

Humble

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WHATSOEVER
HAPPENED
TO
MARY
BLACK,

By A.R. Foote

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The sun was shining brilliantly, blue sky, 26°, just the sort of morning to make everyone happy. All but one. Nona Lemming breezed past about 9.30 am. on this delightful summer's morning. She had a problem. It seems that Miss Lemming was a medium; Not that I'm into that spiritualistic nonsense, but I listened. A client is a client right?

"What's on your mind Miss Lemming?" I asked.

"It's hard to know where to begin Mr Humble," she replied, seeming very anxious to get it off her chest.

"Try the beginning," I reassured her.

"Well," she began "About two nights ago, I was conducting a seance. There were a few others there, ~~plus~~ and myself. Well, normally I go into a trance, but can't remember anything afterwards. Anyway, this time, I felt a presence. A manifestation appeared."

"Manifestation?" I asked.

"Yes, it was an old woman. She was dressed in wispy white flowing lace, flowing, as though there was wind passing through it. It was very unusual in that it spoke to me; she looked quite scared. Her eyes widened as he said "I" spoke. I distinctly heard the name 'Mary Black' and then it said 'murder...murder'." I asked 'who are you, it' just repeated the name and 'murder...murder'.

"What happened then?" I asked, mildly interested.

"It called your name" she said looking straight into my eyes. That put the long boney fingers of a chill up and down my spine.

"My name?" I asked.

"Yes Mr Humble," she said coldly "Your name." She said 'Mr Humble... Help... help me', and faded away. One of the people at the

people recognised your name. You are quite well known Mr Humble," she said informatively.

"Well, Miss Lemming. What can I say?" I was dumbfounded. I didn't even believe in spooks, that was for nuts. "I don't know what I can do for you!"

"Why Mr Humble!" exclaimed the woman "You must help Miss Black. I thought that should be obvious. If it's a matter of payment, I assure you that money is no difficulty at all," she said.

I agreed to see what I could do. She left. After that visit from the short, fat and very spooky woman, I needed a slot of scotch. I had three, and lit a cigarette.

"Who the hell is, or was Mary Black? what was the purpose of my name being mentioned? Where did murder come into it," I asked myself. I wasn't sure whether or not to take this seriously. If it was someones idea of a joke, it wasn't funny. I decided to call Dan.

"Dan!?" I said.

"Yeah Humble, what can I do for you?" he said.

"Got a strange problem!" I exclaimed, telling him of the visit, & subsequent messages by Miss Lemming. He laughed when I'd finished. He found it as silly as I did, nevertheless, I'd look into it.

"Got anything on a Mary Black in the Homoeich files," I asked.

"I'll have a look and get back to you!" he said.

"Yeah, see ya later. Thanks," I said ringing off.

He did get back to me. It was about lunchtime I'd ordered a pizza & coke, really good for stomach ulcers; just as well I hadn't got one. Dan told me that there was no Mary Black in the Homoeich files. He'd looked a bit further, and come up a name in the 'missing persons' files.

"Could be nothing Humble, but I've come up with the name Mary Black. Seems she went missing

back in ^{March} 1926. It was Miss Mary Tamms before that; she married in 1924. Her husband was Wilbur Black. Very respectable family. It was never solved," said Dan. "Anything else?," other files, other Marys'?" I asked. "No, anything with Mary except that one is solved. I don't know if it's anything to do with your strange Miss Lemming, but it's up to you." I thought about it for a few seconds, then decided. "Yep!" I'll take a look at it. Be over shortly." I hung up. The file made interesting reading on the whole. Her old man was suspected of causing her demise although nothing could be proven. It was a well off family to which Mary Black belonged. Her husband was nothing to speak of, no wealth, no connections. However, after the disappearance of his wife he was indeed a wealthy man. A prime motive if ever there was one, but he'd managed to talk his way out of everything. Still, he may have genuinely been innocent: Who knows. I couldn't ask him, he'd been dead 60 years. He was killed in a hit and run accident not long after his wife disappeared. I noticed that that running down hadn't been solved either. Interesting! This was beginning to have the makings of a real "whodunnit?". But talk about cold clues though. These ones were ice cold. I wondered who'd be paying the bill, I doubted it our medium friend would cough up. Instinctively I was drawn to the starting point. 32 Windemere Road. I got in to the Jubilee and drove. This was the address of Mr + Mrs Black all those years ago. I crossed town in about 20 minutes, and drove into those ~~wide~~ narrow tree lined streets in the 'better' part of town. I soon found Windemere Rd and looked for number 32. The houses were all very large and very old. They'd all been kept in pristine condition and the street was lovely. It wasn't hard to find 32, as I approached it and pulled

