

The DIVORCE COURT MURDER

By MILTON PROPPER

SYNOPSIS . . . Six persons are in an inner office of the law firm of Dawson, McGuire and Locke at Philadelphia. A master hearing in the divorce case of Rowland vs. Rowland is under way. Mrs. Rowland, represented by her lawyer brother, Mr. Willard; Mr. Rowland, the defendant, and his attorney, Mr. Trumbull; the court clerk and Mr. Dawson, the master, are the six persons. There is a new development in the case. After failing to defer himself against the charge of adultery in earlier hearings, Mr. Rowland asks up evidence and asks the court's permission to produce witnesses and resist the suit. Judge Dawson overrules the heated objections of Mr. Willard, and orders Mr. Trumbull to bring in the first witness. Rowland's lawyer goes to get the witness but finds her dead—chloroformed. She is Mrs. Barbara Keith, wife of a prominent Philadelphia business man. Judge Dawson phones for police. Detective Tommy Rankin is assigned to the case. He is now questioning all parties involved in the case. NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY.

SEVENTH INSTALMENT

According to the court reporter's record, that was all he said—namely that at 11:30, a stranger, who Mr. Willard later informed him was Mortimer Keith, husband of the murdered woman, appeared unexpectedly from the hall, looked about as though puzzled, and then left quickly without a word.

To Rankin now, the incident was of the utmost significance. Months before it could even have been conjectured that his murdered wife would be a leading witness to Mrs. Rowland's own infidelities. Mr. Keith had been present at the scene of Rowland's apprehension! What could his interest in that intrigue possibly have been? How was he apprised of the rendezvous at the Inn, and what did he expect to find there?

Instinctively Rankin perceived that an immediate answer to these questions was essential to the solution of the crime. Going to the office door he called Jenks to summon Miss Edmond.

When the secretary appeared, he motioned her to a seat and returned to the lawyer's swivel chair.

"Sit down, Miss Edmond," he said brusquely. "You know, of course that I have charge of the investigation of this crime. I am questioning everyone connected with the divorce hearing. You are the correspondent, I believe; I suppose then that you recalled what happened the night of Wednesday February first at Sunset Inn?"

Perfectly composed the girl smiled quietly. "Yes, quite clearly," she 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 Keith. Are you acquainted with her or her husband?"

Though Jill Edmond's tone did not change, he caught an expression of wariness in her gaze before she could veil it.

"No, not personally. Mr. Rankin, as Mrs. Rowland's secretary, I never had occasion to deal with them. Of course, I've vaguely heard of them as people prominent in Philadelphia society."

"I have here the complete story of the . . . escape at the Inn," Rankin tapped Mr. Simpkins' stenographic report. "Among other facts it states that at eleven thirty, just after Mrs. Rowland invaded the bedroom, Mr. Keith arrived and entered behind her. At least you remember that?"

As he passed, 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. Mr. Rowland identified him as Mortimer Keith."

"Surely he must have offered some explanation for his intrusion into an embarrassing domestic scene in which he had no concern," Rankin pressed.

"I don't believe he said a word," Miss Edmond returned. "He didn't remain over a minute; he just came in from the hall and looked about; then he seemed to realize he was meddling and turned and went out silently."

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."

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-oh-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 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 and 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 way down in the bottom of the waste basket under the desk, out of sight."

Jenks 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.

The expert started to leave. "All 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 he 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, theatres and dinners. And Hugh Campbell was her most frequent companion."

"How long has he been acquainted with your wife?" Rankin asked, and where did they eat?"

"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

WALKS WIRES

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RAS.

VENICE, CALIF.—King Tuffy, four-year-old African lion holds the distinction of being the only lion tight-wire-walker. He performs at a height of 10 feet and seems to like it despite his 511 pounds weight.

casino and on the beach. He visited Philadelphia fairly regularly and has 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 the 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 benefited 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 simply, through his will, Rankin. You see, Tom Marshall was a smart man and understood 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 through 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."

