

SOULS for SALE

By RUPERT HUGHES.

(Continued From Yesterday.)

SYNOPSIS

Tragedy ended the romance of Hassan, by accident, daughter of the Her. In addition, the little town of Calverly, when her lover was run down and killed by an automobile. She faced the world grief-stricken and with a secret. In her plight she turned to the family physician, confessed there was to be a baby and appealed to him for help. A cough from which she had been suffering, marked the doctor on an excuse to offer a trip to the south-west. There, he suggested, Men was to arrange an imaginary marriage and then "let her imaginary husband die quietly." Men told her mother the secret of the expected baby and her father was induced to approve the trip as necessary for her health.

In letters home she described attention said her on the train by an imaginary "Mr. Woodville" and later wrote her husband as had become "Mrs. Woodville." Knowing money, she started from Yuma, Ariz., to Palm Springs, a desert oasis, to take a job as waitress.

On the way across the desert from the railroad station to the main village, she chanced upon Tom Holby, famous motion picture actor, and his company out on location. Holby, admiring her beauty, let her accompany him to find a place for her as an extra. The director decided to give her a chance and she entered the movie as an extra in the same scene. She was "killed" that day. She was a success in shedding tears in the one close-up they gave her.

This was her first experience of the profession of mimicry. She was ashamed as glorified, yet as exultant, as if a god had seized her and embraced her fiercely for a moment, then left her aching, an ember in the ashes.

The director was already calling the mob to the next task. She could not help glancing toward Tom Holby. His camel was moving off with the crowd, but he was turning back to gaze at her. He was nodding his head in approval and he raised his hand in a salute of profound respect.

CHAPTER XX.

That afternoon the sandstorm was to be "pulled off." Dynamite mounted on trucks carrying airplane propellers were gathered toward the two

of the hillside that formed about them, kept lifting Men's head above the mound that grew. Sagesbrushes ripped from their places, shot by tearing the skin they touched. Roots of old mesquite went over like clubs, prickly pears and masses of cactus hurled past in the torrent.

Suddenly the sand tide was gone. But a sea of rain followed it, cruelly cold and ruthless. It turned the mounds into gobs of wet sand, slimy and odious. What had been a world of drought in frenzy became a lake in a squall. What garments the wind had not wrenched free grew sloppy and lay and loathsome sticks.

For half an hour the deluge carried the dismal caravan.

Then in an instant the rain was over. The hurricane of sand pursued by food passed on up the valley, to rend the orange groves and tear the fishing boats from their moorings.

The sun resumed his own tyrannical and lashed the three-wretched army back to its camp.

But the camera men retrieved their instruments from the rubber covers they had wrapped about them with a moaning devotion, and the director checked the retreat and formed it in groups for what he called the "beasts adore." Tom Holby's mount, without waiting for command, dropped to its belly and stretched out its neck and closed its eyes against the peril.

But the camera men set their tripods and began to turn their cranks. They had the instinct of the trade and were hopeful that if they themselves did not live their pictures might.

Tom Holby dropped from his post and gathered Men into the shelter of the camel's bulk. She did not know or care that his arm was about her as they stood, peering across the parapet of the camel's back at the onset of the advancing Niagara. Other women crowded to the same camel. The rest of the crowd flung themselves down and dug their arms to the elbows in the sand lest they be swept away.

A courier gate leaped upon them in a yelling charge, with whips of fire that flung the tripods over, and the camera men with them. They persisted, and, shuddering their lenses with their own bodies, turned them this way and that, grinding the cranks and "picking" up what groups they saw about them.

The torrid blast dashed the sand in shovelfuls upon the groveling crowd. The great robes fluttered, flapped, belied, and, ripping loose, went whooping.

The gliding precipice of sand arrived and hid the sun in a gruesome saffron fog. And then precipice was avalanche. With abrupt chill, a brown cold mountain fell on them, stopped the breath, and played shrapnel on the skin in a maelstrom of dagger points that stabbed from every side.

Tom Holby wrapped his burnous about Men as they covered in the lee of his camel. The sand broke over their bulwark as breakers leap across a rock. They were drowned in waves that did not recede. The sand found them inside their robes; it filled their nostrils, their mouths when they gulped for breath. The breakers of sand swept round upon them, broke back over them, and with a grinding uproar that threatened to split the ears they packed with sand, Tom Holby kept struggling to fling

larger flowers we call trees. Men had known the omelette as a tubed spreading arms in a benediction of fragrant shade and dangling bouquets that brushed her hair and caught her hat. Palm trees of vast bole hung out umbrellas of spongy green. Waxy outgrowths held up pallid lilies drooping with fuzz. Pepper trees let their trunks droop. The ancient and honorable black fig trees of the famous San Gabriel litigate, date palms, roses, flowers, and shrubs massed and running wild about the rambling gardens seemed miraculous to Men, who had almost forgotten, in the dreary hell of the desert, that green things had ever been invented, and who found herself walking deeper and deeper into a revel of tropical luxury.

There were Indians here, too—the little company of Cahillias; one old buck, with hair as black as tar drip and as long as his hat brim, was broad, stood gravely watering hilly down and never got up. Leva guided her to the bungalow and left her. Just to be cool, just to be still, were young Indian girls, with their hair brought her her suitcase. Leva had

managed to find it. But Men was too weary to change her clothes. She dropped into a chair by a window and watched a tiny body drive home a few cattle, watched the last red plume fade on the breast of the mountain, watched the first star suddenly shimmer as if a jewel had been tossed from somewhere on the sky.

(To Be Continued Monday.)



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