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 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. Brace calls, and backs up Barbara in her denial that Sentry could have done it, because of the discrepancy of time between the slaying and their seeing Sentry on the road.

CHAPTER IV—Continued

—9—

"Arthur was always losing keys," Mrs. Sentry assented, and realized with a faint shock of terror that she had spoken of her husband in the past tense, and then, with a deeper tremor, that Hare seemed not to have noticed, as though it were natural for her to speak of him so.

She said hurriedly: "I hear the girls coming downstairs. Let's not talk about details, Dean!" Her eyes met his for a moment, held his; and his after a moment were lowered, as though some word had passed between them.

Phil argued, "But just the same—" Then he stopped as Barbara and Mary appeared in the doorway.

" 'Morning, children," Mrs. Sentry said lightly. "Sleepy-heads!"

Barbara saw Dean Hare; she cried: "Oh, have you seen father, Mr. Hare? When will they let him come home?"

"I'm afraid not right away, Barbara," he confessed. "You know, these things take time."

"But they know he didn't do it!" Barbara insisted.

"Well, of course we know—"

"They know it, too!" the girl urged. "I told Mr. Flood—"

Mrs. Sentry spoke quickly, almost desperately. She knew what Barbara was about to say; that Mr. Sentry had come home on the night of the murder at a quarter of one. But if Barbara said that, Dean Hare would know Arthur had lied to him. She fought instinctively to protect Arthur from that discovery.

"Sit down, Barbara, Mary," she said. "After all, there's breakfast to be eaten, our routine to go on."

Barbara insisted: "But mother, I—"

"Barbara!"

Barbara sat down, puzzled by her mother's manner; and Mrs. Sentry thought, amazed at herself: I'm like an ostrich, hiding my head in the sand, trying to pretend, to blind myself— She said: "We've got to keep our heads, our sense of proportion. We must go on eating, for instance!"

Mary said in a low tone: "Must we? Pretend nothing has happened? We won't fool anyone but ourselves."

Mrs. Sentry ignored her. She asked the lawyer, in polite and empty tones, as one makes conversation with a strange dinner partner, "How's Olive, Dean?" Olive was Mrs. Hare.

"She wants to come over this afternoon—if you'd like."

"Of course!"

Mary said grimly: "I'm surprised she's willing to. I expect most people—"

Barbara cried, furiously: "Mary! You talk as though you thought father really did it!" And she said: "We must all go see him, right away! We'll all go together."

Mary said, "I want to see Neil!" She added, "This—he and I must decide what to do."

The doorbell rang, and Oscar went to answer it, and Phil followed him into the hall. Mrs. Sentry suggested: "Ask Neil to dinner, if you—like, Mary. Or to tea?"

Mary hesitated, nodded; then Linda Dane came in with Phil. "Mother said it was too early for me to come," she confessed quietly. "She's coming a little later, Mrs. Sentry. But I didn't want to wait. I knew you'd be up."

"There's nothing to see!" Mary told her coldly. "We're not a sideshow!"

Mrs. Sentry protested, "Mary!"

But Linda said: "It's all right, Mrs. Sentry. I know how you all must feel; but—I didn't come to be curious, Mary. Please don't feel I'm prying. We've always—at least, Barbara and Phil and I have always been such good friends."

Barbara said, "Darling!" And Phil said, "Good kid, Lin!"

Dean Hare rose to go, and he nodded to Phil so that the boy went with him to the car.

"Phil," he suggested then, "don't let your sisters or your mother go to see your father yet. Not today. I shouldn't even go myself, if I were you. In a day or two, yes; but just now he's terribly shocked. It would distress any of you to see him; and I think it would be harder for him to—keep his self control."

"Gosh! I suppose so," Phil agreed, shakily. He urged, "I want him to know we're — with him, though!"

"I'll tell him," the attorney promised.

But then Mrs. Sentry came to the open door. "Oh, Dean," she called, "will you arrange for me to see Arthur, let me know when I'm to come?"