(Continued next week.)

ROMANCE AND TRAGEDIES

An interesting story which reveals that the traditional good and bad luck of the stage, screen and opera is catching up with the radio stars you hear, but seldom see. One of many features in the September 1st issue of *The American Weekly*, the big magazine which comes every Sunday with the *BALTIMORE AMERICAN*. Get your copy from your favorite newsdealer.

TODAY and TOMORROW

FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE

UPLIFTERS . . . enjoyment.

All my life I have been listening to folk who were eager to do something to help the less fortunate. These uplifters are usually more interested in those who live a long way off.

They get spasms of pity for the down-trodden Armenians, the famine-stricken Hindus and the plague-ridden Chinese, more often than they are moved to help those who live in the same town.

One reason is that these far-away folk can't slam the door in their faces, while their neighbors don't like to be patronized. Most folk resent having somebody else decide what is best for them, while most uplifters get their chief enjoyment out of ordering other people's lives.

STANDARDS . . . vary.

I am just as much interested in elevating everybody's standards of living as anyone else can be, but I have no desire to impose standards of any kind upon anybody who doesn't want to be interfered with.

There seems to be a general assumption that anybody who hasn't one or two bathrooms and an electric refrigerator, a car or two, a radio and an oil-burning central heating system, is down-trodden or at least underprivileged. It never occurs to most uplifters that perhaps some of the folks who haven't got those things don't want them.

I am all for the stimulation of human wants, by advertising and every other means. I think it would be fine if everybody wanted all the modern improvements and doo-dads badly enough to get out and hustle for them. But I can't see the point of making a fuss over the ones who don't care whether they have them or not.

CONTENTMENT . . . within

Within two or three miles of my farm I could show you a dozen or more homes of highly-regarded, self-respecting families who have no bathtubs, no running water in the house, no electric lights—no "modern improvements" of any kind. A few have radios—battery sets—and some have "one-pipe" wood-burning furnaces, though most depend on stoves, chiefly in the kitchen range.

Many of these old houses have never even been painted, but out of them have come generations of good citizens and good neighbors, many of them university graduates. These folk would be indignant if anyone told them they were either down-trodden or underprivileged. They know better. They know that happiness does not depend on material possessions and that contentment comes from within and not from without.

AMBITION . . . second son.

Not every boy, even in this modern age, looks for an easy job with short hours and long vacations. I met Sam Baidasari on our village street yesterday and he told me about his second son.

John, his oldest boy, wants to go to college and become a lawyer and with aid of a bit of luck, slightly stimulated, he's got off to a good start in New York. But his brother Francis has only one ambition. He wants to be a farmer, rising at dawn to milk six cows, and doing all the rest of the hard work that a farm boy has to do from sun-up to sunset and after.

"Frankie wants me to quit high school and stay on the farm," his father told me. "I don't mind his being a farmer, but I think he ought to finish school. He's too young to understand the value of education."

"Had you thought of taking him over to the State Agricultural College and getting some of the teachers there to talk to him?" I suggested.

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ted. "That's a good idea," said Sam. "I'll do that." I'm going to keep an eye on Frank Baidasari. That boy will get somewhere.

YOUTH . . . changes world.

As I grow older I get more and more satisfaction out of watching the young folks grow up. By and large, city and country, they are so much like myself and my youthful friends, at their age.

Youth has always been impatient, reckless, sure that it knows more than its elders, bent on having its own way. Youth always will be like

that, I can't join in the outcry that the young folks of today are worse than we were; neither do I think that they average up much better. I do agree, though, that youth is changing the world. That, also, is what youth has always done. We did it ourselves.

"The only service the young can render to the old is to shock them and bring them up to date," wrote Bernard Shaw. If we of advancing years refuse to be brought up to date it is just too bad. The procession of up-and-coming youth will pass on and leave us behind.

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