

**THE ETERNAL ENIGMA.
A ROMANCE IN THE LIFE
OF YVETTE GUILBERT**

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The Eternal Enigma. A Romance in the Life of Yvette Guilbert by Louis de Robert

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LOUIS DE ROBERT

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THE POWDER PUFF HAS OVER HER NECK LIKE A LITTLE WHITE MOUSE. See page 20.

THE ETERNAL ENIGMA

A Romance in the Life of *Yvette Guilbert*

BY
LOUIS DE ROBERT

WITH A PREFACE BY M^LL^E. GUILBERT

*What a pity that the romances in our
own lives cannot end as they do in books*

ILLUSTRATED BY PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE REAL CHARACTERS
TAKEN FROM LIFE BY PACH BROTHERS

NEW YORK
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1897

PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

By YVETTE GUILBERT

WHAT a pity, says the author, that the romances in our own lives cannot end as they do in books. The story that follows is a page from my own life, and it is precisely one of those real experiences which do not end as they do in books. It is the story of the heart, the story of a tender, affectionate soul, cruelly disillusioned by the coldness and indifference of a woman. But this woman felt grateful to the man who laid at her feet the great passion of his life, because she was familiar with the struggles of existence, because she knew how rarely is found true sincerity of the heart and the soul; and although she was never able to respond to his respectful and violent love, she consoled it as best she could with the soothing words of a mother who sings her first-born to sleep with a lullaby. Years have gone by since the occur-

complexion. A slight moustache covered his upper lip; his smile disclosed fine, white teeth.

As he opened the door he slightly recoiled, taken aback at being caught in *négligé*, and with his palette and brushes in his hand. Jeanne at once introduced herself:

"Mademoiselle Jeanne Saulier."

He bowed, held out his hand to Rosel, whom he knew, and said:

"Please come in. My servant is out. You'll excuse me."—

He was taken completely by surprise—he was hard at work—he had not expected the pleasure. And as he apologized he led them into the studio, an immense room magnificently lighted by large bay windows from which could be seen the continual movement in the crowded street beneath. Here again one received the impression of being in a schoolhouse. With its bare whitewashed walls and plain furnishings the studio had the appearance of a big classroom. A few canvases, hung here and there, were the only spots of warmth and color amid the general monotony.

Clairin now turned to look at his visitors. Jeanne was tall and slender and looked pretty in her spring gown. In the full light of the studio and contrasted with her red hair her face seemed quite white. Rosel, standing at her side, was a man in the forties, very fat, jovial faced, and with a heavy moustache. He was still panting from the exertion of climbing the stairs. Both seemed very intimate and addressed each other in the familiar second person singular. They were both connected with the theatrical world, she as a star and he as an amateur playwright.

Loquaciously and rapidly Jeanne explained the object of their call:

"I'm very pleased we found you in, Monsieur, for I was very curious to meet you. It will amuse you when I tell you why. I saw your red-haired peasant woman yesterday among the pictures at the Exposition des Indépendants. Is not the peasant myself? She is the very image of me—my features, my face, my figure. My friends all recognized me, and you may imagine my astonishment. At first I naturally thought it had been done in jest, but Rosel assures me that you did not know

me, that you had never seen me, and I thought that so funny that—here I am.”

Clairin stood listening, almost confused. This tall young woman intimidated him, and while she was speaking he rolled his brushes between his fingers and the color on his cheeks heightened perceptibly. It was quite true, he did not know her, he had never seen her, going rarely to the theatres, devoting all his time to his work. His only distraction consisted in spending his evenings with some of his fellow artists, discussing art. He explained this in a low tone, ashamed for the first time at having to confess that he was so little the man of the world and so much of a hermit. Rosel, standing a few paces away, was watching them both and seemed to be enjoying himself hugely. Then Jeanne questioned him. Was it a model who had posed for the figure? And when she learned that he had painted her from intuition she saw in it a sign of an affinity between them, a sure indication that they were destined to meet and to become friends.

They chatted. She wanted to buy the picture, and was disappointed when she heard that it was sold. But Rosel suggested:

"There's an easy way out of the difficulty. Suppose you ask him to paint your portrait."

"Will you!" she asked.

"Yes, I'm willing."

And she lingered there inspecting the studio. A small portrait resting on the easel attracted her. It was that of a smiling young girl with the grace and coquettish poise of a woman.

"O! how sweet that young girl is! Look, Rosel, isn't that exquisite?"

She wanted to see all there was on the walls, in the portfolios, everywhere. She admired all the sketches, drawings and croquis, praising everything with childish enthusiasm. Rosel, who boasted of a grandfather among the painters of the romantic school, approved everything she said by sheer good nature.

"It must be very interesting to paint," said Jeanne. "Besides," she added, "it is so delightful to work when one is bored or sad."

Clairin smiled.

"I never feel bored; I am never sad," he replied.

She looked at him surprised. Then she said:

"You are fortunate."

They talked on, the one close to the other,