

OUR WEEKLY SERIAL STORY INSTALLMENT

CRUCIBLE

By
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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, who 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. Falkner, noted criminal lawyer retained, inspires hope but not admiration. Dan Fisher, whom Barbara has been meeting at her grandmother's, tries to use influence to keep the family out of the papers, and everyone shields Barbara, on the verge of a breakdown.

CHAPTER VI—Continued
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One day when Brace was to meet Barbara at her grandmother's for tea, and arrived before the girl, the old woman spoke to him of Barbara's condition, said stoutly: "I wish someone would marry her and take her away from here! She can't stand much more. She hasn't the strength to go through all this. She shouldn't have to do it!"

He dissented gently. "People can't shirk such things. Barbara's sister did, I know; but she will always regret it. We have to accept our burdens, our responsibilities. Face them squarely."

She said grimly: "Maybe! No doubt you are a level-headed young man, but I suspect you're too level-headed for your own good!"

He smiled tolerantly. "I'm sorry," he said. "But—dear as Barbara has come to be to me—I can't advise her to dodge or to evade."

"Dear to you, is she?"

"Very!"

"Then marry her," the old woman counseled. "Sweep her off her feet. Marry her and take care of her."

He said gravely: "I hope to, some day. But if I asked her now, she might come to me just to escape. I want her to come to me because she wants me."

"Fiddlesticks! If you want her, take her, on any terms at all."

He shook his head. "I shall have to be a witness at the trial, you know," he confessed. "The District Attorney has warned me to be ready. Barbara need not know, yet; but if we were married, and then I testified, she would blame me, never forgive me."

"Get out of the reach of a subpoena while you can."

"I can't do that. I've given my word!"

"Pah! If you've the courage of a—"

But Barbara arrived, putting a period to their words; and after that Mrs. Sentry did not attempt him again.

She found Dan Fisher more to her taste. Between these two something strong and binding had developed.

He came to her often, even when Barbara was not there. Once he came dispirited, and she saw this and demanded, "What are you so down in the mouth about?"

He grinned. "Been barking down a rat hole," he confessed, "and the rat wasn't at home."

"Talk sense!"

He hesitated. "Well, Linda Dane and I have been putting our heads together, trying to see some way out of this. I thought we had a lead. Old Mr. Wines, the dead girl's father, told me that in her letters home the girl spoke of a man's having asked her to dinner. I started to check on him."

"Who was it?"

"I can't very well—"

"Nonsense! I can keep my mouth shut when I choose."

"Well, it was Mr. Loran."

"Gus Loran?" She considered, nodded. "He's an old goat," she agreed. "He never would have married that Endle woman otherwise. Go on. What about him?"

Dan Fisher said: "The thing looked possible at first. I found that Mr. Loran was away in August, at the same time Miss Wines was away. But that blew up. Two ways. It turned out that Loran was in Maine. I've talked with his guide. He has a camp on a lake up there. Flies up, flies his own plane. He was there."

He added: "And just to make sure, I checked on him for the night she was killed. We know what time she went to Mr. Sentry's office. Mr. Loran boarded a New York train about the same time, went right to bed. The porter saw him in his pajamas a little after eleven; and the porter's sure Loran didn't get off the train after that."

She demanded, "Why couldn't Miss Wines have been in Maine too?"

"Guide says, No."

"Maybe he's lying."

"Didn't seem like a liar."

"Maybe she was near there. Maybe he flew over to where she was."

He hesitated, and she said sharply, "Speak up, man!"

"Miss Wines wasn't in Maine," he said reluctantly. "They've found where Miss Wines was. She was at a hotel in New Jersey."

The old woman's fingers twitched, her eyes closed, then opened again, shrewd and keen. She said in a low tone: "You're not looking at me. I suppose Arthur was with her?"

He nodded. He said miserably: "But it's Barbara that gets me! She'll have to go through it all, the trial, everything. She may even have to testify! I wish I could—marry her, get her out of this."

"In love with her, are you?"

"Yes!"

She demanded, "Then why don't you?"

Dan looked at her quickly, and he colored, and then he chuckled. "You're a girl after my own heart!" he declared. "I'd do it in a minute—if she'd have me—but I can't!"

"Why not?"

"Money," he confessed. "And—this is the only job I've got. If I could land a promise of a job somewhere else—But these are tough times in the newspaper game."

"I'll finance you."

He grinned, shook his head. "Easy come, easy go," he reminded her. "I've never been able to hold on to money unless I earned it myself." He added: "But I'd like to find some way to keep her out of this. Keep her out of the trial, anyway. Why don't you take her away yourself, to Europe or somewhere?"

The old woman said quietly, "The next trip I take, I shall have to go alone, Dan."

He met her eyes honestly, without denial. "This must have—hit you hard," he assented. "The shock, the worry, the uncertainty."

She said, half to herself: "There's no uncertainty. I've accepted that. It's more Ellen's fault than his, perhaps. She shut him out of her life

long ago. He had to turn somewhere. Yet I don't mean to blame her. At least she went on living with him. This is hard on her; but—it may change her, soften her." She added: "Yet he is my son! Whatever he has done!"

Dan's eyes filled. He gripped her hand. She said with a sudden faint smile: "Professor Brace thinks it's Barbara's duty to—see it through. I judge you don't agree?"

He shook his head. "Lord love you, no!" And his eyes began to blaze. "Sometimes Brace—" Then he checked himself. "I wish I could take her away!"

