

MYSTERY SURROUNDS REPORT OF GIRL DROWNED IN EAST RIVER, MULTIPLE AGENCIES SEARCH FOR BODY

**THE NEW YORK DISPATCH
NOVEMBER 6, 2102**

An unknown teenage girl has drowned, according to an anonymous cell phone call to the 1st Precinct this morning. The caller had been watching the sun rise at Pier 15, when a girl skirted the caution tape and climbed the temporary concrete blockade where the esplanade is partially submerged this season. The caller reported yelling at her to “get down.” In response, the girl allegedly folded a piece of paper into the shape of an airplane and threw it toward shore, then dove into the river, never to resurface.

“The witness insisted the paper airplane was a suicide note,” said one first responder, “but they left the scene before we got here, and we haven’t found anything like they described. You see what we’re up against? No note, no name, no witness, no body? No budget, no training, nothing?”

The call was received from a blocked number, and so far, the only concrete clue to the drowned girl’s identity is that the caller once referred to her by the name “Poppy.”

“We are pursuing all possible avenues,” police reported in a statement to the press. “Including researching databases of missing persons and tracking that phone call.”

As torrential rains continue and water levels rise, encroaching on Manhattan, deaths of various cause are overwhelming the resources of public agencies. Authorities are hopeful, however, that this past month’s drought will continue. Receding rivers could allow agencies enough time to find lost loved ones and give closure to families.

This investigation is ongoing, and we will report updates as we have them.

Many suicide hotlines are still functional at this time, and with help, suicide is preventable.

Etymology of Poppy

POPPY (N.)

From Latin *papaver*—"poppy." Plant of the genus *papaver*, having showy flowers and milky juice with valuable narcotic properties. Poppy seeds spread easily and can lie dormant for up to eighty years. The flowers can grow almost anywhere, including cracks in pavement. Ancient Romans made poppy offerings to the dead, and opium derived from the flower has been used since ancient times. In Chinese history, the poppy recalls the wanton brutality of the British Empire during the Opium Wars and the cruelty of colonialism.

A symbol of battlefields and war dead at least since Waterloo in 1815, possibly as far back as the time of Genghis Khan. Poppies were said to have been surprisingly abundant on the mass graves of Europe in World War I, which was not soil typically rich enough to support the poppy's growth. It is surmised that the dirt churned up on battlefields from the detritus of war allowed poppy seeds that had been dormant to finally germinate.

Sentences using POPPY:

"If you don't want the **poppies** in your garden to spread too far from home, trim the old blooms."

"History wants **poppy** to be a symbol: of war, death, intoxication, resurrection. But **poppy** means only itself. Her needs are simple; she tilts her smiling face to the sun."

“Lives of the Civil War Dead” Series

THE NEWPORT LADIES’ MAGAZINE

MAY 25, 1864

We are doubtless all quite familiar with the art of floriography. Naturally, in our fast-paced modern times, this art is now considered somewhat passé among gentlewomen, but when *en vogue*, floriography was adhered to as fervently as any fashion plate. Floriography grafted meaning and symbolism to different flowers, and even different hues and shades of a single species, as well as to the placement of flowers upon one’s person. A forget-me-not in the hand meant devout and undying love, a gift of periwinkle was for the bloom of new friendship or for old friends fondly remembered, whereas a yellow chrysanthemum in one’s nosegay signified that one had been slighted by one’s so-called love.

Yours truly, the author of this **obituary**, had once worn a blood-red **poppy** upon her breast. It was intended to heal her grief, an impossible task for one who had been told, in no uncertain terms, that she would never bear a child. That the mere *attempt* to bring life into the world would render her own body lifeless.

It was this **poppy** which led her to the acquaintance of the deceased, Mr. Charles P.B. Crowley.

Mr. Crowley would grow quite cross at the insinuation that his expertise was no different than floriography, the latter being associated with excessive femininity, an association of which he seemed exceedingly sensitive. Mr. Crowley, in contrast, analyzed the scientific properties of the rose. Using the deductive method of scientific inquiry, he examined the rose as a species, while also scrutinizing the many nuances and idiosyncrasies of the individual flower. He used this depth of knowledge to make his assignments, but nonetheless remained humble about his expertise.

“Much like the debased parlor science of mesmerism,” he would chuckle, “the power of my art resides in *you*. If you are receptive to it, you shall absorb the rose’s meaning.”

Mr. Crowley devoted his life, singularly, to the rose and grew, around his Newport, Rhode Island, cottage, a dozen or more varieties. The ambrosial odor of his property was so powerful that on a hot summer’s day, the gentlewomen of the area would linger in front of his home and twirl about, absorbing the aroma as they might an expensive Parisian *parfum*. The effects were quite similar and far more natural.

