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 open and his gun, which only his father knew of, gone. Meanwhile, the police find the stolen money burned in the furnace. Mrs. Sentry sees her husband, who swears his innocence, and tells her he had known of the robbery and murder the night before, but failed to call the police, and came home at 12:30. Mary quarrels with Neil Ray, and runs away with Jimmy Endle to the Caribbean.

CHAPTER V—Continued

—13—

A log, burned through, broke, and embers rolled upon the hearth. Phil pushed them back into place again. He said miserably, "It's funny to think that everybody we know is talking about us, right now, while we're sitting here."

Linda said, "You'll be surprised how soon even the newspapers will forget."

"Do you know a reporter named Fisher?" he asked. "Barb says he's a friend of Joe's, a Princeton man. Nice chap."

She shook her head. "No, I don't think so." And she said quickly: "Aren't reporters awfully clever, sometimes? Maybe he could help you to find out new evidence or something."

"Gosh, I guess there's too much evidence already."

"Phil, you mustn't! I don't believe your father did it, Phil, no matter what they say. Someone else might have." And she said in brave reassurance, "You and Barbara and Mr. Fisher and I will all get together and see what we can—"

He said stoutly: "No, Lin, not you! It helps a lot to talk to you, but I can't let you get mixed up in this."

"I'm already in it, Phil! I'm in anything you're in. I always have been, always will be."

He stared at her; and suddenly afraid of what he saw in her eyes, stood up. "I'm going to take you home," he said. He chuckled. "Before I start realizing just how big a—help you are."

"I want to be. I don't have to go, yet, Phil."

He said, "Yes you do." And he confessed: "I'm sort of like a sick dog, Lin. I—well, I want to be alone."

She nodded, assenting, understanding. She had walked over from her home not far away. He walked back with her, through the crisp fall night, a half moon bright through the almost naked branches of the trees. She huddled in her loose warm coat, the collar high, her hands in her deep pockets; and he strode beside her at a swinging pace, so that their blood ran faster and clean air drenched their lungs. They came to her home without speaking; and he stopped at the foot of the steps, his head bare.

"Good night, Lin," he said. "Thanks for coming."

He saw her eyes brimming. "Poor Phil," she whispered. "I wish I could help."

"You have!"

"Oh, more, more!" she whispered, smiling through her tears. "You've no idea, Phil! I want to hold you close, like a baby, and comfort you. You're such a little boy, such a dear boy."

He grinned. "You're not so big yourself, Lin!"

"I'm big enough," she promised him. "My heart's awful big. It's just filling me."

"You're the best friend a fellow ever had."

"More than that, Phil," she insisted. "I love you."

"Sure, sweet kid, I love you too!" He kissed her, as he might have kissed Barbara, and she clung to him, and he said: "There! I've got to go now. Mother and Barbara are alone."

"I'll walk back with you," she offered.

He chuckled. "That could go on all night," he pointed out; and she said triumphantly:

"There, you did smile! I knew you could. Good night, Phil."

He walked home straight and strong, thinking how sweet she was. Just a kid, no older than Barbara. When he approached the house he saw a light still in his mother's bedroom; and upstairs he went quietly in to speak to her.

As he opened the bedroom door she signed to him for silence, and he saw Barbara asleep in his father's bed, her cheek tear-stained, her soft hair loose around her head, looking very young, like a child. He bent to whisper to his mother, and Mrs. Sentry said very softly, "Don't wake her. She's worn out."

"You're all right, are you?"

"She was so furious at Mary, and terrified, and desperate. I had a time with her. So I kept her here beside me. I've been waiting to hear you come upstairs."

"You've got a job on your hands, mother, taking care of Barb and me." He saw her eyes soft at his word, gratefully; and he thought how wise Linda had been. "Mind if I leave our doors open?" he asked. "So I can call to you if I—have bad dreams?"

"Of course not, Phil. Call me if you need me."

"I need you all the time, mother."

