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. 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. The evening papers luridly confirm the story, and Sentry takes it hard. Mary, elder daughter, in love with Neil Ray, young interne at the hospital where she works, goes off to dinner at Gus Loran's, Sentry's partner, with Mrs. Loran's brother, Jimmy Endle. Mr. and Mrs. Sentry call on old Mrs. Sentry, and Barbara, alone, receives Dan Fisher, reporter, who advises her not to talk. Phil Sentry, son at Yale, is disturbed at the possible implications and suspicion of Miss Wines' absence from her rooms for three days during August. He goes home to help. Sentry is arrested and booked for murder.

CHAPTER III—Continued

—7—

But when Phil opened the door he saw a young man he did not know, and the man said: "I'm Professor Brace. Is Miss Sentry at home?"

Phil was bewildered; but then Barbara, drying her eyes, came past him. "Of course!" she said. "I'm sorry, Professor! I'd forgotten you were coming."

She shook hands with him uncertainly. He said, looking at their pale faces, at Barbara's red eyes, "I'm afraid I've come at the wrong time."

No one had asked him to come in. He still stood in the open door. Phil started to speak; but Barbara said, "Oh no!" She put on, quickly, like a mask, a bright vivacity. "Come in," she invited. "There's just the family here, and grandmother." She took his hat. "Take off your coat," she said.

He followed doubtfully. In the living-room Barbara said: "This is Professor Brace, mother. You remember I told you about him? How kind he was?"

Mrs. Sentry spoke composedly. "Yes, indeed! Good evening, Professor Brace. Barbara told me you rescued her from some embarrassment." She thought: We must go on in normal ways, as if nothing has happened; and she added: "Mr. Sentry was called out on business; and when you rang, we expected him. That's why you had such a reception committee."

He nodded, perceiving the tension on them all, uncertain what to do or say. Barbara introduced him to her grandmother. He sat down; and the talk ran haltingly, with many silences, till Mary, unable to endure this, presently rose.

"I've letters to write," she said. "If you'll excuse me." She escaped upstairs.

Phil asked old Mrs. Sentry, "Grandmother, want me to take you home?"

"Not yet! I'm not sleepy."

Silence oppressed them, till Barbara, forcing herself to talk, told over again the story of Johnny Boyd's battle with the policeman, and the resulting situation from which Professor Brace had rescued her. Phil and his mother scarce heard her, sat with stony faces, listening for any sound outside. But old Mrs. Sentry cut in at last, said sharply: "Stop talking nonsense, Barbara! It's no time for chit-chat! We ought to be finding out—"

Barbara turned to look at her; looked past her, came sharply to her feet, pale and shaken, pointing. "Look!" she cried. "Who's that?" They saw no one. "There was a man at the window!" she whispered.

Phil raced through the hall, and Professor Brace followed him. When they opened the front door, they faced two men. Something exploded, glaringly, in their faces, and Phil uttered an angry cry, and one of the young men said:

"It's all right, Mr. Sentry! Just a flashlight. We got word of Mr. Sentry's arrest. We're supposed to ask whether you have anything to say. Or perhaps your mother—"

Professor Brace, very still, looked at Phil. Phil demanded hoarsely: "Arrest? Who said so?"

"Inspector Irons."

"It's not true!"

"I'm afraid it is," said the reporter. "He's been booked for murder." And he urged: "Better take it easy, Mr. Sentry. I know how you feel, but there'll be a lot of newspaper men around here in another ten minutes. If you want to say anything—"

"I've a notion to knock your block off!"

The other grinned sympathetically. "I know. Don't blame you. It's tough, all right. But keep your head, if you're wise." He looked at Professor Brace. "Are you their lawyer?" he asked.

"I'm Professor Brace of the Harvard Business School. But I'm afraid it's too early for the family to have anything to say to reporters."

Phil looked at him in surprise, then gratefully. The reporter nodded. "Sure," he agreed. "That's sensible. Be polite, but don't talk. And—take a friendly tip from me. Don't get mad and lose your heads, don't say something you'll be sorry for. And—don't take a crack at reporters. We're just doing our job."

He added: "Another thing that will save you some trouble, change your telephone number; get an unlisted number. Then no one can call the house except your friends."

Phil nodded grudgingly. "Thanks," he said, "What's your name?"

"Fisher. Dan Fisher. Anytime you can give me a break on the story, I'd appreciate it, of course."

