CRUCIBLE

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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CHAPTER XIII—Continued

—27—

"Phil," Linda said, "I shan't see you today or tomorrow. You will be with your mother. You won't want me."

He assented: "Yes, Barbara and I will be with her."

She said, "But you'll feel me with you?"

"Yes, Lin."

She did not kiss him, nor touch his hand; only their eyes met firmly, met and held and clung.

Then Phil went down by those back stairs up which his father had come on that October night months ago; and he took the car and drove home. Barbara was there with his mother. Mrs. Sentry was sitting quietly in the living-room, her hands limp in her lap, a curious deep peace in her eyes. Barbara and Phil stayed with her, talking in low tone, till lunch was announced. But afterwards Barbara caught Phil's eye; and Phil moved with her through the hall toward the door.

"I've got to get out of doors for a while, Phil," she said desperately. "I can't stand it. She's so—still. Almost as though she were happy, were — waiting for someone. It scares me."

He hid his own fears. "Sure, run along!"

"I'll be back," she promised; and he returned into the living-room and Mrs. Sentry asked, "Has Barbara gone somewhere?"

"Just for a walk," he said, and she nodded silently, thinking: Mary is gone, and Barbara is gone, and soon Arthur too will go, and there will be only Phil and me. Phil and me. Just two. There were five of us, but now there are two Phil seems tired. I am tired, dreadfully; tired and old . . . They will shave Arthur's head . . . I mustn't think of it, of that; not concretely. I mustn't scream. I must help Phil . . .

And she began to talk to her son, almost happily. Somehow the afternoon passed. Barbara returned, but she stayed upstairs, writing to Dan, till dinner-time.

At dinner, Mrs. Sentry tried to eat, but the first mouthful choked her. She could not swallow it; the utmost compulsion of her will would not make the muscles of her throat do their task. Phil, she saw, ate readily, easily, rather more rapidly than his usual habit was. He urged her to drink a cup of tea.

"I'm afraid it would keep me awake," she said, and then smiled at the absurdity of that. Awake? Would she ever sleep again? After tomorrow night, Arthur would sleep with a shaved spot, on his head. She resented that shaved spot, as though it were a desecration of the dead. His hair was still so plentiful and thick; no hint of baldness anywhere. Where was the spot they would shave? On his brow? The top of his head? Phil saw her shudder, and rose and took her arm.

"Let's walk in the garden, mother," he said.

She went with him submissively. Barbara watched them go, but made no move to follow them. They strolled around the house arm in arm, past the garage and the tennis court to the pergola, and sat down there; stayed there talking quietly together, careful now to avoid silences, since into silence, just as dreams come in sleep, hideous thoughts come crowding.

Presently it was dark, and she asked, "What time is it?"

"Almost ten."

"I suppose," she decided, "we had better go in."

When they came in, Barbara was gone. Gone to bed, perhaps, Phil thought; and he turned on all the lights in the living-room, till he banished every shadow.

She asked: "Is it cold, Phil?"

"Would you like a fire?"

"I'm—sort of shivering."

He set logs burning on the hearth; and it was hot and he perspired. He thought tomorrow would be long; and he thought he would have to be early at the office Monday morning. Monday was apt to be a busy day.

"Warmer now?" he asked.

She sat down on the low bench in front of the fire, hugging her knees, watching the flickering flames. She had heard or read that when during an electrocution the current was thrown into the body of the doomed man, all the lights flickered—as these flames were flickering—and were for a moment dimmed, and she thought of this now, but she said calmly:

"Will you be busy next week, Phil?"

"I thought we'd go up to York for a few days," he replied.

She was thinking: When the lights in the prison are dimmed, the other prisoners know what is happening and they scream and rattle the bars in their cell doors. I mustn't scream.

She said: "That might be very pleasant, son. Barbara will be gone, of course. There will be just you and me. I can take cook and Nellie."

"We'll lie in the sun and rest," he said.