up at the curb, I couldn't help steering in eerie disbelief. For the house was cloaked in a veil of black phantom lace. For the first time, this case scored me. I have to admit, the initial scepticism I had felt at Miss Jennings' story was becoming shaky. I rubbed my eyes. Slowly looking back at the house I saw that the veil had gone. Could it be a trick of the light? Probably. It had made me quite nervous however. I could think of no other explanation which didn't force my concepts of thinking to their limits. I stepped out of the car and walked to the gate some ten yards away. I stood upon the letter-box and stared up at the old house. It was very large, and rectangular. The front in its entirety was supported from ground to roof with five large white pillars. The house was white and had been well maintained. Within its ample front gardens, stood a sign displaying the fact that the house was on the market. There was a gardener poking around at the side of the house. I walked across the ~~grass~~ neatly mown grass to him.

"Hello," I said.

"Morning" was the reply.

"It's a nice house indeed," I said to him.

"Looking to buy it?" he asked.

"Maybe."

"Been on the market for three years. Folks say it's haunted by the mistress."

"The mistress?" I enquired.

"Yessir, Mistress Mary. Went missing in '26' you know. Never did find her. Folks says she was murdered in the house, and wanders the halls dragging chains and turning lights on and off. Nobody will buy it," he shook his head.

"And what do you think?" I asked.

"Dunno really. Never been in there. Don't believe

in spoofs and all that!"

"Quite right," I said "who do I see"

"Name on the board out front," he said, pointing at the sign out front.

"Thanks," I said.

"Welcome," he replied.

I took three steps, then stopped. I wanted to ask him about Mr Black. I turned around. He was gone. There wasn't a trace. Not even impressions on the grass. I walked to the sign. Elliott and Caulfield. 555-4397. I wrote it down. When I looked up, there was an older man in a grey woolen suit & tweed cap looking at me over the slant brick fence. He didn't say anything, just looked at me.

"Hello," I said.

He just nodded.

"How long has the gardener worked here?," I asked.

"No gardener here," he said looking at me peculiarly.

Shaking his head, he turned and strolled casually ~~away~~ along the sidewalk, and out of sight.

I decided to walk up to the house and have a look. As I did so, that gardener I saw haunted me. With his Charleston, pointed up the middle hamcut and handlebar moustache, he seemed completely out of place, and in the wrong time altogether. The doors were all locked, and the window sashes tightly secured. I walked around the left side of the house. I was shadowed by a stand of huge Oaks. I thought I saw something more at one of the windows. Glancing quickly I caught sight of a door closing the last little bit. I thought I could hear footsteps heading the hall above floors. I had to get inside. Breaking in would have caused damage, so I called the agents on my cell phone. They sent down a young woman to show me through since I told them I was looking for a house. She arrived fifteen minutes or so later.

"Mr Humble, I'm Angelina Foulds," she said energetically.
"I'm from the agents."

"Oh, hello miss Foulds," I said, glancing at her breasts which seemed a little oversized for her build. She adjusted herself briskly and said "Shall we go in?"

The door was unlocked in one swift motion with a large golden key, and she stepped inside, motioning for me to join her. I did. As I stepped over the threshold, I felt as though I was walking into a different world. I could feel something about this house. Angelina could feel it too, as she showed me through all the rooms. It was a feeling of sadness, fear and unease. I felt that something had happened in that house a long time ago. Something terrible. All of the furniture was covered in large white sheets. Oddly, there was no dust.

"Do you get cleaners in here?" I asked.

