CRUCIBLE

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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CHAPTER XI—Continued

—24—

"Don't come again, Phil," Mr. Sentry said. Mr. Hare stepped away so that they might speak alone.

Phil felt suddenly empty. "But father, mother will want to come!"

Mr. Sentry smiled. "Of course! If she wishes. But not you children. I'd rather you didn't; and certainly not the girls." And he asked, "How are they?"

"Fine."

"Mary—happy with Mr. Endle?"

"Yes."

"Barbara well again?"

"Yes."

Mr. Sentry nodded. Phil waited; and his father said at last: "Phil—I don't know that it matters now. But I want you to know a thing or two." Phil felt his cheek stiff with pain. "About my testimony, Phil." The older man faced his son fairly. "All I said about that night was true. I didn't know Miss Wines was there. I shot her by accident. And—I had had nothing to do with her."

Phil's throat was full; but he managed to speak. "I believed you, father," he said. "We all did. That it was—an accident!"

Mr. Sentry cleared his throat. "About the woman last summer," he said, "and the other, long ago. All that is between your mother and me. She knows they—didn't touch what she and I had together."

Phil could not speak; and the older man said: "About the appeal. Appeals, delays, tricks wouldn't help in the long run. I hope you—understood my decision."

Phil said slowly: "Yes sir! But you don't need to consider us. We're up to it." He added: "Of course, Mr. Hare says perhaps the Governor—Well, I mean if we can make him believe you—"

Sentry shook his head. "No, Phil. That's the jury's province, to decide whether I told the truth or not. If they didn't believe me, the Governor has no right to say they were wrong."

"Mr. Falkran says he could get a new trial—"

"I had a fair trial! Bob Flood let Falkran get away with a lot of things." Mr. Sentry's lips set. "I won't put you all through that again, Phil!" And he said, almost curtly: "So—that's all, then. Good-by!"

Outside, Phil found himself trembling. He said apologetically to Mr. Hare, "I feel about ten years old, right now."

"So do all men, sometimes," Mr. Hare assented. "But they never let anyone guess, except their wives."

April slipped away; and Phil missed Linda more and more. But on the first day of May, he reached the office at the usual hour, rang for a stenographer—and Linda came in.

Phil stared at her. She seated herself at the end of his desk, opened a notebook, laid sharp pencils ready.

He cried: "Linda! What are you doing here?"

"Came to take your letters."

"But how did you get here?"

"I persuaded Miss Randall to give me the job."

"But you can't—"

"Don't you believe it," she retorted. "Nobody can get a job under Miss Randall unless they can prove they're good. Certainly not a girl like me. You know, one of the idle rich? We have to prove we've got everything."

"But you—"

"Shorthand, typing, business forms, everything," she assured him gaily. "If you don't believe me, try me." And she said then: "I ought to be good! I've been working at it, studying twelve hours a day for six weeks, and practicing besides. Hence these dark shadows under my lovely eyes. Notice?"

And when he could not speak, she demanded: "Mean to say you haven't missed me? Haven't you even noticed that I'd quit being underfoot around your house all the time?"

"Gosh, I've missed you awfully. But Lin, what's the idea?"

"The idea, young fellow-me-lad," she said, speaking lightly lest her throat swell with tears, "the idea is that I have diagnosed your case, and written your prescription, and the prescription is me, taken regularly, in large doses. So when you go into business, into business go I. When you sit all day at a desk, I pull my chair up to the corner of the same desk. You'll be spending most of your time here for a while. Well, so will I."

"What do your folks think about it?"

"Highly approve,' she assured him. "Would you like me to get my father's consent?"

"Oh, you can't do this, Linda!"

"Of course I can."

"Be here all day with me?"

She spoke huskily. "Be anywhere, always, Phil, with you."

"You'll marry somebody—"

"You, if you'll have me."

"You know I can't, Lin!"

"Then at least I can be your secretary."

"You're so doggoned stubborn."

"But efficient!"

He grinned. "All right," he said. "You know it will be grand for me, having you around."

"Me too, Phil."

"Take a letter!"

Her pencil poised; began to fly.

CHAPTER XII

Phil accepted Linda's presence in the office, but with misgivings. He reported the matter to Mrs. Sentry that night.

"Do you think it's all right, mother?" he asked. "She's sure to be talked about." And he said, thinking aloud: "Linda's so darned fine. If things were different—But they're not, of course. Never can be. I never can marry, or have children. I realize that." He added tenderly, almost lightly: "Besides, my job is to take care of you."

She said: "Yes, Linda's sweet; but she knows that I need you. I shan't always be selfish about you, Phil, but—I shall need you and Barbara, for a while."