She thought of all those men in the prison yammering and howling and screaming, and then she remembered reading somewhere that nowadays there was a spcial wire to carry the electricity to the chair, not connected with the prison circuit at all, so that the prisoners did not see the lights dim; and she wondered about the lights in the room where the chair was, and whether they would go dim, and whether any of the witnesses ever screamed when that dimness came to shadow what was happening.

"I should like that," she agreed. "The hot, bright sun."

Phil said: "And we'll go fishing for flounders, or maybe off shore, for cod. That's always fun."

Men sitting in straight chairs, she thought, around a small brick-walled room, all side by side, except that one chair was set by itself, facing the others . . .

She said: "Sit here by me, Phil."

He sat down on the bench close to her. "And we'll take long drives," he said. "Back through the woods, the pines. There are some beautiful drives toward Agamenticus."

She clung to his hand, so that he felt her tremble; and suddenly she was weak. "Stay with me, Phil," she whispered. "Oh Phil, Phil, be always with me!"

"I will, mother."

"Mary's gone, and Barbara. I've only you."

"You'll always have me," he promised.

"I don't mean to be selfish, Phil. But I need you so."

"I'm here," he said again. "And I will always be—"

The logs burned bright, burned low, were embers cooling to gray ashes, before at last they went slowly up the stairs. Mrs. Sentry went to Barbara's room.

"Just to be sure she's tucked in, Phil," she said. "I've always done that, since you were babies."

"I know, mother."

But—Barbara was not in her room. Phil felt a surge of anger mixed with fear. Mrs. Sentry half-smiled.

"Perhaps she's gone to Dan," she said submissively.

Phil made his mother go to bed; but he did not. He thought Barbara might be at Linda's home, thought of going to see. Then, grimly, refrained. He at least would stand by his mother here.

After a while he heard a car turn into the drive in haste. He went downstairs.

He saw Linda and Barbara in the hall. Barbara was weeping terribly; but Linda's eyes were like stars. He stared at her, bewildered, and as though he were a baby to be comforted, Linda took him in her arms.

Hours before, that morning at the office, Linda's typewriter had been clattering as she typed the letters Phil had dictated, when she became conscious that someone stood beside her. She looked up and saw a shambling little man with absurdly long legs that made him look like a stork, and a small body and a smaller head perched atop them. Linda had not attended Mr. Sentry's trial; did not recognize this man.

She rose and asked, "Whom did you wish to see?"

The man, confused and ill at ease, said doubtfully: "Why, Mr. Sentry, if I could. Dunno as he'll want to."

"And who shall I say?"

"I'm Zeke Wines." He looked at the other three stenographers, busy at their desks beyond Linda, and said apologetically, in a lower tone, as though the confession were a shameful one: "You know. My girl used to work here."

Linda heard the others quiet behind her, listening. She tried to find some word, and then the little man volunteered, "Mr. Hare told me I'd better come see Mr. Sentry."

"Mr. Hare?" She spoke like a parrot, without inflection.

"Y'see," the old man explained, "I got this here from Mr. Hare, the first of June." He fumbled in his pocket, produced a shabby, soft, worn old leather wallet, searched among its contents, found what he sought at last and extended it to Linda. It was a check for $250, signed by Mr. Hare, as Trustee. Linda looked at it without touching it, and the old man said:

"I might have wrote a letter, but I ain't much hand at writing, and I knowed likely I'd git up t' the city before long; so I kep' it and cal'lated to see Mr. Hare when I come."

Linda said hurriedly, "Wait a minute, please." She went into Phil's office, closing the door behind her. The old man stood turning his hat in his hands, looking wistfully around. The other girls began a pretense of work again.

Then Linda came back and said in a low tone, "Come in, please." She held the door open, closed it behind him. He looked around Phil's office, saw no one.

She Caught His Arm. "No," She Said Eagerly. "Don't Go, Please! Wait."

"He ain't here?" he said.

"Mr. Sentry has gone home," she explained. "But I am his secretary, so I can handle—whatever it is you want."

"Well, it's this," the old man told her after a moment, and extended the check again. "Mr. Hare sent it to me, and he said it was from Mr. Sentry, the other one. Said there'd be another check every month right along."

