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THE LAST ACT.

Arriving at a Decision About Changing Its Ending.

By VIRGINIA BLAIR.

[Copyright, 1909, by Associated Literary Press.]

"You must give it a happy ending," said Miss Atherton.

Carruthers looked at her gloomily. "Not unless you say 'Yes.'"

"As if that had anything to do with it," said Miss Atherton scornfully.

"It has everything to do with it," said Carruthers. "When I write a play I write as I feel. If I am sad the play will be sad, and if I am happy the ending will be happy. And I can't be happy as long as you persist in refusing me; hence I shall have to give my play a sad ending."

"Oh, well, then," Miss Atherton tossed her head, "end it any old way. But I won't play it if it doesn't suit me."

A week later he called her up. "It is finished," he said, "and you can read it at your leisure."

"Read it to me," she said and set the next afternoon.

Carruthers found her alone and very beautiful in a violet crape house gown, with her dark hair banded with a gold ribbon.

"I want you to dress like that in the last act of my play," he said, "and carry violets. It will give the proper note of mourning."

"Then you have made it sad?" she demanded.

"Yes. The heroine is a naughty princess who spurns her lover all through the play, and in the end he finds another woman more gentle, more kind, and the princess is left alone in her haughtiness. That is why I want you to wear a purple gown."

"Oh!" said Miss Atherton somewhat faintly.

When he came to the last act he saw that Miss Atherton was intensely interested. "But I don't think I am at all like that," she said ingenuously as he finished.

"Who said you were?" he demanded. "I am writing of a princess in Egypt."

The color flamed into her face. "Of course. I had thought you had me in mind."

"I perceive," Carruthers replied, "that you and the princess have certain characteristics in common, and that is why you would fit the part or the part would fit you. But the question now to decide is, 'Who shall take the part of the other woman?'"

MISS ATHERTON'S EYES SNAPPED.

"I believe you have spent more time on her than on the other woman," Miss Atherton said jealously.

Carruthers looked at her out of the corner of his eye. "I had thought of Miss Muir as your opposite. She would fit in, I think."

Miss Atherton's eyes snapped. "She isn't half as gentle as you might imagine."

"Dear lady," Carruthers remonstrated, "perhaps you are not a judge of gentleness."

"Oh, well"—Miss Atherton laughed a little—"my temper isn't in good shape this morning. You'll have to forgive me if I criticise everything and everybody."

"What's wrong?" Carruthers asked solicitously.

"Everything," succinctly. "I've got to give up my apartment for one thing. Aunt Sarah has to go back to Pine Point, and I can't live alone."

"Of course not," Carruthers agreed promptly, "and you couldn't find a better time to marry me."

"Marry?" she came back at him. "An actress hasn't any right to marry."

"It depends upon the point of view," Carruthers stated. "Of course if you loved me"—

"Please don't talk of love," exclaimed Miss Atherton. "I have enough of it in my plays."

"To return to our mutton," said Carruthers calmly, "I shall give Miss Muir the part of the helpless heroine who so works on the sympathies of the scorned lover that he turns from the princess to her."

"You have made the ending happy for the other girl, then?"

"Yes; you can't pile sadness on too deeply."

"And the princess sits in the purple twilight, in a purple gown, with violets clutched in her two white hands, and moans, 'My lost love, alas!' or words to that effect. I can't see myself doing it," remonstrated Miss Atherton. "You've simply got to change that ending."

"But how?" questioned Carruthers.

"Have another lover in the background for the gentle maiden and let the princess relent at the last minute. You can still keep her in the purple twilight and the purple gown, but you can have her lover at her feet, with the golden moon flooding them with light."

"But the princess wouldn't relent—not the kind of princess in the play."

"She might," Miss Atherton hesitated. "You know you can never tell just what a woman will do."

"Would you," Carruthers demanded eagerly—"would you relent?"

"I am not talking of myself," Miss Atherton told him coldly; "I am talking of the princess in the play."

Carruthers folded up his manuscript before he answered. "Then, positively, I shall not change the last act. I had thought of a better one than that of purple twilight and a lover at her feet. I had thought of the princess at dawn on the terrace, with a wreath of roses on her head, and coming toward her with outstretched hands was her lover, and the glory of the rising sun about them both"—

"Beautiful!" broke in Miss Atherton. "We will have that."

"We will not have that," was the stubborn rejoinder. "As I have told you, I am not in a mood for happy endings."

