CRUCIBLE

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

© Ben Ames Williams.

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. Next morning, while Barbara is telling her mother about her adventure, an urgent phone call comes from Mr. Sentry's office after his departure. Arriving home in the late afternoon, Sentry reports his office has been robbed and a Miss Wines, former temporary employee, killed.

CHAPTER II—Continued

—4—

"Not much here!" Mr. Sentry said and then: "The police think she was one of the robbers. They're looking for a young Italian who has been paying her some attention; a wild youngster whose father is one of our customers. They found a key in her pocketbook that fits the lock on the back door." He spoke to Ray again. "There are back stairs," he said. "Mr. Loran and I use them on Sundays or when the place isn't open for business. This back door admits to the stairs and our offices. She had this key."

Mrs. Sentry realized that Arthur somehow found comfort in thus detailing the day's events; and she felt a dry scorn at Neil Ray's obvious desire to escape. "Afraid of being compromised," she thought; and she thought defiantly that a good many people would be maliciously pleased because the old firm of Sentry and Loran was thus involved in sudden sensational publicity.

Ray had nodded uneasily, and Mr. Sentry went on: "She must have remembered the combination of the safe. It's just an old iron box, bought in my father's time. We never had enough cash on hand to need a real one; and a safe-cracker could have opened this easily enough. But it was opened last night by someone who knew the combination. She probably learned it last summer when she worked for us."

He hesitated, added then, "The police seem to think she let this fellow in, opened the door for him, and opened the safe, and then for some reason they quarreled and he shot her."

Mary said: "It sounds like the sort of ruthless, reasonless things a cocaine addict might do. Don't you think so, Neil?"

Ray did not answer. Mrs. Sentry said, "Don't be so medical, Mary!" She thought: Mary is playing a part! Pretending! I wonder why. And she added: "The office telephoned, Arthur, just after you left this morning. I suppose it was about this?"

"Yes," he assented. "Miss Randall found her, when she got there at eight o'clock."

Mrs. Sentry wondered, shivering in spite of herself, whether any of the women at the Furness luncheon had known; wondered whether they had been watching her to see how she took it.

"It must have been just a few minutes past when they phoned," she said. "Didn't anyone hear the shot?"

Mr. Sentry shook his head. "No. Or at least they haven't found anyone yet who did," he amended. "You see, she was in the hall on the third floor. The hall has no windows, and there's a brick wall between it and the next building, and if the office doors happened to be closed—" He added, "And of course there aren't many people around on the streets down there till early morning."

Mary said: "The poor girl! I hope they get the man. Father, did she have any family?"

"Not in Boston. She came from Dennis; but she'd been living in a room out in Somerville, in a private home, where the husband was out of a job so they had to take in boarders. She'd had work at odd times, a day here, a week there, filling in; but no steady job. The police say she'd been running around with this young Italian; and he was missing today. His father claims he's up in Maine buying cider apples, but they haven't located him. And—apparently there were other men with whom she was intimate, too."

He shook his head, poured another cocktail, said, as though thinking aloud: "I suppose she was hard up, and desperate. If we'd had any idea, we might have made a place for her, given her something to do. That's the tragic thing about living in a city. Terrible things happen all around you, perhaps even to people you know; and till they happen, you never even suspect. People are all actors, aren't they? They wear a mask, put up a good front, pretend that everything's all right—till suddenly everything is all wrong!"

"No need to make speeches, Arthur!" Mrs. Sentry commented drily.

"It has disturbed me a lot," he confessed.

Mrs. Sentry said: "Nonsense! It doesn't concern us! It happened in your office, of course; but it might as well have happened anywhere. It doesn't concern us at all!" She was speaking more to herself than to him. "We know no more about it than anyone else," she declared, shaping for herself the attitude she would present like an armor to their friends.

He nodded, said no more. Doctor Ray moved toward Mrs. Sentry to say good-by. But before he could speak there were voices in the hall, and Mrs. Sentry recognized Barbara's.

