

The DIVORCE COURT MURDER

By MILTON PROPPER

SIXTEENTH INSTALMENT

Rankin's eyes widened in surprise. "Deserting?" he repeated. "Of course that would explain his secrecy about his past and why he destroyed the evidence that he was ever in the service. He wasn't caught, was he?"

"No, he evidently escaped successfully."

"I suppose that's his picture, on the next page," the detective observed.

"Yes, the one that was taken at San Diego," Mr. Roche held out the pamphlet.

Rankin reached for it eagerly enough, but without anticipating the shock that followed. Suddenly, at the sight of the features staring at him from the portrait, he gasped. Experienced as he was in extraordinary developments in his investigation of crime, he could not control his astonishment. The passage of eight years was insufficient to prevent his recognition of the face in the picture.

Such was his overwhelming amazement that Mr. Roche eyed him wonderingly.

"What in the world is the matter, Mr. Rankin?" he demanded hurriedly. "You're not ill, I hope? You act as if you're acquainted with the man."

The detective wiped his brow. "That's just it, I am. But it's absolutely incredible; for the life of me, I can't understand how it can be possible. You see? In time, he recalled how little Mr. Roche knew of the true reason he sought the ex-soldier.

"He's a notorious second-story man, and wanted badly in many cities." With this revelation, he grasped in one fell swoop all the elaborate mechanism of the murder. At one moment he was blindly following his nose; the next, every piece of a complicated and ingenious puzzle, the sheer originality of which he had not even dreamed, fell into place. He needed no more information from the marine records. Now he knew how the crime had been engineered and when it was committed. He perceived all the subtle safeguards by which the murderer prevented suspicion from lighting on him, the daring that revealed his perverted mind. Always ready to allow his opponent due credit, Rankin appreciated his plot, as brilliant and audacious as any he had ever encountered. The measure of its success was the completeness with which it had baffled him until this very moment. With the solution confronting him at every turn, he had been a victim, throughout the case, of a cunning with which he could not cope.

His only consolation lay in the fact that back in Philadelphia he already possessed his quarry's fingerprints. Hence, even without the photograph, he would eventually have discovered Dennis' identity at headquarters, when he compared his prints with those he took early in the investigation.

Yet, despite his information and certainty, he lacked positive proof of the criminal's guilt. Not one iota of his evidence was more than circumstantial nor could it be established directly. Though he could show the man's motives and opportunity, and a dozen suspicious nerves, they had only the force of supposition. Dennis had no eyewitnesses to positive acts that linked him inescapably to Barbara Keith's death. So incriminating were the circumstances that Rankin depended on them alone to convict him; but he was not satisfied. He wanted to leave no loophole by which the man might escape and this he could accomplish only with some testimony that brought the deed straight home to him.

While he continued his conversation with Mr. Roche, Rankin's mind raced in search of some fact that would close his net. Step by step he reviewed every transaction of the criminal, his preparations, precautions and final act; and each detail of the plot he discarded as being incapable of direct proof. That is, until he considered Dennis' purchase of the chloroform. In obtaining that, he committed a distinctly incriminating act, which lent overwhelming significance to the purely circumstantial evidence. The difficulty was that, despite a thorough canvassing of all city druggists, Rankin's assistants had thus far been unable to trace it.

Unless his quarry had never bought the drug at all! The idea that occurred to the detective at that instant caused him to break off his conversation with Mr. Roche. Suddenly he had recalled an item of

information Mortimer Keith had casually dropped early in the case. At the time he could attach no importance to it, and quickly forgot it; now it suggested a startling possibility that made him stiffen and breathe excitedly, as he pondered it. He did not believe some one else bought the chloroform for Dennis; that was too great a risk.

And if he figured wrongly, he could fall back on the canvass of the city, though that would delay the final arrest. In one conclusion he had faith sooner or later, if he followed the man's movements during the entire two weeks prior to the tragedy, he would discover the source of the weapon he used.

The detective immediately acted on his theory and decision. As soon as he finished his business with the secretary, he returned to the Union Station and at 6:15 caught a train for Philadelphia.

Three hours later the train deposited him in Broad Street Station and he went directly to City Hall to complete the necessary formalities. Then armed with the warrant, he departed and walked briskly down Broad Street to Pine. Here he turned, and just past 16th Street he stopped before a sleekly respectable brownstone house, four stories high. The lower windows were dark; but a brass shingle on one front sill—"Dr. Anton Brantman"—indicated that one of the most eminent specialists in ailments of the head lived there.

