

Hidden Ways

By FREDERIC F. VAN DE WATER

SYNOPSIS

David Mallory, in search of newspaper work in New York, is forced to accept a job as switch-board operator in a swank apartment house, managed by officious Timothy Higgins. There David meets Miss Agatha Paget, a crippled old lady, and her charming niece, Allegra. One day, talking with Higgins in the lobby, David is alarmed by a piercing scream. David finds the scream came from the Ferriter apartment, not far from the Pagets. The Ferriters include Lyon and Everett, and their sister, Ione. Everett, a genealogist, is helping Agatha Paget write a book about her blue-blooded ancestors. Inside the apartment they find a black-headed man—dead. No weapon can be found. The police arrive. Higgins, who actively dislikes David, informs him that he is fired. David is called to the Paget apartment. Agatha Paget offers him a job helping write her family history—which will unearth a few family skeletons. He accepts the offer. Meanwhile, police suspect Lyon Ferriter of the murder. Jerry Cochran of the Press offers David a job helping solve the murder. David accepts. He is to keep on working for Miss Paget. Later David meets Grosvenor Paget, Allegra's brother. That night David sees Grosvenor prowling through the Ferriter apartment. David confronts Grosvenor with the story. He is told to mind his own business. Then David goes to Higgins' basement flat to retrieve his luggage. In the darkness he brushes against an unknown person, and in attempting to capture him, falls over his own suitcase. David's landlady tells him that a woman had called upon him. The mysterious lady would leave no message or name.

Agatha had been on the threshold. Nothing in her face gave us a clue. She rolled into the room and spoke crisply:

"It's bad enough to be a refuge for all my family's grief-smitten, without posing as aunt to the New York City police. Captain Shannon has been telephoning. Lyon Ferriter escaped from the Babylon last night."

"How long," I asked suddenly, "did he stay after I left?"

There was a glitter in her eyes.

"About a quarter-hour," she informed me, "and I'd be quite content, David, if you'd confine your criminal investigations for the present to my own ancestry."

"Yes, Miss Paget," I said with meekness that made her chuckle. I know now she had heard at least the conclusion of my talk with her niece. She turned to Allegra.

"Lunch in a half-hour, my dear," she said, and the girl left the room.



"He seemed pleased," I replied—to see me and my bag spread all over the floor."

The old lady started to follow and paused:

"David," said she, "I hope your head is stronger than I've any reason to think it is."

"I hope it's stronger than I think it is," I answered.

She lingered an instant and then nodded.

"Perhaps," she comforted, "it's better than either of us thinks," and trundled herself away.

The door opened. Allegra looked in.

"A message from Miss Paget," she said with mock gravity. "There is an extra place at the table this noon that she wishes you would occupy. Mr. Everett Ferriter is indisposed again."

CHAPTER IX

Linen's frosty glow, the cool glitter of silver and china were like friends long absent. They lifted my morale. I caught Allegra's glance as Lyon helped her into the chair beside his, and grinned. I sat between Ione and Miss Agatha with Ferriter opposite, on her right hand, and I selected the bouillon spoon boldly, because I thought they might wonder if I could.

I found myself disliking the scent Ione wore and her as well, for no clear reason other than that I objected to sultry brunettes.

My neighbor said in her husky voice:

"I haven't thanked you, Mr. Mallory, for what you did that—awful night."

I wondered if it were only the shock of that evening that harried her now.

"Thank me," I asked, "for treating you rough?"

"Exactly. I needed it. I don't usually—fall apart like that."

Lyon spoke with the odd devotion in his eyes he reserved for his sister.

"She really doesn't. She wintered with me in Alaska, but that, after all, isn't preparation for finding—"

He checked himself and turned to Miss Agatha with an apologetic movement of his hands.

"I beg pardon. There is no excuse for dragging—"

"Nonsense," the old lady cut in. "My dear man, closets are the worst possible places for skeletons. It's far more wholesome to leave them out in the air. If you can stand it."

"We have to," he said a little grimly. "Until the police get the idea that people who weren't there could not have done it."

I had wished, a half-hour earlier, that I might be included among Miss Paget's guests. Now I was unhappy. I knew too much and suspected too much more. I was tense and saw portents in actions outwardly innocent. For a moment, I had thought Ione's seizure had concealed terror. Now the sanity of the well-ordered lunch, the calm beauty of the room, the decorous speech of its occupants jeered at my suspicions. The talk veered away to less intense matters. The meal was closing when Miss Agatha said suddenly:

"Allegra, Grove called up while you were dressing. He won't be home till late. You will have to

find another escort for the opera tonight."

