

BLACK SOMBRERO

by CLIFFORD KNIGHT

Elsa Chatfield, Hollywood artist, is cut off from the will of her Aunt Kitty, who died from an overdose of morphine. Barry Madison, an amateur detective, and Hunt Rogers, a professional sleuth, go to Mazatlan, Mexico, on a yacht cruise with Margaret and Dwight Nichols. Arriving there they find that Elsa and her party have preceded them by plane. They dine at the rancho of Elsa's father, Sam Chatfield, whom Rogers questions about his visit to his sister Kitty. In Los Angeles, the night she died. Later Sam Chatfield addresses his guests on the subject of Kitty's death, and asks that Rogers conduct an examination. Rogers cross-questions the entire group and discovers that each has a motive.

CHAPTER VIII

"Thank you, Dwight. And you, Margaret?"

"Not guilty, Hunt," Margaret said with a smile.

Rogers paused as if debating the propriety of his next question. "You told me once, didn't you, Margaret, that you too might be said to have a motive?"

"Yes," answered Margaret frankly. "I was jealous of Kitty; she was out to take Dwight away from me."

"Don't be absurd, dear," Dwight Nichols interrupted.

"I'm not, darling."

"I had a motive," said Elsa impulsively, recklessly. "I hated her. I'd hated her all my life."

Sam Chatfield looked thoughtfully at his daughter and was about to speak when Berta, her white teeth flashing, her eyes moving almost roguishly, declared:

"I had a motive too, and Sam; the sister was inhuman, insulting to us. Such a scene! It made something"—she pressed her plump, beautiful hands to her bosom—"something inside very—very mad. With both of us."

In this curious haste to confess motives, Rogers' face was full of interest; a faint smile played about his lips, his mild blue eyes shifted swiftly from one to the other of the group as each one spoke. After Berta had spoken silence fell upon us. Rogers remarked:

"All these things, of course, I've known. There remains only Reed Barton's motive." He glanced at Reed, who sat stiffly in his leather pantaloons, as if to ask permission for what he was about to say. "Reed has said that Katherine Chatfield can be blamed for his father's suicide—it was over a matter of some mortgaged property which could have been saved by a little leniency upon the part of the deceased."

"Now, then"—he paused, as if uncertain where to go from this point—"according to the estimate of the coroner's office, Katherine Chatfield died some time before midnight; discovery of the body was not made until about seven the following morning. Everyone here has a motive of some sort—perhaps even Chesebro has a motive. It would be odd if he were the only person lacking one. Until he can be questioned in this connection we'll not know definitely. Moreover, whether or not he was there that night—had opportunity—"

"If it's Chesebro you're talking about, Hunt, he was there," came the husky voice of George Rumble. "There? That night we're speaking of? I must be certain."

"Sure he was there. I saw him come away."

"How about his going in? Did you see that?"

"No, I didn't. I'd walked down the street after I got thrown out, and when I came back by there, Chesebro was coming out. Perhaps you've noticed how he's treated me, Hunt—like a yellow dog—from the first time I contacted him. Well, I think that's the reason for it. He's acted like he was afraid of me, or that I might tell on him."

"That's interesting," said Rogers, rubbing the side of his large nose thoughtfully with a forefinger. "Our circle widens."

"I saw plenty of other things that night too. But they never meant anything to me until now, because I always thought the dame committed suicide. You put a different light on things, Hunt."

"Whom else did you see?"

"I saw Reed Barton," and he turned a meaningful glance upon Reed. "He was coming out just as I was trying to get in to hand her the bill for my work."

"But Katherine Chatfield was alive when you got in to see her?"

"I'll say she was alive; she was clicking on all sixteen cylinders when I saw her."

"But you didn't leave the vicinity of her home after you got thrown out? Is that it?"

"Right."

"Did you enter the house a second time?"

"No."

"How long did you stay around thereabouts? And why?"

"I stayed because I was mad. 'George,' I kept talking to myself, 'you got to cool down before you go in again.' When I got to talking to myself you know something is burning me. And that dame sure did. My apologies to you, Chatfield; she was your sister."

"Don't mention it," Sam Chatfield, absorbed in the conversation, roused to reply to Rumble. "I am aware that Kitty was a peculiar woman."

