The DIVORCE COURT MURDER

by MILTON PROPPER

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TWELFTH INSTALMENT

SYNOPSIS

Barbara Keith, wife of a prominent Philadelphia business man, is murdered as she waits alone in a side room to testify in the divorce case of Rowland vs. Rowland. . . She was to have testified for the husband, a friend, who was defendant in the action. . . Detective Tommy Rankin is assigned to the case from police headquarters. . . His preliminary investigation disclosed that both Mr. and Mrs. Rowland had gathered evidence against the other of infidelity. . . The will of Mrs. Rowland's first husband directed her lawyer brother, Mr. Willard, to handle the estate until she remarried when the new husband was to come into control. Detective Rankin finds motives and the evidence of guilt for the murder of Mrs. Keith, leading to the doors of virtually all of the principals involved. These principals are, the two Rowlands, Mr. Willard, Mr. Keith, husband of the murdered woman, Hugh Campbell, paramour of Mrs. Rowland, and his underworld confederates. . .

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

Wisely, Miss Edmond made no effort to deny the charge. "Where did you learn that?"

"From Harvey Willard, of course . . . and Mrs. Rowland," ly. "They informed me of your entire part in the collusion—how, as secretary, you agreed to pretend an affair with the husband. And how you climaxed the 'intrigue' with the affair at the Inn." He smiled contemptuously.

As he intended, anger burned in the gril's eyes, as much directed against her erstwhile confederates as against his insulting comments.

"They told you that? But it was their plan; I had nothing to do with it and no interest in it, until I innocently took the job as secretary."

"Just the same, you've conspired to defraud justice and commit perjury under oath," the detective put in coldly.

Jill Edmond's resentment, increasing with her alarm, loosened her tongue.

"I won't be a fool for them." She clenched her fists. "They may have told you a lot, but they left out even more. You haven't heard yet that they tried to double-cross Mr. Rowland. There was a woman he really loved—for whom he Rankin turned provocatively. "They informed me of your they attempted to catch him with her—his real mistress"

"His real mistress? What do you mean—he was unfaithful, after all?"

"Yes, he had a mistress; and here is more news to surprise you." Miss Edmond spoke triumphantly. "They didn't tell you her name, either, Mr. Rankin; it was Barbara Keith—Mrs. Mortimer Keith! "It was with her, not me, that he went to the Sunset Inn February 1st, to spend the night!"

"Mrs. Keith!" Rankin ejaculated. "Good heavens, how can that be possible?"

He could hardly credit his ears. He had expected information from the girl, but never, in his wildest speculations, such a startling, overwhelming revelation.

"To clear up this whole business for you, Mr. Rankin," she related, "I had better begin at the beginning. What they said about hiring me and planting the impression Allen and I had an affair is probably correct; they'd have no reason to lie about that. Up to the day we chose for the final discovery, everything went according to plan. It was arranged to catch us together, Thursday, February second; you know, as secretary, I had every Thursday off and usually spent it with Allen to increase suspicion. He was to write a note, making an appointment to meet me that night at eight o'clock in town. Mrs. Rowland would supposedly discover it, turn it over to her brother and Dorkin, and the three of them would watch our meeting. Then, to produce proofs of our relations, Allen and I were to drive to the Roadside Hotel, thirty miles out along the Lancaster Pike, and there be trapped in a bedroom together."

The detective's face screwed into a baffled, uncomprehending frown.

"This was set for Thursday, the second? But according to Mr. Willard and the testimony," he objected, "the climax really was acted the day before, Wednesday, February first. And it took place at the Sunset Inn, instead."

Jill Edmond smiled vindictively. "Yes, that's so; that is where the double-crossin comes in. The whole program was advanced one day by Mrs. Rowland's treachery in trying to drag Mrs. Keith into the scandal. She failed only because I was too much for her. At the hearing afterward, she couldn't prove anything against Mrs. Keith, so she, Mr. Willard and Allen had to stick to the story they originally planned and change only the necessary minor details, such as the date and the scene. After all, so far as Dorkin was concerned, he witnessed on Wednesday substantially what we intended him to see on Thursday; and that was the evidence he offered."

Still Rankin wore a puzzled look. "I am afraid I don't follow at all, Miss Edmond. How can that be if Mrs. Keith went with Rowland to the Inn?"

"It's simple when you know the conversation I overheard Wednesday afternoon, February first," the girl returned. "I came downstairs in the Rowland home about three o'clock and heard Mrs. Rowland on the phone in the living room. She spoke to Mr. Willard, breathlessly and yet so plainly I couldn't help understanding; there was something joyful, almost. . . unholy about her excitement. Curious, I slipped into the conservatory where I could listen still better. First, she said, "My suspicions were right, after all, Harvey; I have proof at last Allen is seeing that woman tonight! You refused to believe it when I insisted all this time she was his mistress, but now you'll have to admit it." She then answered a question. "Never mind how I found out; I'll tell you that when you arrive. Just be here with Dorkin—at nine o'clock at the corner of Jackson and Elder streets." Then she added, "He has the audacity to meet her practically in front of my home! Now we won't have to wait for the faked meeting tomorrow night to prove he is faithless; tonight we'll catch him red-handed with his real mistress and have honest grounds for a divorce. And with that she hung up the receiver."