The girl nodded without expression and for an instant her eyes strayed to Ione who asked the old lady:

"You don't go, Miss Paget?"

The composure in her rich voice once more mocked my suspicion.

Miss Agatha shook her head.

"My dear," said she, "I was reared in the Paget tradition. I went to the opera as regularly as I went to church. Being a cripple, I had no conflicting engagements. I went. I still have my father's seats. Allegra and Grove pretend to like it. I grew tired long ago of hearing nonsense sung in one language by folks who speak another, to people who don't understand either."

"As a rule," Lyon said, "operas could stand a deal of editing."

"Extermination," Miss Agatha told him, "is the better word."

I laughed and so did he, and catching my eye, he asked:

"By the way, were you coming out of the cellar last night when I left?"

Once more my spine prickled—I thought that a hidden something lurked beneath that easy question. Out of the murk a new theory suddenly jumped at me. Perhaps the prostrated Everett after all had been my basement antagonist. I gathered my wits and tried to drive into the open whatever fear hid behind Lyon's query.

"Yes."

He smiled.

"After I passed, I thought it had been you. At the moment I imagined that it was just another detective following me around. I haven't dared look under the table this noon, Miss Paget, for fear of finding one."

"I can vouch for this company," Miss Agatha said dryly, "unless David is one in disguise." I wondered what she meant but Allegra asked, mockingly:

"Just a social call on Casanova?"

Out of an eye corner, I saw that Ione held her fork motionless above her salad.

"No," I said. "I went to get my suitcase. I didn't see Higgins till later."

"Later?" Ione repeated.

I looked at her, but her make-up might have been a mask.

"You see," I told her, "the helpful Higgins had left the suitcase in the basement hall. I fell over it, which pleased him, I think."

"The swine," said Lyon and his calm disappointed me. "That's how you hurt yourself, eh?"

He nodded at my trampled left hand. I shook my head, weighing the merits of reticence and complete exposure. I chose the former and merely said:

"No. Someone else gave me that."

"I hope," said Miss Agatha and bit that invisible thread, "that you skinned it on Timothy's jaw."

"He seemed pleased," I replied, "when he came out and turned on the lights, to see me and my bag spread all over the floor."

With the others, I followed Miss Agatha's chair into the living room and looked at my watch.

"It's time," I told the old lady, "that I stopped being a guest and became an employee."

Ione, bright and exotic as a tropic bird, smiled at me as I backed toward the hall door. Lyon's right hand went through the movements of the sword salute.

"Oh, I say," he checked me as I turned to leave, "why not stop in when you leave this afternoon? I'd really like to have you see my collection of blades, if you'd be interested."

"Thanks," I said, finding no way to refuse without seeming churlish. "I'd be glad to."

"Splendid. At what time?"

"Between five and six?"

"Right. I'll be looking for you. I wish there were room for us to fence a bit, but I'm afraid that's impossible."

"I'm glad there isn't," I told him. "I'm very rusty," and went back to the workroom.

It was five when I finished and, under Annie's convoy, took the completed copy to my employer. She sat in the living room at her version of afternoon tea—solitaire, a cigarette and a highball.

I waited while she read the script slowly and without expression. When she had laid the last page aside, she said:

"You're very able as well as willful. You've done it exactly as I should—if I had your gift. Will you take Allegra to the opera this evening?"

The question, flung at me while I was a little unsettled by her approval—I had not had much praise in the last few weeks—was like a punch in the stomach. I gasped. She chose to misread my confusion.

"A purely business proposition. Allegra was going with Grove. All the other young men she knows have engagements. She can't very well go by herself and if you'll escort her—"

"I can send in my bill tomorrow?" I asked. "No, Miss Paget. I'm busy this evening."

