

# Shadow for Sale

by Chester S. Geier

**Doreen wanted money, fame, and all the glamour that went with them. But she had to pay a price, and the price was—**

THE hall was high and wide, and soft lights underscored its atmosphere of quiet luxury. Doreen's awed gaze brought her an impression of thick rugs and lustrous wood, of gilt and gleaming marble. Excitement rose in her, bringing with it a sudden, hungry yearning. She felt herself on the threshold of a new world, and desperately she wanted to cross, to leave the poverty and obscurity of the past forever behind.

She moistened lips whose perfect contours had been emphasized by the painstakingly careful application of makeup, and momentarily her long-lashed, amber eyes narrowed. This, she told herself, was her chance. She had been warned that the road to success was long and rough, but her presence amid these expensive surroundings meant she had already traveled a major part of that road. If she played her hand right, a chauffeur-driven limousine would take her the rest of the way.

Realizing that her expression had become calculating and hard, Doreen deliberately smoothed her features and glanced at Pryor. He hadn't noticed. He was handing his topcoat to the butler, who already held her wrap. Then he turned and was striding toward her with a grin.

Rick Pryor was nice, she decided,

really one of the nicest men she had met since she began her modeling career. He made her feel like an old friend instead of a beautiful girl who had constantly to be on guard. He was amusing and humorous, yet quiet and somehow grave. His tall figure, as he approached, looked straight and trim in immaculate evening clothes. His features were interesting rather than handsome. He had deep-set gray eyes, heavy, dark brows that had a slightly quizzical tilt, and broad, mobile lips below a severely straight nose. His dark brown hair had a crisp wave and showed faint traces of gray at the temples.

Doreen recalled how surprised she had been when Pryor asked her to attend the dinner party with him. She had hardly expected that she would ever become a guest of Whitney Picket, the wealthy manufacturer of Velvoderm beauty preparations. She had posed for a series of pictures advertising Velvoderm products, and it had been in connection with her work that she had met Pryor. He was a junior executive of the advertising firm that handled the Velvoderm account.

"Picket likes the way our advertising has increased Velvoderm sales, and he's making with the eats and drinks by way of celebration," Pryor had explained, speaking of the dinner party.



As Doreen looked into her mirror it seemed as if a dark shadow loomed up behind her . . .

"I'm sure he'd be delighted to meet you. He liked those pictures you posed for—liked them even better when he heard they went over in a big way. With Picket rooting for you, my girl, you're certain to become a famous model. Besides the agency big-wigs, there'll be a lot of other important people at the party, and they'll take up where Picket leaves off. Unless I miss my guess, the model bureau you work for is going to be swamped with calls for your services."

**N**OW Pryor came to a stop before her, and his grin took on an overtone of concern. "Nervous?"

Doreen shook her head. "No—just a little hysterical."

"A waste of nervous energy, my girl. Picket and the others have most likely inhaled too many cocktails to be critical. Relax. Remember what they taught you at modeling school. Or did you attend one?"

"Yes. I won the chance in a beauty contest."

"I don't think you could have had much competition—if any." Pryor looked down at her a moment, the quizzical tilt to his brows more pronounced. His teasing expression was somehow over-shadowed by a kind of grim seriousness. "There ought to be a law against beauty like yours. It's impossible, outrageous — unearthly. You leave plainer girls without a last shred of glamor to cling to."

Doreen wrinkled her nose. "That's the effect of the Velvoderm stuff I've been using—soap, cream, lotion, and all the rest. Guess I'd better stop."

"On second thought, don't," Pryor said. "Men would never know what they're missing if you did." He took her arm and guided her toward a broad archway at the right end of the hall. "Let's make the grand entrance. Easy

does it. Just pretend you're showing off a new dress to a bunch of customers."

As they neared the archway, Doreen saw that a huge living room lay beyond. It was a luxurious room, so stunningly and lavishly decorated that it seemed more like the background for an expensive movie rather than real life. Groups of people in evening dress were scattered about, and above the hum of their voices came occasional bursts of laughter.

Doreen's pulses were racing. Here was the wealth and culture of which she had always dreamed. She wanted to clutch it to her as a small girl might have clutched a beautiful doll.

Just within the entrance, she felt Pryor's hand tighten on her arm, bringing her to a stop. She heard the murmur of his voice in her ear.

"All right, now, go into your act. Give them the works."

She took a sophisticated pose of the type which she had been taught was the style. It was a pose calculated to show off her gown and her slim, rounded figure to best advantage. She smiled slightly, glancing around the room with languid slowness. The knowledge that she was very beautiful beat through her with a heady confidence. She knew what an arresting picture she made with her gold evening dress, her reddish-gold hair, and her gold-tinted skin. Even her gloves were gold, as was the mesh bag she held, and the slippers on her tiny feet.

She heard the mutter of voices falter and partially die away as eyes swung in her direction. She saw the admiring, eager glances of the men, the startled, envious and resentful looks of the women. She had a sudden feeling of exaltation, of power.

"Atta girl!" she heard Pryor whisper.

A short, portly man with blunt,

ruddy features and thin gray hair brushed carefully over his shining scalp detached himself from one of the groups and hurried across the room. Doreen recognized Whitney Picket almost immediately from the newspaper pictures she had seen of him. Picket was grinning with a kind of astonished delight. Even before he spoke it was obvious that he had had too many cock-tails.

