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. Phil, showing the police over the house, finds his strong box forced open and his gun, which only his father knew of, gone.

CHAPTER IV—Continued

—10—

Irons looked at him for a moment soberly. Then he took Phil's arm. "Steady, Mr. Sentry," he said. "The folks upstairs will need all you've got."

Phil said chokingly, "Damn you, what is it?"

"Somebody's burned a lot of money in the furnace," the Inspector told him. "You can still read the printing on the ashes of some of the bills."

"What of it?" Phil insisted.

"And there's an envelope, a long one, only half burned, with the firm name on it. Sentry and Loran. Whoever tried to burn it was in a hurry, didn't finish the job."

Phil protested, "But I don't see—"

Irons said quietly: "Someone took some money out of your father's safe, Thursday night. We've been wondering what they did with it. Where it had gone."

For the rest of that day, Phil was like a man dazed by an actual physical blow. He had, till he saw that rifled metal box in the recess under the window seat, not even contemplated the possibility of his father's guilt. That possibility had been, perhaps, in the back of his mind; but he had not faced it. His faculties had been concentrated upon the fact of Mr. Sentry's arrest, with all the terrors that arrest implied; and upon the fact that his sisters, his mother, his grandmother looked to him now for strength and heartening.

He felt himself young and futile and inadequate to the task imposed; he tried to grow in a moment from an irresponsible boy into the man the situation demanded. He thought more of them than of his father till, looking over the Inspector's shoulder, seeing the metal box that had been forced open, remembering what it had contained, remembering that Miss Wines had been shot, he heard himself lying by instinct, blindly, clumsily. And he saw a moment later that the Inspector knew he had lied; and while panic filled him, Sergeant Kane appeared and led them to the cellar—where worse appeared.

Someone had stolen his gun, and none but his father knew where it was! Someone had burned money in the furnace, and none but his father could have done that! And Inspector Irons had felt this evidence to be conclusive. That certainty was clear in the older man's eyes, plain for Phil to read.

The Inspector's sureness, more than his own senses, convinced Phil; drove home to him the shattering realization. His father was a murderer.

Phil might have been proud of his bearing that morning. When he and Inspector Irons came up from the cellar, Oscar spoke to him, said Mrs. Sentry would like him to drive her to town to see Mr. Sentry; and Phil said, "Right!" He could not for a moment face his mother; so he called to her from the hall, "I'll bring the car around."

He went to do so, brought the small car, the one his father always drove. At the front door he blew his horn; and his mother and Barbara presently came out, and Barbara kissed Mrs. Sentry, hugged her tight.

"Give father a big kiss for me," she directed. "Tell him I love him and I think he's grand and I'll come see him tomorrow sure!" And she called to Phil, "Drive carefully!"

Phil tried his voice, and its very familiarity was reassuring. That at least was unchanged. He had thought the world was changed.

"Sure," he promised; and as his mother got in beside him, "All right, mother?"

She pulled the door shut. "Mr. Hare said to come to his office, Phil," she directed.

And Phil got the car under way; and he told her how much seeing her would cheer his father. "You're always so strong and steady and sure," he said. "Ever since I was a youngster, it always made me feel better to come dump my troubles in your lap. All of us."

He talked so much about her and about his father that it did not occur to her to think of Phil himself. Her thoughts already cast forward to the interview that lay ahead. She dreaded it so terribly; yet it must be faced, must be gone through.

When after a dazed half hour of preliminaries she found herself waiting for Arthur to be brought to her, she looked at her surroundings with an almost impersonal curiosity. They seemed to her hideous; a small room, a table, two chairs. A grill of slender bars at the one window, a smell of disinfectants . . . She was to see Arthur alone; but the door would be open, and an officer in a position to watch them through the open door. It did not occur to her that the District Attorney's old friendship for Arthur had led him to permit her unusual consideration. Dean Hare had warned her they would be watched; she thought this hard enough.

Arthur came in. A man walked beside him, stopped with him in the doorway, and she heard the click of metal. But she heard it at a great distance, all her senses concentrated in her eyes.

"Mr. Hare Said to Come to His Office, Phil."

He was so little changed! Except perhaps that he seemed tired, and that his eyes were inflamed, he was not changed at all. Yet he had been gone so long. She tried to remember how long, and realized incredulously that it was no more than a matter of hours.

He came toward her, rubbing his wrist with his hand. He stopped, facing her. He said, from a little distance: "Well, Ellen! I'm glad you came."

