CRUCIBLE

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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SYNOPSIS

Barbara Sentry, seeking to sober up her escort, Johnnie Boyd, on the way home from a party, slaps him, and attracts the attention of a policeman, whom the boy knocks down. As he arrests him, Professor Brace of Harvard comes to the rescue and drives Barbara home. On the way they see Barbara's father driving from the direction of his office.

CHAPTER I—Continued

—2—

"I'll have to admit," Brace said, "that you played the game! But if you're going to be so loyal, shouldn't you be specially careful in choosing your friends? Loyalty misplaced is pretty treacherous."

"Johnny always has behaved himself before. I don't care much for cocktails and wild parties; but there are certain things you do when you're on the deb list, you know. Mother wanted me to have one season of it," replied Barbara.

"Big dance at the Somerset, stag lines, all that sort of thing?" His tone was derisive.

"No, I just had a luncheon at home. Father's and mother's friends, and their families. Last March."

"Well, there's some sense to that."

She laughed faintly. "Oh, we're really a pretty sensible family," she assured him. "Perfectly respectable, honestly." There was amusement in her tones. "Of course we're in trade. Father and his father and grandfather before him. Fruit and things. Oranges from Florida and all that. I suppose you professors think business is a pity; but at least we're wholesale. That's something, isn't it?"

He chuckled. "Everything, I should say." And she exclaimed triumphantly, "There, I knew you could laugh if you tried!"

"But it seems such a waste of time for a girl to chase around to drunken parties—"

"Oh, don't be so worthy! Besides, it wasn't a drunken party. Johnny's foot slipped, that's all."

He said thoughtfully: "I know his kind; see them in class right along. But I don't know the girls they run around with. You're a—new breed to me." He looked at her directly. "I come from a small mid-Western town," he explained. "Folks were church people. We didn't drink, or—dance much, or play cards. Of course, I know the standards I learned as a youngster are old-fashioned now. But—what have you put in place of them? What are you like? Girls your age, I mean? Yourself, and the girls you know?"

"We're a pretty decent lot," she assured him. "The people ten years older than us did run wild; but the girls I know don't drink too much, and they're level-headed and responsible. My older sister works every day in the hospital. She's going to marry a doctor and be a medical missionary. Mother does a lot of club work, things like that. We're the sort of family that doesn't get into the society columns very much. We don't telephone the editor every time we have people to dinner. But we're all right. Doing our jobs, behaving ourselves."

She hesitated, laughed a little. "I don't know why I'm telling you the story of my life—except that I sort of want you to—well, to not be so sure I'm just a crazy kid."

He said: "I don't! I did at first, naturally; but I can see you're—not as bad as I thought." He smiled. "I suppose yours is what we think of as a 'fine old Boston family.' Your father's turning at the next corner. Shall I follow him?"

"Let him go," Barbara directed. "We'll take the next turn. Yes, I suppose we are. I never thought much about it. My sister and I do the usual things. Of course my brother's in Yale instead of Harvard, but the Sentrys have been Yale for a good many generations. And mother and father—"

"By the way," the professor suggested, "why not tell your father about this scrape tonight? I expect he'd like to feel that he had your confidence."

"No, he'd just disapprove and be stern," she said. "He's always been pretty strict with himself, and with us too. He keeps telling me how girls behaved when he was young!"

"It wasn't a bad way to behave!"

She laughed. "I'll bet as many girls were kissed in buggies then as in automobiles now. Turn here. Our house is two blocks ahead." And then she exclaimed: "That must be father just turning into our drive! He drove awfully slowly, didn't he? Switch off your lights. Stop in the street, and we'll wait till he has gone to bed."

They stopped in front of the house, hidden behind a high hedge, and Professor Brace stilled the engine. In the sudden silence they heard steps on gravel.

"He's coming back from the garage," she whispered; and a moment later: "There! He's opened the front door!" Light shone out, then was dark as the door closed again. "We'll wait till he's gone upstairs," she directed. "Do you mind?"

He did not mind. He asked where Johnny lived, how to get clothes to take him for his appearance in court in the morning. She gave him the number of Johnny's dormitory room. "But probably one of his room-mates will do it," she suggested. Then an upstairs light came on.

"There!" she said. "Father's undressing. He must have gone to the kitchen for something before he went upstairs." And when presently the light went out, "Now he's in bed!" She opened the car door. "You've really been awfully kind. Thanks a lot." She extended her hand.