Hare looked to Phil for support; but Phil said, "I know it will do him good to see mother, Mr. Hare." And the lawyer surrendered.

"Very well," he agreed. "If you—"

Oscar came to summon Mrs. Sentry to the telephone. "Mr. Loran calling," he explained. She departed, and Hare said doubtfully:

"I still think it's a mistake, Phil, for her to go. Mr. Loran came last night while I was there. He was just back from New York. Your father almost broke down, just talking to him. Mr. Loran was sympathetic, of course, and loyal, and indignant at the police; but—it does no good to take that attitude. The police aren't to blame." He hesitated, said then, "We have to face the fact that there's a lot of circumstantial evidence against your father."

Phil said explosively, "You know darned well my father wouldn't kill anyone!"

"It's not a question of knowing. It's a question of proving."

Then he turned, for a police car came up the drive. Reporters on duty like guards at the entrance trotted after it; and Dan Fisher was among them. The police car stopped behind Dean Hare's; but Dan came along to where Phil and the lawyer stood, and he said in a low tone:

"Sentry, if you and Mr. Hare are interested, Flood waited outside last night till Professor Brace came out, questioned him."

Phil nodded, only half hearing, staring at the police car, from which officers alighted. Fisher asked softly, "Who was the young lady who came in a few minutes ago?"

"One of my sister's friends."

"What's her name?"

Phil hesitated, but Dean Hare said, "Phil, the best rule with reporters is, if they're going to find out anyway, tell them."

Phil nodded ruefully. "I suppose so. She's Linda Dane."

Fisher said, "Oh! I know her brother, Joe." Someone else demanded, "Not engaged to her, are you?" Phil shook his head, coloring with anger, and Inspector Irons alighted from the police car and said to the reporters:

"All right, boys, outside. Give these folks a break. I'll see that you get anything that you ought to have."

They obeyed him, moved away, and Dean Hare asked: "Anything new, Inspector?"

"I want to have a look around inside," the Inspector explained. "If that's all right?"

"Of course."

"And I might ask some questions. I suppose you'll want to be in on that." He added, as though apologizing for his own forbearance, "It's not the way I usually handle things, but the D. A. says to keep you in touch as we go along."

The lawyer nodded. "Thanks." He said: "Mrs. Sentry wants to see Mr. Sentry this morning. I'll be with her. Could you hold off on the questions till this afternoon?"

Irons reflected: "Well, the Grand Jury's sitting, and the D. A.'s idea was to give them the evidence we've got, tomorrow." He looked at Hare. "I understand you and Mr. Flood agreed not to arraign him before?"

"Yes."

Irons looked at Phil apologetically. "It was hunch, as much as anything, when I booked him," he confessed. "But the D. A. got some stuff last night, and—I'll want to have all the dope I can get, for the Grand Jury."

"Of course," the lawyer agreed. "But this afternoon will do, to—ask your questions. Suppose I meet you here at two."

Phil, listening, felt himself shiver; his teeth pressed hard together to keep them quiet. There was something in their tones deeply terrifying. He was almost relieved when Dean Hare drove away, and he himself was left with Inspector Irons.

When Hare departed, the other men who had come in the police car approached, and Irons introduced them to Phil. Inspector Hays, Sergeant Kane, Officer Regan.

And the Inspector suggested then, "Mr. Sentry, you want to show us around?"

"Glad to," Phil agreed.

"I'd like to have a look at the garage."

Phil led the way, watched the Inspector note the cars, study the garage. "Chauffeur sleep up above?" he asked. Phil nodded. Old Eli was burning leaves by the tennis court, and they went that way. Irons asked the old man:

"You usually hear a car come in at night, do you?"

Eli said, "Hey?" And Phil explained: "He's pretty deaf. You'll have to talk louder. But he wouldn't hear anything at night. Takes an earthquake to wake him."

Eli demanded querulously, "What you say?"

