

OUR WEEKLY SERIAL STORY INSTALLMENT

CRUCIBLE

By
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CHAPTER IX—Continued
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Falkran cleared his throat. "Well," he said, "Mr. Sentry stood the cross-examination surprisingly well." And as Dan Fisher moved, the lawyer insisted, smiling: "Of course, for our friends the reporters this was the high spot of the trial, and they made the most of it. But as Mr. Sentry's counsel, I was proud of him."

Mrs. Sentry nodded without speaking. Falkran challenged Dan, "Wasn't that your impression—as a friend of the family?"

Dan started to answer honestly, but he caught Phil's eye with entreaty in it, and said only: "I was too busy taking notes to think of that side of it. Our job is to report the case, not to decide it." He added guardedly, "But I thought Mr. Weldon shook him once or twice."

Falkran said: "I'm glad to have your opinion. Weldon is of course a skillful cross-examiner, makes every possible effect. It is conceivable that some of the jurors may still be undecided; but Mrs. Sentry's testimony tomorrow will turn the scales our way."

Dan protested, "I don't think you should call her."

"I know," Falkran agreed. "You and all her friends have a natural desire to spare her. That is to be expected. And believe me, Dan, I do not insist. But Mrs. Sentry understands that an acquittal may depend upon her testimony; and of course she wishes to do whatever she can for her husband, no matter what the cost to herself."

Mrs. Sentry watched them both, her face expressionless, saying nothing. Phil came to sit on the arm of her chair, his eyes holding Dan's, dreading what Dan might say.

Dan said, "You claim her testimony may acquit him?"

"I have promised her it will."

"What can she say that will help?"

Falkran hesitated. "Well, Dan," he answered at last, "you heard Mr. Sentry's testimony this afternoon. You understand that the only motive the State can suggest was Mr. Sentry's fear of his wife's attitude. But if Mrs. Sentry testifies that he had no cause to be afraid of her, and that he knew it, then that motive disappears."

There was a silence that extended for long minutes. Dan watched Mrs. Sentry. She sat with her head a little bent.

And she looked at them, at Dan and then at Falkran. Dan stared in quick surprise. There was something in her eyes he could not read; something like serenity. "So I must decide," she said quietly. Then to Falkran: "You wish me to testify?"

"Yes."

Her eyes held his for a moment. Then she said, half smiling, looking up at Phil, "Son, a curious thing has happened to me." The room was very still. "Phil, I have suddenly—fallen in love with your father. He's so alone, so helpless. I must help him." She met Falkran's eyes; she said: "I want to do everything I can. Ask me whatever you wish!"

He came leaping to his feet, smiled that great blustering smile of his. "Splendid!" he exclaimed. "I counted on you, counted on your strength and courage. Be easy, Mrs. Sentry. Your testimony will set your husband free."

She rose to face him; but, on her feet, weakness swept her. She leaned on Phil, said to them all: "Forgive me. I am tired. Phil, will you take me upstairs?"

In the morning Falkran did call Mrs. Sentry to the stand. At her name, she rose and walked steadily to the witness box. She was sworn, and Falkran approached her.

He asked simply, "You are Mrs. Arthur Sentry?"

"I am."

"The wife of the defendant?"

"I am."

Falkran turned, he bowed to the District Attorney, he said, "You may inquire."

And the District Attorney said instantly, "No questions."

Falkran smiled triumphantly; but Mrs. Sentry stood dazed and incredulous. Strong for the ordeal she had expected, this deliverance drained all her strength away. Falkran came to lead her to her seat again.

Through the remaining days of the trial, she listened inattentively, even when Mr. Loran, during the State's rebuttal, took the stand. His testimony was brief. He denied any personal relations with Miss Wines; said he never saw her after her work in the office was ended. He testified that on those days in August when she was out of town, he was fishing in the Maine woods; and he testified that on the night she was killed he went to New York on the 12:30 a. m. train, boarding it at about eleven, and going to bed at once in his compartment. His guide in Maine, and the Pullman porter, corroborated his testimony.

