

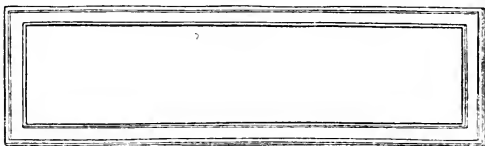
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THE
PHOTO-PLAY

*“You are never a failure until
You admit it Yourself.”*



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THE PHOTO-PLAY

A Book of
Valuable Information
for Those Who Would Enter
A Field *of* Unlimited
Endeavor



By
RALPH P. STODDARD



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TO YOU
ATTACHED

INTRODUCTION

There is a big demand for Scenarios, or stories for the motion pictures.

Several manufacturers are advertising for Scenarios, and pay good prices for suitable manuscript.

While the requirements are such that any person of ordinary literary ability may write a Scenario only a few succeed owing to the lack of knowledge of the formula and technique of Scenario writing.

A Chicago film manufacturer reports that out of five thousand received as a result of an expensive advertising campaign, only fifty Scenarios were accepted. This one per cent. is probably a fair average of copy accepted and paid for by all of the manufacturers. Of the ninety-nine per cent. of Scenarios rejected a large majority contain ideas that could be made into a good Photo-Play. The task of extracting the grain from the chaff is too great for the busy filmmaker. Yet he must have Scenarios for hundreds of picture plays are produced every week.

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The amateur and novice are being weeded out, while those who take the pains to study this art and prepare themselves for the work, are meeting with excellent success.

To receive the attention of the producer and have a chance for sale, a Scenario must conform to certain established rules and be presented in proper form. Many who now submit these plays, only to have them returned by the manufacturer, may make their writing profitable, if they will instruct themselves in the art and technique of the work.

15 books
15 or 20
Technique of the

A Simple Story

Generally a Photo-Play should be a single theme or plot, not a complication of plots as are our stage plays and novels. Many Scenarios submitted and rejected, contain sufficient ideas for two or three Photo-Plays, had they been worked out separately.

now changed

The story must be told by a series of happenings. While titles and sub-titles are used, and often strengthen the interest in the story, no manufacturer would buy a Scenario which would not stand alone or carry its story to the audience by the pictures, regardless of the title. Few sub-titles, letters, telegrams, or printed messages should appear in the play. The letter or telegram is often necessary and is permissible when consistent with the story, but these mediums should not be overworked.

Probably ninety out of every one hundred Photo-Plays have a plot, yet some of the most successful are a series of pictures to illustrate a theme without a thread of story. An example of this is a Lubin production entitled: "Will It Ever Come To This?" In this comedy is shown

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suggestions of the "new woman" idea carried to the extreme and while entirely without a plot is one of the best pictures ever made by this manufacturer.

The raw material of the Photo-Play Scenario, then, is simply an idea. It may be a story with a plot or a series of incidents pointing some theme.

The Big Idea

Have you an idea for a picture play?

Is it one of action rather than of words?

Can you suggest, say fifteen to twenty-five scenes, each one relating to the other, and each succeeding one a forward step in the story, culminating in a single scene which will bring out your climax?

Are all your scenes photographically possible, and are the settings, costumes and "properties" within the reach of the average filmmaker?

If you can answer these questions in the affirmative, then you are able to write and sell a Scenario and have the satisfaction of witnessing it on the screen.

There can be no loose ends nor going back in building your Photo-Play. The incidents of your story must follow in succession all leading to the final incident which discloses the interesting feature of your plot.

If these rules are observed and your characters are taken from every day life of the pres-

ent and your story is familiar to the great majority of Americans, your success is almost certain.

It is not necessary that you have an entirely original theme. Some writers say there is no such thing. The old themes are worked over and over and put in different forms and applied to different characters and always are acceptable and interesting .

You cannot use more than three to six principal characters in a play and each one must be a distinct type if the audience carries them through the picture without confusion.