Irons nodded. "Skip it," he decided. He crossed to the pergola, looked down at the water just below them here. Two ducks sunning themselves on the bank waddled into the water and swam warily away.

"All right," said the Inspector. "Let's go in the house."

Indoors, with his mother and sisters looking to him for strength, Phil himself was stronger. His grandmother had come downstairs; they were all in the living-room. Phil explained what the Inspector wished to do, suggested they stay where they were. Inspector Hays and Sergeant Kane went toward the kitchen. Regan had remained outside. Inspector Irons and Phil went upstairs.

Phil suggested, "If there's anything special you're looking for, I might help you."

Irons hesitated. "I don't want to—put anything over on you," he said gently. "I told Mr. Hare I wouldn't ask you any questions unless he was here."

Phil colored. "We've nothing to hide!" he protested.

"Sure, I know," the Inspector agreed. "But I'll just look around. I want to see everything. Whose room is this?"

"Mine," said Phil. The Inspector nodded; he opened the drawers of the chiffonier, the desk, the closet, the recess under the window seat where Phil kept rods and fishing gear.

Phil, looking over the other's shoulder, saw something there; a japanned metal box with a combination lock. And the cover of the box had somehow been forced open! His thoughts went racing . . . In the summer after his Freshman year, at a dude ranch in New Mexico, one of the cowboys had given him an old single-action .45 revolver, with cartridge belt and holster; had told him that the weapon had been taken off the body of a man killed in a gun battle, years before. Phil brought it home; but because Mrs. Sentry was afraid of firearms, he never showed it to his mother or his sisters, kept it here in this locked box. Only, he had showed it to his father. His father had known it was here . . .

Irons picked up the box, now empty, and he held it to his face and sniffed at it. The old holster had been heavy with grease and oil. Phil remembered the rich smell. He heard himself now, saying hurriedly: "That's my old tackle box. Used to keep a couple of reels in it, in leather cases." The Inspector did not turn. "I forgot the combination, had to break it open with a—" He tried to think what tool his father might have used. "With a chisel," he said, and repeated: "Couple of reels, and some bass plugs—"

"Must have been hard on the chisel," the Inspector commented, and turned, the box in his hands, and looked at Phil. Phil saw sympathy and understanding in the older man's eyes, and was sick with fear. Then Sergeant Kane said from the doorway, in an intent tone: "Hays wants you, Inspector. Down cellar."

Irons nodded. "Right," he said. With the broken box under his arm, he followed Kane.

Phil followed them. Irons once looked back, as though to bid him stay behind; but he did not speak.

In the cellar, Inspector Hays stood by the furnace. The furnace door was open. The fall had been warm, these last few days unseasonably so; and there had been here no recent fire.

Irons went toward the other Inspector. Hays said quietly, "See if you see what I see."

He turned a flashlight's beam into the fire box of the furnace. Irons stooped to look in. After a moment he stood up.

"Close the door easy," he said crisply then. "Close the draughts. Any air might make the ashes crumble or muss them up. I'll get Peters and Knobble right out here. They can handle it."

Phil touched his arm. "What is it, Inspector?" he asked.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

"Morning, Children," Mrs. Sentry Said Lightly.

Captive Balloons Are to Help Defend English Cities Against Air Raiders

In a recent lecture, Air Commodore J. G. Hearson partly lifted the veil of secrecy surrounding the balloon barrage scheme, in which a large number of captive balloons will add to the protection of cities against air raiders, says the Illustrated London News.

Each balloon is handled by a lorry-winch with a crew of ten. Toward the end of the World war "balloon aprons" were used in the defense of London. They were formed by tethering four or five balloons in a line and stretching a network of wires between them.

The balloon barrage of today is not in the form of "aprons," but consists merely of the cables by which the balloons are held captive. At first sight, such a defense may appear rather diaphanous; but, if simple calculations are made, it will be found to be far more effective than many might imagine.

