

Information for Episode #11

Mrs. LeBoeuf Breaks the Rules

"The wise murderess will take care to observe a few simple restrictions. She overrides these at her peril.... 1. *If you decide to murder your husband you must never act in concert with a lover.* In comment upon this rule it must be added that a lover should appear nowhere in the record; not a sign, not a suspicion, not even a shoelace of his."

--Edmund Lester Pearson, *Rules for Murderesses*

Mrs. Ada Bonner LeBoeuf of Morgan City, Louisiana, found her husband James annoying. Or perhaps it was the case that her paramour, the also-married Dr. Thomas E. Dreher, the country doctor who delivered her four children, simply outshone Mr. LeBoeuf in certain respects. Regardless, Mrs. LeBoeuf and Dr. Dreher found themselves madly in love but suffering from an impediment that a divorce attorney could have cleared up in a jiffy; alas, this simple answer apparently occurred to neither of them until it was far too late.

The doctor settled on an old-fashioned cure, hiring one James Beadle, described in the papers as a trapper, to put an end to Mr. LeBoeuf. A civil shot to the head would have sufficed to remove the offending husband from the face of the earth, but the trapper carried out his assignment on July 1, 1927, with grim vigor, electing to mutilate the poor man's corpse before throwing it in a lake. The trapper labored under the misimpression that a punctured body would more readily sink to the bottom.

Needless to say (or you would not be reading of it here and now), the scheme unraveled. The first-degree murder trial that followed a month after the murder of Mr. LeBoeuf was billed in the press as one of the Southland's most sensational legal battles, since, it was reported, the South hadn't convicted and hanged a white woman for murder since Reconstruction days, and Louisiana had *never* hanged a white woman for murder, not even in the days of French and Spanish rule.

The trial was a cross-country sensation. The state produced nearly a dozen witnesses who testified to the details of the scandal. Per these many witnesses, the light-o'-loves carried on their small-town affair in the "negro shacks" on the outskirts of the village. The evidence included love letters that were read aloud. The state also tried to establish that Mr. LeBoeuf caught wind of the dalliance in the days before his death.

It was reported that the doctor spent the proceedings mopping his brow furiously while the black widow watched the clock. The trapper, whose conflicting statements and recanted confession had brought them all down, chewed his wad of tobacco. The trapper escaped a death sentence. But the remaining two defendants were sentenced to perish at the hands of the executioner.

Following the trial, there was a considerable effort to obtain a reprieve from the sentence, for fickle public opinion was with the convicted murderers. Even most of the jurors who had handed down the convictions signed a petition requesting leniency. The lovers were imprisoned to await clemency from Governor Huey P. Long. But it never came.

Mrs. LeBoeuf and the doctor were allowed to see one another one last time. They held hands and sobbed together before they were hanged on Feb. 1, 1929. His parting words to her were, "Goodbye, I hope we will meet in the other world."

Mrs. LeBoeuf was hysterical as she was led blindfolded to the gallows, and she began to cry out, "My mother, my mother, oh my God. Isn't this a terrible thing! Don't let me stay there too long. Oh, isn't this a terrible thing! This is murder itself. That rope is too tight around my neck. Yes it is Mr. Martel. Oh, my God, God."

The doctor was able to keep his calm at the end. "Mr. Frost," he said to a reporter, "you know we didn't do it." When the rope descended around his neck, he said, "Oh, God, have mercy. Just don't let me choke to death."

Both died instantly, the newspapers reported.

And Louisiana, its spokesman said, brought an account opened on July 1, 1927, into balance.

Sources:

"Love Affair Behind Crime To Be Probed; Woman 'Go-Between' of Lovers to Be Quizzed; Trapper Still Denies Part," by International News Service, *Danville (Va.) Bee*, July 11, 1927.

"Woman is Calm; Principals in Louisiana Murder Trial Remain Unruffled As Case Progresses," by International News Service, *Lima News*, July 26, 1927.

"LeBoeuf Case Expected to Go to Jury Today; State Will Try to Show Love Affair Between Doctor and the Woman in the Case," *Burlington (North Carolina) Times*, Aug. 6, 1927.

"Doomed to Hang," *Syracuse Herald*, Dec. 9, 1928.

"Ada LeBoeuf And Dreher Hanged For Murder; Woman Dies First, Then Her Lover," by the Associated Press, *Danville (Va.) Bee*, Feb. 2, 1929.

Recommended reading: *Ada and the Doc: An Account of the Ada LeBoeuf-Thomas Dreher Murder Case* by Charles M. Hargroder