She held him close, her arms straining. She surrendered for a moment to her love for him; and she whispered, "Oh, Phil, Phil!" And she said, "But Phil—we mustn't let Barbara know!"

Barbara stirred in her sleep, murmuring; and Mrs. Sentry released her son, and Phil tiptoed away.

She thought, alone in the darkness: If I had known how, tonight, I might have helped Mary, might have saved her. And I must take care of Phil and Barbara. They're young, young! They need me so . . .

And she thought: I must be wise. She thought, like a prayer, with a humility new and strange to her: Oh, please, help me be wise!

CHAPTER VI

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Mrs. Sentry knew in her heart that her husband was guilty. The fact that he had lied to her that night when she asked him what time it was might not in itself have been enough to convince her; but she had a deeper certainty. She remembered in retrospect so many circumstances, meaningless in themselves at the time, that now assumed a damning relevance. Any husband and wife whose days and nights for twenty-odd years are spent together do come to be akin; do come so close to one another that thoughts are shared. One speaks, out of silence, of a certain thing; the other answers: "I was just about to say that myself. How strange!"

So, looking back, remembering the jewel on her birthday in September, remembering his constraint these last few weeks, remembering—as women will in moments of distress and hurt and anger—that wrong he had done her twenty years ago, she knew. He was a murderer.

And Mary knew; and—made the more vulnerable by the very standards which had kept her head so high—the collapse of her life was complete. Defiantly, as a child which is hurt whishes to wound others in turn, she had cast herself away.

And Phil knew; and even Grandmother Sentry had refused to let her love for her son blind her to the probability of his guilt. Thus of those who had been closest to Mr. Sentry there was left only Barbara, enough a child to have a child's trust and to say despite the world's opinion: "No. He did not do it. No!" She had seen him come home before the hour when Miss Wines was assumed to have been killed. On this peg she hung her loyal faith.

It was Dean Hare who—without intention—shook her. He came to the house next morning to consult Mrs. Sentry about plans for Mr. Sentry's defense.

"You know, of course," he said, "that the Grand Jury voted an indictment? We had to expect that."

"So there will be—a trial?"

"Yes."

"How soon?"

"Well, the State will want time to prepare its case." He looked at her hesitantly. "I want to talk to you about a lawyer," he said. "I thought of Mr. Crowninshield. He's an able trial lawyer, but he has never handled criminal cases. Nevertheless if we could have had him—"

She asked: "You won't be able to do it yourself?" There was no accusation in her tones; only regret. "I had hoped you might. You were Arthur's—She checked herself, and changed the tense of the verb. "You are Arthur's friend."

"That wouldn't be fair to him," he said. "I do very little trial work, Ellen, and no criminal work at all."

"Will you speak to Mr. Crowninshield?"

He coughed. "I'm sorry. I have done so. He is too busy to take the case."

For a moment, silent, she thought: Mr. Crowninshield made excuses, but really he refused because he thinks Arthur is guilty. Probably he told Dean so, and Dean is sorry for me, trying to spare me, pitying me. Strange, to be pitied. I never needed pity before. I will not be pitied! Let me speak strongly . . . And her tones were steady, almost casual, as she asked, naming other lawyers among their friends: "Who, then? Mr. Davenport? Mr. Reese?" She knew them both—able, respected men.

"Oh, they don't do trial work. Not in criminal cases."

"You must have someone in mind?"

"I thought of Falkran. He's a good jury lawyer."

"I don't think I ever heard of him," she suggested with a cold politeness. "Isn't there some one of our friends—"

He said slowly: "Well, criminal law is—a field by itself, I'm afraid. But Falkran has been successful in that field." And he proposed, "Suppose I bring him to see you!"

"Very well, do," she assented, thinking: The man is probably a shyster of the worst type, but Dean would not recommend him if there were any better way. If Mr. Falkran will only believe in Arthur's innocence, I can accept him. Even if I don't like him. If he will save Arthur . . .

She heard steps on the stairs, and Barbara came in, hesitant for a moment, then valorously cheerful.

