

CRUCIBLE

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By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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 morning, while Barbara is telling her mother about her adventure, an urgent phone call comes from Mr. Sentry's office after his departure. Arriving home in the late afternoon, Sentry reports his office has been robbed and a Miss Wines, former temporary employee, killed.

CHAPTER II—Continued

"Not much here!" Mr. Sentry said and then: "The police think she was one of the robbers. They're looking for a young Italian who has been paying her some attention; a wild youngster whose father is one of our customers. They found a key in her pocketbook that fits the lock on the back door." He spoke to Ray again. "There are back stairs," he said. "Mr. Loran and I use them on Sundays or when the place isn't open for business. This back door admits to the stairs and our offices. She had this key."

Mrs. Sentry realized that Arthur somehow found comfort in thus detailing the day's events; and she felt a dry scorn at Neil Ray's obvious desire to escape. "Afraid of being compromised," she thought; and she thought defiantly that a good many people would be maliciously pleased because the old firm of Sentry and Loran was thus involved in sudden sensational publicity.

Ray had nodded uneasily, and Mr. Sentry went on: "She must have remembered the combination of the safe. It's just an old iron box, bought in my father's time. We never had enough cash on hand to need a real one; and a safe-cracker could have opened this easily enough. But it was opened last night by someone who knew the combination. She probably learned it last summer when she worked for us."

He hesitated, added then, "The police seem to think she let this fellow in, opened the door for him, and opened the safe, and then for some reason they quarreled and he shot her."

Mary said: "It sounds like the sort of ruthless, reasonable things a cocaine addict might do. Don't you think so, Neil?"

Ray did not answer. Mrs. Sentry said, "Don't be so medical, Mary!" She thought: Mary is playing a part! Pretending! I wonder why. And she added: "The office telephoned, Arthur, just after you left this morning. I suppose it was about this?"

"Yes," he assented. "Miss Randall found her, when she got there at eight o'clock."

Mrs. Sentry wondered, shivering in spite of herself, whether any of the women at the Furness luncheon had known; wondered whether they had been watching her to see how she took it.

"It must have been just a few minutes past when they phoned," she said. "Didn't anyone hear the shot?"

Mr. Sentry shook his head. "No. Or at least they haven't found anyone yet who did," he amended. "You see, she was in the hall on the third floor. The hall has no windows, and there's a brick wall between it and the next building, and if the office doors happened to be closed—" He added, "And of course there aren't many people around on the streets down there till early morning."

Mary said: "The poor girl! I hope they get the man. Father, did she have any family?"

"Not in Boston. She came from Dennis; but she'd been living in a room out in Somerville, in a private home, where the husband was out of a job so they had to take in boarders. She'd had work at odd times, a day here, a week there, filling in; but no steady job. The police say she'd been running around with this young Italian; and he was missing today. His father claims he's up in Maine buying cider apples, but they haven't located him. And—apparently there were other men with whom she was intimate, too."

He shook his head, poured another cocktail, said, as though thinking aloud: "I suppose she was hard up, and desperate. If we'd had any idea, we might have made a place for her, given her something to do. That's the tragic thing about living in a city. Terrible things happen all around you, perhaps even to people you know; and till they happen, you never even suspect. People are all actors, aren't they? They wear a mask, put up a good front, pretend that everything's all right—till suddenly everything is all wrong!"

"No need to make speeches, Arthur!" Mrs. Sentry commented dryly.

"It has disturbed me a lot," he confessed.

Mrs. Sentry said: "Nonsense! It doesn't concern us! It happened in

your office, of course; but it might as well have happened anywhere. It doesn't concern us at all!" She was speaking more to herself than to him. "We know no more about it than anyone else," she declared, shaping for herself the attitude she would present like an armor to their friends.

He nodded, said no more. Doctor Ray moved toward Mrs. Sentry to say good-by. But before he could speak there were voices in the hall, and Mrs. Sentry recognized Barbara's.

Then Barbara and Linda Dane appeared in the wide doorway. Barbara had an afternoon paper in her hand.

When the sempstress was done with her that morning, Barbara went home with Linda Dane for luncheon. These two and Phil Sentry—Mary, the older sister, had always held herself aloof from their cheerful exuberance—had since childhood been much together; and now that Phil was at Yale, Barbara and Linda were devoted. They went after lunch, in Linda's car, to a moving picture theater; and later



"I Hope They Get the Man. Father, Did She Have a Family?"

they met Bill Cates and Rod Hepburn at the Ritz for tea.

