

Her Love Sin

An Amazing Human Document

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She had made a woman's supreme sacrifice for the man she loved. Yet, when his eyes were opened to her astounding act, he turned silently away. Was she punished too much?

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CAN love survive poverty, hard work and the deprivation sometimes of the necessities of life? We were both so much in love—George and I that we married even though he was only a clerk in a department store and I a stenographer in a film corporation.

But George some day would be famous, and with fame would come fortune—we were both so sure—for George was a writer. True he had had only rejections so far, but he was full of hope that some day, very soon, he would come through!

All day long he measured dress goods and at night he would sit over his desk until three and four in the morning writing. From sheer exhaustion he would fall asleep on his arms and my day started with heartbreak—the tragedy of having to awaken him. This I did gradually, preparing his bath, starting the coffee to boil in our tiny kitchenette and then I would awaken him.

But you cannot burn the candle at two ends without reaching the point where there is no more substance. It was a terrible winter that winter, the worst we've had for years. Our dismal combination living room, bedroom-alcove flat was

none too warm, and frequently George would have to stop writing to thaw out his benumbed fingers.

At the end of March—a cold, blustery March, George came down



*In the doorway,
turned to stone,
stood my husband*

with a terrible cold. Influenza, the doctor said. I was nearly distracted with worry. George's salary, of course, stopped while he was away from the store and my salary of twenty-five dollars a week could not be stretched another inch. Then to add to all my worries, I was up against another problem at my office.

There was a Mr. Multinnee, one of our important directors, who kept

pushing himself into my consciousness. I hated him. He emanated prosperity and sensuousness.

He was pudgy, with black hair, thick lips, a broad nose and lead-colored eyes. Ordinarily I would have insulted him but I thought of George—George whose eyes had a feverish, hunted look; George who was so knocked out from his illness that he could hardly work. So I smiled when I wanted to scream;



I was in Multinne's arms. Suddenly I looked over his shoulder—I froze in horror

laughed when I wanted to sob. . . .

One day he asked me to take a letter. I got out my notebook.

"Just say," he dictated, "that any time you say the word, Nathan Multinneez is yours for the having."

I never answered a word but I burned with anger. Little did I realize the part Nathan Multinneez was to play in my life.

GEORGE'S stories—he had written a number of short stories as well as his novel—came back with painful regularity. About the end of April he lost his position. He tried hard to get another place, and as he was able to sleep later in the mornings now, his health bucked up a bit. But there was so much unemployment that year. You can't imagine the number of men who answer the advertisements in the paper. Poor old George was one of hundreds and hundreds of men after that most elusive of things in New York—a good job. And then too, he really was unfitted for most employment. He tried to get on the newspapers. Couldn't get a look in. There were a score of live, husky, swift-stepping young college youths ahead of George.

My husband was thin—almost cadaverous looking at that time and he looked older than he was. He didn't sleep enough. He didn't eat enough. He wasn't well enough dressed and he hadn't a pinch of, I suppose you might call it "pep." Some men are "go-getters." They can land anything they go after. George, in spite of his talent—no, genius—was diffident, slow and painfully shy. I daresay he'd let every man go ahead of him if there were a crowd waiting to get a position.

As I said, he did his best to get another position, but his efforts

were fruitless. So then he said he'd work much harder at his writing. He felt sure it would "pan out." The return of his manuscripts never daunted him. He never had the slightest doubt but what ultimately he would succeed.

Of course, my salary—I was getting twenty-five dollars a week—did not afford us many luxuries, but by careful economy it sufficed at least for our needs. Love and hope are meager meals, but they are the food of the gods, and with my salary George and I might have continued indefinitely.

I forgot to mention too that even though his stories were being rejected at this time, we took it as a promising sign that he never received printed rejection slips. On the contrary, he had most encouraging letters from editors and publishers, but there was always some little reason why this or that story was refused.

