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 day 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. Dan Fisher explains the evidence against him—that the robbery was a fake, the safe opened by one who knew the combination, changed since Miss Wines' employment there—that a back door key, a duplicate of Sentry's, was found in the girl's purse, and that Sentry, too, had been away those three days in August.

CHAPTER III—Continued

—8—

Flood rubbed the knuckles of his left hand with the palm of his right. Then he said gravely, "Your husband suggested that I come and—tell you the situation, Mrs. Sentry." He added, "Ex officio, you might say." No one spoke, and he added, "I regret to say that Inspector Irons has booked Mr. Sentry on a charge of murder." He hesitated, explained, "The Inspector tried to find me beforehand; but I was out, and he thought it best to act without delay."

"Didn't he—exceed his authority?" Mrs. Sentry asked in dull tones.

"No," he admitted. "And—I'm bound to say that I should have acted as he did, in his place."

"You mean you would have arrested Arthur?" She seemed to choke, then added coldly, "You imply he—is guilty?"

"I'm afraid there's enough evidence to hold him."

"That's outrageous! Have decent citizens no rights?"

His color rose at her tone. "You must understand that your husband is accused of murder," he retorted. Mrs. Sentry closed her eyes and let her head rest against the back of the chair; and he added, more gently: "But of course, I want to do—everything possible to protect you, to see that you are—annoyed as little as possible. There will be—"

Barbara, who had been in a deep abstraction, cried now as though suddenly remembering: "Oh, wait a minute! Father didn't do it. Father didn't kill her. I know he didn't!"

She leaned forward sharply, and Mrs. Sentry's eyes opened in swift hope. The District Attorney said sympathetically, "I know it must seem incredible to you all, as it does to me! I've known Mr. Sentry—"

"No, no!" Barbara cried. "I don't mean that. I mean, I really do know he didn't. I just realized that he couldn't have. It said in the paper that she was killed a little after one oclock. A night watchman heard the shot. Don't you remember, Mr. Flood?"

"That was in the paper," he assented. "But—"

She interrupted him. "But father was home before then!" she cried triumphantly. "We saw him! Professor Brace and I came up from Essex through the East Boston Tunnel, and father passed us in his car right outside the entrance. We followed his car, stayed behind him all the way out here." She appealed to Professor Brace. "You remember, don't you?"

The District Attorney looked at the other man. He asked in a curiously quiet tone, "Is that right, Professor Brace?"

Brace, after a moment, said: "Yes. Yes, that's correct."

"And what time was that?"

"That was before one o'clock!" Barbara said eagerly. "I looked at my watch as I came in the house, and it was quarter of one. So father couldn't have, don't you see? He was already at home before she was killed!"

The girl's eyes were shining, her cheeks bright with triumph. But Mrs. Sentry, while Barbara spoke, felt all her muscles slowly contract. Her body was like an empty shell, and her ears rang.

She heard, as though at a great distance, District Attorney Flood tell Barbara in an even tone that this was very interesting and would be considered; but more real to her than Mr. Flood's words were other words, spoken that night when Arthur came home from his bridge game, and she half woke to greet him, and asked him, murmurning drowsily, "What time is it?"

And—she remembered with a terrible and conclusive certainty—he had replied, "Quarter past eleven."

But if Barbara told the truth, then Arthur had lied. And if he had lied—

Her thoughts recoiled, refused to answer the hideous, damning question.

CHAPTER IV

—

Mrs. Sentry slept not at all till a little before dawn; she woke to face a naked sun just rising in a raw and aching glare above the eastern horizon, leering at her through the trees whose foliage had thinned even during the night and now would soon be gone. Her eyes opened, but not to full consciousness; she lay for a while, turning her head sidewise to avoid the glare, watching small shadows shift and change on the rough plastered wall.

Then she turned to look toward Arthur's bed, and saw the spread and pillow cover rumpled as though someone had lain there; and she remembered that Mary had come in to her last night, weeping in furious and passionate revolt, in hurt, tormented pride.

And little by little she remembered all the rest, picking up this fact and that circumstance, and setting them in their proper relation to one another. I'm glad I'm alone, can be alone for a while, she thought; and she decided that if anyone came to wake her she would pretend to be asleep. Mary had seemed to blame her father, with a raging bitterness; had been filled with anger more than grief, like a mother robbed of her child, a girl of her lover.

