Hidden Ways

By FREDERIC F. VAN DE WATER

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CHAPTER XV—Continued

—16—

'Don't bother," I said, "to ring for the maid to show me the door. I can find it. I ask you—not now but later when you've less to disturb you—to think seriously whether I've ever violated your confidence. I knew about Grove and his key. I saved him once from the jam he is in now. I knew of his liaison with Ione. See how much of that you can find in the Press, or any other newspaper—up to now."

Allegra gave a little laugh of disbelief. She tossed Duke's squeal on the desk between us and went from the room. I bowed jerkily to Miss Agatha and headed for the door. Her voice checked me.

"Up to now," she repeated. "Do I understand that is a threat?"

I had stood plenty. Her stern eyes could not beat mine down.

"And do I understand," I answered, "that your question is a prelude to bribery?"

"Are you," she inquired, "doing your best to be insulting?"

"I am," I told her, "and I didn't begin it."

She chuckled. The hearty sound never seemed more bizarre. It wrecked melodrama and spoiled my pose. I stared. Miss Agatha grinned.

"Put down your hat and coat," she bade me. "I want to talk to you. Don't stand there gawping. Do as I say. Allegra is troubled with ideals. She'll outgrow them in time. Suppose you tell me, as politely as you can manage, just how you happen to be on the Press."

She smoked one of my cigarettes while I confessed my arrangement with Cochrane, and the difficulties of being pulled two ways by conflicting loyalties. Once or twice, while I spoke, she nodded and when I had ended, gave that preposterous grin of hers.

"You make me feel better," she told me. "I didn't want to believe I'd twice been mistaken in my estimates of character in so short a time."

I found myself defending Grove.

"You'll learn when this thing is unscrambled that he's been just a young idiot, nothing more. No one can make me believe that—"

"No one can make me, either," she broke in, quietly. "He's a good boy. He's lacking in common sense, that's all. Well, it's a family failing."

"Miss Agatha," I blurted, smitten by the calm she preserved above the anguish that must be tearing at her, "you're a game guy!"

Her face relaxed a trifle.

"David," she said, "when women reach my age, they cry easily, or not at all. I have no gift for tears. Grove is in trouble and I have to help him. I always used to pull him out of scrapes. That's my job again."

She looked at me and the wrinkles about her eyes deepened.

"If you had a spark of chivalry," she mocked, "you'd offer to help me."

"And if," I answered, "you had any intuition whatever, you would know that anything I've got is yours."

"I do know it," she admitted with another chuckle, and then grew suddenly grave.

"Will you help me," she asked, "to save my nephew from the trouble into which a scoundrel and a stupid police force have plunged him and out of which a pompous lawyer apparently can't get him? I am an old woman, David, and a cripple. I can't put a murder and a suicide where they belong, by myself."

"All you have to do," I promised, "is point out the murderer."

"Do you think so?" she asked tartly. "I've found him already."

I looked hard at her.

"It's Lyon Ferriter," said Agatha Paget. "I've known that all along."

CHAPTER XVI

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Miss Agatha's quiet words were more shocking than screams. They spoke so simply and readily the belief that I had blundered toward, and recoiled from and reached at again that I could only stare at her.

I blurted:

"How do you know?"

She was like a damaged and ancient lamp in which the flame still burned clearly. She told me:

"From his hands. I was sure the evening when Captain Shannon first questioned him. Don't you remember?"

"Very well," I answered, "but—"

"His hands," she went on, "hung at his sides. Usually, he uses them a lot. He was watching himself. He was acting the part of an entirely innocent person in whose flat a man had been found murdered. He was overacting it. He had something to hide and he was hiding it, very carefully. Too carefully to fool me."

"Then why—?" I began, but she cut me off.

"David," she said, "I've been never so certain of my own virtues that I cared to hunt down the iniquity of others. Mr. Ferriter may have had very good reasons for killing his visitor, but—"

She bit on nothing with a little jerk of her head and I thought of Lachesis, the withered Fate who cuts the cord. She rummaged in her handbag for something and, divining her need, I offered a cigarette and lit it for her. Smoke and something more dire had narrowed her eyes as she went on:

"Lyon Ferriter was clever in his alibi. Since the part that anyone can check was fact, it has to be presumed the rest was too. No one can prove he was in that flat when the man was stabbed. What?"

I had started to speak. Now I said, "Excuse me," and held my words.

"And until," Miss Agatha went on, "that is proved and it is found how he got out afterward, Lyon Ferriter thinks he is safe. He is proud of his cleverness. That is dangerous—for him."