I'm not clever. George once said I had "flashes." That is, there were times when I would come out with some observation that he would say was searching, penetrating. However, he was the brains of our little family. But it was my strength and optimism that kept us afloat, for in spite of his fine mind, George was subject to fits of deep depression.

I HAD a great crying spell last night. It came on me all of a sudden just like a raging storm. It tore through my whole being. It seemed to well up from somewhere deep down within and I could no more control or hold it back than I could dam up the ocean with my hand.

Most people think women like I am now never cry. They think we are so hardened and calloused that we are impervious to feelings; our

hearts are petrified. There's something to that too. For three years I never shed a tear. All human emotions perished within me. There was not a spark of fire left. And I cannot explain the tears of last night.

I suppose it's the going over of all this old stuff—like reliving it. I come alive again—out of my living tomb.

I CAN'T remember where I left off. I have to tell you some things about Multinneez. You see, all this time he was after me at the office. From that first time when he slipped his cards all over my desk he never let me alone. He was crazy about me—wanted me, and he went about trying to get me in his coarse way. I knew the value of his friendship and I masked my feelings. I knew that it was desirable for me to stand well in his eyes. I had a feeling that I would need him some day and I had not the slightest compunction about using him if necessary.

I suppose you think that sordid. So it is. But then, after all, I was sordid for another. Had I only myself to consider, I would have snapped my fingers in Multinneez's face and told him to go to the devil. But I had George back of my mind all the time. So I smiled at him instead, laughed even at his off color jokes, and when his thick fingers would hover over mine I would manage to keep mine flying at the type.

But you can't keep a man like that at arms length for long. I was playing a dangerous game. Through Multinneez's influence my salary went up ten dollars a week. He was always giving me presents of flowers and candy and finally jewelry. Do you know what I did

with a diamond ring he gave me? Well, I pawned it and then, to deceive him, I wore a good imitation.

With the money I got for pawning that ring, we were able to take a larger flat on the top floor, and that gave us a sort of roof garden, where George used to write. It was quite pretty up there, and I bought one of those swinging couches with an awning top, and when George felt like it he could lie down and rest.

But even these precautions were not enough, and with the first chill of the new fall, George came down critically ill. He had influenza in an aggravated form and the doctors feared pneumonia. I was nearly distracted with worry. You see, the doctors—I called in three in my desperation—said that he could not have the proper care in our rooms, and they said he'd stand a better chance, if I could arrange to have him at the hospital. Hospitals, I learned then, are only for the rich or the desperately poor. Anyone who has been sick knows what it costs today to go to a hospital. One can hardly afford to die in these days.

I REMEMBER after the doctors left to arrange for George to be taken to the hospital, I walked round and round in a circle, wringing my hands and not knowing what I was doing, with just one thought cracking away in my brain—the thought that I must somewhere, somehow, get the money to give George proper treatment at the hospital. And as I ran like a crazed thing around in that circle suddenly the fog cleared up from my mind. I saw the way clear cut before me. It was an ugly, a terrible way—but I knew that I would have to tread it!

I DARESAY you already know from whom I obtained the money to pay for George's illness. Most stories bring the heroine just to the verge of ruin and then save her, leaving her virginal and pure. That's how you write stories, isn't it? But that's not how things go in life. Everything has its price, and I, no different from hundreds of other women before me, had my market value. Multinne, I believe, would have paid five times the price I exacted for the moments I spent with him. Even though he drove a hard bargain with me the first time I went to him. Not only that he played a dirty trick on me.

I went directly to his apartment. I asked him outright for one thousand dollars. He replied:

"What do I get for it?"

"Anything I have to give."

That brought a gulping chuckle from him, and he said huskily, as his arms closed about me:

"I'll take the first installment now then."

I want to say to you that no matter what I did at that time, I never once lost my head. A chant was going on inside me. I was crying—shouting within me:

"This is for George! For George! For George!"

