

**Stagescripts**

# The Lady Vanishes

A comedy thriller adapted by Derek Webb

*from the novel by Ethel Lina White, on which the classic Hitchcock film was based*

**Professor** What exactly do you mean?

**Miss Evelyn FP** We live in a very quiet neighbourhood, close to the cathedral. It was ruined for everyone when a terrible person came to live there. A war profiteer; at least, I call them all that. One day, when he was racing about in his car, drunk, as usual, he knocked down a woman. We saw the accident, and our evidence got him six months' imprisonment. It was a very bad case.

**Professor** I congratulate you on your public spirit.

**Miss Evelyn FP** We were quite pleased with ourselves too, until he came out. After that we were marked people. This man – aided by his two boys – persecuted us in every kind of way. Windows were smashed, obscene messages chalked on the gates. We could never catch them in the act, although we appealed to the police and they had a special watch kept on the premises. After a time it got on our nerves. It affected my sister most, as she was terrified lest one of her pet animals might be the next victim. Luckily, before it came to that, the man left the town.

**Professor** I see. I'm sorry to hear that.

**Miss Evelyn FP** So, can you blame us, that we made a vow never to interfere in anything again... unless it's a case of cruelty to animals or children.

*Fade to black. SFX: the sound of a train travelling at speed is heard.*

## Scene 6

*USR Compartment: As the lights fade up, Iris is discovered on her own in the compartment. She is sitting opposite where Miss Froy sat. She jiggles up and down as before, looking out of the window. As the SFX fade out, Max arrives at the 'door'.*

**Max** All alone.

**Iris** Yes, thank goodness.

**Max** Where is everybody?

**Iris** Don't know. Maybe they've all gone for lunch.

**Max** Mind if I join you?

**Iris** Be my guest.

**Max** *(Sitting down in what was Miss Froy's seat).* Well, are you planning to stop off at Trieste?

**Iris** *(Stiffly).* No.

**Max** But are you sure you're fit to go on? The Professor's not sure you are.

**Iris** I know. He's talking about me going to some nursing home.

**Max** When did this happen?

**Iris** Earlier. He said he'd had word with the Doctor who suggested I had a good night's rest, before I continued the journey: "for my own benefit"... that's a laugh!

**Max** I see.

**Iris** So what about you? What do you think?

**Max** To be frank, I'm worried stiff about you.

**Iris** Why?

**Max** Hanged if I know. *(Beat).* Well, I like you... Anyway, cheer up you'll soon be back with your friends.

**Iris** Not if the Doctor has his way. Anyway, I don't want to see any of them. I don't really want to get back. I've no real home. And nothing seems worthwhile anymore.

**Max** So what do you do with yourself?

**Iris** Nothing... Oh, play about, mainly.

**Max** With other chaps?

**Iris** Yes, we all do the same things. Silly things. There's not one real person among the lot of us. Sometimes, you know, I get terrified. I'm wasting my youth. What's at the end of it all?

**Max** My life's really very different from yours. I never know where I'm going next. But it's always rough. And things happen. Not always pleasant things either. If I could take you on my next job, you'd get a complete change. You'd go without every comfort a refined home should have, but I'd lay odds you'd never feel bored again.

**Iris** It sounds lovely... are you proposing to me?

**Max** No, I...

**Iris** (*Laughing*). Why not? Lots of men do. And I'd like to go to a really rough place.

**Max** Fine. So let's get down to business. Got any money?

**Iris** Some. A few thou. Just chicken-feed really.

**Max** Suits me. I've none at all.

**Iris** So you're planning to live off my money?

**Max** Sounds like a good idea.

*Pause.*

**Iris** Tell me, what sort of mind do you have exactly?

**Max** Fair to middling, when its lubricated. It works best on beer.

**Iris** Could you write a detective novel?

**Max** No. Can't spell.

**Iris** But could you solve one?

**Max** Every time.

**Iris** Then suppose you give me a demonstration. You've been very clever in proving that Miss Froy couldn't exist. But, if she did, could you find out what might have happened to her? Or is that too difficult?

**Max** (*Bursting out laughing he stands up and rubs his chin with this hand*). Well... let me see... (*He paces up and down the compartment*). Ah!

**Iris** Yes!

**Max** No, that wouldn't work...

**Iris** Oh...

**Max** (*Pacing up and down, flashes of inspiration touch him, then disappear. Finally*). Ah, yes!

**Iris** Yes?

**Max** I think I've got it to fit. Bit of jiggery-pokery in parts, but it hangs together. So, would you like to hear a story called: 'The Strange Disappearance of Miss Froy'?

**Iris** I'd love to.

**Max** Then I'll begin. (*He sits.*). But, first of all, when you boarded the train, was there one nun next door or two?

**Iris** I don't know. How should I know? I only glanced in on the way to have tea.

**Max** Think.

**Iris** I only noticed one. She had a horrible face, I remember that.

**Max** Hmm, my story demands a second one later on.

**Iris** Well that's not to say there isn't another one.

**Max** True.

**Iris** Go on then.

**Max** I haven't started yet. The nun thing was only a preamble. Here goes...

**Iris** I'm all ears!

**Max** Miss Froy is actually a spy who's got some information which she's sneaking out of the country. So she's got to be bumped off. And where better than on a train journey?

**Iris** You mean, they've thrown her out of a window onto the track?

**Max** No, don't be silly...

**Iris** Me?

**Max** No, if they'd chucked her on the line, her body would be found and awkward questions asked. That's why she's got to disappear. On a journey a lot of valuable time will be wasted before it can be proved that she's even missing.

