CRUCIBLE

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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SYNOPSIS

Barbara Sentry, seeking to sober up her escort, Johnny 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. Linda Dane, friend of Barbara and Phil, tries to comfort Phil.

CHAPTER VI—Continued

—14—

A curious crowd stared at them as they came out, and Phil said, as they drove away, "You can wear a veil next time we come, Mother."

"I shall not wear a veil," she answered, fighting to forget Arthur, to forget how gray and lifeless the flesh on his cheeks had seemed, and how dull his eyes were. She must forget, so that she could be brave enough to come to him again.

At home, Barbara was waiting with questions. They told her he was fine; was cheerful, confident, and unafraid. They brought her back to comfort for a while.

Dean Hare, a day or two later, brought Falkran to see Mrs. Sentry and Phil. Phil was not at first favorably impressed. The lawyer was a big man, bald save for a fringe of red hair above his ears, with the wide, loose mouth of the natural orator; and Phil thought he studied the rugs and the furniture with a shrewd appraising eye, and he saw his mother visibly conquer her distaste for the man.

She asked, after introductions were done, "Are you familiar with my husband's case, Mr. Falkran?"

"I see the newspapers have convicted him?"

Her eyes hardened. "You think him guilty?"

Falkran, suddenly, smiled; and Phil at that smile felt a quick liking and trust for him. The lawyer said. "Mrs. Sentry, no man was ever electrocuted on a newspaper verdict."

Her eyes closed at that word, then opened again as he went on. "If I could have my choice," he said, "I should choose to defend men who have already been convicted in the newspapers. When everyone is convinced a man is guilty, the smallest grain of evidence in his favor has a tremendous effect in provoking doubt of his guilt." He added, "And from the practical point of view, such a situation makes it easier to disqualify jurors, easier to get the jury we want."

Mrs. Sentry had not surrendered her question. "You think him guilty?" she insisted.

"No man is guilty till a court has found him so, after a trial by due process, and till all appeals have failed."

"I asked whether you think my husband guilty?"

He smiled again. His smile had won many a jury. He said reasonably: "Mrs. Sentry, I haven't even talked with him. I don't know his side of the case at all. I only know the published facts. Mr. Hare has told me nothing. The evidence is damaging, difficult; but there are a thousand explanations that might meet the situation as it appears."

Phil saw that his mother too was being won to liking. She put her question in another way. "If you thought him guilty, would you defend him?"

Falkran smiled again. "Even a guilty man is entitled to his day in court, to a fair trial, to all the protection afforded by the law." Then he answered her directly: "Yes, Mrs. Sentry. Even if I knew Mr. Sentry guilty, I would defend him with all my powers."

Mrs. Sentry nodded, surrendered her point. "You said," she suggested, "that any one of a thousand explanations might cover all the evidence."

"An infinite number, yes."

"Have you anything in mind?"

"Mr. Sentry may suggest something." She started to speak, to tell him that Arthur had found the girl dead; then remembered Phil was here and caught herself.

Falkran went on: "You see, Mrs. Sentry, until I talk to your husband, remind him of small circumstances he has himself forgotten, I can make no plan."

They talked a further while; and Mrs. Sentry said at last that she would let him know her decision next day. She used the interval to consult Arthur's mother.

Old Mrs. Sentry said: "Falkran? Oh, yes. I've heard of him."

Mrs. Sentry explained: "I should have preferred—one of our friends, of course. I hoped for a certain—dignity! But Mr. Hare says we must have a good criminal lawyer, and he recommended Mr. Falkran."

The old woman said harshly: "Dignity! Ellen, sometimes you—" Then she caught herself, spoke almost in apology. "Of course you'd prefer some fine name; but Falkran's a clever man. Arthur will need a good lawyer. Better take him."

So it was decided; but Mrs. Sentry thought, driving home: Even Arthur's mother knows. The whole world knows, I expect. All my friends know; all of them are feeling sorry for me. Oh, hateful!

And she thought again, desperately: Perhaps Mr. Falkran can persuade some woman to say she was Arthur's mistress, that he went to her that night. Pay her to say it, perhaps. No price would be too high, to save him!