When he put the check in my hand, he folded it up. Something made me look at it and I saw he had made it not for a thousand dollars but for one hundred. He said, with his lead-colored eyes fixed upon me:

"First installment, baby. Nine more coming."

All the way home I kept repeating over and over again:

"Ten times one hundred is a thousand! Ten times!"

I am not insensitive—or rather I should say, I was not insensi-

tive in those days. I was able to commit that act without the usual self-condemnation or even shame, because my whole mind was saturated with one thought—George. I wasted no time on self-analysis. Nevertheless I never left Multinne save with a sense of being *unclean*. I had a sort of dim comprehension that all the waters of the world could never make me whole or clean again.

By the time George left the hospital, I had received all of the thousand dollars and I had been ten times to his apartment. I meant never again to go there or to have anything further to do with him. But when George came home, he was so painfully weak that the doctors ordered him to be sent "south." They suggested that his lungs were affected.

It costs money to go south. Everyone knows that. After the doctors had left us alone together, we sat for a long time hand in hand, looking at each other. He tried to pooh-pooh their warnings. Said he was sound as a whistle, and in a few days would be himself again. He said everyone was weak after the flu. As for going south—When he said "South," a far away look came into George's eyes, and I knew he was thinking of some sweet, warm land, where he could rest and sleep and write. Oh, I knew his thoughts before he uttered them. That's how close I was to him, then. As we sat in our little dingy room on that murky, humid-chill day, I knew that the doctors were right, and that George could not continue to live in such a climate.

I think we are all affected by the weather. There are depressing days when it seems almost as if some clammy heavy hand was clutched upon our sore souls. That was the

kind of day it was when George sat dreaming of the south and my mind went stealing back like a thief to the place where I knew were a thousand dollars—waiting to be taken by me.

I DON'T know what my face revealed, but George sat up suddenly and he puckered up his brows in that boyish way characteristic of him.



"What's the matter?" asked my husband,
"you don't look yourself!"

"Look here, Joss, dear old girl, you don't look yourself. Your face is—is—changed somehow. What's the matter dear? You mustn't worry so much about me. I'm first rate now."

Do you know how I felt then? Just like a captured, surprised criminal. I thought that my sin was marked upon my face. And why shouldn't it be? We register happiness and joy on our faces; we

register sorrow and grief. One's face is a mirror for our emotions. Does not crime and sin then also put its implacable print upon us? I've wondered about that.

Look at me now. Would you believe that I am only twenty-six years of age? Oh, I know what you are thinking. It's not the one sin only; it's the attendant train that always follows when one goes wrong. Drink—drugs—what not? They all drag us down to the hell that is on this earth itself.

I'm not going into the details of my return to Multinneez.

Our misdeeds follow us like our shadows. Our actions are inevitably followed by their consequences. You cannot cheat destiny. I believe in predestination. I believe I was born under some unlucky star. Most women of my class are superstitious, you know. It's queer, too, for when one descends to the very dregs of life, what is there left to look for? The sky is blotted out. We cannot see the sun. We are down in dark, deep waters, sluggish quicksands, and we rise only to the top when we are dead.

I think whoever first used that expression "Primrose Path" must have meant it as bitter satire. Primrose! Why—Primrose? Where is the Primrose coloring? I never saw it. There was no light—no rosy shades in my degraded affair. It was just a cold-blooded business transaction. For so many dollars and cents I sold my body. You will say: "And your soul." I don't believe that.

I like to think that no matter how my body was involved, the real Me—the soul of me—soared above my sin. I tell you, though I went over and over again to Multinneez, I had only one single purpose in mind. I surrendered myself to a man I hated for a man I loved. I closed my eyes; I gritted my teeth; I closed my mind as it were. I leaped down blindfolded, and I sank into heavy darkness like one who is drugged.

I DON'T think I mentioned the fact that George did not go south after all. He refused to go. Said he had been too much of an expense to me already. He said he was going to buckle down to work and I'd soon "see."