"Well?" I asked as she paused. She did not seem to hear me. She pursued, her eyes still narrow, her voice daunting in its calm:

"All of which has been none of an old woman's business—up to now. Lyon Ferriter called on me this morning. He said he wanted to help Grove. What he wanted was to admire his own cleverness. If he had come to me fairly, David; if he had said, 'Your nephew and my sister have been having an affair. How can we get them out of trouble most easily?' he would have had me as an ally."

She rubbed the cigarette out on the ash tray with slow violence. I

"Do I understand that is a threat?"

gave her another. Her voice had an odd ring as she went on:

"But he didn't. He had no idea why Grove was in his flat! He said that he had given the boy a key because Grove was in and out of the apartment a good deal. Implicitly he served notice on me that that was what he had told, or will tell, the police. He'll protect his sister and leave Grove to be scapegoat for the death of Everett and the earlier murder, if possible. My nephew's plight is a godsend to him."

"And to Ione?" I asked, doubtfully.

"And to Ione," Miss Agatha answered and her jaw grew hard. "She hasn't spoken, has she? She has not come forward with the truth to help her lover. Hers is the perfect fear that casteth out love. I wish I knew what it is."

Her self-possession got me by the throat. I blurted:

"How foul people are!"

Miss Agatha cocked an eye at me.

"So you're finding that out?" she asked.

She sat silent a moment and I thought of the weathered figurehead, immune to storm.

"Miss Agatha," I said, "what do you want me to do?"

She answered indirectly in a level voice:

"All my life, thanks to my legs, I've been audience to the sorry dramas mortals play. I don't like the way this particular one promises to end. I don't like the thought of Grove still in jail—though I understand he is only being 'held for questioning' according to Senator Groesbeck."

"Has he—your nephew—given any explanation?"

The affectionate smile that accompanied her reply was pitiful. Grove, it appeared, had said nothing to the police and little enough to his lawyer. He had been typing a letter at the desk in the workroom and had seen a light in the apartment, across the air shaft. He had gone to the Ferriter flat and had found Everett about to throw himself from the window. He had tried to hold him, but the man had screamed and torn free. That was all. He would say no more. He would not even explain the note the police had found in his pocket.

"And they say," Miss Agatha ended, "that chivalry is dead. Grove, the young sophisticate, posing as Sidney Carton would be funny if it weren't so tragic. He won't see that. He won't help himself. Very well, I shall have to save him by putting Lyon Ferriter in his place."

The certainty in her voice stirred mine to awe as I asked: "How?"

Miss Agatha looked at me hard for an instant and the wrinkles about her eyes deepened.

"David," she said. "I haven't the least idea," and she gave her deep chuckle.

I sat on the desk's edge and told her everything I knew. It was a relief to talk to someone without holding back. We smoked together at first and then, as I passed from the scuffle in the basement to the duel with Lyon and the rifling of my room, the cigarette burned down unheeded in her fingers. She asked at last:

"And why have you had all this attention?"

"Miss Agatha," I told her with a grin, "I haven't the least idea."

She chuckled again.

"At any rate," she said, "we start even as allies."

"Wait," I bade, and told her of the foreign voice I had heard at Mino's. She looked at me hard when I had finished.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

I shrugged.

"Right now, I'm not very sure of anything. Yet I don't think I'm beginning to hear voices. And it may be important, but it isn't evidence, unless we can persuade Lyon to drop back into it again for the benefit of the police."

"No," she said thoughtfully. "You're right. It's a signpost, nothing more. There is a flaw in Lyon, somewhere. Everybody has one. If we could only find it and work on it—"

"You said he was proud," I reminded her.

"And clever," she added. "And also lucky, at poor Grove's expense. Think a minute."

She gathered her fragile body together and looked hard at the hands clasped in her narrow lap as though they held a seer's crystal ball.

"Think," she went on, "of his luck. Everett knew Lyon had killed Blackbeard. And Everett was frightened. Anyone could see that. He was not of the breed of heroes. You were to be killed by accident while Everett rifled your room. The Ferriters thought you had something that was key to the murder."

"And Everett failed," I offered as she paused, "and that, plus fear, destroyed him. So he wrote a farewell note to his family, who were waiting for him to show up at Mino's, and killed himself out of sheer terror."

The surprise in her face heartened me.

"Yes," Miss Agatha said slowly, "that is quite possible and Grove found the note and since its implications seemed to threaten the well-being of his precious beloved, pocketed it — he would — and thereby damned himself."

There was excitement and odd relief in thrusting facts into the pigeonholes of theory where, at least, they would lie without falling out in confusion. Faint pink had come to Miss Agatha's cheek-bones and her eyes sparkled. I asked:

"Has your nephew told to whom he wrote the letter at this desk last night?"