"Oh, hello, Mr. Hare! she said. "I didn't know you were here. How's father?"

"He sent a lot of messages to you all."

"When can I see him?"

"Soon, now. He'll be in more comfortable quarters."

"Why?" she asked, puzzled.

"They'll move him to the County Jail," Mr. Hare explained.

"Oh!" Her color faded, and she confessed, "I thought for a moment you meant he was coming home."

Mrs. Sentry said: "Not right away, Barbara. You see, he's been indicted."

"I know," she assented. She appealed to Mr. Hare. "Does that mean he has to be tried?"

"Unless the District Attorney nol prosses the case."

Her eyes lighted, her tone quickened. "The District Attorney? Mr. Flood? Does that mean he can let father go?"

Hare shook his head. "He can't do that, Barbara, unless he's sure your father is innocent."

"But father is!" she cried. "And Mr. Flood knows it! I told him! You see, I saw father come home that night, just before one o'clock, and Miss Wines wasn't killed till after one."

Dean Hare looked quickly at Mrs. Sentry, remembering that she had told him Arthur was at home at quarter past eleven. She shook her head, warning him to silence, beseeching him to protect Barbara's faith in her father; and saw his pupils dilate, and thought: He knows, now, that I know. And she closed her eyes so that he might not read them.

Then Barbara asked insistently, "Isn't that so?"

Hare said reluctantly: "Well, as a matter of fact, Barbara, they're not sure about the time. There's some evidence which suggests that she may have been shot earlier."

Barbara paled; but then she protested, "Just the same, Mr. Flood's a friend of father's!"

"He must do his duty."

Barbara cried desperately, "Well, I don't care!" Her voice broke. "I want my father to come home!"

Dean Hare rose. "I must go," he said, hurriedly. "I'll bring Mr. Falkran to see you, then?"

Mrs. Sentry went with him to the door, leaving Barbara alone in the living-room; and Phil came down the stairs as they stood in the hall, and Mrs. Sentry said: "Go to Barbara, Phil." He obeyed her; and when the door was closed behind Dean Hare, she stood with her shoulders against it, thinking in an inconsequent fashion, as though this somehow typified all the tragic confusion into which their lives had fallen, that now Arthur would be in the jail and she did not even know where the jail was.

Then wearily she turned back into the living-room. Whatever happened, the children needed her.

She found Barbara sitting very still in a big chair there; and the girl's hands clasped the arms of the chair so hard that her knuckles were white. Phil was beside her, whispering some reassurance; but Barbara was like stone, and Phil looked at his mother appealingly, helplessly.

She tried to muster a tone of cheerful confidence. "Well," she said, "it's a relief to be doing something, planning something. Dean—"

Barbara said, "Mother! Are you going to let Mr. Hare be father's lawyer?"

Mrs. Sentry began, "There's a Mr. Falkran—"

But the girl cut in. "Because you mustn't! You mustn't, mother. Mr. Hare thinks father killed her. I know he does!"

Phil said gently: "Now don't be that way, Barb. You're just—strung up, and worried, and tired. Mr. Hare—nobody thinks that, Barbara. It's just what they call a prima facie case. They have to have a trial, but not even Mr. Flood—"

Barbara demanded: "Do you believe he did it, Phil?"

"Of course not!"

"Do you, mother?"

Mrs. Sentry even smiled. "Barbara! After all, I'm his wife, you know."

"But—do you?"

"Don't be silly!"

Barbara came storming to her feet, shaking, trembling. She cried pitifully, "Mother, you don't, do you? Please!"

And Mrs. Sentry said, "Of course not, child!"

"Mary did! Or she wouldn't have run away." Barbara cried pitifully. "Oh, tell me the truth, mother, Phil!"

And Phil said in a great voice: "Barb darling, we know he didn't do it. He couldn't! We all know that!"

Barbara held his eyes. "Then why haven't we all been to see him, instead of just mother? He'll think we've deserted him."