Your first scene should be strong. In it plan to fasten the attention of your audience. Let them deep enough into the story to be thoroughly interested, but not deep enough to have any impression of what the climax is to be.

You must introduce your characters to your audience, not let them come on the screen unacquainted. If it is a part of your idea that a certain character is an optimist he should do something optimistic at his first appearance. If another character is a grouch, to make your story consistent, he should show an example of his grouchiness as soon as he comes on the

screen. If it is important to the audience that one of your characters is a doctor, or lawyer, or college student, or whatever else, you must either place him in surroundings which show his vocation or in some way clearly introduce him.

Shun Crime Scenes

The ban has been placed upon pictures showing violent crime of any nature or containing scenes in the least immoral or suggestive. There is little hope of sale of a Scenario with a murder or a theft in it. Your story might have to do with a murderer or a thief and be interesting and carry a moral lesson without picturing the actual crime. There are some exceptions to this rule. The censors pass upon the pictures of historical foundation containing crime scenes and occasionally in the stories if it is used more forcibly to drive home a moral lesson.

What the film-makers want most are clean-cut, domestic stories with everyday situations and characters. Comedies are in demand by all makers, while several advertise especially for Western and Indian stories.

Don't go away from the plain stories to find something strange and startling for your Scenario. It is like stepping over a dime to chase a rolling dollar which you never may catch.

Almost every issue of a big city newspaper contains, in its news stories, ideas for good picture plays, if skill is applied in arranging the Scenario. Those who have a taste for Scenario-writing will do well to read the newspapers.

An Example

Not long ago the newspapers of the country carried a story of domestic trouble in the family of a noted artist. A divorce suit and reports of reconciliation between the artist and his wife were features of the daily head lines. Finally they were brought together through their mutual love for their little girl. This idea has been used in no less than four recent pictures.

The Scenario writer must always consider photographic limitations. Don't put "dark and stormy nights" in your plays. Many an attempt at Scenario writing has been banished to the waste basket for that mistake.

While the film-maker can apply tricks of the films and produce almost any illusion, from the appearance of ghosts to having stones roll themselves up a steep hill, it must be a subject of exceptional interest to warrant their attempting unusual effects. It is better to avoid everything of that kind and leave such subjects for the producers' own creation.

If your story can be enacted in ordinary surroundings to be found almost anywhere, such as

open air scenes or interiors of residences or offices, so much the better is your chance of having your story reach the picture screens. Keep your characters out of scenes requiring special or expensive scenic construction by the manufacturer.

SS. The moving picture's greatest fort is its ability to take its characters to as many different locations as is necessary, and actually show them going from one place to another. This the stage play cannot do. A drama running two and one-half hours must be confined to a few scenes, and the characters brought together there, while the moving picture play may show characters long distances apart, in entirely different surroundings with only a fraction of a second between scenes. For instance: We may see a young man fighting in the trenches in Mexico, and the next instant see his anxious father and mother in a quaint home in the Vermont hills.

This great advantage of the moving picture should be taken advantage of by the Scenario writer. The open air is the natural element of the moving picture play. Don't spoil your attempt at writing by trying to take it elsewhere.

Preparing Copy

With your idea worked out, the next important matter is the preparation of copy. Thousands of attempts have failed and plays been rejected unread, because the proper formula was not followed.

As an average, a reel of moving pictures which contains 1,000 feet of film, requires fifteen minutes for projection on the screen. Approximately the same length of time is required to enact the play before the camera. Your whole story then, must be shown in fifteen minutes of action.

There may be but four or five different settings, some of them used many times in the course of the play, but each change counts as a scene. An ordinary story, should be told in fifteen to twenty scenes, with four or five subtitles.

Typewrite your copy on one side of sheet only, leaving a wide margin at the left side of every sheet. Triple spacing is preferable, and you never should write closer than double space lines. Put your title at the top of the first sheet,

with your name and address in the right hand corner.

