

# CRUCIBLE

## By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

### THE STORY

**CHAPTER I**—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 she does not know him. It is 11:15 and that he's been playing bridge at the club. Next morning, while Barbara is telling her mother about her adventure, an urgent phone call comes from Mr. Sentry's office after his departure.

**CHAPTER II**—Arriving home in the late afternoon, 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 Nell 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.

**CHAPTER III**—Phil Sentry, son at Yale, disturbed at the possible implications and suspicion of Miss Wines' absence from her room for three days during August, goes home to help. Sentry is arrested and booked for murder, and 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 story. Fisher comes to the door, and because of the discrepancy of time between the slaying and their seeing Sentry on the road.

**CHAPTER IV**—Phil, showing the police over the house, finds his strong box forced 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 but she does not believe him. He tells her he had known of the robbery and murder the night before but failed to call the police. He comes at 12:30. Both Phil and his mother are doubtful of Sentry's innocence, but keep silent, protecting each other.

**CHAPTER V**—Mary takes a letter from Sentry, and tells him she will not see him. She tells him she will not see him. She tells him she will not see him.

**CHAPTER VI**—Fisher, on the criminal law, retained, hopes to see Barbara has been meeting at her grandmother's, tries to use influence to keep the family out of the national news. One shielded Barbara, on the verge of a breakdown. Old Mrs. Sentry plans to see her son. Fisher writes a letter from the office and dies two days before the trial opens.

**CHAPTER VII**—Barbara alone misses the trial, because of a nervous laryngitis. Miss Randall, from the office, tells that Miss Wines always asked for Loran, not Sentry. A clerk from a New Jersey resort swears that Sentry and Miss Wines were together in August, but with difficulty identifies the girl's photograph. A policeman testifies to seeing Sentry's car near the office. Fisher gives his report of the night, and the girl's father, failing to identify any of the photographs, writes a letter from his daughter, asserting her dislike of Sentry.

**CHAPTER VIII**—Sentry, on the stand, admits firing the fatal shot in the dark and by accident, and that he heard the man who posted him running down the stairs and discharged the gun. He denies misconduct against Miss Wines, admitting it was another woman with him in August, and tells of Miss Wines' being refused money by him and being left alone in his office. He says that the drawer containing his duplicate key was open on his return. Court adjourns on his sensational testimony. He says again, Mrs. Sentry says that Loran wants to buy the business.

**CHAPTER IX**—Mrs. Sentry going to see her husband at Falkran's best, realizes her loss for sure. She tells him through the cruel examination, and is advised to miss the afternoon session. Dan Fisher, who has been in the dead-end against her testifying as hopeless. Falkran leaves it to her. She is called to the stand by the district attorney. There are no questions, and the jury retires.

**CHAPTER X**—Dan advises Mrs. Sentry not to go to court to hear the verdict. Phil returns, and they guess conviction. Falkran plans an appeal from the sentence, to be executed early in July, just four months away.

**CHAPTER XI**—Mrs. Sentry sees her husband next day, and seems serene in her confidence of his innocence. Falkran plans an appeal from the sentence, to be executed early in July, just four months away.

And suddenly it was June. In May, July had seemed far away; but now it was just around the corner.

On the third of June, Mr. Falkran telephoned to see whether he could see Phil and Mrs. Sentry that evening. Mrs. Sentry made him come.

Mr. Hare had suggested to Phil long ago that the commutation might save Mr. Sentry. Phil had not mentioned the possibility to his mother, but she told him, on his return from the office that day, that Mr. Falkran was coming in the evening, and wondered why, Phil remembered Mr. Hare's remark months before.

"I expect," he said, "he wants to discuss asking the Governor to commute the sentence to life imprisonment."

Her pupils dilated; her eyes widened. "Oh!" she murmured.

He reflected: "We don't want Barbara here when he comes. I'll ask Linda to take her away some where, on some excuse." And at his

mother's assenting nod he went to the telephone.

Linda was quick to do what he asked. So when at a little after eight Falkran rang the bell, Phil and his mother were alone; and Phil himself went to the door.

"During the trial, I did my full duty as I saw it," Falkran said. "I used every means I could discover to secure at least a disagreement. Regardless of a client's guilt or innocence, he is entitled to every legal protection. If his fate is in a jury's hands, then he has a right to expect that every possible means shall be used to create a doubt of his guilt in the jury's mind. I did all I could."

