

LOVE AND LOYALTY AT YALE

by

Samuel L. Blumenfeld

The first time I ever laid eyes on Richard Herrin was in the courtroom at White Plains. I had read about the murder when it took place and thought a great deal about the young man who had committed it and his motives. Now he sat at the defendant's table between his lawyer and the lawyer's assistant. When he turned and you finally saw his face, you wanted to stare. It was a handsome face on a large, stocky body. You stared at him because he was a murderer. Not just any murderer. Richard Herrin had bludgeoned his girlfriend with a hammer. A claw hammer. In her bed, while she slept. She didn't die instantly as he had intended, but she died hours later in a hospital never having regained consciousness.

In court I saw an old woman staring at him continuously. You couldn't tell what she was thinking. During the two days when Herrin testified, the courtroom was spellbound. All eyes were on this benign looking impassive face as he told the story of his intense two-year love affair with Bonnie Garland, starting from the very first day and moving inexorably, like the calendar itself, to the day of the murder. You couldn't help but sympathize with him. He spoke

so well. He answered every question so directly, without hedging. He was so obviously honest, so personable. He described so many touching moments. And there were so many love letters brought into evidence, pages and pages of love letters. My God, he was the perfect romantic lover, the kind you wished your own daughter would have. And finally he described that fatal holiday weekend, the events leading up to it, and the murder itself, in graphic bloodcurdling detail. Reliving it all, he finally broke down and sobbed uncontrollably. And after it was over, you loved him. You loved him for his suffering. You loved him because his motives were pure. You loved him . . . and yet you knew he was a murderer. And maybe you loved him because he was a murderer. You no longer knew . . . after watching and staring at Richard Herrin.

It is said that the greatest test of love is the ability to kill the person one loves. In fact, Truman Capote once assessed the quality of a ladyfriend's love affair by remarking that her boyfriend "didn't love her enough to kill her." It's a perverted notion, yet one that haunts both lovers and loved. There is always that moment of blinding jealousy or frustration when one would like to smash to a bloody pulp the face one has loved so desperately. But seldom does such anger actually lead to performance. There is always enough sense, enough composure, enough "love" to stop one. And if these are lacking, there may be enough fear of the consequences, cowardice, or religious scruples to inhibit action. But occasionally one takes the fatal step . . .

Dear Don:

Would you be interested in an article on the Herrin case, to be entitled LOVE AND LYALTY AT YALE: I have been following this tragic love story ever since Richard Herrin murdered Bonnie Garland in July 1977. They had met at Yale. A few weeks ago I attended the trial and watched Herrin tell the court why and how he killed his girlfriend. It was the most dramatic scene I have ever witnessed.

Herrin is an extremely appealing individual, and he has rallied around him a formidable group of friends and supporters. I talked with his lawyer who told me that there was much more to the story than has come out in the press or at the trial. The gut feeling I got from watching the trial for three days was that here was a very meaty, fascinating modern tragedy with fascinating people.

If you would like me to pursue this further, let me know. It's been a long time since my Rockefeller piece appeared in Esquire. Would love to do another good one for you.

Faithfully,

ESQUIRE

F O R T N I G H T L Y

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Dear Sam:

Oddly enough, I need a bit more time to decide on your Herrin proposal. It's interesting to me but I need to brood longer on how that interest will hold up. If you need action within the next two weeks, I'd understand if you went elsewhere. Otherwise, you'll hear from me then.

Sincerely,


Don Erickson

July 10, '77 Sunday

Burial Is Set for Yale Senior Believed Murdered by Boyfriend

SCARSDALE, N.Y., July 9—Bonnie Jean Garland, the 20-year-old Yale senior who was fatally bludgeoned early Thursday morning at her home here, allegedly by a boyfriend from whom she was trying to break off, will be buried tomorrow after services at 4:30 P.M. at the Scarsdale Congregational Church.

Miss Garland, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Paul G. Garland, was beaten with a hammer in the bedroom of her home in the Fox Hollow section of Scarsdale at about 2:00 A.M. Thursday. She died at White Plains Hospital that night.

Richard James Herrin, a 23-year-old graduate student at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, who was staying at the Garland home, allegedly confessed to the murder after giving himself up to a priest at Coxsackie, N.Y., near Albany. He is being held without bail in the Westchester County jail in Valhalla and is to be arraigned on a second-degree murder charge in Scarsdale Village at 10 A.M. Tuesday.



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