Mrs. Sentry answered, "Mr. Hare advised—"

The girl cried furiously: "Mr. Hare! Well, I'm going to see father, right now! So he'll know that someone—"

But in the end she did not go. It was Phil who persuaded her to stay at home while he and Mrs. Sentry went, that afternoon. But she sent her father many messages.

Phil and Mrs. Sentry stayed not long with Mr. Sentry. Phil was shocked to see the change in his father. The older man's very voice was altered, was husky and hoarse as though from long disuse. And he said little; he thanked them almost humbly for coming; he said over and over, "Ellen, you know I didn't do it?"

And she said, "Of course, Arthur." And she told him Mr. Hare's proposal that Falkran be enlisted as defense counsel.

"He's a good defense lawyer," Mr. Sentry assented. And after that, there seemed no more to say. Mrs. Sentry was perfectly composed when she bade her husband goodby; but when she and Phil had left the jail she trembled uncontrollably.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

No Michigan Rivers Have the Tree-Like Pattern Thought of in Picturing Stream

It may not help you catch more trout or perch or even bullheads to know that the river which you go fishing in is the longest one in the state, or the oldest or the swiftest. If the time between bites begins to stretch, such information will make your fishing that much more interesting, however, says Jadk Van Coevering in the Detroit Free Press.

The St. Joseph river, for example is classed by geologists as the "oldest" river in Michigan. It once drained to the Kankakee river and thence to the Mississippi. At one time the Raisin and the Huron were its headwaters; the Kalamazoo once entered it in the northern part of St. Joseph county. All this information is to be found in "Michigan Today," which is a bulletin published by the state department of public instruction.

The Grand is the longest river in Michigan, but it is made up of older rivers which have been diverted from the original channels. The Muskegon has the longest and narrowest valley, 45 miles wide, with few tributaries and but one stream of any importance entering from the south. It is worth noting that no Michigan rivers have the tree-like pattern that we usually think of when we picture a river.

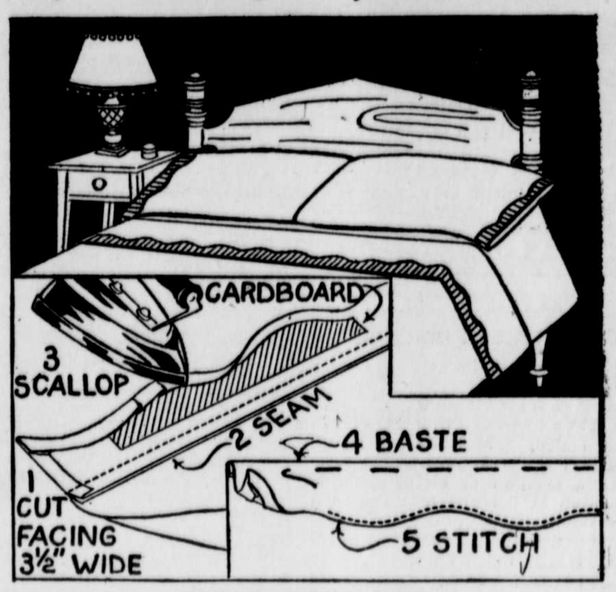
The Saginaw is the shortest major river. It is only 20 miles long, yet it has the largest drainage area in the state, due to its long tributaries, the Tittabawassee, Shiawassee, Flint and Cass. Trout fishermen will check the fact that the Au Sable river is the swiftest river in the southern peninsula with a fall of 669 feet. The shorter Rifle is almost as swift as the Au Sable and one of the few streams in the lower peninsula which flow over rock rapids. The Ocqueoc in Presque Isle county is the only river in southern Michigan having falls in its course. The St. Clair river is the third youngest river in the state and the only river in the world which flows from a lake, yet is forming a delta. The Detroit river, although the widest, 2,200 feet at Woodward avenue, was the last river to be formed.

London Subway Is Oldest

London's metropolitan railway is the world's oldest subway, having been opened in 1863 and electrified in 1905.