"How long did you hang about?" Rogers persisted.

"Oh, maybe an hour. Not right in front of the house, Hunt, you understand. I'd walk down to the end of the block and loaf a while then come back. About the second time I done that I see Mrs. Nichols get in a car standing in front of the house and drive off."

Dwight sprang out of his chair and walked over to Rumble. He seized him roughly by the shoulder. "Are you accusing my wife of killing Kitty Chatfield?" he demanded harshly.

"No. I'm just telling what I saw that night."

"Don't, darling," said Margaret. "He may be right at that."

"May be right?" repeated Dwight, puzzled.

"Well, then, is right," said Margaret defiantly.

Dwight let go his hold on Rumble and straightened up, passing a hand across his face uncertainly.

"Who was it who ran out of the house, Margaret?" asked Rogers.

Margaret inhaled deeply of her cigarette, desperately striving to control her jumpy nerves.

"He didn't see me," she said. "He couldn't have known, I'm sure, that I was behind the drapery. I lost



Two men on the platform were doing the Coyote dance.

my courage; I couldn't go on with it. Talk with Kitty, I mean."

"Who was it?" pressed Rogers.

"I'll tell you who it was, Hunt," Rumble's voice replied. "I can see she don't want to tell. But the guy passed me down the walk a little ways, where a street light hit him full in the face." I glanced at Margaret. I thought that she was about to faint; her eyes were on Rumble, fascinated, hypnotic. Rumble took his time, realizing that he held the spotlight. Finally he said, "It was Reed Barton."

Dwight Nichols sat back with an air of relief, picked up a cigarette and lighted it, and filled his lungs with smoke. Margaret settled into her chair with a little sigh. I looked at Reed Barton. He was like a man bewildered. Suddenly he became aware that we all were staring.

"George Rumble is a liar!" he said quietly.

There was little or nothing left to be lugged out into the open that night. For a time Hunt Rogers continued to explore skillfully into the hidden angles of what already had been revealed. At length Elsa interrupted.

"We're wasting the evening, Hunt," she said, getting to her feet and imploring him with her eyes to quit and let us go outside. For from out of doors came the sound of music, of dancing feet, of voices lifted in song. The members of the household, grown tired of waiting for the signal to start, were already trying their skill.

"All right, Elsa," Rogers yielded with a smile, "on the condition that I may question any one of you later, if it is necessary to clear up cloudy points."

"Of course," Sam Chatfield agreed. "And I thank you, Mr. Rogers. You've managed to throw light into several dark corners. If at any time I can be of service to you, please command me."

Rogers' reply was lost in the general movement of the group to the scene of the festivities in the open courtyard just beyond the patio wall where a low platform had been built over hollow jars to magnify the sound of the nimble feet and clicking heels.

"Oh, senora," Rogers detained Berta as the others moved out of the room.

"Yes, senor," Berta replied, pausing expectantly and looking up at the tall figure.

"This morning," Rogers began, "near the stables an old dog was put to death with chloroform. I was told that you gave the drug to the man for that purpose. Is that true?"

A blank look greeted Rogers' question. For a moment Berta continued to stare upward at her questioner.

"No, it is not true," she said suddenly. "I know nothing about any chloroform. It is unthinkable that such a drug would be on the rancho, senor."

"Thank you, senora," said Rogers, and he bowed to her.

George Rumble caught up with me as I strolled through the patio in the direction of the dancing platform. He put his hand on my arm and walked several steps with me before remarking:

"You know, Barry, Hunt's got me to thinking the same as he does. Somebody sure as heck croaked that old gal back in Pasadena. But why does Reed Barton want to lie about it? I ain't wrong. I'm not lying. I saw him; and I don't forget a face. He acted like he was scared to death—runnin' down the sidewalk. I think he got into a car down around the corner that night. Because there was one pulled out in about the time it would take for him to run there, get in and drive off."

"Anyway, George," I said, "it's up to you to prove it. Margaret says she didn't see who it was; Reed says you're lying. Who is going to believe you?"

"You know what?" George Rumble said emphatically. "I think the old lady was dead when Barton ran out of the house."

"You may be right."

