Hidden Ways

By FREDERIC F. VAN DE WATER

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CHAPTER XVII—Continued.

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Annie returned and announced Senator Groesbeck.

"Alone?" Miss Agatha asked and the wistfulness in her voice hurt me. "Then I'll see him in the living room, Annie."

The maid pushed the wheel chair down the hall. I sat at the desk and strove to set down on paper, after Miss Agatha's prescription, my own outline of the Morello mystery. I found it hard, for each item bore innumerable streamers of surmise and suspicion. I do not know how long Allegra had been standing in the doorway when I looked up.

I rose clumsily. She was still pale but she seemed more tired now than angry. There was a droop to her shoulders and I cursed myself for feeling pitiful. She said at last:

"You make it just as hard as possible, don't you?"

A few hours earlier she had pointed out the abyss that lay between her and me. I had sworn then never to strive to rebridge it. Sense still assured me that it was best for her to remain on her side and I on mine. Hunger for her, desire to aid her were checked by memory of my recent, adolescent idiocy. It hurts to have even a silly dream kicked apart. I said:

"I beg your pardon."

"You heard me."

I made no reply. She went on, like a child reciting a lesson:

"If I've misjudged you, I'm sorry."

"Miss Paget," I told her, 'I misjudged you—and am even sorrier."

"I came in here," she told me, "to apologize because Agatha thought I should."

She might have been talking to the butler. There was no call for her to put me in my place. I was there already and had sworn not to leave it again. I said:

"That seems to me about the worst reason in the world."

Again she apparently hoped for something in my face that was not there. She muttered:

"You make it very hard."

She was just a kid after all. Which was still another reason why things should stay as they were. So I said:

"You said that before — which leaves us just where we started."

"Do you want to leave it there?" she asked directly, and I forced myself to answer:

"Why not?"

There was a stir in the hall and the sound of voices. I did not know whether I was relieved or desolate when she left. Senator Groesbeck, now sleek and pompous, passed the doorway. Miss Agatha trundled herself into the room.

"What was Allegra doing in here she asked.

"Apologizing," I said.

She gave me one of the looks that made me feel she was counting my vertebrae and then said, "Hah!" in an odd tone. Thereafter, her mind dwelt on other matters.

"I wish," she complained, "that I hadn't so respectable an attorney. I need a scoundrel who'll help an idiot who won't help himself."

"As bad as that?" I asked.

She nodded and lighted a cigarette.

"Grove," she said, "is being held as a material witness. He still won't talk, so they're going to take him before the grand jury presently. If he doesn't talk then, he'll be indicted."

Her brisk voice was armor that, I know, hid great distress. She brooded a minute, while I groped for words and then asked:

"Where's the typewriter?"

"You said," I told her, "that it was in the storeroom."

"Why didn't you get it?"

"Miss Agatha," I asked, "can you imagine Higgins letting me rummage through a basement storeroom without a writ of mandamus, a habeas corpus and a strong-arm squad?"

The lines of worry in her face slackened and she chuckled.

"No," she admitted. "I'm an old fool, David, but just the least bit bedeviled today. We'll go down together."

I trundled her into the hall and rang for the elevator. She said nothing till the car appeared, but the grim lines had deepened again on her face and I knew she was eating her heart out for her nephew. Hoyt took us down. I could see his ears pricked for tidings, but we did not speak. I had propelled Miss Agatha into the basement hall. A wan light burned there and the air was heavy with the familiar smell of lime and coal gas and cabbage for the Higgins' dinners, past and present. Miss Agatha dug in her handbag and chose a key from a ring.

Along one side of the basement hall was a series of iron doors, with gaps at lintel and threshold for ventilation. They guarded the cubbies that served as attics for tenants of the Morello. It was against one of these that I had reeled during my dark struggle with the intruder. I thought, as I fumbled with the lock, how brief a space by actual measurement, yet how long ago, that had been. Perhaps if I had been less clumsy that night, I might have ended the mystery. I might have saved innocent folk much danger and distress. The smell and gloom of the basement allied themselves with memory to tighten my nerves so that I flinched when Miss Agatha said impatiently:

"Can't you do it?"