"Oh, well, have your way, then," said Miss Atherton crossly.

During rehearsal Miss Atherton observed that Carruthers took especial pains with Miss Muir's part.

"You act as if she were the star," she remonstrated one day just before the last act.

"I like her part," he said. "It fits in with my ideal. I want the audience to realize what gentleness and sweetness may accomplish as against beauty and pride."

Before Miss Atherton could answer she was called for the last act.

She played it well, putting into it all the despair of a woman who, having scorned love, knows that she has lost that which she prizes most in the world.

Even in her street gown she made it effective, for with the violets against her lips she murmured: "I shall wear no other flowers. They are the flowers of mourning, and all my days I shall mourn—alone!"

As the last word came in a whisper she stared, unseeing, into space.

"Beautiful!" Carruthers told her when she came off. "Beautiful!"

"But I don't like it," she sobbed. "It makes me miserable to play it."

He took her to a quiet spot where they could talk. "Why should it make you miserable?" he asked.

"Because I want happiness," she answered, "in my play—and in my life, Carl."

She had never called him that. For a moment he stared at her. Then he cried, "You mean that you will?"

She smiled, but her lips were white.

"Yes. I want my life to have a happy ending, Carl."

"Dear heart," he whispered, "I will change the last act."

The Wrong Man.

"A marriage had been fixed for 10 o'clock," said a clergyman, "and I had an appointment with the bishop at 11:30. Half past 10 came, a quarter to 11, and no bride or bridegroom. Presently the clerk announced their arrival. I went out. The couple stood in the usual place at the entrance to the chancel, and I began the service.

"'Please, sor,' began the man.

"'Don't speak now,' I said and continued the service.

"'I am very sorry, sor, but'—

"'Never mind now,' I said hastily. 'I cannot listen to excuses, for I have no time to pare.' And again I went on with the marriage service.

"A movement of the unhappy man caused me to look up.

"'But I am not the man!' he shrieked, like some frightened animal. 'I have only come to say the cab has broken down, sor,' he gasped. 'I am only the best man.' And, with a sigh of relief, he mopped his brow. All the while the lady smiled serenely.

"'Poor man! Did he get a fright? So did I, for I was new at the work and did not know what the consequence might be.'"—London Telegraph.

A Man Must Think.

A man must use his own judgment. He must think his own thoughts. He must believe his own convictions, let them jostle whom they may. There are ideas which are in the air. They settle down upon us like smuts in a manufacturing town. They settle upon us in the subway and on the streets. We find it difficult to brush them off our minds, and they grow bigger and stronger and dominate us.

We think we hold opinions when, as a matter of fact, they hold us. And this would be of the less consequence if they were our own opinions. But they are not. And they are not the opinions of our friends either. They have not been made in the sense in which one builds a conviction or shapes a life. And the trouble is that we think we are thinking when we are only obeying the orders of the opinions which have taken possession of us.—Dr. Charles F. Aked.

It Went Back.

In one of our old towns, which has recently been the scene of a pageant, a party of Americans were being conducted over the ancient abbey.

The ages of this part and that were pointed out by a learned attendant, and at length, "That arch," says he, "may possibly go back to William the Conqueror."

"Don't you like it?" said a guest promptly.

The attendant explained that he did not understand.

"Doesn't it suit you? Why are you sending it back, anyway?"—London Mail.

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A SCOTTISH LEGEND.

The Story of the Knight With the White Feather.

TWO COURAGEOUS WARRIORS.

Heroic Alexander Hume and His Still More Heroic Fellow Soldier and Protector—The Sad Sequel to the Battle That Was Lost.

The heraldic arms of the Scotch town of Selkirk show a woman seated on a tomb, on which is also placed the Scottish lion. The legend told about the arms is this: King James IV. of Scotland, who was about to invade England, needed recruits for his enterprise. The town clerk of Selkirk, William Brydone, tried his best to aid his king by persuading his fellow countrymen to enlist in the royal cause. So earnest was he that he is said to have moved over a hundred lusty Scots to join his standard. Among these was one of the name of Alexander Hume. This man was a shoemaker of the town of Selkirk. He was strong, stalwart, bold and an excellent workman. Brydone was very glad to welcome him, as he reckoned him quite the best man of the hundred, and his comrades, who were also brave men and true, cheered him as he appeared among them, such confidence had they in his wisdom, prudence, valor and strength.