"No, it never seems to need it," replied the agent. It was as if someone was coming in and clearing the place unbeknown to all. As the tour of the house continued, the feeling of unease stayed, growing stronger as we descended the stairs. The agent pointed to ~~the~~ door near the kitchen. She told me it was the door to the basement. Whatever was causing this feeling of unease, was behind that door. I once again felt the icy cold fingers as a shiver ran up and down my spine. I thought I heard a voice, I listened. It seemed to be coming from behind the cellar door. As I approached it and lay my hands upon the panels I became aware of the extreme cold of it to the touch. Now I heard that voice "Help.... Murder" it said in high pitched wailing tones. I jumped back from the door, the wailing stopped. Miss Foulds had continued her spiel totally unaware of anything I was experiencing.

"Miss Foulds," I said.

"Yes Mr Humble," she replied

"Is there a key for the cellar?" I asked.

"I don't believe there is," she said.

I carried with me, a set of various picks, to allow entry through locked doors etc. I would use those to open that cellar door. First though, I had to get Miss Foulds out of the house. I asked her if I could have a look around on my own while she waited outside, before I made up my mind. I told her I wanted to "get the feel of the place". She agreed and waited outside on the verandah. I quickly took out the picks, and selected the right two. As my hand touched the door, again I felt the quickening at my heart beat "Boom Boom ... Boom Boom", I felt the icy cold surface of the door, and I heard the frantic voice from within. I wondered if it could all be some elaborate hoax as I fiddled with the lock "Click!". It tumbled. I took hold of the handle and turned it clockwise. I felt the door give as I pushed it gently. It slowly swung open. All was dark down there. It was cold, so cold. I felt very scared, intrigued to the point of terror. I groped around the wall for a light switch. I couldn't see one in the dark. There was a gentle walloping breeze; It was cold and dark, as I swear, it crept right through me. The voice was now voices. They grew louder, It grew colder. It began to glow in that cellar as the voices grew louder "help murder!", they said. The cellar glowed blood red. The voices grew steadily louder. I was terrified, I felt my mouth open so stout out but felt no forthcoming air from my lungs. Finally, with my hands to my ears, I let out a shout of fright. Suddenly, the light switched on. It was Miss Foulds' "Are you Ok?", she asked "I heard you start and thought you'd tripped or something", she said.

"Yes," I said embarrassed "I slipped on the stairs."

"Who were you talking to?" she asked.

"You heard that?" I replied.

"Yes. It sounded very weird, almost ghostly."

"Look Miss Foulds, I'm not really interested in buying," I said.

"Who is?" she asked gauntly.

"I'm an investigator. I had to get in here to check out a few things for a client," I said.

"I knew there was something familiar about you," she said smiling. "I've seen you in the papers."

"I don't doubt that at all Miss Foulds," I said.

"Call me Angelina," she said.

"Ok Angelina, I'm trying to discover what happened to Mary Black. She lived here, and probably died here in 1926. She disappeared and was never found. I don't suppose you'd know anything of the family history at this place would you?"

"Not personally," she said holding up a large folder in front of her. "But this folder got all the info right back to 1846 when the place was built," she said excitedly. We looked through the folder. Nothing much came from it of use; It was still no clearer after we read the contents of the folder, what had happened to Mary Black. After she'd disappeared, and her husband died, the house was left empty and unattended for twenty years. It had become quite run down in that time. It was bought after the war, 1948, by Mr David Saxon Pine. He made major changes and updated the whole place, putting in new wiring and fittings, several window sashes, and repainting and decorating the whole place. In 1950, the cellar had to be recemented on the South wall, when bits of it began crumbling away. The cement had become soft and was not stable. Celton Ray contracted to repair it.

"Now that's interesting," I said.

"What is" asked Angelina.

"The wall, notably the South wall was recemented," I replied.

We both looked around the cellar, fixing eyes on the south wall. It was indeed cement. The other three walls were wooden, the floors above was supported with beams, at least on the other three walls. The South wall was the inner-most wall. It lay behind the staircase. I thought about it and couldn't see the sense in cementing it. It was the only thing in here that wasn't wood. I realized at once, that the probability of there being a body behind there was extremely high. However, I couldn't go smashing up some house because a spook told me too. I'd get carted off to the Sunny Farm for sure. I'm certain that if the gentleman who'd recemented the wall had chipped it out first, he'd have discovered the missing Mary Black behind it.