"You know"—he paused, as we reached the grilled doorway to the open courtyard, "I'll bet I could run that thing down—find out who killed that woman." Someone passed us in the darkness, and Rumble reached out to detain him. "Chatfield, I was just telling Barry that I think I could figure out who killed your sister. I'm going to try it, anyhow."

"Well—I wish you success, Mr. Rumble," replied Sam Chatfield courteously. "Don't you want to come on out into the plaza now? I'll find you a seat. We've got some interesting dancers among the workers on the rancho. They are putting on most of the show for us. A few people may come out from town to join in or to watch, as they feel like it."

"Sure, we're coming. It's business with me. I'm always looking for talent. I never know where I might find something or somebody I can promote—like I have Elsa."

"There's a Yaqui dance just getting started. You mustn't miss it."

Rumble and I found seats on a bench in an enlarged circle under the open sky. There was an air of festivity pervading the crowd. The air was heavy with perfume drifting down upon us on the soft night air. A burst of firecrackers startled the edge of the crowd, but they soon popped themselves out. The odor of cooking came from the kitchen where in the ruddy glow of charcoal fires women still were patting tortillas.

Two men on the platform were doing the Coyote Dance. To the beating of a flat drum, and the chanting of the lone drummer, the dancers, swinging lowered heads, their feet moving in an intricate sidewise shuffle, backed slowly to the rear of the platform. To a brisk tempo they galloped forward, only to repeat the maneuver over and over. Coyote skins stuck with feathers of the turkey, eagle, woodpecker and hawk hung down their backs. As the dance began to take on a monotonous air, Rumble wearied of it and got up from the bench and disappeared. A moment later Elsa crowded in beside me.

"Did you just get here?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered in my ear, and snuggled against me. I put my arm around her and we sat for some minutes while the beating of the drum and the chanting Yaqui voice went on.

"I'm not the same person in Mexico, Barry, that I am at home. This is a man's country, not a woman's. So what does all my talk about economic independence mean down here; and finding myself, and running until things go dizzy inside of me? Was I being silly, Barry? Mexico gives me a sense of deeper, more fundamental things."

"You're just being Elsa," I said. "Adorable as always, and desirable and lovely."

"Please, don't say things like that, Barry. I feel very contrite for my madness this morning. I went in just now to apologize to Jimmy the Cheese. Even though I still hate him enough to kill him, I thought I should apologize for my unladylike behavior this morning. It was very humiliating for me to have to beat him like a dog. And, honestly, I didn't know about his heart. That's what makes it so embarrassing for me now."

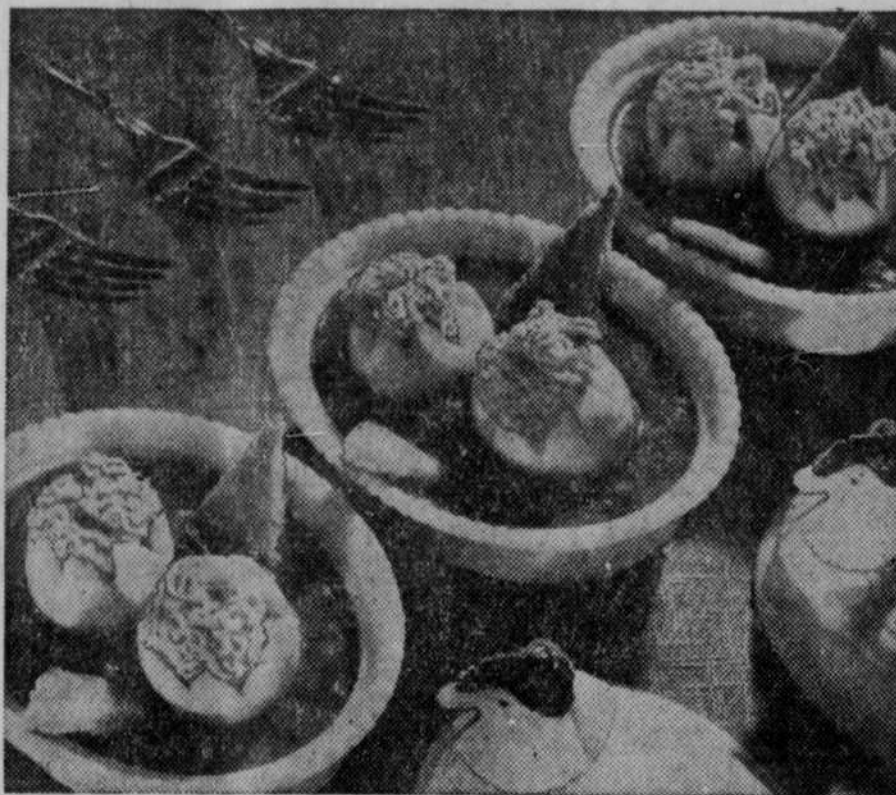
"And did you apologize?"