He said: "See here, Miss Sentry. May I drop in, one of these days? I'd like to know you better."

Her eyes twinkled. "Then you don't think I'm hopeless?"

He chuckled. "Maybe I can reform you!"

"Do come. Sunday evening?"

"Thanks. Count on me. Goodnight!"

Their hands clasped. He started the car and drove away; and Barbara, walking for silence's sake on the turf beside the gravel drive, went toward the house.

She wondered why her father had been downtown so late tonight; wondered what time it was; looked at her watch.

It was quarter of one.

Mrs. Sentry, Barbara's mother, roused when her husband turned on the light in their bedroom and got into his bed beside hers. She did not fully wake; just asked drowsily, "Everything all right, Arthur?"

"Of course! Perfect!"

"What time is it?"

"Quarter past eleven," he said, and she heard the rustling of the paper as he began to read. She thought sleepily that he was home early. He always dined at the Club on Thursday evenings, with bridge before and after dinner; but usually he was later than that in coming home. He was still reading when she drifted back to sleep.

When Nellie knocked on the door at seven next morning, Mrs. Sentry had been some time awake, planning her day. The seamstress in the forenoon, lunch at Mrs. Furness' to hear Miss Glen speak, dinner at home this evening. Mr. Sentry did not rouse at Nellie's knock; and Mrs. Sentry saw that he lay on his side, his back toward her; and she noticed with a faint jealous resentment of his continued youthfulness that his tumbled dark hair was not yet thin even on the top of his head. They had been married almost thirty years. The children, babies so short a time ago, were young men and women now. Mary, so like Mrs. Sentry herself, absorbed in her work at the Hospital, taking it with a severe seriousness. Phil, a Junior at New Haven, closer to Mrs. Sentry than either of his sisters, apt to tease her about her pride, her high head. Barbara . . . Mrs. Sentry reflected now that Barbara, the youngest, was almost like a stranger in the family. Only between Barb and Phil, both with a gift for laughter, was there close abiding sympathy. Mrs. Sentry wondered—lying half asleep—what their other children would have been like if there had been others. But of course there could not be. She had, so far as outward appearances were concerned, forgiven Arthur that old offense readily enough. "At least," she told him icily, that day a few weeks before Barbara was born when he came to her in contrite confession, "there has been no scandal. I could not forgive a scandal. So, since no one knows—unless she—" And the matter was never mentioned again between them. But the forgiveness, naturally was only on the surface. Yet they continued to preserve the outward forms, even to sleep in beds side by side, so that not even the servants ever knew . . . Mrs. Sentry thought this morning that her ancient tolerance had been repaid. Their lives had always been outwardly serene; were serene as they grew older now . . .

She rose, leaving Arthur abed; but while she was dressing, she heard him stirring, and called, "Thought you might want to sleep."

He said, "No," rather curtly.

"Do well last night? Have a good game?"

"Didn't hold any cards." The Thursday night bridge was in the nature of a tournament, four rubbers being played after dinner. He referred to this as he explained now: "They finished us off by half past ten. I hung around for a few minutes, and then came along home." He added: "And I forgot your package from Butler's, Ellen. They delivered it about four o'clock, but I left it on my desk at the office."

"It doesn't matter," she said. "Today will do." She repeated, "It doesn't matter at all," and she wondered why she went to such pains to reassure him, realized that there was something like apprehension in his tone, as though he were afraid what she would say. She asked hurriedly, "Who did you play with?"

"Dean Hare," he said. "Against Carl Bettle and Bob Flood."

She came into his dressing-room, herself ready for the day, and watched him knot his tie, brush his hair, trim his mustache. "What a time you have with that, don't you?" she said, amused at his intensity as he leaned close to the mirror, his jaw depressed to draw his upper lip taut, holding his mustache flat with one finger while with many grimaces he trimmed its ragged edges.

He nodded, and put on coat and vest, stowed odds and ends in his pockets, said, "Well, ready?"

She felt tautness in him, a need for reassurance. "You look about twenty-five," she told him dutifully. "Not a day older than Mary. You make me feel as though I had four children instead of three!" He smiled; and she thought she had succeeded in putting him in better humor for the day. She had always administered praise to him like a medicine, skillfully.

