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Miss Nobody from Nowhere

BY ELIZABETH JORDAN

EIGHTH INSTALMENT

"After they come we gotta be out there settin' around in our corner. The bunch there now is regulars that come early to be good tables. They know each other. But when the girls begin to waste it, or two or three men comes together, that's when we get busy."

"How do we get busy?"

"Miss Morris," Miss Morris' eloquent glance with eyes, who was sending a sharp, coquettish, coquettish smile. The instructor seemed to be watching Eve's expression with interest. "We're dancers, and we're just tooestess. See?"

"One o'clock," Stella added, "is to keep the men from driftin' from homesickness after they git here."

Queenie ignored Stella.

"When a man's settin' alone at a table, or two or three men are together, look it up. It's Decoration day and they're sayin' it with flowers. I think an give 'em the glad eye. Natural fresh, you understand, just a kind look to let them know there's a girl close near. If they sneak, I draw on my hot-air tank and find out who they are; and later, I introduce them to some of the girls in their set who they wants meet. If they don't respond I breeze past like I hadn't seen 'em, and try some others. None of the other girls goes near till I find out who the men are and introduce. If you seen one's own brother at a table you couldn't go to him, but if you could. That's all there is to it, but it's gotta be done with class."

To the movie there seemed a great deal to it.

"If they respond, I suppose we dance with them?" she asked, anxious to get a more definite line on her individual duties than Ivy had given her.

"An't she the clever kid?" Matzie remarked. "Get it the very first time."

"Dance with 'em if they want you to," the instructor coldly explained. "If they won't you sit down and give 'em the story of your life, let 'em have it. Only make 'em shapely. No salo staff. Matzie tells 'em she's a Russian princess and it goes over great. If they wants talk while you listen, leave 'em do it."

"They'll tell you how lonesome they are," Stella contributed. "Lonesome," she sneered. "They don't open my fan-sets with that dope. The men that comes here is as lonesome as you waitin' in a box of bait?"

Stella, Eve learned, was a pessimist and a black one. She was also a snob, and a treacherous confessor that she had no use for women. Her speech and Queenie's were usually better than those of the other girls, but on occasions they could, and often did, swear on the angel of the guitar. All this Eve grasped after. At present the lesson of the moment was:

"There's two things you don't stand for. Queenie was saying in a whisper. "You don't take insults and you don't doin' from rock to rock. That's what I see. Men that come here has got to treat us like ladies."

To Eve the whole experience was part of the dream she was having in the nightmare in the dream and lessening. She was intensely interested, and she realized that she was also a trifle more sophisticated than the girls around her. She had never danced in cabinets; she was aware of that. She knew nothing of their intimate inner workings, or of the duties of employees. But she must have known such places as at least an occasional visitor, for the superficial aspects of this one held no surprises for her.

"What you're really here for, Bert, is to attract the men," Stella drawled. "Make 'em see what great big wonderful ways you think they are and you'll be a wow."

"Now, Bertson, if you think you've had enough gasoline to roll out on the floor with a well start, and I'll run you wise to the regulars an' the loose-ankle boys."

"Which are the loose-ankle boys?"

The regulars are the guys that come every night an' scatter their coin. The loose-ankle boys are the instructors—the lads Jake hires to dance with the dames that blow, in for a good time. That's all they gotten for, but Gavell knows it's plenty. Any women that's got a real face can make some man bring her to a cabaret an' dance with her. The ones that come alone an' has to rely on the boys are the ones Gavell forgot.

"Don't pay any attention to the loose-ankle lads. They'll come buzzing round, for they need a change bad, an' they'll want to give you the once-over because you're green. But Jake ain't payin' us nickels to dance with them."

All the girls were intrigued by the new comer's presence and they showed it in various ways—some by talking, the rest by close attention to what was said.

Eve followed her with a sinking heart. What had she let herself in for? But the two young men they approached were wholesome-looking American lads who had just given an order to water, and who for the present were most interested in having it filled than in the scene around them. Queenie cast a radiant smile at them, and one of the young men returned it with a cheerful but impersonal grin. She slowed her steps a little distance from the table, checking Eve's swifter movement by a warning pressure of the arm.

"Look at them settin' there waitin' for bread and milk, with good music goin' to waste," she tentatively observed, in a tone designed to reach the ears of the new-comers. The latter looked up, this time with attention. The girls were under inspection now, to be taken or rejected. To Eve the moment was horrible.

"Give us time, girlie, give us time!" urged this young man with a grin. "We're hungry, and we've got a gang of rambunctious. But if we're slow to move, after the stuff you tooks care a lot, to take you to the center of the town later on and make a May-pole of you."

"We may ordered for two, and I could eat them both," he plaintively observed.

"Well, order two more!"

His friend had been watching Eve. "That goes for me, too," he quietly said.

"It's a date," Queenie agreed, and tactfully started to move on. But the other young man spoke again.

"Won't the ladies join us and have some of the rabbit?"

The young man of the grain towned. As she spoke, the quiet young man drew out for Eve the chair next to him. Miss Morris secured the remaining empty chair for herself and sat down with a sigh of achievement.

"You ain't got the nice manners of your boy friend, Willie," she told the grinning youth. "But if you stick around with him, m'rap's you'll improve. Get a cigarette?"

The grinning youth had, and offered his case. Miss Morris helped herself and passed it to Eve, who hesitated an instant and then took a cigarette and lit it at the match the quiet young man held for her.

"My name is Hunt," he told her as he did so.

"He's is Miss Ferguson. She's new to this work. I'm Queenie Morris. Miss Morris made the announcement with an air that compelled the grinning youth to get up and bow deeply,

and Queenie accepted the burlesque homage with a care-free grin equal to his own. She had lit a cigarette without his assistance, and, having established a friendly between her and him, was doing the honors with such affability.

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