I asked Angelina who the owner of the house was. She told me that there was a family trust which controlled what happened to the house. John Desbitt was the man in whose name the trust was managed. He'd bought the place in 1989, stayed there three nights and shifted out. He believed it to be haunted. It had been on the market ever since. She gave me the number of the trust. We left the house. My first thought was to see Dan, & see what he thought of all this.

I relayed everything to him that I'd found out, leaving out the spooky stuff. He was able to get a court order to tear down the wall, based on reasonable cause when the blueprints for the house revealed that there was no concrete walls anywhere in the house. We went back to 32 WINDGEMERE Rd. The owner wasn't too thrilled at the thought of police tramping all through the house, but there was nothing he could do. He didn't come down

Two uniformed police brought pickaxes and sledge hammers downstairs. Two other officers joined them as Dan and I watched intently, one swing after the other. As the cement chipped away, we could see a second wall. It was red bricks laid abreast of each other. Quite thick. The bricks yielded though and a hole was broken through the wall. Half an hour later, it was big enough to walk, albeit stooped over, through. Dan went in first. He had a torch which he switched on. I followed, my torch in hand. There was another room behind the wall. It was furnished, and had water supplied. There was an iron bath which had rusted through and the whole room was cloaked in spider webs. At the other end of this very large room, stood a large four poster bed. It was exceedingly dusty, and was curtained by black veiled lace. We walked slowly over to it. Dan lifted the veil. We looked in. "Jesus Christ!" he exclaimed.

I stared; one of the officers vomited.

Lying in the bed, was a completely decomposed body. It was that of a woman. Dan reached carefully over, and lifted the covers. They fell apart, rather. Alongside the woman's body, was a larger one. The case was immediately reopened. The bodies were removed and examined by the police pathologist. Through dental records, it was discovered that the bodies were those of Mary Black, and an unidentified male caucasian about 34 years old at time of death. Dan ran down a list of names of men who were reported as missing in 1926. The year the bodies became dead bodies. All had been found but three. After a process of elimination, traces were run on one man. Elwood Gray. It took two weeks to find his dental records, and then identify the body as that of Elwood Gray. He'd gone missing

the same day as Mary Black. I wondered what the connection was. The bodies had both terminated as the results of starvation. There had been no injuries to them at the time of death. It became clear, someone had bricked them into this concealed room and left them to die; Slowly! It made no sense to me. I decided to track down any living relatives of Gray. Mary Black's family had ended the line, with her as the youngest. All the others had died over the years. Gray, however, had one surviving brother, who'd attained the ripe old age of 89. I went to see him.

For such an old man, he still had plenty of wite about him, he remembered his brother disappearing, and the anguish it caused his family when he was never found. He leaned over from his wheel chair and took a photograph album off the dresser in his room. He opened it at a certain "page" "this is Elwood", he said, indicating a photograph of his brother. The stock of ^{seeing} that photo made me shiver. It was the gardener, I'd seen at the house a couple of weeks ago.

"He was a gardener", I said.

"Yeah, used to work for a dame in Windemere Rd," he said "he kinda fancied her. They often went out ~~at~~ together when her husband was away on business. Used to anyway, till that bum Black came home early and caught em. He killed them you know. everybody said so. He got what was coming to him. Got it real good he did." The old man went off into a babble. I thanked him and left.

Things had become clearer. Mary Black and Elwood Gray were lovers. Mr Black came home early & caught them out & schemed to get even. He furnished a room, where they were later sealed into, and sadistically left to die. Not long after though, someone had run down, and killed

Black. I wondered 'could it be revenge', if so, half the city would be suspects. It was common knowledge, or at least common belief that Black had killed his wife for the money. I wondered why Old Mr Gray had mentioned murder for love. He said that someone had told him. I wondered who that someone could be, since money was publicly suspected as the motive for her disappearance. Since she had never been found, it struck me as odd that Gray said that Black had murdered them both. How did he know that murder was indeed involved. How did he know that the two hadn't simply run off together; although it would possibly be reasonable to assume that they were dead, since they'd made no contact with anyone and hadn't been seen. This guy knew more than he was telling. Maybe he killed one, or all of them. Who knows. At his age though, he'd be able to hide behind senility. I had to go back to him. He sat where I'd left him 10 minutes before.