She paused, breathless at the vehemence of her own recital.

"So I had to get in touch with Allen and warn him of the trap. Only I couldn't locate him; I went out and phoned his apartment several times, but in vain. My only hope was to be at the meeting place and if Allen arrived first, warn him and try to stop him. I hired a car, figuring I might need one if any traveling was to be done. At eight-thirty I parked near the corner, careful not to be observed; I watched Mrs. Rowland, Mr. Willard and that detective come at twenty to nine and hide nearby. Fifteen minutes later, Mrs. Keith walked up, and at exactly nine o'clock Allen picked her up."

"Since I could not signal Allen, I followed both cars to wait for a later chance. All the way to the Inn, I trailed behind Mrs. Rowland while she trailed him. At the Inn, I drove ahead and parked on the other side. But while Mr. Willard's crowd delayed until Allen and Mrs. Keith were well settled in their quarters, I acted. I could tell from the new light on the second floor, the location of their room. Without stopping to ask at the desk, I entered and went directly upstairs as if I were an expected visitor. When I knocked at the door, there was a dead silence until I announced my name; then Allen opened it cautiously for me and let me in."

"Mrs. Keith was panic-stricken," the secretary proceeded dramatically "half-fainting and trembling in terror; she cried out about being ruined by the scandal. Allen had enough presence of mind to realize that he had to save the reputation of the woman he loved. He sent both of us into the bathroom to exchange clothes. Luckily, we were about the same size. Then I gave Mrs. Keith the key to my machine and Allen ordered her to drive back to the city immediately.

"Even so, she had barely a moment to spare. As she stepped into the hall, Mrs. Rowland, her brother and Dorkin were already climbing the stairs. To escape them, she had to slip into an open bathroom several doors down the corridor. Then she waited until everyone rushed into our room—before she sneaked out and ran down to my car. She probably just missed meeting Mr. Keith on the way."

The girl flicked away her cigarette ash and shrugged her shoulders carlessly.

"The rest of the story must be fairly clear from the records of the hearing," she concluded. "Allen and I were well compromised by the interruption; we acted dismayed and guilty, precisely as it had all been planned for the next day. Though I almost spoiled it by laughing at Mrs. Rowland's rage and mortification and Mr. Willard's amazement. During the confusion, they searched the room, closets and bathroom for Mrs. Keith. Yet they had to carry out the scene, not daring to demand where she was or question the substitution. That would have given away they would have given away their knowledge of the whole secret and admitted the collusion."

After a moment of deliberation, Rankin said:

"I suppose that covers all the ground, Miss Edmond, except for my original question. Do you think Mr. Keith went to the Inn because he suspected his wife would be there with Rowland?"

Again he sensed in her that quick wariness.

"I'd say it was something like that."

"That's very important," Mr. Rankin returned graciously. "You had no reason to shield Mortimer Keith in this business had you?"

The girl looked startled. "Of course not, Mr. Rankin," she answered vehemently.

"You also failed to inform me," Rankin pointed out severely, that, on the afternoon of the murder, Mr. Keith visited the lawyers' offices. He arrived about when you did, two-thiry-five. You couldn't help seeing and recognizing him in the main office, yet you concealed that fact from me."

"Mr. Keith there?" Jill Edmond's attempt at surprise held a false note. "I swear I didn't know, Mr. Rankin; I neither saw him come in or leave."

At the sudden inspiration that occurred to him at that instant, Rankin shook his head savagely.

"Perhaps I can suggest a better reason why you wanted to protect him; you found it profitable to tell him the truth."

The secretary's eyes widened with terror.

"That is called blackmail, Miss Edmond," he went on, "a much graver offense than obstructing justice. You threatened to make public Mrs. Keith's infidelity unless it was made worth your while not to."

"No, no, that isn't what happened at all!" Jill Edmond's alarmed cry interrupted. "I had done him a service he would appreciate; at the cost of my character, I had saved his wife's honor and his from public disgrace. Surely it wasn't too much for me to expect some . . . reward."

"And in that way, profit at both ends for the same thing." Rankin declared curtly. "I went to see him as soon as I got Allen to admit who he was. And he was perfectly willing to let me have the money."

Abruptly the detective rose, his mouth grim and ominous.

"Miss Edmond," he warned her, "this is your only chance; hold your tongue and be prepared to testify to this knowledge when called to do so."

" Yes, yes, Mr. Rankin. "Jill Edmond promised only too fervently. "And thank you; you can depend on me not to breathe a word to anyone."