"He has not," Miss Agatha answered. "I never have known silence less golden than his."

"Because," I went on, "I think he is telling the truth," and then I confided my own experience at that desk when, looking up, I had seen a light across the area and Grove pulling down a shade in the Ferriter flat.

Miss Agatha, when I had ended, reached out a hand and, amazingly, patted my knee.

"I think, David," she said quietly, "a very wrong-headed pair of women owe you more than an apology for what they thought of you this morning."

"Forget it," I told her.

She shook her head.

"No," she said. "Just postpone it. Mightn't it be well if we were to write down, separately, all we know and suspect of this—bewilderment? Thereafter, comparing our lists, we might find some hint of what else we should do?"

"It might," I granted, humoring her.

"There's another typewriter about," Miss Agatha thought aloud. "I believe it's in the basement storeroom. I'm sure it was put there when it came back from the repair man's. Allegra!"

I do not think she saw the movement I made to check her call. I had small desire to face the scornful girl again. It hurt too much and, at the same time, angered me. But in an instant there she stood in the doorway, looking at her aunt and plainly not recognizing my existence. Sight of her smoldering niece made Miss Agatha revise her purpose.

"My dear," she said briskly, "I have already apologized to David for what we both thought when his friend's letter came this morning."

She paused. Allegra's face did not stir nor did her eyes move. I fumbled for some word to end this ordeal and found nothing.

"Why should I apologize?" the girl asked. "So that I can read about it in tomorrow's Press?"

If she could hurt me so, I might be able to reach her. I said, as easily as I could:

"News must be either interesting or important."

I was sorry then, for she looked at me, caught her breath and fled.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

NATIONAL AFFAIRS

Reviewed by **CARTER FIELD**

Fear spreads in Congress that country will be drawn into war . . . Willkie Republicans convinced a victorious Germany would force U. S. to totalitarian basis.

(Bell Syndicate—WNU Service.)

WASHINGTON.—The cloakrooms of the house and senate in the early days of January are somewhat reminiscent of those days back in 1916 when, after a call at the White House, Sen. William J. Stone, chairman of the foreign relations committee, and Speaker Champ Clark came back to the Capitol with a report that the "President was leading us into war."

So grave were the foreign repercussions from this situation that President Wilson decided something had to be done. Not only the Allies, but Germany, were getting what the President knew was a very erroneous picture of the situation so far as any position this country might take was concerned.

So Mr. Wilson demanded a showdown. He demanded a vote in both house and senate on the issue. It so happened that a congressman from Texas, Jeff McLemore by name, had introduced a resolution warning all American citizens to stay off armed ships. At that time many merchantmen were being armed with 4.6 guns, mounted on the stern, with the idea of their being able to shoot any attacking submarine.

WAVE OF FEAR EVIDENT

Incidentally, the fact that all the Ohio Republican congressmen but one, Simeon D. Fess, voted against the President on that issue was the chief reason for the debacle of the Republican party in Ohio during that campaign, which resulted in Ohio going for Wilson. And had it not been for Ohio no one would have cared much how California went—Charles Evans Hughes would have been elected.

All this is of moment now because the same sort of wave of fear, though not yet of tidal proportions, is running through congress with respect to the growing conviction in Washington that the United States is headed straight for this war—or at least that the President intends to do everything possible to help Britain whether or not the results of that help lead to war.

But history is apt to repeat itself, in fact almost certain to do so if the peace-at-any-price advocates on Capitol Hill talk too much. There is no doubt that there are enough Republicans who are eagerly on the President's side in this case to make certain that he can have his way on any proposal to help Britain.

* * *

DISAGREE ON FOREIGN POLICY

The real difference of opinion in this country as to the war situation, according to those who agreed with Wendell L. Willkie in the last campaign and have agreed since, is not very often debated. It is not a question of whether one is pro-British or anti-Hitler; it is a question of what is best for this country in the long run.

On one side are the Willkie and the Roosevelt followers. On the other are those who agree with Charles A. Lindbergh, to name just one of this group's spokesmen.

Willkie and Roosevelt believe that if Britain goes down in this war it will be impossible to preserve the American way of life.

Lindbergh and those agreeing with him believe that it would be entirely possible for the United States to get along amicably with Hitler, even if the Nazis are completely triumphant in Europe and Africa.

ROOSEVELT, WILLKIE DISAGREE

The chief difference between Willkie and Roosevelt, believing the same thing on the big question, is POLITICAL procedure. Willkie believes the administration should take the public into its confidence and stage a real debate as to the extent of further aid to Britain—how far we should go—whether we should risk an actual declaration of war, etc.