He thought doubtfully of Dan, but he promised: "Sure, Linda knows. We'll be here, mother. Don't be afraid!"

It was the first day of May when Linda came into the office; and during that month, July seemed far away. Business problems arose to worry Phil. Once he sought Mr. Loran's advice; but the Loran home was closed. Mr. and Mrs. Loran, he heard, had gone to Europe for the summer. So Phil turned to his mother, and every evening he consulted with her, asking her counsel, by his demands upon her forcing her to find strength to meet them. Also, Barbara was better every day, the flood of spring which flowed across the city surging through her too.

But Barbara never mentioned her father. It was as though she had deliberately put him out of her mind. The others, recognizing this, did not speak of him in her presence; and they sought for her sake to protect her in every way, to find a routine, to live as near normally as possible.

Dan was often at the house; and sometimes Phil wondered how his mother could be blind to the bright devotion between Dan and Barbara that was so plain to his informed eyes. Once Dan wished to speak to Mrs. Sentry, to tell her their secret; but Phil's persuasions restrained him. Yet Dan came often, and Professor Brace too; and the tennis court had use again. If Sundays were fair they might all be there, Linda and Barbara, the Professor and Dan and Phil. Sometimes Mrs. Dane, or Mrs. Urban or other friends of Mrs. Sentry dropped in, and after tennis there was tea . . .

was Professor Brace who in the end shattered the insulation of silence with which they had conspired to protect Barbara. He insisted on confessing to her his damning testimony against Mr. Sentry at the trial. He warned Phil in advance of what he meant to do; and Phil, unable to dissuade him, told Dan what Brace intended.

"I tried to talk him out of it," he explained. "Probably Barb can stand it now, though. She's a lot better. I'm more worried about mother. She doesn't show things on the surface much, but she's awfully shaky inside. Every once in a while, she shivers."

"I know."

"And lately her left eyelid keeps twitching."

"Sure, she's pretty well worn out." Dan reverted to Barbara. "But Phil, Professor Brace is a darned fool! What Barb needs is to forget all this business; never speak of it or think of it again. As soon as I can get a job somewhere else, I'm going to take her away from here, marry her, and raise about nine children and keep her so busy she won't have time to think about all this. People think too much anyway!"

Phil said: "I know; but he looks at it just the other way. He says we have to face it, live it down." And he confessed, half-angrily, "To hear him talk, you'd think he wanted her to wear a placard telling the world who she is."

Dan said scornfully: "That stuffed shirt! He's—like a woman. He wants to be a martyr. You know, the old line: 'I could not love thee, dear, so much, loved I not honor more.'"

"I don't blame him for testifying. Do you?"

"Hell, no! I'd have done the same. But why should he rub it in now? I'll go see him tonight and tell him so."

But Dan's arguments were unavailing too. Professor Brace chose a Sunday afternoon in May for his confession. There had been tennis. Linda was there. When it was time for tea, she and Phil and Mrs. Sentry went into the house, and Dan and the Professor played a set of singles, Barbara looking on; and when the set ended—Professor Brace won—Barbara said warmly:

"You're good, Mac. We'll teach Dan some tennis yet, before we get through."

Dan retorted cheerfully, "Maybe I'm not so good, but Linda and I can give you two a lesson, any time."

"Mac and I have never teamed up," Barbara confessed. "But it wouldn't take us long to learn."

The professor said suddenly: "We teamed up once, Barbara. The first night I met you. The night we followed your father home."

Barbara's color drained away. Dan said furiously, "You darned fool!" But Barbara said:

"Hush, Dan. Mac didn't say that just to make me unhappy, did you, Mac? What are you trying to tell me?"

"I just want you to know, Barbara, that I testified against your father, told the jury about our seeing him that night, helped to convict him." She was white as ivory; and he said: "You had to know sometime. I wanted it to come from me."

She did not speak. He stood like one awaiting judgment; but Dan said honestly: "He wasn't to blame, Barb. He was summoned, had to tell or lie. I'd have done the same."

"Of course," she assented. "I don't blame him for testifying. But Mac, I do blame you for telling me."

"Oh, Barbara, you can't fool yourself, pretend to ignore what has happened!"

Barbara faced him for a moment; then suddenly without a word she turned, turned and ran, ran into the house and away. He called her name, but he did not pursue her.

Dan said disgustedly, "You may be a professor, but you're the darnedest fool I ever saw!"

"She will see I'm right, in the end!" Brace insisted.

