

OUR WEEKLY SERIAL STORY INSTALLMENT

CRUCIBLE

By
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CHAPTER VII
—16—

Sunday afternoon, the day after the funeral, Falkran came to see Mrs. Sentry, to remind her that the trial would begin next morning. And he said: "You will of course be in the courtroom every day. I had better tell you what to expect, so that you may show no emotion. The jury will be watching you."

"I shall show no emotion!"

He hesitated. "We ought to discuss," he suggested then, "what you will wear. What is your opinion? Will you be in mourning for Mr. Sentry's mother? That might be effective."

"I think not," she replied. "I dislike—pose. I should not normally wear mourning for Mr. Sentry's mother."

"Perhaps not," he agreed, faintly disappointed. "But—some quite simple dress. And no jewelry?"

She smiled mirthlessly. "No jewelry," she assented.

He said: "Mrs. Sentry, to succeed before a jury requires a careful handling of intangibles. I shall not ask of you very many questions, but my hope is that the State on cross-examination will adopt toward you such a tone that the jury's sympathies will turn in your direction." He confessed, "I even hope that you and Miss Sentry may actually break down, on the stand."

Mrs. Sentry was silent for a moment. "I shan't break down," she said. "I shouldn't know how. But Barbara—She's really so young, and—she hasn't seemed to me well lately. Is it absolutely necessary?" She added, "We haven't let her go to the jail, you know."

"Quite right," he agreed. "You were right not to subject a sheltered, lovely girl to the ordeal of entering those surroundings. But a courtroom is not so bad." And he conceded, "She need not be there till the jury has been selected; but after that, yes." He added, watching her warily, "And if she comes face to face with him in the courtroom, no one will be surprised to see her kiss her father, cling to him, perhaps burst into tears—"

Mrs. Sentry said quietly, "I should be surprised. We are not a demonstrative family."

After he was gone, though he had insisted on the necessity of Barbara's appearance in court, she hesitated to tell the girl. When at last she did so, Barbara tried to speak. She swallowed hard, cried, "No! I won't, mother!"

She seemed to be hoarse: Mrs. Sentry asked, "Are you catching cold?"

"Yes," Barbara said eagerly. "Yes, my throat is sore." "You'd better go to bed. A cold compress will fix that throat of yours; and some hot lemonade—"

Barbara came quick to her feet. "Yes, yes," she agreed. "I think I'm going to be sick! I feel sick, mother, awfully."

Mrs. Sentry touched her forehead. "You've no temperature," she said. "It will clear up by morning."

But in the morning Barbara was unable to speak at all, and Doctor Maiton found that she had two of three degrees of fever. "A day of two in bed, and drink lots of water," he prescribed. Downstairs afterward, with Mrs. Sentry, he spoke reassuringly. "Her throat is normal," he said. "No inflammation. I suspect it's excitement, nervous strain."

"But people don't run a fever unless they're sick!"

Doctor Maiton smiled faintly. "Our small daughter runs a fever whenever Mrs. Maiton is away from home overnight. A temperature above normal may be a symptom of mental or spiritual as well as of physical ills. Just keep her in bed, don't argue with her—"

So Barbara in the morning stayed abed, with Nellie in solicitous attendance. Some time after Phil and Mrs. Sentry had left for the courthouse, for the opening of the trial,

Dan Fisher appeared, laughed Nellie out of her objections, came up to see Barbara propped in pillows. Her eyes lighted when she saw him.

"Hullo, Barb," Dan said. "Phil told me you were under the weather. They'll be all day getting a jury, so I thought I'd run out and see you. Feel pretty rocky?" Her lips moved, but no intelligible sound emerged.

"What's that?" he asked. She shaped, elaborately, the words, "I can't talk!" He echoed, "Can't talk?" And she nodded in violent assent, and he said: "Why not? Lost your voice?" She nodded again, and he said heartily:

"Why, that's fine! You know what I'd do if I were you? I shouldn't find it for a while. Let the darned thing stay lost!" He sat down on the edge of her bed, touched her hand. "And if it comes back," he advised with a chuckle, "try to manage a little appendix, or some gall stones. Or maybe break a leg!"

