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Dame May Whitty is rescued by Margaret Lockwood and Michael Redgrave in *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), an “exact summing up of the Gaumont-British series.” (PHOTO FROM BRITISH NATIONAL ARCHIVE)

And finally came *The Lady Vanishes* (1938), which was also produced by Edward Black. Hitchcock felt this would be his last film in England. He had decided that immediately after finishing it he would accept one of the Hollywood offers, though he still didn't know which one. He wanted to end with a splash, to do something that would simultaneously be the product of four years of experimentation, a summary, and an end to a particular period. He chose to adapt an espionage novel by Ethel Lina White, *The Wheel Spins*, and assigned the scenario to the young team of Frank

Lauder and Sidney Gilliat, modifying it with the help of his wife during the actual filming.

The Balkans. In a mountain hotel are assembled the travelers of a snowbound train. There are a series of comic incidents, amidst which the murder of a guitarist goes unnoticed. The next day all the travelers gather on the platform of the departing train. On board, Iris, a young Englishwoman who is returning to London to marry, begins a conversation with an old woman, Miss Froy. The latter disappears, and with the exception of Iris, nobody seems to have seen her. Aided by Gilbert, a young folkdance specialist with whom she had had a run-in the previous night at the hotel, Iris sets out to look for her in the various compartments. Another traveler, Dr. Hartz, tries to persuade the young woman that she is suffering from an hallucination and that Miss Froy does not exist. After a series of tragi-comic incidents, Iris and Gilbert find the old woman, who is actually a secret agent whom Hartz has been assigned to eliminate. But their railway car is shunted off to a side track and attacked. Miss Froy escapes into the woods while Gilbert, to whom she has confided her secret, takes over the controls of the engine and brings the train back onto the path to safety. Everybody, including Miss Froy, meets up again safe and sound in good old London.

The Lady Vanishes is almost an encyclopedia. It is the exact summing up of the Gaumont-British series, and therefore requires little commentary. Its early parts feature the models and mechanical cars that Hitch loves to play with. The actors are excellent, and young Margaret Lockwood is certainly more beguiling than Nova Pilbeam. Hitchcock is finally able to impose on the public that two-tempo construction which had seemed so troublesome in *Rich and Strange* and *The Secret Agent*. The allusions to current world developments are biting, and the white handkerchief waved in vain by one of the passengers, an antipathetic neutralist, cannot fail to evoke Munich. The verve of Sidney Gilliat's dialogue in no way submerges the director's personality. It's an excellent English film, an excellent Hitchcock film.