Mrs. Sentry nodded. "I know," she smiled. "I did all I could too, Mr. Falkran."

"Yes," he agreed. "We all did. Barring the possibility that higher courts might have found some error by the State, Mr. Sentry had every protection. But he didn't want to appeal on technicalities. And the jury believed him guilty."

He hesitated, then went on: "Yet there are grounds for asking mercy for him too. Not a pardon. We cannot hope for that. But a commutation is possible. District Attorney Flood will not oppose it. Of course, he cannot support our petition; but he will stand neutral. Mr. Sentry's character, his long and honorable life, all count in his favor. And—it is always possible that the tragedy might have been an accident, as Mr. Hare testified."

Mrs. Sentry considered for a while, sitting very quietly; so that Phil came to her side and she held his hand while she faced the lawyer.

"What would we do?" she asked then. "What is the procedure?"

"I want you to understand," Falkran explained, "that Mr. Hare agrees with me that an appeal to the Governor is justified. Mr. Flood, as I said, will not oppose it; and I have consulted a number of Mr. Sentry's friends."

And he went on, "The first step would be to have a hearing before the Governor and Council; to present evidence as to Mr. Sentry's life and character, and to call attention to some points in the evidence at the trial—the possibility of accident."

"A public hearing?"

"Yes," he added quickly: "But you would not need to attend that. Only afterward, you would want to make a personal appeal to the Governor."

She passed her hand across her eyes. "When?" she asked, in a whisper.

He said thoughtfully: "I should first lay the groundwork. Perhaps in two or three weeks. Say the third week in June."

Mrs. Sentry rose, clinging for a moment to the arms of her chair, then standing erect. She caught Phil's arm, supporting herself so.

"Very well," she promised. "If you advise it, I will do it."

But when Falkran was gone—she had held fast to Phil, so that the lawyer went alone to the door—she said in a low tone, "Don't leave me, Phil."

"Of course not. I won't."

"I'm all right," she whispered, "as long as I have you and Barbara."

She added, smiling weakly: "At least I think I am. But it will seem strange to me to beg!"

"Father wouldn't want you to, mother!"

"I think I shall be proud to do it," she replied.

They had another letter from Mary; this time from Paris, brief, defiant. She wrote:

Dear Mother: This is just to keep you all in touch with my progressing career. Of course I have occasional news of you, via voice and in the well-known public prints but I haven't broken into the newspapers—yet.

I ran into Jimmy Endle the other day. He's not a bad chap unless you're married to him. Also Gus Loran is here. Miss Loran is treating herself to a Paris divorce. I seem to fascinate Gus. My fatal beauty, no doubt. But of course, Argentine, my pretty little beef baron—did I tell you we were married—'s terribly jealous. Maybe he'll take me home and make me eat pampas and tangoes and things. I don't even know whether you try them or bolt them. Having a fine time. Wish you were here.

Mrs. Sentry read the letter and handed it to Phil; and this time she did not protest when he threw it into the fire.

The days were gone like the fanned pages of a book, so swiftly that it was scarce possible to name them as they passed. Twice or thrice Falkran came to report that the foundations for the appeal to the Governor were being laid. Phil could see his mother muster strength for that ordeal.

Till at last the lawyer telephoned, late one afternoon, spoke to Phil. "Can Mrs. Sentry see the Governor tomorrow?" he inquired. "If she can, I will make the appointment, come to fetch her."

Phil asked dumbly: "What time?" Falkran said: "At two, if that is convenient for both of them. Will that suit her?"

## WPA REDUCTION NOT TO AFFECT DARE VERY MUCH

The State-wide reduction in WPA rolls announced out of Raleigh last week probably will not have much effect on Dare County, according to I. P. Davis, Superintendent of Public Welfare and WPA certifying agent for Dare County.

Beginning between January 1 and January 15, North Carolina is supposed to drop WPA workers at the rate of 1,000 a week for seven weeks, or an average of 70 from the WPA rolls of each county in the State.

However, according to Mr. Davis, the number of Dare County men who will voluntarily leave the WPA rolls in January and February to get ready for the spring fishing should just about offset this county's required reduction of 10 persons per week for seven weeks.

"We should have to cut very few cases in Dare County," said Welfare Superintendent Davis, "and we certainly will not have to cut off anyone who is in dire need."



