



# “Musing from the Hill” by Susan Crossett

as seen on the *Dunkirk Observer* on Fridays  
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## M’Lady’s Fan

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Lunch with a special friend way back in the olden days when we could meet and greet without masks.



She was special even before she handed me a gift – a lovely intricately carved fan which, I believe, she said she had purchased on a recent trip to Gettysburg. Shades of my grandparents! And how very lovely!

I don't suppose I'll use it often. Then again, with me, who knows? I have seen many women find the need in our non-airconditioned church during the oppressive summer months. The church's fans are just simple appropriately-shaped cardboard with a handle.

I doubt if I've spent many moments of my life being subtle although being as straight-forward as many of these messages suggest is far beyond me. Indicate to someone in particular that you're interested? And face rejection? At my age? Then again, it might be nice if the gentleman in question could also carry a fan – knowing presumably bits of the language so he could safely reply.

“Carrying in left hand in front of face: 'Desirous of acquaintance.'

“Carrying in left hand, open: 'Come and talk to me.'

“Touching tip with finger: 'I wish to speak to you,' or

“Running her fingers through the fan's ribs: 'I want to talk to you.'

“Placed behind head: 'Don't forget me.' ”

Then again, since the days of my Tom Swift decoder . . .

what? Ring? Badge? (and it probably wasn't Tom Swift for that

was my father's era – anyway, I haven't done decoding since I was a kid.) I'll expect to have fun with this column but let's leave it at that.



I wasn't too surprised to find a fan – I knew exactly which drawer to search but I was very surprised at its lavishness – oh, dear reader, you need a photograph. Long soft (unbelievably soft) black feathers with

what I'd say was plastic but I doubt if plastic was available in my grandmother's era. (I stand corrected. Celluloid was an early plastic in use by the late 19th century.)

This is perfectly gorgeous – just the thing for a night at the opera when I'm sure it was used and appreciated. What glamour some people lived with back then.



The same drawer had the perfect opera glasses (well, why not?) – French, with what I'd suspect is ivory on the sides, designed for show, I imagine, more than any aid to vision.

“Drawing across the cheek: 'I love you.' With handle to lips: 'Kiss me.' The shut fan held to the heart: 'You have won my love.' Shut the fully opened fan very slowly: 'I promise to marry you.' Carrying in right hand in front of face: 'Follow me.'”

Facts: Simple as they seem, fans have parts. The outer sticks are called guards and may be

decorated, often quite lavishly. The guards and sticks are held together by a rivet. Only cockade fans open into a full circle which can then close into a single guard. Fans have probably always been around. We know they kept the flies off the Pharaohs four thousand years ago. King Tut's tomb contained one fan with a gold handle covered in ostrich feathers while a second was made of ebony with gold and precious stones. Nothing too good for these women! The Romans brought back Greek fans which were considered items of great value. It was the Japanese, however, who devised the folding kind. By the seventeenth century China had begun importing into Europe huge numbers of fans where they were used to regulate air temperature as well as providing self-cooling or as a shield from the glare of the sun. Tanning of the skin was totally unfashionable in those days as was the development of a ruddy complexion from sitting too close to a fire. Opera fans know that they are used in many stories to hide one's face, often as part of an elaborate flirtation. And so our current intrigues began.

“Drawing it across the forehead: 'You have changed.' Threaten with the shut fan: 'Do not be so imprudent.' Resting the fan on her lips: 'I don't trust you.' Passing the fan from hand to hand: 'I see that you are looking at another woman.' Fanning herself with her left hand: 'Don't flirt with that woman.' Open and shut: 'You are cruel.'”

“Hiding the sunlight: 'You're ugly.' Placing it on left ear: 'I wish to get rid of you.' Twirling the fan in the right hand: 'I love another.' With little finger extended: 'Good-bye.'”

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