"Yes?"

"Well, I don't want it," Zeke Wines told Linda gently.

"Mr. Sentry wanted you to have it."

"I know. Mr. Hare told me all about that in the letter. But I never lived off my gal long as she was alive, and I don't aim to now."

And he said apologetically: "Not that I hold anything ag'in the young man here. Nor ag'in anybuddy, for that matter. Folks git twisted into a net sometimes, and they thrash around any way to git out. I've see fish do the same. Never blamed 'em."

"It would make Mr. Sentry—young Mr. Sentry—happy to think he was helping you."

He said gravely: "Like as not. But I dunno why I should go out of my way, do something I don't want to do, account of him."

"I see," she assented. "You're right, of course. I didn't understand. I'm sorry." She took the check from his hand. "I am to destroy this, not let Mr. Hare send any more?"

"Thank'ee kindly."

"I'm sorry you had to bother to come here."

"That's all right," he said. "I never was here before. I—kind of hankered to come." He looked around the room. "This's where it happened, ain't it?"

"Just outside the door there," she said, after a moment. "In the hall." She passed him and opened the door. "Out here," she said.

"She'd be'n in here, hadn't she?"

"Yes." Linda fought to hold her voice steady. "But—they found her outside in the hall."

He came slowly toward her as though to step through the door; but on the threshold he paused, half-turned, set his shoulders against the jamb to which the door was hinged. "Dunno as I need to look," he said in a low tone. He stood with his head a little lowered, staring straight ahead, not speaking. The silence seemed to Linda long. She was numb with sorrow for him; scarce heard him when he spoke.

Yet what he said was like a crash of thunder. "Guess here's where the bullet hit, ain't it?" he asked, and pointed, and looked at her inquiringly.

Linda after a paralyzed moment said hoarsely, "What?"

"Right here," he repeated. "The bullet hole."

And he extended his hand. He touched, she saw, the brass latch plate set on the door jamb and designed to receive the tongue of the lock. Her knees wavered, but she mustered enough strength to go toward him, almost staggering; to look where he pointed. She bent down, the better to see.

The latch plate had an opening in it, rectangular, perhaps an inch and a quarter from top to bottom, something over half an inch across. Inside this opening there was a recess where before the plate was set the wood had been chiseled out to make a slot into which the bolt slid home. But there was more. There was a round hole in this raw wood, not very deep, somewhat discolored; and Linda, leaning close, saw that the edge of this round hole was marred as though a knife blade had been inserted there to serve as a pry, to pry something out . . .

Old Zeke Wines said in a low tone, "Bullet must have gone right through the hole where the bolt goes, never even touched the sides, lodged in the wood there."

"Yes," said Linda. Her voice rose. "Yes, yes. Yes, it did!" she cried, loudly, her voice almost shrill.

For one phrase was ringing in her thoughts, over and over. Barbara's words: "If father didn't kill her, there'd be another bullet, somewhere."

And Linda thought: There is! There is! But no wonder we didn't find it! In the shadow, and it's dark here by the door. You can't see it even now unless you peer in through the lock. How sharp the old man's eyes must be . . .

"Well, thank'ee, Miss," said Zeke Wines meekly. "I'll bid you good day."

And he would have moved away. But Linda came to life; her thoughts began to clear. She caught his arm. "No," she said eagerly. "Don't go. Please! Wait. This is important. This—"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Merganser Family of Ducks Destructive; Found to Be Menace to the Trout Streams

The three members of the merganser family of ducks can well be named "wild fowl without a friend."

No one cares to fight their battles for protection. Despised by the duck hunters, considered by epicures as unfit for food, condemned by fishermen as a menace to our trout streams, the merganser ducks, called useless, destructive and predatory, are seriously threatened with the death penalty, notes Albert Stoll, Jr., in the Detroit News.

The thousands of conservation officers and fish culturists throughout the United States have been empowered to destroy mergansers if they appear to be destructive to fish life. There will be few so deputized who will refrain from "shooting on sight" the first merganser coming within range of the gun.