Then Barbara and Linda Dane appeared in the wide doorway. Barbara had an afternoon paper in her hand.

When the sempstress was done with her that morning, Barbara went home with Linda Dane for luncheon. These two and Phil Sentry—Mary, the older sister, had always held herself aloof from their cheerful exuberances — had since childhood been much together; and now that Phil was at Yale, Barbara and Linda were devoted. They went after lunch, in Linda's car, to a moving picture theater; and later

"I Hope They Get the Man. Father, Did She Have a Family?"

they met Bill Cates and Rod Hepburn at the Ritz for tea.

When they came out on Newbury Street afterward, screaming newsboys pushed extras in their faces. Barbara saw a headline:

PRETTY TYPIST SLAIN

One of the boys bawled: "Produce House Murder! Read all about it!" And Bill Cates looked at the paper which the boy held, and said softly, in a startled tone, "Hullo!" He bought a paper, folded it in his hand, said: "Barbara, Linda, come along. Let's get out of this."

They followed him toward Linda's car, and Barbara asked gaily, "What is it, Rod? Why the big mystery?"

But he did not laugh. He opened the paper again and looked at it, and they all looked over his shoulder; and Barbara as she read felt something inside her body contract into a crawling, shuddering knot. She thought she was choking, and her eyes ached; and Linda's hand was tight in sympathy and reassurance on her arm, and Bill said, "Gosh, that's rotten!"

Barbara when she spoke did not recognize her own voice. She said, "Give it to me, Bill." She took the paper, read the unbelievable lines again.

"Steady, Barb!" Linda whispered. "It's all right."

Barbara was husky. "I've got to go home, Linda. Mother will need me. She'll be wild. Can we, please?"

"Of course. Here's the car."

Bill and Rod helped them in. Bill said lamely: "Don't let it get you, Barb. Just the damned tabloids, making a sensation out of nothing!" Rod said, "Keep smiling, Barb."

"Of course," she told them. "Thanks for a lovely tea. See you soon." The car was moving. "Good-by!"

On the way home, Linda drove and watched the traffic, and Barbara read the story in the paper, reciting to Linda the essentials.

But she was cold with terror at her own thoughts. When she and Professor Brace emerged from the Tunnel last night, her father had passed them in his car, coming from the direction of the office. The dead girl had been found in the office this morning. Killed when? She could find in the paper no answer to that question, and her eyes blurred so that she could not read.

Linda said: "Don't worry, Barb. It just happened to happen there! It might have happened anywhere."

"Mother will be just sick!" Barbara whispered. "She's so proud, Linda! And she hates newspapers!"

"They'll forget all about it in a day or two."

"And father, too!" Barbara shivered uncontrollably. "Golly, Linda, I'm scared."

"Bless you, there's nothing to be afraid of!"

Barbara nodded. "Of course not! I'm not afraid. It's just—upsetting. I'll have to cheer them up at home. They'll be pretty low! Linda, come in with me when we get there. We'll have to put on an act, make them laugh somehow, make them see the funny side—"

"Steady, Barb! You're trembling!"

"I can't help it. And my teeth keep chattering!"

"You poor kid!"

"For Heaven's sake don't sympathize with me or I'll bawl! I've got to laugh or I'll scream, Linda. I am scared, I guess! Golly, I wish Phil was home."

"He'll come when he sees the papers. But Barb, it's nothing. A week from now everyone will have forgotten it. Of course it's pretty tough right now, though." And Linda urged: "Throw that paper away, Barb. Don't look at it any more."

Barbara began to cry without a sound, sitting bolt upright, her eyes streaming, the paper in her hands. "That's it, go on and cry," Linda approved. "Then you'll feel better." And when presently they came within a block of the Sentry home she stopped the car. "Now, powder your nose," she directed. "You can't go in looking like a wreck!"