When they came out on Newbury Street afterward, screaming newsboys pushed extras in their faces. Barbara saw a headline:

PRETTY TYPIST SLAIN

One of the boys bawled: "Produce House Murder! Read all about it!" And Bill Cates looked at the paper which the boy held, and said softly, in a startled tone, "Hullo!" He bought a paper, folded it in his hand, said: "Barbara, Linda, come along. Let's get out of this."

They followed him toward Linda's car, and Barbara asked gaily, "What is it, Rod? Why the big mystery?"

But he did not laugh. He opened the paper again and looked at it, and they all looked over his shoulder; and Barbara as she read felt something inside her body contract into a crawling, shuddering knot. She thought she was choking, and her eyes ached; and Linda's hand was tight in sympathy and reassurance on her arm, and Bill said, "Gosh, that's rotten!"

Barbara when she spoke did not recognize her own voice. She said, "Give it to me, Bill." She took the paper, read the unbelievable lines again.

"Steady, Barb!" Linda whispered. "It's all right."

Barbara was husky. "I've got to go home, Linda. Mother will need me. She'll be wild. Can we, please?"

"Of course. Here's the car."

Bill and Rod helped them in. Bill said lamely: "Don't let it get you, Barb. Just the damned tabloids, making a sensation out of nothing!"

Rod said, "Keep smiling, Barb."

"Of course," she told them. "Thanks for a lovely tea. See you soon." The car was moving. "Good-by!"

On the way home, Linda drove and watched the traffic, and Barbara read the story in the paper, reciting to Linda the essentials. But she was cold with terror at her own thoughts. When she and Professor Brace emerged from the Tunnel last night, her father had passed them in his car, coming from the direction of the office. The dead girl had been found in the office this morning. Killed when? She could find in the paper no answer to that question, and her eyes blurred so that she could not read.

Linda said: "Don't worry, Barb. It just happened to happen there! It might have happened anywhere."

"Mother will be just sick!" Barbara whispered. "She's so proud, Linda! And she hates newspapers!"

"They'll forget all about it in a day or two."

"And father, too!" Barbara shivered uncontrollably. "Golly, Linda, I'm scared."

"Bless you, there's nothing to be afraid of!"

Barbara nodded. "Of course not! I'm not afraid. It's just—upsetting. I'll have to cheer them up at home. They'll be pretty low! Linda, come in with me when we get there. We'll have to put on an act, make them laugh somehow, make them see the funny side—"

"Steady, Barb! You're trembling!"

"I can't help it. And my teeth keep chattering!"

"You poor kid!"

"For Heaven's sake don't sympathize with me or I'll bawl! I've got to laugh or I'll scream, Linda. I am scared, I guess! Golly, I wish Phil was home."

"He'll come when he sees the papers. But Barb, it's nothing. A week from now everyone will have forgotten it. Of course it's pretty tough right now, though." And Linda urged: "Throw that paper away, Barb. Don't look at it any more." Barbara began to cry without a sound, sitting bolt upright, her eyes

exciting thing? We came out of the Ritz with Bill Cates and Rod Hepburn and there were two newsboys just screaming and pushing papers into our faces, and Rod saw your name in one of the headlines, father. So we bought the paper. I think it's perfectly exciting. Did you know her? Is she as pretty as her pictures? I love murders, they're so gruesome! Think of having one right in the family! Look! The headlines aloud: "Pretty typist slain. Police seek missing lover of dead girl. Robbery and murder—"

Her mother said sharply: "Barbara! After all, it's not 'right in the family!'"

"You know what I mean, mother!" Barbara protested. "I mean we're—well, probably we'll all be witnesses at the trial. I know I'll be scared to death. I wonder if he's good-looking. Father, did you ever see him? This Italian?" She came to sit on the arm of his chair. "You don't need to pretend you're all so calm. I'll bet you're as excited as I am, really."

No one spoke for a moment. Then Neil Ray said uncomfortably, "I really must go."

He rose; and Linda cried as though relieved: "Heavens, it's after six o'clock! So must I!"

Mary went with Doctor Ray into the hall. Barbara looked beseechingly at Linda; but Linda shook her head, so Barbara and Linda followed the others. Mrs. Sentry and her husband were left alone.