And she reflected that by thinking this, she was admitting to herself her actual opinion of Mr. Falkran; and she felt a contamination of the spirit. Felt herself unclean. To be pitied by her friends, to seek the help of scoundrels . . .

Nevertheless, for all their sakes, if Arthur was to be saved, Mr. Falkran it must be.

The weeks that elapsed before Mr. Sentry could be brought to trial were long, but they were curiously empty; and Mrs. Sentry, used to activity, came in the end to accept this emptiness, to understand that their world would hereafter be thus constricted, whatever the outcome of the trial. It was not so much that her friends dropped away. Some did so; yet others, upon whom she had not counted, surprised her by their understanding loyalty.

But the larger world in which she had been active, all the organized benevolence in which she had taken a vigorous part, now—though with polite expressions of regret—nevertheless closed its doors against her. The resignations which she felt it her proud duty to offer were accepted. She hid as she could her fierce resentful pain.

She missed Mary dreadfully; clung passionately to Barbara and Phil. Linda came often to the house, and Mrs. Sentry thought: Perhaps Linda will marry Phil, even after this. I had hoped Ann Waring . . . The Warings are so fine. But Linda is nice. He might do worse. And she thought: Barbara will marry, too. She's a child. After this is over, she will forget, as children do. I must be sure she marries well. The right marriage means so much, especially for a girl. Once I get Barbara married, I can rest, can surrender. For me there can never be a new beginning. I am too old, old, old. And I can never face people again without knowing their thoughts, imagining their whispers . . .

She would have nursed her hurts in solitude; but certain friends persisted in their friendliness. Mrs. Dane came often, quietly loyal, never insistent; and when Mrs. Sentry suggested, in the tone of one doing a conscious duty, that Linda might better stay away, Mrs. Dane said simply:

"She's very fond of Barbara and Phil. And so are we. We're glad to have her come to you."

And Mrs. Urban. Mrs. Sentry had always thought of Mrs. Urban as a mouse of a woman, with no mind of her own; yet she found in her now strength and loyal understanding. Of the others, Mrs. Furness invited Mrs. Sentry to luncheon, but she declined. I will not be made a show of, she promised herself; and Mrs. Harry Murr's persistent advances likewise she put aside.

There was one loss which hurt her keenly. She and Mrs. Waring had been closest friends; and the families were intimate. The two mothers had even discussed the possibility that Phil might marry Ann Waring. But a week after Mr. Sentry was indicted, Mrs. Waring took Ann away to Europe to school there. The decision was sudden; Mrs. Sentry knew it had not been planned in advance. And Mrs. Waring left without even a note to say good-by.

Mrs. Sentry never spoke of this hurt to anyone. In the same way she ceased to resent the curious groups of people who drove past the house in cars, and even alighted to pluck flowers or break down branches off the shrubbery for souvenirs. Only when one night someone dug up a young tree in the front yard and took it away did she accept District Attorney Flood's suggestion that a policeman stand guard in front of the house night and day.

"I See the Newspapers Have Convicted Him?"

For all these things, Mrs. Sentry found strength and courage; but one thing she could not face. She could not read the newspapers, or look at them. Since the first few days, reporters had been kind. Carl Bettle had been of service in that respect. He had put through with the publishers of the other papers an agreement not to print photographs of Mrs. Sentry or Phil or Barbara, and to use their names as little as possible in news stories. When Mrs. Sentry thanked him, he said:

"I don't deserve all the credit. One of our reporters, a young man named Fisher, suggested it." Barbara was in the room and he looked at her, smiling a little, and explained: "He had met you, he said. I think he had you particularly in mind."

Barbara nodded. "Yes, I like him," she agreed. "We've seen each other since, once or twice."

Mrs. Sentry protested, "Seen him, Barbara? Where?"

"In town," Barbara confessed. "He has tea with grandmother and me, sometimes. It's perfectly proper, mother. Grandmother likes him."

"But a reporter, Barbara!"

Carl Bettle chuckled. "Whoa, there, Mrs. Sentry!" he protested. "Reporters aren't so bad, nowadays. You're prejudiced!"

