

# A DASH OF IBSEN

## THE VELVET TOUCH

(RKO-Radio)

**A**LTHOUGH it was touchingly described in the advertisements as "the private life of a beautiful woman revealed with a world of Sparkle, Laughter, and Suspense, wearing Many Glamorous Gowns designed by Travis Banton," *The Velvet Touch* turned out to be little more than a rather sumptuously staged thriller. Of course this could have been deduced beforehand from the fact that Sydney Greenstreet was in the cast, and as it turned out he plays the second of his two roles on this occasion—the fat detective instead of the fat villain—and plays it exactly as he has done all his previous ones.

The film's main interest is that it provides a Vehicle (as they say in the trade) for Rosalind Russell, and since it enables her to play the part of an actress who wants to play the part of Hedda Gabler, is isn't a bad sort of vehicle either. Miss Russell strides, stamps, raves, and bewails her way across the screen from the very first

### BAROMETER

FAIR: "The Velvet Touch."  
MAINLY FAIR: "Fuller Brush Man."

scene to the last in a manner suggesting the good old tradition of acting before they invented the close-up, and there is never a doubt that the film is hers, and hers alone. She has even had the male lead taken by a relatively unknown actor from England (Leo Genn—*Green For Danger*, *Henry V*), a smooth performer who deserved a meatier role.

Considered as a film (as distinct from a Vehicle) *The Velvet Touch* is only slightly better than average. Valerie Stanton is a brilliantly successful Broadway comedienne who wants to break away from the producer who discovered her 10 years ago and made her what she is to-day. In an argument after the last performance of their latest smash hit, he threatens to ruin her popularity by revealing some scandal of the past if she persists in the folly of wanting to play Ibsen's Hedda Gabler. At the height of the quarrel she picks up a statuette from the table and hits him

with it. Horror-stricken (it is murder, she realises) she flees to her own room where she recalls the events leading up to the crime. These include her meeting, and falling in love with, a handsome architect named Michael Morel (Leo Genn) who is working over at Lake Success with UN.

The next development is the arrival of Captain Danbury of the New York Metropolitan Police (Sydney Greenstreet), a confirmed theatre addict, and a great fan of Miss Stanton's besides. The plot thickens when another actress in the company named Marion Webster (Claire Trevor), who was also apparently the producer's mistress, is discovered in a state of nervous prostration beside his body. Everyone, including the captain, thinks she did it, so the problem is now what Valerie Stanton will do about her conscience. Has she the courage to confess? She is about to do so when Marion Webster commits suicide, and the police declare the case closed. What of Valerie's conscience now? Has she the courage to go on living with her secret, or must she still confess?

At this point it becomes apparent that the film is attempting to draw some sort of parallel with *Hedda Gabler* itself. There is the same issue of whether a woman has the courage to go on living in such circumstances. There is the motive of the fear of scandal. Also,



LEO GENN  
A smooth performer

when it appears that Michael Morel had known all along that she did the killing, there is the same prospect of her future life being in the control of the person who shares her secret. Some of the lines in the film too, such as Valerie's repeated "Why did this horrible thing have to happen to me?" echo the words of the play. However,

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