she hid on the ship as it departed. When discovered shortly after, she was hysterical, highly intoxicated, and forcibly removed, yelling: "Kill me! Throw me overboard!"

On Thursday, June 4, she told her mother and sister that she was going to a party hosted by the noted publisher Bennett Cerf in honor of acclaimed actress Miriam Hopkins. That story, however, was countered by an acquaintance of Starr, another ship's doctor, Charles Young Roberts. He indicated that he met her at 10 p.m. in the lobby of the Roosevelt Hotel, where they then traveled to a speakeasy followed by a cab ride around the city.

The next day, Friday, the last time her family saw her alive, Starr was seen around the city and the piers. In a beauty shop, she was described as a "tall, slender brunette, strikingly beautiful." On the pier, she was found to be drunk. In an early afternoon cab ride with a man, Brucie, "who seemed anxious to get rid of [her]," she was admonished as she left the cab, "Don't come back [to the pier]." As she departed, Brucie told the cabbie: "To hell with her. I have had my pleasure. Take me back to the pier."

Starr also returned and spent several hours, from 5:30 to 10 p.m., in the cabin of Dr. Roberts, where they had a light meal at 8:15 or so. Departing Pier 56, she was put into a green cab, ostensibly planning to go to a party on another ship.

On Saturday, June 6, Starr's parents were greatly concerned that she had not returned. They also drafted a letter seeking additional money from Peters. Sightings, often unreliable, placed her in Tappe's Hotel, a hangout for gangsters near Long Beach, an entry point for illegal liquor.

### **'A rotten sleeper'**

The police initially thought she was murdered, with Peters considered to be involved in some way. The fact that she drowned with sand in her lungs and trachea and bruises on her body supported the conclusion that she had been held forcibly underwater. Her autopsy revealed that she had eaten a rather large meal beforehand, with surprisingly no evidence of alcohol. There was, however, the strong presence of a sedative.

This view shifted, however, when letters dated May 30, June 2, and June 4 that Starr wrote to Dr. Carr came to light. In the first, she wrote of her love for him and her wish to "end my worthless, disorderly bore of an existence," ending strangely with her desire to see him the next time he returned to New York.

In her second letter, she apologized for her behavior on May 29 aboard the Franconia. In the last, she again spoke of suicide, as he did not love her, and her desire to go out with a bang — having one last delicious meal with good drink and music and encouraging men who flirted with her on the street. "I don't care who they are. I wish I got more pleasure



*Mayor Peters, the respected politician who sexually abused Starr.*

sleeping with men. I'm afraid I've always been a rotten 'sleeper.'" But she also added: no window jumping, no drugs and a wish to keep "AWARE every second."

So how did Starr Faithfull die, a question an investigation and inquest could not answer? Did she meet a man like Collins who beat and killed her? Or one of the many violent gangsters and bootleggers who frequented the area? Or a politician? Did she attend a ship's party and throw herself overboard? Or accidentally fall from one?

Why was she so heavily sedated when she wanted to be "AWARE"? Why no alcohol? What happened to her outer clothing and accessories? What of the many bruises on her body? And with whom, as her autopsy revealed, did she have intercourse with shortly before her death?

Many books, articles, documentaries and works of fiction have been written based on her life. John O'Hara in 1935 wrote one such novel. Twenty-five years later, it was turned into an even more fictionalized movie, "BUtterfield 8," for which Elizabeth Taylor won an Academy Award for her portrayal of one whose tragic life far exceeded anything the screen had to offer.

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