

WHERE'S EMILY?

by Carolyn Wells

CHAPTER XXXII

"I'm not sure I believe you, Craven, but I want to believe you," said Sayre. "Now listen: the proposition of your oriental friend and niece is blackmail, pure and simple, and will be treated as such if carried one step further. Tell him this, and tell yourself the same thing. Moreover, it doesn't at all rest with me. It would be better for you two precious scamps if it did. But if it is mentioned again, I shall take it straight to the trustees of Miss Duane's fortune and if you ask me, I will tell you that you'll not fare very well at their hands. They'll have it in for you far worse than I should ever dream of. Now, will you advise the Hindu of this phase of the matter, or shall I?"

"I'll look after it, Mr. Sayre, and don't think I had—"

"I'm not going to think anything about you. You're none of my business. But it is my business to see that Miss Duane is not blackmailed, whether at home or absent, and I shall look out for her interests in any and every way I have a right to."

Craven departed, and Rodney sat for a long time thinking. Not about the Swami; he was beneath notice, so was Craven; but about the situation, the hopeless, fathomless situation.

And then the telephone bell rang, and his friend in New York told him that he had managed to corral Fleming Stone and engage him, and that he would arrive at Knollwood Sunday evening.

Sayre was decidedly cheered up at the thought that the great detective was really coming to take up the case.

Himself a good organizer and an indefatigable worker, he could accomplish wonders in his own business or in fields with which he was familiar. But as a detective he knew absolutely nothing, and he didn't fool himself into thinking he did, as so many amateurs are fain to do.

Pete Gibby had vaunted his own powers a little, but of late he had subsided, for he found he had no practical knowledge of sleuthing in any of its phases.

Saturday evening, the evening of the intended wedding day dragged. But after dinner some Hilldale people had telephoned over for such of the young people as cared to come to a small dance, and Betty and Neil wanted to go.

Gibby and Burton Lamb went with them, and Rodney sent regrets, saying he would stay with Aunt Judy.

She smiled at him, well knowing wild horses could not drag him away from Knollwood.

The two sat alone and talked after the others had gone. He told her of Stone's coming, and she, too, was glad.

"What do you suppose he'll do, Rod?" she asked.

"I haven't the slightest idea. I don't know whether he works alone or with a corps of assistants. I don't even know what sort of man he is. But he's recommended as the best in the country so he's the one for us."

"He'll want to know everything, of course."

"Everything. Hold nothing back, Aunt Judy. If there's the least mite of information you've been keeping quiet, out with it to Stone. You can't expect him to get anywhere if we hold out on him. These Atlantic City pictures, whatever they are, must be shown to him. Get that? Never mind me, but take Stone right into your full confidence. Will you?"

"Yes Rodney. I'll show them to you now."

"Never mind just now. They don't worry me a bit. I know they're not really compromising or that old heathen seem would make more of them. He sent Craven here to dig up some money for his silence about them. Oh, how can the Hilldale people stand for that old fraud?"

"And I think he set Lawlor on

the hunt in Emily's room to find the pictures.

"Well, of course, Lawlor had a right to search her rooms in connection with the Pennington matter. But, yes, I think the Swami put a bee in the police bonnet about it. Haven't seen Lawlor since, have you?"

"No. Mr. Collins told them to find Emily before they began to suspect her of any wrongdoing of any sort."

"Collins has a way of putting things, emphatically, hasn't he? Aunt Judy, tonight I'll go back to my own bedroom. Now that the wedding day is past, I'm convinced that something has happened to Emily. I hoped up to the last minute that it was one of her pranks, but if it had been, she would have been back here today. So it's foolish for me to keep up this farce of staying on the sofa until she returns. I have a little common sense, if I can't ferret out what has happened to her."

"What do you think, Rod?"

"I can't think. I've thought until my brain is mush. Now I'm going to wait for Fleming Stone, and let him think for us. He must have had experience with mysterious disappearances and abductions of grown-up people."

"But if it is abduction, wouldn't the demand for ransom come to us by this time?"

"You'd think so, Aunt Judy. But it hasn't, and that makes it look as if abduction isn't the explanation. I hope it is, for then we could just pay the price and be done with it. Let's do all we can to help Mr. Stone, and nothing to bother or hinder him."

