

Miss Nobody from Nowhere

BY ELIZABETH JORDAN

THIRD INSTALLMENT

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

A beautiful young woman finds herself on the sidewalk in a strange city. She cannot remember her name or where she came from. She has nothing in her purse to tell herself who she is. A young man who has seen her in the hotel where she is stopping notices her and takes her to the hotel in a cab. There they find that she registered, in French, as "Miss Eve Nobody of Nowhere." The clerk has been calling her "Miss Parsons." The young man tells her she is in New York. His name is Eric Hamilton, of Chicago. She is terrified at her loss of memory. He asks his friend, Dr. Carrick, a nerve specialist, to call at the hotel. Dr. Carrick talks encouragingly, but says he will send a nurse to stay with the mysterious "Miss Parsons" that night.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

"Will you tell me exactly what the doctor said, and all he said?" she asked at last.

"Of course." He came and stood beside her. "He thinks that you have had some sort of shock, which made you decide to get away from the scene of it, whatever it was. He thinks you came to the decision very hastily, for you started with no luggage. Yet when you got here you clearly expected to stay some time, for you went out the next day and bought some things which you had delivered here at the hotel."

"When I came up here to my rooms before dinner I went through everything," she confirmed, "but there was nothing to help me, except some money. It's not much, but I hope it will see me through. Anyway, it's probably all I have in the world, for my clothes show I'm not rich. They're good but not gorgeous," she grimly paraphrased.

His heart leaped over the small jest, but before he could speak her face darkened and she went on.

"The money won't carry me very far in a New York hotel if I have a long siege—with a trained nurse at night and a psychiatrist coming every morning," she pointed out. "Suppose this attack lasts longer than my money does."

"It won't," he spoke with such conviction that she brightened again. "The Garland's summer rates are still in effect, and they're very reasonable," he went on, "Carrick is too good a chap to send you a big bill."

He was talking against time, to keep her panic at bay till the nurse came.

"Oh, what a devilish situation this is." She turned back to the window, bringing her hands together with an effect of desperation that alarmed him.

"Come now," he urged, "keep steady! A whole lot depends on that. The more quietly you take this the sooner you will get over it. He agrees that the thing to do is to sit tight, just as you're doing and let inquiries come from the other end. If your family and friends don't know where you are, they'll have started an investigation by this time, but they're probably doing it very carefully."

She stood still and stared into the darkness. Suddenly she turned back to the room with a little laugh that broke through their seriousness like a gush of a fountain.

"We may discover that I have run away from a husband and six children," she said lightly, but giving him a definite effect of breathlessness and tension. "My innocent babes may be crying for me this minute."

"What a ghastly idea!" he began, and stopped abruptly. As if she had caught his thought she looked at him with sudden intensity; but he was on his guard again and his disarming smile banished any suspicion she might have had. However, the little episode seemed to harden some half-formed purpose, for she went toward the inner door with an air of resolution he recalled later.

"If you will excuse me," she said, "I'll make some preparations for the nurse. I suppose since she is coming she must be made comfortable. No, please don't go," she added as she turned to take up his hat. "I'd rather you were here when she comes. There's some light literature on the table that may interest you."

She made a hospitable gesture toward the light literature, and disappeared through the door leading into her bedroom.

He selected a magazine, drew an easy-chair to the reading-lamp, and contentedly sat down. She was only a few feet away, on the other side of the door, and there was something satisfactory in being her sentinel. It wasn't strange that he was immensely interested in her, he mused. Any one would be interested in a girl in that tragic plight. For a few minutes more he casually thought about her while he turned the pages of the magazine, glancing at pictures and titles.

A title on a page of the magazine he held caught his eye and he began to read, with frequent glances at the closed door and an ear alert for sounds in the inner room. As he had already demonstrated, it was not his habit to do anything by halves. He became attentive to the article he was reading, then interested, and finally absorbed.

A knock came at the door and a woman entered.

"Is this Miss Parsons' room?" she inquired. "I'm Miss Adams, the nurse. Dr. Carrick sent me."

"Yes, of course. We have been expecting you."

"Doctor Carrick told me all about the case and gave me full instructions," the nurse went on. "It took some time. Otherwise I could have been here sooner. I suppose she's in her room," she suggested. "Hurry, I better go right in and."

Miss Adams gave the door panel a soft but decided tap, and when she received no reply she repeated it without emphasis, calling clearly: "The nurse, Miss Parsons. May I come in?" But when there was no response to this, she turned and cast a questioning glance at the young man.

"Go in," he managed to bring out, and strengthened the order with an imperative gesture.

Plainly Miss Adams was not the type of nurse who accepted orders from every one who chose to give them. She hesitated, and rapped a third time. Still receiving no reply, she turned the knob and entered the bedroom, leaving the door ajar behind her. Hamilton remained close to the open door, but he did not look into the room beyond it. Instead he wheeled and stared at the opposite wall, telling himself there were a half dozen reasons why the girl in the inner room might not have heard those three decided taps.