She said: "We must sit down, Dean says, with the table between us, and our hands in sight. On the table, perhaps."

He nodded. "They have to be careful, I suppose." They sat down; and he said, "How are the children, all right?"

"We're—distressed, of course. The policeman is watching us, Arthur."

"I suppose so." His eyes held hers. He said: "Ellen—I'd have done anything possible to—spare you all this. The whole thing is so—incredible. Just a series of miraculous coincidences."

"It is incredible, yes."

"Of course, it will straighten out in a day or two. I had nothing to do with that girl, Ellen. But you know that, of course."

"You've told them so?"

"Of course. Why, Ellen, they say themselves that she was killed about one o'clock. I was home long before that." She felt, almost to her own surprise, a deep compassion in her heart. He said urgently: "You know that, yourself. You were awake when I came home."

She hesitated. "No, Arthur," she amended, "I wasn't awake. I woke up, asked you what time it was."

"Well, I told you. It was quarter past eleven."

She tried to speak, but her throat was tight. He tapped the table between them with his fingertips. "Good of you to come," he repeated, and he said: "Gus came last night, late. He came over from New York on the five o'clock and saw an extra at the station, and hurried right up here. It helped to see him. You feel pretty much a pariah, in jail, you know."

Mrs. Sentry smiled dutifully at the feeble humor. "He called me up this morning," she assented, "just to say we could count on them in every way."

"He's all right."

"I'd like him better if Mrs. Loran were nicer. She and I don't speak the same language. You heard Mary tell how she behaved the other night, at that dinner when Mr. Loran wasn't there. As if she were a—burlesque actress, Mary said."

"Mary always hated Gus. He used to kiss her and Barbara whenever he saw them when they were youngsters, and Mary always hated to be kissed. Gus did it to tease her, as much as anything." He added, after a moment: "I expect Mary takes it—all this—pretty hard. She's the sort who would."

She confessed: "I think she's worried about what Neil Ray's attitude will be. He's rather a—prig. But Mary loves him."

"It will all clear up in a few days," he predicted.

"I hope so." She spoke after a moment, in a tone curiously humble. "But Arthur—I think we have to be honest with each other. I know what time you came home." He stared at her; and she saw his cheek drawn and pale. She said: "It was quarter of one."

After a long while he spoke, very slowly, in a low tone. He said: "Yes, Ellen. It was quarter of one, half-past twelve, about that, anyway." He asked, "How did you know?"

"Barbara saw you."

"Barbara?" Sudden panic in the word.

"Yes."

His eyes were flickering with rapid thought. His fists clenched on the table; he lifted one and lowered it again, and sweat was on his brow.

"I hoped no one saw me," he admitted. "Barbara?" She did not speak; and he said at last, hopelessly: "Well, if they ask her, she must tell them. None of you must lie, Ellen. Tell them the truth."

"Tell me the truth, Arthur," she pleaded.

"I had nothing to do with the girl, Ellen! I didn't—murder her!"

She asked no question; and after a moment he went on, hurriedly: "This is what happened. I went to the office, after the bridge game broke up, to get that coffee-pot of yours. I'd forgotten it when I left in the afternoon." His lips twisted wretchedly. "She was—she lay there—I don't know how she got there, Ellen, or who killed her. I lost my head. I ought to have called the police, but I was afraid to. I left her there, went home. I thought if no one saw me—"

She said, gently: "You always were afraid of things, Arthur. You found her there dead?"

"Yes."

"Just—lying there?"

"There was someone with her. A man. They had robbed the safe, taken the money. He ran past me in the dark as I came up the stairs." And he said again, in a helpless resignation: "Barbara must tell them the truth if they ask her. None of you must lie." He made a bitter gesture. "It will be hard enough to make them believe the truth—that I lost my head, ran away, left her there."

Mrs. Sentry said: "Barbara has already told them. She told Mr. Flood."

"Told—Already?" He was white.

"She thought that if Miss Wines was really killed at about one, as the papers said, you couldn't have done it. So she told him you were at home before that, to prove to him that you didn't do it."

"Miss Wines was killed about twelve o'clock," he said, half to himself.

"How do you know?"

He stared at her. "She was killed before that," he amended suddenly. "Before I got there. Bob Flood knows—" He rose in haste. "You'd better go, Ellen," he said. "Tell Dean Hare I must see him right away. You see, I've told them, up to now, that I was at home at eleven fifteen. I hoped I could—lie out of it. But now I may have to tell them the truth."