Hume's wife, Margaret, was a fine young woman and very fond and proud of her brave, strong husband. Now, Margaret did not at all like this proposed invasion of England. She felt that it would mean great trouble to the Scotch people, who would certainly be vanquished by their strong enemy, and the thought came to her that her own brave husband might perhaps lose his life in the struggle. She therefore used all her best efforts to keep him at home. She pleaded in vain. Alexander was firm. At last she held up to his face their little five-months-old daughter and asked who would look after the child if he should die and who would keep her from misery and misfortune.

Hume loved his wife and child, and these appeals brought the tears to his eyes, but they did not break down his resolution, which he had girt about him as armor. Nothing could move him to become untrue to his king and country.

Finding that no entreaties could move him, Margaret at last gave way to anger and told him that his eager desire to be thought the bravest man of Selkirk would not supply the child he was bound to work for with a bite of bread. She said even more than this. Her tones grew higher, and one word led to another, as you know it will, until the couple parted in anger, he to the field of battle and she to remain at home.

Alexander had not gone far before it flashed across the mind of his wife that perhaps she might never see him alive again. Unable to control herself, she flung the child into its crib and rushed out of the house. She must see her husband again and get from him one parting glance or word of reconciliation. She hurried through the town, she sought everywhere for him, but he was nowhere to be seen. He had gone off with his comrades. The poor wife wept bitterly. Her grief was deep.

Hume and his fellows were soon engaged in battle. He displayed the greatest bravery. Wherever he went numbers of the enemy fell. In every direction upon the field of battle he was seen. His companions kept well up to him, and in particular one man who had lately joined the party. This man fought with a courage equal to that of Hume himself, keeping continually beside him and defending him in many perils. Once when an Englishman from behind drew very near to the Scot this soldier struck the cowardly fellow to the earth just as he was inserting his spear between the clasps of Hume's armor. Hume called to the brave fellow and demanded his name, even in the midst of the fight, but the stranger said that that was no matter.

This generous soldier wore a leather jacket and an iron helmet, in which there was placed a small white feather. Wherever Hume fought on the battlefield there might be seen beside him the iron helmet and the white feather.

At last the battle ended in defeat for the Scotch, who scattered in all directions. Hume, who, with other soldiers, was obliged to lie concealed in the forest for some time, took the first opportunity of inquiring after his faithful attendant. But all his inquiries were without avail. He could not trace him. Nothing could he learn of him but that he had disappeared when the fight was over.

Alexander Hume hurried to his cottage. He was anxious to see again his beloved wife and bestow upon her the kiss of reconciliation. When he reached it he listened at the door, and his heart beat fast. He had kind words to say to her from whom he had parted in anger, and his deep wounds needed dressing. He lifted the latch and walked in. All was still. No wife came to meet him; no child's cry met his ear. On looking round the room he saw seated in an armchair the knight who had fought so bravely beside him in the battle, wearing the same leather jacket, iron helmet and white feather. That person was Margaret Hume. She was dead and clasped in her dead arms the little child.

Be conciliatory and considerate if you hope to win conciliation and consideration.—Ward.

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(Weather and ice permitting)

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Will leave Baltimore Thursdays at 8.00 a. m. for Betterton and Sassafras river landings, stopping at Gales and Toldhester on the return trip.

Tolchester Schedule—Saturdays, leaves Baltimore at 7 a. m. and 2.30 p. m.; leaves Tolchester at 9.00 a. m. and 4.30 p. m.

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Returning, steamer leaves Chestertown for Baltimore, Monday, Wednesday and Friday at 8 o'clock a. m., weather permitting, stopping at all the above landings, arriving in Baltimore about 2.00 p. m.

Steamer will leave Baltimore, Pier 7, Light St., weather permitting, Monday and Friday at 6.00 p. m., stopping at Quaker Neck, Booker's, Ralph's, Chestertown, Buckingham, Sprys Deep Landing, Crumpton.

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This time-Table Shows the times at which steamers may be expected to arrive at and depart from the several wharves, but their arrivals or departure at the times stated is not guaranteed, nor does the Company hold itself responsible for any delay or any consequences arising therefrom.

WILLARD THOMPSON,
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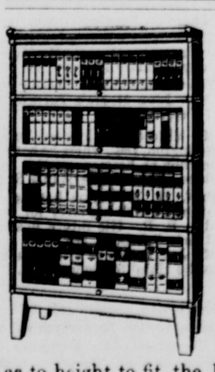

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