"Yes, of course. And I'll give him the pretty green suite, so he'll be comfortable and well fixed. Neil leaves tomorrow."

"Just as well. She's a dear girl in some ways, but if she took a notion to make up to Stone, she'd pester the life out of him. Lamb has to go home tomorrow, too. You see, he expected to leave on Sunday, after—after Emily and I had gone away. And he has important business engagements. Well, he could be of no use here. When we get Stone we won't need any other help."

Sunday was another beautiful, bright September day, another day of mocking emptiness to the hearts that yearned for their missing darling.

The girls had coffee in their rooms, but the men came down for breakfast and Aunt Judy was there to greet them.

Abel Collins drifted in, joined the group at the table, and then, to their surprise, Jim Pennington came.

"Thought I'd stop in and say good-by," he explained. "I found I was all ready to start, and I fidgeted about so, waiting, that I concluded to go along. The house is all shut up and I can't sit around all day."

He was very nervous and looked worn and weary, as if he had had a sleepless night.

"You poor boy," said Aunt Judy. "I think you are wise to get away as soon as you can. Now, you have a good breakfast, and then get an early start before all Hilldale is craning its neck after you. I know just how you feel and I'm sure you're doing wisely. Leave us an address so we can tell you when Emily comes back."

"I've no address as yet, other than my bankers', but they will always know where I am. I shall make some plans in the next few days, and I'll drop you a line, Mrs. Bell, so you'll know where I am. It's good of you to care."

"I've a notion to drive down to New York with you," said Lamb, looking thoughtful.

"Do, I'd be glad of company, and I'm a good driver."

"No," concluded Burton. "I'm not packed. And, too, I'd rather stay till afternoon, and see the girls again."

"As you say. Well, I'll be getting along. I won't try to say what

I hope for you all—I'm—I'm pretty much all in."

With a few handshakes, he left them, speaking no further word.

Prill helped him into his car, and Pete Gibby also went out on the porch.

"Goodby," he said, noting the suitcases and hatboxes in the car. "Going right to the club?"

"Yes, or some hotel. I'll decide

on the way down."

And Pennington drove off, sitting erect and firm behind his wheel.

"He's all right when he's alone," Gibby said, returning to the dining room, "but people seem to get on his nerves."

"No wonder," Rodney observed, "especially over here where he knows we have our own trouble."

"He's in a bad way," Lamb said. "I shouldn't have cared to ride with his driving. I spoke on an impulse."

"Oh, no," Gibby insisted. "He started off like a born chauffeur. He'll be all right, once he's quit of these harrowing scenes and that empty house of his. I never saw such a nervous man. I suppose it's that artistic temperament. I

don't see how his wife ever lived with him."

"Maybe it was because she couldn't—that—"

"No, no," Aunt Judy interrupted Lamb's speech. "Pauline was just as temperamental herself. They were happy together and understood each other. Her trouble was all caused by her grief at her child's death. When Jim gets away

from all this and settles down somewhere, he'll get quieted down, probably write a new play, and regain his poise and balance."

"You're a wise woman, madam," said Abel Collins, bowing toward her. "Your remarks show acumen and wise prognostication. It might be added that our friend may find some other temperamental soul, who will—"

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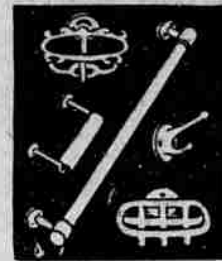
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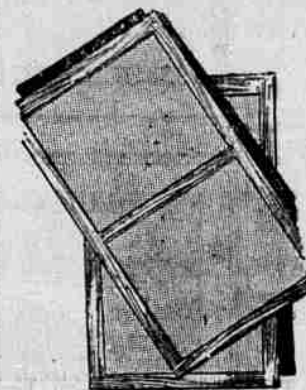
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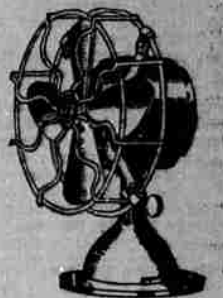


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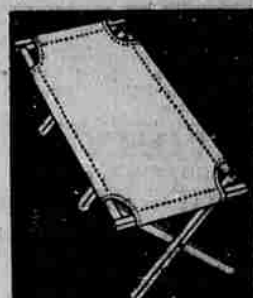
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