

# CRUCIBLE

By BEN AMES WILLIAMS

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CHAPTER XIV—Continued  
—29—

In the middle of the first week at York, business called Phil back to town; and Linda of course came with him. That night at home, her father, watching her, discovering her increasing distress, spoke doubtfully.

"I know how you love Phil, Lin," he said. "Your mother and I understand. But—we hate to see your life broken by it. If he feels he must be with his mother—"

"I'll wait," she said. He shook his head. "That isn't fair," he urged. "Not fair to yourself—or to us, Lin. We've been sympathetic, but—we want you to be happy, some day. Please."

"I'd rather be unhappy, loving Phil, even if I never can have him." "It isn't even fair to Phil," he insisted; and Linda cried, her self-control for a moment cracking:

"Oh, be still! What do I care what's fair? There's no fairness in it, anyway. Fair? Was it fair for this to happen to Phil? To all of them? Is it fair to me that I can't have him now?"

And then, suddenly contrite, seeing his sorrow, she was in his arms, weeping. "Oh father, father, what am I going to do?"

He held her close. "There, Lin!" he told her. "Sorry. I didn't mean to make it harder. Whatever you do, we're standing by."

"So am I," she whispered. "So am I. But I'm awful sick of it. It's so long, long, long—"

Yet with Phil in the office next morning she managed as always to be steady, reassuring, calm. While he dictated, his eyes rested inattentively on her head, bowed above her notebook; but his thoughts were on his dictation, till as the last letter was done he stopped in mid-sentence, staring at the hair above her brow.

She looked up inquiringly, and he finished the letter; but when she had gone to her typewriter and he was alone, he was troubled and full of a deep, protective concern. Unmistakably, in the dark masses of Linda's hair, there were threads of gray.

He thought, incredulously, that she was no older than Barbara Twenty-one? Twenty-two? She had been, through these months, so composed that it had not occurred to him to think of her as suffering, weary and torn and tired from giving herself without stint so long. She must rest, he decided, must give up the work here; and he considered how to tell her so. When a little after noon, in her car, they started for York again, he began to make an opening for this suggestion.

"You know, Lin," he said, "you've carried me through all this. I don't know what I'd have done without you to talk to. It has helped a lot, just—worrying out loud to you."

If there was bitterness in her smile he did not see it. "Of course," she said. "That's what I'm here for, isn't it, Phil? At least I can do that much for you."

He said, half-smiling: "You keep me going, and I keep mother going. That's what it amounts to."

Her glance flashed toward him almost angrily. "You enjoy feeling that you're indispensable to her, don't you?" Her tone was a challenge.

"I—suppose so," he admitted. "At least it's a job to do."

"If she told you you were just a nuisance, you'd probably be angry, or hurt."

"Yes, probably."

"You know," she said resentfully. "I think that's often the way. We hang on and hang on, telling ourselves we're important, when as a matter of fact we're just—boring people. I'm not at all sure that we couldn't help more by taking care of ourselves, letting other people go their own road."

He smiled. "You can't mean I've bothered mother?"

"Well, no one can learn to walk till they get rid of their crutch, Phil." Her tone was gentle now, yet she said: "You've been her crutch. It's about time she learned to walk alone."

"I couldn't leave her, Linda!"

"Oh, I suppose not," she assented briefly. They were at the moment stalled in traffic. When now the green light released them, she meshed the gears with a clashing vehemence that was somehow eloquent, and let in the clutch so sharply that the car leaped jerkily ahead. He said, trying to laugh:

"Whoa! Trying to break our necks?"

"Sorry!" But she did not sound sorry; and she spoke in a sharp decision. "Phil, you'd better tell Miss Randall to find you a new stenographer. I'll stay till she gets someone; but then I'm through."

He had meant, a while ago, to tell her just this; to tell her that he could not let her any longer sacrifice her youth and her happiness to him; to tell her that she must leave

him. But now at her word he felt a deep hurt and loss.

"Had enough?" he asked in level tones.

"I'm tired, too tired to keep it up. I may go abroad, anywhere."

"Well, you're wise," he agreed carefully. "Summer's a hot, hard time. But of course, I'll miss you!"

"You'll find somebody easily enough."

"Oh yes, don't worry, Lin. We'll get along."

"People do, don't they?"

"Yes. Yes, somehow."

She laughed mirthlessly. "I've been—flattering myself persuading myself you couldn't do without me."

"Well, you've helped a lot, Lin. Probably I won't realize how much till I have to—go it alone."

"Oh, you'll get used to it! And—you'll never learn to walk till you throw away your crutch. I'm tired of being a crutch, anyway."

They were clear of the worst traffic, came to the straight reaches of the Turnpike, sped a while in silence.

"See here, Lin," he protested at

last. "You—sound bitter. 'Mad. That's not like you.' Her lips twisted; he thought they quivered, too, and there was a thickness in her tones.