* * *

Rankin's faith in Barbara Keith was destined to receive an even more severe strain that every night when he reached the Central Detective Bureau.

(Continued Next Week)

"Poor Richard" Revised

Be thrifty and the governemn will tax you.—Miami Herald.

Horrors of War

A chemical to burn the feet of the shoeless Ethiopians may be tried by Italy. Tying knots in the invaders' spaghetti would be a frightful reprisal.—Detroit News.

NOTICE OF SALE

By virtue of the authority in a judgment in an action pending in the Superior Court of Duplin County, entitled. "Arthur Dempsey vs. F. P. Powers, Et Al", the undersigned will sell to the highest bidder for cash, at the courthouse door in Kenansville, N. C., on **MONDAY, SEPT. 2, 1935**, at one o'clock, P. M., tract of land situated in Island Creek Township, Duplin County, North Carolina, described as follows:

Beginning at a stake at the North edge of the Public road, west of the railroad 14 poles from the center of the canal D. J Farrior's corner and runs thence his line N. 18 E. 86 poles to a stake in J. S. Westbrook's line, thence as his line S. 81 E. about 19 poles to a stake; thence S. 18 W. 87 1-2 poles to a stake by the public road, thence with the north edge of said road N. 76 1-2 W. 18 1-2 poles to the beginning, containing 10 acres, more or less.

This July 19, 1935.

GEO. R. WARD,
Commissioner.

Aug. 8-15-22-29 —737

NOTICE OF SALE

By virtue of the power of sale contained in the Deed of Trust from I C. Ennis, and Mary Lou Ennis, his wife, to W. T. Wallace, Trustee, dated Dec. 12, 1927, Book 294, page 196, Registry of Duplin County, default having been made in the payment of the debt secured thereby the undersigned will sell to the highest bidder for cash, at the courthouse door in Kenansville, N. C., on **MONDAY, SEPT. 2, 1935**, at one o'clock P. M., a tract of land situated in Rockfish Township, Duplin County, North Carolina, described as follows:

Beginning at a black gum at the mouth of a Branch near the Savage old fields and runs thence North 32 West 30 poles 20 links to a stake by an old road in L. B. Ennis's line; thence his line North 65 East 13 1-2 poles to a stake in a branch; thence up said branch as it meanders a course about N. 34 E. 116 1-2 poles to a stake in S. R. Williams line thence his line South 82 E. 3 poles to a stake in an old road; thence same course continued 2 poles to a stake; thence south 24 east crossing said old road 53 poles to a stake in the run of the first branch named above; thence down said branch a course about south 34 west to a pine by an old road; thence south 15 1-2 west 44 poles to a stake by a road; thence south 49 1-2 poles west 42 1-2 to a large blackgum at the fork of two branches thence up the right hand branch nearly a north course to the beginning, containing 46 acres, more or less.

This Aug. 1, 1935.

W. T. WALLACE,
Trustee.

Geo. R. Ward, Atty.

Aug. 8-15-22-29 —741

NOTICE OF SALE

By the virtue of the power of sale contained in a mortgage from W. R. Costen to Maury Ward, as appears in Deed Book 219, page 113, Registry of Duplin County, default having been made in the payment of the purchase money debt secured thereby, the undersigned will sell to the highest bidder, for cash, at the courthouse door in Kenansville, N. C., on **MONDAY, SEPT. 2, 1935**, at two o'clock, P. M. a tract of land in Rose Hill Township, Duplin County, North Carolina described as follows:

Adjacent to the road leading from J. C. Williams mill to Rose Hill adjoining the lands of Sam Sutton, Atlantic Coffin and Casket Company and others, more particularly described in the mortgage above referred to containing 10 1-2 acres, more or less.

This the 1st day of August 1935.

MAURY WARD,
Mortgagee,
By M. G. STARLING,
Admr.

Aug. 8-15-22-29 —739

NOTICE OF SALE

By the virtue of the power of sale contained in a Mortgage from Garfield King to Maury Ward as appears in Deed Book 186, page 263, Registry of Duplin County, default having been made in the payment of the purchase money debt secured thereby, the undersigned will sell to the highest bidder for cash at the courthouse door in Kenansville, N. C., on **MONDAY, SEPT. 2, 1935**, at one o'clock, P. M., lands situated in Island Creek Township, Duplin County, North Carolina, described as follows:

East of and adjacent to the bay road, adjoining the lands of A. J. Ward, Maury Ward and others, particularly described in the mortgage above referred to and containing 11 11-32 acres, more or less.

This Aug. 1, 1935.

MAURY WARD,
Mortgagee,
By M. G. STARLING,
Admr.

Aug. 8-15-22-29 —740

Now enjoy Modern City Refrigeration . . .

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Crutchfields Warehouse
Tuggles Warehouse Star Warehouse
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