

Missing — Roberta Hoyt!

By ADELE LUEHRMANN

Illustration by R. M. Crosby

CAUGHT in a block at a Fifth Avenue crossing, Richard Terrill, a young Georgian on his first trip to New York, finds himself suddenly addressed by a beautiful young girl, who appears to know him, but whom he can not recall. After a few moments of verbal sparring, she accepts an invitation to have tea with him. In the tea-room she tells him that her name, Roberta Hoyt, is known to everybody, including the police. After promising to call on her the next day, he puts the girl in a cab and returns to the tea-room to call up his newspaper friend, Talbot Sands. He discovers that Miss Hoyt had dropped a vanity-case, which their waitress gives him. He telephones her house, and is mystified to hear that Miss Hoyt is ill. That evening he accompanies Sands to Riverton. Driving through Riverton in an automobile, they pass a car that has broken down and from which issue groans. The driver, who is accompanied by a woman, explains that he is taking a sick man to a hospital. He refuses their chauffeur's aid. Later they recall that the groans sounded more like a woman's than a man's. The chauffeur recognizes the driver as the fiancé of Roberta Hoyt, an heiress who has a summer home in Riverton. Returning to town, Sands learns through his newspaper that Roberta Hoyt has been missing from her home four days.



"He drew from his pocket a handkerchief—a woman's, very fine in texture, but badly stained. 'Blood,' he said."

I DID not have to wait for the papers, as it turned out. Tal himself gave me the particulars of Miss Hoyt's disappearance on our way back to Riverton that night.

It was about eleven-thirty when he blew into the lobby of the Cecil, and found me waiting up for the first editions.

"Want to go back to Riverton?" he asked. "We've just time for the last train."

"Where's Ferry?"

"Backed out—doesn't believe the man we met was Farnham. You see, it's been learned that Farnham has not been seen at his hotel or club since Friday, the day Bobbie Hoyt disappeared, so everybody's jumping to the conclusion that they're together. They did get a license at Riverton, as that chauffeur told us, so it does look like an elopement, I'll admit. Ferry says it's a hoax—that she's trying to create excitement and get into the papers again, and ought to be spanked. Says he's not going to lose any sleep over her, and everybody else at the office seems to agree with him. But, no matter how you look at it, Dick, there was something wrong about that limousine episode; and if the man was Farnham—"

"But you've no evidence that he was, except that kid's opinion."

"I've got a hunch, and this time I'm going to follow it up. I was a fool not to do it at first. Come along or not, as you like." And he made for the door.

"But what are you going to do when you get there?" I protested, following him out to the street.

He got into a taxi and told the driver to speed it to Grand Central.

"It's the wildest thing I ever heard of," I grumbled, falling into the cab after him. "You haven't a thing to go on."

"Yes, I have. Listen. I phoned to the hospital at South Eden,—there's only one,—and was told no patient had arrived there to-night and none is or was expected. So, whoever the man was, he was lying—that's fact one. Fact two is the queer way he and the woman acted.

Fact three: they were headed toward the Hoyt place. And that groan we heard—"It was a moan," I corrected.

"All right, but it may have been a woman's—that's fact four."

"And fact five: you're a nut."

He snorted disgustedly.

"All right; if you haven't enough imagination to see that there's something very queer about the affair, go on back to bed and sleep your fool head off."

All the way to Riverton he talked, discussing the details of the disappearance of Miss Hoyt as they had reached the newspaper office. But I may as well give the account that the *Record* printed next morning. It contained all the facts generally known at that time.

THE police were notified last night of the disappearance from her home of Miss Roberta Hoyt, twenty years old, grandchild of the late Robert Hoyt, millionaire shoe manufacturer. According to Mrs. Otison, an aunt with whom she lives, the girl has not been seen since last Friday afternoon, nearly five days ago. She left home about three o'clock to go to Cécile & Company, the Fifth Avenue dressmakers, and Peter Barney, her chauffeur, says she left there shortly after four and ordered him to drive her straight home, but that, at the corner of Fifth Avenue and Fifth Street, just in front of St. Patrick's Cathedral, she stopped him and got out, remarking that it was such a fine day she preferred to walk home. And since that moment, as far as is now known, she has not been seen nor heard from.

The first night of her niece's absence, Mrs. Otison says she had inquiries made at all the hospitals, fearing that Miss Hoyt had met with an accident; but she had since taken no further steps toward discovering her whereabouts. She shrank, she says, from making the facts public, because of the unpleasant notoriety, and clung to the hope that Miss Hoyt had followed some sudden caprice and would soon return of her own accord. For that reason she enjoined secrecy on the servants, and ordered that any one calling or telephoning should be told that the girl was ill. It was William Rosser, Miss Hoyt's guardian, who, learning of his ward's disappearance on his arrival yesterday afternoon from Europe, at once took charge of affairs and notified the police.

