

# THE LADY EVELYN

A Story of Today

BY MAX PEMBERTON

"Then your ideas are of the French?" He put it to her with an object she could not divine, though she answered as quickly.

"They are entirely English both in my preferences and my friendships," was her reply, nor could she have told anyone why she put this affront upon him.

"She's going to make friends enough out yonder in the Fall," said Izard, whose quick ear caught the tone of her conversation. "I shall take this company over in September if we play to any money this side. Miss Romney goes with me, and I promise her a good time any way. America's the country for her talent. You've too many played-out actors over here. Most of them think themselves beautiful, and that's why their theatres close up."

He laughed a flattering tribute to his own cleverness, as much as to say—"My theatres never close up." Count Odin on his part smiled a little dryly as though he might yet have something to say to the proposed arrangement.

"Are you looking forward to the journey, Miss Romney?" he asked Etta in a low voice.

"I am not thinking at all about it," she said very truthfully.

"Then perhaps you are looking backward," he suggested, but in such a low tone that even Izard did not hear him.

When Etta turned her startled eyes upon him, he was already addressing some commonplace remark to his hostess, while Mr. Charles Izard amused himself by diligently checking the total of the bill.

"I could keep a steam yacht on what I pay for wine in this hotel," he remarked jovially, addressing himself so directly to the ladies that even his good dame protested.

"My dear Charles," she exclaimed, "you are not suggesting that I have drunk it?"

"Well, I hope some one has," was the affable retort. "Let's go and smoke. It's suffocating in here."

Etta had been greatly alarmed by the Count's remark, though she was very far from believing that it could bear the sinister interpretation which her first alarm had put upon it. This fear of discovery had dogged her steps since she quitted her home to embark upon as wild an adventure as a young girl ever set her hand to; but if discovery came, she reflected, it would not be at the bidding of a forger whom she had seen for the first time in her life but a few days ago. Such wisdom permitted her quickly to recover her composure, and she pleaded the lateness of the hour and her own fatigue as the best of reasons for leaving the hotel.

"I am glad you were pleased," she said to Izard, holding out her hand directly they entered the hall. "Of course it has all been very dreadful to me and I'm still in a dream about it. The newspapers will tell me the truth to-morrow, I feel sure of it."

He shook her hand and held it while he answered her.

"Don't you go thinking too much about the newspapers," he said, with a splendid sense of his own importance. "When Charles Izard says that a play's got to go, it's going, my dear, though the great William Shakespeare himself got out of his grave to write it down. You've done very well to-night and you'll do better when you know your way about the stage. Go home and sleep on that, and let the critics spread themselves as much as they please."

As before, when she had first come to the hotel, Mrs. Izard defied the warning glances thrown toward her by the man of business and repeated her honest praise of Etta's performance.

"It's years since I heard such enthusiasm in a theatre," she admitted; "why, Charles was quite beside himself. I do believe you made him cry, my dear."

The mere suggestion that the great man could shed tears under any circumstances whatever appealed irresistibly to Count Odin's sense of humor.

"Put that in the advertisement and you shall have all the town at your theatre. An impresario's tears! They should be gathered in cups of jasper and of gold. But I imagine that they will be," he added gayly before wishing Etta a last good-night.

"We shall meet again," he said to her a little way apart. "I am the true believer in the accident of destiny. Let us say au revoir rather than good-night."

Etta looked him straight in the eyes and said, "Good-night."

## CHAPTER IV. Two Personalities.

Etta Romney was very early awake upon the following morning; and not for the first time since she had come to London did her environment so perplex her that some minutes passed before she could recall the circumstances which had brought her to that square room and made her a stranger in a house of strangers.

Leaping up with a young girl's agility, she drew the blind aside and looked out upon deserted Bedford Square, as beautiful in that early light of morning as Bedford Square

could ever be.

How still it all was! Not a footfall anywhere. No milk carts yet to rattle by and suggest the busy day. Nothing but a soft sunshine upon the drawn blinds, a lonely patch of grass beneath lonely trees, and great gaunt houses side by side and so close together that each appeared to be elbowing its neighbor for room in which to stand upright.

Etta returned to her bed and crouched upon it like a pretty wild animal, half afraid of the day. A whole troop of fears and hopes rushed upon her excited brain. What had she done? Of what madness had she not been guilty? To-day the newspapers would tell her. If they told her father also—her father whom she believed to be snug in distant Tuscany—what then, and with what consequences to herself! A dreadful fear of this came upon her when she thought of it. She hid her eyes from the light and could hear her own heart beating beneath the bed-clothes.

