

A Very Confidential Secretary

The Survival Files — Case 26 — ESS = 240.8

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“There is a stranger here, a quiet grey-haired woman with a curious force.”

With these intriguing words a series of communications and correspondences were set in motion that resulted in one of the more evidential cases ever recorded.

The speaker was called Astor, an entity who served as the control (sort of a spirit traffic cop) for a medium named Geraldine Cummins. Actually, the term “speaker” is somewhat misleading, as Cummins used automatic writing to convey the spirits’ messages.

The setting was London, the date, March, 19, 1945. Cummins had recently spent several years in her home country of Ireland caring for her invalid mother and she was planning on returning there in June.

The events were reported by an author and researcher who seems never to have revealed her first name: Ms. E.B. Gibbes. For many years, Gibbes acted as recorder and investigator for Cummins. She had also experimented with several of the other leading mediums in England.

Astor continued to say that this “curious force” compelled him to pass on the strange woman’s message. Whatever language it is that spirits speak, seems poorly suited for initially conveying peoples names; often they resort to a kind of rebus. In this case, the woman first showed Astor a foot and then a daisy. From this, he concluded that her name must be Marguerite Foote.¹

Foote did not wish to write for herself — that is, to take control of the medium’s hand — so Astor served as her spokes-spirit. Through him, Foote said that she had long worked for a man named James and that she wanted to talk with someone named Donald. And that he was coming to town in April and would request a session with Cummins, and that it was important that she get her message to Donald. She added that she had died three years previously, in Kensington.

Cummins generally did not recall what transpired during her trances. All she recollected in this case was that something was communicated about a certain man named Donald, a man whom Cummins had sat with occasionally in Ireland. Gibbes affirmed that his name had come up, and asked Cummins if she thought Donald might be planning a trip to London; but the medium thought such a visit was unlikely.

During a sitting held six days later, Gibbes questioned Astor further regarding the gray-haired woman. He said that he had asked her about this employer of hers, but all he was able to get from her was that James was an important man of business. Gibbes, having done some research and found no record of a Marguerite Foote in the London district of Kensington, asked for further details about the woman’s death. Astor replied that he had inquired about that and the woman had said, “There is more than one Kensington in the world.” and then smiled.

Rarely are we told of spirits smiling at one another, but even more revealing in this exchange is the inability of Astor to gain information from Foote. Apparently it is not true that one’s mind becomes an open book in the hereafter.

A couple of weeks went by without any further messages from Foote; then, on April 14th, she had Astor correct her previous message. It seems that when she spoke of someone coming over, she had meant that James was coming over to her world (that is, he was about to die) not

¹ Marguerite is a French variant of Margaret and also a botanical French name for a daisy.

that Donald was coming over to London. Apparently, she wanted to warn Donald about James' health. Astor was also able to learn that Foote had moved to Kensington, New Zealand, when she retired as James' confidential secretary. Her position was taken, she claimed, by a young woman named Sheila, who was very clever but inexperienced.

During all the sessions, Foote seemed reticent to reveal any more than might be necessary to get her message about James through to Donald. On several occasions, she expressed concern about "careless talk" and worried that she was revealing too much to these two strangers at the other end of her psychic pipeline.

Gibbes and Cummins had been waiting to speak with Donald when he made his predicted arrival in London. Once they realized how the original message had been misinterpreted, they decided to write to Donald in Ireland. Before they could do so, however, they heard of the death of a well-known man named James, who was a close family friend of Donald. Cummins then wrote a letter of condolence to Donald. In it, she mentioned that the spirit of Marguerite Foote had been contacting them and that she appeared to be a nice, gray-haired lady from New Zealand.

Donald's return letter stated, "What you wrote about Marguerite Foote is most interesting and evidential." In addition to confirming the name, Donald said that, indeed, the woman was James' confidential secretary for many years, that she had moved to New Zealand, and that she had white hair, even though "relatively a young woman."

Without going into tedious detail about the timing and content of the ensuing correspondence between Donald and Cummins/Gibbes, we'll summarize the evidential hits as follows:

1. That James was about to die.
2. For many years, James had a confidential secretary named Foote.
3. Foote's first name was Marguerite.
4. Foote's hair was gray in her youth and turned white in her later years.
5. Foote was reserved with strangers, but persistent.
6. Foote had known Donald.
7. When Foote retired, she had moved to New Zealand.
8. The person taking her place was named Sheila.
9. Sheila was inexperienced. (Foote also stated, and Donald confirmed, that Sheila was clever, but that could be deduced from the position she had attained.)
10. Sheila's last name was Shipton.
11. Sheila was married.
12. Sheila's husband was in the army.
13. James had a very close friend named Walter who had died sometime before.
14. Walter's last name was Robson.
15. James referred to Robson as "Wat."

Other than the initial misunderstanding concerning who was "coming over in April," the only statement made by Foote that was not verified as 100-percent accurate was that she had died in Kensington. Research showed that she had been treated at Kensington Hospital before dying in a nearby suburb. Of course, we do not know how Foote referred to her local area when she was living. People often refer to the nearest well-known town when speaking of their origins. (The author, for instance, generally replies "DC" when asked where he is from; even though he actually lived within the borders of the District of Columbia for less than 10-percent of his life.) So, we won't count "died in Kensington" as a miss, but we won't count it as a hit either.

ESS Score

Although Donald was very involved in investigating and confirming the statements, he was not present during the initial contact with Foote, so he must be considered an “uninvolved party” as far as the possibility of mental telepathy is concerned. Thus, none of the information given was known to an involved party. Note also, that Donald revealed nothing to indicate that he sensed the imminent demise of James. A small, but particularly evidential fact is that Foote was first described as having gray hair. In almost every case, spirits are said to appear to strangers as they looked in the prime of life. If the information was coming from Donald’s mind, the visage would have the white hair he remembered. If the description originated with the medium, a color of hair more appropriate for the woman’s apparent age would be expected. The fact that Foote appeared sporting the gray that she had worn in her younger days is thus extremely evidential. Add to that the reticence she displayed and the anxiety of revealing too much and this situation rates a “p.” CS = 172.

Witness Reliability rating is “f” (65 pts) plus a bonus (3 pts) for Donald’s testimonies, WR = 68.

The Character/Complexity of Information rating is “r”. IC = .8.

Total ESS Score: $172 + 68 + .8 = 240.8$

For Further Information See: *The Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, May, 1947, pages 32-43.

END CASE 26

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