"Mr Gray," I said. He looked up at me.

"Mr Gray, how did you know your brother was dead?" I asked.

"The papers," he said nonchalantly, looking down. He was lying.

I felt that he was completely unsurprised at his brother's death. I asked him if he'd killed Mr or Mrs Black, or his brother. He said nothing.

There was still a missing piece to this puzzle, I went back to Dan.

"Dan, I need to know all you can tell me about the death of our friend Mr Black," I said.

"Not much to tell really. He was found dead at the wage in Cardwell road. The medical examiner said he'd been run down."

"What about an autopsy?" I asked.

"No autopsy. Cut & dried," replied Dan.

I was still puzzled. I told Dan that I suspected foul play. I told him what I'd

found out from the old man, and he was interested. To solve this, we had to solve the murder, it there was indeed, one of Mr Black. I was sure that Black had killed his wife & her lover by starving them to death. But what if someone else found out. Someone like Old Mr Gray: If he wanted revenge for his brother's murder, sure he could kill Black, but it would look like murder. What if Black was dead before he was run down.

"I want to examine Black's Body!" I said.

"I agree. I think he was murdered. If we can prove it, that changes things," said Dan.

The body was exhumed and examined in detail. Because there had been no autopsy, the police didn't discover that Black had been shot in the head. Black's head had been squashed by whatever ran him over to disguise the wound from the bullet. The pathologist removed a .22 calibre bullet from within the skull. There were two entries, one exit, and one bullet.

"One bullet missing Dan," said Bob the pathologist.

"What about the one you've got?" said Dan "Any chance of a match if we got the other one?"

"Yeah, this ones not too badly damaged, I'll have to clean it up a bit," said Bob.

Dan & I left. Through D.M.V. we found the address where Gray lived at the time of Black's death. He had an old cottage in Leister, about five miles from town. After searching for five hours, one of the detectives came up with a possible. There was a bullet of the same calibre embedded in the now rotten wood in a garage in the yard. Dan removed it easily as the wood fell away. I was surprised to see it intact, if it was the ~~same~~ ~~one~~ ~~that~~ ~~one~~ that killed Black;

Back at the lab, Bob matched the bullets up. They had come from the same gun.

According to licensing, he did own a .22 pistol at that time. An order was made for the remains to be buried again. This time, there were no mourners at the funeral. Just two men with shovels in their hands. The question now was; where is the gun. It was a hell of a job tracking it down. Grey wasn't much help, although he told me that he used to go shooting at the back of his place with a friend. Chic Mullers. I found Mr Mullers, although he was 90, he still puttered around at home. He remembered Mr Grey giving him the gun, when Grey hastily moved to the city. I took it to the police lab. Bob matched it with the slugs and we had a make. It was Grey's gun that killed Black. Although it was identified, it wasn't enough. Maybe it was the gun. Maybe Mullers borrowed it and shot Black. Maybe Grey shot him. Still something missing. I had to go back to the house. There had to be some kind of clue. Something so obvious that we all missed it. Whatever it was, we'd already seen it and not taken any notice. I went back, I looked everywhere. There just didn't seem to be anything unusual in that room.

Just as I was about to give up, I noticed the small vee, ~~at~~ the corner of an envelope. It was embedded partially in between bricks, in the undemolished part of the wall. I looked around for something to dig it out with. There was a wooden handled screwdriver in the rubble. I picked it up and began scraping away at the mortar holding the bricks together. Slowly, it ~~came~~ away. I was very careful not to damage the envelope. It may well have been a vital clue in all this, and it may be very brittle after all these years. Finally, I removed the brick from on top of it. It was partly obscured by damp and some of the ink had run. All I could make out on the front

of it was the name, on part of the name. Mr ~~Cole~~ Ray. The rest was obscured. There was a letter inside, it had been hastily written in dark pencil and was not obscured. It read --

My Darling ~~Celton~~ I love you so dearly. I would, if my heart allowed, leave my husband, but alas I can't. While he lives I must be true to him.

your Dearest.
Mary.

