

THE DIVORCE COURT MURDER

BY MILTON PROPPER



FIFTH INSTALLMENT

SIX—Six persons are in an office of the law firm of Daw-Quire and Locke at Philadelphia. A master hearing in the case of Rowland vs. Rowland is being held. Mrs. Rowland, represented by her lawyer brother, Mr. Rowland, the defendant's attorney, Mr. Trumbull, court clerk and Mr. Dawson, master, are the six persons. A new development in the case after failing to defend himself against the charge of adultery in his hearing, Mr. Rowland has evidence and asks the court to produce witnesses and he sues. Judge Dawson overheard objections of Mr. Trumbull and orders Mr. Trumbull to be the first witness. Rowland's goes to get the witness but he is dead—chloroformed. She Barbara Keith, wife of a Philadelphia business man. Dawson phoned for the police. Detective Tommy Rankin is on the case. He is now going on with the story—

According to the court reporter's notes that was all he said—named at 11:30, a stranger, who later informed him was Keith, husband of the red woman, appeared unexpectedly from the hall, looked puzzled, and then left quickly without a word. Rankin, now, the incident was of great significance. Months before could even have been conjectured that his murdered wife would be leading witness to Mrs. Rowland's infidelities. Mr. Keith was present at the scene of the murder's apprehension! What could interest in that intrigue possibly be? How was he appraised of the rendezvous at the Inn, and did he expect to find there? Rankin, now, perceived something of an immediate answer to these questions was essential to the solution of the crime. Going to the door, he called back to come Mr. Edmond. The secretary appeared, he led her to a seat and returned to a lawyer's swivel chair. It dawned, Miss Edmond, he brusquely. "You know, of course, that I have charge of the investigation of this crime. I am questioning everyone connected with the case hearing. You are the co-defendant, I believe; I suppose then you recall all that happened the night of Wednesday, February 27 at the Sunset Inn?" The girl smiled quietly. "Yes, quite clearly." He admitted freely. "I could hardly forget it as I was unfortunately involved." "You've also been told," the detective pursued, "that the dead woman is Mrs. Keith—Mrs. Mortimer. Are you acquainted with her or her husband?" No Jill Edmond's tone did not miss the expression of her interest in her gaze before she veiled it. No, not personally, Mr. Rankin. Mrs. Rowland's secretary, I never had occasion to deal with them. course, I've vaguely heard of her as people prominent in Philadelphia society.

The detective placed small stock in this idea. He retired to the library where Dr. Sackett waited, impatient to present his report and get away. His examination of the body confirmed Dr. Clark's original diagnosis. "Thanks very much, Doctor," Rankin said, when the physician completed his summary. "Now, I'd appreciate it if you'd do one more service for me before you leave. Attend to shipping the body to the morgue." Grumbling, Dr. Sackett nevertheless proceeded to supervise the disposal of the corpse. Hardly had he gone when Johnson appeared from 1505, tying his fingerprint kit together. "I'm just about finished in there, Tommy," he said. "I've located plenty of prints all over the place—on the table, the desk and the bookcase. All I need now is to find out who owns them." "Well, I've had the entire staff detained," Rankin returned, "so you can take their prints. And practically every visitor who entered fifteen-o-five is here too. Get Jenks to help you with that." He paused. "How about marks on the doors and windows, Johnson? Did any come from there?" The expert shook his head. "Nothing doing, I'm sorry to say. I examined the sills and knobs thoroughly but they were as clean as a whistle." "And the chloroform bottle? Were there any prints on that?" Again Johnson shook his head and the detective pursed his lips in disappointment. The expert raised a hand and smiled quizzically. "One moment, Tommy, not so fast. Have you searched the office that held the body at all?" "No, I haven't had time," Rankin replied. "I made a pretty complete canvass of the place while collecting my prints; and I located something I supposed you had missed. These were stuffed away down in the bottom of the wastebasket under the desk out of sight. Johnson produced a pair of yellow sport suede gloves, of expensive quality. Turning back the cuff, the detective disclosed the label of an exclusive haberdashery on Chestnut street. They were clean and little worn, and he eagerly noted their size, seven and three-fourths. The expert started to leave. "All right, Tommy, I'll do my best," he promised. "I rather expected you'd be interested in my find." Now he returned to Mr. Dawson's office, switched on the central light and summoned Allen Rowland. He motioned the young man to a chair. "Now I'm ready to discuss more important matters with you," he said; "primarily about your evidence of your wife's infidelity with Campbell." Rowland made himself comfortable, lit a cigarette and offered Rankin one. "My lawyer doesn't know anything about it personally," he returned easily. "Only what Mrs. Keith and I were lucky enough to discover two weeks ago; we both went to him and gave him the details." "Well, exactly what was this occurrence that gave you the chance