The house was old, of brick, foursquare, with a French roof, the slopes broken by gables that admitted light to the servants' quarters and storage rooms on the upper floor. It had been built by Arthur's grandfather, in what was at that time open country; but now it was crowded among others, most of them of a later period, and retained only a narrow area of lawn and garden, with room for a tennis court beside the garage in the rear. A sluggish stream meandered behind the garage at an angle across the rear of the lot; and there was a pergola of brick and stone behind the tennis court, built by Arthur's father, on the bank above the water where ducks came to feed. Rhododendrons ten or twelve feet high screened the house from the street in front, and there were hedges along the lot line on either side. Outside, the house was as it had been built, save for the English ivy which cloaked the walls; but inside there were changes. Arthur's mother, when she was mistress here, had torn out walls, intalled bathrooms, dressing-rooms, closets; redecorated again and again.

Mary was at the table when Mr. and Mrs. Sentry entered the dining-room; rose punctiliously to greet them. She was a tall, lovely girl, her cheeks a little hollowed so that her cheekbones and the line of her jaw showed firmly; and her eyes were apt to be grave, even when she smiled. She wore this morning a suit of blue-gray homespun, and her father, seeing this, commented:

"Looks as though you're dressed for business."

She nodded. "Yes," she agreed. "I'm going to the hospital." She spent part of every day there as a volunteer, tending convalescent patients, learning something of nursing and medicine in the process. The hospital was Mrs. Sentry's pet charity; but Neil Ray, rather than her mother, was responsible for the fact that Mary's interests were thus directed. Neil was studying medicine, planning to follow his father as a medical missionary in China; and he wanted Mary to marry him.

"I told him," she confessed to her mother the night he proposed to her, "that I was no kind of wife for any kind of missionary!" Yet she had thereafter plunged into this work, as though thus she might deserve him. That was months ago.

Mrs. Sentry had spoken her mind to Mary, with the frankness upon which she prided herself. "Ridiculous!" she said. "To go way off to China! And preposterous for him to let you humble yourself! You've lost your head over this young man."

But the only result of her advice had been to awaken in Mary a defensive and antagonistic attitude, make her increasingly critical toward them all. Thus she said to Mr. Sentry now:

"And speaking of hospitals, you look as though you ought to be in one, father. Been burning the candle at both ends?"

"Had a bad night," he explained. "Lay awake, fighting to get to sleep, for hours."

"You don't look sleepy," Mary commented, in a dry, professional tone. "You look as though—well, as though your nerves were all shot." She smiled. "Probably liverish," she suggested. "Stick out your tongue!"

Mrs. Sentry said in a dry tone, "Mary, I'm beginning to object to this clinical atmosphere in the home."

"You find so many objectionable things about me lately, mother!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

"You Find So Many Objectionable Things About Me Lately, Mother!"

Peasants of Poland Like Their Colors; Women Wear Mixtures of Bright Shades

In no corner of the world has modern fashion in dress made less headway than in the Polish countryside. The spinning wheel and the loom still hold their place of honor, and homespun still is the garb of 75 per cent of the peasants.

There are four main groups of peasant costumes in Poland. The two most striking are in and around Lowicz, and on the southeastern border of Poland among the Huculs. The others are to be found among the Gorals in the Zakopane district and in Upper Silesia, notes a writer in the Detroit News.

Lowicz skirts are made from the famous rainbow wool, showing wide stripes of orange and canary yellow, alternating with narrow strips of blacks and browns, violet and amaranth, rich chocolate hues, deep purples, green and rose. But yellow seems to prevail, a yellow as radiant as the California poppy. The fashion comes straight from the native soil, for the women weave just what they see through their door: long, narrow fields which at a distance look like vari-colored stripes on the landscape.

These women wear close fitting vests with horizontal stripes and their white linen blouses have loose sleeves, sometimes gayly embroidered.

The Huculs run to bright colors, which would be considered somber if compared with those of Lowicz. A unique feature is that the women wear aprons instead of skirts—one apron fore and another aft. The result is a close fitting garment with plenty of looseness for riding and mountain climbing. And this is being considered by stylists for sports wear as a variation on the coulettes that have recently been the rage.

The sleeveless lambskin coats worn by these women also are adapted for winter sports. They usually are made with the fur side in, and the outer skin embroidered in gay colors. They give plenty of free arm play and keep the torso toasty warm. Hucul women wear them all winter in the icy mountain blasts.

Ohio's State House

The state house at Columbus, Ohio, was completed in 1859. It took 20 years to build it. In 1899 an annex was built on the east side of the main structure, and in 1929 an office building erected on the banks of the Scioto river, donated by the city of Columbus.

