Wednesdays at Four

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Published by MIRA

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CHAPTER

1

"One of the best kept secrets in the knitting world is that knitting lace appears to be much more difficult than it is. If you can knit, purl, knit two together and put the yarn over your needle to form a new stitch, you CAN knit lace."

—Myrna A.I. Stahman, Rocking Chair Press, designer, author and publisher of *Stahman's Shawls and Scarves—Lace Faroese-Shaped Shawls From The Neck Down and Seamen's Scarves,* and the soon to be published *The Versatility of Lace Knitting—Variations on a Theme*

Lydia Goetz

I love A Good Yarn, and I'm grateful for every minute I spend in my shop on Blossom Street. I love looking at the skeins of yarn in all their colors and feeling the different textures. I

love my knitting classes and the friends I've made here. I love studying the pattern books. I love gazing out my front window onto the energy and activity of downtown Seattle. In fact, I love *everything* about this life I've found, this world I've built.

Knitting was my salvation. That's something I've said often, I know, but it's simply the truth. Even now, after nearly ten years of living cancer-free, knitting dominates my life. Because of my yarn store, I've become part of a community of knitters and friends.

I'm also married now, to Brad Goetz. A Good Yarn was my first real chance at life and Brad was my first chance at love. Together, Brad and I are raising our nine-year-old son. I say Cody's *our* son, and he is, in all the ways that matter. I consider him as much my child as Brad's; I couldn't love Cody more if I'd given birth to him. It's true he has a mother, and I know Janice does care about him. But Brad's ex-wife is…well, I hesitate to say it, but *selfish* is the word that inevitably comes to mind. Janice appears intermittently in Cody's life, whenever the mood strikes her or she happens to find it convenient—despite the parenting plan she signed when she and Brad divorced. Sadly, she only sees her son once or twice a year. I can tell that the lack of communication bothers Cody. And Janice's cavalier attitude toward motherhood angers me, but like my son, I don't mention the hurt. Cody doesn't need me to defend or malign Janice; he's capable of forming his own opinions. For a kid, he's remarkably resilient and insightful.

On a February morning, my store with all its warmth and color was a cozy place to be. The timer on the microwave went off; I removed the boiling water and poured it into my teapot after dropping in a couple of tea bags. The rain was falling from

brooding, gray skies as it often does in winter. I decided it was time to start another knitting class. I maintain several ongoing classes and charity knitting groups, and I usually begin a new session four or five times a year.

As I considered my new class, I was also thinking about my mother, who's adjusted to life in the assisted-living complex reasonably well. In some ways, I suspect that moving her was even more difficult for my sister, Margaret, and me than it was for Mom. Although Mom hated giving up her independence, she seemed relieved not to have the worry about the house and yard anymore. I wept the day the house was sold, and while she never allowed me to see her tears, I believe Margaret did, too. Selling the house meant letting go of our childhood and all the reminders of growing up there. It was the end of an era for us both, just as it was for our mother.

While I drank my tea, I flipped through the new patterns that had arrived the day before. The first one to catch my eye was a prayer shawl. Lately, I'd seen several patterns for these shawls, some more complex than others. I could easily envision knitting this one for Mom.

Prayer shawls have become popular in the last few years—and not only for prayer. They offer comfort and warmth, emotional, as well as physical. I'd received several inquiries about them and thought perhaps one of these shawls would make for an interesting class. I decided to discuss it with my sister, Margaret, who has a keen business sense and a good feel for which class I should offer next. I didn't appreciate that about her until after she'd come to join me at the shop. Margaret worked for me part-time, which has now turned into full-time. She's not as good with people as I am, but she knows yarn and, surprisingly, has become

an excellent employee. She's also my friend. Not so long ago, I couldn't have said that; we might be sisters, but the tension between us was unbearable at times. Our relationship changed for the better, and I thank A Good Yarn for that.

Margaret wouldn't arrive for another thirty minutes, since the shop officially opened at ten. Any number of tasks awaited my attention, things I should be doing, like paying bills and ordering new yarn. Instead, I sat at my desk, with my teacup between my hands. I felt so incredibly blessed.