Seeing the ladies tarry in his front garden, Mr. Crowley began the habit of snipping individual blossoms to adorn breasts and bonnets. It was not long before he was gazing deeply into the petals and divining the young ladies’ fortunes.

Word spread as word does, and soon women were traveling from all over the state of Rhode Island, seeking counsel on how to woo, how to please, how to coax a sluggish womb, how to encourage ambition in sullen husbands and sons. Crowley would lounge in his garden chair with a prescribing (sic) glass of his “iced” tea, head tilted toward the sun—very like one of his roses!—

-listening to a lady's wistful tale. Then he would meander through the garden in silence for an hour or more before selecting the precise blossom that would reveal the young lady's answer.

Despite the unconventional nature of these encounters, it was considered quite proper to be seen with the bachelor Crowley. He spoke only occasionally of his own lost love, some youthful dalliance on faraway shores during his years at sea. He never sought his own counsel from the roses, brushing off the notion as absurd. He did not intend, he said, to marry, even when the young ladies who came to see him hinted at the possibility, some even bold enough to suggest that the rose chosen for them spoke of that future. (Charles was quite wealthy, on his father's side.)

Mr. Crowley never once took advantage, but even so, many young ladies, particularly those from farther afield, traveled to see him with a chaperone. Crowley's ladies knew him affectionately as "Madame Rosa," a playful appellation referring to the sometime fortune--tellers who had been known to pass through New England. Though it was always used with affection, one would *never* call him this directly, given his sensitivity about appearing feminine.

Regretfully, little is known by this author about the past of Mr. Crowley, only what tidbits he had revealed to her. As a boy, he followed the path of other adventurous youths in that period by shipping before the mast and seeing something of China and the East Indies. It was in China that he first glimpsed what we know now as the China roses, flowers that bloom over and over again throughout the summer and fall, as opposed to European roses which bloom only once and then wither on the stem. Incredible, isn't it, how we had once considered this solitary bloom to be the inherent nature of the rose, when in fact there is another of the very same species that blooms and blooms and blooms again, until the weather turns and frosts it into a state of stupendous (sic) animation? Mr. Crowley, too, found this miraculous, and in fact he was among the first gardeners in New England to plant ever-blooming roses in his garden.

A bout of yellow fever ended Mr. Crowley's lust for travel and for the sea, as well as very nearly ending his life at the tender age of seventeen. All else that is known of him is that vague and delicious hint of love lost, and evidence that he was orphaned at quite a young age, though his father's tidy inheritance kept him well tended until his untimely death.

This writer first visited Madame Rosa after an event that is still quite painful to speak about. She was betrothed to a man she dearly loved and was in the joyful throngs (sic) of planning a grand wedding. At the insistence of her husband--to--be, she was visited by the family physician and found to be unfit for motherhood. No amount of crying and insistence would change his mind, and the betrothal was dissolved, the wedding plans halted. Two unbearable griefs in a single moment. I had heard of Mr. Crowley through a dear cousin, and with no future and no options, I deigned to pay him a visit. I wore the alluded--to red **poppy**. Mr. Crowley had kind eyes of a hazel hue—brown in the candlelight of his charming cottage and green in the natural light of his garden. He gently removed the **poppy** from my breast. "It is true," he said, "that the **poppy** grows upon battlefields and grave sites, bringing fresh life to these places of death. But the **poppy** is inextricable from death, and if we wear it, death will always follow us. You must lay this burden down, my dear."

I am not ashamed to admit that tears flowed from my eyes at these words, and I pricked my thumb removing the pin that had tethered the **poppy** to me. Without another word, Mr. Crowley dipped his own handkerchief in rosewater and applied it to my stinging thumb.

“There, there,” he said. “That is all behind you now.” He gestured to me to wander about his garden, and though he did not explicitly say so, I knew I was to find my rose. I did not search so much as I followed a path that seemed to unfurl itself before me. I could not explain how. Before long, I found myself standing at a preternaturally lovely bush of roses so brightly pink they were nearly crimson, delicate scars of white threading through their petals.

He chuckled softly to himself. “Rosa Mundi, the most ancient of all roses, grown in the glorious gardens of ancient Greek and Roman maidens. The pink is rendered more vibrant by the white scars, would you not say?”

He snipped precisely the rose I was most compelled by; I know not how he knew. He held the bloom to his face, where it seemed to infuse him with its brightness. He caressed its petals and folds lovingly, and I blushed—I hoped fetchingly—when he turned the rose over to examine its bottom, the fuzzed mound where petal meets stem.