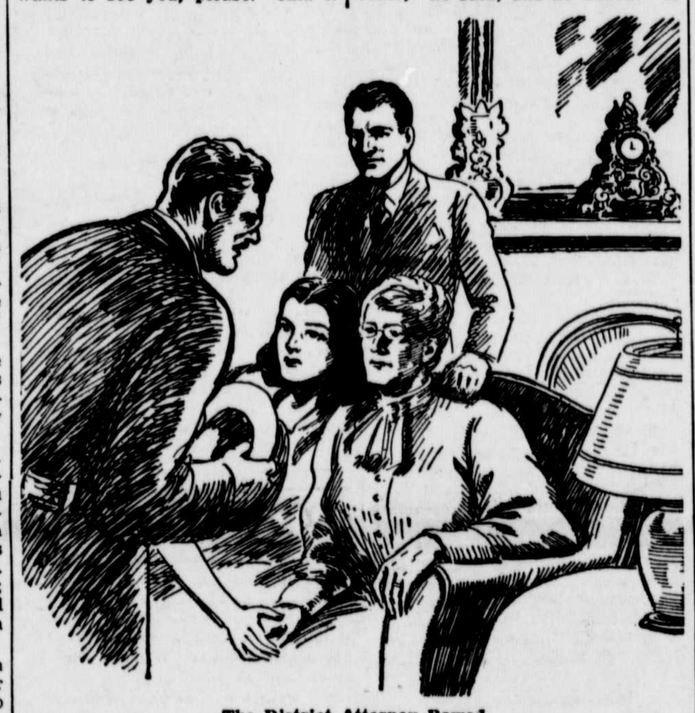
Old Mrs. Sentry called from the living-room, "Phil, who's that?"

"A reporter, grandmother!"

"Well, bring him in here. I want to talk to him."

Phil hesitated; he heard his mother's whispered protest, heard the older woman say: "Nonsense! He can tell us what we want to know." She called again, "Phil!"

Then Barbara came into the hall, herself conveyed the invitation. "Mr. Fisher, my grandmother wants to see you, please." And it was she who made the introductions in the living-room. "Mr. Fisher was here the other night, mother," she explained. "He's a Princeton man, and he knows Joe Dane." As though these were credentials.



The District Attorney Bowed.

Her mother nodded icily; and old Mrs. Sentry said, "I heard you say Mr. Sentry had been arrested."

Fisher said quietly, "I don't know that he's been booked yet, but they're holding him."

"They think he killed this girl?" The young man hesitated; and she insisted: "Speak up! We're adults!"

"Yes," he admitted. "I believe they do."

"Why? They must have some reason?"

Fisher nodded. "I can tell you what little I know, if you want."

"That's exactly what I want."

He said: "Well, you see, the robbery was a fake. Whoever opened the safe knew the combination—or else was an expert safe-cracker. The combination had been changed since Miss Wines worked in the office. Only Mr. Sentry and his partner and Miss Randall knew it. There wasn't enough money in the safe, ever, to make it worth the trouble of opening, not for a—professional!

"So the girl didn't come there to rob the safe. She came to meet someone. A man brought her; drove her in town, let her out at a corner four or five blocks away at about eleven o'clock. A policeman saw him do it; and the man parked there and talked to the cop while he waited for her. He stayed there till half-past twelve and then decided she had made a fool of him. He told the cop she had promised to be back at twelve."

Fisher hesitated, but no one spoke; and after a moment he went on, "If you've read the papers, you know that the Medical Examiner found a reason why she might have been killed." And he added hurriedly: "She was missing for three days in August. Mr. Sentry was away at the same time. His office had his address, but they tried to get in touch with him during those three days and couldn't."

He finished quickly: "And she had a key to the office that was a duplicate of Mr. Sentry's key. So—Irons took him in for questioning—and the man that made her key recognized Mr. Sentry, identified him, before I left Headquarters."

Barbara, her eyes very wide, started to speak; but Grandmother Sentry said quickly, "Hush, child!" She spoke to Fisher. "I told you we were adults," she reminded him. "Don't mince words. I suppose you're trying to say that the girl was, as my generation used to put it, in trouble; and that the police believe she went somewhere with my son in August; and that they sometimes met in his office, to which he had given her a key; and that they met there the other night and that my son killed her. Is that it?"

Fisher said honestly, "I'm afraid so."

"Why should he kill her?"

"She told the man who brought her to town that she was going to get some money."

"Blackmail?" The reporter did not speak; and in the silence Barbara hiccoughed like a sob; and the old woman said: "Thank you! Good evening."

Fisher half-smiled. "I'm supposed to be interviewing you," he confessed. "But—"

"You've too much intelligence to try," the old woman interrupted. "Come in to my hotel and have a cup of tea with me some day, young man. Phil, show him to the door."

The reporter nodded. "I will come," he said, and he added: "If you haven't thought of it, you might call up Mr. Sentry's attorney." He turned toward the door, Phil on his heels. And no one spoke till Phil came back.