"I'm prejudiced against any young man who meets my daughter secretly."

Barbara cried: "Oh, now, mother, that's silly! It's not secretly, with grandmother there; but even if it was—"

Mrs. Sentry said, yielding: "Of course, dear. I'm afraid it really is prejudice. Ask him to have tea here too, Barbara, if you wish."

"I'm at grandmother's now more than I'm at home," Barbara reminded her; and this was in fact true. Old Mrs. Sentry had since her son's arrest surrendered to physical immobility. Her mind was as keen, her tongue as sharp as ever; but she stayed in her room at the hotel where she lived, had her meals served there, even submitted to an indignity she had long declined, and hired a companion who was also nurse and masseuse.

And Phil had used the old woman's helplessness to dissuade Barbara from her desire to see her father. "You and I have to make it as easy as we can for mother, Barb," he pointed out. "And mother can't be with father and with grandmother too, and she can't go to the jail without me, so grandmother's your job! Don't you see?"

So Barbara yielded—Phil thought she yielded very easily—and spent much time with her grandmother; and old Mrs. Sentry by degrees forgot to use toward her that tone of sharp disapproval which had so long been her habit toward both girls. There was during these weeks something deeply and wistfully appealing about Barbara. She was thin; her eyes seemed larger; her color had faded; she looked at people eagerly, anxiously, as though hoping someone would say—what no one ever did say. And Grandmother Sentry was very gentle toward her, warned Mrs. Sentry once:

"That child is ready to crack, Ellen. Look out for her."

Mrs. Sentry nodded. "I— do all I can!"

Grandmother Sentry sought in her own ways to serve; she welcomed Barbara, and welcomed Professor Brace, or Dan Fisher, when one or the other came with Barbara to be with her.

The old woman did not like Professor Brace, and she told Barbara so. "He's a Middle-Westerner, of course, but he's a rank Puritan at heart, Barbara. Believes in the mortification of the flesh or something of the kind. Believes in duty. The wrong kind. If he were a Spartan he'd nurse a gnawing fox to his bosom. Any man with sense knows that you ought to dodge suffering when you can. He's the 'grin and bear it' type."

"He's been sort of nice," Barbara argued. "Standing by."

"I know. 'The boy stood on the burning deck!' Anyone but a fool would dive overboard!"

" 'Whence all but him had fled,' " Barbara reminded her. "But there are a lot of us still on the burning deck, grandmother. And he doesn't have to stay. He's just doing it to be friendly."

"Like him, do you, child?"

"It's sort of nice to have friends—"

The old woman saw in the girl's eyes a secret terror, a mounting fear she had seen there before; and she was silenced. Whenever they spoke of Mr. Sentry, and Barbara cried, "He didn't do it, grandmother!" old Mrs. Sentry always assented, always spoke quick reassurances. Barbara was grown so pitifully frail . . .

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Calculating Machines Used by Chinese Two Thousand Years Before Christ's Time

Two thousand years before Christ the Chinese knew the principle of the calculating machine: they used the Abacus, that educational plaything not seen so often now as a few years ago, says London Tit-Bits Magazine. They invented gunpowder and used it in brass carronades long before the western bow and arrow stage. They found their way across vast oceans by using a form of compass.

The Arab pearlers of long ago forestalled modern science, too: they discovered a way to examine the ocean bed. They used a glass bow, or funnel with a glass bottom, which they pressed down into the sea to enable them to locate pearl-shell beds.

The ancient people called the Cholos, of Peru, knew and practiced something that is today only a theory, much debated among doctors and laymen. Fierce wordy battles are being fought on the question of Euthenasia. The Cholos had an official named the Despenador, freely translated "Putter out of Pain." The Despenador was a woman, and her duty, when all efforts to save the life of a pain-wracked dying person had failed, was to thrust her elbow into the breast or stomach of the patient until the merciful relief of death resulted.

One may wonder what was the basis of Shakespeare's suggestion ("Hamlet," Act III, Scene 4):

Come, come, and sit you down; you shall not budge;
You go not till I set you up a glass
Where you may see the inmost part of you.

Had some alchemist or wizard man hinted at what is now known as X-ray photography?