She rolled forward to take the key. It turned as she moved and I pulled the door open before her advancing chair.

"There it is," Miss Agatha said, "over—"

Her voice died. The harsh sound of her indrawn breath set my neck to prickling. The light of the ceiling bulb poured into the maw of the storeroom. It shone upon something at Miss Agatha's feet at which she stared, at which I gaped, first stupidly, then in frantic disbelief. I bent forward.

"Careful," Miss Agatha warned in a dry whisper. "Don't touch it."

CHAPTER XVIII

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Wind boomed in the elevator shaft and I heard the whine and catch of a car shifting gears in the street. The rest of my mind had stalled under its sudden load. Close to my ear Miss Agatha's breath came and went quickly. So we remained for a palsied instant, watching the object on the storeroom floor.

It lay just within the ventilation space at the iron door's base—a bizarre item for a spinster's storeroom, yet, in itself, nothing to wake dread. It was a knife with a black leather handle and a worn gray blade, streaked with what might

"I came in here," she told me, "to apologize."

have been rust. We both knew whence it had come.

It was the knife that had hung in the sheath they had found on Blackbeard's murdered body. It had been driven into its owner's heart. It had uttered the flat sound of smitten metal when it had fallen during my struggle in the basement, to lodge inside the door of the Paget storeroom.

I bent over it again. Miss Agatha made no further protest as I picked it up by its point, swathed it loosely in my handkerchief, and rose. Her eyes met mine and asked a question. I feared to answer. I heard myself say:

"We had better go upstairs."

She nodded. I placed the handkerchief-wrapped knife in her lap and trundled her to the elevator shaft. We were silent on our upward journey. In the work-room, I picked up the muffled weapon carefully and laid it on the desk. Then I faced Miss Agatha.

It was hard to ask the question. The knife had killed; it might kill again. It was the link between the murdered and the murderer. My voice was hoarse:

"What shall we do, now?"

She blinked. Her speech was calm as her face:

"I think we had better telephone Captain Shannon."

I said:

"There may be no one's fingerprints on that knife. There may be —anybody's."

I could not speak her nephew's name, but she understood.

"Call Captain Shannon," she said, and there was a lump in my throat as I obeyed. I spoke only briefly, asking the Homicide Bureau chief to come at once with a fingerprint man; then hung up on his further questioning. The receiver clattered as my shaking hand restored it. Miss Agatha said:

"We both need a drink," and rang for Annie.

I nursed the liquor I would willingly have gulped. Miss Agatha sipped hers and at last spoke part of her thought aloud:

"This was what you heard fall, that night in the basement, but how —why—I don't see—"

Her voice ran down. I said feebly:

"Unless it is a maniac—"

Uncertainty left her. She gave a crooked smile.

"Who had designs on Higgins?" she scoffed. "David, Lyon Ferriter is no maniac. He is amazingly clever. I told you that this morning."

"But Lyon," I pointed out, "was in your flat when—"

She did not let me finish.

"I know, I know," she said. "But he did it. He killed the visitor to his flat. I object less to that, David, than to the knowledge that he is laughing at us now. I never have liked to be laughed at. It's been my legs, I suppose. Heavens, our assembled brains should be as good as his. If only we could find a flaw, a weakness."

She drank again and then went on:

"Everything radiates from Lyon Ferriter, but none of it reaches back to him."

A thought pricked me and some of the jumble of fact fell into coherent pattern.

"That's why," I blurted, "Lyon tried to kill me; that's why my room was searched. He thought I had found that knife. His own fingerprints must be on it."

"They won't be," Miss Agatha promised grimly. We were still for a moment. Then she said:

"Day after tomorrow is Grove's birthday."

Her voice was so bare of sentiment that it was piteous. The day when Grove attained his inheritance, the day toward which, all his life, she had steered her foster son, would find him in disgrace and danger, unless—

I jumped at the telephone's ring. Could Shannon have arrived so soon?

"Answer it," Miss Agatha bade and her voice quavered a little.

I obeyed and was ashamed of my own agitation.

Jerry Cochrane drawled:

"Dave, I want to see you. I've got hold of something a bit interesting, my laddie. Where can you meet me?"