"Why shouldn't I be bitter, and mad?" she demanded; and then she said: "Oh, I know I've no one to blame but myself!" She stepped on the throttle viciously; the car leaped ahead. "Goodness knows you didn't encourage me! But like a fool I kept hoping—"

"You're hitting sixty, Lin!"

"I want to hit sixty," she retorted. "I want to hit seventy, eighty!"

The car was racing.

"Stop it, Lin!" he insisted. "Slow down." And he said, "I'll cut the switch, unless you do."

"Oh, all right." She dropped to a fifty that by comparison seemed like crawling; and she said:

"I've hung on, and hung on, hoping some day you'd want me so bad you'd forget your father, and your mother, and how much she needed you, and everything. I guess I was a fool, that's all. Your mother doesn't really need you, and Barbara doesn't. Nobody needs you but me—"

Her voice broke. "I need you awfully, Phil," she pleaded. "Can't you see? And you need me."

He said, staring straight ahead: "I love you, Lin, God knows. But—it isn't only that mother needs me. It's—that nobody—that I can't marry anybody."

She drove on, and he watched the road, and the road sped to meet them mile on mile. Mile on mile, and she was an automaton, like one frozen, at the wheel; and his eyes were bleak on emptiness; and the road raced toward them like a ribbon, dove beneath them, so was gone.

He watched the traffic light shine green half a mile ahead; saw it yellow and then red as they drew near. They were close. They were upon it! He cried in quick alarm:

"Lin! Red light!"

Her brakes bit—just in time. They slewed and swerved and skidded to a stop with screaming tires; and a car slid across in front of them with bare inches to spare. The driver bawled something, furiously, and was gone.

The lights changed. Linda, still in that stony silence, meshed her gears and crossed the intersection. She picked up speed; and then Phil cried suddenly:

"Stop, Lin! Slow down!"

She obeyed, staring at him.

"What's the matter?"

Phil laughed, and there was a

deep intoxication in his tones. He said, like one awakening, "Why—I must be crazy, Lin!"

"Crazy? Phil, what do you—"

"Sure, crazy! Why, I honestly thought, Lin, that I could let you go!"

Her eyes, probing his, quickened to look out the window so that she might not see. "Be nice to see Barb again," he remarked. "And Dan."

She chuckled. "I have a few things to say to Dan!"

"What about?"

"I haven't told you," she confessed, "but Barbara is going to have a baby. She wrote me last week. That's why I decided to go out to Cleveland."

"But—that's great, mother!" Phil cried. "Is she all right?"

"Of course she's all right! Why shouldn't she be? But Dan's salary is ridiculously inadequate. They can't afford a baby."

He grinned. "Lots of people do, on less!"

"Lots of people do lots of things I don't expect Barbara to have to do."

Phil said cheerfully, "You know,

with them, smiling, calling words of farewell. Her eyes held his as the train slid away.

"Well," said Mrs. Sentry then, "it's nice to have you to myself for a while. Of course Linda's sweet; but she's with us so much."

Phil colored, and pretended to look out of the window so that she might not see. "Be nice to see Barb again," he remarked. "And Dan."

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Mrs. Sentry what lay between them. Linda, her point won, yielded to his desire to delay the disclosure for a while.

The day of their departure for Cleveland, Phil was in the office in the forenoon, said good-by to Linda there, then went home to finish his packing and go directly from the house to the afternoon train. When old Eli drove him and his mother to the Trinity Place station, Phil was surprised to find Linda waiting on the platform.

"Just some papers for you to look over while you're away, Phil," she explained; and she handed him a long envelope, unsealed. He saw that she had written on the outside: "Open this when you are alone."

And she explained: "Routine things. Don't bother with them now."

So Phil thrust the envelope into his pocket, and they all stayed talking together till the train pulled in. Mrs. Sentry went first up the steps, and she did not look back, so Phil was able to kiss Linda before he followed his mother aboard. He saw through the windows Linda move along beside the car, keeping pace

you're secretly hoping she'll need you to take care of her for a while."

"Don't be absurd! My place is with you!"

"Oh, I'd get along," he said, and wished to say, "You know, Linda and I—"

But his mother's eyes swung shrewdly toward him before he could speak, and his courage failed; and she smiled at nothing and said:

"Russian Bank, Phil? It helps pass the time."

It was hours later and he was in his berth, undressed and about to turn out his light, when he remembered that envelope Linda had given him, still in the pocket of his coat on the hanger here beside him. He reached up and got it and drew out the contents. There was a note from Linda herself:

Dear—

Take all my love with you, Phil. This letter came to the office addressed to you, after you left today. It's from Mary. So I didn't open it. Since it's addressed to you, I thought perhaps she didn't want your mother to know about it. That's why I was so mysterious.

And my dearest love to my dearest. Come back soon.

Lin.

