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 at 12:45, but when he gets home he tells his wife it is 11:15 and that he's been playing bridge at the club.

CHAPTER I—Continued

—3—

Mrs. Sentry poured coffee, and Oscar, who had served them for a dozen years, hesitated at the table as Mr. Sentry said: "Oscar, tell Eli he'd better take me in today. I'll be ready in five minutes." He began to eat, hurriedly "Barbara not awake?" he asked.

"Oh, she may sleep till noon. She was probably late getting in. Did you hear her, Mary?"

Mary shook her head. She asked her father, "Can you drop me at the hospital on the way to town?"

"Of course!" he told her. He asked, a little impatiently, "Paper not here yet, Oscar?"

"I think the boy forgot us this morning," the man replied. "Nellie says she saw him go by, but when I looked, just before you came down, the paper wasn't there." He added, "The car is ready, sir."

"All right. Thanks," Mr. Sentry agreed. "Ready, Mary?"

"Soon as I get my hat on." She went into the hall.

He rose, stooped to kiss Mrs. Sentry on the cheek she turned to him; and she followed them to the door to watch them drive away, in the high - topped old limousine with brass side lamps, and with old Eli, gardener, chauffeur, and general handy man, who had served them through all the years of their marriage, at the wheel. Mrs. Sentry liked old things, things with dignity, about her. The Sentrys were an old, fine family. Mrs. Sentry had been a sea captain's daughter, had met Arthur during his youthful summers on the Cape. She thought this morning with a familiar content that she had married wisely and well.

Turning back into the house, she heard a warning hiss, and Barbara peered down at her from the upper hall. Mrs. Sentry said: "Oh, awake, are you? Why didn't you come down to breakfast?"

"Is he gone?" Barbara demanded in a dramatic whisper. "The coast clear?"

"Your father? Of course."

Barbara, with exaggerated caution, on tiptoe, came down the stairs. Mrs. Sentry, thinking proudly how pretty the girl was, smiled at Barbara's pretended stealth and asked:

"What have you been up to now, you imp?"

"I stole his morning paper," Barbara confessed. "See!" She produced it from behind her. "I was watching for the boy, and when he came I slipped down and got it. I even bolted the front door afterward so Oscar wouldn't know."

"Why?" her mother asked in sudden concern. "Barbara! Have you got yourself into the headlines?"

"I was afraid I had!" They were at table now. "But I didn't. There's not even anything about Johnny."

"What happened?"

Barbara laughed softly. "It was really exciting," she declared. "When Johnny hit the policeman I fairly squealed. After that, of course, he had to put poor Johnny in jail, and I'd have been stranded if Professor Brace hadn't come along."

Mrs. Sentry said drily, "Suppose you start at the beginning, Barbara."

Barbara considered. "Well, Helen Frayne deliberately got Johnny drunk," she said. "I suppose that was the beginning. So I persuaded him to start home. He was really awfully nice about it."

"I'm sure he gets drunk in a most gentlemanly way!"

Barbara laughed. "There, now you're being severe! I love to shock you, mother! You ought to be sorry for poor Johnny, instead of being so sarcastic!"

"I still don't know what happened."

"Well, when we started home, Johnny knew he couldn't drive, so he asked me to, and I did, of course; but I didn't want to take him to Cambridge and then have to take a taxi out here; and Johnny was in no shape to drive. So I turned down toward the ocean and parked so he could get some air."

"If he was drunk, why not let someone else take care of him? Why did you have to—"

"Oh, I had to stand by!"

"Noblesse oblige?" Mrs. Sentry's tones were scornful.

"I thought it was up to me," Barbara confessed simply.

Her mother relented. "Perhaps it was. Go on."

Barbara nodded. "But I couldn't wake him up. They say if you slap their faces that helps; so I did, and just then the biggest policeman in the world came along and wanted to know what the trouble was.