"He was asleep. I spoke to him but he was lying very quietly, and, oh, so bandaged! Did I do that, Barry? I came away without disturbing him. Probably the next time I'll not feel contrite and he'll never know that I want to apologize."

The dancing continued; the drum, the chanting voice, the dancers who each were now astride a long bow, which they beat, as they would flog a horse, with a split bamboo stick, as they shuffled nimbly and galloped about, began almost to weave a spell upon the spectators.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

HOUSEHOLD MEMOS... by Lynn Chambers



Stuffed Eggs Are Colorful in Spanish Sauce (See Recipes Below)

Point Wisdom

There should be some sort of an "E" award for the housewives who go about their business daily, keeping their homes in order and feeding their families nutritious, well-balanced meals in spite of high prices and hiked-up point values.

And to you ladies who rate or would rate the household "E" aren't you finding new respect for foods low in points or which require no points? I wager there's many an egg with a heart of gold that's come to your rescue and hitherto scorned fish that's made a hearty and delicious meal when points have been all used up.

Both eggs and fish are complete proteins, and they are just as important as meat in building and repairing body tissue which is necessary every day. Both can be combined into just as looked-for dishes as meat and cheese which are rationed.

A word of caution when you cook those precious eggs. Use low temperatures whether you fry, scramble, cook or bake them, otherwise you will have tough, leathery eggs. Cook them carefully, and ah! you will indeed discover how delightful they truly are. Use variety in serving eggs, too, and don't just go through the humdrum monotony of serving them plain boiled.

Spanish Eggs on Toast. (Serves 4)
8 stuffed egg halves
4 slices of toast
Spanish sauce

Lay slices of toast on bottom of baking dishes. Prepare Hot Stuffed eggs as suggested in following recipe and arrange eggs on top of toast. Pour hot Spanish sauce over and around eggs. Garnish with toast triangles. Serve at once.

Stuffed Eggs.
4 hard-cooked eggs
3/4 teaspoon salt
Dash of pepper or cayenne
3 tablespoons salad dressing
1 teaspoon chopped parsley

Cut eggs in half lengthwise or crosswise. Remove yolks, press through sieve. Add seasonings and dressing. Beat until fluffy and refill egg whites. Top stuffed eggs with buttered crumbs and broil or bake in hot oven about 6 minutes or until crumbs are browned.

Spanish Sauce.
Prepare about 3 cups of your favorite tomato sauce and season rather highly. Add 2 tablespoons chopped onion and 2 tablespoons chopped green pepper at the last.

Eggs a la King. (Serves 3 to 4)
3 tablespoons butter or margarine
3 tablespoons flour

Lynn Says:
Meat Stretchers: Store and cook meat properly for greatest economy. Fresh meat is best stored if wiped with a damp cloth, covered loosely with waxed paper and stored in coldest part of refrigerator.

Variety meats, ground meats and fish should be used 24 hours after purchasing. Ground meat darkens if allowed to stand and spoils more quickly than whole cuts.

Frozen meat keeps indefinitely in the freezing unit. However, after thawing, it spoils more quickly than other meat and should be cooked immediately.

Cooked meats should be covered closely to prevent drying and stored in coldest part of refrigerator. Do not cut, grind or slice until ready to use.

Poultry should be cleaned and washed before refrigerating. It keeps better if stored whole rather than in pieces.