Give names and brief description of your characters.

Next, give a synopsis of the play telling the whole story as briefly as possible. Follow with the Scenario by scenes, numbering them, and with wide spacing between the scenes. In each scene you should tell exactly what you want to appear on the screen, giving detail of setting and "properties" and the movement of your characters.

Official Instructions

The following are extracts from official instructions from the Scenario Editor of a New York film house:

A Scenario should under no circumstances be offered to two manufacturers at the same time. You can neither legally nor honorably sell the same idea more than once. Do not offer a Scenario to a second firm until you have had a definite refusal from the first.

Stories may be comic, pathetic, romantic, melodramatic, tragic or what you will. Arrangements of well-known plays, novels, or historical events are not usually desired. The companies make their own arrangements of such material and do not buy manuscripts of this nature unless they are of uncommon excellence.

Care should be taken that the plot of a motion picture story does not substantially duplicate some motion picture already produced. Many manuscripts are rejected on this account.

While motion pictures are not intended for phonographic or other spoken accompaniment, the characters are frequently seen to be talking and their gestures and attitudes indicate to the

audience what they are saying. At such times the Scenario may give a line or two of dialogue as a cue to the gesture instead of describing the gesture at length. The gesture alone, however, must be capable of conveying the idea to the audience.

A short general description or indication of the requirements of each scene (each "set" or "locality") should precede the description of the action that is to take place within that scene.

The Scenario should indicate what sub-titles are to be used, and these should be few.

A scene in which the characters still remain on the stage at its termination should not be followed by one in which the same characters are "discovered," unless it is intended for some reasonable purpose to use a sub-title to indicate a lapse of time between the two scenes. Where successive scenes involve the same characters and the plot does not require the lapse of time between those scenes, the characters should walk out of the previous and into the following scene.

Form of Manuscript

Use typewriter paper, white, 11x8½ inches. Number all pages and pin them together.

Every Scenario must be endorsed with the name and permanent address of the owner. Do not use an assumed name unless you expect to carry on all correspondence and have checks made payable under that name.

Postage and self-addressed envelope should be enclosed to insure return of rejected manuscripts. Never roll manuscripts.

The film companies will fix a value of from ten to one hundred dollars upon acceptable manuscripts, according to quality and amount of work required to perfect the same. If a statement that the company's rate is acceptable is endorsed upon the manuscript, check will be forwarded on acceptance. If such statement does not accompany manuscript an offer of a definite amount will be mailed to the owner, who may accept or reject.

Great numbers of motion picture manuscripts are received and time is required to pass on them. Only those obviously not available are returned at once. The consideration of others requires two to three weeks.

It is very seldom that a manuscript properly identified by the owner is lost. The firms, however, will not be responsible for lost manuscripts.

The best manner in which to write your letter in submitting a Scenario is to do it briefly and something like this:

Jan. 1, 1911.

Scenario Editor,

.....Film Co.,
New York:

Dear Sir:

The accompanying scenario is offered for use at your regular rates. Please return if not available. Stamps enclosed.

Very truly yours,
A Film Writer,
Chicago, Illinois.

Unknowns Succeed

An author's name is of little consequence when he comes to writing picture plays. Kipling, McCutcheon, Hornung, Ade, or any other literary light would demand hundreds of dollars for a Scenario. They would get it, too, and by their reputations would have their names emblazoned upon the film. But the writer with no great literary reputation stands the better chance if his work merits it. The modest author may be in an obscure corner of the earth, but that matters little to the Scenario editor.

Picture manufacturers are willing to pay fair prices to those without reputations who furnish the "right stuff."

The writer ambitious to achieve success with his Scenario, must go to the picture shows often, study not only the limitations placed on the art but also its scenic effect. He should read the trade journals, that is, papers devoted exclusively to the motion picture business. These journals publish a synopsis of every picture play presented.

