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Purple Cult Clue.

[The "Purple Cult" is the newspaper's term for Wilfred T. Smith's Church of Thelema located in Los Angeles. Nina Susoff (aka Anna Sosoyeva) was a friend of Regina Kahl's, who was a drama teacher at the College Nina attended. Regina was a member of the O.T.O. and Nina Susoff had actually visited the O.T.O.'s headquarters at 1746 Winona Boulevard for their 1939 New Year's party. Aleister Crowley was furious with Wilfred T. Smith when he found that the Los Angeles O.T.O. had been linked to her murder.]

They had said the blonde dancer had a brilliant future as a dramatic actress. In her—they said—beauty, talent and ambition were so blended that surely she must conquer on the stage and in films.

And so on that night, through the darkness that smelled of moist earth and mist, Nina Susoff hurried towards the Little Theatre on the lonely campus of the Los Angeles City College. Cloak wrapped about her costume, nimble feet crunching gravel on the path, past neat shrubs and bushes, past darkened college buildings looming against a dark sky she hurried. The curtain was about to go up and she didn't want to be late for her opening lines in the play. Hollywood scouts—so ran the rumor—were in the audience. She was eager.

But for Nina that curtain never went up. Beside her, a clump of bushes rustled. Out of the darkness a man's voice spoke. Out of the darkness a great club descended. Then the man's fleeing footfalls died away. Staggering now, the dancing feet of Nina Susoff carried her a few steps till she collapsed in the arms of a newly arriving friend, gasped a few words, her last.

For Nina Susoff, former Ziegfeld Follies dancer, the show was over.

But for others, this brutal murder was just Act 1, Scene 1 in a grim drama now proceeding, as Los Angeles police probe the weirdest or recent mysteries.

Secret Society.

Why was Nina Susoff slain—and who was the man who struck and ran? Police have not yet learned, but they have uncovered a bizarre secret society—the Purple Cult, it is called—whose somber rites involve a gleaming black coffin, symbolic candles and a chilling occult ritual. Strange and sordid, police say, are those rites practiced before that coffin. And remembering Michigan's Black Legion, the authorities were determined not only to find out whether the Purple Cult had anything to do—as suspected—with the dancer's death, but also to probe its purposes and activities to the limit. Incidentally they learned that although college men and women make up its membership, the Cult has no connection with an organization of similar name in Eastern colleges.

Even before the Cult's name had come into the picture, the murder of the blonde Russian dancer—already well known under her stage name of Anya Sosoyeva, before she forsook the dance for the drama—had excited Southern California to tense indignation. Bombarded by letters from cranks and amateur sleuths, police waded through a welter of conflicting clues before reaching their present understanding of the background and possibilities of this amazing case.

Nina Susoff was no ordinary dancer. Nor were romance and heartbreak, struggle and success unknown to her. Ten years ago, at the age of 22, she was the wife of dashing Lawrence Page Tulloch. San Francisco Bohemian, author and writer of radio mysteries. Gay, happy-go-lucky and prosperous, this handsome couple seemed destined to enjoy years of active, stimulating married life—in spite of the fact that Nina's career at that time had taken her temporarily away from her husband, across the continent to New York where she was greatly admired in the Follies.

However much he missed his wife, it wasn't in Tulloch's makeup to live like a hermit in her absence. He gave gay cocktail parties, and during one of these, a woman guest—Mrs. Gertrude Hawkins Lavine—was mysteriously shot to death with a pistol.

How it happened, the general public never learned. Despite Tulloch's earnest plea that it was all an accident, he was arrested and tried in one of the tensest court dramas ever enacted in San Francisco. His young wife staunchly stood by him; manslaughter was the charge, and the jury disagreed. A second trial resulted in Tulloch's acquittal—but he was so broken by the terrific ordeal that he died a year later.

The widowed Nina went to Europe, plunged into her work. European audiences were enthusiastic, but the girl wanted something more. She wanted an education—an understanding of the classics of the theatre, for out of her own life and her own sufferings had come the desire to interpret the great roles of drama.

With remarkable humility and strength of purpose, this successful dancer went back to high school—Lowell High School in San Francisco, where she lived with her family. Following this, she went to Los Angeles and entered as a student in the City College where, in the drama classes, her talent drew immediate attention.

The Murder Night.

On the night of the Murder, she had slipped across the campus to her little apartment nearby. The first step towards the career she wanted might, that very night, be right before her, it seemed, thanks to the advanced student show—and the expected Hollywood scouts.

And then—the bludgeon fell.

It was Wally Myar, her partner in a song and dance skit, into whose arms she staggered before losing consciousness forever. Myar had just arrived to meet her outside the auditorium.

"A man hit me on the head . . ." she whispered faintly.

"My God, girl, what's the matter?" the slim, young man cried, noting the blood streaming from her battered head. The girl gasped:

"I heard a voice say: 'Hey, where are you going?' That's all I remember. Why didn't you come sooner?"

Those were the last words of Nina Susoff. An hour later she died.

Detectives swarmed over the campus, combing every inch for clues. Beneath a low shrub, evidently used by the slayer as a hiding place, they found a lethal weapon—a green-painted, blood-stained piece of two-by-four timber of a convenient length to wield. Beside it lay a bloodstained glove, a woman's celluloid comb and a card.

Although Miss Susoff had not otherwise been attacked, authorities immediately rounded up those whom they considered capable of committing crimes against women. A janitor, previously in difficulties, was seized, grilled for two days but released when his alibi was found airtight. Working along another line of conjecture, police questioned every man whom they

could trace by examining the dead woman's snapshots, love letters and addresses, on the theory that the murder might have been done by a disgruntled suitor.

And then, suddenly, came the sensational "break" in the case—the verification of the rumored existence of a strange secret order with 30 to 40 members among the student body of the college—the Purple Cult.

Blonde Nina had been seen in the company of a formidable, thickset fellow who quickly was dubbed the "Ape Man"—and this unknown, it was said, was a member of the Purple Cult. At first police proceeded on the theory that the dancer herself had belonged to it too, or at least had participated in its weird, occult rites. But no proof of this has come to light.

To light has come, however, strange doings of this Cult. Its meetings, investigators learned, take place weekly. Ritual is borrowed wholly or in part from Far Eastern orders, and the thoughts of death and a strange afterlife which it inspires are heightened by the gleaming black coffin around which the ceremonial revolves. As one witness described it:

"Thin shadows from candles burning on either side of the casket gave an eerie touch to the scene as heavily, rich-robed participants stood in silence before the coffin at the altar."

Who are the members of this order? So far, probing fingers of the police have tangled in a veil of secrecy—but they have managed to grasp firmly one central fact in the mystery; it is almost definitely established that some of the students whose confidences were shared by the alluring Nina, are Cult members. Police believe that somewhere the hidden motives of this apparently purposeless murder touch the secret group. And, pointing to the record of Michigan's Black Legion—regarded as a "harmless" organization before its record of torture and murder came to light—they declare:

"If this sort of thing is trying to get a start in California, we're going to root it out—now."