

# SLIVERS, THE CLOWN SUICIDE FOR A GIRL

## Man Who Amused Millions Dies When Bedford Reformatory Inmate Refuses Him.

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#### Sought to Marry Her, but Institu- tion Had Changed Her View- point and Life Ambition.

Twelve hours after the girl who had been sent to the Bedford Reformatory for stealing his jewels, nearly three years ago, had refused to marry him and get a parole from the institution, Frank Oakley, otherwise known as "Slivers," the famous Hippodrome and Barnum & Bailey clown, committed suicide with gas in his room at 308 West Seventy-first Street.

A friend of the clown received a letter from Mrs. Mary Rebecca Moore, Superintendent of the institution, yesterday morning, telling him that the girl had told her she wanted no more of "Slivers"; and when the friend called at the house to break the news he learned that "Slivers" had killed himself shortly after midnight.

Mrs. Moore had not communicated with "Slivers" direct, and it will never be known whether he had been told that the girl had refused the chance for a fresh start with him. But his friends believe that he had other sources of information than the authorities, and that an intimation from some one about the reformatory had convinced him that he had no chance of getting the girl to throw in her fortunes with his. No other motive is known for the suicide.

It was early in 1913 that "Slivers" was playing in Utica in the same vaudeville bill with Viola Stoll, a pretty blond not yet seventeen years old. One night she told him, crying, that she had lost her job. The clown was well over forty, and when he offered her a ticket to New York she accepted. A day or so later he came here himself and kept in communication with her, and learned that her money was giving out. The middle-aged man was her only friend, and when he proposed to the girl that she come and live with him she accepted.

#### "Here's Some Jewelry for You."

Oakley's wife had left him about five years before that, and he had an apartment at 520 West 139th Street. The pair had lived together for several weeks when Oakley came home one day and said to the girl, "Here's some jewelry for you."

The gems were worth about \$5,000, and had been the property of Oakley's wife, who had died about the time he set up the establishment with Viola Stoll. Oakley said later that he never meant them as a gift. Viola said she thought he did. Anyway, when the time came that the girl began to feel a revulsion for the man much older than herself she decided to run away and take the jewels with her.

The police set to work, and a month afterward Detective Frank Connors went to St. Louis and arrested the girl at the home of her stepfather. She had pawned one diamond piece for \$200, but the other jewels she still had.

Viola was sentenced to three years in Bedford and for a long time Oakley saw or heard nothing of her. Then, about six months ago, he met her mother, also an actress, in Chicago. When her mother reminded him that Viola was coming out of the reformatory this Summer, and told him something of how she was getting along, she began to haunt him again.

When he came back to New York he got into communication with George Young, secretary to George S. Dougherty, when he was Deputy Police Commissioner, and last Wednesday Oakley and Young went to the reformatory. Oakley told Mrs. Moore he wanted to marry the girl and take her away with him.

#### Girl Has New Viewpoint on Life.

There were a good many obstacles. The new parole law forbids persons paroled to leave the State, and Oakley had just signed a contract with Barnum & Bailey to go to the Pacific Coast. However Oakley persuaded Mrs. Moore to tell the girl he wanted to marry her at once and take her away.

But in her two years and a half at Bedford Viola Stoll had come to look at things in a new light. She had had enough of the stage, she said; she wanted some quiet place to settle down. She was looking for a home, and partnership with a traveling clown didn't appeal to her. Moreover, she had forgotten the man who had paid her railroad fare to New York when she was stranded in Utica, and remembered only the man thirty years older than herself who had taken her into an irregular household, and had finally accused her of stealing jewels that she had regarded as a gift. So she said she wouldn't marry Oakley under any circumstances; that she would serve her term, and she begged Mrs. Moore not to let the clown know of her whereabouts after she left the reformatory.

On Thursday night Mrs. Moore wrote to one of Oakley's friends, who was to be the medium of communication, and told him what the girl had said. And yesterday morning before the message had reached him, at least by that route, Oakley had killed himself.

The dead clown had a wide acquaintance, and there was much sadness yesterday when his suicide became known. One of his old associates was Clyde W. Powers, who appeared as a clown at the Hippodrome when "Slivers" was there in his baseball pantomime.

#### Began in Barnum's Cook Tent.

"When Slivers finally landed with Barnum & Bailey," said Mr. Powers, "he got a job in the cook tent, doing chores. Everybody liked the boy, but his best friend was 'Nosey' Monroe, the elephant keeper. He used to let the boy practice leaping over the elephants between performances, and finally Slivers made his first appearance before an assemblage which included almost everybody attached to the circus. His friends shouldered him out of the tent on their shoulders that day.

"When Slivers came to the Hippodrome, facing audiences of a different type, he studied them carefully, at the same time studying his art as patiently and faithfully as an opera singer."

Outside of the tent he was a serious-minded man. One day he said to a friend:

"I never see the lights go on and hear the band strike up for the grand procession but I think of Dan Luby—a great clown and a good friend of mine—my side partner. A good many years ago, some place in Indiana, we marched together into the big tent behind the elephants. Dan was feeling lowspirited and had been talking all day about a hunch that something was going to happen. But I cheered him up, and we frolicked along till the grand entry was over.

"Then they brought out the elephants and Dan and I began to jump over their backs. At least Dan did—he was a good jumper, and I was the faker, the fellow who tries to jump and makes all sorts of funny tumbles. Of course Dan had to 'horse' his act, too, but just the same he had to put over his thriller.

#### Laughed in Presence of Death.

"Well, the time came for him to jump from a springboard over four elephants. He got away in good shape, but in clearing the last beast he didn't right himself, and hit the tanbark flat on his back. The crowd yelled with laughter—funny stuff to see. I knew what had happened; we all knew. But it was the first night of a three-day stay, and we couldn't afford to do anything to make that bunch unhappy. I flip-flopped up to the best friend I had on earth, and he lay there dead with his back broken. Up came the other clowns. We picked him up and carried poor Dan off, doing funny stuff while the crowd roared with laughter. When we got Dan behind the scenes we cried over him."

Slivers's funeral service will be at Stephen Merritt's Chapel, 223 Eighth Avenue, at 6:30 o'clock tomorrow evening.