CRUCIBLE

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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CHAPTER XIV—Continued

—30—

Phil smiled happily; and then he turned to Mary's letter, and sobered again; and for a moment he held it in his hands, remembering their last word from Mary with bitterness. He was tempted to destroy this letter unopened; but at last, like one performing an unpleasant duty, he tore off the end of the envelope and drew out the letter inside and began to read.

And at the first words, his eyes widened, and his breath came hissingly and he sat up sharply in his berth. The letter was from Paris. Mary had written:

Dear Phil:

Gus Loran killed Miss Wines. He has told me so.

I'll try to tell you just what happened. I think I told you he was here. His wife was getting a divorce. We met by accident; but he seemed fascinated by me. My Argentine and I weren't getting along very well. He's gone back to South America now. I began to realize that Mr. Loran had something on his mind. He was drinking a lot, and looking sick; and then he began to give me presents, pretty valuable ones, and I asked him why, and—he was drunk most of the time of course—he began to talk about some great wrong he had done me, and about making amends.

This went on for weeks, and he's been sort of cracking up all the time. I asked him questions, but he'd shut up like a clam. But when my husband left me, he got maudlin and wept about what was happening to me, and blamed himself, and finally, night before last, he begged me to forgive him and I asked for what, and I finally got it out of him.

He had Miss Wines in Maine in August. The guide lied for him. And he says she tried to blackmail him, and his wife was already threatening to divorce him and collect big alimony, and he was scared. Then Miss Wines sent word to him to meet her in the office that night at half-past eleven. He was going to New York, anyway; and he decided to try to scare her so she would let him alone. He had a pistol he had carried in the War, and he took it to scare her with. He says he took out the magazine, thought it was empty. He got on the New York train and put on his pyjamas over his clothes and called the porter and told him he was going to sleep, and then slipped off through another car, and went out a different gate, and went to the office and she was there.

She'd stolen father's key, he says. He offered her the money there was in the safe, and she said she wanted a lot more than that, and she said she was going to tell Mrs. Loran, and started out. And he jammed the pistol against her back as she passed him in the doorway, thinking it was empty, intending to scare her, and it went off.

She took two or three steps and fell; and he saw the empty cartridge rolling across the floor and picked it up, and then ran to her and called to her to get up, and saw she was dead. And he heard someone on the stairs and turned out the lights, and when father came, in the dark, he jumped past him down the stairs and ran. And he saw father's car and started to drive away in it, and realized he had turned into a one-way street and might be arrested for that, so he left it there and hurried back to the station and sneaked on the train. No one saw him.

So, Phil, I went to the American embassy here and told them, and they got the police. They are going to arrange things so they can hear everything we say, in case I can get him to go over it all again. I'll try, Phil. They say just my story isn't enough to prove it. Maybe you'll have heard from the police before you get this. I read about father's commutation; and even if I can't get Mr. Loran to talk again, this may help to get father pardoned.

It's too late to help me. But maybe it will help make up for my deserting you all. Anyway, it's all I can do.

Mary.

Phil read this letter through with racing eyes; and when he had done, he read it again more slowly, till every word was fixed on his brain. And there was great triumph in him, and a deep jubilation. His first thought was to rouse his mother, tell her. But—she was asleep, and if she knew this tonight, she would not sleep again. She would insist that they leave the train, go back to his father . . .

And he thought of Barbara; Barbara, who of them all had never faltered in her faith. And in the end he hugged this secret close. It could wait, he decided. Wait till tomorrow. Wait till they were with Barbara. Barbara had a right to be the first to know.

So in the morning—they were roused early, since Cleveland would be reached soon after dawn—he said nothing to Mrs. Sentry. When she saw his high spirits and asked some question, he said evasively, "Oh, just looking forward to seeing Barbara, that's all!"

