

The DIVORCE COURT MURDER

by MILTON PROPPER

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ELEVENTH INSTALMENT SYNOPSIS

Six persons are in an inner office of the law firm of Dawson, McQuire & Locke at Philadelphia. A mass hearing in the divorce case of Rowland vs. Rowland is under way. Mr. 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 filing to defend himself against the charge of adultery in earlier hearings, Mr. Rowland digs up evidence to induce witnesses and resist the stated objections of Mr. Willard. Judge Dawson overrules the orders of the witness brought in. 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. Detective Tommy Jenks is assigned to the case. He now questioning all of the parties involved in the case.

OW GO ON WITH THE STORY Rankin was in the captain's office when Jenks returned, and he was illuminating his features. Behind him came a young, thin, curly-haired chap in the uniform of a cab driver.

"Back already, Jenks?" he commented. "It isn't three hours since you left to check on Keith's Washington trip; you couldn't have got very far."

"Far enough to prove he never boarded that twelve-fifty-five train," Jenks responded cheerfully. "Almost the last person I questioned was your fellow, Jim Blake. He has a yellow cab at the West Philly station stand."

"His story," Jenks continued, "is that Mr. Keith no sooner got into his own machine in the station yard than he hired a yellow cab to follow it."

"The detective turned to the cabman. 'Is that so, Blake? How can you be certain the driver was this Mr. Keith?' 'I don't know his name,' Blake replied, gaining assurance, 'but if he wasn't the same as this bloke's been asking about, then he's got a double. He comes in a maroon colored Packard limousine, driven by a driver. It ain't hard to remember him; I haven't had a fare and run up such a bill in a half a year of endless Sundays.'

"I see," Rankin nodded. "In your own way, Blake, tell me exactly what happened. At what time did he arrive?"

"About twelve-fifteen, yesterday afternoon; and the car came into the station driveway, right beside the cabstand. That's why I could hear everything," he said. The shoffer started to carry in his bag but told 'im never mind and to go on, and handed it to one of the porters. He ordered the shoffer to check it for 'im inside the lobby. He held the check until he came back for it; and he tipped 'im a buck. Then he moved for my bus and climbed in a while of a hurry."

Well, all this didn't take as long as to tell it, y'unnerstan," continued the cabman. "And when he got in my cab, his limousine was only leavin' the station yard. He says, 'Follow me; don't get too close, don't lose it, whatever you do.' In West Philly, he turns on Forty-fifth Street and goes outside an apartment house; there he picks up a gent 'im—'a tall, blond, handsome guy, like an athlete. I think the place was the Westy Apartments," he added. Rankin nodded. "Of course, you went for Allen Rowland," informed Jenks. "I suppose you, Blake, the next destination was Chestnut Hill?"

The shoffer stayed outside in the car. I got orders to wait too, but not over ten minutes; if Mr.—what-is-name didn't show up by then, I was to leave. And he hands me a whoopin' big tip besides a six-dollar fare. So I hung around for almost fifteen minutes, but he never came out and that was the last I seen of 'im."

Rankin spoke with ill-concealed eagerness. "Did any of the people you were interested in appear while you were watching, Blake?"

The taximan scratched his head and replaced his cap as he answered. "Oh, yes, the gent the shoffer first picked up came out and spoke to 'im," he replied, as if just remembering. "I guess to dismiss 'im or give 'im orders, because he drove off as soon as he went inside again."

"Could you say what time this happened? It's important for you to be as exact as possible."

"Well, since I watched the clock all the while I waited, I can tell you pretty close," Blake returned. "My own ticker said twenty to three; and by the City Hall clock, I wasn't more than a minute or so slow."

The detective received this unexpected support of Allen Rowland's account with a grunt of satisfaction.

"Now, Jenks, with regard to this redcap at the station," he said. "How long afterward did Mr. Keith return to him for his baggage?"

"At quarter after three, Tommy," the other answered. "In time to catch the three-twenty train."

"And that would bring Keith into Washington about three hours later—say six-twenty," Rankin observed.

Obviously, Rankin's next step was a visit to Mr. MacQuire to learn the object of Mr. "Tarleton's" call, the name the telephone operator said Keith had given.

As it was now almost seven o'clock, the detective could no longer reach Mr. MacQuire at the Wolff Building. He obtained the lawyer's home address from a directory. In answer to his ring, a maid opened the door. She escorted him through the sun porch into a larger living room.

