

'WHERE'S EMILY?'

by Carolyn Wells

CHAPTER XXXIX

"Not so deep as the big ravine," he said, "but a long enough fall to kill anybody. I see they've fixed up the vines."

"Yes, the Village Improvement Society looked after that as soon as the police allowed it. Now," as Stone started on again, "there's the Pennington house."

"Where?"

"Look higher up. See, you can just see the roof through the trees."

"Gracious, I shouldn't want to live there. Why don't they cut out enough to make a clearing?"

"It doesn't seem white so treacherous when you get up to it," volunteered Betty. "Want to go up?"

"Can't see any reason for it," Stone said, looking at his watch. "Guess we'd better be about our business. Where's the hospital?"

It was pointed out to him, but he took slight interest.

"What I want now," he said, "is to have you take me to call briefly on two or three of the most knowing people in Hildale. I mean the ones who know most about gossip going on, and include, if you please, the lady who was last at the tea—Maraden, is the name?"

"All right," Betty chirped, feeling that this was her chance. "I'll know where to go, Pete. Not the Stevensons, not the Ballards, the

Maradens come first, and then Sally Kirke's and Jane Wolcott's."

"Good choice," Pete approved. "Maradens it is."

They went to the Maraden house, another large, beautiful mansion, and were received most kindly.

Mrs. Maraden, an elderly dame, was disinclined to talk much, but her niece, a vivacious young person, more than made up for it.

"Isn't it just too terrible?" Miss Maraden exclaimed. "To think of Emily and Pauline both being there with us at the tea and now—where are they?"

Her dramatic rendition of these words was accompanied by eloquent gestures of despairing inquiry.

Fleming Stone gave her no direct answer, but said:

"That's what we're trying to learn, Miss Maraden. Maybe you can help us. Have you a good memory?"

"Fine," she declared. "Why, Auntie says I can remember—"

Stone cut short her reminiscences, not rudely, but decidedly.

"Then, please see if you can remember the exact happenings of your departure from Knollwood after the tea there last Thursday."

"Of course I can! I've often

thought it over. It seems so strange—"

"Tell it, just as it happened."

"Why, it was this way. I don't know anything about time, for I never do. But Auntie and I were waiting to shake hands and say good-by to Mrs. Bell. We had already told Emily we were going. The affair was informal, you know, but we always are careful to be polite to Mrs. Bell. She's such a dear. Well, we were about the last ones. Just ahead of us the Penningtons were saying good-by. As soon as they turned away from Mrs. Bell, Auntie and I stepped up to her and told her what a nice time we'd had, and all that, and then we came away. The Penningtons were just in front of us, but not quite within speaking distance. Anyway, we didn't speak to them. They went on till they came to the place where the street goes off to Wallace's, and then they stood still and said a few words—I didn't hear, of course—and then Mr. Pennington turned off toward Wallace's and Mrs. Pennington kept straight on. She came to the bridge over the little ravine, and she stopped and stood there, as if she was waiting for her husband. So, we passed her there. I was going to speak to her, but she didn't look up or turn around, so I didn't think I'd better speak. I didn't know her so awfully well. So we went on, and, of course, I thought no more about it then. We turned at the bend, and I couldn't see her anymore, and I didn't look back anyway. I simply assumed that she waited for her husband

and they went on home together. That's all I know about it."

"Thank you, Miss Maraden, you've stated it very clearly. And you saw nothing of Miss Duane?"

"Nothing at all."

"You don't know whether Mrs. Pennington had on a fur neck-piece or not?"

"I couldn't swear to that. I think she had nothing of the sort, any way not around her neck. But she might have had one in her hand."

"You've told this story before?"

"Oh, Lord, yes. Every member of the police force wanted to hear it, so I've told it over and over again. But always the same. I'm sure of my facts, and I saw everything just exactly as I've described it, and I saw nothing more."

"If Miss Duane had been ahead of you and your aunt, would you not have seen her as you turned the bend in the road, after passing Mrs. Pennington?"

"Why, yes, probably. I never thought of that. Still, it was getting dark and I might not—"

"Dark at five o'clock?"

"Yes, it was that day. It was very cloudy, and we thought a thunderstorm was coming up, but it went around to the north, as they so often do."

"Miss Maraden, what is your opinion of the Hindu, Lal Singh?"

"If there was one thing Cora Maraden loved better than another, it was to express her opinions of people, so she went at it with gusto."

"He's a dear," she said, "a perfect dear! Some people say he's a faker, but I don't care anything about that. I mean, I don't care whether he is or not. He interests me tremendously, and I just simply adore him. Oh, he has such ways with him! Why, just the way he rolls his eyes is too adorable! You can't get me to say a word against that gorgeous person!"

"I don't want you to," and Stone smiled in sympathy with her enthusiasm. "But, with all your admiration of him, don't you sometimes think he's just a wee bit mercenary?"

"Aren't we all?" she challenged. "Now don't you stir up any trouble for that ray of sunlight, or you'll have me to reckon with."

Clearly, Miss Maraden was far more deeply interested in the Hindu than in either of her two friends to whom disaster had come, and feeling he had learned all she could tell him, Stone rose to go.

"Well, by giner, I'll bet you didn't learn much there," opined Gibby, as they took to the road again.

"All's fish that comes to my net," Stone murmured in reply. "Now for the gossipiest tongue in all Hildale."

"Follow me," said Betty, importantly, and she led them to Sally Kirke's charming cottage.

Smaller than most of the houses, it was a love of a bijou residence, and again Stone found his sense of aesthetic values gratified by the exquisite interior of Miss Kirke's home.

She was a bachelor girl, living with a duenna, which fully satisfied Hildale's requirements of propriety, and she prided herself on being afraid of nobody's opinion. She said what she chose and did what she chose, regardless of social comment, and so greatly did she possess the superior complex that she managed to remain top of the heap, above and beyond criticism.

(To Be Continued Tomorrow)

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Visiting in Marshfield—Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson Tester of New York City, who have been visiting here this week, accompanied by the former's sisters, Mrs. K. R. Padelford of Yreka, California, and Mrs. E. R. Snyder of Portland, have left for Marshfield, where they plan to spend the coming week-end with Mr. and Mrs. Redford Tester.

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