Mr. Rosser seems to place little confidence in Mrs. Otison's theory of voluntary disappearance. Miss Hoyt, he says, is very impulsive and high-spirited, with a tendency

to do spectacular things, but is too kind-hearted to persist in a course that would occasion distress to others. He expressed the hope that publicity would result in a solution of the mystery, but did not conceal the fact that he was seriously alarmed.

Miss Bridget O'Halloran, proprietress of Cécile & Company, when reached by telephone last night, stated that she had seen Miss Hoyt in her shop Friday, but had noticed nothing unusual in her manner. Miss Hoyt had insisted that a certain gown be finished by Saturday evening, and an appointment had been made for a fitting Saturday morning. On her failing to appear at the time set, Miss O'Halloran said, she had herself telephoned to make inquiries, and had been told Miss Hoyt was ill and could not keep the appointment.

When last seen Miss Hoyt was wearing a brown velvet suit with a fisher neck-piece and muff, a large black velvet hat, high brown shoes, and white gloves. Her height is five feet six, and her weight a hundred and thirty-five. She has dark red hair, naturally curly, blue eyes, and fair complexion with high color. Her manner is exceedingly animated, and she is considered beautiful.

She was wearing several pieces of jewelry: a bar-pin of sapphires and diamonds, a cluster sapphire-and-diamond ring, a pearl ring, and a bracelet-watch. In addition to these, she wore on a gold chain an old French locket which had been converted into a modern vanity-box. This was of old gold, quaintly engraved with a Crusader charging a dragon, and bore the motto: "Pour la croix et toi" [For the cross and thee].

Miss Hoyt is an orphan, her parents having died in her infancy. She made her home with her grandfather during his lifetime, and was looked upon as his sole heir; but when he died about two years ago it was found that his large estate had been left to her conditionally, the condition being that she marry before reaching the age of twenty-one. On failing to do so she was to forfeit all claim to the fortune. This provision of the will excited wide comment and was generally condemned; but those who knew his devotion to his granddaughter understood it to be a last desperate protest against her pronounced independence of mind, and particularly against her activities in behalf of woman suffrage, a cause with which the old millionaire had neither sympathy nor patience.

For several months rumors have been current of an engagement between Miss Hoyt and Herbert Farnham, an Englishman, only son of Lord Darrow, and though there has been no public announcement of the engagement, it is known that a marriage license was issued to them at Riverton, New York, a few weeks ago. As far as is now known,

no marriage took place. Efforts to reach Mr. Farnham last night failed. At the Fitz-Maurice, where he has an apartment, it was said he had not been seen for several days, and inquiries at several clubs received the same answer. Whether the young Englishman's invisibility has any bearing on that of Miss Hoyt is still a question, but it seems probable that her mysterious disappearance has back of it nothing more mysterious than a wedding journey.

Miss Roberta Hoyt, though but twenty years old, has several times achieved a prominent place on the front page of the New York newspapers. At the age of fifteen she held a burglar at bay for an hour in her room at a boarding-school; at eighteen she was arrested in connection with a shirt-waist workers' strike; and more recently her photograph in man's polo attire occupied a full page of a Sunday supplement.

It may be unfair to imply that Miss Hoyt seeks the lime-light, but certainly she attracts it. She has a remarkable talent for conspicuousness, an uncommon gift for drawing the public eye. We venture to predict that when the hue and cry over her disappearance has reached its height, when the search for her has become desperate and the mystery impenetrable, when the stage is set and the orchestra properly attuned and the audience raised to the gasp of expectancy, then—and not till then—will Miss Bobbie bob up again.

The last few paragraphs were, of course, editorial comment, but I quote them because they represent a view very generally held and very unfair.

I confess that I felt very uncomfortable and hypocritical, sitting there on the train that night, listening to Tal's earnest discussions of the case. But how could I tell him of my meeting with Miss Hoyt?

WHEN we reached Riverton we found our chauffeur waiting. Tal had telephoned the station agent to pass the word to him that he would pick up a fare if he were on hand. "The Martin place," Tal directed, as we started off. He was in front, and from the back seat I leaned forward, for I knew he meant to do some pumping.

"Seen anything more of that limousine we met to-night?" was his beginning.

The driver shook his head.

"Thought not," said Tal. "You were