

# THE DIVORCE COURT MURDER

BY MILTON PROPPER



### FOURTEENTH INSTALLMENT

Well, there was the fact that Ellen and Garrett had only a small fraction of the stolen goods," said the nurse who had attended the former Mrs. Keith. "After she was here six months, I realized I sympathized with her, and once permitted herself to speak in me. When I asked how she got into this trouble, she didn't try to justify herself, but only Garrett. He wasn't natural. It was bad, she claimed, and she did her best to stop him from going wrong. But he admired his friend's smartness and his influence, and the temptation of easy money was too much for him. I could tell she clearly feared and despised the fellow."

Rankin spoke eagerly. "Did she tell you anything about who he was and what became of him?"

"She could hardly know what happened to him after her arrest." The matron shook her head. "But she mentioned the name by which she knew him; more than likely it was an alias. If I'm not mistaken, he traveled as Fred Dennis."

But the matron had no idea of her charge's history, once she passed beyond the walls of the penitentiary. She had never heard from her. Nor could she supply any further details about Fred Dennis, or his description, which Rankin particularly desired. And she was ignorant of how Ellen Trent met her lover or where. In court, she had been represented by a Mr. Nathan Lewis, a Fort Wayne lawyer, in all probability appointed by the judge to defend her, because she had no money.

Late that afternoon, Tommy Rankin presented himself by appointment made over the telephone, at the law office of Mr. Nathan Lewis. Evidently the lawyer had prospered since the day, six years before, when he was appointed by the court, an

inconspicuous young lawyer, to defend Ellen Trent.

Mr. Lewis studied Rankin's card and motioned him to a deep armchair.

"Yes, Mr. Rankin," he inquired politely, but with quiet reserve. "You're from the Philadelphia police bureau, I see. How can I be of service to you?"

"I called you to make sure you wouldn't leave the office before I arrived," the detective replied. "It's about a young woman whose mysterious murder I am investigating in the east. Her name is Barbara Keith and she was once your client, charged with concealing and disposing of stolen goods. You knew her as Ellen Trent."

The lawyer looked genuinely shocked, and shook his head solemnly.

"I'm sorry to hear that," he murmured. "Of course, I recall the case quite well. Exactly what happened to her?"

Briefly Rankin related enough of the tragedy to enlist Mr. Lewis' co-operation. The latter listened attentively.

"I have reason to believe," Rankin concluded, "that this affair in Fort Wayne — her arrest and imprisonment — has a bearing on her death. She was being blackmailed by some one familiar with her past. And you can probably tell me more about it, from her angle, than anyone else."

Mr. Lewis pondered. "Under these circumstances, I suppose I am justified in revealing whatever I can to help you. To me, it has always seemed a most distressing situation, for which the girl was not to blame at all. Her misfortune was to love a ne'er-do-well. Yet, there were the goods, the evidence that she knew of the robberies, and her obvious relations with one of the men. I considered it most wise that she plead guilty and trusted to the court's leniency for a minimum

sentence."

"That's one of the details I want," the detective cut in quickly. "It's been suggested to me, from other sources, that she was really quite innocent."

"I'm firmly convinced of that," Mr. Lewis declared. "At our first interview in the city jail, she assured me she was ignorant of Garrett's dishonesty until after they had lived here for six months. At times she wondered why he stayed out so late at night. She found out about him eventually when he returned at dawn, after a narrow escape during an attempted robbery. He had been separated from Dennis and brought back some of the loot; then she realized his occupation and taxed him with it."

"And what's your opinion of Garrett? Did you gather he was vicious or just weak?"

The lawyer spread his hands. "Miss Trent insisted it was entirely Dennis' fault; without his persuasion and the enticement of easy money, Garrett would never have gone wrong. She loved him so, it was almost pitiful how she deluded herself about his worthiness."

"Have you any idea, Mr. Lewis," he asked, "how and where she met Garrett in the first place?"