Men of the Mounted

by Captain G. Elliott-Nightingale

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THE SKULL WITH A HOLE IN ITS FOREHEAD

THEY found the headless body of an aged man on the banks of the Bow river right after the ice had gone out, and right away there was a check-up to find out who was missing. That was in June, 1910. Several months passed and then, just as the beautiful Bow was beginning to freeze up again, a trapper stumbled over a small boulder. Later on, upon examining the round thing that had tripped him, the trapper realized that he was handling a human skull. Like a good Canadian he was soon in touch with the Royal Mounted.

A more thorough and extensive search and investigation was soon under way. Within a few yards of where the skull had been picked up, the Mounted saw a strange looking heap which later proved to be a blanket and a cowhide tied with ropes, the whole still frozen solid. The first discovery had come in June, the second in November, and still no one had turned up missing. With everyone accounted for, the only thing the Mounted could do was to store the remains. The check-up of transients and settlers, however, continued; meanwhile a grizzled and widely experienced physician and surgeon examined the remains. The physician announced, a little while later, that the man had been about fifty or sixty, had iron-gray hair, and that the hole in the forehead had been made by a bullet of .22 caliber, and that the bullet had been found imbedded in the skull. Moreover, there had been another bullet found in the body. It had entered from the right side and had coursed upward through both lungs and had lodged in the ribs of the lower left side.

Then a constable had a bright idea. Everyone had been accounted for, he argued, but that was only for the year 1910 or for the months preceding and following the discovery of the headless body. What about last year? After all, the constable argued, the deceased could easily have been done in a year or two years ago, so why not go back a bit? Soon all interest was centered upon the absence of one of the first settlers, an Englishman named Peach. In no time the Mounted discovered that Peach had sold out to a man named Robertson and had then returned to his home in England. Robertson was soon being questioned in a town a hundred miles away, and he corroborated the information of the deal with Peach. Later it was learned that Robertson had moved to Calgary after having bought the Peach homestead and that he had left orders that all mail for Peach be forwarded on to his address in Calgary. Well, this was really the first "break" for the Mounted. Why should Robertson want Peach's mail forwarded to him?

Robertson was again questioned, this time by a Mounted policeman he had never seen before but who knew the results of the first interview.

Robertson's story changed color entirely during this second questioning, but the Mounted policeman kept this discovery entirely to himself. Some days later another Man of the Mounted had a quiet little chat with Robertson, and again the latter's story changed completely. Surely Robertson was tying himself up into a knot. Then he announced that he was going down to a small settlement just a few miles away for a few days' rest, a sort of short vacation.

Instead of alighting at the small town, he stayed on the train and went through to McLeod. Here he proceeded to get drunk and was soon boasting that he had made a cleanup in the Yukon gold fields and was returning to his home in the States. And, as he sat boasting how tough he had been in his time, a constable of the McLeod detachment walked in and very quietly arrested him for the murder of Tucker Peach. Back in Calgary, Robertson tied himself in such a knot of lies and falsehoods that there was nothing else to do but confess. His confederate, one Fisk, had fired the first shot, into Peach's forehead. He, Robertson, had fired the second. Fisk had learned that Peach had a large amount of money hidden somewhere about his homestead cabin, and was scheming to get it when he met Robertson who was planning to buy the Peach homestead. "Buy it," advised Fisk, "then we'll knock him (Peach) on the head and get your money back. Then we'll ransack the cabin and find the two thousand he has hidden somewhere in it. After that, you take the homestead, and I'll take the horses, and we split his money between us when we find it."

No one knows to this day whether Fisk and Robertson found the old man's hoard, but they do know that Canadian law worked fast, and smoothly as these two renegades were tried. Fisk was sentenced to hang. Robertson was given life imprisonment. Inside of a month after capture, both men had begun paying for their awful crime.

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HOUSEHOLD QUESTIONS

Washing White Silk.—Never use soap on white silk. The soap should be dissolved in water before laundering is begun.

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Cooking Green Vegetables.—Let the water be boiling when the vegetables are put in. The kettle should be left uncovered and the cooking time reduced to a minimum.

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Filling Worm Holes.—If furniture is attacked by wood worms, syringe the holes with paraffin, and afterwards fill them with paraffin wax.

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Washing Stockings.—Socks and stockings sometimes become discolored at the feet from the lining of shoes. If about a tablespoon of ammonia is added to the water in which they are washed, most of the stain will be removed.

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