He twirled the cocktail glass in his hand, looking at it fixedly, not meeting Mrs. Sentry's eyes. She heard the good-bys at the door; heard Mary and Barbara hesitate, and whisper, and start upstairs. Then she heard Mary say in a low, indignant tone: "You're outrageous, Barbara! This isn't a joke!"

"I know," Barbara agreed, softly. "But you all looked so glum! I tried to put on an act, cheer you up—"

Their voices trailed away. Mrs. Sentry thought that was like Barbara, to seek to make a jest out of this. And in very poor taste, she decided. She said to her husband, "Arthur, we must just ignore this!"

"I don't know why it should hit me so hard," he confessed. "But—she looked so little and pitiful, lying there. And of course there were police, and photographers, and reporters around all day. Gus is in New York, so it all fell on me. It wore me down."

"In New York? Mary's going there to dinner tonight."

"He went over yesterday. Didn't expect to be back till Sunday."

Oscar came to say that dinner was served, and Mrs. Sentry remembered that an afternoon paper was delivered to the kitchen, so the servants already knew; and everyone would know, either tonight or in the morning. All their friends...

She said quietly: "Will you call the girls, Oscar? They're upstairs!" He disappeared, and she asked her husband, "Are you ready, Arthur?"

"I'll wash my hands," he decided. She had not, since returning from hearing Sarah Glen, had time to order her hair; and she went to do so, and she thought she and Arthur might go down to their summer home in York Harbor in the morning, and stay till this sensation died.

But it would be better not to seem to run away...

Mary sat with them while they dined, waiting for Jimmy Endle to call for her. She proposed making excuses, staying at home; but Mrs. Sentry said: "Of course not, Mary! After all, this doesn't touch us! Certainly not any more than it does Mr. and Mrs. Loran, and they're giving the dinner."

(TO BE CONTINUED)

Paul Bunyan's Ry. Station Discovered by Small Boy on His Visit to London

The sort of railway station that only Paul Bunyan could have built was described recently by a Bridgnorth small boy who visited London and wrote about it to his envious smaller brother at home, according to a Bridgnorth, England, correspondent in the Philadelphia Inquirer. Written in all seriousness, the letter, which came into the possession of C. N. Turner, of the Associated British and Irish railways, follows:

"The sight of Paddington station is really beyond description. The roof is practically invisible, being 2,500 feet above the platforms, airplanes circling beneath it all day. The roof is made of glass and requires 5,000 men to clean it once weekly in an airship.

"There are so many platforms that it is totally impossible to count them—the length of them is quite five miles. There are motor buses to take passengers from one end of a platform to the other; each bus holds 3,000 people.

"The trains are colossal; each train consists of 4,000 coaches and requires 20 engines to pull it. The trains are of the corridor type and

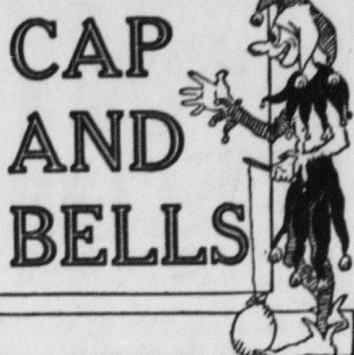
are equipped with motorcycles to convey passengers to lavatories and dining saloons.

"Each engine is 50,000-horsepower and requires 50 men to stoke it. It is necessary to have motor lorries in each cabin to convey the coal from tender to firebox.

"There is a refreshment room at Paddington station which is seven times the length of Bridgnorth High street and four times as wide.

"The station master is as big as St. Leonard's church, Bridgnorth, the biggest man in the world. One cannot fail to hear him coming, as his boots are as big as the North Gate. He walks over the trains without any difficulty whatsoever."

Wild and Domestic Turkeys
It's not such a far cry from wild to domestic turkeys. Spanish conquerors found the first turkeys, closely related to the wild birds, in Mexico. They took turkeys back to Europe around 1530. In 90 years, by the time the Pilgrims came to America, turkeys were common in England. The birds were probably named for their cry of "turk, turk, turk."



QUITE TRUE

The professor had been lecturing the class on poisons, and after discussing various deadly substances, says London Answers magazine, he asked the class to name a few more. At once one student put up his hand. "Well?" said the professor. "Aviation, sir."

