

## Shamed To Death

The Julian Hotel desk clerk didn't know what to do. The Long Beach hostelry prided itself on fine service from a quality staff, now one of their guests was complaining of not feeling well. Earlier she had been in the hotel dining room. Had their guest, Mary Black, eaten something that didn't agree with her? Her moaning and groaning was beginning to frighten the staff, but she wouldn't allow them to call in a doctor. Finally the hotel manager took matters into his own hands and summoned Dr. Welbourn.

Mrs. Black refused to tell the doctor what troubled her, but she did assure him her pain wasn't due to food poisoning. All she did say was that she was very worried. Unable to help her because of her refusal to allow an examination, the doctor left. Dr. Welbourn did, however, tell the manager to check in on her every hour or so and if she got worse call him. Hotel staff followed the doctor's orders, but when they next checked on Mary Black they found their guest lying on the floor, nearly nude and frothing at the mouth. She died an hour later. An autopsy revealed she had taken poison.

The investigation into the death of Mary Black in March 1899 brought out a shocking story of shame and wrong against her absent husband and children. It also cast an unfavorable shadow over the man who claimed to love her. Who was this woman who had taken her own life? Los Angeles neighbors of Mrs. Black said she had arrived in Southern California in December 1898. She seemed well to do and received money regularly from England. She had a frequent visitor, Gerard Mitchell, an Englishman who told the coroner he had recently arrived in Los Angeles and had no job, but he and Mrs. Black were to be married. They were just waiting for the death of her husband, who was in poor health.

The story Mitchell told sounded like something out of a Victorian romance novel. He was the son of a poor clergyman who had left England to seek his fortune in America. Fate led him to Fred Schultze's ranch in San Antonio, Texas, where he met Fred's sister, Mary. Mary, known as Nellie to her friends, had left her husband and two children in England. Married at the age of 17 to an ogre of a man, Mary finally convinced him to let her visit her brother in Texas. She refused to go back, telling her husband that her heart disease prevented her from traveling. Common interests drew 36-year-old Gerard and 43-year-old Mary together. They fell deeply in love. Divorce was unthinkable since neither Mary nor Mitchell had any money of their own, and it would bring shame to both families. Mitchell left for a job in Mexico, but love finally won out. The following year the couple agreed to meet in Los Angeles. In December 1898 they came to Los Angeles separately, Mary traveling from Texas, Mitchell from Mexico. Here they lived together as man and wife, with Mary's estranged husband, knowing nothing of her affair with Mitchell, sending her money to live on.

But shame over their adulterous actions tormented Mary and Gerard. The religious convictions they had been brought up believing in weighed heavily on their souls. Guilt finally caught up with them.

Somehow Mary's brother heard of their living arrangement and he pleaded with them to live separately for propriety's sake. He told them that Mary's husband was ill. It was only a matter of time before Martin Black died and Gerard and Mary could legally marry. Mary was torn. What should she do? Should she return to her husband's bedside and be with him at the end? She hadn't seen him for nine years. What would happen to her two children once her husband died? But Mary knew she didn't have the strength to face her past.

Mary and Gerard decided to take things one step at a time. Though Mary told Gerard it would be the death of her to leave him, they agreed it would be better for appearance sake for them to live alone for awhile. Mary left the house the two had purchased together and took rooms in a nearby boarding house. Gerard said he knew nothing about the events leading up to Mary's supposed suicide, but thought it was because someone had found out about their past living arrangement and she could not live with the shame.

Two days after Mary's death Gerard went to the house he owned with Mary and ingested both strychnine and laudanum. He also slashed his wrists with a razor and cut his throat. His body was discovered by a woman looking to buy the home. Mitchell was still conscious, but he couldn't talk because of his severed windpipe. The bloody razor was found lying on the pillow and the razor case was on a chair by the bed. The bottle of laudanum and a paper containing strychnine were found on a chair in the corner of the bedroom. He died an hour later.

Why had Gerard committed suicide? Without Mary he was penniless. He had spent all his money in buying furniture for the house and paying for medical treatments for himself. Was this lack of money the cause of his death, or was it truly a desire to be with the woman he loved?

Circumstance, or fate, brought the two together once again. The remains of both were sent to Evergreen Cemetery in Los Angeles and, coincidentally, buried side by side.