But he was wrong in this prediction. Barbara thereafter avoided him, and when he came to the house she was quick to disappear. Yet Barbara began to wish to know all that had happened at the trial.

She asked her first questions on the Sunday following. Dan came, after dinner; and Barbara, ready for tennis, met him with a bright challenge; and Phil and Mrs. Sentry followed them out to the court to watch the game. Dan and Barbara had played together before, and at first Dan had been able to win at will; but as Barbara's strength returned, she had easily the better of their matches, opposing her graceful swiftness and disciplined strokes to Dan's furious energy and awkward force.

This day Dan, running back for a perfect lob, piled headlong into the backstop and rebounded and sat down hard; and Barbara laughed aloud, and then called in quick solicitude:

"Hurt, Dan?"

"No, not a bit!" he retorted, and scrambled to his feet. "Hit 'em in my reach, you big bully! Come on!"

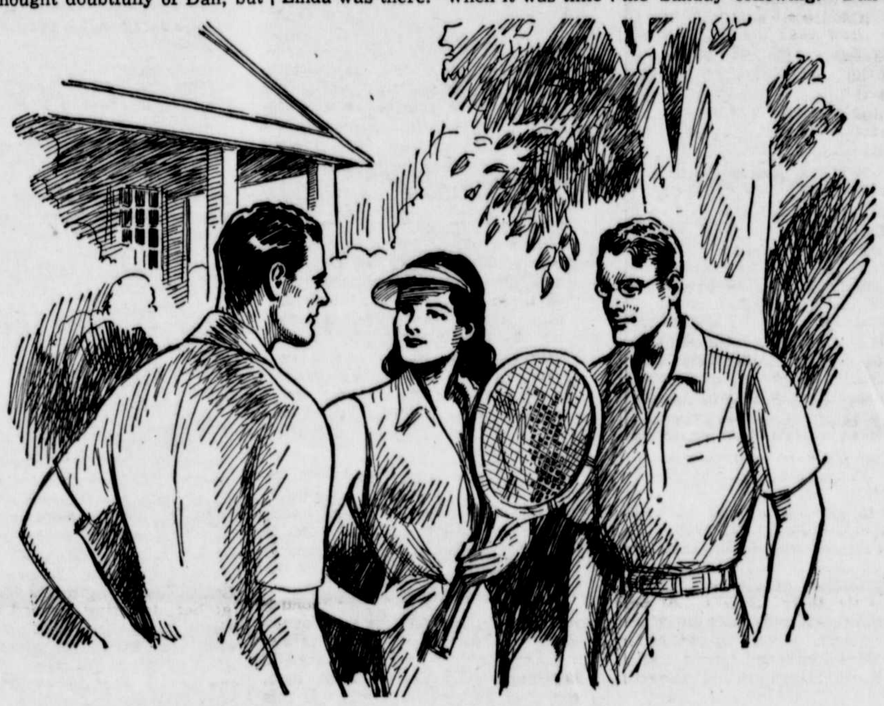
Phil thought their words, their happy voices, were eloquent. He looked at his mother a little anxiously; but he saw that her eyes were curiously serene

"Did you hear her tone when she asked Dan whether he was hurt?" she asked softly.

He pretended surprise. "Her tone? No. Why?"

"She's growing fond of him."

(TO BE CONTINUED)



"Mac and I Have Never Teamed Up," Barbara Confessed.

Majority of Highway Motorists Found to Be Making Less Than Twenty-Mile Trip

Highway travel is predominately a short-distance movement and less than two out of every 100 vehicles observed on main highways are traveling more than 100 miles to reach their destinations. Eight out of ten are traveling less than 20 miles. These are averages of preliminary figures obtained in 11 states in planning surveys being conducted by the bureau of public roads in co-operation with 43 state highway departments.

The main highways and their extensions through cities carry 58.9 per cent of the total motor-vehicle traffic; 30.8 per cent is on the large mileage of other city streets and scarcely more than 10 per cent of the total occurs on all secondary and local rural roads which, in mileage, have eight times the extent of the main highways.

Preliminary data from 17 states show traffic on the main highways and transcity connections to be 58 per cent urban in origin and 42 per cent rural. These are approximately the percentages of urban and rural population in the states where the counts were made.

Ninety-three per cent of the use of city streets, other than through routes, is by urban vehicles, while 84 per cent of the traffic on minor rural roads is by rural vehicles.

Data being accumulated in the planning surveys, says the bureau, will give definite indications as to what should be accomplished in further road building; as to the relative transportation service that may be afforded by improving this or that class of road; as to who will benefit if either is done and who, being benefited, should pay the cost and in what proportion.