The professor stared. "Come, come!" he exclaimed. "This is no time for hilarity. What do you mean?"

The reply was completely unexpected: "Why, sir, one drop will kill."

BY KNOTS, MAYBE



"Why doesn't the water leave the shore?"

"Probably because it's tide there."

Even Worse

A woman rushed out of a house shouting "Fire!" A passer-by started to run to the fire alarm, while another dashed into the hall and, being unable to see or smell smoke, says Stray Stories magazine, turned to the excited woman and asked, "Where's the fire?"

"I didn't mean fire! I meant murder!"

A policeman arrived at that moment and demanded to know who had been murdered.

"O, I didn't really mean murder," wailed the hysterical woman, "but the biggest rat you ever set eyes on ran across the kitchen just now."

A Banker

"What's the matter, sonny?" said a kindly faced gentleman to an urchin on the street. "You must be very poor to wear such shoes as those this kind of weather. Have you any father?"

"Well, I should say I have."

"What does he do?"

"He's a banker, he is."

"A banker!"

"Yes, sir. He's the feller that piled the snow on this here sidewalk."

CAN'T FOOL HIM



"This furniture store ad says: 'Let us feather your nest.'"

"Don't they know feather beds are no longer used?"

Explained

Husband—How much did you pay for that new hat?

Wife—Nothing.

Husband—How did you get it for nothing?

Wife—I told the milliner to send the bill to you.

Financial Note

Husband—I've told you before that it is economically unsound to spend your money before you get it.

Wife—I don't know. If you don't get it—at least you've got something for your money.

Ferry Good Answer

"I believe the Albany boat leaves this pier, does it not?"

"Leaves it every trip, ma'am. Never knew it to take the dock up the river yet."

A Matter of Choice

Golfer (who had just gone around in 112)—Well, how do you like my game?

Caddie—I suppose it's all right, but I still prefer golf.

Slow Time

Tom (excitedly)—Say, Jerry, your watch is gone.

Jerry (feeling leisurely in his pocket)—Well, no matter. It can't go long enough to get far away.

Or Jump Ball

Criminal (sentenced to the gal-lows)—Warden, I'd like to have some exercise.

Warden—What kind of exercise do you want?

Criminal (grinning)—I want to skip the rope.

Good Job

Jerry—What does your uncle do?

Asparagus—He's an exporter.

Jerry—What kind of an exporter?

Asparagus—He just done got fired by the Pullman company.

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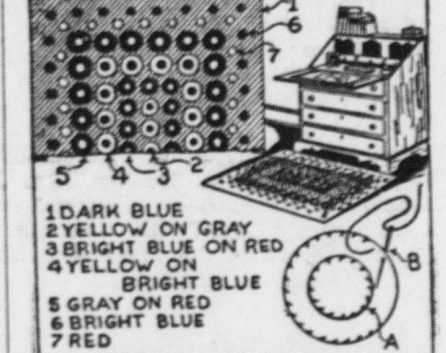
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Rug From Old Coat And Scraps of Felt

By RUTH WYETH SPEARS

THE directions for making the rug in my book—SEWING for the Home Decorator, have brought many letters from readers describing rugs that are new to me and very interesting. The reader who shares with us this idea for using pieces of heavy woolen and scraps of felt, tacked her rug to the side of the house and took a snapshot of it which she sent me.

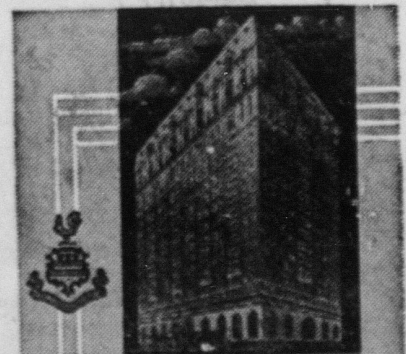
The finished rug is 34 by 23 inches. Half of it is shown here at the upper left. The foundation



(1) is made of the back width of a very heavy old coat. An allowance was made for a hem to add weight to the edge. The foundation may be pieced if a large section of heavy cloth is not available or felt purchased by the yard may be used for it.

Next, circles of felt in two colors, cut from old hats and discarded school pennants, are sewn together with heavy black thread as at A. These are then sewn in place as at B beginning at the center of the foundation. The large circles in the three center rows are two inches in diameter. Those in the next two rows are 2½ inches. All the small circles are one inch.

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