Not till she was satisfied that Barbara had repaired damages did she drive on. Outside the door Barbara pleaded:

"Come in, Linda. Back me up. Mother will be just sunk. I'll play the idiot, till I either make her laugh or maker her so mad at me she'll forget this mess. Ready?"

"Well—if you want," Linda said doubtfully.

They went in; they came to the living-room door. But Barbara, when she saw her father here, remembering last night, was shocked and still for a moment, stammered doubtfully, "Oh, you're home, father!" She saw the Transcript in his hands.

Mrs. Sentry said stiffly, "Don't be obvious, Barbara!"

Barbara hesitated; but then she became suddenly animated. "You've seen the papers! Darn it, I wanted the fun of telling you!" She cried: "Isn't it all thrilling? Mother, don't you think it's the most exciting thing? We came out of the Ritz with Bill Cates and Rod Hepburn and there were two newsboys just screaming and pushing papers into our faces, and Rod saw your name in one of the headlines, father. So we bought the paper. I think it's perfectly exciting. Did you know her? Is she as pretty as her pictures? I love murders, they're so gruesome! Think of having one right in the family! Look!"

She opened the paper, read the headlines aloud: "'Pretty typist slain. Police seek missing lover of dead girl. Robbery and murder—'"

Her mother said sharply: "Barbara! After all, it's not 'right in the family'!"

"You know what I mean, mother!" Barbara protested. "I mean we're—well, probably we'll all be witnesses at the trial. I know I'll be scared to death. I wonder if he's good-looking. Father, did you ever see him? This Italian?" She came to sit on the arm of his chair. "You don't need to pretend you're all so calm. I'll bet you're as excited as I am, really."

No one spoke for a moment. Then Neil Ray said uncomfortably, "I really must go."

He rose; and Linda cried as though relieved: "Heavens, it's after six o'clock! So must I!"

Mary went with Doctor Ray into the hall. Barbara looked beseechingly at Linda; but Linda shook her head, so Barbara and Linda followed the others. Mrs. Sentry and her husband were left alone.

He twirled the cocktail glass in his hand, looking at it fixedly, not meeting Mrs. Sentry's eyes. She heard the good-bys at the door; heard Mary and Barbara hesitate, and whisper, and start upstairs. Then she heard Mary say in a low, indignant tone: "You're outrageous, Barbara! This isn't a joke!"

"I know," Barbara agreed, softly. "But you all looked so glum! I tried to put on an act, cheer you up—"

Their voices trailed away. Mrs. Sentry thought that was like Barbara, to seek to make a jest out of this. And in very poor taste, she decided. She said to her husband, "Arthur, we must just ignore this!"

"I don't know why it should hit me so hard," he confessed. "But—she looked so little and pitiful, lying there. And of course there were police, and photographers, and reporters around all day. Gus is in New York, so it all fell on me. It wore me down."

"In New York? Mary's going there to dinner tonight."

"He went over yesterday. Didn't expect to be back till Sunday."

Oscar came to say that dinner was served, and Mrs. Sentry remembered that an afternoon paper was delivered to the kitchen, so the servants already knew; and everyone would know, either tonight or in the morning. All their friends . . .

She said quietly: "Will you call the girls, Oscar? They're upstairs!" He disappeared, and she asked her husband, "Are you ready, Arthur?"

"I'll wash my hands," he decided. She had not, since returning from hearing Sarah Glen, had time to order her hair; and she went to do so, and she thought she and Arthur might go down to their summer home in York Harbor in the morning, and stay till this sensation died.

But it would be better not to seem to run away . . .