HOW TO SEW

by Ruth Wyeth Spears



Distinctive bed linen in sets.

OPENING mail is always stimulating—especially so when one comes upon a letter like this: "Dear Mrs. Spears—If you could step into my house you would see in every room ideas I have gotten from your Book 1—SEWING, for the Home Decorator. Your drawings are so easy to follow that I have made slipcovers and even reupholstered a wing chair. I never knew there were so many good ideas for curtains and bedspreads.

"All my friends admire those I have made. I am now planning to make some new sheets and pillow cases. I like to buy sheeting and pillow case tubing by the yard to fit different beds. Can you suggest some kind of trimming? I want something that will wash well and that I can make quickly on the machine. Sincerely, T. S."

I wonder if "T. S." has my Sewing Book 2, Embroidery, Gifts and Novelties? On Page 14 of that book is a suggestion that just about fills her requirements, and for those of you who are keeping scrap books of these sewing lessons as they appear in the paper, here is an idea for contrasting facings for sheets and pillow cases. The diagram shows each step in the making of the colored facings. Make your own cardboard pattern for the scallops by drawing part way around a small plate or saucer. Use this pattern to mark and cut the scallops. After the scallops are cut, turn the raw edge over the cardboard pattern with a warm iron as shown.

With the help of Mrs. Spears' Book 1—SEWING, for the Home Decorator, you can make many of the things you have been wanting for the house. Book 2—Embroidery and Gifts is full of ideas for ways to use your spare time in making things for yourself or to sell. Books are 25 cents each. If you order both books, crazypatch quilt leaflet illustrating 36 authentic stitches is included free. Address: Mrs. Spears, 210 S. Desplaines St., Chicago, Ill.

He's That

Father—Isn't it time you were entertaining the prospect of matrimony?

Daughter—Not quite, dad. He won't be here until eight o'clock.

A gold digger is a girl who takes her fund where she finds it.

Earnest Money

"Am I rightly informed that you are offering a reward for the dog you lost?"

"Good gracious, have you found my Fifi?"

"No, but I intend looking for it and came to ask for a little advance."

Another Insect

First Picnicker—I feel a lethargy creeping over me.

Second Picnicker — Yes, the grass is full of them.

That's Easy

Little Cuthbert—I can never tell which is "d" and which is "b."

Little Betty—Oh, the "b" is the one with the stomach in back.

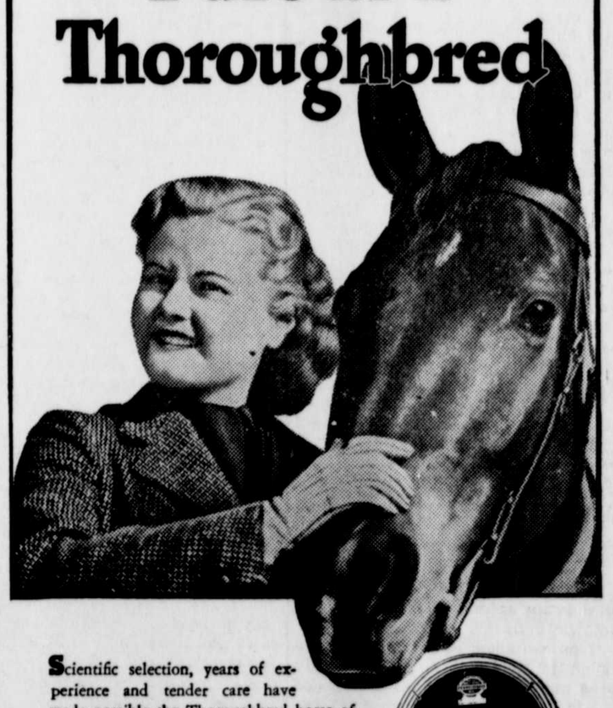
Say what you will of swimming, it's certainly a clean sport.

His Fault!

"You were right, Henry, and I was wrong."

"Forgive me, dear."

Pure as a Thoroughbred



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