

OUR WEEKLY SERIAL STORY INSTALLMENT

CRUCIBLE

By
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CHAPTER X—Continued

—22—

The District Attorney's words in his closing argument came back to Phil in burning phrases:

"He decided to kill her. How do we know? Because he stole his son's revolver. If he wanted to carry a weapon for any legitimate purpose, he, a man of standing, would have asked for and would have received a permit; he would have bought a modern pistol, compact, easily carried, effective. Instead, knowing his son was away, knowing the absence of the gun would not be detected, knowing it was an old weapon that could not be traced, he chose to use that to commit the murder he had planned. He planned the murder, he arranged a pretext to explain his return to the office that night—the forgotten coffee-pot—in case he encountered someone on the way. He made an assignation with his victim. He met her there, he killed her, he staged a clumsy fake robbery . . ."

Phil's thoughts ran over and over the same words; and Linda suddenly was beside him. He had not heard her come. She said nothing; only took her stand there firmly, her arm through his, her eyes straight ahead.

He said at last, "Funny, but I feel better, now that it's over."

"Soon be spring," she murmured. He exclaimed, surprised: "Queer you should say that. It's just what I was thinking."

"I know! People get to be that way, knowing each other's thoughts, sometimes." She added: "Barbara seems better. But I saw you from the window, so I came down."

He told her what Doctor Minton had said. "And he wants someone to sit with her, talk to her," he explained. "You or me."

"I can't stay for lunch," she confessed. "But I'll come and be with her this afternoon."

Phil and his mother had lunch together, and at first they were silent, but at last she said:

"Phil, I've been meaning to speak to you. There is something we shall have to decide. You and I. You, really." And she explained Mr. Loran's demand for the dissolution of the partnership.

Phil tried to focus his thoughts on this new problem. "Shall we sell?" he suggested; and he said, with a sort of shudder: "I told Eli to sell the roadster—and give up the number plates. I want to get rid of everything."

"I understand, Phil. But—will you want to go back to college in the fall?"

He shook his head. "No. I never want to see the fellows I used to know."

"You must do something, son!"

"Why must I? We've plenty of money."

"Plenty," she agreed. "But—just spending money is not enough to make a life out of. Playing, killing time, making a business out of sport, no man can be content with that. I won't have you do that, Phil."

"I can't go back to college. Oh, I could, but it would mean leaving you alone here." He realized with a faint surprise that the thought of leaving their home was not to be considered. Their roots were here, roots deeply grown. His mother would stay here. "I want to be with you, mother."

"I'm afraid I shall need you," she agreed; and he saw her shiver uncontrollably, and she waited a moment before going on. "Of course," she said, "the first thing is to appeal; to use every possible means to save him. That may take a long time. I don't know much about such things. Mr. Falkran can tell us. But after that is over, I shall need you. I'll try not to be selfish. I hope as long as there are things I must do, I can keep going. But when the time comes that there is no more for me to

do—" She smiled pitifully. "You'll have to pick up the pieces of me and put me back together again."

"I'll be here, mother. But I'll always need you more than you need me."

"But you must have work, Phil. So I think we should buy out Mr. Loran, let you take over down there."

"I don't know anything about the business."

"Good! You will have to work so much the harder. That is what you need." And she said: "Think about it, Phil. You have time. It need not be decided yet a while."

They did not speak again of his father until they left the table. Then, she asked in a low tone: "Phil, what did the Judge—" She hesitated, said at last, "Phil, when?"

He told her, hoarsely, "The week of July 1."

She said quietly: "That seems—very soon." Then she hesitated, turned away from him up the stairs.

Professor Brace came in that afternoon. It was a long time since he had called at the house. Mrs. SENTRY was resting, and Phil, who was sitting with Linda and Barbara, went down to speak to the professor. He had gone out of the courtroom to overtake the other man, the day Brace testified, and as his mother directed had assured the professor that they did not resent his testimony; but Brace said now:

"I ventured to call, Phil. Your assurances the other day . . . And—I must ask about Barbara."

"Doctor Minton says she's better."

"Does she know about my testimony?"

"No. We haven't told her anything much about the trial."

Brace said, half to himself: "I shall have to tell her, when she is better."

Phil protested: "Oh, don't, Mac! Let her forget the whole thing."

Brace shook his head. "I—want everything open and above board between Barbara and me. I think a lot of her, Phil."

Phil nodded awkwardly. "Sure," he agreed. "But that's no reason you have to—rake this all up again. It's all the more reason for letting her forget it if she can."

"I want to—to build a life together for Barbara and me. But not on a foundation of lies and concealments."

"You're too darned—conscientious, or something. You had to do it. You were as helpless as the rest of us. But why not forget it?"

"When can she see me, do you think?"

"Anytime, I suppose. But darn it, Mac, if you're going to get her all worked up—"

"No, I'll wait till she's herself again," the other promised.

When Professor Brace was gone, Phil returned upstairs, told Linda in whispers what the other had said.

She said, vehemently: "Oh, he's always so—positive, and virtuous, isn't he, Phil? I think it's better to—bend a little sometimes; not be so stiffly good all the time."

She stayed for dinner. Mrs. SENTRY went early to bed, and Phil and Linda were with Barbara when the doorbell rang. Phil went down and admitted Dan; and Dan started to speak, then checked himself.

"You all right, Phil?" he asked in a low tone.

"Sure!"

"You look—different, changed."