He slipped away from further questions. It was too important to discuss over the house telephone, he said, and for like reason I forebore to tell what we had found. At last I clapped my hand over the mouthpiece and said to Miss Agatha:

"It's Cochrane. He sounds so sleepy, I know he's excited. May he come here?"

At once she refused and then, to my amazement, gave way before my arguments. I pleaded that it might be important before Shannon came, to learn what Cochrane had discovered. I said we needed the alliance of Jerry's quick mind. Miss Agatha consented at last:

"Have him come, David. You're very stubborn and I—I imagine I'm getting old."

I bade Cochrane hasten and hung up as Miss Agatha said:

"Allegra, my dear, will you tell the hall force that Mr. Cochrane is to be admitted?"

The fur collar of the girl's cloak softened her face and the February wind had lent it color. Her aunt told her dryly and briefly of our discovery. Allegra glanced past me at the swathed weapon on the desk. Then a thought startled her.

"Agatha. You've sent for the police. And no one knows whose fingerprints may be on that knife. Even—"

"Even Grove's," her aunt completed in a level voice. "Yes, my dear. I'm not a Roman matron, but I have a respect for law. If they are there—"

Allegra had stepped quickly toward the desk. I knew her purpose and moved between her and the knife.

"They aren't your brother's," I told her. "He was here when that knife was lost."

Anger lighted her eyes but her face went white.

"If you think," she said in a taut voice, "I'm going to let my brother's life be juggled about because a spy has hoodwinked an old woman—"

Miss Agatha's quiet speech stilled her.

"I'm not too old, Allegra," she said, "to be obeyed in my own house. Will you tell the hall force to admit Mr. Cochrane, or shall I?"

I saw what was coming. The girl's face seemed to break apart into quivering fragments. Her voice shook with ghastly mirth.

"I won't. It can't be happening. It's a funny, hideous—"

I said sharply.

"Get hold of yourself. You aren't Ione Paget."

She looked at me like someone just waked. Then she drew a deep unsteady breath and went to the telephone to do her aunt's bidding. Thereafter, she turned and looked at me again.

"Thank you," she said. "That's the first time—"

"Forget it," I told her.

She drew up a chair beside Miss Agatha. Their hands joined. The girl bent over and kissed the still old face. So we waited for Shannon while the crumpled mound of handkerchief on the desk kept us still.

It was Cochrane who arrived first. His chubby face, his mild prosaic air loosened the atmosphere. He bowed and acknowledged Miss Agatha's introduction to her niece so easily that I think the girl was partly reassured. Then he beamed at me.

"This is in confidence," he said, including the whole room in his smile. "This, my lad, is banner-line stuff, if we can get to use it. Did you see the Sphere this morning, any of you?"

I shook my head. I felt the sting in Allegra's voice as she answered:

"We read the Press."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Fashion-Wise Women Take Up Crocheting With Real Zest

By CHERIE NICHOLAS

WHEN you pick up your newspaper these days, or flip through the pages of your favorite magazine, more often than not you'll see pictures of stage, radio and motion picture stars, college girls, club women and debutantes, all busy at a new hobby—crocheting!

A crocheting fad is sweeping the country. Crochet hooks are being wielded by busy fingers from Maine to California, from the Canadian border to the Gulf of Mexico. The vogue has taken such hold that nowadays when a deb reaches into her handbag, it's probably for a crochet hook rather than a lipstick.

Mind you, it's not just the home girls interested in housewifely arts who are crocheting. This time it's the college girls whose campus-bound trunks, returning from midwinter homecomings, fairly bulged with unfinished sweaters and blouses and accessory items into which, no doubt, they will be putting the final stitches in the lecture room, pacing busy hands to busy minds. In the city thoroughfares it's the debutantes who are crocheting in taxicabs speeding to and fro in their round of social engagements. Stage and radio stars are at it too, while they wait their cues, all of which means that crocheting has definitely reached the glamour stage.

That crochet has come "in" as a style of high importance is big news from the fashion angle. The famous designer Schiaparelli may be back of it all, for when she arrived some months ago on the Atlantic clipper she wore a crocheted collar, crocheted gloves and listen to this—crocheted stockings! The latter were very smart looking and created a sensation because of their unusualness.