Lynn Chambers' Point-Saving Menu
*Baked Fish With Stuffing
Broccoli With Lemon Wedges
Baked Potatoes
Jellied Fruit Salad
Whole Wheat Rolls Butter
Honey Oatmeal Wafers
Beverage
*Recipe Given

2 cups milk
Salt and pepper
6 hard-cooked eggs, chopped
1/2 pound mushrooms
1 tablespoon chopped pimiento
1 tablespoon chopped green pepper

Melt butter or margarine in top of double boiler; add flour and stir to a smooth paste. Add milk gradually, stirring constantly, and season. Cook 5 minutes over boiling water. Add eggs, sliced mushrooms sauteed in butter or margarine, pimiento, and green pepper. Reheat. Serve on toast or in rice ring.

Chinese Omelet. (Serves 6)
3/4 cup uncooked rice
4 tablespoons butter or margarine
4 tablespoons flour
2 cups milk
3 eggs, separated
1/4 teaspoon paprika
1 1/2 teaspoons salt
1/4 teaspoon dry mustard
4 tablespoons grated cheese

Cook rice until tender. Rinse with hot and cold water. Make a sauce of butter or margarine, flour and milk. Cook, stirring constantly until thickened. Beat egg yolks. Add rice, sauce, seasonings and whites. Fold in stiffly beaten egg whites. Pour into a greased shallow pan. Bake at 350 to 375 degrees for 35 minutes.

Do you frequent the fish counters at least twice a week to look for bargains in fresh fish? If you don't, you should, for it's a splendid way of providing your family with a good quality protein food, to say nothing of the way in which you save points for meat.

***Baked Fish.**
Clean fish and prepare for stuffing. Dry carefully inside and sprinkle with salt. Stuff and sew up fish. Rub with melted fat, salt and dredge with flour. Place on a greased fish sheet in dripping pan.

Place over fish small pieces of salt pork or brush with oil. Bake 45 minutes in a moderate (350-degree) oven.

Fish Stuffing.
1 1/2 cups bread crumbs
2 tablespoons chopped onion
3/4 cup chopped celery
2 tablespoons chopped parsley
1 egg, beaten
1/2 teaspoon salt
3/4 teaspoon paprika
1 teaspoon lemon juice or
1/4 teaspoon herb seasoning

Combine all ingredients together and add enough milk or soup stock to hold ingredients together in a moist dressing. Fill fish, then sew sides together with a coarse needle and thread.

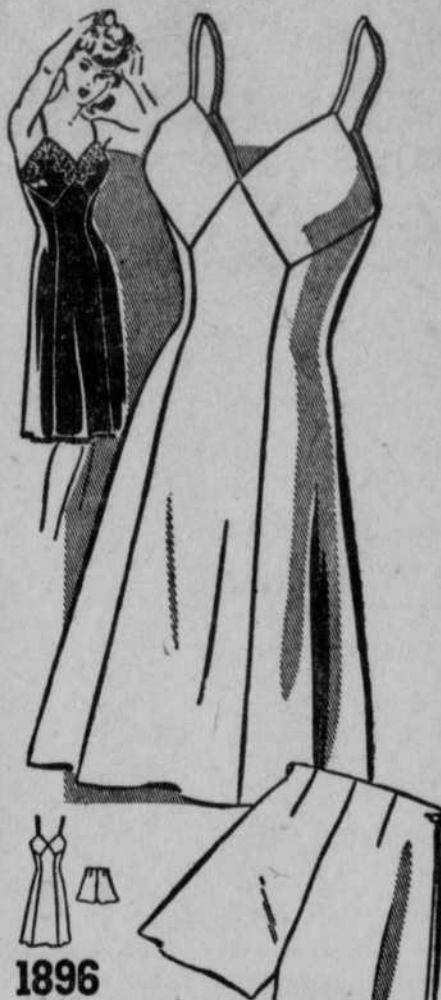
Baked Halibut With Spanish Sauce. 2 pounds halibut
Spanish Sauce:
1 can tomato soup
1 small onion, chopped
4 tablespoons green pepper, chopped

Place halibut in greased utility dish. Mix tomato soup with green pepper and onion and pour over fish. Bake for 1 hour in a 375-degree oven.

What are your problems in rationing? Write to Lynn Chambers for expert answers, enclosing a self-addressed, stamped envelope for your reply, at Western Newspaper Union, 210 South Desplaines Street, Chicago, Illinois. Released by Western Newspaper Union.

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