They alighted at the Cleveland station, and Dan and Barbara were there to greet them, and Barbara was quick in her mother's arms, while Phil pumped Dan's hand. Then Barbara came to kiss Phil, her eyes dancing; and she linked her arm through his, and Mrs. Sentry and Dan were close on their heels, and they came to Dan's car. Phil, watching Barbara, thought she was become beautiful. It had never occurred to him that his sister was beautiful before. He had thought of her as a nice-looking youngster; but now she wore a subtle radiance of glowing eyes and clear skin and steady lips that were strong even when they curved in quick laughter.

Phil said, "Dan, you've made a beauty out of Barb!"

"Old Doctor Fisher," Dan chuckled. "Every treatment guaranteed. A raving beauty after three months of marriage, or your money back."

"It's Been Fun. Perfect. I Shouldn't Have Wanted It Any Other Way."

Then they were stowing themselves in the car, and Phil saw that it was new, and thought Dan must be prospering, and wondered what their home would be like. It was an apartment, he knew; and when they were arrived, the apartment, though small, proved to be reassuringly sunny and comfortable, and the furniture could not be objected to.

Phil saved his great news, relishing the anticipation of their great happiness. Barbara, through breakfast, did most of the talking, only appealing to Dan for corroboration now and then, relating her arrival in Cleveland when she came to join Dan, and the first days in a hotel when, while Dan was at work, she sought for apartments, till she had a list for his inspection; and how they moved in here with nothing but twin beds, a few towels and some linen, and so began housekeeping.

"So first I furnished the kitchen," Barbara explained. "Just buying each day the things I actually needed. And then the bedroom; and then I began on the living-room. After I had things picked out, Dan would go see them before I decided. And I made all the hangings myself, by hand. I'm as good a sempstress as Miss Simpkins right now, mother. And when we had everything in, I began to monogram our linen—Why mother! You're crying!"

Mrs. Sentry said through tears: "It's all right, Barbara. I was just being sorry for myself because I missed sharing all that fun with you. I should have been here, helped, done most of it." She spoke to Dan. "I'm afraid your bride didn't come to you as well equipped and prepared as she should have been, Dan."

Dan grinned. "I haven't any complaint," he declared. "But maybe it was hard on Barb."

"You idiot!" said Barbara gently; and to her mother: "It's been fun. Perfect! I shouldn't have wanted it any other way."

Mrs. Sentry looked toward Phil, and suddenly her eyes twinkled. "I'll do better by you and Linda, Phil," she promised; and Phil's heart leaped, and Barbara cried delightedly:

"Phil! You and Linda? Honest? Oh, that's grand!"

Phil could not speak, staring at his mother. Barbara was kissing him hard and happily, and Dan was shaking his hand, and then the telephone rang in the hall, and Dan went to answer it, and Phil said shakily:

"But mother, how did you know—"

She smiled. "I am not blind! You and Linda wore it like banners, that day you came back to York."

"And you don't mind?"

"I've minded your not trusting me enough to tell me about it, that's all."

"When will you be married?" Barbara challenged. "Soon?"

Mrs. Sentry said smilingly: "Yes, soon, I hope." And to her son: "I wasn't sure I could—let you go, till we saw Barbara so happy, Phil. At home I had too much the feeling that things were ending; that there was nothing to look forward to. But—things are just beginning here, with Barb and Dan. And you and Linda can make a fine new beginning too."

Phil's throat was full; he thought: This is the time to tell them! He reached in his pocket for Mary's letter. But then Dan came into the room. He came quietly enough; yet his very quiet made them look at him in sudden attention.

Phil saw Dan's face white and set; and Barbara saw Dan's face too, and was in his arms in one swift movement, staring up at him, crying: "Dan! What is it, Dan?"

Dan said in a low tone: "It was the office that called, Mrs. Sentry. They've just had an A. P. bulletin, with—great news! Gus Loran has confessed to the French police that he killed Miss Wines. The Governor says Mr. Sentry will be pardoned at once, will be free today."