A title for your Scenario is a matter of considerable importance. Attractive, comprehensible titles will aid in selling your product. Keep

your titles in five words and get a “punch” in them, so to speak—something that will instantly strike home to the public.

Above all else don't get discouraged. Probably no Scenario writer in the world had his first manuscript accepted. Every successful writer knows what it is to have copy returned. Profit by the criticism, and study the art, then you are certain of success.

Facts About Producers

Film manufacturers have their acting companies organized much after the fashion of a repertoire company. A stage director, Scenario editor, leading man and leading woman are the principals. The companies number from 10 to 25 actively engaged actors and actresses.

Every film company has its studio—the place where the pictures are taken. This contains a stage, an abundance of set scenery and properties and the motion-picture cameras. With this equipment an ordinary film may be made in a single day.

The actors and actresses are rehearsed, and a certain day is set for taking the pictures. Some of the scenes in a Scenario are made inside the studio and others outside just as called for by the manuscript. In winter many of the moving picture acting companies go to the south or southwest, where the climate is warm and there is plenty of outside scenery. Then the western pictures and those requiring much outdoor scenery are made.

The pictures of a moving picture play are taken by two or three cameras, working alternately. A negative is first made and then devel-

oped in a dark room and prepared for making prints. The print is on a long strip of film about an inch wide. It is but a series of pictures on film, which when run through a moving picture machine and projected on the canvas, passes before the eye so fast that the characters seem to have life. The method of printing is similar to that used by your local photographer. A hundred prints may be made from one negative just the same as a hundred pictures of yourself may be made from the negative picture of yourself, which you pose for but once.

Some Scenarios bought by manufacturers are not produced for weeks and months after they are paid for but they are always sure to be produced and widely advertised. The prints or films, as they are commonly called, are first sold by the manufacturers to film exchanges and the latter rent the films to the picture theatres. Nearly every large city has its exchange which in fact, is but a distributing agency for films.

Scenario Purchasers

Below is given a list of prominent moving picture manufacturers. Try all of them before you give up. If one refuses to buy your manuscript, send it to another.

The Vitagraph Co., 116 Nassau St., New York.

The Biograph Company, 11 East 14th St., New York.

*Georgia + Georgia
Los Angeles*

The Kalem Company, 235 West 23rd Street, New York.

G. Melies, 204 East 38th Street, New York.

Pathe Freres Company, Jersey City Heights, N. J.

Lubin Manufacturing Company, Philadelphia, Pa.

Edison Manufacturing Company, Orange, N. J.

Essanay Film Company, Chicago, Ill.

Selig Film Company, Chicago, Ill.

Rex Motion Picture Company, 573 Eleventh avenue, New York.

Independent Moving Pictures Company 102 W. 101st Street, New York.

The Powers Company, 241st Street and Richardson avenue, New York.

David Horsley, (Nestor), Fourth Avenue and 14th Street, New York.

Hollywood, Cal

The Tannhauser Company, New Rochelle, N. Y.

American Film Company, Ashland Block, Chicago, Ill.

We Will Aid You

Beginners, as a rule, turn out crude work. They may have the right idea—an idea that might be worth from \$10 to \$100, if submitted to the film manufacturer in the proper form.