Miss Adams reappeared, and now she was obviously disturbed.

"We mustn't assume too much," she said kindly, with an understanding glance at his agitated face. "You said she was frightened, and in such conditions patients do strange things. I've looked out of the window," she added calmly; and again he felt his scalp prick. "There's nothing wrong in the street. Of course she may be somewhere else in the hotel."

He found his voice. "You're perfectly sure she isn't in these rooms?" he asked.

"Quite sure," Miss Adams smiled austere. "I've looked in the closet and even under the bed."

"May I look?"

Her manner nicely combined with its professional courtesy an intimation that he would be wasting his time, but he pushed past her even before she could move to one side.

The room had the look of having been unoccupied for days.

The words of the nurse made him swing around toward her.

"Here's the way she left," she said. He had noticed another door with a bolt on the inside. It led from the bedroom and he had taken for granted that it was part of the adjoining suite and was locked. Now he saw that the bolt had been shot. The nurse held the door ajar, revealing a glimpse of a side corridor past its threshold.

"Easiest thing in the world," he conceded. "She packed, stole out through that door and along that back corridor to a rear staircase, and probably got away without being seen by any one. But how about her hotel bill? Do you think she'd forget that?"

Miss Adams looked thoughtful. "She might. They do all sorts of queer things when they're not normal."

He had been staring down unseeing at a little writing stand, but now he caught a faint suggestion

of penciling on the top envelope of the pile of hotel paper.

"Here's something," he cried, and picked up the envelope. Then his expression changed. It was addressed to Doctor Carrick.

"Where did you find that?" the nurse demanded. She had been standing on the threshold, looking down the hall, but turned back into the room at the sound of his voice.

"On the table, on top of this little heap of stationery. It looked like all the other envelopes, for the name is written on it very faintly, with a hard pencil. I didn't notice it till now."

He felt the envelope.

"Lord! I wish I dared to open it," he muttered.

Hamilton hurried from the room. At the hotel office desk he asked for a match and lit his cigarette with careful casualness.

"Has Miss Parsons gone?" he asked as he drew in the first mouthful of smoke.

"Yes; she checked out most an hour ago," the clerk told him, and added without rancor, "Women make me tired."

Hamilton rested an elbow on the desk.

"Why?"

"Oh, because they're always changing their minds. That girl said when she came that she was only staying one night. She stayed three days. That was all right—the longer the better. But tonight she had a cot put in her room for a woman friend who was to visit her, and after I'd stirred up a chambermaid and a porter and got everything fixed she changed her mind again and cleared out. She left a dollar for the chambermaid and the porter though," he added forgivingly, and ended, on another afterthought, "Nice girl."

Hamilton put on the hat he had been carrying and descended the hotel's front steps to the street.

"Cab, sir?" asked the doorman, who knew him.

"Not yet... See here Saunders—" Hamilton put a dollar into the man's hand—"did you happen to hear the address Miss Parsons gave her cabman tonight when she left?"

Saunders pocketed the dollar and looked sympathetic.

"She didn't take no cab here sir," he reported. "It was funny, too, for she usually does. Besides, tonight she was carryin' a little bundle. But when I started to get a taxi for her she walked off, shakin' her head."

"Which way did she go?"

"That way," Saunders indicated the side street. His voice sank to a confidential note, for his was an honest nature and he desired to earn his dollar—in part, at least.

"I got the feelin', sir," he said, "that she walked off because she didn't want to give no address here. If that hadn't been it, why would she carry them things? She give me my quarter jest the same, and I'd bet that quarter she took a cab at the next corner."

Hamilton returned to the waiting nurse. It was easy now to piece together the bits of the puzzle. Miss Parsons had experienced another panic, had decided that she was becoming "a case," and had fled to avoid that horror. Of course she would pick up a cab farther along the street or take one of the scores of cabs plying up and down the next avenue, only a block away. By this time she might be in Harlem or on a train bound west or south. In any case, she was definitely gone. She was out there somewhere in the darkness. What would become of her? Anything, everything, might happen to her.

He must find her, of course. That went without saying. Even if his interest had been less than it was, he couldn't let her, in her condition, vanish into the unknown. He had not been responsible at first, but now.....

He made his report to the nurse. "She paid her bill and checked out an hour ago."

Miss Adams nodded.

"She would," she confirmed.

Hamilton's strained nerves snapped.

"If it was so certain that she would why the devil didn't Carrick warn me?" he broke out, and immediately apologized again. "Come on, we'll go uptown and talk to Carrick. You don't suppose he has gone to bed, do you?" he asked irritably.

Miss Adams expressed her theory that Doctor Carrick could not have done anything so inconsiderate. It was much more likely, she thought, that the physician might have dropped in at the club on his way home, to have a rubber of bridge with some friends. As a nurse who attended many of his patients she knew something of his habits. She even knew the name of his club and mentioned it.