Though it was long after nine hours, Rankin rang the bell. Five minutes elapsed before footsteps echoing along the stairs announced Dr. Brantman's approach.

Without any comment he led Rankin into the lofty waiting room for patients.

Rankin apologized for the intrusion and then came directly to the point. His first query caused Dr. Brantman to shake a solemn head and tighten his lips with a sigh.

"Yes, I was well acquainted with Mrs. Keith," he replied; "I treated her for headaches. . . . A dreadful business that." He paused and made commiserating sounds. "Only I don't think it was Wednesday evening, May twenty-fourth, that she consulted me last, it was several days later."

He went with Rankin into his private office. "Yes, I am right." He pointed a finger at a scrawled, almost illegible notation. "Here it is, two days later, at eight-thirty p. m., on Friday, May twenty-sixth."

"Of course, doctor, that fits in perfectly after all," declared Rankin. "She couldn't have visited you Wednesday. She was accompanied, wasn't she, Dr. Brantman?"

At the physician's reply, his face lighted with a half smile of confidence. After that more eagerly and rapidly he began to put his questions, insistently pressing upon Dr. Brantman his startling inspiration.

Finally, the doctor could no longer contain his uneasiness. "I don't doubt, Mr. Rankin, that what you suggest is possible," he admitted. "My nurse, Miss Vickers, wasn't here to watch and I had no other patients; and my drug shelves are quite open. If I happened to be occupied at this desk, I might not notice what went on behind the screen. Only it's so difficult to believe."

"Not if you knew the person we're dealing with as well as I do," Rankin returned.

"But wouldn't Mrs. Keith be curious about the theft? She'd question it, or stop him, or inform me of it."

"She was in no position to prevent anything," Rankin explained. "She didn't dare interfere. . . . You had better look, doctor, to find out whether I'm mistaken. But just point out the drug; we must be careful not to destroy any clues or prints."

"I hope to God you are wrong," Dr. Brantman murmured fervently.

More pallid than usual, he stepped behind the screen. The detective located the bottle.

"I fear that you are right after all, Mr. Rankin," he announced gravely. "The amounts don't check at all; I should have seven ounces left. Even if my judgment is only roughly correct, at least four ounces are missing."

Delighted by the substantiation of his theory, Rankin lifted the vial with extreme caution.

"And that means there should be fingerprints," he commented, "if this hasn't been disturbed since."

He probably brought along a small container instead of taking this."

Fifteen minutes later, with the evidence upon which he relied and

Bethel High School And Community News

Miss Lorena Lawrence who has been spending part of her time for the past year or so in the state of New York, visited Bethel High School last Wednesday. Miss Lawrence is a sister of Misses Lottie and Mae and Dean who are attending school at this place. Their father lives just across the Watauga and Avery county line in the edge of the latter county.

Mrs. Gordon Winkler, one of the grade teachers, was out of school last week on account of sickness.

Notwithstanding the inclement weather, quite a number of patrons attended the P. T. A. meeting Wednesday night. The meeting was called to order by the president, Mr. C. A. Clay. Mrs. Carl Farthing, secretary, read the proceedings of the last meeting. The following business was transacted and program rendered:

Mr. Dickson, principal, mapped out the general plans of the school and heralded the news that the project for the new building has been approved by both the state and the national government and that work is expected to begin immediately. Volunteer work in the way of hauling rock on what is locally known as the "Pick-Breeches" Road so that the rock may be crushed by the road machine which is working in the community.

Some musical pieces were rendered by Misses Margaret Perry and Betty O'Neal. The most interesting part of the program perhaps, was an old-time spelling match in Webster's old "Blue-Back" speller. Two points of interest were very noticeable: 1. Our more modern spellers did not remain on the floor long enough to tire their limbs. 2. Those who are old enough to remember having studied this old speller were delighted to hear the familiar words and to revel in the memories of gone-by days.

At the close of the meeting refreshments consisting of hot coffee, cookies, potato salad, etc., were served by the teachers.

The meeting adjourned to meet one month hence, at which time an interesting program is expected to be given and refreshments will be served by some of the patrons of the district.

A very interesting program was given by the students of the Literary Society Friday evening.

CROP ESTIMATES FOR THE UNITED STATES IS GIVEN

Washington.—The corn crop this year was reported today by the Agriculture department, in its preliminary production estimate as 2,211,268,000 bushels.

