



SOULS FOR SALE

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Second Installment

Remember Steddon, a pretty, unsophisticated girl, is the daughter of a kindly but narrow-minded minister in a small mid-western town. Her father.

Rev. Doctor Steddon, violently opposed to what he considers "worldly" things, accepts motion pictures as the cause for much of the evil of the present day. Troubled with a cough, Remember goes to see

Dr. Bretherick, an elderly physician, who is astonished at the plight in which he finds her. Pressed by the doctor, Remember admits her unfortunate affair with

Elwood Farnaby, a poor boy, son of the town sot. As Remember and Dr. Bretherick discuss the problem a telephone message brings the news that Elwood has been killed in an accident. Dr. Bretherick accordingly persuades Remember to go West, her cough serving as a plausible excuse; to write home of meeting and marrying a pretended suitor—"Mr. Woodville"—and later to write her parents announcing her "husband's" death before the birth of her expected child. Unable alone to bear her secret, Remember goes to her mother with it.

Her mother agrees with the plan of the doctor. Mem leaves town. On the train Mem accidentally meets Tom Holby, movie star, traveling with Robina Teele, leading lady in the movies, who are the cynosure of all eyes. The train comes to an abrupt halt, a disaster having been narrowly avoided, and the passengers get out and walk about.

NOW GO ON WITH THE STORY

The other passengers dawdled about, but Mem went farther and farther. She wanted to see what was on the other side of that butte as much as mankind has longed to see the other side of the moon.

When she started back the cool of the butte's shadow made her rest awhile. The heat and the hypnosis of the shimmering sand sea put her asleep in spite of herself. She awoke with a start.

The train was moving, a new locomotive dragging it and its broken engine. She ran, fell, picked herself up, limped forward.

She was alone in the wilderness, and the train was already a toy running through a gap between two lofty buttes. Both mocked the girl unendurably and she stood panting in a suffocation of fright, her hands plucking at each other's finger nails.

Then for the first time Mem understood what the desert meant to those who had seen the last burro drop and found the canteen full of dry air.

For a trance-while Mem made a perfect allegory of helplessness on a monument. She heard a voice laughing with a kind of querying exclamation:

"Hello?"

The word was as unimportant as could be and it came from what she had just decreed the most useless thing on earth, a handsome moving-picture actor. He went on:

Tom Holby laughed at fate as in his pictures.

"I've nearly died of thirst in the desert half a dozen times," he said; "but there was always a camera or two a few yards off and a grub wagon just outside. And the heroine usually came galloping to the rescue and picked me up in time for the final clinch. I see the heroine, but the grub wagon's late."



"Are you a heroine or an adventuress?"

"Wh-what are we going to do?"

"Well, I'm not going to act, anyway, as long as there's no camera on the job. Let's sit down and wait."

"For what?"

"Oh, I guess the train will come back, or another one will come along and we can flag it in plenty of time. Sit down on this handsome red divan. Won't you? I'm Mr. Holby, by the way."

"Yes, I know," she said, and told him her name.

"Remember, eh? Great! Robina would have preferred that to the one she chose. Do you know Robina?"

"I've seen her."

"On the screen?"

"On the train."

"Oh, then you haven't seen her. That isn't the real Robina that walks about. That's just a poor, plain, frightened, anxious little thing, a Cinderella who only begins to live when she puts on her glass slippers. She has to be so infernally noble all day long that you can hardly blame her for resting her overworked virtues when she's off the lot. I used to be a pretty decent fellow, too, before I began to be a hero by trade. But now—gosh! how I love my faults! When there's no camera on me I'm a mighty mean man."

"Really!"

"Oh, I'm a fiend. I'm thinking of playing villains for a while, so that I can be respectable at my own expense outside the factory. But I'm so muddled up between my professional emotions and my personal ones that it's hard to keep from acting, on and off. Now look at this situation. If the camera gang were here I'd know just what to do. I'd be Sir Walter Raleigh in a Stetson and chaps. But since there's just us two here and I have you in my power—or you have me in your power—I don't know just how to act.