**Iris** What do you mean?

**Max** At first people will think she's missed her connection or stopped in Paris for a day or two to shop. So, by the time they get busy, the trail will be stone cold.

**Iris** So is the whole train in the plot?

**Max** Hardly.

**Iris** Who then?

**Max** Just the Baroness, the Doctor and the nuns. But, of course, there'll be a conspiracy of silence. None of the passengers who are local would dare to contradict the Baroness. So there must have been some dirty work at the station over her reserved seat. They had to make sure she would be in the Baroness's compartment and at the end of the train.

**Iris** But what's happened to her?

**Max** Aha, that's where my brain comes in...

**Iris** Yes?

**Max** Miss Froy is where the Doctor says he found her.

**Iris** In the compartment next door?

**Max** Yes, but covered with rugs and disguised with bandages and things!

**Iris** How? When?

**Max** When you conveniently dropped off to sleep. No doubt the Doctor asks Miss Froy if she could render some service next door. And being an obliging creature she goes.

**Iris** She would. I know she would.

**Max** And the second she enters the compartment she gets the surprise of her life. To begin with the blinds are down and the place is in darkness. She smells a rat, but before she can squeal, the three of them set on her.

**Iris** Three of them?

**Max** Our friend... (*he puts on an accent*), ze Doctor, ze Nun and...

**Iris** Who? Not the Baroness?

**Max** No, the patient.

**Iris** The patient?

**Max** Of course! The patient is one of the gang. One of them pins down Miss Froy, the other throttles her so she can't shout, and the Doctor gives her an injection to make her unconscious.

**Iris** Yes...

**Max** Oh, and the nun you saw is actually a man... that's why you thought she looked so ugly.

**Iris** And what about the patient?

**Max** Well, by now, you've unearthed some English people who will remember Miss Froy, and you've roped in the vicar's wife. So they have to produce someone to prove you wrong. So down come the blinds again and the so-called patient changes clothes, and, hey presto: Miss Froy, complete with feather and hat!

**Iris** It could happen, you're right! (*Pause, and then in a quiet voice*). What will happen when they reach Trieste?

**Max** Oh this is the part my readers will adore. The real Miss Froy will be put in an ambulance and taken to a remote house by a deserted lake or something. You know the sort of thing... black oily water lapping a derelict quay. Then she'll be bundled up, weighed down with lead or rocks and dumped in the mud and ooze.

**Iris** How awful!

**Max** Yes, But I'm not altogether ruthless. I'll let them keep her drugged to the bitter end, so the poor old dear'll know nothing about it.

**Iris** Then we can't waste any time!

**Max** (*Laughing*). Oh, how I wish I had you to listen to my golf stories! You've got just the right reaction!

**Iris** What do you mean?  
**Max** I made it up! (*Beat.*) It's the best I could do in the circumstances, but it's not really what happened.  
**Iris** It isn't?  
**Max** No, of course not.  
**Iris** You made it up?  
**Max** Yes.  
**Iris** But it could have happened just as you described it.  
**Max** No, don't be fanciful. The whole thing's ridiculous.  
**Iris** So you're not going to help me?  
**Max** The patient in the next compartment is undoubtedly real. And, if we were to go storming in there, the Doctor would have us thrown off the train, and rightly so.  
**Iris** Yes, you're right... (*She slumps back in her seat.*) But there is one thing that rings entirely true...  
**Max** What's that?  
**Iris** That newspaper report. It says that that head of the family couldn't have murdered the other chap because he was away at his hunting lodge at the time.  
**Max** And?  
**Iris** And he wasn't! Because Miss Froy met him in the early hours and he shook her hand. So she's a witness... a very important witness that needs to be silenced!  
**Max** Well...

*They both settle back into their seats.*

**Iris** Well, what do you think.  
**Max** I think...  
**Iris** Yes?  
**Max** I think I could do with something to eat! Care to join me?  
**Iris** No, I'm really not hungry at the moment. Maybe later.  
**Max** All right. And, we'll talk it through with the Professor.  
**Iris** That won't be any good.  
**Max** What do you mean?  
**Iris** He's like everyone else. He doesn't believe me. He'll have me shunted off to a nursing home with that Doctor if I don't watch it.  
**Max** (*Standing up and going to the 'door'.*) I'll go and have a word with him.  
**Iris** If you want. But I'm not going anywhere with that Doctor, and that's final! Directly we get to Trieste I am going to the British Embassy.  
**Max** Don't be such a silly goat... what for?  
**Iris** To tell them all that's been going on, of course..  
**Max** Oh, Iris, Iris...  
**Iris** Don't you 'Oh, Iris' me! Are you with me or against me, Max? Are you stopping off at Trieste?  
**Max** No, and neither are you!  
**Iris** I see. Then you didn't mean what you said about liking me, and all that.  
**Max** I certainly meant, all that.  
**Iris** Well, if you don't come with me to the Embassy, I'm through with you.  
**Max** Can't you realise I'm your only friend?  
**Iris** If you were a friend, you'd prove it.  
**Max** Wish I could. As your best friend, I ought to knock you out, so that you'd stay put for the next twenty-four hours, and rest your poor old head.  
**Iris** Oh, I hate you! For heaven's sake, go away!  
**Max** Alright, I'll catch you later. (*He exits SL.*)