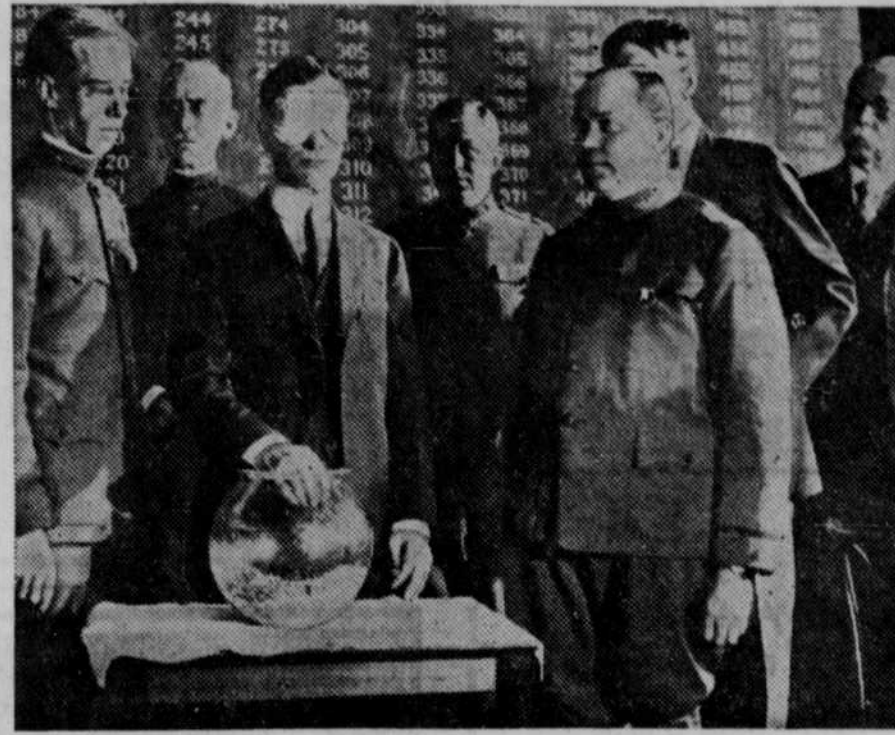
"There are times, David Mallory, when I could slap you," Miss Agatha said and sat very straight in her wheel chair.

"That goes double," I answered. She chuckled. She liked defiance.

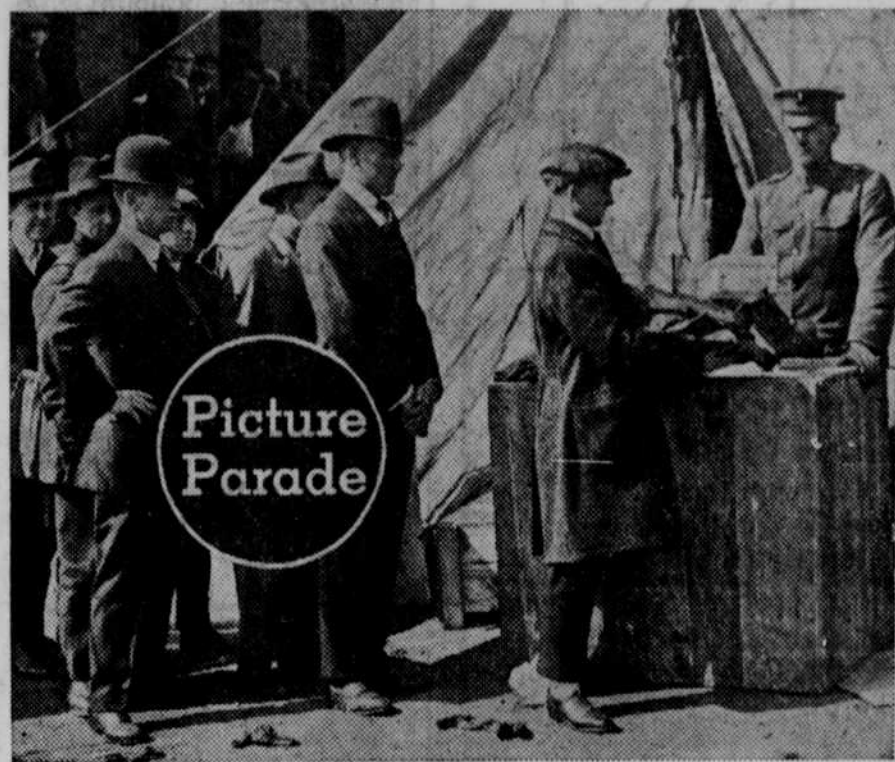
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Draft History to Repeat As Uncle Sam Gets Busy

The Burke-Wadsworth selective military service bill, which calls to military service men between the ages of 21 and 35, inclusive, recalls the scenes of 1917 when Uncle Sam drafted his army for the World war. As in 1917, there are not enough arms to go around, and some draftees may be forced to train with wooden guns. Physical requirements will not be as strict as those used in selecting men for the regular army in peacetime.