"Read That, Old Man!"

need not even know. She must stay here. I will want to come home to her, afterward."

Phil had time to nod, and then he saw Dan striding toward them through the hall. "Hullo!" Dan cried, and his eyes were shining.

"Where's Barbara?" he snatched a telegram from his pocket, thrust it into Phil's hands. "Read that, old man!" he cried. "I've been working on it for two months, trying for that or something like it."

The message had been sent, Phil saw, from Cleveland. He read, aloud:

"Salary O. K. Start July 1." "W. E. Robinson."

He looked at Dan. "What is it?" he asked.

"Plenty!" Dan told him exultantly. "It's the city editor's job on the Swift-Towne paper in Cleveland, and a salary to match. Enough to get married on. Where's Barbara?"

"Barbara?" Mrs. Sentry spoke in a whisper.

"Of course!" Dan hesitated. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Sentry. I forgot you didn't know. I've been trying for weeks to land a job somewhere, so I could take her away from here."

"Away?"

"We're going to be married, Mrs. Sentry."

Mrs. Sentry seemed to sway a little. She extended her hand toward Phil, as though for support; but, misunderstanding, he gave her the telegram, and saw her read it dumbly, and saw her clasp her arms tight across her bosom as though to crush down a sickening pain. He turned again to the other man, arguing in an empty fury:

"But Dan—right now—What's the hurry?"

Dan gripped his arm. "Plenty!" he said soberly. "You know it, Phil." He looked at Mrs. Sentry. "You know what I mean. It's almost—July. I've got to get Barbara away before that!"

And when they did not speak, he urged: "Come on, Phil, Mrs. Sentry. I know you're with me! Please!"

Mrs. Sentry smiled. "Yes, Dan," she said. "Barbara's upstairs. Go to her!"

Dan gripped her hand, raced away. Phil looked after him for a moment, not daring to look again toward his mother.

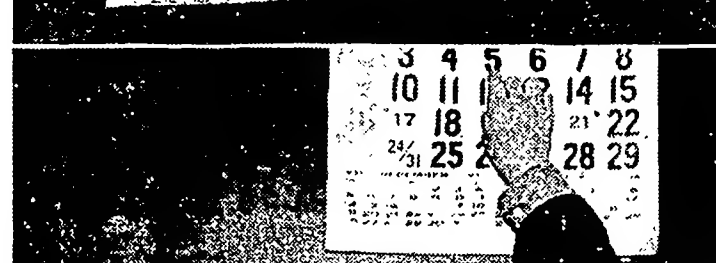
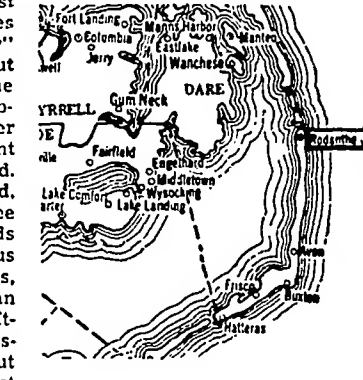
When he did, he saw that she had dropped the telegram, had bent to pick it up; and he saw that she seemed unable to do so. Her arm hung straight down from her shoulder; and her fingers lay with their backs on the floor, two or three inches away from the telegram, her knuckles touching the rug. Her hand was white and bloodless.

He stooped for the yellow paper; and she said, laughing uncertainly: "That's funny, Phil. I was trying to pick up the telegram and I couldn't seem to reach down far enough and then I saw my hand was touching the floor, but I couldn't feel it at all."

Her utterance was hurried; she mumbled the words as though her tongue were thick. One side of her face, Phil saw, was lifeless, sagging as though the flesh were dead upon her bones.

## Lonely North Carolina Town Marks Christmas January 5

RODANTHE, N. C., easternmost town in America, celebrates Christmas twice each year. "New" Christmas comes December 25 but just as regularly on January 5 the inhabitants of this isolated town observe "Old" Christmas, a carry-over from the days before our current calendar was generally accepted. Christmas trees must be imported, for Rodanthe has only one tree (see below), a gnarled oak. But the kids enjoy this plan, because Santa Claus visits them twice. Their parents, fishermen and coastguardsmen on an island that is little more than a shifting sand dune, participate enthusiastically in both celebrations. But around Old Christmas centers most of the tradition.