"I told him it was all right, but when he tried to help, and got Johnny out of the car, Johnny hit him, and they began to fight. So the policeman had to knock him out. And then Professor Brace came along and offered to help, so he brought me home, and he was going to take Johnny some clothes this morning so Johnny wouldn't have to go to court in his dinner jacket."

"And who is Professor Brace?"

"He's a professor in the Harvard Business School, and he's ever so disapproving and respectable. You'd love him, mother." Her tone was affectionately derisive. "He looked at me just the way you're looking now."

Mrs. Sentry smiled. "I don't mean to—look that way, Barbara. It's just that you young people bewilder me a little, sometimes."

"Poor dear!" Barbara murmured. "That's just what Professor Brace said. That was afterward, while he was bringing me home." She hesitated, and Mrs. Sentry had a sudden impression that the girl was holding something back; but she was too wise to ask questions, to force a reluctant confidence.

"He brought me home," Barbara repeated. "And of course on the way I thanked him, and told him who I was, and he said I kept very bad company. As if a girl could always pick and choose! And he told me who he was—"

The telephone rang; they heard Oscar go to answer it, and Mrs. Sentry listened half to him, half to Barbara.

"And he lectured me like a Dutch uncle," Barbara explained, "and I told him he talked as if he were a thousand years old, but it turned out that he was only twenty-eight. He's nice, even if he is serious. I suppose, being so young, and a professor and everything, he thinks he has to be."

Mrs. Sentry called to Oscar, "Did they want Mr. Sentry, Oscar?"

The old man came to the door. "Yes, Mrs. Sentry. It was his office. I told them he was on his way."

"Is anything wrong?"

"They seemed anxious to get hold of him."

"I wonder why." Mrs. Sentry reflected. Oscar made no suggestion. "Probably just business," she decided, and spoke to Barbara.

"And Professor Brace brought you home?"

"Yes." Again that odd hesitation; then she added: "We sat and talked for a while, outside. He's coming Sunday evening to call!" Her eyes were dancing. "I think he plans to reform me, mother!"

"Well, I hope he does!"

"I hope he tries," Barbara agreed. "I like him. I think it would be rather fun!"

CHAPTER II

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Mrs. Sentry liked to think of herself as extremely busy. She often said, a little complacently, "My days are so full, you know!" This morning, after breakfast and the mail—there was a letter from Phil at New Haven—she consulted with cook, and then for an hour or two she was engaged with Miss Simpkins, the sempstress who came in by the day.

While she was being fitted, she heard the limousine return, and wondered whether Eli would know why the office had telephoned to Arthur. But Eli was deaf, and—it could have been nothing worth inquiry. Their lives had long since assumed a pattern. They dined with their friends; their friends dined with them; they went to the Symphony in the fall before going South for the winter; they saw the better plays. Arthur had his golf on weekends, in a foursome of years' standing that included Dean Hare, Judge Ray, and Ernest Waring. The Hares were probably their most intimate friends. Gus Loran, Arthur's partner, did not play golf. Riding was his sport. They exchanged dinners with the Lorans, but not often, because of Mrs. Loran. They were on old and cordial terms with a dozen or a score of families like their own. Mrs. Sentry thought of their ordered lives complacently. Then, remembering Barbara's adventure the night before, she hoped Barbara would, another time, be wiser, and that Johnny Boyd would be sobered by his thrashing at the policeman's hands, and she wondered what it was that Barbara had decided not to tell her. Then she heard voices on the tennis court behind the house, and looked out and saw Barbara playing with Linda Dane; and she watched the two young girls, slender, graceful, playing hard tennis in a way that made it look easy, in a fashion so controlled and smooth they seemed to move to music as though in a dance. Then the set ended and the girls came toward the house and Mrs. Sentry could hear their voices in Barbara's room, raised to be audible above the hiss of the shower. When Miss Simpkins finished with Mrs. Sentry, Barbara—hair in tight wet curls on the nape of her neck from the shower, slender and lovely in her slip—took her turn while Linda watched, and the two chattered happily together.