She was not Etta now, but knew herself by another name, the name of Evelyn, which in this mood of repentance became her better, she thought. True, she had been Etta when she appeared before the people last night, the wild mad Etta, given to feverish dreams in her old Derbyshire home and trying to realize them here amid the garish scenes of London's dramatic life. But arrayed in the white garb of momentary penitence, she was Evelyn, the good nun's pupil; the docile gentle Evelyn awaiting the redemption of her father's promise that the gates of the world should not be shut forever upon her youth, but should open some day to the galleries of a young girl's pleasure. It was the Etta in her which made her impatient and unable to await the appointed time; the Etta which broke out in this mad escapade, ever trembling upon the brink of discovery and fearful in its possibilities of reproach and remorse. But the Evelyn reckoned up the consequences and was afraid of them.

Etta sat up in her bed once more when she heard the newsboy in the square. The papers! Was it possible that they would tell the public all about last night's performance; that her name would figure in them; that she would be praised or blamed according to the critics' judgment? The thought made her heart beat. She had been warned by that great man, Mr. Charles Izard, not to pay too much attention to what the papers said; but how could she help doing so? A woman is rarely as vain as a man, but in curiosity she far surpasses him. Etta was just dying of curiosity to read what the critics said about her when old Mrs. Wegg, her landlady, appeared with her morning tea; and this good dame she implored to bring up the newspapers at once.

"I can't wait a minute, Mrs. Wegg," she said, for, of course, the old lady knew that she was a "theatrical." "Do please send Emma up at once—it's absolute torture."

The excellent Mrs. Wegg waddled from the room leaving Etta to intolerable moments of suspense. When the newspapers came, a very bundle which she had ordered yesterday, she grabbed them at hazard, and catching up one of the morning halfpenny papers immediately read the disastrous headline, "Poor Play at the Carlton." So it was failure after all, then! Her heart beat wildly; she hardly had the courage to proceed.

POOR PLAY AT THE CARLTON  
But  
A PERSONAL TRIUMPH FOR MISS ROMNEY  
The Old Story of Haddon Hall Again  
The Star Which Did Not Fall To Shine

Etta read now without taking her eyes from the paper. The notice would be described by Mr. Izard later in the day as a "streaky one"—layers of praise and layers of blame following one another as a rare tribute to the discretion of the writer, who had been far from sure if the play would be a success or a failure. In sporting language, the gentleman had "hedged" at every line, but his praise of Etta Romney was unstinted.

"Here," he said, "is one of the most natural actresses recently discovered upon the English stage. Miss Romney has sincerity, a charming presence, a feeling for this old world comedy which it is impossible to overpraise. We undertake to say that experience will make of her a great actress. She has flashed upon our horizon as one or two others have done to instantly win the favor of the public and the praise of the critic."

Etta put the paper aside and took up a notice in a very different strain. This was from the stately pages of "The Thunderer." Herein you had a dissertation upon Haddon Hall, the Elizabethan Drama, the Comedie Francaise, the weather, and the tragedies of Aeschylus. The writer, though the play a good specimen of its kind. He, too, admitted that in Miss Etta Romney there was the making of a great actress:

"But she is not English," he protested, "we refuse to believe it. An artiste who can recreate the atmos-

phere of a mediaeval age and win a verdict of conviction has not learnt her art in Jermyn Street. We look for the biographer to help us. Has the Porte St. Martin nothing to say to this story? Has Paris no share in it? We await the answer with some expectation. Here is a comedy of which the Third Act should be memorable. But whoever designed the scene in the chapel is capable de tout

So to the end did this amiable appreciation applaud the player and tolerate the play for her sake. Etta understood that it must mean much to her; but she was too feverishly impatient to dwell upon it, and she turned to the "Daily Shuffler" wishing that she had eyes to read all the

papers at once. The "Daily Shuffler" was very cruel:

"Miss Etta Romney," it said, "is worthy of better things. As a whole, the performance was beneath contempt. At the same time, we are not unprepared to hear that an ignorant public is ready to patronize it."

Had Etta known that the author of this screed was a youth of eighteen, who had asked for two stalls and been allotted but one, she might have been less crestfallen than she was when her fingers discovered this considerable thorn upon her rose-bush. But she knew little of the drama and less than nothing of its criticism; and there were tears in her eyes when she put the papers down.

"How cruel," she said, "how could people write of others like that!" She did not believe that she could have the heart to read more, and might not have done so had not little Dulcie Holmes flung herself into the room at that very moment and positively screamed an expression of her rapture.

TO BE CONTINUED

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