Phil said gropingly, "Well, something's changed, I guess." He tried to explain. "Did you ever swim in a fast river, Dan? A strong current, with stuff drifting in it? You seem to be standing still, because the drift around you isn't moving. But if you look at the banks, they're racing past. See what I mean?" Dan nodded briefly, and Phil said: "It's been like that, these last months. As though we were all standing still—and yet racing, past

something. Or maybe—toward something."

"And it's—different now?"

"Yes. Now I sort of feel as if I was—running under my own power again. Instead of just—drifting, I'm—going somewhere."

Dan nodded. "I know what you mean. How's Barbara?"

Phil said: "Better, I think. I'm sure she is. She's sure father didn't do it, you know."

Dan made a rueful gesture. "How's your mother?"

"Asleep," Phil said. "Or at least



"He Knew They Had a Conviction Without Crucifying Her."

she's gone to bed. She's sort of—caved in." And he asked: "Dan, why did Falkran put her on the stand and then not ask her anything?"

"He wanted to be able to say to the jury, 'Sentry testified that his wife knew these things. I called Mrs. SENTRY as a witness, gave the District Attorney a chance to ask her whether that was true; but he didn't! Why not? Gentlemen, he didn't dare!' And Dan pointed out, 'You heard him, yourself, in his closing argument!'"

"But why didn't Mr. Flood cross-examine her?"

"He knew they had a conviction without crucifying her."

Phil nodded. "Falkran wants to see mother about an appeal," he said. "I told him to wait a few days."

Dan hesitated. "Phil, if you appeal, you'll only drag this thing out. He hasn't a chance in the end. The State leaned backward to give your father every break."

"I still believe him, believe it was an accident."

Dan did not argue. "Can I see Barbara?" he asked.

So they went upstairs. Barbara's eyes met them in the door, held fast to Dan's. Dan took her limp hand, spoke to her; but Barbara made no sound.

"Shucks," Dan urged cheerfully, "you don't have to keep that up, Barb!" He told her gently: "It's all right. They won't ask you any questions now. You can get your voice back any time."

She turned toward him in a sudden access of vigor, and her lips moved.

"Can't talk?" he asked. She shook her head. "Sure you can, Barb! Nobody's going to make you say anything you don't want to; but you can say anything you want to say." And he urged: "Listen, Phil and your mother have enough on their minds without having to worry about you. You don't want to make it harder for them, do you?" Her face contorted grievously, and her eyes filled. Dan bent close

and tenderly. "There, sweet," he whispered. "It's all right. You're going to be better in the morning, sure as sure. Don't let me bother you, my dear!"

Her hand caught his fingers against her cheek, held his hand pressed there. Her brimming eyes besought him. Then suddenly she was tugging at him, tugging at his arms, trying to lift herself into his arms. And Dan looked at Phil and then at Linda, and Linda saw his streaming brow.

He muttered: "Phil—" Then abruptly he caught Barbara in his arms, bending over her, pressing her close; and her arms were tight about his neck, and her cheek and then her lips pressed his, and Phil and Linda were forgotten; and Linda touched Phil's arm, drew him away. They went out into the hall,

Linda said: "Stay with me."

So, together, these two and outside the house, Linda said: "I'm glad both of you." She added, "I guess you know I and I—"

Dan chuckled reassuredly. "Don't worry, Gabe. Linda."

She asked huskily, "Judge—"

"Yes," he said, in a before imposing sentence. "Usually the Court waits to think the Judge and District Judge thought it would er for them all here. I have to come to court again. He answered her half-attention. "The week of July 1, they appeal."

"Will that do any good?" "Just—delay, I'm afraid the thing out. Falkran is a single good exception, leaned backward to be fair."

"It won't—save him!" his head; and she cried: "hope they don't! Oh, I'm tomorrow!" And she whispered: "I shouldn't say anything him dead!"

He said: "Dying's nothing got a friend, a doctor, and there's nothing to it. You got your eyes and die, that's living that's hard. Mr. SENTRY be out of it, but they'll never of it, Lin." And he said: "rebelling at his own just words: 'Yes they will! I'll get Barbara out of it if I kidnap her.' They walked for a little, and he said: "ought all to go away, change names and take a trip, go the world. Plan to be in somewhere when—by July."

"Oh, no!" Linda protested tears. "No! Don't let them I have to be with Phil."

He squeezed her arm. "Miss Dane, your brother just himself out a pretty good sister, if anybody should up to inquire."

She laughed tremulously then, "Besides, no matter they went, someone would to recognize them."

"I doubt it," he said. "There's nothing so dead as day's story. Inside of a month won't be a line about the SENTRY any paper in town."

They were come to her. "Think so, really?"

"Sure! Newspaper stories of the bumps a baby gets falls downstairs. They hurt, while, but they're forgotten quick."

"When you bring me a paper nothing in it about them. I framed," she promised.

"That's a bet!"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Famed Orange Trees Grace Paris Summer Brought Out From Versailles Winter Ho

Although after the Commune of 1871 destroyed most of the buildings of the Tuileries, the surviving Imperial orangerie just before the beginning of the present century, at the most incredible age of 473 years. The seed from which it sprang sown in 1421 at Pampeluna, wife of Charles III, king of Navarre, of which Pampeluna was the capital.

Later, the little tree was given a queen of Navarre to Anne of France, and it afterward came into the possession of the monarch Francois I. He eventually gave it to Fontainebleau, and called it grand Connetable."

When Louis XIV had his orangerie made, he moved it there, and it the new name of "le Grand Connetable." Neither the fruit of the nor that of those which have come from its famous stock has been known to ripen.

No Witches Burned in U. S. There seems not to be any authentic case of the burning of a witch in the United States. Many, however, were executed by hanging in the Seventeenth century in New England, as witchcraft was a crime.