When Mrs. Sentry was dressed for the luncheon—Mrs. Keith Urban would call for her—she went to ask whether Barbara would be at home for luncheon. Barbara explained: "No. I'm lunching with Linda, and we're going to a movie, and tea at the Ritz."

Tires grated on the drive, and Mrs. Sentry said: "Here's Mrs. Urban. Then I'll see you at dinner, Barbara." She went down the stairs. Luncheon was pleasant, even though Miss Glen—she was an English novelist—did monopolize the conversation. Mrs. Sentry, listening to her lecture afterward, thought Miss Glen interesting but inclined to patronize. She remembered vaguely a phrase, "On a certain condescension in Englishmen," and wondered who said it, and it annoyed her that she could not remember certainly, and then she began to be sleepy, and had to stifle yawns, and wished there were a window open somewhere. Mrs. Furness' furnace must be on. It was too early to start furnaces, Mrs. Sentry thought. Open fires were enough to banish the occasional chill of these early fall days. Eli had protested yesterday at the amount of firewood he had to carry in every day. She wondered again whether Eli knew why the office had telephoned for Arthur this morning; but Arthur would be home by a little after five, to tell her. It was past four now.

Then Miss Glen had finished; and Mrs. Sentry, when she and Mrs. Urban were in the car, said in dry distaste, "Alice feels she's responsible for our cultural life, doesn't she?"

"I like Miss Glen's books," Mrs. Urban confessed.

"They're good enough," Mrs. Sentry agreed. "But it's a pity a woman who can write as well as Miss Glen does should feel called upon to try to talk. I thought her deadly!"

Mrs. Urban subsided meekly. Very few people argued with Mrs. Sentry. She prided herself on speaking her mind, had sometimes a biting tongue; and when she expresed an opinion it was in the tones of an oracle. Mrs. Urban was faintly relieved to drop her presently at her own door.

Mrs. Sentry expected to find Arthur already at home; but Oscar said he had not yet arrived. "Miss Sentry and Doctor Ray are in the living-room," he explained.

Mary, when Mrs. Sentry joined them said, "Neil brought me home, and I made him stop for tea."

"Have you rung?" Mrs. Sentry asked. Mary had; and Oscar presently brought in the tray. Mrs. Sentry poured, and she suggested that Neil stay to dinner; but Mary said: "He can't, mother. I'm dining out. At the Lorans'."

She saw the older woman's expression of surprise, and said: "Oh, I know, mother. But Mrs. Loran asked me three weeks ago, by telephone; gave me no chance to think up an excuse. What could I do?"

"Nothing," Mrs. Sentry confessed. Mrs. Loran was of course a vulgar nobody, whom she herself had always held at a distance. Barbara would simply and honestly have declined this invitation; but Mary's standards were conventional as her mother's. There were things one did not do. Mrs. Sentry herself would have felt compelled to accept an invitation given three weeks in advance, unless the truth would serve as a reason for refusal.

Neil Ray said now in a jocular tone: "Pshaw, Mary! You know you'll enjoy yourself. Mr. Loran always makes love to you."

"He makes love to everyone when he's had a drink or two."

"Well," he insisted cheerfully, "Endle's good company—they say."

Mary met her mother's eyes. "Mr. Endle's calling for me, mother," she explained defensively. "After all, he's Mrs. Loran's brother, and she suggested it. I couldn't very well refuse."

Mrs. Sentry said, "I suppose not!" She heard the front door open, called, "We're in here, Arthur."

Mr. Sentry came to join them and she saw that he was tired. "Hullo, Ray," he said, shaking hands with the other man. "Hullo, Mary." He declined tea. "I'd rather have a cocktail. Shall I ring?"

"Do," Mrs. Sentry assented. She perceived that something had distressed him; but she asked no questions, thinking he might prefer not to speak before Neil Ray. Yet he said at once, "It's been an upsetting day." And he explained, "The office was robbed last night."

"Robbed?" Mrs. Sentry echoed, incredulously. "But there's nothing there to steal! Except oranges!"

