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. It was my province to deliver into her royal band the scroll intrusted to my keeping by my gracious master. For weeks I had been looking forward to this audience with feverish eagerness. But now, at the crucial moment, when grace of bearing and fluency of speech would perhaps serve to win me a smile from those perfect lips, I stood gaping like a clown in the midst of her lackeys.

My feet refused to move, my knees trembled, the scroll in my hand shook, my tongue clove to the roof of my mouth. There was a muffled giggle on my right. Then a clear, exquisitely modulated voice smote the air like the notes of a golden harp.
"Methinks," said the queen, flashing

le aghter from her violet eyes, "that the messenger of our fair consin, 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 ment 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

A change, swift and terrible, came over her countenance. Her eyes flash-Her cheeks paled. Her lips straightened to a scarlet line. Tearing the parchment thrice across, she cast it at my feet and hissed in a low tone of concentrated fury: "That, variet, is my answer to your master! See that you deliver it to him with all possible haste! Out of my sight! Begone!" Then again her wonderful voice rang

out in all its clearness. "Men of Bodalva," she said, "never while Sylvia lives shall you bend your neck beneath the yoke of the Russian

tyrant!" "Long live Queen Sylvia!" shouted the courtiers. And from somewhere in

the distance came the sounds of tumultuous applause clapping, stamping and cries of "Brava! Brava!" Mechanically I backed down the red velvet path, unheeding the hisses and

black looks which beset me on either side, and presently found myself in a small anteroom, the walls of which were hung with doublets, hose, cloaks, plumed hats and various articles of armor. Almost immediately I was confronted by a tail, thin, flashily dressed man, who eyed me with an expression of extreme disfavor.

"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 ASTORIA 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 bis

shoulders. "Well, I won't report you if you look sharp for the rest of the performance. Luckily for you the boss is away tonight. What are you doing it for, anyway? Stage struck or Elsworth struck?" I did not deign to answer, ...ad, with

a derisive guffaw, he went out, slamming the door behind him. I had been alone scarcely a minute

when that irritating giggle again fell upon my ears. "Who's there?" I cried, flinging open

the door and peering into the dimly lighted corridor.

"Sh! Go back!" whispered it feminine voice. And as I obeyed its command the doorway framed a petite golden baired damsel, resplendent in pink sat 168 Tenth Street,

in and a court train. I seized her hands and drew her to the center of the room under the electric light.

"Elfrida!" I gasped. "What are you

doing here?" She dropped me a stately courtesy. "The Countess Olga, fourth lady in waiting to her majesty Queen Sylvia. at your service," she said, with dignity.

Then she giggled and blushed. "It was you, then, who kept laughing

an the time I was on the stage," I said eproachfully.

Elfrida looked penitent.

"It was mean of me." she admitted. "But you did look so funny!" She giggled again at the recollection. I made no reply in words, but I let her see that I forgave her.

"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.

Elfrids 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. If he had remembered that I was on the crew, he wouldn't have been so scared. "I could not love thee, dear, so much loved I not honor more," I had quoted solemnly to Elfrida the night we said goodby.

That was why she was packed off to that beast of a Brenner when she should have been queening it in Albany society. She was so original that when there was no immediate danger of her eloping with me her father was afraid that she might take up slumming or typing or insist on going to the Philippines to nurse the soldiers. Brenner had doubtless been apprised of these contingencies, but apparently the possibility of Elfrida succumbing to the ordinary schoolgirl variety of stage fever had occurred to no one.

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. As far as he was concerned, to see was to engage. Did I mention that Elfrida was a ripping. tearing beauty? Well, such is the case, and she confided to me that she was paying for her own costumes.

"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.

"And give up earning my own liv ing," demanded Elfrida indignantly, "just when I have proved how easily I can do it?"

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

turned her back on me, and for fully two minutes every one of my usual methods of effecting a reconciliation failed utterly. At length a brilliant idea came to me.

"If you will leave the company to night, 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 curont week. "You are willing, then, to forego the

pursuit of the queen?" inquired Elfrids, 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. "I will do it," she said after a moment's deliberation. "But we will both have to forfelt our salaries."

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I glanced at the clock, It was quarter after 9, and I knew by the noise outside that the first act was just over. Selzing the fourth lady in waiting unceremoniously 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 flummery 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 performane, 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 cars 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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