Trains are tedious things; but planes move swiftly. Yet to Mrs. Sentry, that day while they seemed to hang motionless in a cloudless sky alive with sunshine so bright she thought it could never be obscured, the swift journey homeward appeared to be interminable.

But it was not. The panorama below them, moment by moment, changed; the mountains beneath them slid behind; new cities far ahead came quickly into view, and then, distant yet beautiful, the sea . . .

Before they landed at East Boston, Phil had seen Linda waiting, far below. In his arms, held close, her lips tight to his, she whispered only his name, Phil, Phil, Phil, her lips moving against his. And then:

"He is waiting for you, Phil. For you all to take him home together. Eli is here with the limousine, and I've my car—"

He rode with her through congested streets to the shabby portals of the prison; and the limousine pulled up behind them. Upon arrival there she said:

"Dan and I will go on ahead, Phil. Just you, whom he loves, to meet him here and bring him home." And she whispered, "But hurry to me, Phil."

Phil nodded, his eyes blurred so that he could not see. Of what followed he remembered little save the strong grasp of his father's hand. Then they were in the limousine, Phil on one of the small seats, half turned to face Barbara and his father and mother in the seat behind. They crossed the bridge above the murky railroad yards, and Phil saw how pale his father was. But beyond, driving beside the river where the sun shone clear, Phil thought: It will put color in his cheek again. It will not take long.

And he thought: We are all very silent. And then he nodded, understanding. There was too much to say; and yet there was nothing that was not already being said by Barbara, her hands tight clasped on his father's arm; by Mrs. Sentry pressed close against her husband's side.

They crossed the river, passed familiar corners. Soon now they would be at home. And Linda would be waiting . . .

Phil turned in his seat to face forward, he turned to look ahead.

(THE END)

Among Bothersome Dusts, Silica Said to Be Cause of Disease Known as Silicosis

Dust is never a pleasant thing to breathe, but some dusts are far worse than others. Coal dust, for example, may color a miner's or coal heaver's lungs as black as night, but it rarely does anything more serious, states a writer in the Chicago Tribune. On the other hand, the repeated inhalation of freshly ground silica dust (silica is a general name for the compound that makes up sand and quartz), frequently results in a disease known as silicosis, characterized by an extensive scarring and destruction of lung tissue.

This disease has come to be recognized as a serious industrial hazard. Since sand and quartz are obviously quite nonpoisonous as found in nature, the fact that they are more dangerous than other dusts when finely ground, led to the suspicion that silicosis was a result of some hitherto unrecognized property of silica.

Tests on rabbits appear to have shown that the danger can be greatly lessened if the silica dust is mixed with a trace of metallic aluminum dust.

Silica is a compound of the elements of silicon and oxygen, and the atoms of these elements are so arranged on the surface of freshly broken silica that the oxygen atoms possess a small but definite part of the combining power of free element.

Presumably this is responsible for the fact that freshly ground silica is more soluble than other forms of the material. This in turn suggests that the deadly effect of silica dust is the result of its actually combining chemically with the lung tissues, and not of mere mechanical irritation.

If this were true, the way to denature silica dust would be to bring it in contact with something that had a greater affinity for oxygen, so that the latter would be completely saturated before it had time to attack living tissue. Theoretically, aluminum should have such an effect, and tests with it have borne out these predictions.

Many Changes in Plant, Animal Life Continue to Baffle the Scientists

We marvel at the hidden forces which control the behavior of all creatures on land and in the water, many of which are ascribed to "instinct," but much of this phenomena still baffles us because up to this time no solution has been offered. For instance, in the bee world we find a curious procedure which is beyond all understanding. When bees swarm to establish a new home we are told that a certain number immediately segregate themselves and remain perfectly quiet. Regardless of the feverish activity all around them, this group of bees settles down for the specific purpose of producing wax for use in the new home.