She rose to face him; she asked softly, "You didn't kill her, Arthur?"

"Of course not! Ellen, don't you believe—"

"You can tell me!"

He hesitated. He said then, in a quickly mustered anger, "I told you, I didn't!" But she had felt his hesitation; she watched him pitifully, and he cried: "What are you waiting for? Go on. Tell Dean Hare—"

And she said, submitting: "Very well, Arthur, I'll tell Dean. I'll do whatever you say."

He turned abruptly toward the door. The policeman came to meet him. She thought he went away almost eagerly, as though glad to escape the question in her eyes.

She waited for a while after he had gone, in that hideous little room, fighting for self-control. Arthur's hesitation had been like confession. His mustered anger at her insistence had been eloquent. She knew now surely that he was guilty. She faced the future, dazed, feeling nothing. A dreadful time, a lifetime that must be endured.

She thought, almost amused: I've always been so proud. And she remembered something she had said to Arthur long ago, something about a scandal. I could not forgive a scandal, she had warned him then.

There was no question of forgiveness now. Too late for that. Just, somehow, to endure, to live.

But Arthur had given her a message for Dean Hare, wished to see Dean right away. And—Phil was waiting for her. She rose and moved.

In the car, Phil asked, "Well, how is he?"

"Oh, he's fine," she said. "Don't worry, Phil, he's fine!" Whatever her own certainty, the children need not know.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Marble Floor of Library of Congress Given Care Equal to That of Costly Gem

People think they take good care of their biggest diamond ring.

The chances are ten to one they take less care of it than the Library of Congress takes with its floors. People wash their rings in any soap, and bump them against metal objects. There is no such "rough stuff" with the classically beautiful marble floors in the Library of Congress.

Those floors cannot even be scrubbed with a mop, for fear of the metal pails chipping the edges of the marble slabs, according to W. C. Bond, superintendent of the building. Instead, a corps of char-women each night goes over the shining marble with soft cloths, scrubbing the stone with painstaking care, writes a United Press correspondent in the Chicago Daily News.

Not only that, but no soaps or washing powders touch the floor until they are thoroughly tested by the bureau of standards to determine that they contain no abrasives such as sand, which would scratch the finely polished surfaces.

Before the bureau of standards was established, the library force used to take a piece of marble and soak it in a solution of soap to determine if the soap contained acids.

"The acids might stain the marble," Bond explained.

"The marble is priceless," he said. "I would not estimate what it would cost to replace it. For instance, we have two mantelpieces. They cost about $3,300 originally. But you can't get that kind of marble now. It has been said they are worth many thousands of dollars."

Bond has just one trouble—he can't stop a person who has metal heelplates, and he lives in constant fear that the scraping of metal plates will chip the marble.

But he has taken some precautions. When a person carries a cane into the library, he must check it, and the library gives him another which is shod with a rubber tip. If he carries an umbrella, he must check that. No tap-tapping on the marble flags with metal.

Shave Hindu Boy's Head

Between the ages of nine and twelve the orthodox Hindu boy has his head shaved, leaving a small strand of hair on top. He is then invested with the sacred thread and thus formally admitted into the practice of Hinduism.

ALSO CORRECT

A Sunday school teacher had, for 10 minutes, completely held the attention of his young auditors with the story of the prophet Elisha and how two bears had devoured 42 children who had taunted the old seer on his journey to Bethel.

"And now," said the teacher, wishing to stress the moral, "what does this story show?"

Several moments of silence followed and then a very small miss ventured this:

"It shows how many children two bears can hold."

Nothing Stingy

The Reverend—Ah, Mrs. Newrich, I was just coming to ask you for a subscription towards a cot for the hospital.

Mrs. Newrich (conscious of the responsibilities of wealth)—A cot? Get a double bed and have it put down to me.—Philadelphia Bulletin.

ON HER GUARD

"Have you decided where you're going on your vacation?"

"No indeed! Hubby might want to go to the same place I had selected."

A Miracle, Maybe

The teacher was explaining the law of gravitation, and how it prevented people from falling off the earth.

When he had finished he invited questions from the class.

"Please, sir," said one pupil, "what kept them on the earth before this law was passed?"

Wrong Guess

Mr. Henpeck had been involved in an accident. When he "woke up" in the hospital he turned to his wife, sitting by him, and asked: "Where am I? Am I in heaven?"

"No," she answered, "I'm still with you."—The Rail.

Same But Different

Visitor—Well, your baby is certainly a cute little rascal. Does he take after his father?