Needless to say, I didn't always feel this tranquil. When I was in my early twenties, a second bout of cancer struck with a viciousness that had me reeling. I survived, but my father didn't. You see, he fought so hard for me, and when it seemed I'd make it after all, he died, suddenly and unexpectedly, of a heart attack. It was almost as though my recovery meant he could leave me now.

Before I lost Dad, I tended to approach my life tentatively, afraid of happiness, fearing the future. It was a void that loomed hopelessly before me and filled me with dread. Dad was the one who gave me strength. With him gone, I knew I was responsible for my own life. I had a decision to make and I boldly chose…independence. I chose to become part of the world I'd retreated from years before.

The ceiling above me creaked and I knew Colette was up. Colette Blake rented the small apartment over the shop. For the first two years, that tiny apartment was my home, my very first home away from family.

After I married Brad, I wasn't quite sure what to do with the apartment. It stood empty for a while. Then I met Colette, and I'd known instantly that she'd be the perfect tenant. The

apartment would console her, give her a place to regain her emotional balance. A bonus—for me—is that she looks after Whiskers on my days off. My cat is a much-loved feature in my store, which he considers his home. I've had customers stop by just to visit him. He often sleeps in the front window, curling up in the afternoon sun. Whiskers generates lots of comments—and smiles. Pets have a way of connecting people to life's uncomplicated joys.

Colette reminds me of myself three years ago, when I first opened the store. I met her shortly before Christmas, when Susannah Nelson, who owns the flower shop next door, brought her over to meet me. It wasn't cancer that shook her world, though. It was death. Colette is a thirty-one-year-old widow. Her husband, Derek, a Seattle policeman, died a little over a year ago. When I mention that, people usually assume Derek was killed in the line of duty. Not so. Following a Seattle downpour, he climbed on the roof to repair a leak. No one knows exactly how it happened but apparently Derek slipped and fell. He died two days later of massive head injuries.

In the weeks since she'd moved here, Colette had only referred to the accident once, as if even talking about her husband was difficult. I've learned that she's an easygoing person who laughs readily and yet at times her grief seemed palpable. Overwhelming. I understood how she felt. I remembered all too well that sense of anguish, that terror of what might happen tomorrow or the next day. Colette approached life fearfully, just the way I once did. I longed to reassure her, and I hoped my friendship provided some pleasure and solace. Friends like Jacqueline and Alix had done the same for me.

The apartment has an outside entrance, as well as the one

leading into the store. Susannah Nelson had hired Colette soon after Susannah purchased what used to be known as Fanny's Floral. Colette's mother once owned a flower shop, and Colette had worked there as a high-school student. Her house sold practically the day it was listed, and Colette needed to move quickly. My tiny apartment was vacant, so we struck a deal. I assumed she wouldn't be there long. Most of her belongings were in storage and she was taking the next few months to decide where she'd live and what she'd do.

The stairs creaked as she ventured down. Since Colette became my tenant, we sometimes shared a pot of tea in the mornings. She was always respectful of my time and I enjoyed our leisurely chats.

"Tea's ready." I reached for a clean cup. Without asking, I filled it and held it out.

"Thanks." Colette smiled as she took the tea.

She was thin—too thin, really. Her clothes were a bit loose, but with her aptitude for style she cleverly disguised it. I noticed, though, as someone who's done the same thing. Part of what I liked about her was the fact that she was lovely without seeming consciously aware of it. Despite her occasional silences, Colette was warm and personable, and I could see she'd be a success at whatever she chose. She hadn't said much about the job she'd left, but I gathered it was a far more demanding position than helping customers in a flower shop.

This job change obviously had something to do with her husband's death. She told me he'd died a year ago January fourteenth. She'd waited for the year to pass before making major changes in her life—selling her home, moving, quitting her job.

These changes seem drastic in some ways and completely understandable in others.