"Oh, there's always some money in the safe. Some of the truckmen who peddle their wares pay in cash, you know." He added soberly: "But that's not the worst of it. A girl was killed."

There was an instant's dreadful silence. Mrs. Sentry asked through dry lips: "A girl? One of your employees?"

"No," he said; but he added: "She did work for us for a while last summer, during the vacation season, when we were short-handed. Miss Randall got her from business school. She was only with us about two weeks. Her name was Miss Wines."

Oscar brought cocktails, but Doctor Ray declined one. "I'm on duty tonight," he explained, and rose. "You'll be wanting to dress, Mary," he said. "I'll go along."

Mrs. Sentry thought he felt his presence here an intrusion; but Mary, watching her father, said: "No, stay. We're not dining till eight."

Neil remained standing, uncertainly; and Mrs. Sentry asked, "But how was she killed, Arthur?"

"Shot," he said. "Shot in the back. They found her in the upper hall this morning, outside our offices." And he spoke again to Neil Ray, explaining to him, seeming to find relief in his own words. "Mr. Loran and I have our offices on the top floor, the third floor. It's an old brick building, down in the market district of course. His office is in front and mine in back, with a reception room between. Switchboard, and some typewriter desks. Our letters are handled there. Our bookkeeping and so on is done on the second floor, and on the street level, the routine business. Of course mostly we sell directly from the refrigerator cars."

"But what was she doing there?" Mary asked; and she added: "'I think I met her last summer, father. You remember the day I came down from York to do some shopping and had lunch with you? She was taking some letters when I came in to get you, and you introduced her. Little, and rather pretty, and innocent looking? I'm sure I met her.'"

"Probably you did," he agreed. "I don't recall."

Ray said again, "I'll have to be going."

"You needn't hurry, Neil, really," Mary urged.

Mrs. Sentry said, "Mary, don't you see Doctor Ray is embarrassed, wants to get away?" Ray started to protest; but was silent as Oscar brought the Transcript. Mr. Sentry took it, looked at the front page. "Here it is," he said, and was silent, reading the brief story under its small headline.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Plucking Produces a Tailor-Made Dog; Turns Pups Into a Canine Fashion Plate

The terrier is a tailor-made dog. He's a product of civilization, being no more a creature of the wild than his boss. It's just as fitting for a terrier to spend his life ungroomed as it is for the gentlemen of the era to wander unshaven. Or, for that matter, for the ladies to defy the dictates of fashion, to the last hairdresser, and be natural, asserts an authority in the Washington Star.

By grooming is meant stripping and plucking. Every one knows that a dog of the heavy-coated type must shed, come springtime. Otherwise there are skin troubles and general discomfort. Terriers fall under this classification. Of course, if Pups isn't plucked he'll shed some. And if dad's hair wasn't cut it'd shed some, too, after it had grown as long as Mother Nature intended in the first place. When Pups is relieved of his winter coat in the proper manner, he emerges a canine fashion plate.

Taking terriers as a whole, plucking makes the greatest difference in a wire fox terrier. Scotties and sealyhams, etc., still resemble scotties and sealyhams with all their winter wool. A wire terrier is practically unrecognizable as such when it's heavy coated. It looks like a cross between a French poodle and a floor mop.

Now then, as to the method—it's painless. An instrument is used that resembles a short-toothed comb, with sharp edges. This "stripper" is run through the coat (by hand), thinning it down and shaping it up. Dead hairs, ready to come out anyway, are plucked between the thumb and finger. All in all, there's nothing to it to give the dog any discomfort. Nails are clipped and filed, furnishing the manicure, and Pups is washed and ready to be admired. The job can be done for a small sum, including everything.

Carried Coffin With Her

How many know that Sarah Bernhardt, the great actress, carried her coffin with her for years before she died? It was made of rosewood, says London Answers Magazine, and had handles of solid gold, being placed at her bedside every night on a trestle made especially to hold it.