They form a wedge-like mass on the roof of the new hive, and in the matter of a day or so wax exudes from their bodies and hardens into transparent flakes. When the quantity is deemed sufficient they separate and get busy on the task of building the framework of honeycombs and cells. The act of massing together is perhaps instinctive, but the actual process of producing wax is a mystery as yet unsolved. We could hazard the guess that the substance for wax-making is already in glands or sacs and that the heat generated by the clustered bees causes the wax to slowly flow from pockets in the body. In reality we know nothing of the chemical process involved and probably never will. The truly amazing feature of the entire procedure is that the bees seem able to do this at will, writes Mack B. Stielau, secretary of the Detroit chapter, Izaak Walton league, in the Detroit News.

Although scientists have for years studied the phenomena of hibernation among mammals, reptiles and insects, as well as the migration of birds, they have as yet not been able to find the compelling force. It is possible that in the near future they will be able to pierce the veil which enshrouds these mysteries.

The ability of certain fishes to emit electric shocks inspires wonder and, so far as we know, this marvelous power is also unexplained. It would be interesting to learn not only how this current is generated, but whether it is projected for defensive purposes or used to render prey helpless.

Among the amphibia we have the toad and frog which undergo a marked metamorphosis after the tadpole stage, and we puzzle over the question why nature established such a complicated life cycle. Then there are certain newts and salamanders with the faculty of growing a new tail when that appendage is nipped off by an enemy.

In the realm of plant life we have the enigma of chlorophyl, the green coloring matter present in all vegetable cells. Analytical tests have thus far not established with certainty the true composition of this complex substance, and a recent news item on the subject tells us that scientists are still working on the problem. Chlorophyl is able to absorb some of the energy of sunlight, and this captured force breaks down water and carbon dioxide.

WRONG NUMBER

A cobbler christened his establishment "The Boot Hospital." A customer brought him a pair of boots which would have disgraced a tramp, says London Tit-Bits Magazine.

"Shouldn't have these mended if I were you," said the cobbler. "I would throw 'em away."

"But I want them mended," was the reply. "This is supposed to be a hospital for boots, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's a 'ospital all right," rejoined the cobbler, "but it ain't a mortuary."

THE PROOF

First Castaway—Yes, this island's inhabited all right. Just saw five white men, all trying to sing "Sweet Adeline."

Second Ditto—Thank heavens! We're in a civilized country.

Spare the Rod

"I say, pa," said little Tommy, "didn't you tell me the other day that it was wrong to strike anyone smaller than yourself?"

"Yes, Tommy, that's what I said," confessed the fond parent.

"Well, I wish you'd write my teacher a note to that effect," said the youngster. "I don't think she knows about it."

Competition

Business man—Well, if it isn't John Corcoran, the man I met up in Maine one rainy night six years ago at the Moose River Junction railway station.

Salesman—Good-by, sir.

Business man—Aren't you going to try and sell me something?

Salesman—No, I sell memory training courses.

Almost Submerged

Wyles—You look miserable. What is wrong?

Gyles—I am up to my neck in debt.

It can't be as bad as all that.

It is. My hat's the only thing I have paid for.—Minneapolis Journal.

Rather Aged

First Student—I wonder how old Miss Jones is.

Second Student—Quite old, I imagine; they say she used to teach Caesar.—Royal Arcanum Bulletin.

Nuff 'Snuff

Mo—I say, why don't you get a larger paint brush? You could do twice as much work.

Lasses—'Cause Ah ain't got twice as much work to do, das why!

Share and Share

"I can hear your new radio set as though it were in my room."

"Well, what about helping to pay off some of the installments?"—Atlanta Constitution.

Careless

Hubby—I got a mustard bath today.

Wife—Hm-m! Don't those hot-dog stands provide paper napkins?—Houston Post.

Sound Advice

Stranger—Sonny, can you tell me the quickest way to get to the station?

Oliver—Run.

NO LESSONS NEEDED

He—I could learn to love you.

She—Most fellows don't have to learn—it comes natural.