The trial sped; the arguments began. At half-past three on Thursday afternoon, the jury retired.

To wait for the verdict, Mrs. Sentry and Phil went to a hotel, took a room. At five, and at seven, Falkran telephoned; and at a quarter of ten, he phoned again to assert that the jury stood ten to two for acquittal.

At eleven, he came himself to say that the jury, still unable to agree, had been locked up for the night.

"So there will be no verdict till morning," he said. "A verdict in less than first degree, or a disagreement, is possible; but I expect acquittal. I will give odds that to-morrow night Mr. Sentry will sleep in his own bed! You can go home and rest easy."

Mrs. Sentry and Dan went down in the elevator, out to where old Eli waited with the limousine, and so came home.

CHAPTER X

Mrs. Sentry woke next morning wearily, from sleep that had brought no repose. While she dressed, she thought: I must hurry, hurry. Perhaps already the jury has decided. I must hurry, hurry to be there. Her breath was short; it was a conscious effort to fill her lungs; and within her body there seemed to be a crawling, writhing knot, as though her nerves were in actual physical motion like the tentacles of an octopus.

She came downstairs bravely; but while they were at breakfast Dan telephoned to urge them not to come to court. "It can't possibly do any good now, you know," he reminded Phil. "The thing is settled, one way or the other."

Phil, returning to the table, repeated this advice. Mrs. Sentry cried instantly: "No, Phil! No. I must be there, must do everything I can."

"Being there can't do any good, mother," he reminded her. "When the jury does come into court again, they will have decided. The sight of you can't change them."

She looked at Phil acutely. "That means you think they will convict him? Find him guilty?"

"Gosh, no!"

"But Phil, if there's any least chance of his acquittal, I must be there. There to—take him in my arms." She colored like a girl.

He put his arm around her. "I'll be there," he promised. "To bring him home. If he can come. If he cannot—then for you to be there would just break you down." And to be miserably with your strength, mother. Keep it to spend when it will do real good."

It may have been two hours before he came home. Mrs. Sentry had waited in a surface calm, consulting with cook about meals be-

fore she went upstairs to sit with Barbara. When she heard the car, she descended, slowly, holding to the stair-rail, walking carefully. Each step was a voluntary action that required to be planned and with the utmost caution carried through.

She met Phil in the front hall, so that his back was to the light and she could not see his face clearly. Nevertheless she saw that he was alone. So no word from him was necessary.

She swayed toward him, and he held her close.

He said in a low tone, evading



She Swayed Toward Him, and He Held Her Close.

the direct statement: "Mr. Falkran wants to see you, to discuss the appeal. I told him to wait, to come in a day or two."

So she knew; and after a moment she shivered suddenly, as a sleeping dog shivers to keep warm, and she felt him stiffen into a frozen rigidity and knew he was afraid for her; so she freed herself, and smiled to reassure him.

"I'm all right, son," she said. "But I shall lie down for a little while. I'd rather be alone just now. You might go sit with Barbara."

He nodded, assenting; and they parted in the upper hall. When he came into Barbara's room, she turned her head on the pillow to look at him, and he thought how thin she was, her eyes lucent, her lips pale; and he thought, almost grateful for this task to do: Barbara needs me. We've left her too much alone. I must be with her now.

And he sat down on her bedside and held her thin fingers tight in his, and felt them cling and tug. She croaked something, some question; and he said:

"Yes, Barb, old girl. And now we've got to—help mother, take care of her. That's our job, yours and mine."

She muttered: "Yes; mother." This was one of those days when she could manage half-formed syllables, could make herself intelligible in brief phrases. Then after a moment she said, in a sudden passion, her voice a husky croak:

"But he didn't do it, Phil!"

Phil nodded automatically, more to content and quiet her than in assent.

He stayed a long time with Barbara; and she lay watching him, holding fast to his hand, her eyes flowing tears, as though tears were balm. He was still with her when Doctor Minton came; and the doctor talked quietly to her for a while, and almost cheerfully.

"You've had a long siege, Barbara," he said. "But now you've turned the corner. You're going to be better right along. Be yourself again soon, won't you?"

