



SOULS FOR SALE

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"I'll pay the price. I'll do anything you say. You can't refuse me."

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. At Tucson Mem meets Dr. Galbraith, a pastor, who knows her father and takes an interest in her. She miscalls Tom Holby "Mr. Woodville" in order to make her fancied suitor seem more real. While the Galbraiths are away, she writes them as well as her parents that she has married "Mr. Woodville" and that they are to live in Yuma—for which price she buys a ticket. Mem decides to kill off her imaginary husband by saying he died of thirst in the desert, meanwhile she starts off for another town to get a job as a servant. On the way she runs into the movie company of Tom Holby. Tom insists that she become an extra, and is most cordial to her. She finds herself in the movie game. Remember Steddon comes West to avoid revealing the result of an unfortunate love affair to her father. The Rev. Dr. Steddon, a clergyman of kind heart but narrow mind who attributes much of the evil of the world to the "movies" and constantly inveighs against them. Mem, her lover Elwood Farnaby having died in an accident, at the advice of Dr. Bretherick, gives her bad cough as an excuse to get to Arizona and from there writes home that she has met and married "Mr. Woodville," a wholly imaginary person. Later she writes again to say that her "husband" has died in the desert. She takes a job as a domestic to avoid being a burden on her parents. A fall prevents her becoming a mother. In Arizona she had met Tom Holby, a leading man in a motion picture company, and through him gets the opportunity to play a part in a desert drama. With the company is Robina Teele, a Star, fond of Holby and Leva Lemaire, an extra woman. After her accident, Mem becomes friendly with Mrs. Dack, a poor woman of Palm Springs, Arizona, and takes an interest in her bright little son, Terry Dack, who has a great gift of mimicry. Inspired by a letter from Leva, Mem plans to go to Los Angeles to take a job in a film laboratory. She gets a job in a film laboratory, but loses it. She meets a Mrs. Sturges from her home town, who talks of the evils of the movies and says the stars are forced to sell their souls. Mem then learns her mother is coming to visit her. Mem is worried about her finances.

Now Go On With the Story

Well, she would sell what God had made of her for what man might make of her! At the studio she had met the leading director, Arthur Tirrey. It was he who said to this one or that one, "Here is a part; play it, and the company will give you so much a week." He was the St. Peter of the movie heaven, empowered to admit or to deny. He was the man for her to seek. He had seemed a decent enough man, and he had looked at Mem with-

out insolence. But you can never tell! Mem studied herself a long while in the mirror, since her eyes and her smile must be her chief wardrobe, her siren equipment. She practiced such expressions as she supposed to represent invitation. They were silly and they made her rather ill. She reached Tirrey's office and found him idly swapping stories with his assistant. He spoke to her courteously, motioned her into his office, closed the door, and took his own place behind his desk. The telephone rang. He called into it: "Sorry, Miss Waite; that part has been filled. The company couldn't make your salary. I begged you to take the cut, but you wouldn't. Times are hard and you'd better listen to reason. Sorry. Good-by!" This was a discouraging background for Mem's siren scenario. But she determined to carry out her theory and, in all self-loathing, adjusted herself in her big chair to what she imagined was a Cleopatra sinuosity. She thought of her best lines; secretly twitched up her skirts and thrust her ankles well into view. She turned upon Mr. Tirrey her most languishing eyes, and tried to pour enticement into them as into bowls of fire. She pursed her lips and set them full. She widened her breast with deep sighs. Tirrey seemed to recognize that she was deploying herself. He grew a little uneasy. But he was as polite to Mem as if she had been Robina Teele. "What can I do for you?" "I want a chance to act." "What experience have you had?" he asked. Mem was suddenly confronted with the fact that all actors must offer themselves for sale—not the pretty women only, but the old men, too, and the character women. Actors are much abused for talking to themselves. Few of them do when

business is not involved, but when it is they must discuss the goods they are trying to sell. Shoe merchants talk shoes; railroad presidents, railroads; politicians, politics; clergymen, salvation. Each salesman must recommend his own stock and talk it up. So Mem had to grope for experience and dress her window with it. And she had had so little she lied a little, as one does who tries to sell anything: "I was with the company that Tom Holby and Robina Teele played in. I took the part of an Arabian woman. Mr. Folger, the director—er—praised my—er—work." "Well, he knows," said Tirrey, "but he's not with this company, you know. Have we your name and address and a photograph outside in our files?" "No." "Well, if you'll give them to Mr. Dobbs, with your height, weight, color of eyes and hair, and experience, we'll let you know when anything occurs. I'll introduce you to Mr. Dobbs and he—"

He moved toward the door to escape from the cruelty of his office, but a frenzy moved her to seize his arm in a fierce clutch. She tried to play the vampire as she had seen the part enacted on the screen by various slithy toves. She drew her victim close to her, pressed tight against him, and poured upward into his eyes all the venom of an amorous basilisk. "I'll pay the Price! I know what it costs to succeed, and I'm willing to pay. I'll do anything you say, be anything to you. You can't refuse me!" She could hardly believe her own ears hearing her own voice, though with pride in the acting she was doing lifted her from the disgust for the role. He looked at her without surprise, without horror, without even amusement, but also without a hint of

surrender. His only mood was one of jaded pity. "You poor child, who's been filling your head with that stuff? Are you really trying to vamp me?" The cross word angered her: "I'm trying to force my way to my career, and I don't care what it costs." Tirrey's sarcastic smile faded: "Sit down a minute and listen to me. A little common sense ought to have told you that what you've been told is all rot. Suppose I were willing to give a job to every pretty girl who tried to bribe me with love. Do you know how many women I see a day—a hundred and fifty on some days; that's nearly a thousand a week. And if you won me over you'd still have to please the director and the managers and the author and the public. How long would our company keep going if we selected our actresses according to their immorality?" "Forget this old rot about 'paying the Price.' Tell Mr. Dobbs your pedigree and we'll give you the first chance we get, and no initiation fee or commission will be charged. How's that? A little bit of all right, eh? You're a nice child, and pretty, and you'll get along." He lifted her from her chair and put his arm around her as a comrade, and slapped her shoulder blades in an accolade of good fellowship. She broke under the strain and began to cry. She dropped back into her chair and sobbed. It was good to be punished and rebuked into common decency by the way of common sense. It chanced that the president of the company was returning to his office from a visit to one of the stages. This was the man whose name was familiar about the world. Every film from his factory was labeled: "Bermond presents—"; "Copyright by the Bermond Company"; "This is a Bermond picture." The slogan of the company was, "This is a Bermond year." When Mr. Bermond heard Mem crying, his heart hurt him. He did not like scandal, disorder, confusion, or grief on his lot. He went to Mem and tried to console her. He took her hands down from her contorted face and forced her to look at him. Seen through the cascades of her tears she was strikingly attractive, appealing. "Sarah Bernhardt failed in her first play, you know, and you may be a second Sarah some day," he said. "Just you wait." Mem's eyes were filling with rainbows. A bystander drew Bermond aside. It was Claymore, a dramatist who had had a few successes before he established himself in the moving pictures as a director. "That girl has the tear," he said to Bermond. "That woman you've given me for my next picture is awful. Let me take this kid and give her a real test. She might have just what we want." "Sure! Fine! Go to it!" said Bermond, and hastened to Mem with the good news that Mr. Claymore—the great Mr. Claymore—was going to give her a chance!

The next morning found Mem at the studio betimes, borrowing mascara and advice from Miss Calder. Claymore was waiting for her when she came from the women's dressing rooms. She was daubed, smeared, lined, powdered, rouged, mascaroed, and generally calclimined for duty. Her heart was beating in alternate throbs

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