Ticked Off

Finally, with a weary sigh, the Boss gave in. "Then you want all the office furniture insured?" asked the triumphant salesman.

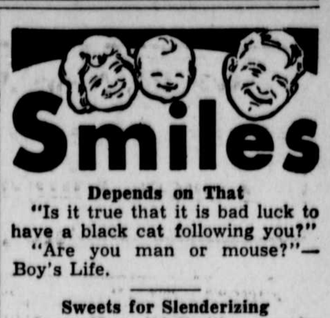
"All except the clock," sighed the Boss. "Everybody watches that."

Time to Change

"I've had enough of all these jewels, cars and furs!"

"Ah! You want to retire to the country?"

"No! I want new jewels, new cars and new furs!"



Depends on That

"Is it true that it is bad luck to have a black cat following you?"

"Are you man or mouse?"—Boy's Life.

Sweets for Slenderizing

Jane—How did Smithson make all his money?

June—O, he invented a chocolate bonbon with lettuce center for women on a diet.—Stray Stories.

In the recent high winds, says the Chicago Tribune, an elderly fat man whose toupee blew off chased a Pekinese for two blocks before discovering his mistake.

That Choked Feeling

For her birthday, little Pat had been given a ring, but, much to her disappointment, not one of the guests at tea noticed it. At last she could bear the indifference no longer.

"O, dear," she exclaimed. "I'm so warm in my new ring!"—Stray Stories.

NO ONE IS IMMUNE TO ACID INDIGESTION

But Why Suffer? *Here's how you can "Alkalize" anytime—anywhere—the easy "Phillips'" way!*

WHY SUFFER from headaches, "gas," "upsets" and "biliousness" due to Acid Indigestion—when now there is a way that relieves excess stomach acid with incredible speed.

Simply take two Phillips' Milk of Magnesia Tablets at first sign of distress. Carry them with you—take them unnoticed by others.

Results are amazing. There's no nausea or "bloated" feeling. It produces no "gas" to embarrass you and offend others. "Acid indigestion" disappears. You feel great.

Get a bottle of *liquid* "Phillips'" for home use. And a box of Phillips' Milk of Magnesia *Tablets* to carry with you. But — be sure any bottle or box you accept is clearly marked "*Phillips'*" Milk of Magnesia.

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★ IN LIQUID OR TABLET FORM

Present Ills

Present sufferings seem far greater to men than those they merely dread.—Livy.

How Women in Their 40's Can Attract Men

Here's good advice for a woman during her change (usually from 38 to 52), who fears she'll lose her appeal to men, who worries about hot flashes, loss of pep, dizzy spells, upset nerves and moody spells.

Get more fresh air, 8 hrs. sleep and if you need a good general system tonic take Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound, made *especially for women*. It helps Nature build up physical resistance, thus helps give more vivacity to enjoy life and assist calming jittery nerves and disturbing symptoms that often accompany change of life. WELL WORTH TRYING!

Words as Shadows

As shadows attend substances, so words follow upon things.

Don't Sleep When Gas Crowds Heart

If you toss in bed and can't sleep from constipation and awful GAS BLOATING remember this: To get quick relief you must get DOUBLE ACTION. You must relieve the GAS. You must clear the bowels. Adlerika is just what you need because it acts on the stomach and BOTH bowels. Adlerika is BOTH carminative and cathartic. Carminatives that warm and soothe the stomach and expel GAS. Cathartics that quickly and gently clear the bowels of waste matter that may have caused GAS BLOATING, sour stomach, sleepless nights and indigestion for months. Adlerika relieves stomach gas almost at once. Adlerika usually acts on the bowels in less than two hours. No waiting for overnight relief. Adlerika does not gripe, is not habit forming. Get genuine Adlerika today.

Sold at all drug stores

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

Have you anything around the house you would like to trade or sell? Try a classified ad. The cost is only a few cents and there are probably a lot of folks looking for just whatever it is you no longer have use for.

Classified ADS get Results