So in these days all their solicitude came more and more to cen-



"Why Couldn't Miss Wines Have Been in Maine Too?"

ter upon Barbara. Phil sought in every way to cheer her; and as Christmas approached he tried to enlist her interest in planning some holiday observance that could be endured. They were in her room one night, Barbara abed, Phil sitting beside her while they groped for some device, when with no warning she interrupted their discussion to say:

"Phil, tell me truly, do you think father killed her?"

He was shocked into silence for a moment; countered then, "Gosh, Barb, what do you take me for?"

"Do you?" she insisted.

"No, of course not."

"I read all the newspapers," she said. "If he didn't, how could all the things they say be true?"

He said: "But you haven't read father's side of it, Barb. Wait till he tells his story."

"What is his story, Phil?"

"Why, he doesn't know anything about it at all."

She looked away from him. "Phil, shall we all have to testify?"

"Not mother," Phil replied.

"Probably not any of us," he added. "Mother can testify if she wants to, though. She probably will if he wants her to."

"I won't!"

"Well, if he wants us to—"

"I won't!" she repeated tensely, eyes still averted. "No matter who wants me to. I won't! I'll—cut out my tongue first."

Her voice shook, and he said: "Whoa, Barb! You're scared. There's nothing to be scared of!"

She looked furtively all around.

"Phil," she whispered, "do they know for sure when Miss Wines was killed? The papers said at first someone heard the shot a little past one, but—Mr. Hare said they think maybe she was killed earlier."

Phil hesitated. "I don't think they're sure, Barbara. But—it wasn't a shot that man heard. They've found a truck that backed up about that time." And he said:

"They know when Miss Wines ate dinner; and they know about how long it takes food to digest, so they go by that, partly; and partly by—well, things doctors look for."

"What time do they think she was killed?" He did not answer; and she whispered: "Phil, father got home that night at quarter of one. I told Dan Fisher, and Dan told me not to tell anyone, but I had already told Mr. Flood." Her voice rose, was shrill. "I won't tell it again, Phil. Never! I won't! They can't make me!"

He took her, shaking, in his arms, intent to comfort her. "You won't have to, Barb. I won't let them bother you."

She clung to him. "I'll cut out my tongue first."

"Don't get so excited, Barb!"

"But why did Dan tell me not to tell, Phil?"

Phil said almost sternly: "Now listen, Barb! Quit worrying! It's all right. What do you read the papers

gaged them. Barbara went to make her grandmother's and when at half-past two appeared with the lawyer, a woman received him in a waiting very erect in her gown. But at once she sent Phil and Barbara out of the room, and they were alone she asked questions, watched him, and him."

He suggested at last haven't been to see Mr. Sentry.

"No."

"He asks often for you," she told her. "I shall be glad to him I have seen you so well."

She eyed him shrewdly, want me to go see him?"

"I know it would—help him admitted."

"Then I will," she promised curiously submissive tone, first fine day."

"Splendid!" he said, beaming you do, Mrs. Sentry, I pass everything else."

Old Mrs. Sentry tried to out her promise to see her.

"But I shall want to be with alone," she said, then added, "I'd like for you—for all of ride down with me, wait outside. My courage is gone. I'm not as strong as I used to be."

They waited for a fair day that winter in Boston was one. Not till the first week of February, on the eve of the opening trial, did the season serve came a day when spring was just around the corner, and the shone warm. Old Eli brought ancient limousine. Barbara and nurse helped Mrs. Sentry, Phil and Barbara steadied the elevator and down and car. She sat between Barbara and Mrs. Sentry, Phil on the map-up seat in front of them. He drove through scant mid-of-traffic to the jail; and the old an's cheeks shone bright and ber, flushed and hot, and Barbara saw a pulse pound in her throat.

But she could not, when the came, go in. As the car stopped she collapsed suddenly, not even topping sideways, shrinking down into herself as she was small. Even their eyes saw that she was ill; she was not faint-heartedness. It was den terror, uncertain what Phil and Barbara stammered fumbled; but Mrs. Sentry steadily:

"We'll have to take her home was too much for her."

They all stayed in town that with her; for the doctor had warned them. Once the old spoke, in a surprisingly voice. She said:

"Tell Arthur I loved him," she added, with no irony or tones. "And tell Mr. Falkner he can use this—just as well."

Her death, toward dawn, headlines. "Sentry's Mother Shot en at Jail," said the morning per. "Mrs. Sentry Dead on Trial," said the afternoon edition. Her funeral occurred on Saturday two days before the trial was to begin. The brief and premature spell had ended in a blizzard of clogged traffic. They followed to the cemetery between the walls of snow.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Boys and Girls of 4-H Clubs Protect
Animals and Birds of Rural District

Few persons realize the important contributions the members of the 4-H clubs are making to the cause of conservation, writes Albert Stoll, Jr., in the Detroit News. These clubs, operating throughout the nation and composed principally of rural boys and girls with the motto, Head, Heart, Hand and Health, have been in a particularly fortunate position to become intimately acquainted with their native plant and animal life and realize just what these resources mean to their communities.

In many instances the groups are responsible for reforestation projects and the conservation of farm woodlots. They have encouraged, through protection and refuges, the maintenance of a crop of fur-bearing animals in their communities. Through winter feeding operations

they helped carry quail, pheasant and winter song birds through severe periods. In Michigan alone, clubs have been given thousands of pheasant eggs for incubation after rearing them made liberally when the birds were able to take themselves. They have taken active interest in the preservation of rare wildflowers. They have encouraged the indiscriminate killing of beneficial hawks and owls, practice which their forefathers considered good preservation.

In the more remote districts have rendered valuable service in the prevention and control of brush fires.

In short, they have given a did demonstration of what can be accomplished if it becomes interested in a subject and applied heart and hands to the task.