Crocheted jewelry is another unique item, especially the lei flower necklace with bracelet to match. The idea of stiffly-starched small crochet wings worn in the hair has spread like wildfire. Young girls are especially like these wings because it takes only a jiffy to make them and they are different and much more interesting than the traditional ribbon bows they have been wearing. A miniature crochet shawl to complete a sweater and plaid-skirt outfit is another favorite accessory.

At exciting style prevues for spring the emphasis on crochet fashions is unmistakable. Ideas are such that clever women at home will be quick to add crocheted items to their own wardrobes. For example, insets of crochet in triangles, squares or circles, also yoke tops, add style touches to the new pastel wool frocks. Pockets and belts of crochet and jackets with crocheted sleeves bespeak the high-style significance of this new vogue for handwork.

Milliners are on the alert, too. They are making snug crochet turbans with dramatic twists and drapes of crochet to give front height. The white crochet hat at the top of the left in the illustration has gone patriotic in that an American eagle spreads its wings in a gay crochet motif. To the right (above) a casual wide-brimmed hat has its crown embellished with an applique of floral crochet done in green cotton thread. The smart crocheted pillbox hat shown below has a close-fitting snood for anchorage and "style."

(Released by Western Newspaper Union.)

Lapel Gadgets

Jewel gadgets continue to flourish on midseason jacket lapels. With the discarding of burdensome winter fur coats comes evidence of the importance attached to suits for midseason and early spring wear. With suits in the limelight, then it is that the gadgets so popularly worn on jacket lapels will come into their own with renewed emphasis. While women are willing and eager to discard their fur topcoats during the interval that spans winter and spring, they still cling to the touches of flattering fur that so dramatized their smart turbans. In the picture an enormous gold-and-topaz pin is worn on the lapel of a mossy green wool long-coat. There will be considerable topaz and amber jewelry in evidence during the midseason months and early spring in line with the trend toward yellows and beiges and sunburnt tones that are sponsored for spring.

Emblems Important Trimming Feature

The new costumes and sweaters are emblazoned with emblems. Some are embroidered, others formed of jewels, beads and sequins. The casual sports blouse flourishes a nautical emblem on its sleeve or perhaps on the pocket. Sailor blouses with insignia on the sleeve are "last word" fashion news for spring.

Your best dress should have an imposing emblem embroidered in jewels and metal beads.

Your hat looks patriotic with a jeweled or embroidered eagle spreading its wings on crown or brim. Your scarf should carry a cunningly contrived emblem, and your "hankies" too. The story goes on and on throughout the spring style program in endless and fascinating ways.

Designers Match Hats With Tailored Tweeds

Designers think so highly of matching the tailored suit with a tailored hat of identical material that they are stressing the idea in advance spring fashions. When you buy your suit ask for a two-some that includes the matching hat. If you are having your suit turned out by your favorite tailor, buy an extra piece of the tweed or novelty suiting to furnish your milliner who will fashion smartest kind of headgear from soft brimmed hats to jaunty sailors and pillbox types. Perhaps a turban might interest you most. Tell your milliner and she will turn out a most intricately knotted affair or draped and will go even to the point of creating a handbag to match.

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HOUSEHOLD QUESTIONS

Grease the measuring cup before measuring syrup or molasses and it will not stick to the sides of the cup.

• • •

To keep brown sugar moist and fresh, store in a covered container with a freshly cut piece of lemon.

• • •

A window box of seasoning herbs is handy for winter cooking.

• • •

If rubber gloves are sprinkled on the inside with corn starch or powder they will slip on more easily.

• • •

Don't buy very large or very small vegetables. There is much waste in the small ones and the large ones have lost some of their flavor.

• • •

For something new and different spread baked ham with a half-cup of molasses and bake 30 minutes in moderate oven. This gives a delicious flavor and a brown top. You can include a teaspoon each of cinnamon and cloves for a spicy touch.

• • •

To make silver and glassware shine, dry them directly out of hot sudsy water. This treatment also helps to retard tarnishing of silver, which takes place more quickly in winter time when the furnace is on.

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