to defend? And how did Mrs. Keith happen to be a witness to it?" "Only accidentally; when I needed some one to bear out my story, she was fortunately in a position to help me." Rowland plunged into his account. "But long before my affair with Miss Edmond, my wife and I disagreed because of her friendships with other men. I knew she had many admirers; but I had no reason to believe she was misbehaving with any of them. After she brought suit, however, I moved into my own apartment and began to watch her closely. What was sauce for the goose, I decided, was sauce for the gander, and I hoped, in the end, to get evidence that she was being unfaithful. I was my own detective. First, I paid her chauffeur, Donald Finley, to keep me posted as to when she went out in the evening—both when she drove her himself, and when she dismissed him, because some one else was taking her. On those nights, for the last two months, I waited outside the estate in my car. When she and her visitor left, I would follow them all over town—to parties, dinners and theaters. And Hugh Campbell was her most frequent companion." "How long has she been acquainted with your wife?" Rankin asked. "Where did they meet?" "At Saratoga last summer. Adele bets on the races regularly, and Campbell had a couple of horses entered on which she placed bets. They won, and afterward mutual acquaintances introduced them; that was the beginning. Then, last winter, we were at Palm Beach where he had taken a villa; she attended his parties and they saw much of each other at the casino and on the beach. He visited Philadelphia fairly regularly and had been a guest at the Willard home." "Was the divorce entirely Mrs. Rowland's wish? You opposed it and would have done all in your power to prevent it?" "The young man spread his hands to emphasize his reply. "Certainly I opposed it," he declared vehemently. "I had everything to lose by it. The income Adele settled on me, plenty of leisure, and social position. And I was trustee of my wife's first husband's estate; that was most important. For that, I was as anxious to stay married as Mr. Willard was to force us apart." Rankin's voice held a note of fresh interest. "Mr. Willard? How did it affect him? Had he a personal concern in the divorce besides his professional desire to win the case?" "He benefitted by it decidedly!" Rowland gave a short, scornful laugh. "The minute Adele was single, the executorship of Tom Marshall's estate—and with it the power to manage its income—reverted to him. But as long as the marriage lasted, I had charge. It was all part of Marshall's clever arrangement to make it difficult for Adele to marry a second time." "Difficult?" The detective frowned his perplexity. "You'll have to explain, Mr. Rowland. How did he expect to accomplish such a purpose?" The other shrugged. "Quite simple, thru his will, Rankin. You see, Tom Marshall was a smart man and understood his wife as well as