The second member of the firm, whom he had not yet met, descended from above. Tall and ungainly, Julian MacQuire suggested a scholar rather than a practical business man. After introductions were completed, the detective's preliminary questions disclosed that he had no special knowledge about either Mrs. Rowland's divorce or the murder itself.

Presently Rankin turned to the more pressing subject. "I understand, Mr. MacQuire," he said, "that you had a caller yesterday afternoon named James Tarleton?"

The lawyer displayed surprise but nodded. "That's correct," he said. "You were acquainted with him, of course?" The detective kept his tone casual. "He was a regular client of yours?"

"On the contrary, Mr. Rankin, I never met him before in my life. As is my habit when strangers consult me, I inquired how he happened to seek me out. He stated that he had learned of the firm's special reputation in handling divorce matters."

"And it was about a divorce,

I suppose, that he sought your advice?" asked Rankin.

Where the lawyer had spoken willingly before, he now hesitated.

"That is somewhat difficult to answer," he returned cautiously. "You realize I am bound to treat a client's affairs strictly confidential."

"Yes, under ordinary circumstances," Rankin agreed, but where a heinous crime is concerned, there are exceptions. Have you noticed the pictures of Mrs. Keith's husband in the papers?"

Mr. MacQuire's perturbation increased. "I... not very closely, I'm afraid. Besides, I had all my information of the tragedy first-hand from Mr. Dawson."

"That would explain why you didn't mark the resemblance between your caller and Mortimer Keith," said Rankin.

Mr. MacQuire's uneasiness turned into astonishment. "Mr. Keith?" he exclaimed. "But that's incredible! He explained he wanted to obtain a release from paying alimony."

"A rather weak excuse," Rankin smiled thinly. "Did anything Mr. Keith say suggest he was really interested in what his wife was doing there? For instance, did he mention her or the Rowlands?"

Mr. MacQuire's jaw tightened. "Yes, he mentioned Allen Rowland; but so casually I could hardly surmise he had an ulterior motive. He said he had observed some one slightly familiar enter the office just ahead of him, who he thought was Rowland whom he had once met."

"And how did you reply to that?" Rankin asked.

"Well, I let him understand that while I, personally, had no dealing with him, Mr. Dawson was deliberating his case. Just what way, I didn't go into."

"But Mr. Keith at least learned it was a divorce case that brought him there?"

The lawyer flushed uncomfortably. "He seemed familiar with his domestic troubles without my telling him; in fact if his object was to pump me, he was very cautious. We dropped the subject and left together."

"That was at two fifty, wasn't it, Mr. MacQuire?" the detective inquired.

"To the instant, I was due at my club at three-fifteen, and was so worried about being late for my game that toward the last I constantly watched the clock."

At which time, Rankin reflected, the cabman Blake, had already stopped waiting for Mr. Keith and driven away.

"And what became of your visitor?"

Mr. MacQuire replied slowly, unconscious that on his answer rested the accuracy of Rankin's deduction.

"At the lobby we said goodbye and parted at the entrance of the building. I had to catch

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a train." "Have you any idea in which direction Mr. Keith went?" the detective asked. "I could tell you that," Mr. MacQuire replied. "As I left, he started back into the lobby, to buy some cigars at the stand and that was the last I saw of him."

Rankin rose with a smile of satisfaction and reached for his hat.

Rankin determined to interview the ex-secretary that very night. She lived in Logan on York Road, in a private dwelling that had been remodeled into an apartment house.

Jill Edmond, though surprised at his visit, did not appear especially disturbed. She had a three-room apartment. Takirk Rankin's hat, the girl indicated a chair.

"I must apologize for intruding at this time of night. Only I need a bit of information you can supply immediately."

"Of course, if I can," Miss Edmond returned curiously. "What do you want to know?"

"It's about the evening you went with Mr. Rowland to Sunset Inn. You told me before you had no idea why Mortimer Keith turned up, right after Mrs. Rowland interrupted you. I've come to let you reconsider that statement."

The secretary stiffened, on guard. "Add to it?" she repeated, affecting perplexity. "No, it is still a puzzle to me what brought him there or where he came from."

Rankin's features set in a stern frown.

"You don't believe that your-

self and you are hiding the len Rowland's... sweetheart, truth." Harshness crept into and correspondent in the direction "In fact, Miss Edmond, you kept to yourself a great deal I should have learned. For instance, that you received four thousand dollars to act as Al-

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