

The Fourth Lady In Waiting.

By EDITH J. HULBERT.

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"A herald from his imperial majesty the czar of Russia!" There was a flare of trumpets, an eager swaying of the lines of courtiers, a soft ripple of laughter and then silence.

Before me stretched an interminable path of red velvet, flanked on either side by rows of smirking, bowing creatures clad in rainbow hued satins, velvets and glittering with jewels.

At the farther end, on a throne of ivory and gold, sat a regal, white robed woman, crowned and girdled with diamonds. Behind her stood two dusky giants majestically waving fans of peacock feathers.

At her feet knelt two tiny pages attired in blue and silver. She was the queen of Bodalva and one of the most beautiful women in the world. I was a nobody.

"Methinks," said the queen, flashing laughter from her violet eyes, "that the messenger of our fair cousin, the czar, is unduly overawed by our presence. Be not afraid to approach, Sir Herald. We are quite harmless."

Again came that subdued giggle, all the more maddening that it had about it a baffling familiarity, but at a frown from the queen it was quickly suppressed.

Summoning all my will power, I plunged desperately forward and in a moment was kneeling at the foot of the throne between the two pages.

"The humble as well as the great, your majesty," I faltered, "are overcome by the spell of beauty."

She smiled and, indicating by a gesture that I was to rise, took the scroll and, unrolling it, hastily scanned its contents.

A change, swift and terrible, came over her countenance. Her eyes flashed. Her cheeks paled. Her lips straightened to a scarlet line.

"See here," he said. "We don't want supers in this company to forget their cues and occupy the center of the stage for ten minutes, and we don't want any lines thrown in either. The man who wrote that play can attend to that."

"But," I stammered, "the queen—Miss Elsworth—said something to me that wasn't in—"

"What's that to you?" he interrupted sarcastically. "You're not a star just yet, are you? Who are you, anyway? One of them young chaps from the college, ain't you?"

I nodded. "First time on?" Again I nodded. He shrugged his shoulders.

at the time I was on the stage," I said reproachfully. Elfrida looked penitent. "It was mean of me," she admitted. "But you did look so funny!" She giggled again at the recollection.

"Where did you come from? How did you get here? Why haven't you written to me in all these weeks?" I asked as soon as I felt sure she thoroughly understood my mental attitude regarding her.

"Mme. Brenner's, New Haven. Skipped with the show Saturday night. Couldn't write. Watched every minute," she answered with unwomanly lucidity and brevity.

Elfrida always was different from other girls. This was why I made such a fool of myself over her last summer after my junior year that the governor was afraid I never would stand for the senior grind at Harvard.

Consequently with her power of resource it was mere child's play for her to "break jail," as she expressed it, during the relaxed vigilance of the Saturday evening recreation hour and subsequently to coax her way to the manager's presence.

"You must go back at once," I said sternly as soon as we had compared notes on the numerous exciting events which had occurred since our parting.

"You've only been at it two days," I remarked, "and as it is the 4th of the month I suppose you still have most of your allowance."

"If you will leave the company tonight, I will," I said in the tone of one making the sacrifice of a lifetime.

"Elfrida displayed signs of interest. She didn't of course know that my engagement, like that of a dozen other fellows who were members of the queen's guard, was only for the current week."

"You are willing, then, to forego the pursuit of the queen?" inquired Elfrida, quoting from the play with mock intensity. I detected, however, an undercurrent of real anxiety in her voice and hastened to reassure her.

"Anything that I gave up for your sake would be the next moment forgotten," I replied dramatically.

She allowed me to kiss her. "It will do it," she said after a moment's deliberation. "But we will both have to forfeit our salaries."

I glanced at the clock. It was quarter after 8, and I knew by the noise outside that the first act was just over. Seizing the fourth lady in waiting unconcermously by the arm, I hurried her down the corridor to the ladies' dressing room.

"Borrow a long dark coat if you haven't got one," I whispered, "and pin that summery under it. I will have a cab here in five minutes, and you can get the 9:40 for New Haven."

She obeyed my directions, and twenty minutes later I stood alone on the station platform disconsolately watching the rapidly disappearing train that was bearing her Brennerwards.

I got back in time for the third act all right, but I didn't succeed in meeting Miss Elsworth after the performance, nor any other time, for that matter, for I kept my promise and quit that night.

In this case, however, virtue met with a substantial reward, for when the episode came to the ears of my father and of Elfrida's they were so impressed by my masterly handling of the situation that they permitted our engagement to be announced.

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