A month ago 2,213,319,000 bushels were indicated. Last year's crop was 1,377,000,000 bushels and the 1928-35 average production 2,562,000,000.

Preliminary production estimates of other crops (in bushels except where stated) with last year's production include:

Peanuts, 1,280,000,000 pounds and 1,063,000,000; apples, 168,000,000 and 121,000,000; grapes 2,330,000 tons and 1,930,000; pecans 95,300,000 pounds and 40,400,000; potatoes, 354,000,000 and 385,000,000; sweet potatoes, 28,200,000 and 67,400,000; tobacco, 1,300,000,000 and 1,046,000,000.

Dr. Brantman as a witness, the detective left the house on Pine Street. On the warrant in his pocket he had filled in the criminal's name. His eyes glistened with excitement as he summoned a taxi. Experienced though he was in the pursuit of wrongdoers, he would have been less than human not to be stirred by this momentous occasion.

He gave the cabman directions as he climbed in. "And on the way," he directed, "if you notice a cop, stop so I can pick him up."

The taximan obeyed. Near 44th Street two uniformed men stood on the corner, conversing, and the taxi drew up to them. Rankin beckoned them in; and by the time he had identified himself and explained what he expected of them, they reached their destination.

It was an exclusive, somewhat elegant red-brick apartment house, U-shaped, each of its three wings having a separate entrance. The detective dismissed the cab and selected the entrance into the left wing, in the vestibule of which he paused at the letter boxes.

He indicated one. "That's the one we want, boys—three-C, third floor," he declared. "Now remember your orders—to stay out of sight while I enter." He drew out a whistle, borrowed from one of the officers. "Don't interfere unless I blow this," he continued. "I expect I can manage him by myself; but he'll be desperate, so stand by, ready in case he is troublesome."

With that, he pressed the button beneath the name of the man he sought; and in a moment, a buzzing sound released the catch on the inner door. The three men trooped in, over a red-tiled floor, and, disregarding the elevators, ascended the stairs on the right. On the third floor, the softly-lighted corridor stretched in both directions, lined with regularly-spaced, numbered doors, 3C so close to the stairhead that, to prevent observation, the policeman retreated down several steps toward a midway landing. Then Rankin advanced to the apartment door and boldly seized the brass knocker.

(Concluded Next Week)

Forest Grove Items

Saturday, 2 p. m., Nov. 10, Rev. J. C. Canipe met his regular appointment at Forest Grove Church. Then Sunday following Rev. Canipe gave a brief report on the Baptist convention held in Winston-Salem. This came during the Sunday School hour. Immediately after Sunday School, the pastor delivered an able sermon to a great number of community people as well as visitors.

Among the visitors were: Mr. S. C. Eggers and two daughters, of Boone, Mr. and Mrs. A. E. Bumgarner and son from Willowdale Church, Mr. Jerry Cook of Bethel, Miss Jennie and Catherine Sherwood of Bethel and Mr. Ernest Henson of Cove Creek.

Miss Carrie Eller who has spent the past few weeks in Boone, visited home folks here the past week-end.

Miss Kate Winebarger of A. S. T. C. spent the week-end with home folks here.

A number of the community people have been attending the revival at upper Beaver Dam.

Farmers of this section are making good headway on the grading of their tobacco.

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Crazy Water Crystals

We have the agency for this famous Mineral Crystal which is proving so generally satisfactory. Let us supply your needs.

NEW PRICES - - \$1.00 & 60c. Formerly priced \$1.00 and \$1.50. Get a supply today!

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When Colds Threaten.. Vicks Va-tro-nol helps Prevent many Colds

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At the first warning sneeze or nasal irritation, quick!—a few drops of Vicks Va-tro-nol up each nostril. Especially designed for nose and throat, where most colds start. Va-tro-nol helps to prevent many colds—and to throw off head colds in their early stages.

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IVE BEEN SMOKING CAMELS FOR YEARS, WHEN MY ENERGY SUPPLY RUNS LOW I GET A LIFT WITH A CAMEL.

MY RECIPE FOR RENEWING ENERGY IS TO SMOKE A CAMEL, TOO, AND THEY HAVE SUCH A MILD, DELICATE FLAVOR!