(Continued Next Week)

DAYLIGHT SAVING

Ottawa, Ont. May 12.—Twenty eight Canadian cities, sixteen states in the United States and five European countries are observing daylight saving time in some form this year.

The European countries observing the new schedule will be Great Britain, the Irish Free State, France, Belgium and Portugal.

Daylight saving time merely moves the clock ahead one hour in the various time zones. Some confusion is caused in railroad schedules and radio program listings.

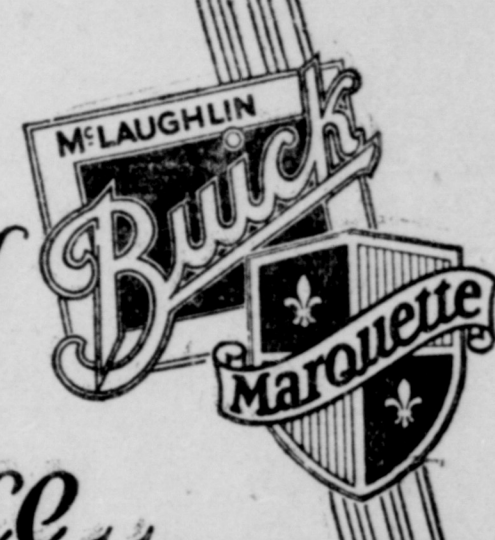
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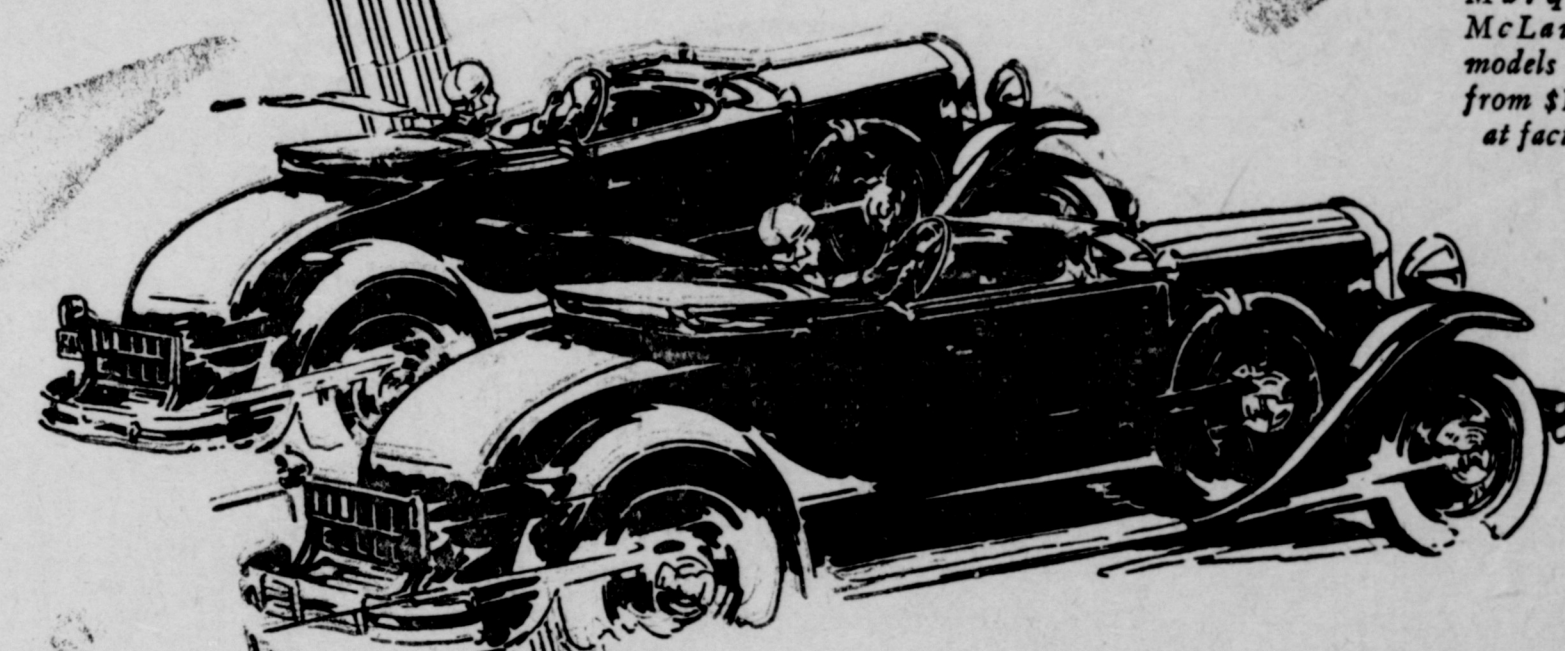


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