Mother—Well, yes, in a way. His father is not quite so cute, but much more of a rascal.

His Work

John—Your father is a very distinguished looking man with his gray hair.

Jack—Yeah, that's the way it is in this world—I did all the work and he gets all the credit.—Farm Journal.

Carried to Excess

"Was your wife's slimming diet a success?"

"Rather — she disappeared completely last Friday."—Stray Stories Magazine.

Any Bargains?

"How much are you selling kisses for, may I ask?"

"Five dollars apiece, sir."

"H'm. I suppose you won't be having a clearance sale later on?"

More "Poise"

Haughty One—Sure, I've three fraternity pins. I've got three boy friends.

Other Gal—H'm. That puts you a coupla chumps ahead of me.

Dizzy Dialogues

"I gotta hunch."

"Oh. I thought youse was just round-shouldered."

NEXT!

Barber—Bay rum shampoo, sir?

Ardent Dry—Horrors, no! A dry rub, if you please!

Base Remark

Joe—I been reading the society page. It says here Julia left Washington after a short stop.

Joed—Jeepers! Isn't she ever gonna get over that yen for ball players?—Washington Post.

Or Maybe Earlier

"Do you make it a rule to get up at five in the morning?"

"Not invariably," said Farmer Corntossel. "When the family wants to go on a week-end picnic I may be up at half-past four."

CLASSIFIED DEPARTMENT

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Salesman—Men's Neckwear. Established, popular priced Fall and Xmas line. Com. Novelty Scarfs, 128 W. 31st, New York.

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Eight popular breeds and crosses. Started chicks; also Ducks and Poults. Hatches twice weekly. MILFORD HATCHERY, Milford Road nr. Liberty Rd., Pikesville, P. O. Rockdale Md. Pikesville 56-R.

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Braided Rug Design From New England

By Ruth Wyeth Spears

SO MANY readers have expressed interest in rag rugs that I know many of you will want to copy this one. I discovered it in a village on Buzzards bay where, a century ago, whaling ships put out to sea. In the book offered below there is a knitted rag rug found one time on a trip through Ohio. I have not yet done a special book on rag rugs. It does seem that there should be a way to exchange designs from different parts of the country.

The center medallion of the rug shown here is its outstanding feature. The braiding is fine and tight. The braided strips should be sewn together with strong linen thread or about size 8 cotton thread used double. The center round should be 8-inches long as shown. Sew around and around until the center oval is 14-inches long, then make the eight loops shown in the next round—three along each side of the oval and one at each end.

These loops should be 2-inches long. In working around the loops with the next rows, the trick is to "ease" the inside edge of the braided strip in just enough to keep the work perfectly flat, and to give the scalloped effect shown. As you work around, the scallops gradually straighten out and the rug becomes more oval in shape.

NOTE: Every Homemaker should have a copy of Mrs. Spears' book SEWING, for the Home Decorator. Forty-eight pages of directions for making slipcovers and curtains; dressing tables, lampshades and many other useful articles for the home. Price 25 cents postpaid. Ask for Book 1, and address Mrs. Spears, 210 S. Desplaines St., Chicago, Ill.

NERVOUS?

Do you feel so nervous you want to scream? Are you cross and irritable? Do you scold those dearest to you?

If your nerves are on edge and you feel you need a good general system tonic, try Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, made *especially for women*.

For over 60 years one woman has told another how to go "smiling thru" with reliable Pinkham's Compound. It helps nature build up more physical resistance and thus helps calm quivering nerves and lessen discomforts from annoying symptoms which often accompany female functional disorders.

Why not give it a chance to help YOU?

Over one million women have written in reporting wonderful benefits from Pinkham's Compound.

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Wary of Choices

Look out for choices. They run into habit, character, destiny.—Maltbie W. Babcock.

HELP KIDNEYS

To Get Rid of Acid and Poisonous Waste

Your kidneys help to keep you well by constantly filtering waste matter from the blood. If your kidneys get functionally disordered and fail to remove excess impurities, there may be poisoning of the whole system and body-wide distress.

Burning, scanty or too frequent urination may be a warning of some kidney or bladder disturbance.

You may suffer nagging backache, persistent headache, attacks of dizziness, getting up nights, swelling, puffiness under the eyes—feel weak, nervous, all played out.

In such cases it is better to rely on a medicine that has won country-wide acclaim than on something less favorably known. Use *Doan's Pills*. A multitude of grateful people recommend *Doan's. Ask your neighbor!*

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