She smiled faintly and pressed his hand; and he said more seriously: "But don't get too sick, Barb! This—your father—is one of those things that might happen to anyone. It has happened to you, no getting around that. But you're going to go on living just the same, afterward; and living's fun! Life's fun, if you know enough to let it be. And—this will all be behind you, by and by."

She spoke, clearly, in normal tones. "Honest, Dan?"

He was surprised. "Hullo, cured already?"

Her color drained away; her lips moved, but no sound came. He said regretfully: "Say, you're tired I'm bothering you. I'll run along."

But she held his hand, would not let him go.

"Want me to stay?" he asked. She nodded; and he sat down again, and talked on at random, cheerfully, and once or twice she smiled and her lids drooped till they closed.

A little later her fingers relaxed their grip, and he eased his hand free and stood up, and for a moment looked down at her, sleeping. His eyes dimmed; he brushed them with his hand, whispered something gently. Then his fist clenched hard till the knuckles were white. He shook this clenched fist at nothing, at the house perhaps, at the tragic silence all around the lovely, sleeping girl.

Afterward, he went quietly away.

Phil, sitting beside his mother in the courtroom, on the fourth day of the trial—Barbara was still abed at home—heard Mrs. Sentry sigh deeply as though with relief, and leaned to whisper, "What is it?"

"I just remembered something."

"What?"

She shook her head for silence, for attention to the witness just then on the stand. The witness happened to be Miss Randall, office manager for Sentry and Loran; and she was testifying that after Miss Wines' actual employment by the firm was ended, the girl came several times to the office, and on one occasion was for a few minutes alone with Mr. Sentry. Mrs. Sentry, after that relieved sigh which had caught Phil's attention, heard Mr. Flood's question.

"Whether you saw Miss Wines after she talked with Mr. Sentry?"

"Yes."

"Did you observe anything about her condition?"

"She was crying desperately."

District Attorney Flood surrendered the witness; and Falkran rose.

"Now, Miss Randall," he said, in that confident and friendly tone which was so effective with the jury, "you say Miss Wines came to the office on more than one occasion, after her work there was finished?"

"Yes."

"Did she see Mr. Sentry on any other occasion than this one of which you have just spoken?"

"No, she never asked to see him."

"Was Mr. Loran in his office on the occasions of her visits?"

"No, never."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because she always asked for Mr. Loran."

"But if she always asked for Mr. Loran, why did she finally see Mr. Sentry?"

"She seemed so anxious to see someone, I suggested that she see him."

"Did she quickly agree?"

"No, I persuaded her."

"You persuaded her to see Mr. Sentry?"

"Yes."

"And now, Miss Randall, about the amount of money in the safe—"

But Mrs. Sentry's attention did



"I Think I'm Going to be Sick! I Feel Sick, Mother, Awfully."

not follow him. It went back to his first questions, with their startling and incredible suggestion of a relationship between the dead girl and Mr. Loran; and her thoughts explored the avenues of possibility thus revealed.

This daily attendance at the trial of your husband for murder was like being hypnotized! You were immune to emotion: you sat bolt upright in a straight chair, with your eyes wide open and your face expressionless, and people hurt you in many ingenious ways, but you felt no pain.

She wondered whether she would be black and blue tomorrow, through all the tomorrows, as she had been the next day after that other occasion so long ago. But meanwhile it was a boon to feel no pain. Not even when they showed the dead girl's coat with the small blackened hole in it where the revolver muzzle had been pressed when it was fired. Not even when they showed the weapon itself, and Phil—poor Phil, so white and brave—had to testify that someone had taken it from his room at home. Then there was a man who testified about something mysterious called "lands," and said that a certain bullet had surely come from this gun. And a hotel clerk from some New Jersey mountain resort swore that two people who registered as Mr. and Mrs. Hume spent three days last August at his hotel, and that Mr. Hume was Mr. Sentry, and that Mrs. Hume was—by the photographs shown him—Miss Wines.

Mrs. Sentry felt no pain even at this. Mary had forewarned her. But she paid curious attention when Mr. Falkran gave the witness a great stack of photographs.