Thinking of Mary, Mrs. Sentry thought of Neil Ray. Mary had not mentioned him last night; yet there had been something like terror as an undercurrent to her wrath. Mrs. Sentry wondered what Neil Ray would do or say to all this. Remembering his anxiety to escape from the house the other night, she thought there might be something of the prig in that young man, a tendency to deplore—

Deplore? The District Attorney, she remembered, had deplored something last night. "Deplored the necessity!" That was it. He had asked her to promise that the children would all remain available as witnesses if needed; and he had admitted that he could not require her to testify, but she had said of course she would stay near Arthur. "Near my husband," she had said, and remembered now that when Arthur gave her the new ring, the emerald, on her birthday three or four weeks before, he had signed the enclosed card "Your Husband," and she had felt a sense of strangeness at the time, because he usually used his name, just Arthur. And also the ring had been a lavish present, without precedent in recent years, so that she had smilingly accused him of a guilty conscience.

Her birthday in September! Miss Wines had worked for her husband's firm during the summer; and that mysterious absence of which the papers spoke, when the girl was supposed to have gone to New Hampshire, was in August; and then when they all came home from York Harbor for Mrs. Sentry's birthday, in September, Mr. Sentry gave her that beautiful emerald and signed himself "Your Husband."

She understood now. He must have sought to ease his conscience so, and she thought with more tenderness than she had felt toward him for years how unhappy he must have been since then, playing a part, suffering through sleepless nights. Insomnia. I wonder, she thought, whether I'll have insomnia now. I slept last night, a little. I'm still half asleep. It doesn't hurt, so I must be. Why am I so sure Arthur did it? If I were a young girl, his bride, I should be loyally, blindly sure of his innocence; but I'm an old woman, old, old. Barbara is sure he is innocent. Does Mary know, I wonder? And Phil? I wonder whether I shall see Arthur today. I can't help him. It's the children who need me now. I wonder if they're awake. What time is it? I ought to keep my traveling clock on the bedside table here, so that if Mr. Flood asks me how I knew it was quarter past eleven, when Arthur came home that night, I needn't say Arthur told me. I needn't actually lie. I can say, "There was a clock on the table between our beds." I needn't say I looked at it.

She rose at the thought and went to fetch the clock from her dressing-room and set it on the table here beside her bed, but she did not lie down again. The household, the servants, would be excited when they saw the morning papers. She must control the situation. She dressed, and rang, and when Nellie came, pale and shaking, she asked crisply, "Are the children down, Nellie?"

"Philip is."

"Neither of the girls?"

"No."

Will you ask Oscar and Emma to come up here, please, and you come with them."

Five minutes later they filed in and faced her. Oscar stood stolidly. Nellie wrung her wretched hands. Big Emma, the cook, was crying openly, her lips mumbling nervous blubbering sobs.

Mrs. Sentry said, "That's not necessary, Emma!" And she added: "We are all going to have an unpleasant time for a while. Of course I shall not be surprised, or blame any of you, if you wish to leave." She felt grateful for their quick expressions of loyalty. Grateful for the loyalty of servants? Was she already brought so low? "You're quite free to go," she insisted stiffly. "But please understand, if you stay, I shall expect a perfectly normal household—as if nothing had happened."

She hesitated, then went on: "You must, of course, help the police in every possible way, be completely frank, truthful, hide nothing!" It was useless and dangerous to try to drill the servants in lies or denials; and—there was nothing they could really know, or tell. She added: "That is all. I count on you."

Emma wiped her eyes, and they filed out. Later, after she was dressed, Phil came in and said, " 'Morning, mother." He kissed her awkwardly, an unaccustomed gesture. "Dean Hare's downstairs. I wasn't sure you were awake."

"Perhaps he will have breakfast with us," Mrs. Sentry suggested. "Is Mrs. Hare with him?" Mrs. Hare was a cheerful, chuckling, loyal friend, but—Mrs. Sentry hoped she was not here just now.

Phil said, "No, he's alone." They went downstairs together. Dean Hare was in the living-room, and Mrs. Sentry greeted him almost with a smile.

"Good morning, Dean," she said. "I hoped you would come."

"I came last night, after I left—Arthur," he explained, "but the house was dark. I thought, if you were asleep, better not to wake you; so I didn't ring."

"How is Arthur?"

He said slowly, "Shocked and shaken, but—all right." He added, "I arranged about the telephone at once, after Phil called me, so you won't be bothered." He told her the new number. "You can give it to your friends," he said, and continued, "Then I went to him, to Arthur." He hesitated, said thoughtfully, "You know, Bob Flood and Arthur and I played bridge together that night, Thursday night."

Mrs. Sentry started to speak, then said to her son, "Phil, tell Nellie Mr. Hare will have breakfast with us."

"I've had breakfast," the lawyer replied.

"A cup of coffee, at least," Mrs. Sentry insisted. "And you may change your mind. Go on, Phil." Phil went toward the kitchen, and Mrs. Sentry said, in a lower tone, as soon as he was out of hearing: "Yes, Arthur told me. He got home a little after eleven." Phil last night had heard Barbara tell the District Attorney that her father had come home just before one; he must not hear her say this now.