It depends on you. Are you a heroine or an adventuress?"

"I don't understand you."

"Are you an onjano or a vamp?"

"I don't speak French."

"Then you must be an onjano," he said. "In that case I suppose I really ought to play the villain and—But here comes the train. Gog-gone it! just as we were working up a real little plot. I hope I haven't compromised you. If you're afraid I have, I'll have to go back and hide till the next train comes along. Or you can, for I imagine it's Robina that reversed the engine. She probably missed me and suspected that I was out here with a prettier girl than she is—pardon me. Shall I go hide?"

"Oh, no! no! I couldn't think of it. Nobody knows me. It can't make any difference what they say about me."

"Gosh! what an enviable position. Stick to your luck, Miss Steddon. May I help you down?"

That was a chapter in Mem's life. Holby had guessed right. Robina had missed him and when the helpless conductor protested against the already late, she pulled the rope sacrilege of reversing the Limited, herself.

She knew the signals, having played in a railroad serial, and she soon had the train backing at full speed. She had half suspected that Tom Holby had a companion in the desert, and when she looked out and saw him with the pretty chit whose magazine he had picked up, she was tempted to give the signal to go ahead again.

But she preferred to give poor Holby her opinion of him. Mem crept back to her place, shivering with her first experience of stardom and its conspicuousness.

The train made up so much of its lost time that it was only two hours late when it drew into Tucson. Tom made his adieux and left Mem in a whirl. But her faculties went around in the mad panic of a pinwheel when a strange, sombre person spoke to her:

"Miss Steddon?"

"Yes."

"I am Doctor Galbraith, pastor of the First Church here. Your father telegraphed me to meet you at the train and look after you."

"Do you know papa?"

"No, but he found my name in the yearbook. I have found a nice boarding house for you, and my wife and I will look after you as best we can."

Mem was struck violently with the thought, "But what becomes of Mr. Woodville now?"

In her desperation, she caught sight again of Tom Holby, who had walked briskly to the head of the train and was striding back to his car. A frantic whim led Mem to say, very distinctly, as she passed him:

"Good night, Mr. Woodville."

Holby could hardly believe his ears, but he laughed to himself. "This is fame!" bowed and went on.

The Reverend Galbraith paused, but Mem urged him along, saying, "That's an old friend I met that she had established the existence of her Mr. Woodville. She was already unconsciously "planting" characters. "His face looked familiar; but I guess it wasn't."

The reason it looked familiar was that lithographs of it were posted up all over Tucson. Holby was to appear there in a picture.

Mrs. Galbraith turned out to be a joyous Western woman raised on a ranch and of a loud and hilarious cordiality. She was distressed because she could not take Mem into her own little home, but it was spilling over with children.

On the way to her boarding house she noted many of Tom Holby's portraits. He was not the star of the picture. Robina Teele was the star. Mem felt a longing to see this heroic picture, but Mrs. Galbraith would not leave her for a moment, and the night was prayer-meeting night.

Mem attended the evening devotions. There was nothing strange to her in the drowsy, cozy atmosphere, the sparse company singing hymns and bowing in prayer and finding a mystical comfort in the thought of sins forgiven and in eternal home beyond the grave.

Doctor and Mrs. Galbraith took her back to her lodgings and left her. They had no objection to moving pictures and attended them often, but Mem did not know this, and she felt like a thief when her worse self compelled her better self to a dark dishonesty. Both selves went to the movies.

If the cinema store had been an opium den Mem could not have sneaked more guiltily into it.

When she had found a seat in the dark hall she was so illiterate in the staples of fiction that she tingled with excitement over hackneyed situations that left many a sophisticated child yawning and gave never a pause to the swaying jaws of the gum-grinding crowd.

But Mem was experiencing an agitation such as she had not known

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