Bonnie's N. P. A. Tillett, biggest man in the coast area, says that his Santa Claus for Rodanthe is the Old Christmas party. They had to send to the mainland to get red cloth capacious enough for his suit. Each Old Christmas celebration is held in the school building where the only "furriner" is the school teacher.

To the present teacher, a girl from Virginia, Old Christmas is the world's most puzzling custom. But seasoned residents of Hatteras Island don't look at it that way. To them, Old Christmas is no more unusual than the Fourth of July. On their isolated island the event has been celebrated by generation after generation, and will probably continue for generations to come.



Rodanthe children believe in "Old Buck," an ogra with hoods and horns who comes a Old Christmas to punish the naughty boys and girls, just as St. Nicholas rewards the good youngsters. None of the islanders remember how "Old Buck" originated, but he's definitely a part of the celebration.



Old Christmas on Hatteras island, where autos must travel the beach.

## CATHOLIC CHAPEL AT KILL DEVIL HILLS COMPLETE

Construction on the \$5,000 Catholic chapel at Kill Devil Hills, the first such chapel ever erected in Dare County, was completed last week, but the dedication will not take place until the late spring or early in the summer, it was learned this week.

Work was begun on the chapel about two months ago, with Frank Stick as contractor, and the finishing touches were applied to the building last week. The chapel was officially inspected last week end by Bishop Eugene J. McGuinness, D. D., Bishop of Raleigh, and the Rev. Father Michael Carey of Elizabeth City, and was accepted by them at the time. Bishop McGuinness bestowed upon the new chapel the name of the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer.

The church seats 100 people and is built almost entirely of juniper, with an outside covering of Johns Mansville asbestos shingles. In addition to the chapel itself, there is provided living quarters for a priest, that is, a room and bath complete in all details. Plans for the building were drawn by Professor Mekelsie, professor of architecture at the University of Virginia.

The idea of erecting a chapel in the Kitty Hawk-Nags Head resort area for the convenience of Catholic visitors who come to Dare County's beaches and points of historical interest each summer is primarily the brain-child of Mrs. Harry Lawrence of New Bern, N. C., who in turn convinced the Reverend Michael A. Irwin, pastor of the Catholic church in New Bern, to take the matter up with the Most Reverend William J. Hafey, D. D., former Bishop of the Diocese of Raleigh and now Bishop of Scranton, and with Father Carey, pastor of Saint Elizabeth's Catholic Church in Elizabeth City.

A few months before Bishop Hafey's transfer to Scranton, he decided to build a chapel in the Kitty Hawk Beach area, and Mrs. Lawrence promptly donated a lot on the beach highway almost directly in front of Kill Devil Hills. But before work could be started the bishop was transferred and the matter was held in abeyance awaiting the appointment of a new bishop. When Bishop McGuinness went to Raleigh, he immediately approved of the project, and late last summer orders were issued to erect the chapel.

Through the efforts of Father Carey, a donor in the North Carolina diocese has contributed \$3,000 toward the expense of building and furnishing the chapel. However, the church, completely furnished, cost slightly more than \$5,000, which leaves \$2,000 to be raised. This will probably be raised among the Catholics in this section of the State.

The new chapel is a part of the parish of Elizabeth City, and Father Carey will conduct the services there; that is, he will conduct Mass at both churches each Sunday during the summer months.

On the day of the dedication, or any day thereafter when the building is open, the public will be welcome to visit and inspect the chapel.

In a letter to this newspaper, Father Carey says: "We are most grateful to Mr. Frank Stick for the fine spirit he has shown. He has not only endeavored to build a fine chapel, but a building which may in the future serve to foster the erection of better edifices on the beach."

## HYDE COUNTY BAPTISTS EAGER TO BUILD CHURCH

Baptists of the Sladesville section of Hyde County have sent out an appeal for donations of money or building materials to help them build a house of worship for their denomination in that community.

For several years the Baptists of Sladesville have held their services at the schoolhouse and in the homes of members, but now they are anxious to have a church building they can call their own. Hence their appeal for donations.

Contributions should be sent to the "Hyde County Messenger" at Fairfield, N. C.

Teacher—Johnny you've misspelled most of the words in your paper.  
Johnnie—Yes ma'am; I'm going to be a dialect writer.

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