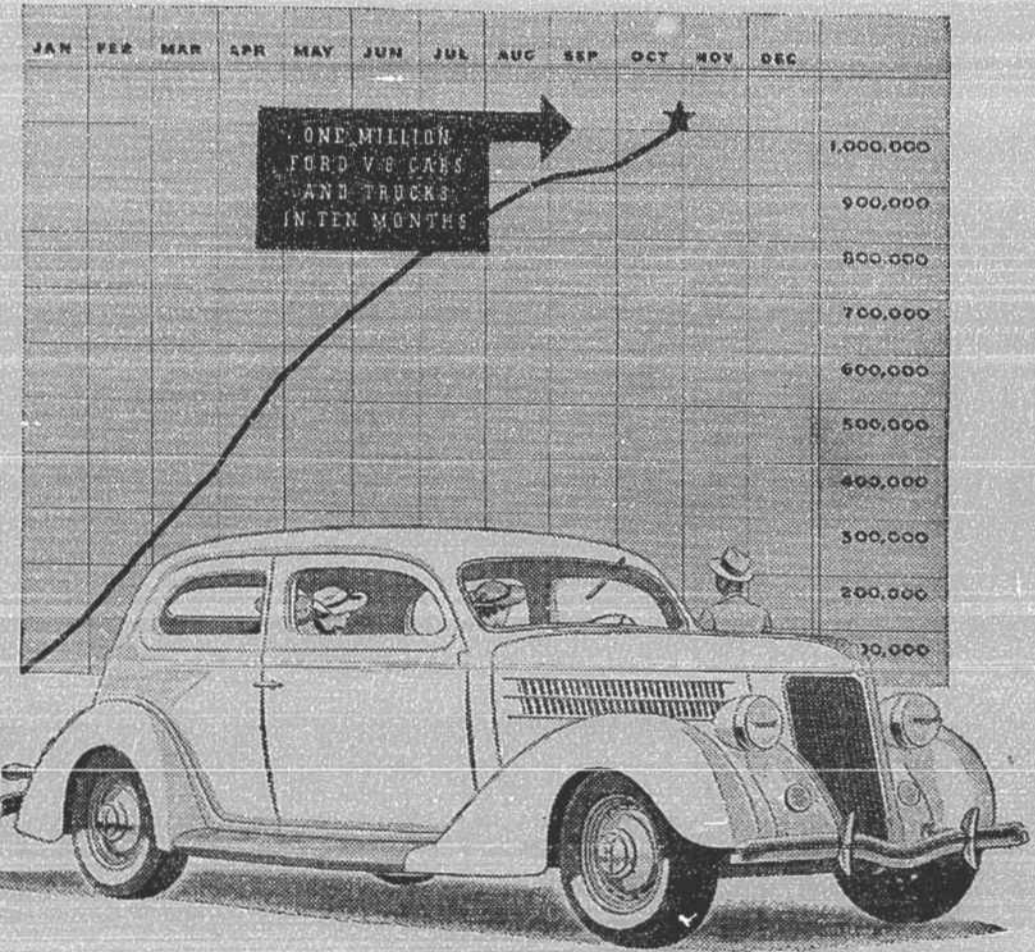
YOU'LL LIKE THEIR MILDNESS TOO!

HENRY CLAY FOSTER Tiger Hunter

HOUSEWIFE Mrs. Charles Daly

CAMELS Costlier Tobaccos

V-8 LEADERSHIP



ON OCTOBER 31 of last year, Henry Ford announced his intention to build a million Ford V-8s in 1935. We are pleased to report that this goal was reached in exactly ten months instead of a full year.

One million cars and trucks is an impressive total. But figures by themselves mean nothing. It is what they represent that counts. Selling a V-8 at a low price has brought a new kind of automobile within reach of the people. Producing it has provided steady work for hundreds of thousands of men in the Ford plants, in associated industries and on the farm.

These million Ford V-8 cars and trucks have helped to make things better all around. In the first ten months of 1935 the Ford Motor Company paid out, in the United States alone, \$140,119,326.00 in wages and \$523,111,389.00 for materials.

FORD MOTOR COMPANY
BUILDER OF FORD, LINCOLN AND LINCOLN-ZEPHYR MOTOR CARS

THE NEW FORD V-8 FOR 1936 IS NOW ON DISPLAY. THE CAR THAT LED ALL OTHERS IN 1935 HAS BEEN MADE STILL BETTER FOR THE NEW YEAR

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Ten to Twenty-nine Years	.20	.80	100.00
Thirty to Fifty Years	.40	1.60	100.00
Fifty to Sixty-five Years	.60	2.40	100.00