Assuming that the span of the wings of a bomber is 70 feet, and that that bomber passes through a line of balloons tethered at 100-yard intervals, there is about one chance in four of the aircraft hitting a cable and one chance in two if it makes an "in-and-out" passage, a formidable risk which no attacker could afford to continue taking if the cables are lethal; that is, capable of destroying any airplane coming in contact with them.

The cables are so thin that they cannot be seen from a traveling airplane, even by day and in fine weather.

The role of a balloon barrage is to deny passage to aircraft below the barrage height over the defended area; thus driving the attackers to an altitude at which they can be dealt with by anti-aircraft fire and interceptor fighters.

Best Words to Indicate Letters

In spelling a word over the telephone Reader's Digest gives the following list of words as the best to use to indicate the various letters: A as in Alice, B as in Bertha, C as in Charles and so on through David, Edward, Frank, George, Harry, Ida, James, Kate, Louis, Mary, Nellie, Oliver, Peter, Quaker, Robert, Samuel, Thomas, Utah, Victor, William, X-ray, Young and Zebra.

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IF YOU'RE one of those women who so often say "Dear me, I wish I could sew!", then by all means try your hand on these smart designs, and like many, many others, just as inexperienced as you are, you'll find that you can sew, and enjoy it! Our patterns include detailed sew charts that show you just what to do, step by step.

The Woman's Dress.

Here we have a diagram design, which means you can finish it successfully in a few hours. And you'll find it one of the most becoming and comfortable you ever wore around the house. The short sleeves are slashed, which makes them easier to work in, and prettier to look at. Sleeves, neckline and pointed closing are trimmed with ricrac. Make this dress of gingham, seersucker, percale or calico.

The Little Girl's Dress.

This dress will make your small daughter look even more adorable, with its high, snug waist, square neck, puff sleeves and full skirt. You'll probably want to make her half a dozen dresses just like this! And she'll certainly beg for a little sweetheart apron. For the dress, choose dimity, dotted Swiss, gingham or percale. For the apron, organdy, dimity or lawn.

No. 1559 is designed for sizes 34, 36, 38, 40, 42, 44, 46 and 48. Size 36 requires 4¾ yards of 35-inch material; 2½ yards of ricrac to trim as pictured.

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Traitorous Doubts

Our doubts are traitors, and make us lose the good we oft might win, by fearing to attempt. —Shakespeare.

How Women in Their 40's Can Attract Men

Here's good advice for a woman during her change (usually from 38 to 52), who fears she'll lose her appeal to men, who worries about hot flashes, loss of pep, dizzy spells, upset nerves and moody spells.

Get more fresh air 8 hrs. sleep and if you need a good general system tonic take Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, made *especially for women*. It helps Nature build up physical resistance, thus helps give more vivacity to enjoy life and assist calming jittery nerves and disturbing symptoms that often accompany change of life. WELL WORTH TRYING!

Get rid of WORMS in children or adults. An enormous appetite, itching of the nose, grinding of teeth in sleep, eating dirt or clay are symptoms that may indicate worms. The best medicine to drive them out is Dr. Peery's "Dead Shot" Vermifuge. 50c a bottle at druggists or Wright's Pill Co., 100 Gold St., New York, N. Y.

Sentinels of Health

Don't Neglect Them!

Nature designed the kidneys to do a marvelous job. Their task is to keep the flowing blood stream free of an excess of toxic impurities. The act of living—*life itself*—is constantly producing waste matter the kidneys must remove from the blood if good health is to endure.

When the kidneys fail to function as Nature intended, there is retention of waste that may cause body-wide distress. One may suffer nagging backache, persistent headache, attacks of dizziness, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes—feel tired, nervous, all worn out.

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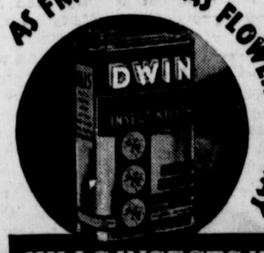

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