

WRITING ON THE WALL

WALTER SHEDLOFSKY
Saint Louis, Missouri

Good afternoon, Lieutenant Jamison. I appreciate your taking off time to see me. I am Lyle Stanton, lawyer for the estate of Malcolm Travis who died three weeks ago.

Please come in. Let us go into the library. This is where Travis died. There was no question about his death. His cancer was terminal. He was found sitting at this table with a copy of **Word Ways** near his fallen head, surrounded by all these books. Did you ever see so many books outside a public library? Shelves reach from ceiling to floor and books completely fill three walls of this room. I estimate there must be ten thousand books on every subject imaginable. Though his main interest was detective stories and publications on word play, he read everything from science fiction to historical novels. Thank heavens he was organized. Each category is identified and authors are listed alphabetically within each category.

The only wall not shelved is the one where we came in. Though there are no books on that wall, Travis managed to affix that placard above the door. He stapled that typed verse you see to the placard.

Miracle answer can be deduced. Try insight.
Yellow fortune unlock; in some sequestered nook,
Sharp solution rests within some specific book;
Tautly resolve task Herculean, see bright light.
Enigmatic will awaits with this curt advice:
Resolute quest insists that search must be precise.
Yield doubtful nuance, succeed with a chase airtight.

That is why I have asked you to come. I have heard about your ability to solve such puzzles.

Let us sit down at this table while I tell you why we need a solution. Before Travis retired he had been a very successful businessman. When he retired his assets totaled half a million dollars. That is the dilemma. We can find no will. Though he had never married, he is survived by two brothers and two sisters. He considered them parasites, and they are angry because he rarely provided financial assistance. If a will can't be found, litigation will take years, and only the lawyers will get rich.

I hope you can solve our dilemma. After the funeral everyone convened here in the library, but the verse remained a mystery. They wanted to make a book by book search, but I heeded the

verse and prevented that effort.

Please solve our problem, Lieutenant, and I will guarantee a sizable contribution to the Police Fund.

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Lieutenant Jamison got up from the table and walked toward the door. He took a position where he could study the verse more closely. After five minutes of study, a smile touched his lips. He turned and walked to the west wall. He found the shelf that contained the category he wanted. He found the appropriate author and ran his finger past the titles, and finally picked out the book he wanted.

He laid the book down on the table before the lawyer. Stanton opened the front cover. There fastened to the front flap of the dust cover by Scotch tape was a safe deposit box key. The name of the bank was lettered on the key.

"All you need now is a court order. I'm sure you'll find your will."

"Truly astonishing, Lieutenant. Out of ten thousand books how were you able to decide on this specific book?"

VERBATIM COMPETITION

Verbatim, the Language Quarterly, announces its fifth world-wide contest inviting writers to submit original articles for \$2500 in prizes - \$1000 first prize, \$500 second prize, and \$250 third through sixth prizes. Writers are encouraged to submit as many articles as they like. Articles should not exceed 2000 words and can be on any topic pertaining to language - how to speak it, write it, play with it, mutilate it, criticize it, or enliven it. All entries will be considered for publication in Verbatim.

October 31 is the deadline for the Verbatim competition. Please send a self-addressed stamped envelope for contest rules to Verbatim, 4 Laurel Heights, Old Lyme CT 06371 or Box 199, Aylesbury, Bucks., HP20 1TQ, England.