Hare nodded. "Yes, he told me he came straight home; and that of course makes it impossible that—he could have done this. He couldn't have left the Club when he did, and—gone to the office, and still got home so soon."

She said, "You don't need to convince me, Dean!" But she was thinking: So Arthur has lied to Dean Hare as he lied to me. I suppose he thinks—hopes—no one saw him come home.

Then Phil returned to say breakfast was ready. They went into the dining-room, sat down. "I must see Arthur today," she said.

The lawyer hesitated. "It might be as well to—wait," he advised. "In fact he told me to ask you to wait; that he wouldn't be there long, that it would be unpleasant for you."

"Nonsense! I'm no—timid girl! I shall see him today. Will you arrange it?"

Phil said, "I'll go with you, mother."

"No, Phil. Not this time." What she had to say to Arthur none must hear.

Dean Hare said tentatively: "I don't know whether you care to hear the—reasons the police give for the arrest. Of course, the newspapers—"

She thought of Fisher, the reporter; but—let Dean tell her if he wished. She could think while he talked.

She said, "I don't read newspapers!"

Hare nodded. "I suppose not." And, choosing his words, he went on: "You see, the girl had a key to the back door. Inspector Irons came Sunday morning to ask Arthur where she could have got it, and Arthur suggested that Miss Randall might have given it to her; but Irons found that Miss Randall didn't have a key to the back door herself. There was a new lock put on two or three years ago. Ike Tory, the janitor down there, put it on, and gave Arthur and Gus Loran keys.

"The Inspector took Arthur's key, and he went out to get Gus Loran's. Gus was in New York, went over Thursday and didn't get back till late last night; but Mrs. Loran found his key book and Irons picked out the key. He found that the key Gus had was different from Arthur's, and from the one in Miss Wines' bag. But hers was a duplicate of Arthur's; and her key seemed pretty new, but Arthur's was older than the other two, more worn.

"The Inspector went back to try the keys. They all worked in the lock. He asked Ike Tory why they were different. It turned out that when Ike put the new lock on, a year or so ago, only two keys came with it; so he took an old key that was something like these, and filed it down himself till it fitted the lock. Ike takes pride in saving money for the firm; did it to save having a new key made, to save 75 cents or whatever it was. And he gave Arthur the key he made, kept one of the originals himself, gave the other to Gus Loran."

He hesitated, and Mrs. Sentry said automatically, "I don't see anything in that."

Hare was uncomfortable. "Well, Irons believed," he told her, "that the dead girl's key must have been made from Arthur's, because they matched perfectly, while her key didn't match Loran's; so he had all the locksmiths canvassed, and late yesterday afternoon they found a man who remembered making the key. He remembered it, because he noticed on the key that was given him for a pattern that parts of it had been filed off later than other parts; so he knew it had been made out of a key originally meant for another lock. He asked the customer whether he wanted an exact duplicate; and the customer said Yes."

He hesitated; but no one spoke, and he concluded: "They brought this chap to Headquarters last night. He picked your father out of a line-up as the man who had the key made."

Mrs. Sentry said nothing; but Phil cried, "Probably the police tipped him who to pick!" Mrs. Sentry thought: Phil is so young. Mr. Fisher told us all this. Phil must remember.

Hare said regretfully: "Well, Arthur admitted last night at Headquarters that he did have the duplicate key made. He said he kept it in his desk in case he lost the other. He thinks Miss Wines must have stolen it."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Lightning Strokes Are Preceded by "Feelers" Which Guide the Main Bolt

Strokes of lightning are preceded by "feelers" which guide the main bolt to its objective, according to Karl B. McEachron, high voltage electrical engineer, writes a Schenectady (N. Y.) United Press correspondent.

The lightning stroke which appears to be a single one-way discharge is met part way by a small flash originating from the earth, he said. This preliminary discharge attracts the main stroke and draws it to the ground.

In some cases the leader stroke shoots upward to a cloud, to be immediately followed by several successive flashes over its exact path from the sky downward, McEachron said.

The discoveries of lightning habits were made through a three-year observation of the Empire State building in New York city, the best and most frequently struck lightning conductor that could be found.

The study was conducted by the General Electric company to solve the problem of better protection to transmission lines and other electrical apparatus.

Hundreds of pictures taken by a high-speed camera aimed at the 1,025-foot tower from another skyscraper displayed strange phenomena in lightning conduction.

"We learned that leader strokes which precede all lightning flashes move toward the ground in a series of hesitating steps of approximately 200 feet in length," McEachron explained. "The streamers progress this short distance, substantially die out, and after a wait of a few millionths of a second proceed in a second step, repeating until they reach the earth. Succeeding flashes move without hesitation at speeds of 10,000 miles per second or faster."