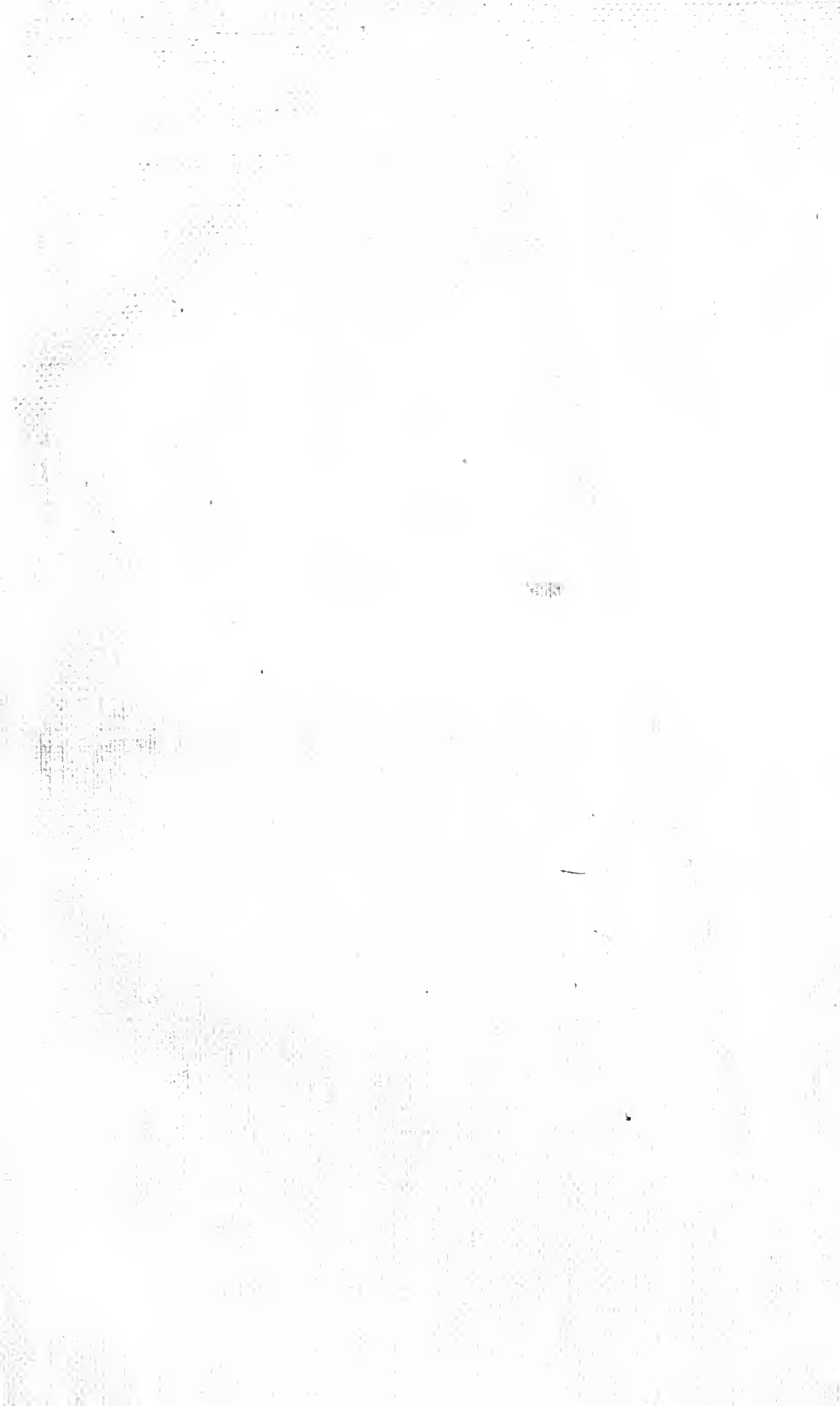
We do not operate a correspondence school, but we do wish to aid those who are starting to write motion picture plays. The Scenario must be written “stage-like” and be free from grammatical errors. It must be clear and concise—so attractive in appearance that the busy Scenario editor will read it instead of sending it back to you with only a hasty glance. We will show you where you make your mistakes, if any, and give you many valuable hints and suggestions. Simply send your manuscript to us with \$1.00; when it comes back to you it will have increased in value 100 per cent. or more.

It is especially important that your manuscript be typewritten and our charge of \$1.00 includes typewriting as well as editing, revising and criticising. If you are at all in doubt about your Scenario being in good form the small price paid for reviewing and correcting will be well worth while and may mean your ultimate success as a Scenario writer. The charge barely covers cost of typewriting.

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Cleveland, Ohio.



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