Those who are on intimate terms with these birds, and know of their food habits, seem to agree that they constitute one of the greatest enemies of our brook trout. They remain in their northern habitat until ice completely covers even the smallest pot hole or open expanse of river water, feeding continually upon whatever fish life these waters may furnish. Unlike other species of ducks, their appetite never appears satisfied.

The examination of the stomach contents of an American merganser killed on the Boardman river proved that this bird had just partaken of a ten-inch rainbow trout for his breakfast. This is not unusual. It is surprising how large a fish the merganser can swallow with but little effort.

Possibly a thinning in the ranks of the merganser is justified, but it is a certainty that ornithologists will not countenance their complete extermination.

Famed Tower of London

Not one, but many towers compose the famed Tower of London. Normans built the fortress on the ruins of another fort constructed by Julius Caesar's legions. It has served since as the royal palace, a prison, and, finally, as sort of an historical museum and resting place for the crown jewels. Until 1834 it also housed the royal menagerie. Though many persons believe it still is an impregnable fort guarding London, its chief weapons are ancient swords and armor of historical value.

Shapely Neck Important to Good Looks

By PATRICIA LINDSAY

AS THE mode changes we refashion our bodies! No wonder men marvel at us. One year we are without chests. The next, we develop nicely rounded bosoms! If the walking vogue is a slouch—we slouch and allow our shoulders to grow rounded! Just bring on the style and we grow into it!

Honestly, we are queer, we of the female sex. But at last only good posture and regal carriage is fashionable. Thank heaven for this era's style for now we must learn to walk erect with easy grace. Our shoulders must be firm and lovely to set off the new strapless gowns and swim suits. Our necks, usually neglected, must be beautiful, as appropriate pedestals for smartly coiffured heads. Hair sweeping up into a cluster of curls with tantalizing ringlets in back of our ears. Yes, it is practically the Gibson Girl period returned, and we might conceivably look forward to wasp waistlines!

Exercises will help to fill out chest and straighten shoulders.

To Keep Neck Beautiful

A few brief rules for keeping the neck beautiful. Scrub it each morning with a rich deep lather and body brush, using a light rotary movement. Rinse it well. Dry well. Powder with the same shade of powder you use for your face. Remember your neck is a continuation of your face!

At night cleanse it with a light cleansing cream. Then, with an upward movement, massage the skin well, using a rich nourishing cream or a bit of mineral oil.

Whenever you think to do it, exercise your neck by bending it forward and backward and rotating it slowly.

There is no beauty in hollow shoulders or a skinny neck. You develop them through exercise and eat enough to fill them out. A simple exercise does wonders for both, here it is:

Lie on your stomach across a chair, balancing the body carefully with feet and arms as if you were swimming the breast stroke. Out straight—slowly to the sides—back until you feel a pull on your shoulder blades. Relax after a minute or two and repeat.

Of course, the actual breast stroke while you are swimming will do more than anything else to make your shoulders beautiful.

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HINT-OF-THE-DAY

For Glorified Eyes

From Paris comes a new beauty secret that does wonders in rejuvenating tired eyes. For the girl who has read until the small hours to finish a book, or for the lady who's missed out on her normal quota of sleep, this new product is said to restore the sparkle of youth in a jiffy.

It comes in the form of a jar full of featherweight masques saturated in a solution that relieves eye tension and tiredness and leaves the eyes clear and radiantly alive.

You place one of the pads on your eyes and lie down for five minutes of relaxation. There comes a feeling of refreshing coolness to take the sting out of tired eye-balls and gently stimulate the skin area around the eyes, where age and fatigue show first.

Best part of the treatment is that good effect lasts for hours. The pads are harmless.

Quinine Has Saved Many Lives

The quinine tree gets its name from a grateful lady, Countess Chinchon. While her husband was Spanish governor of Peru, she contracted malaria and suffered from it for several years. Then, in 1638, says the Washington Post, she was given tea brewed from cinchona bark. She immediately recovered. Overjoyed, she returned to Spain and publicized this remedy. In the three centuries since she first used it, quinine has saved countless lives, brought relief to millions of malaria sufferers in all tropical countries.