This letter was dated Jan 13th 1926. There was a second.

Dearest Celton, why do you torture me so. In your heart you must know that I have only love for you. Why must you condemn me to a broken heart at the thought that you cannot believe me when I say Elwood is not my lover. You are my only lover. Please don't torture me any longer, for we must part to drown my aching heart at your mistrust of my love.

your Dearest
Mary.

This, the second and final letter was dated March 14th 1926. Dan told me that Mary Black disappeared on 20th March 1926, about one week later. This was the vital clue. Although it still left a mystery as to who killed Mr Black, it was becoming much clearer. I went back to see Mullens. I asked him about Celton Ray. He told me that Ray and Mary were lovers. Ray was bitterly jealous that Black was still around to keep his wife's intentions and love to himself. Mullens said

That Ray got really angry sometimes, accusing Mary Black of fooling around with her gardener. He used to get drunk, and run off at the mouth. Even threatened to kill him a few times. I asked what happened to Celta Ray. "He's still around," Mullens told me. He also told me where to find him. Mullens also said that only he and Ray knew of Ray being Mrs Black's lover. I drove to Dainesville, to see Celta Ray. He was indeed still around, but he had carried a heavy burden all his life and it showed. I told him who I was, and why I came to see him. He nodded his head and then wept.

"She was a beautiful woman. The love of my life," he said. "I have always missed her love, her touch, her warmth. I want to be near her now." he said. That's all he said, he ~~lapse~~ fell forward off his seat grasping his heart. He was dead. So much for that. I was really frustrated now. I felt so close. So incredibly close to solving this puzzle. I put everything together as I waited for the ~~ambulance~~ ~~to arrive~~ to arrive. The gardener didn't fit here properly. I thought maybe he'd been the lover of Mrs Black. Yet there were no signs that this had been the case. Only Grey would know. Time was not on my side. One of the oldies had died already. My information sources were diminishing. Grey remembered a bit more. It seems that his brother adored Mrs Black, but they were never lovers. He drove her everywhere, because she couldn't drive and people thought what people thought. I thanked him one last time and left. I went to see Dan. He had found out a bit more. but told me to spit out what I'd discovered.

"Well," I began. "It would seem to me that Mrs Black and Celta Ray, were lovers. Celta Ray wanted Mrs Black to leave her husband and be with him. She refused, saying that

while her husband was alive, she'd stay loyal to him. In the meantime, Gray, the gardener, had grown quite a platonic fancy to Mrs Black. He done her everywhere when her husband was away, kind of a chauffeur, Ray got a bit miffed at this, and did away with Mrs Black and Elwood Gray, during one of the husband's absences, burying them alive behind that wall to suffer a lingering death. I know he built that wall. I found two love letters, sent to him buried within it. Now the tricky part. Because he was jilted by Mary Black, Celton Ray for one reason or another managed to get Mr Black to Elwood Greys place, Elwood lived with his brother, where Ray took Greys gun and killed Black with it, later running over Black to hide the fact he'd been murdered. Celton Ray killed them all," I said "That's that."

Dan looked at me.
 "Not bad at all, this arrived an hour ago," said Dan handing me a letter. "It's from Rays lawyer. Read it." It was a letter of confession to be opened on boys death. I couldn't believe what I read. almost word for word of what I'd found. I was very pleased with this investigation.

"I don't know what you said to Ray, but whatever it was, it saved the state an execution," Dan laughed. I laughed.

One week later, a letter arrived in a strange looking envelope. All faded. I opened it. there was a check for \$10,000. made out to Mr Humble, and signed Mary Black. I was surprised, ~~the check was dated~~ ~~March 14th~~ ~~1926~~

the check was dated March 14th 1926. I decided to give spooky jobs a miss. from now on.

~~the~~ ~~AD~~ J