Colette wore her long, dark hair parted in the middle. It fell straight to her shoulders, where it curved under. She seemed to achieve this effect naturally—unlike some women, who spend hours taming their hair with gel and spray.

In the short time she'd been here, Colette had made a positive impression on everyone she met. Everyone except my sister. Margaret, being Margaret, shied away from Colette, instinctively distrusting her. My sister's like that; she tends to be a naysayer. She insisted that renting out the apartment had been a huge mistake. In Margaret's eyes, a tenant, any tenant, wasn't to be trusted. She appeared to think Colette would sneak into the shop in the middle of the night and steal every skein of yarn I owned, then hock them on the streets and use the money for drugs. I smiled whenever I thought about that, since not only did I trust Colette, I have a fairly expensive alarm system.

Margaret is, to put it mildly, protective of me. She's older and tends to assume more responsibility than is warranted. It's taken me a long time to understand my sister and even longer to appreciate her, but that's a different story.

Colette held the teacup close to her mouth and paused. "Derek would've turned thirty-three today," she said quietly. She stared into the distance, then looked back at me.

I nodded, encouraging her to talk. She'd only told me about Derek that one other time. I believed, based on my own experience, that the more she shared her pain, the less it would hurt. "Derek wanted children. . . . We'd been trying, but I didn't get pregnant and now . . ."

"I'm sure you'll have children one day," I told her. I was con-

fident that she wouldn't be alone for the rest of her life, that she'd marry again and probably have children.

Her smiled was filled with sadness. "Derek and I talked about a baby that morning. The next thing I knew, I was choosing his casket. Ironic, isn't it?"

I didn't know how to comfort her, so I leaned over and gave her a hug.

She seemed a little embarrassed by my show of sympathy and focused her gaze on the floor. "I shouldn't have said anything. I didn't mean to start your day on a sad note. Actually, it wasn't until I glanced at the calendar on your desk that I realized the date."

"It's okay, Colette. I'm just so sorry."

"Thank you," she said, shrugging lightly. "Life is like that sometimes, you know?"

"Yes…" And I did.

Colette set the empty cup in my sink.

The back door opened, then shut with a bang. Margaret, of course, muttering about the weather. After Colette moved in, Margaret had taken to parking in the alley, apparently to keep an eye on my tenant's comings and goings. After dumping her huge felted purse on the table, she hesitated, stiffening at the sight of Colette.

"Good morning," I said brightly, pleased to see her despite her bad mood. "It's a fine morning, isn't it?" I couldn't resist a touch of sarcasm.

"It's *raining,*" she replied, eyeing Colette almost as if she were an intruder.

"Rainy weather's good for knitting," I reminded her. For me, there was nothing more satisfying on a rainy afternoon

than working on my current knitting project with a cup of tea by my side. People looked for something productive to do when it rained and—fortunately for me—that sometimes included knitting.

Margaret removed her coat and hung it on the peg by the back door. "Julia dropped me off this morning," she said in passing.

I caught the significance right away. "You let *Julia* drive the new car?" Only the day before, Margaret had said that her oldest daughter, a high-school senior, had been asking to take the car out for a spin. If I recall, Margaret's exact words were *Not in this lifetime.*

Margaret's hot-from-the-showroom vehicle was a first for the family, since she and Matt had always purchased their cars secondhand. Margaret's previous car was well past repairing, and she was excited about buying a brand-new vehicle. They'd looked for weeks before deciding on one that was in high demand and said to get incredibly good mileage. Once the decision was made, they'd waited two months for the vehicle to arrive. Which it finally had in all its metallic-blue glory.

"I know, I know," Margaret grumbled. "I said I wasn't going to let her take the car, but I couldn't help myself. She has something going on after school and somehow managed to convince me that her entire scholastic future rested on driving my car." Her mouth twitched as she admitted how easily Julia had finessed her way past her mother's objections.

"I don't even have a hundred miles on that car," Margaret said. "That's how fast she broke down my defenses. Sad, isn't it?"

Colette laughed. "Kids can do that."

Margaret responded to the comment with a dismissive nod, barely acknowledging Colette.