Aquila an Imaginary Place

Aquila is an imaginary place. In the novel, "Action at Aquila," it is supposed to be a few miles south of Luray, Va., and west of the Blue Ridge along the Shenandoah river.

WHO'S NEWS THIS WEEK

By LEMUEL F. PARTON

NEW YORK.—Prevailing fashions in iron men make us proud of our own model. We cite big, smiling, durable Gabby Hartnett, batting .296 over a period of 16 years, with a high of .354, dropping only three pop flies in all that time and still pegging the ball to second with no letdown in machine-gun speed and precision. Phil Wrigley, owner of the Chicago Cubs, ups him $5,000 in a $27,500 player-manager contract, for his eighteenth season with the Cubs.

Gabby Is Our Own Model of An Iron Man

He's growing gray over the ears, but this department is ready to lay a bet that he'll still be in his catcher's armor after the overseas iron men have been sent to the showers, even if they are batting 1.000 at this moment. He's a marvelous handler of pitchers, with a laugh that eases tension and keys down nerves.

At Woonsocket, L. I., where he grew up, he was Charles Leo, a name long since lost. It was in 1922 that he signed for what looks like a lifetime stretch, as a rookie catcher for the Cubs.

DR. OLIVER CROMWELL CARMICHAEL lives up to his name. At the conference of southern business leaders at Atlanta, the chancellor of Vanderbilt university cries down the yen for security as "the goal of stagnation and defeat." With grim Cromwellian tenacity, he has been shoving this home for years. Dr. Carmichael says "security" is fundamentally at war with sound economics.

Dr. Carmichael Cries Down Yen For Security

He is a native of Goodwater, Ala., a Rhodes scholar from the University of Alabama.

A HARD-BOILED, bantam-weight British newspaper man was assigned to a colonel's staff in the World war. The colonel was contemptuous. He tossed the newcomer a handbook on Syria. "Take that," he said, "and study it. You might be able to digest it in six months." "Perhaps I can," said the scrivener "It took me only three months to write it."

Warns England Clean Sweeping Is Vital Need

That was gamey little Leopold S. Amery, one-time ace reporter for the London Times, later a cabinet member, now putting his steel spurs to Mr. Chamberlain's "appeasement," the reciprocal trade treaty and all deals with the dictators. He says, "You might as well try to please a tortoise by stroking its back."

In parliament, he has been for many years the leader of the die-hard conservatives. He is against any social fixings or trimmings whatsoever, and, having been, like Kipling, a reporter in India, is for the old empire formula without any modifications.

The son of a poor civil servant in India, he scrambled through Oxford by snagging every scholarship in sight. He went to parliament and in 1922 became secretary of the admiralty. Later, as colonial secretary, he swarmed all over the empire, making fluent orations in Syrian, Arabic, Turkish, French, Italian and German. In Cambridge he had confounded his elders by his gift of tongues.

He is a bitter-ender who says Der Fuehrer's big horses aren't going to run over him. He has been a prophet of doom and has warned England against meeting a crisis by sweeping the dust under the rug.

SEVERAL months ago, the Nazis expelled George Grosz from the realm. He had beaten them to it by about six years. Just now, he gets American citizenship. He was a savage and ironic caricaturist who had raised many blisters on sundry Nazi hides before he made his getaway. While he is a certified Aryan, he was an outstanding candidate for a concentration camp and was shrewd enough to see what was coming.

Beats Hitler's Order of Exile By Six Years

When he landed here in 1932, to teach at the Art Students' league, there was a row in the league, but President John Sloan defended him as "one of the greatest of modern artists," and here he is, painting happily, and everything is gemeutlich.

He has given up caricature and lets the world go by. His paintings are hung in many good galleries, and he has a nice home in Queens, where, with his wife and two children, he says he enjoys his exile tremendously.

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