After some cogitation, the attorney recalled that the girl had mentioned that they became acquainted in Akron, Ohio, late in 1925. She worked as a wrapper in a large department store there and met the young man at a dance hall. Mr. Lewis was not better informed than Mortimer Keith had been. She had no relatives, he believed.

The lawyer told her sweet-heart became acquainted with Fred Dennis. It was at the Indianapolis race track, where Garrett began to hang about when he failed to obtain work. In hope of acquiring some loose change. But the girl could not name, Mr. Lewis explained as Rankin probed more thoroughly, any of Dennis' other associates.

"No wonder she detested Dennis so!" Rankin exclaimed. "He threatened her happiness, endangered the man she loved and brought her endless worry and anxiety for his welfare."

"Exactly," Mr. Lewis agreed. "That's the reason, when Garrett was killed, she considered him his murderer. I have a vivid picture of her in prison, crushed and numbed by his death; she didn't care what happened to her without him. But she had one interest — a grim determination that Fred Dennis should suffer for it."

The detective nodded. "I suppose he realized her opposition and enmity."

"He could hardly help it, the way she always tried to persuade Garrett to break away. It was a continual struggle for ascendancy over him; she told me that when she'd almost win him away, Dennis could bring him back to heel with a word."

"But the police didn't catch him, even with her information?" Rankin vouchsafed.

Mr. Lewis toyed with a pen on his desk and pushed back his chair as he replied.

"No, he escaped again," he related, "by the skin of his teeth, just before they broke in."

"And nothing was heard of him afterward? No trace of his whereabouts?"

The lawyer shook his head. "No, he dropped completely out of the picture."

"But at least you have Miss Trent's description of him," the detective put in.

"The police could give you that," Mr. Lewis replied. "It was their job to hunt him. And I believe they still hold such of Dennis' possessions as didn't have other rightful owners."

"In that case, I'll want to see them at once." Abruptly, Rankin rose and extended his hand.

But instead of shaking hands, Mr. Lewis glanced at his watch and also rose.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Rankin," he said, "I'd like to go along with you to headquarters. Recalling how favorably the girl impressed me, I'm interested in the case and wish to learn what develops. In fact, if Dennis is responsible for her murder, I feel almost involved in it myself."

"Why, certainly, Mr. Lewis," the detective returned pleasantly. "You're quite welcome to join me and follow it up."

The lawyer had put into words the possibility to which his investigations and all the information he obtained on this journey pointed. Certainly, Fred Dennis had ample reason for harboring malice against Ellen Trent and desiring her death. From the beginning, her opposition to his control over her sweetheart, Garrett, constantly threatened to disrupt his plans and endanger

his criminal enterprises. Then, with Dave Garrett's death, her more active hostility resulted calamitously for him. She made him a fugitive from justice. It was hardly likely that a man of his character, vicious and revengeful, yet astute and daring, would hesitate to commit murder in retaliation.

He was familiar with Barbara Keith's past and in a position to disclose it; and as part of his revenge, he could blackmail her by anonymously calling her husband's attention to them, he would establish her relations with Garrett and her prison sentence as a thief. He might even have been aware of the expected baby. To silence him, Mrs. Keith would undoubtedly have been willing to pay dearly.

Why, then, had he chosen, to chloroform her during the divorce hearing? And how had he reached her there? To these obstacles to his theory of Dennis' guilt, Rankin had to produce a solution. So long as Mrs. Keith continued to pay him, he would hesitate to kill the goose that laid such golden eggs; and she had given him a check as recently as June first. But there was a limit to the bleeding process. If driven to the wall by his demands, she might have turned on him finally, threatening both to

deny him to the authorities and to admit the truth to her husband. The fact that the day before she died she had broached a subject, the delicateness and importance of which her nervousness and alarm attested, supported this supposition. Instead of wishing to speak of a divorce, as Mr. Keith supposed, she may have intended to confess. Though she lost her nerve in the crisis, yet desperate and hounded, she contemplated a fresh menace to Dennis.

