

## Hiding in Plain Sight

The letter was from Moxon, Derby and Clements, addressed to Harold Skelton Esq, The Old Lodge, Chilton Street, Clare, Suffolk, CO10 8QS.

*Dear Mr Skelton,*

*We are acting as sole executors of the will of Miss Hilda Blackburn and you are listed as a beneficiary. I urge you to contact me at your earliest opportunity so that I may apprise you of a significant inheritance.*

*Yours sincerely*

*Joseph Clements LL.B*

I sat back in my chair musing on this surprising turn of events. I had not the foggiest idea who this Hilda person was but my name is indeed Harold Skelton and I do reside in this secluded house in rural Suffolk.

I called the Ipswich number given and arranged to present myself at their premises later that afternoon. Before setting out I spent two hours in the now routine transformation of my appearance. With the cosmetic expertise honed in the dressing rooms of countless theatres, I skilfully changed my complexion to a much greyer skin tone. Dark shadows under the eyes, a web of wrinkles around the mouth and grey streaks through my normally jet-black hair completed the reverse Dorian Gray effect. *Voilà*, I had added at least a couple of decades to my actual age. I donned a threadbare suit of an antique style I found in the wardrobe when I first moved into the house and unearthed an old, stout walking stick on which I leaned heavily. A hearing aid of the visible, bulky kind completed the ensemble. I can tell you I was inordinately proud of the overall result

Mr Clements was a jovial, well-upholstered fellow with a red-veined nose which bore unequivocal witness to many bibulous lunches. He greeted me with a flaccid handshake and a beaming smile.

“Mr Skelton, I won’t beat about the bush. I’m delighted to be the bearer of very good news indeed. The late Miss Blackburn has left you a house in South Kensington which we have had valued at £5 million.”

Apparently, there was a codicil to the will which explained the reason for the bequest. I listened with rapt attention as the podgy lawyer told me that I was the love of poor old Hilda’s life. Her father’s refusal to allow her to marry me, a

person far below her station, had broken her heart. She had lived the rest of her life in virtual *purdah* like an upper caste Indian widow. It was Hilda's dying wish that I should receive this handsome endowment.

I stepped into the street, discarded the stick and executed an athletic cartwheel which made several passers-by smile in approbation at the antics of this spry old man.

How could I have guessed that my assiduously researched and executed plan to murder the reclusive Harold Skelton would yield such additional bounty? Assuming his identity had already given me a very comfortable lifestyle but Hilda's beneficence would add a very thick crust of icing on the cake.

Who says that acting and murder don't pay?