Fairness and impartiality marked selection of the first draftees in accordance with the selective service regulations during the World war. Here you see Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, blindfolded, drawing the first draft capsule from a glass bowl, in 1917.



Scenes like this, showing draftees checking in at Fort Slocum during the national call to arms in 1917, will once more be the rule now that the Burke-Wadsworth military training bill is in effect.



Draftees being examined by a military medical staff in 1917. The army of 400,000 men who are taking the oath of allegiance under the Burke-Wadsworth bill will be the healthiest conscription group in the nation's history.



Countless rolls of cloth in the quartermaster's department in Philadelphia soon will be cut into soldiers' uniforms.



Draftees training with wooden guns during the World war.

GUESSWORK

By CARLTON JAMES

(Associated Newspapers.) WNU Service.

HEAVY, dense fog engulfed the city. Great clouds of it, resembling phantom ships, rose from the river bottom and floated spectra-fashion beneath the yellow eye of light that was the street lamp.

Inspector Joe Warren paused to watch the curious apparition. For a moment he stood in the deep shadow near the bridge's ironwork, his hat pulled down and coat collar turned up against the bleak, wet cold.

He shivered and was about to move on when a figure emerged from the darkness beyond and came into the light of the street lamp. The figure was that of a man, and at sight of the inspector standing alone there he came forward.

As the stranger drew near, Warren saw that his face was drawn and white, and that his eyes held a frightened look.

"You're Inspector Warren, aren't you?" he asked, and Warren peered at him in some surprise. Queer, he thought, that this stranger should recognize him at a glance.

Without waiting for a reply the other man rushed on. "You'd better get help! A man just now committed suicide! Jumped off the bridge there, into the river."

Warren was used to emergencies, had schooled himself for quick thinking. Scarcely before the stranger had finished speaking, he had produced a police whistle and was blowing it shrilly.

Dimly, out of the darkness came an answering whistle, and seconds later a uniformed policeman materialized out of the fog and gloom. A second followed and then a third. Warren issued short, crisp orders. The policemen vanished as quickly as they came. Warren and the stranger were alone again.

"They'll get him," Warren said. "May be too late, though."

"Good. I hope so. It was awful." The stranger nodded nervously and moved away.

"Wait a minute."

The other man paused, looked over his shoulder inquiringly.

"What's your name? May want to look you up later."

"Oh!" The stranger turned, came back. "Name of Blair. George Blair. I was coming across the bridge," he further volunteered. "Saw a man standing near the rail. As I approached he climbed up and—"

"Let's walk back," Warren cut in. "You can show me the exact spot. Maybe," he added, as if by way of apology, "we can help the cops."

Blair seemed to hesitate, seemed to recoil at the idea. He said after a moment, "All right."

The two men walked silently out on the bridge. Midway across Blair halted.

"There's his coat, there." He pointed to a dim outline on the ground. Warren made out a crumpled coat, weighted down by a small box. "He was standing here," Blair went on, "when I came up. I grasped at his arm and he turned on me snarling."

"What did he say?" Warren asked.

Blair seemed to reflect. Presently: "Something about letting him alone. A man could do what he chose with his own life. Then he dropped the box he was carrying and struck me in the chest. By the time I had regained my balance he was overboard."

"Hum-m," said Warren, and peered over the high railing into that black void that lay below. Ostensibly he was listening for sounds of the rescuing policeman. Suddenly he turned.

"Blair, you're lying! If those cops down there find the body they'll find the body of a man who has been murdered!"

Blair's eyes bulged. He seemed on the point of collapsing. But Warren continued: "Get a grip on yourself, man! Let's have the story. It's your only chance."

"Only chance of what?" hopefully.

"Only chance of not making things worse. I suspect you had a reason for killing him."

"I didn't kill him! I didn't! He—"

There was a sob in the man's voice. He seemed to be struggling to maintain his senses. "He—he stole some jewelry from my store. I came from the back room in time to see him going through the door. I gave chase, caught up with him on the bridge. He dropped the box and flung off his coat. We struggled. He tried to throw me over the railing, almost succeeded, but I managed to break loose. I struck out fiercely. The blow knocked him off balance and he fell into the river below." He finished, panting heavily.

"And you thought you killed him," Warren went on. "You became frightened, and then, instead of going to the police like you should have done, you thought up this suicide gag. Is that it?"

"No one would have believed me," the man pleaded. "It looked bad. I thought it was all right—then I saw you."