Strange I never suspected the cause of his cheer in those days.

For he was cheerful. He used to whistle and hum about our rooms, and when I would come home he would give me the most mighty hugs and call me all kinds of pet names. I didn't even suspect anything when he lifted my face one day, looked deeply into my eyes, and said in a voice that vibrated with emotion:

"Dearest, dearest, dearest—only a day or two more and then—then, sweetest of little women, I am going to give you"—he lowered his voice to a joyous whisper—"the surprise of your life!"

You see my mind at that time was obsessed with so many cares and alarms. Even with the money I was getting from Multinneez I had my hands full making both ends meet.

The doctors' bills were terrifically high. Then there were all kinds of things it was necessary for George to have at that time. Eggs—one dollar a dozen that year—quantities of milk, cod liver oil. . . . Oh! I can't begin to enumerate the things the doctors said he had to have. He had no idea how much they cost. George was singularly innocent and guileless. Anyone could deceive him, and I had no trouble in making him believe that I had had several raises in my pay and that at night I worked overtime. So I did! Is that not a ghastly joke?

OF course, it was written in the book of Fate that George should find me out. A woman told my fortune by cards once, and she said that I was "living a double life," but that I would soon be discovered. It's remarkable the things they are able to tell from cards.

As I said, it was inevitable that George should find me out. I wouldn't have believed it possible the coincidence of his going down to my office that night, in order to

break to me the wonderful news of the sale of his first book—to show me the contracts and the check that had arrived—then to find me not there. The office closed. Dark. The elevator boy told him I was never there at night. I always went out with my "fellow"—Mr. Multinneez, the president of the company.

I can imagine how George took that in slowly, blinking his eyes and his brows congested. It probably didn't sink in at once, and then perhaps the boy said something else, cementing the thing, and way back in George's mind the slow rise of a terrible suspicion. . . . Of how he went over the pages of the telephone directory, his finger going down the list of M's. Of the "Multinneez" in the telephone book. The address—written shakily on a piece of paper. . . . I found it later, or rather Multinneez did, and, in fact, he supplied these details.

I can't go on!

I'VE been lying here for three days trying coherently to follow the train of events. My mind wanders at times. They say I talk to myself. I know I do. I dare say that's what I'm doing now. I resurrect the past and live in a world of my dreams. I am back again in our apartment—George is asleep over his desk. I awaken him with a kiss. I go to touch him. Oh, God! he is not there! It is only a dream. . . .

THERE are moments in our lives that stand out in our memories like electrical flashes of fire branded on our conscience.

If I lived to be a hundred thousand years, I could never forget that single moment of my life when I looked over the shoulder of Multinneez and saw my husband's face.

If he had struck me! If he had sprung upon me with animal, primitive fury! If he had whipped and lashed me—shot me through the heart or head! But no! George stood like one turned to stone and just looked at me. He said no word. His face had that bewildered, blighted look of a child caught in some ghastly trap. I saw his head come right down between his shoulders. He drooped like an old, old man. Then backward, step by step, my George faded through the doorway and into the darkness of the hall. Thus he passed from my life forever.

THEY say the wages of sin is death. One would think Death was the worst of all punishments. Living seems to me more terrible than death. Death even has something beautiful about it.

Death liberates us from rude worldly cares; death wreaths us about in veils of oblivion. Death is the fragrant balm from heaven which wipes away all the rust from our souls.

I SUPPOSE sick people are prone to morbid fancies. I have a hatred of life. Remote things seem to me the most precious. I live in the fragrance of memories. There are times even when I am almost happy. I lie back here and my mind soars away from me. I am carried away on wings, as it were. I am near to George again! I feel his presence, the soft, sympathetic touch of his hand upon mine, his cheek pressed against my own. I close my eyes and I seem to see before me a beautiful conflagration, mysterious and subtle, and there I warm my shivering hands. I am lifted out of myself, as I said—on wings—on wings!