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## Bumble Bee Colony May Number Up to 300 or 400; Put in Very Busy Summer

The bumble, or humble, bee is recognized by its large, thick hairy body and long bass hum. The colonies are not numerous compared with those of wasps, or the stingless or the honey bee. A populous colony may number from 300 to 400 individuals, according to a writer in the Indianapolis News. The proportions of sexes and castes of some species have been found to be, in a colony of 120, 25 females, 38 males and 59 workers. The roundish oval cells differ in size and have no exact arrangement. Besides the cells containing the young, the old discarded ones are made to serve as honey tubs or pollen tubs.

The queen bee awakens in early spring from her winter's sleep under the leaves or moss, or in deserted nests, and selects a nesting place, generally in an abandoned nest of a field mouse, or beneath a stump or sod, and immediately collects a small amount of pollen mixed with honey, and in this deposits from seven to fourteen eggs, gradually adding to the pollen mass until the first brood is hatched. As soon as food enough has been collected, she lays the eggs for the second brood. As soon as the larvae are capable

of motion and begin feeding, they eat the pollen by which they are surrounded, and gradually separating, push their way in various directions. When they have attained their full size they spin a silken wall about them, which is strengthened by the old bees covering it with a thin layer of wax. When the larvae reach the pupa stage, at which time they remain inactive until their development, they cut their way out and are ready to assume their duties.

The first brood that comes forth usually is composed of workers; about the middle of the summer eggs are deposited which produce both small females and males. All eggs laid after the last of July produce the large females or queens. On the approach of winter, all except the queens, of which there are several in each nest, die.

### Have Odd Grain Bin

Indians of southern Mexico have a unique bin for storing shelled corn against weather and the depredations of the harvester ant. It is built in the shape of a cup and saucer, with a thatched roof, and the saucer part is filled with water.



### WORDY CONDUCTOR

Conductor (on train)—Fare! The passenger paid no attention to the conductor's demand. Conductor—Fare, please. Still the passenger was oblivious, according to the Montreal Star. Conductor—By the ejaculatory term "Fare!" I imply no reference to the state of the weather, not even to the kind of service vouchsafed by this philanthropic company. I merely alluded, in a manner perhaps lacking in delicacy, but not in conciseness, to the monetary obligation incurred by your presence in this car, and suggest that you liquidate.

### Wholesale Lots

King Solomon once attended the opening night of a musical comedy and enjoyed himself immensely. The producer hurried up to him after the show and asked: "What did you think of the chorus your Majesty?" "Great," replied the potentate, "I like to date up the first three rows some evening."

### IN THAT FAMILY



"Those pugilists are birds." "Right—they're both feather-weights."

### Guilty Conscience

A meek little man was in court for a minor offense. "Were you ever in trouble before?" asked the judge. "Well—er—er," was the hesitating response, "I kept a library book too long once and was fined six cents."

### Two Troublesome Cases

Husband—You will never succeed in making that dog obey you. Wife—Nonsense. It is only a matter of patience. I had a lot of trouble with you at first.—Philadelphia Bulletin.

### A Good Show

She—Are they putting that poor man out for laughing? He—No. The manager sent for him to find out what he was laughing at.

### Transatlantic

Guide in Trafalgar square—Have you seen Nelson's column? American Visitor—No, what paper does he write for?

### Tune Changed

Lieutenant (roaring with rage)—Who told you to put flowers on the table? Gob—The executive officer, sir. Lieutenant—Pretty, aren't they?

### Grand Canyon

Photographer—Do you want a large or a small picture? Sissy-boy—A small one. Photographer—Then close your mouth.

### Borrowers

Smith—And do the people next door borrow much from you? Jones—Borrow? Why, I feel more at home in their house than my own.

### Taking no Chances

Boss—I want a reliable chauffeur who takes no risks. Applicant—I'm your man, sir, provided I can have my pay in advance.

### THE OFFENSE



Magistrate—Well, what have you been arrested for—shooting birds? Sambo—No, sah, judge, your honor, I've 'rested feh on 'I jes' shootin' a little crap.

### Something to It

"You wouldn't care for a man unless you could look up to him." "Yes," answered Miss Cayenne, "but I don't want to be obliged to look up too far. Who wants to feel like a midget?"—Washington Star.

### The Cord Attached

First tramp—The lady said she'd give me a meal, but there was a cord attached. Second—You mean a string. First—No, I mean a cord—a cord of wood!

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### SAFETY TALKS

Like the Chicken, We— IT BEGINS to look as though maybe we humans are second cousins to the chickens when it comes to crossing the road. Of 7,250 pedestrians killed during 1937 in traffic accidents that occurred in cities, says the National Safety Council, in its 1938 edition of "Accident Facts," 85 per cent were struck while crossing the road. About 2,900 persons were injured fatally while crossing a street somewhere BETWEEN intersections. Approximately 3,260 met their death at intersections. Either they were crossing the intersection with the traffic signal, against the signal, diagonally, or were crossing an intersection at which there was no traffic signal. Deadly and tragic work at the crossroads!

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Misplaced Pride. To be proud of learning is the greatest ignorance.—Jeremy Taylor.

## Watch Your Kidneys!

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