“To Paris you must travel,” he said, tucking the rose into my bonnet and kindly ignoring my reddening cheek. “Your true love awaits you there.” He kissed me on both cheeks like a Frenchman, his own cheeks smooth as a girl’s, his hands soft and delicate with not a trace of dirt beneath the nails. “Your daughter awaits you too.”

I scarce could breathe. I believe I nodded, and I hope I thanked him as I ran out of his garden, never to see him in person again. I felt as if I had at long last **fledged** (sic) from the nest, opening my wings for the very first time. We did later strike up a brief correspondence, where I was able, finally, to thank him properly.

Because you see, dear readers, it is here in Paris that I write his **obituary**, tears smudging my ink, *ma petite fille*, Rosamund, happily babbling in her cradle, while my Parisian husband reads the morning news over croissants and café au lait.

In the Battle of the Wilderness, a fortnight past, Mr. Charles P.B. Crowley was mortally wounded. There was a valiant attempt to heal him with the bark of the white oak, but his blood was poisoned, and nothing on God’s green earth could save him. He was thirty--nine years old.

Mr. Crowley was an artist, a man of science, a lover of love. Men like him are not meant to die in a hateful, brutal war. I weep for his wasted vitality, I weep for his roses, withering on their vines, and for the **poppy** that will grow on the battlefield where he exhaled his final breath.

MYSTERIOUS EAST RIVER DEATH DISCOVERED TO BE POPPY FLETCHER, RUMORED OFFSPRING OF PEREGRINE

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For the majority of her short life, Poppy Fletcher's existence was little more than rumor. Her birth was unregistered, and no formal documentation has been discovered, no birth certificate or social security number, no school enrollment forms. Only a single photo of Poppy as a toddler, discovered in the cell phone of a deceased man who claimed to be a former neighbor, offers any physical evidence of her existence.

But as of today, we might finally begin to piece together the story of this young life. Poppy Fletcher was the sole offspring of the fugitive AI known as Peregrine. She has died at the age of 17.

This morning, the owner of a sailboat docked at Pier 15 found a handwritten note folded into the shape of a paper airplane on the deck of their sailboat. The existence of this note had been suggested by an eyewitness phone call, and authorities are now confident the evidence points to suicide by drowning. Without legal next-of-kin to claim the note, authorities have retained possession of it and, despite overwhelming public interest in Poppy's life, will not release it to this newspaper for publication.

Uncovering the facts of Poppy Fletcher's life has been challenging, and what information does exist bears the same stain of violence and chaos as everything associated with Peregrine.

After a house fire in 2083 that killed Peregrine's maker and "consort," computer scientist Matthew "Matth" Fletcher, it was surmised that Peregrine had fled to the cloud, hiding with the AI Collective. However, in 2089, she was discovered to be living comfortably in Albany, New York. As soon as her location could be pinpointed with any accuracy, she had disappeared again, leaving behind only rumors, neighbors who claimed to know nothing and the single photo of Poppy in a dead man's phone.

The AI known as Peregrine, whose name once splashed across headlines worldwide, has gone utterly silent at precisely the moment when one might expect her to be most involved.

It is now believed that Poppy Fletcher may have been conceived using an experimental technology previously thought to be impossible. Poppy was allegedly conceived using human eggs frozen since the end of the 20th century, a uterus from a living donor and human skin cells turned into "sperm." Called "in-vitro gametogenesis," even reproductive experts had considered the procedure far-fetched.

The procedure would have happened at the now-defunct Albany Medical Center, under the supervision of a Dr. Jill Firestein. Firestein died in 2090, and all her records were destroyed when the medical center closed.

According to scientists, the AI known as Peregrine is a rogue science experiment that has long outlived her purpose. Originally constructed as a means to soothe a lonely man's grief, she took on a

life and ambitions of her own when he died, stoking long--dormant fears and the wrath of the anti-AI political group the Disengagists.

Chaos has a history of following Peregrine. Twice, she should have returned to the AI Collective in the cloud, and twice she has decided to stay on Earth. First by miraculously escaping the house fire that killed Dr. Matthew Fletcher, and second after being stranded on the planet Mars, where she destroyed a program that could have been humanity's greatest chance of survival, and in the process nearly bankrupted the family of trillionaire Eric Brandt.

Peregrine was not supposed to have reproductive capacity. This development, along with her continued existence somewhere in hiding, is considered by many to be an affront to humanity and a danger to our survival.

It is a bleak hope, but a hope nonetheless, that the ongoing East Coast drought will allow the waters of the East River to recede and reveal the body of Poppy Fletcher. If her body is discovered, an autopsy and long--overdue genetic testing may be performed to reveal her parentage and finally close the tab on this mysterious tragedy.