Antaeus, Giant Wrestler

In Greek mythology Antaeus was a gigantic wrestler (son of Earth and Sea, Ge and Poseidon), whose strength was invincible so long as he touched the earth, and when he was lifted from it, his strength renewed by touching it again. It was Hercules who succeeded in killing this charmed giant, by lifting him from the earth and squeezing him to death.

WHO'S NEWS THIS WEEK

By LEMUEL F. PARTON

NEW YORK.—In 1918, the Bolsheviks were fixing to shoot Maj. Alexander P. de Seversky, but he persuaded them to let him go to America so he could get a new wooden leg. He got it, also a beautiful wife, a $5,000,000 airplane factory, and a lot of flying records, culminating in his new east-west transcontinental record of 10 hours and 3 minutes, from New York to Los Angeles.

Seversky Gets A Wealth of Things Here

Flying for Imperial Russia in the World war, he engaged in more than 100 dogfights with the Germans and dropped 13 of them. But one day they dropped him—into the Baltic. A forty-pound bomb, which he had failed to release, exploded as the ship struck the water, and blew it to bits.

Recovering consciousness later, he discovered that, witless as he was, he had been clinging to a pontoon. The water was red around him. Shifting his good leg over the pontoon, he made a torniquet of his torn trouser leg. He swooned again, as a Russian destroyer picked him up. He crow-hopped the Chinese border on his wooden leg, as a stupid border guard refused to recognize his papers.

Washington received him hospitably, in April, 1918, and made him a consulting engineer for the army air service. He later experienced some rough going, but the only real crack-up in his career was encompassed in that drop into the Baltic. He was steadily on the uptake, designing planes, flying and bringing through his factory. In 1933, he designed and built an amphibian plane which made a record of 177.79 miles per hour. Trained in the Imperial Naval academy, he has contributed greatly to aviation engineering and design.

Several years ago, using an alarm clock and few electrical odds and ends, he made a waltzing plane, swaying rhythmically with band music from below. His waltzing days were over and he found this a satisfactory substitute.

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SIMON LAKE, the inventor of the submarine, 72 years old, hopes some day to get an under-sea peek at the sunken continent of Atlantis.

Lake Out to Redeem the Submarine

In a mid-town hotel in New York, he is up to his knees in blueprints of submarine adaptations and gadgets which he hopes will be found useful by the deep sea boulevardier. His father is 91; his grandfather lived to the age of 96 and his sister to 102. Although his once red hair is white, he thinks he is just now getting his start in life.

His 25 basic patents alone made the submarine possible. Like many, possibly most, inventors, he could devise a scheme for almost anything except getting what was coming to him. So, in his genial, casual way, he is broke.

Reading Jules Verne, when he was 10 years old, led him to capsize a rowboat on the Toms river in New Jersey and test his staying powers in the submerged air chamber. In 1894, he made a wooden submarine 14 feet long, with a soda water tank supplying compressed air. It worked nicely. In 1894, he made the Argonaut, Jr., in which he cruised under the water for thousands of miles on Chesapeake bay.

Like the Wright brothers, he aroused little attention. He finally got Washington interested when he telephoned to the capitol from the bottom of the sea. His working submarine came through. Washington didn't seem to care much what he did, so he took his invention to foreign capitols. Czarist Russia made him some impressive offers but he decided they were a dissolute lot and, as a self-respecting American business man, he wouldn't have anything to do with them.

All in all, he became fed up with bureaucrats and red tape and governments in general and turned to deep sea treasure hunts. The submarines, of course, destroyed much more treasure than they ever dredged up. This troubles him. Vigorous and energetic, with a wrinkled, knobby weather-beaten face, genial and friendly, he plugs along alone in his hotel to redeem the submarine by making it a general cargo and passenger carrier.

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The Letter Writers

The average Englishman writes 78 letters a year; an American writes 67; a New Zealander, 66; Swiss, 60; German, 56; Dane, 46; Austrian, 38; Dutchman, 34; Swede, 26; Frenchman, 26; Norwegian, 20, Italians, Spaniards and Portuguese write less than 20 letters a year.

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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.

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