"And wondered how long I'd been around, eh? You knew I'd been here long I'd have heard the struggle and the splash as the chap fell into the water. Well, I heard neither."

"But, how—"

"Guesswork, mostly," Warren

said briefly. "That and a few obvious blunders you made. Easy to see you're no professional at the game. But here come the cops. We'll see how true your story is."

Bulky figures were emerging out of the darkness. Policemen. Two of them carried a limp form between them. A third came behind. "We've sent for an ambulance," one of the uniformed men said, addressing Warren.

"Dead, is he?" Warren asked.

"No. Not quite. Pretty well fagged out. He had managed to get to the dock, and was hanging on to a stranger when we arrived."

"Any marks on him?"

"A bruise or two on his face. No real damage."

"Good. Do what you can for him, till the wagon arrives."

Warren turned to Blair. "Go on home, mister. And sleep it off. But, first, pick up your box of jewels from where you placed them on this bird's coat."

Blair turned, stopped, then straightened up. "How," he asked, "did you know I placed them there? What made you suspicious, anyway?"

Warren permitted himself a smile. "Guesswork mostly. I'm used to dealing with real criminals. Amateurs like yourself are easy to figure out." He paused, then: "Next time, be more careful. If things had happened as you said they did, the box of jewels couldn't possibly have been on the coat."

One Woman

By JOHN C. HAYWOOD (McClure Syndicate—WNU Service.)

WOMEN have entered very little into my life. Except one. The memory of her face, not beautiful in regularity of features but in expression of love and tenderness is with me still. The tones of her voice haunt me. I cannot forget her. I have lost all trace of her although I have tried diligently to find her, aye, even hired a detective to bring me news of her, alive or dead.

It was dusk when I left my office uptown and entered the subway. In a happy mood I took my seat. A few seats away across the aisle I saw her. Shabbily dressed but neat.

Then I saw her face, half turned to watch something on my side of the car. I guessed, from the gurgles and occasional shrieks that rose above the noise, it was a baby. And such longing, such passionate tenderness as shone in the woman's face stirred me deeply. What was her story? Had she lost a little one? It could not be that for there was no sadness in her look. As I speculated she turned her face to me. I am twenty-eight. Not ill-looking. My clothes stamp me, I believe, for what I aim to be, a prosperous man, but through the drift of circumstances I am not that. Yet, from my well-polished shoes to my gray fedora the woman looked me over. Calmly. Casually. Then turned with soft gaze upon the child.

At Fourteenth street I folded my newspaper and prepared to leave. The woman, holding in her hand a little purse, moved onto the platform of the car.

About half way up I saw she had dropped her purse. Gladly I picked it up. With a thrill of joy I called "Madam!" Now I should have speech with her. She stopped and as I reached her side and handed her the purse she clutched it and leaned as though faint against the side wall.

"I am glad," I said, "I happened to be behind. You might have lost it."

"Lost it!" her voice came thinly. An echo. "And it is all I have in the world." She put her hand to her chest. Tears came into her eyes.

"Come." I put my hand on her arm. "Let me help you up. In the air you'll feel better."

"Thank you." Together we mounted the stairs. There were many passing. They jostled us. With the woman leaning upon me I felt conspicuous.

"Come out of this crowd," I said in a don't-contradict-me voice, and led her into the entrance way of a closed store. "Now, cut out that weakness. You have your purse, haven't you? Be glad." She wiped her eyes. And smiled, not exactly a whole smile, but a good sample.

In the half light I saw her eyes glint fiercely at me. She bit her lip, then with wonderful self-control, said:

"You must let me go. I—I think you misjudge me. You have indeed been wonderful. I—I liked you—"

"I forgot you were a stranger."

"Don't go. I'm sorry! Tell me about yourself. Perhaps I can help you."

For a moment we were both silent. Then impulsively she took hold of the lapel of my coat and told me her story; the sordid story of an orphan's struggle in a workaday and heartless world. And as she told it, her face lighted by a memory of good in some man, "wise and kind and intelligent as you are" she had said, her hand trembled on the clutched lapel and she shook me in her vehemence.

I felt love growing in my heart for her. She told me her name was Alleen Turner and she lived in a cheap boarding house on the East Side. I promised to call. But I did not. I put her in a taxi and paid the fare from some loose change in my pocket. When the car disappeared, there went with it my watch, my wallet and considerably more cash than I could afford to lose.