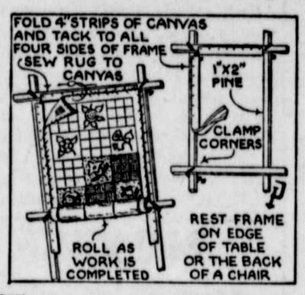
The position of what might be called the Willkie group, always remembering that many Republicans in high places do not agree (Joe Martin, Republican leader of the house, Sen. Hiram Johnson of California, and Sen. Arthur H. Vandenberg of Michigan, for example) is rather interesting. They do not want to go the whole way towards war—but they think it almost impossible to say where to draw the line.

They insist that the only reason the United States is not at war with Germany today is that Hitler does not believe it to Germany's advantage to take that step.

There is no doubt in their minds that a victorious Germany would force this country inevitably to a totalitarian basis on economics. They believe the old system of international trade would be over, and that even if the Americas were untouched, the United States would have to change to meet the changed conditions.

HOW TO SEW

by Ruth Wyeth Spears



TWO of the nicest hook rugs I have were made without a frame. Many rug makers like to work this way so that they may turn the work as they do different parts of the design. Then, too, whenever rug hookers meet there is sure to be an exchange of treasured bits of colored fabrics. In no time at all a rug making group is meeting and it is difficult to carry a frame when one goes visiting. It is often difficult to find space to put a frame away in a small house or apartment, too.

You can see by this that I rather favor working without a frame though I know perfectly well that it is more efficient to work with one. Almost all professionals have frames that rest on a permanent base. I have sketched here the type of frame that most amateurs use. You can buy the corner clamps at the hardware store and put the frame together quickly. It may be the size of your rug or smaller. If it is smaller, just part of the rug is stretched on the frame at one time.

* * *

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ASK ME ANOTHER ?

A Quiz With Answers Offering Information on Various Subjects

The Questions

1. What is the population of Greece?
2. What standards are used by the Bureau of the Census in computing the number of illiterates in the country?
3. Under what conditions may a private in the U. S. army wed?
4. What does a panegyric piece of writing do?
5. "Now God be praised, I die happy" are the dying words of what general?
6. President Andrew Johnson escaped impeachment by how many votes?
7. Does the moon, when it is half full, shed half as much light on the earth as it does when it reaches the full stage?
8. Which is the world's largest flower?
9. Of sheep, cattle, deer, antelope, goats and swine, how many of them are cloven-hoofed animals?
10. How much horsepower is developed by the hydroelectric plant at Niagara Falls?

The Answers

1. The population of Greece is 6,204,684.
2. The Bureau of the Census rules that any person 10 years of age or older who cannot read or write in any language is an illiterate.
3. With his commanding officer's permission.
4. A panegyric piece of writing elaborately praises.
5. James Wolfe (after his victory at Quebec).
6. One. The vote was 35 to 19; a two-thirds majority was necessary for conviction.
7. No, a half-full moon sheds only about one-ninth as much light on the earth as one that is full.
8. The krubi which grows in Sumatra and takes 12 years to bloom. It is over 8 feet high and 12 feet in diameter. It is bell-shaped and has a disagreeable odor.
9. All of them.
10. At present over a million horsepower is produced, and experts estimate that the volume of water which pours over the precipice could develop over 3,975,000 horsepower, or nearly one-tenth of the power needs of the United States.

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Sign of Wisdom

The most manifest sign of wisdom is a continual cheerfulness; her state is like that of things in the regions above the moon, always clear and serene.—Montaigne.

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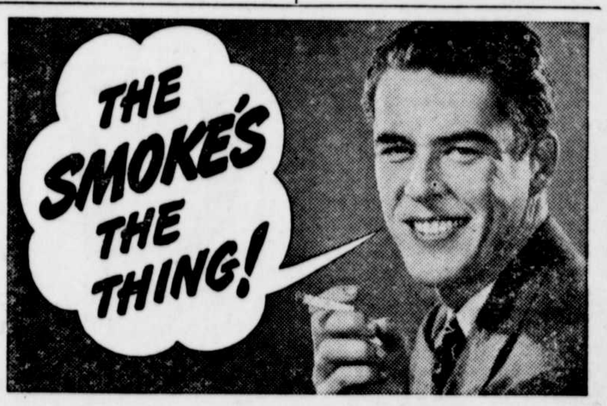
Passing Splendors

The splendors that belong unto the fame of earth are but a wind, that in the same direction lasts not long.—Dante.



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