Phil went downstairs with the older man, and he asked, "Is she as sick as she looks, Doctor?"

The other said gently, "She was worse yesterday morning than she had been at any time; but she's better today." And he asked simply, "Did you tell her your father was convicted?"

Phil said, "Yes." And he said: "A strange thing—it seemed to make her feel better, to reassure her. But she believes he is innocent, of course."

"Fine!" Doctor Minton agreed. "You stay with her, Phil; and if she shows any inclination to talk, encourage her. Miss Dane has been much with her, hasn't she? And you and your sister are pretty close to one another?"

"Yes, sir."

"Try the clock, this afternoon; and one of you stay with her. If she tries to talk, answer her; get

Eli had neatly clipped the ends and touched them to protect them against damage and returning by the other. The drive he noticed in a corner crocuses just bursting the sod. March was well. Four months till July. In four months, the week of would have come—and gone.

The week of July 11! The phrase slid like a snake through the dulled channels of his mind, walked out toward the garage which the doors stood open, saw the cars there. The old sine which was Eli's pet. The depot wagon which he and Barbara were apt to use. The ster which his father had driven night. The limousine and the ster had low number plates, digits in the one, four in the one of the mild forms of notation in which he knew his took a secret pride.

He went in to look at the ster; and he stared at it with a physical distaste. He made sudden decision to be rid of it, came in from the garden, and started to speak to him and remembered that he would be shouting, because Eli was dead if he shouted, his mother, the house, might hear. Instead, took an envelope from his pocket and wrote on it orders for a man to drive the roadster to country, find a dealer somewhere who would buy it at any price, surrender the number plates, them up for good and all. He signed as he wrote that the plates been renewed since his father drove the car; but the number the same, had been the same year since before he himself born. Get rid of them!

Eli read the instructions, nodded his assent, silent as Phil took the registration, and the report of transfer of ownership in blank, scribbled a note of authority to sell the car. He held his hands together in a deep and turned away, and it did not cur to him till years afterward, looking backward on these months, the moment was a milestone was the first time in his life he had ever made a concrete decision involving definite action, an adult plane and carried it through. He thought of years that his own maturity, from that moment when, without consideration, he took the headship of the family.

He left Eli and went out past tennis court, littered with last year's dead leaves, the remains of a snow still persisting in one corner; and he stood in the little merhouse above the muddy ground on which stained and rotten things persisted, and looked down at his father that night had thrown a gun.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

High School Drivers Take Toll; Traffic Deaths Up 130 Per Cent in Eleven Years

Motor car drivers of high school age are involved in ten times as many fatal accidents, per miles driven, as the driver of forty-five to fifty years, according to an analysis of road accidents published by the American Magazine.

"Furthermore, the high school record has been getting worse," the magazine states. "In the last 11 years there has been a 25 per cent decrease in traffic deaths of children five to nine years old, and only a slight increase in those ten to fourteen. That is, the safety campaigns to teach children to watch out for themselves in the streets are having their effect. But in the ages of fifteen to nineteen, the high school age, there has been in this same period an increase of 130 per cent in traffic deaths. The reason is obvious. Fifteen is about the age when children begin to drive."

Pointing out that this age of greatest danger is also the best age for teaching motor car operation, the article urges wide extension of such work as that now being done by Amos Neyhart, former professor of

industrial management at Pennsylvania State college, who is heading up a national program for teaching high school students to drive. Nearly 200 high schools are now on this plan of instruction, and this summer between 60 and 70 schools will have courses for high school teachers in the technique of teaching automobile operation.

"Ultimately," the article predicts, "a motor car for teaching driving or a fleet of such cars, will be much a recognized part of the equipment of any progressive high school as is today the kitchen equipment in the domestic science course or the tools in the manual training shop, and a driving course will be required before graduation at a high school."

Comedians of Animal World

The only comedians of the animal world are the Australian kookaburras, whose laughter fills the forest with merriment all day. About the size of a crow, the kookaburra is a giant-sized laugh, and is also used in Australia because it eats mice, insects and snakes.