Then Mrs. Sentry asked, "Mother—was that necessary?"

"I've had my eyes open all my life, Ellen. Pretending not to see things doesn't keep them from existing. I've known for fifteen years that you and Arthur—"

"Mother!"

Old Mrs. Sentry hesitated; she looked at Barbara, pale and still like one who gazes upon unimagined horrors, and was silent. After a moment Phil spoke.

"I'll call Dean Hare, shall I, mother?" Phil asked.

She nodded. Professor Brace suggested, "I think that idea of an unlisted telephone is a good one, too."

While Phil was at the phone, old Mrs. Sentry remarked, "Ellen, I think you'd better put me up here tonight."

"I think so too, mother," Mrs. Sentry agreed. "You mustn't go back to the hotel, be there all alone." She seemed to welcome the opportunity for physical action, rose, said vigorously: "And I'm going to put you to bed right now, too! No use in your getting so dreadfully tired. Come."

Phil was telephoning from the library. The two older women, Grandmother Sentry with a word of farewell to Professor Brace, departed. Barbara looked at the professor helplessly.

"I feel—funny!" she confessed. "I keep thinking I ought to cry, but I don't really feel a thing."

"You're still numb," he suggested. "If a person is shot or stabbed, he just thinks at first that someone pushed him! He doesn't realize how badly he's hurt till the first shock is over."

"And of course," she reflected loyally, "I know it's not true! It couldn't be, could it?" Then, as Phil returned, she asked quickly, "Did you get Mr. Hare, Phil?"

Phil nodded. "Yes," he said. "He's on the job." He mopped his forehead. Then they heard Mrs. Sentry coming downstairs, and Phil and Barbara went to meet her as though to help her.

But she came in strongly, went to a chair, sat down. Only when she was seated did she slump with weariness. She looked at Professor Brace, her guard for a moment down.

"I feel as though we were all dreaming, insane," she said. "I'm glad you're—a stranger. If you were one of our friends, you'd be sympathetic, and—I don't think I could stand that." She added, "At first I didn't feel anything; but now—I'm beginning to!"

Phil on one side, Barbara on the other, pressed close to her, as much seeking comfort as giving it; and Barbara said miserably, "I think the worst part of it is not knowing what has happened, or what is happening!"

"Mr. Hare is on the job, Barb," Phil reminded her; and he explained to his mother, "I asked him to come later and tell us—whatever there is to tell—as soon as he knows."

Mrs. Sentry nodded. "We can't do anything but wait, I suppose!" Her head lifted. "It's outrageous!" she cried. "We're respectable, decent people. The police, the newspapers—"

No one spoke; and after a moment she said indignantly: "I turned off the lights in mother's room and looked out. There are cars in the street, Phil, and men standing around."

"Reporters, probably."

"I won't have that. Tell them to go away!"

Professor Brace said: "They'll stay, Mrs. Sentry. That's their job, you see."

"Well, it's a thoroughly disreputable job!" The doorbell rang, and she exclaimed, "If that's one of them, don't let him in!"

Phil nodded, and he and Professor Brace went together to the door. A man stood there; reporters grouped behind him a policeman by his side.

Phil would have closed the door; but the man said: "Hold on! I'm District Attorney Flood."

Phil hesitated. "Oh, hullo, Mr. Flood," he said. "I've heard father speak of you. You played cards together sometimes, didn't you?" And he explained: "I'm Phil Sentry. Come in, won't you?"

The District Attorney came in and Phil closed the door, and introduced Professor Brace. "My mother's in the living-room," he explained, and led the other that way. "This is Mr. Flood, mother," he said.

Mrs. Sentry, without rising—she could not trust her knees—extended her hand. "Good evening. I've heard Arthur speak of you. This is our daughter, Barbara."

The District Attorney bowed. He was a big man, florid, physically powerful, a successful politician, and with a record of success in his profession too. Yet he seemed smaller now, and ill at ease. Barbara sat on the arm of her mother's chair, watching him; Phil and Professor Brace stood at one side, their faces somewhat in shadow.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Small-Mouth and Large-Mouth Bass of Different Type and Habits, Expert Says

The general rule for telling the difference between a small-mouth and a large-mouth bass is that the mouth of the small-mouth does not extend beyond a point below the eye, while the mouth of the large mouth does extend back of the eye, according to a writer in the Indianapolis News. The small-mouth is found in most clear-running streams and clear cold lakes from the St. Lawrence river to Dakota, and southward to South Carolina. It varies in different localities, but at maturity is usually one to two feet long, with a weight of two to five pounds. The adult is generally olive-green, often darker on the head. It has the arrowy rush of the trout, the untiring strength and bold leap of the salmon, while it has a system of fighting tactics peculiarly its own. It will rise to the artificial fly as readily as the salmon or the brook trout, under the same conditions; and will take the live minnow, or other live bait, under any and all circumstances favorable to the taking of any other fish.