Mary sat with them while they dined, waiting for Jimmy Endle to call for her. She proposed making excuses, staying at home; but Mrs. Sentry said: "Of course not, Mary! After all, this doesn't touch us! Certainly not any more than it does Mr. and Mrs. Loran, and they're giving the dinner."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Paul Bunyan's Ry. Station Discovered by Small Boy on His Visit to London

The sort of railway station that only Paul Bunyan could have built was described recently by a Bridgnorth small boy who visited London and wrote about it to his envious smaller brother at home, according to a Bridgnorth, England, correspondent in the Philadelphia Inquirer. Written in all seriousness, the letter, which came into the possession of C. N. Turner, of the Associated British and Irish railways, follows:

"The sight of Paddington station is really beyond description. The roof is practically invisible, being 2,500 feet above the platforms, airplanes circling beneath it all day. The roof is made of glass and requires 5,000 men to clean it once weekly in an airship.

"There are so many platforms that it is totally impossible to count them—the length of them is quite five miles. There are motor buses to take passengers from one end of a platform to the other; each bus holds 3,000 people.

"The trains are colossal; each train consists of 4,000 coaches and requires 20 engines to pull it. The trains are of the corridor type and are equipped with motorcycles to convey passengers to lavatories and dining saloons.

"Each engine is 50,000-horsepower and requires 50 men to stoke it. It is necessary to have motor lorries in each cabin to convey the coal from tender to firebox.

"There is a refreshment room at Paddington station which is seven times the length of Bridgnorth High street and four times as wide.

"The station master is as big as St. Leonard's church, Bridgnorth, the biggest man in the world. One cannot fail to hear him coming, as his boots are as big as the North Gate. He walks over the trains without any difficulty whatsoever."

Wild and Domestic Turkeys

It's not such a far cry from wild to domestic turkeys. Spanish conquerors found the first turkeys, closely related to the wild birds, in Mexico. They took turkeys back to Europe around 1530. In 90 years, by the time the Pilgrims came to America, turkeys were common in England. The birds were probably named for their cry of "turk, turk, turk."

Winners in Cake Recipe Contest

Some of the Prize-Winning Cakes Baked in the Experimental Kitchen Laboratory of C. Houston Goudiss.

THE home economists on the staff of the Experimental Kitchen Laboratory, maintained in New York City by C. Houston Goudiss, who conducts our "WHAT TO EAT AND WHY" series, have reached their decision concerning the prize winners in the recent Cake Recipe Contest. Winners have already been notified and have received their checks.

The first prize of $25.00 went to Mrs. D. F. Kelly, 1004 Charles St., Whitewater, Wis.

Second Prize Winners.

The five second prizes were awarded to Mrs. H. Harshbargen of 2427 Fifth Ave., Altoona, Pa.; R. A. Williams, 12075 Rosemary Ave., Detroit, Mich.; Mrs. C. A. Burns, Box 788, Oakland, Miss.; Miss Sadie Cunningham, Avonmore, Pa.; and Mrs. Laura Meyer, 107 Pleasant St., Plymouth, Wis.

Third Prize Winners.

Mrs. T. H. Fjone, Flaxville, Mont.; Mrs. Lester Ralston, 127 South Judd St., Sioux City, Iowa; Mrs. Harry A. Kramer, 16 Marin Road, Manor, Calif.; Mrs. F. D. McDonald, Route 1, Amherst, Texas; Vera Tygar, Commodore, Pa.; Mrs. George Ahlborn, R. D. No. 1, Mt. Pleasant, Pa.; Mrs. B. A. Robinson, Box 578, Emmett, Idaho; Jean Guthrie, 4712 Campbell St., Kansas City, Mo.; Mrs. Walter Richter, Bonduel, Wis.; Mrs. P. C. Blakely, Alden, Mich.

Honorable Mention.

Emogene Williams, Damon, Texas; Mrs. Simon Moen, Norma, N. D.; Mrs. Dick Collins, Masonville, Iowa; Mrs. B. F. Herman, Box 1118, Crosby, Miss.; Mrs. Paul Lorenz, P. O. Box 225, Strathmore, Calif.; Mrs. S. S. Arentz, Simpson, Nev.; Mrs. Vida Hilger, Box 257, Rockland, Mich.; Mrs. Grace H. Peterson, Box 335, Amherst, Wis.; Mrs. Cecil Skinner, Bedford, Wyo.; Mrs. Joe Furnace, 317 West Twentieth St., South Sioux City, Neb.