Men of the Mounted

by Captain G. Elliott-Nightingale

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HOW TO WRECK A VILLAGE

PIE-A-POT and Long Lodge, Cree chieftains, audacious warriors and veterans of many a scrap with other tribes, ruled their villages with an iron hand. They were happy, prosperous and had very little trouble. Shortly after the coming of the "red coated pony soldiers of the Great White Mother," the Pie-a-Pot and Long Lodge tribes of Crees had been given a splendid reservation with timber and game and fish in abundance. There they had settled down peacefully.

And then one day, to the astonishment of all concerned, Pie-a-Pot and Long Lodge ordered their tribesmen to pull stakes, for the two tribes were going for a ramble across the country without having any particular destination in view. The handful of white settlers became a bit alarmed, but their alarm subsided when they observed the Pie-a-Pots and Long Lodges were orderly.

In time the Pie-a-Pots and Long Lodges came across a large party of white men digging up the ground and also laying thin strips of iron or steel across the flat prairie. "What is all this?" inquired the majestic Pie-a-Pot. "Oh . . . just building a railroad," replied one of the workmen. The Crees moved on into the west and when they were about a mile or so past the end of steel the two chiefs ordered the tribes to pitch camp.

Slowly but surely the end of steel crept closer and closer toward the Cree encampment and it was later discovered that the camp was situated on the right of way of the railroad. As the end of steel moved closer and closer, engineers and foremen parleyed with Pie-a-Pot and Long Lodge, entreating them to move either to the right or left, off the right of way, so that the work could go on without unnecessary delays. The chiefs stood firm, and in time refused to parley further with the engineers in charge.

Then, one fine morning Pie-a-Pot and Long Lodge were visited by two red-coated horsemen, a sergeant and constable of the Northwest Mounted Police. The argument was soon going again, and matters reached such a stage that the sergeant informed them that they had better move or he would do the moving for them. Pie-a-Pot let out a ninety horse-power howl, and soon the sergeant and constable were surrounded by hundreds of howling, painted Crees out for blood and scalps and the complete destruction of the white invaders. During a lull in the melee, the sergeant took out his watch and told Pie-a-Pot that he would give him exactly 15 minutes to move off that railroad right-of-way. Instantly there was another demonstration of anger and truculence, and the two Men of the Mounted sat their saddles as best they could in the milling mob. As the last tick of the fifteenth minute passed into eternity, the sergeant of the Northwest Mounted Police dismounted right into the midst of that bloodthirsty mob. He forced his way through it and walked right over to Pie-a-Pot's teepee and kicked the keypole down. While squaws and children howled and screamed under the collapsed tepee, the sergeant walked to the next tepee and kicked the keypole of that one down. From one to the other that lone sergeant strode, kicking keypoles down until every tepee was flat. Young bucks and so-called "braves" followed close on his heels, pushing against him, making faces at him, cursing him, and doing all they could to annoy or frighten him, but the sergeant just kept right on going until all tepees were flat, and in spite of their proximity, not one Cree had dared to strike a blow at the courageous sergeant. With everything flattened, the sergeant mounted his horse and gave his last order.

"Orlright . . bustle abaht a bit . . . On the move . . . shove orf abaht your blurry business, wotever it is," all of which was his cockney way of saying "Git goin'." Meanwhile, Pie-a-Pot and Long Lodge were so angry they were stumped for words. Never had they seen such audacity. One lone man, wearing a red coat, had literally wrecked their village. It is highly probable, moreover, that Pie-a-Pot and Long Lodge realized that if the other men of the Mounted were anything like this sergeant, perhaps the Pie-a-Pots and Long Lodges had better not get into any more arguments with them. These red coats were bad medicine. At any rate, as the chieftains saw the hopelessness of further resistance, they muttered a few words to nearby tribesmen, and within two hours the Pie-a-Pots and Long Lodges were heading for their reservation. En route Pie-a-Pot chanced to remember that if he didn't behave himself the Great White Mother would stop sending supplies of food and flour and clothing and that little bit of treaty money now and then. "Oh well, what a day it's been, anyway," he might have said, as he arrived at the reservation.

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