"Will you please select from this collection all the photographs you find of the young lady who stayed with Mr. Hume at your hotel?" he suggested.

The clerk spent a harried fifteen minutes at the task. Twice or thrice he protested, "I don't think I can."

But Falkran urged, "Oh, come now, if you remember the girl who was with Mr. Hume so well that you can recognize her in a photograph which the State showed you, you can surely recognize her in the photographs which I show you."

Mrs. Loran—who was also Jimmy Endle's sister—attended the trial with some regularity, listening with a lively interest to the testimony, sometimes smiling and whispering to her companion of the day. Once when Mrs. Sentry and Phil came along the corridor for the afternoon session, Mrs. Loran stopped them, volubly explaining:

"Of course I know you don't want to stand here with people staring, but I thought you'd like news from Mary. Jimmy's here in town, but naturally Mary didn't come. She's staying on at Palm Beach and Jimmy's going back in two weeks."

She was watching Mrs. Sentry. "Jimmy says Mary's wonderful, so gay, dancing, playing around; says you'd

Mrs. Loran. I'm Fisher's old. Is it true Mr. Loran of buying a ticket to be stared at him furiously away, and he said: "Phil, a guardian! Don't let that stick pins in your nose."

Mrs. Sentry nodded. Dan had been throughout a source of strength, how to reduce all this to an everyday human making them realize that over the world, had been to time pilloried as they lored here. Mrs. Sentry herself that this was small yet it was comfort just making her feel not so alone. She admitted to way home one day. "To begin to like Dan Fisher."

"Sure," Phil assented, good scout.

She asked: "What does Phil? About the trial?"

"Why, he said today the State proves father there that night, their hang together."

She looked at him in quiet hope. Arthur's guilt her so certain that she believe anyone else might. She protested:

"But all that about the bullet, and the gun, at the New Jersey hotel?"

"I know," he assented, says that isn't enough, gesting motive and pre and all that isn't enough they can prove that father there that night, between twelve."

"But he wasn't!" she moment almost believing words. "He was at home past eleven."

Phil, about to speak, then held his tongue. Later cling to this straw of "Sure," he agreed. "So have been down there—"

But next day listening ears, and as though from great distance, Mrs. Sentry Professor Brace testify the night of the murder he Barbara home from Shore. Questions and struck her like dull blows.

"Did you come through?"

"Yes."

"How did you cross the tunnel?"

"Through the tunnel."

"Do you know the location try and Loran's place of?"

"Yes."

"How far is it from the place of the tunnel?"

"A few blocks."

"If you were driving to place of business to the home, what route would you take?"

"Past the mouth of the river."

down to the station, out the river."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Mud of Bentonite Clay Most Versatile Product; Has Medicinal and Other

About the most versatile mud in the world is that made by mixing bentonite clay with water. The solid factor in this mud may have been used in a soap mixture to make your wineglass sparkle, and is often used to settle the wine which fills the glass, says Technology Review. Then, if dinner has disagreed with you, and your inward activities have to be X-rayed, bentonite may be used as a vehicle to carry through your alimentary system the barium sulphate which will be photographed.

Unconsciously following the precept of the Indians, who used bentonite as a soap, the beauty addict may have her face packed with a clay in which bentonite is an important element, and then may treat a blemish with salve that bentonite has thickened.

Bentonite derives its name from the Fort Benton shales of the upper Missouri valley. Product of the weathering of volcanic glass, it appears in minute percentages in all soils, and of which several are in the United States.

At an extreme from these personal uses of the oblong mud are mechanical, industrial, and agricul-

tural applications of bentonite. The simplest of these was the use of a bentonite mud to pack the axles of wagons, a method the pioneers of American colonization were said to have practiced.

In our own more complex trial days, bentonite mud has unusual value in quickly mending defects in concrete construction used to plug cracks when nothing else works. An injection of bentonite mud pumped into an oil well into and plug horizontal fractures by the well hole, preventing the walls and the infiltration of water into the well. A current of bentonite mud, pumped down a tube of an oil-well casing, flush out the cuttings of the process of drilling, bringing them back to the surface through the outer casing.

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