Magnificent Cakes Entered.

The judges report that they have never seen a finer collection of cakes assembled at one time. Because almost all the cakes were so exceptionally good, it was extremely difficult to choose the winners. But a most careful scoring system was used, and the cakes were checked for general appearance, including shape, size and crust, both color and character; flavor, including odor and taste; lightness; crumb, including texture, rated as to its fineness, tenderness, moistness and elasticity, color and grain.

C. Houston Goudiss has said that he regrets that every woman who entered the contest could not win a prize. He offers his congratulations to the winners and his thanks to the many other homemakers who helped to make this Cake Contest such a splendid success.

Uncle Phil Says:

That's Rehabilitation

Young men who are bad are usually so because they want to be bad. You've got to change their point of view.

The greatest agencies of moral reform are those that invite you and do not seek to drive you.

You may admire those who are brilliantly sarcastic, but you can't love them.

Try It on Crackpots

From the first, laughter has shattered thrones and demagogues.

When you give your "moral support" you should be vocal about it. Silent moral support is worthless.

DO YOU KNOW HOW TO

Balance Your Diet?

This Free Chart Makes It Simple as A-B-C

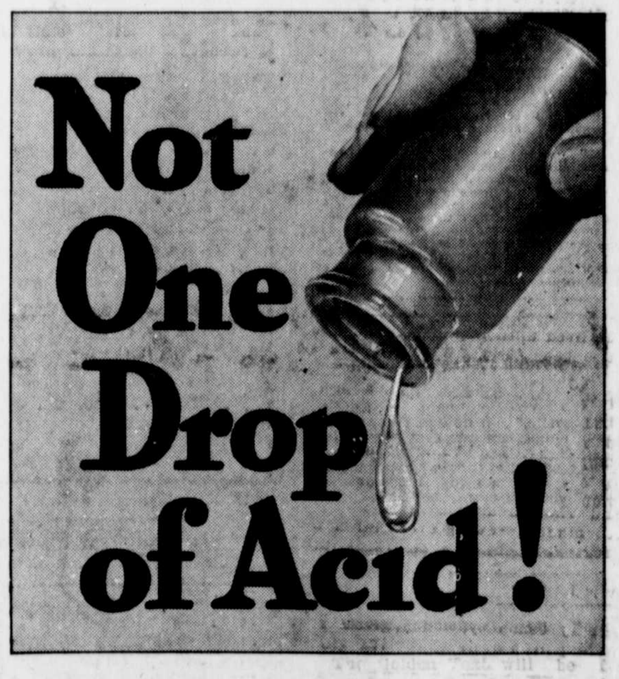
Helps to Safeguard Health

Planning a balanced diet will cease to be a puzzle if you send for the Homemaker's Chart for Checking Nutritional Balance, offered, free, by C. Houston Goudiss.

It lists the foods and the standard amounts that should be included in the daily diet, and includes skeleton menus for breakfast, dinner and lunch or supper, to guide you in selecting the proper foods in each classification.

● *A postcard is sufficient to bring you this valuable aid to good menu planning. Just ask for the Nutrition Chart. Address C. Houston Goudiss, 6 East 39th Street, New York City.*

Not One Drop of Acid!



QUAKER STATE has accomplished a scientific "miracle" . . . produced from the finest Pennsylvania crude oil a motor oil *so pure* that the common ailments of sludge, carbon and corrosion are wholly overcome. Four great, modern refineries equipped with every scientific aid are at the service of the motoring public . . . deliver to you *Acid-Free Quaker State* which makes your car run better, last longer. Retail price, 35¢ a quart. Quaker State Oil Refining Corp., Oil City, Penna.