And always, so long as she lived, her knowledge of his criminal career, which she could pass on to the authorities, endangered his freedom.

Mr. Lewis drove the detective direct to headquarters. It was his presence rather than Rankin's official card that gained them a prompt audience with Lieutenant Becker.

He was the officer who had arrested Ellen Trent six years before, and led the subsequent raid on Dennis' flat. Even now he was sensitive about that fiasco and mention of it brought a wry frown to his features. Rankin briefly related the story of Barbara Keith's murder and the trail that led to Fort Wayne. When he explained its connection with Fred Dennis and his desire to obtain information about him, Lieuten-

ant Becker nodded.

"Of course, we still have all the things from his apartment," he declared, "that is, his personal things. I'll have them here in a day."

He summoned a policeman from the record room. Within ten minutes the officer returned with papers, reports and several suitcases.

(Continued next week)

Doughton Fears Citizens May Rely Too Much On Government

Salisbury, Sept. 2.—The nation's greatest danger now is that citizens may come to rely too heavily upon the government, Congressman R. L. Doughton told the Associated Master Barbers of North Carolina at their eighth annual convention here today.

Doughton, chairman of the house ways and means committee, reviewed congress' acts to relieve the nation's strained economic situation. He praised the social security act as the most far-reaching in American history.

Although some mistakes were made and the new laws generally were built crudely, said Doughton, the relief and recovery task was well done.

### NOTICE OF FORECLOSURE SALE OF REAL ESTATE

North Carolina, Wilkes County. The Federal Land Bank of Columbia vs. Ada V. Burch and husband Elmer W. Burch, T. J. McNeill, D. H. Morrison, J. B. Church, William Bullard, John Masten, Tyre Felts, Sam Pardee, J. A. Porter, Cecil Bumgarner and the First Carolinas Joint Stock Land Bank of Columbia.

Pursuant to a consent judgment entered in the above entitled civil action, on the 16th day of August, 1935, in the superior court of Wilkes county, before Honorable F. D. Phillips, judge presiding, I will, on Monday, the 30th day of September, 1935, at 10 o'clock a. m., at the courthouse door in said county, sell at public auction, to the highest bidder therefor, the following described lands situated in Wilkes county, North Carolina, in Edwards township, comprising 310 acres, more or less, and bounded and described as follows:

All that certain piece, parcel or tract of land, containing 310 acres, more or less, situate, lying and being on the Yadkin River, about one mile east from the village of Roaring River, in Edwards township, Wilkes county, North Carolina, and having such shapes, metes, courses and distances as will more fully appear by reference to a plat thereof, made by W. A. Gwyn, surveyor, sometime in March, 1912, and being bounded on the north by the lands of C. L. Parks, on the east by the lands of S. J. Greenwood, on the south by the Yadkin River, and on the west by the lands of L. J. Sabours. This being the same land conveyed to the said Ada V. Burch by S. J. Greenwood and wife, M. P. Greenwood, on May 18, 1912, and recorded in the office of the register of deeds for Wilkes county in Book 91, at page 38.

The terms of sale are cash on confirmation of the sale by the clerk of the superior court, but no bid shall be accepted or reported by the commissioner unless the maker of said bid shall deposit with the clerk of the superior court at the close of the bidding, 10 per cent of his bid in cash or certified check, as evidence of good faith; the said sum to be applied on the bid should there be a compliance with same; but should the successful bidder fail to make such deposit immediately upon the acceptance of his bid for the entire tract, then the said property shall at once be resold as a whole at such highest bidder's risk, on the same day; and should this said successful bidder make said deposit and thereafter fail to comply with said bid without just cause, or legal excuse shown, such deposit shall be forfeited and delivered to the plaintiff and retained by it as liquidated damages, and the premises shall thereupon be advertised and resold upon the same terms and at such purchaser's risk, on some subsequent day, to be designated by the commissioner.