The large-mouth black bass is as abundant as the small-mouth species, but prefers lakes, bayous, and sluggish rather than running waters. It is found from Canada southward even into Mexico. It averages in length one to two and one-half feet, and in weight two to eight pounds. Its color is dark green above and silvery below, the young having a broad blackish band on the sides with dark spots above and below it. It is called in various places by many different names, as Oswego bass, straw bass, green bass, bayou bass, green trout and chub. It is almost as game a fish as the small mouth. Its specific name "salmoides" (Latin salmo, salmon and Greek eidos, like) was given it from a fancied resemblance to a salmon.

GREAT BOOKS

Dumas' Story Formed Basis For 'Traviata'

By ELIZABETH C. JAMES

ONE has grown used to seeing characters from favorite books on the screen. There is interest also in meeting again the old books, just as their authors wrote them long before the cinema era. Among famous love stories recently brought to the screen is that of Camille, the lady created by Alexander Dumas in his book, "The Lady of the Camellias."

Elizabeth James

You recall that Dumas opened his romantic novel by relating how he himself had gone to the sale of the personal possessions of Marguerite Gautier, a beautiful courtesan of Paris. He bought the book, Manon, which had been inscribed by one Armand Duval, whom he guessed to be one of her lovers.

The day after this sale a card was presented at the author's door, bearing the name of Armand Duval. Very curious, Dumas invited the caller into his apartment. The personable young man could hardly talk for weeping. He wanted to buy back the book, Manon.

VERSATILE DUMAS

Alexander Dumas, fils, was the natural son of the noted novelist and a seamstress. The mother brought up her son carefully and early he attained a wide and cultured education. Taunts from his playmates shadowed his childhood with unhappiness.

The younger Dumas was versatile in the number of his literary talents, but one quality ran through them all, the purpose of a reformer. Most of his works have a didactic theme, which caused the elder Dumas to scold his son.

After much weeping, Duval told the story of the Lady of the Camellias.

Marguerite Gautier, outstanding among the lovely women in Paris, had as her favorite flower the camellia, which she wore the year round in preference to all other flowers. From the time that Armand first saw her, his life was not the same. When he obtained an introduction to her, he was so overcome that he made a very silly impression and for two years he made no effort to see her again. At one time she was ill for two months, and he went daily to inquire about her, never leaving his name.

Marguerite Is Consumptive.

Finally he arranged to meet her again. When she learned that it was he who had come daily for two months, she was interested and invited him to supper. He knew already that she was consumptive.

Marguerite had never seen anyone pity her so deeply and she was touched. When Armand told her how much he loved her, she explained that her mode of life was lavish, that she spent 100,000 francs a year. But no arguments prevailed against their mutual attraction. Marguerite loved Armand.

As spring came, she suggested that they leave Paris and take a house in the country for the summer. This plan seemed idyllic, and proved to be so. For six months the lovers were happy. Then came a message for Armand to meet his father in Paris.

The interview between father and son was stormy, but neither gave way to the other. The next day Armand called again to see his father but found him out. Returning to Marguerite he found her in a state of agitation worse than he had believed possible. She gave him vague reasons and wept continuously. The next day she urged Armand to go once more to see his father. To please her, he did so.

Marguerite Disappears.

Late in the evening when Armand returned to the country, he found the house dark. Frantic, he found that Marguerite had gone. A letter stated that their relationship had been lovely, but it could not last. Armand was wild. He would show her! Back in Paris he went everywhere that Marguerite went, he gambled and lived recklessly, taking every occasion to insult her. Marguerite fled from Paris.

In her exile, the Lady of the Camellias knew that she would soon die. Longing for Armand she wrote him each day, but did not send the letters. She gave instructions that when she was dead these letters with one other should be sent to Armand.

On returning to Paris, Armand learned of her death and received her letters with one from his father to Marguerite in which Armand's father had implored Marguerite in the name of her love to give up his son so that the family name and future would be untarnished. The importunate letter had used every means to win her to the idea that she would be doing an heroic deed in the name of love.

The plot of Verdi's opera, "La Traviata," comes from this book.

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He was a pork butcher, and he and his sausages had done very well indeed in the town—until a rival came along and, by undercutting and pushful publicity, started to take all the trade.

Butcher No. 1 was sitting in his shop musing on what the inside of a poorhouse would look like, when a bright idea suddenly struck him.

Changing his clothes as quickly as he could, he hurried to his competitor's shop and, elbowing his way through the crowd of customers, planted a dead dog on the counter.

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