The states are still at work collecting a mass of statistical facts on highways and preparing the first complete maps of all rural highways. Each of the 43 states will publish its own results.

How to Tell Mule's Age

One way to tell a mule's age is by his teeth. On the edges of the incisors are grooves or cups that wear away as the animal advances in years. Another way the ages of mules are determined is by the cavernous spaces above their eyes. These sunken places do not fill out when an old mule is fattened.

CAP AND BELLS

LOOKED THAT WAY

"Now, how do you know that your friend Stiff is dead?" demanded Wiggs, counsel for the defense.

"Well, I don't know. It's pretty difficult to prove," replied the witness.

"Ah, there you are. Just as I suspected, you don't know whether he is dead or alive!" snapped Wiggs.

"As I was saying," continued the witness, "I don't know whether Stiff is dead or not, but what I do know is that they buried him a month ago, on suspicion."—Stray Stories Magazine.

What, No Apples!

An old Scottish gardener accompanied his employer, an artist, to an exhibition of pictures in London.

Among them was one called "The Fall." He stood studying this picture so intently that his employer was moved to ask him his opinion of it.

"I think no great things of it," he replied. "Why, sir, Eve is tempting Adam with an apple of a variety that wasna' known until 20 years ago."

UP WITH THE TIMES

"So at last you've reasoned yourself into the belief you must have a car?"

"Yes; auto-suggestion's a powerful thing—when the family's helping it out."

No Fast Friend

The big city lad was showing his country friend the sights, and during the course of the tour visited a French restaurant.

"These," he pointed out, as a dish arrived, "are snails."

"Snails?" cried the country boy. "We don't eat those things in Arkansas!"

"Of course you don't," said the city chap gently, "you couldn't catch 'em."—Washington Post.

Recluse

A friend called upon a guest at a hotel, knocked and asked him to open the door.

"Can't, door's locked!" the voice within announced.

"Well, unlock it!" the caller requested.

"Can't, threw the key away!"

"Great heavens, man! What will you do if there is a fire?"

"I won't go!"

Unbalanced Budget

Jones—How do you spend your income?

Smith—About 30 per cent for shelter, 30 per cent for clothing, 40 per cent for food and 20 per cent for amusement.

Jones—But that adds up to 120 per cent.

Smith—That's right.

Girls

Dick—How come you don't care for girls?

Doc—Oh, they're too biased.

"Biased?"

"Yes, biased. It's bias this and bias that till I'm flat broke."

New Racket

Holowynge — Frisby has a new racket now.

Cryeng—What? Is it something dishonest?

Holowynge—No, he plays tennis with it.—Pathfinder Magazine.

PRECAUTION

Father—That young man you're going with is a bad egg.

Daughter—I know it. I'd dropped him long ago if it weren't for that.

Smart Groom

Gob's Bride—Why do you always want me to pull your ears when I kiss you?

Groom—So I can tell where your hands are. I lost my wallet four times the other way.—U. S. S. California Cub.

Danger Signal

"Rastus, I see your mule has 'U. S.' branded on his hindquarters. Was he in the army?"

"No, boss, dat 'U. S.' don't stand for Uncle Sam, it means Un-Safe."

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JUST JESTS

Reliable

"I can trust my maid at any time. I can go away for three days and know exactly what she will be doing all the time."

Mrs. Brown—That's remarkable! What do you think she will be doing just now?

Mrs. Jones—Nothing.

It Got Her

Landlady—If you don't stop playing that saxophone you'll drive me crazy.

Sax Player—Guess it's too late. I stopped playing an hour ago.

KNOWS HIS OWN — "Hello, Gray, you've shaved off your mustache. I really wouldn't have known you if it hadn't been for my umbrella."

ADAPTABLE

She—Which do you prefer—blondes or brunettes?

He—Either one suits me. Don't bother to change on my account.

A POSER—"Daddy, why do you wind up a business when you want it to stop?"

First Worry

It was the eve of their wedding, and she was looking rather sad.

"What's troubling you, dear?" the prospective bridegroom asked.

"Why, John," she sighed, "I'm wondering where we are going to live after the honeymoon!"

"Gosh—is that all?" he replied. "Pooh! that's nothing. What's bothering me is—how am I going to pay the minister!"

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.

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Division of Time

Method in study, with a proper division of time, will give us time for leisure and recreation.—Nevin.

FEEL GOOD

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NR TO-NIGHT TOMORROW ALRIGHT

ALWAYS CARRY TUMS QUICK RELIEF FOR ACID INDIGESTION

Image of the Mind

Language is the sensible portraiture or image of the mental process.—Bacon.

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