I do. And a jealous husband. It seemed inevitable that at his death she would marry again and he intended to forestall that. So in his will, he fixed it that whoever she married next would be independent of her. In fact, he would actually manage her financial affairs and, thru them, her, at least with regard to his property." "Exactly what did the terms of the will provide?" Rankin inquired. "In the first place, he made her brother executor of his estate so long as Adele remained single after his death," Rowland elaborated. "He was to direct all investments for both their benefits and turn over to her at least seventy per cent of the annual income. Or, if she married again and was then divorced, the control reverted to him. Naturally, it was to Willard's advantage to keep her a widow; and if she should remarry, induce her to separate." Rankin nodded, in appreciation of the diabolical effectiveness of the late Tom Marshall's measures. "So, with the divorce goes the management of the estate," he summarized. "But I thought Harvey Willard had means. Both he and your wife inherited from Peter Willard's estate. Why should he need the trusteeship?" "The young man shook his head. "He's not rich any more, and anyhow Adele was willed most of it. Willard's share all disappeared in poor investments and the stock market. And Marshall's will permitted him to spend for his own benefit the thirty per cent he didn't need to transfer to his sister—about fifty thousand annually. I happen to know he is hard pressed by creditors—unless he can obtain plenty of funds by July first, he's a ruined man; they will close in and force him into bankruptcy. Adele is too smart to throw good money after bad and won't lend it to him. Only a prompt divorce decree can save him." "Still," the detective pointed out, "if your wife intends to marry this Campbell shortly, what good will that do him? As her husband, he then becomes the Marshall executor and Willard's situation isn't bettered at all." "Even with temporary control of the estate," Rowland returned, "he might manage to slide out from under." He extinguished his cigarette. "Besides, he had no more idea of Adele's intentions in that direction than I had until my spying brought the result." He paused, and after a brief moment for reflection Rankin inquired. "Yes, I can understand that. Now, what did you discover by examining Mrs. Rowland?" "Two weeks ago I obtained the evidence I needed," Rowland resumed his narrative. "It was on the Wednesday evening after the last hearing. I had learned several days before from the chauffeur that Campbell was back in town; and for some evenings I continued my usual watch and trailed them. Then that Wednesday, May twenty-fourth, Finley reported he had been dismissed for the evening, and also added this significant item: Adele's maid had casually informed him that she was instructed to pack an overnight bag for her." "Well, right after supper, I took up my watch by the entrance of the Willard estate. Campbell, driving a Cadillac coupe, arrived at eight o'clock, and Adele joined him with her overnight bag. But for the early part of the evening, they did nothing more censorable than on other occasions. First, they went to the Forrest Theater. At eleven o'clock they visited the Organdy Club on Broad Street, but I didn't dare follow them in. Instead, I parked near Campbell's car, looked into it and

saw that he too had brought an overnight bag. He and my wife remained in the night club until midnight. And perhaps twenty minutes before they appeared, Mrs. Keith came out of the place by herself—" Rankin's interruption was abrupt. "All alone?" he demanded sharply. "She was at the Organdy unescorted?" "Yes, and it puzzled me, too," Rowland replied. "I called her and she explained that she had been to the opera for which Mr. Keith did not care. Because the club was so close by, she went in to see the floor show. I realized, for a married woman in her position, the story didn't ring true. I didn't question her, as it was none of my business and beside the point. I was too thankful for her appearance just when I needed a witness to worry about it." "You were well enough acquainted with Mrs. Keith to enlist her aid in such a personal matter?" (CONTINUED NEXT WEEK)

Bomber and Bride



DETROIT—At the moment this picture was taken the world series baseball games were the high point of interest for Joe Louis, brown bomber of heavyweights, and his bride. They were here for the games, Joe rooting for his Detroit tigers and his bride favoring her home-town Chicago cubs.

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I have here the complete story of the—er—escape at the Inn." Rankin tapped Mr. Simpkin's stenographic report. "Among other facts states that at eleven-thirty, just as Mrs. Rowland invaded the bedroom, Mr. Keith arrived and entered, and her. At least, you remember that?" As he paused, the girl merely nodded, her very silence an indication of her vigilance. "What I want to learn, Miss Edmond, is why he appeared like that? How was he connected with this affair between you and the Rowlands?" The secretary shook her head. "I don't think I can tell you that, sir," she answered. "I don't know why he came. In fact, he was a total stranger to me until some time later when—Mr. Rowland, identified him as Mortimer Keith." "Surely he must have offered me an explanation for his intrusion into an embarrassing domestic scene which he had no concern," Rankin insisted. "I don't believe he said a word," Miss Edmond returned. "He didn't remain over a minute; he just came from the hall and looked about; then he seemed to realize he was meddling and turned and went out quietly." Rankin sensed that she chose her words carefully. "You have no idea what brought him to that particular place at that time?" Imperceptibly the secretary hesitated, but her reply was positive and direct. "Not the least, Mr. Rankin. He probably had no reason. If he happened to be stopping at the Inn that night, he couldn't help coming forward when he heard the commotion."



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