

# Sunday Magazine

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## Missing — Roberta Hoyt!

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**M**Y fate was settled by a police whistle, and —I mention this merely to show how I feel about it—when the mystery was finally solved, I tracked down the policeman who blew that particular whistle at that particular moment and presented him with a yellow-back and my blessing.

About a year and a half before, I had finished a law course at the University of Georgia and gone back to Atlanta, my home, and opened an office, intending to acquire a practice as quickly as possible. But clients did not come with a rush, and things were getting rather discouraging when, all unexpectedly, a distant relative of my mother's who lived in New York died and left me fifteen thousand dollars. When I was suddenly summoned to the august presence of the executor to receive my inheritance, I did not hesitate, believe me.

It was my first trip to New York. On the day that things began to happen I had been there a little less than a week. Talbot Sands, a class-mate of mine at Georgia, who had renounced the law and his family traditions for a job on a New York paper, had been showing me my way about, ordering my viands, selecting my raiment, and generally superintending the disbursement of the legacy. It was an occupation that suited Tal down to the ground, and he had expressed a readiness to go right on with it as long as the going was good. But sitting alone in a law office is a chastening experience, and I had announced definitely and firmly that I was going back to Atlanta when my week was up. New York was a great town, and Tal was quite right about the big men and big fortunes that were made there every day in the year; but I had a client in Atlanta, and I was going back to him. That was, of course, before the whistle blew.

It blew about four o'clock in the afternoon. I was alone, walking down Fifth Avenue, content with the world and pleasantly aware of my handsome new bank balance. I had just decided to cross the avenue and continue down the east side, when the traffic policeman at that corner blew his whistle. Instantly the motors dammed up on either side of the crossing dashed forward and drove me back to the sidewalk, and in the haste of my retreat my arm brushed against a girl standing at the curb, halted also apparently by the rush of vehicles.

She was a beauty. I got that fact definitely in the first glance, and with it a confused impression of blue eyes, glowing cheeks, and dark red hair that began under a large black hat and ended in a fur boa. She had on a velvet suit of reddish brown which matched her hair.

I had wheeled instantly with an apology, and she had returned a gracious little nod. Then, as I looked away again, she spoke, the words coming in a little rush of pleased surprise:

"Oh! How do you do?"



At four o'clock she had met him on Fifth Avenue. Before midnight every newspaper office in New York was rushing her name into head-line type: "Roberta Hoyt—the rich Miss Bobbie Hoyt."

She was looking straight at me, and so taken aback was I that I could only open my mouth and gape at her.

"Don't you remember me—Miss Hoyt—Roberta Hoyt?" she asked, with a light, girlish laugh, holding out a white-gloved hand which had emerged from a huge muff.

I stared blankly for a moment. I did not remember her at all, and it did not seem possible to have forgotten a girl as pretty as she was if I had ever seen her before. Roberta Hoyt? The name seemed familiar; I must have met her somewhere. At any rate, as she did not appear to have the slightest doubt of it, there was nothing for me to do except bluff my way along, trusting to some remark of hers to bring enlightenment.

"Oh, of course!" I said, and shook her hand warmly.

But as I spoke she drew her hand away sharply and gave me a startled glance. She must, I decided, have mistaken me for some one whom I resembled in face but not in speech.

A CURIOUS pause followed. I was very uncomfortable, and could think of nothing to say. She had used no name in addressing me, so I had no idea whether she knew who I was or not. Roberta Hoyt? The name was familiar. I had certainly heard it before.

"Lovely day, isn't it?" she surprised me by remarking abruptly and with an obivous attempt to seem at ease.

"Yes—bully," I stammered.

"New York is always wonderful in the fall."

"It's a great little town."

She was sparring for time, I thought, trying to make up her mind about me, probably no surer now than I whether or not she had made a mistake. Meantime, I was wondering where I could have met an English girl, for her pronunciation was decidedly British. So was her voice—deep and rich and lovely.

"It's been a long time since we met, hasn't it?" she asked.

I hesitated. I did not believe the question was as ingenuous as it sounded, and I was not going to show my hand until she showed hers.

"Much too long," I said, smiling.

That put it up to her again. And it had been too long since we had met—if we ever had.

"Whose fault was that?" she questioned, looking away, and her lips twitched.

"It wasn't mine!" I answered.

Then I laughed. The situation was absurd. There we were bluffing each other to a standstill because each was honestly at sea about the other and would not admit it.

She laughed too, but rather nervously, I thought, and I have no idea what would have happened next if at that moment the traffic officer had not again blown his whistle, this time to clear the crossing for pedestrians. We were swept along with the crowd, and were on the other side of the avenue before there was a chance to speak again. Then she said, very composed now and dignified:

"So nice to have seen you. Won't you come in for tea tomorrow? There'll probably be some people you know."

"Thank you; I shall be delighted."

I gave her a sharp look as I spoke. I was puzzled. Was she merely retreating gracefully from an awkward position, or did she still believe she knew me? Roberta Hoyt? Where, oh where, had I heard that name?

"I'll expect you, then," she said, with a cordial smile, and turned away.

The instant for action had come. Unless I could prevent it, in another minute she would have gone out of my sight and my life forever. The thought gave me a queer jolt.

"I wish you'd come to tea with me now," I said suddenly.

It was an inspiration straight from the blue. I did not know I was going to say the words until I heard them, and even then I had no idea I had done more than gain a few seconds of time. But she turned, and it was plain that she was actually considering the invitation. I urged it eagerly.

She wavered, smiling doubtfully. Then: "I will, then—I'd love to," she agreed simply. "Where shall we go?"

Gasping a little at my luck, I mentioned several of the fashionable hotels; but she preferred a quieter place, she said, and there were dozens in that section—just down the sidestreet there was probably one.

We started off. I was walking on air. I