Dr. B. F. J. Schonland in South Africa, using a camera similar to the one used in the New York experiments, also discovered that the usual lightning discharge consisted of a leader stroke, which was followed by a main stroke from the ground upward to cause the visible flash.

Man 70 Million Years Old

Man is "traced" back 70,000,000 years. The earliest known "link" is in the dead Montana forest, according to Smithsonian institution.

A Play Outfit; a Basic Dress

DO YOU need something new to dawdle in or to dress up in? Here are two new designs, one for play and one for afternoon, that are so smart you really should have both. It costs so little, in time and trouble, to make them for yourself, with these simple designs that even beginners can follow with no difficulty. And of course you can splurge on some really luxury fabrics, when you sew your own.

Play Suit and Sports Frock.

This new design gives you both! The play suit has beautifully cut shorts and a nice bodice top with the sunniest kind of sunback. The frock is created merely by fastening that straight skirt around you, and the bolero goes with both! Notice how cleverly the ricrac braid is used to simulate a square yoke in the front. The smartest thing for this design is linen in a dusty pastel shade; calico, percale and pique are good, too. Be sure to trim it with ricrac.

Dress With Bodice Detailing.

Here's a design that brings a breath of fall smartness in the bosom detailing that you'll see in expensive models this coming season. Also in the Victorian sleeves, high at the shoulders and fitted to the arm below. The straight panel in the back, the gathers at the waistline in front, give you a lovely figure-line. Although it's so distinguished looking and subtly detailed, this dress is easy to make. Just six steps in the detailed sew chart. Make it now of silk crepe, linen or georgette. Later in sheer wool, satin or velvet.

The Patterns.

1557 is designed for sizes 12, 14, 16, 18 and 20. Size 14 requires 5⅝ yards of 35-inch material. 10 yards of ricrac braid to trim.

1482 is designed for sizes 32, 34, 36, 38, 40, 42 and 44. Size 34 requires 4⅝ yards of 39-inch material with long sleeves; 4¼ yards of 39-inch material for short sleeves.

Success in Sewing.

Success in sewing, like in any other field, depends upon how you approach the task in hand. To help you turn out clothes professional looking in every detail, we have a book which plainly sets forth the simple rules of home dressmaking. The beginner will find every step in making a dress clearly outlined and illustrated within its covers. For the experienced sewer there are many helpful hints and suggestions for sewing short cuts. Send 15 cents (in coins) today for your copy of SUCCESS IN SEWING, a book every home dressmaker will find of value.

Send your order to The Sewing Circle Pattern Dept., 247 W. Forty-third street, New York, N. Y. Price of patterns, 15 cents (in coins) each.

© Bell Syndicate.—WNU Service.

ASK ME ANOTHER ?

A Quiz With Answers Offering Information on Various Subjects

The Questions

1. In what lake does the Mississippi river have its rise?
2. Who were the Druids?
3. Who was the author of this quotation: "America never lost a war and never won a conference"?
4. What is a papal bull?
5. What is the largest city south of the equator?
6. What is the most traveled highway in the United States?
7. Why was the state of Florida given that name?
8. What percentage of motion picture films shown all over the world is made in the United States?

The Answers

1. Lake Itasca in Minnesota.
2. Priests of the religion of the ancient inhabitants of Britain, Gaul and Germany.
3. Will Rogers.
4. An edict of the pope.
5. Buenos Aires, Argentina.
6. The American Automobile association says that U. S. Highway No. 1 in the vicinity of New York city has the heaviest traffic.
7. It was discovered on Easter Sunday—in Spanish, Pascua Florida, the Feast of Flowers.
8. A survey of the department of commerce shows that American motion pictures constitute 70 per cent of the showings in all foreign markets.

Condemn Your Faults

Many men are angry with them that tell them of their faults, when they should be angry only with the faults that are told them.—Venning.

"Black Leaf 40" KILLS LICE
OUR "Cap-Brush" Applicator makes "BLACK LEAF 40" GO MUCH FARTHER
JUST A DASH IN FEATHERS.. OR SPREAD ON ROOSTS

Your automobile requires pure oil . . . oil that will not break down into sludge, carbon or corrosion-forming elements.

Acid-Free Quaker State is a scientific achievement in motor oil *purity*. In four, great modern refineries, operating under the most exacting control . . . selected Pennsylvania crude oil is freed of all impurities. Every drop of Quaker State is rich, pure lubricant. Retail price, 35¢ a quart. Quaker State Oil Refining Corp., Oil City, Penn.

Buy Acid-Free Quaker State

IT MAKES CARS RUN BETTER LAST LONGER