First.—The commissioner at said sale shall first offer the tracts of said land listed in the name of T. J. McNeill and containing 106 1/2 acres set out & closed from A.

Chatham and others to said McNeill, as shown by deed dated May 27, 1920, and recorded in Book 124, page 97, in the office of the register of deeds for Wilkes county, and said tract includes 1 acre sold by said McNeill and wife to Rufus Baldwin as shown by deed dated January 28, 1922, and recorded in Book 158, page 568, in the office of the register of deeds for Wilkes county; also one tract for 12 2-10 acres conveyed by said McNeill and wife to J. H. Masten by deed dated April 21, 1924, and recorded January 17, 1931, in the office of the register of deeds for Wilkes county in Book 148, page 570; also some small tracts claimed by J. A. Porter, Sam Pardee and Tyre Felts, out of said McNeill's 105-acre tract, the deeds to which do not appear of record.

Second.—A tract of 65 acres sold by J. P. Allen and wife to D. H. Morrison, by deed October 25, 1919, recorded July 23, 1929, in Book 116, page 153, in the office of the register of deeds for Wilkes county.

Third.—A tract of 56 86-160 acres conveyed by W. L. Bullard and wife to J. B. Church by deed dated August 10, 1923, and recorded August 30, 1923, in Book 133, page 40, in the office of the register of deeds for Wilkes county.

Fourth.—A tract of 16 acres claimed by the First Carolinas Joint Stock Bank of Columbia, S. C.

Fifth.—Also the balance of the W. L. Bullard tract, amounting to 61 1/4 acres after deducting 56 86-160 acres conveyed by Bullard to J. B. Church as shown in third tract above, the said 118 acres being originally conveyed to W. L. Bullard by A. Chatham, Jr., and others, by deed dated May 11, 1920, and recorded in Book 116, page 173, register of deeds office for Wilkes county.

Should the above named tracts or any part of same at said sale fail to bring a sufficient amount to discharge the plaintiff's judgment, including principal, interest and costs of this action and costs of advertising; then the said commissioner shall at once offer for sale to the highest bidder the entire tract of 310 acres mortgaged to the plaintiff by the defendants, Ada V. Burch and husband, E. W. Burch, on the 3rd day of July, 1918, and recorded July 24, 1918, in Book 105, page 50, in the office of the register of deeds for Wilkes county. All bids will be received subject to rejection or confirmation by the clerk of the superior court, and no bid will be accepted or reported unless its maker shall deposit at the close of said bidding the sum of 10 per cent of his bid with the said clerk, as a guarantee of his compliance with his bid, the same to be credited on his bid when accepted.

Notice is now given that the said lands will be resold at the same place and upon the same terms at 2 o'clock p. m. of the same day, unless said deposit is sooner made.

Every deposit not forfeited or accepted will be promptly returned to the maker.

This 29th day of August, 1935. FRANK D. HACKETT, Commissioner.

9-22-35

# FREE! FREE!

## Season Tickets to the Great Wilkes Fair

ARE NOW BEING GIVEN FREE BY THE FOLLOWING BUSINESS FIRMS:

### BELK'S ABBSHERS

--and--

### CENTRAL SERVICE STATION

CALL ON THEM NOW AND GET FULL INFORMATION.

# The Great Wilkes Fair

## North Wilkesboro, N. C., September 17-21

J. C. WALLACE, Secretary.

W. A. McNEILL, President and General Manager

### Rid Yourself of Kidney Poisons

Do you suffer during, or too frequent urination, backache, headache, dizziness, swollen feet and ankles? Are you tired, nervous, feel all weakness and don't know what is wrong?

Then give some thought to your kidneys. Do not give kidney pills carelessly, for functional kidney disorder may, in some cases, lead to the blood, and to poison and upset the whole system.

Use Doan's Pills. Doan's are for the kidneys only. They are recommended by the world's great doctors. You can get the genuine, time-tested Doan's at any drug store.

### DOAN'S PILLS