"Rick, my boy! It's good to see you. A pleasure, indeed." Picket wrung Pryor's hand briefly, his pale eyes on Doreen. "And this is Miss Sutton? Of course, of course! You're even lovelier than your pictures, my dear. In fact, they hardly do you justice."

Taking Doreen's arm possessively, Picket led her into the room. He kept up a running fire of talk as he introduced her to the other guests. The faces and names, mingled with Picket's effusive remarks, made a kaleidoscopic confusion in Doreen's mind. She wanted almost desperately to remember the more important persons, and she felt annoyed with the manufacturer.

THE announcement of dinner a short time later gave her a respite from Picket's attentions. Seating arrangements were such that she found herself between Pryor and a small, sad-faced man whose name, she managed to recall, was Louis Brissac. The latter was thin, with a long nose and large eyes that looked tired and disillusioned. He had a shock of grizzled hair that somehow made her think of Einstein.

Pryor seemed on familiar terms with Brissac. "Lou's a photographer," he explained. "One of the best in the business. And he knows it, too. The prices he charges for his work are nothing short of robbery."

"Robbery!" Brissac was humorously

indignant. "My friend, a masterpiece is simply not a masterpiece unless it is paid for according to its worth."

Pryor winked at Doreen. "Lou's convinced he's a Michaelangelo of the lens."

"I admit it," Brissac said. "In this world of cut-throat competition, one must beat one's own drums." He grinned at Doreen and then fell to an appraising study of her face. "Miss Sutton, it strikes me that you are a subject worthy of my talents. Perfect features, unusual coloring. You must let me do a camera study of you some time. In color."

"Business or pleasure?" Pryor demanded with a mock-sinister air.

"Pleasure, of course," Brissac explained quickly. "With Miss Sutton as a model, it would be impossible to think of business."

"Thank you," Doreen said. "I consider myself properly flattered."

Brissac resumed his study of her, and the sadness seemed to deepen in his face. "I believe you're new to the game, Miss Sutton."

"Yes. I've been modeling only about six months."

"Ah. Then perhaps it isn't too late."

Doreen stared. "Too late?"

Brissac nodded with a curious grimace. "Exactly. By allowing pictures to be made of them, models such as yourself are placed in deadly danger—a danger out of all proportion to the profit involved."

"Oh, oh!" Pryor said. "Here it comes again. Lou is going into his favorite song and dance."

"I'm afraid I don't see how modeling could be dangerous," Doreen said.

"But it is," Brissac insisted. "The danger lies in posing for photographs. It may seem strange that I, a photographer, should speak this way. Yet it is exactly the experience I've had in

my profession that convinces me I am right." He leaned closer, his voice low and his eyes intense. "Miss Sutton, perhaps you've heard of savages who, apparently out of superstition, refused to permit explorers to take pictures of them. It wasn't superstition. Those savages knew a deep truth—a truth to which civilized people, with their strongly materialistic attitude, have deliberately blinded themselves. The idea behind their refusal to pose for pictures was that a portion of their souls would remain with their photographic duplicates. A fantastic idea, you will say. Some people have had pictures taken of them for years without anything strange happening to them. Movie stars, for example. But the fact is that nothing strange seems to happen—unless you know exactly what happens, what symptoms to look for."

"What do you mean?" Doreen asked, impressed despite herself by Brissac's earnestness.

"Well, to continue with movie stars as an example, you've no doubt noticed how they come and go. A new face, a brief spurt to fame—and then obscurity. The public has lost interest. And why? It's because these stars have lost something they had in the beginning—a certain vitality, a certain charm and freshness. In other words, their souls have been drained, leaving them, to all practical purposes, empty shells.

"Many stars remain in the business for dozens of years, of course. Their popularity doesn't seem to fade. Perhaps it's that they have greater depth of soul than others. Or perhaps they have learned to act so well, to pretend under all circumstances, that they are able to cover up their deficiencies."

"Anyway, modeling isn't like acting in the movies," Doreen reminded.

"Yet the same thing happens, even if on a smaller scale," Brissac said. "I know. I've seen them rise and fade, the handsome boys and the lovely girls. I've seen them arrive, fresh and eager. I've seen them go, vain and hardened, cynical and often cruel. You may say that money and fame have spoiled them—but the truth is that they have lost something precious. The picture-making business is like a hungry demon, feasting on the souls of its victims and tossing the empty husks aside."

Doreen grimaced. "You make it sound so unpleasant."

"It is, Miss Sutton. And that is why I say to you, get out of modeling before it's too late. Marry some nice man and settle down. Make him a home and have children. This is the only way to true happiness, for you will be preserving everything inside you that is decent and good."

"But suppose I prefer to remain a model?"

"Then you will become a shell—an automaton. You will still be beautiful, though in a different way. You will still talk and move and smile. But a large and important part of you will be gone. For I tell you in all the deepest sincerity that it is impossible to sell the shadow and keep the substance, as you obviously believe. With each picture you permit to be made, you will actually be giving away a little piece of your soul. Bit by bit, until all true humanity is gone."

"Cut it out, Lou," Pryor growled suddenly. "You're scaring the kid."

"I want to scare her," Brissac said. "And I know, friend Rick, that you agree with my purpose deep down inside you. You agree for exactly the reason that you chose Miss Sutton as your partner tonight. There are any number of other models who would

have jumped at the chance of a date with you. But you chose Miss Sutton, because she has something they are beginning to lose."

Pryor said nothing further for a moment. He frowned down at his plate, then glanced again at Brissac. "I've heard those ideas of yours pretty often lately, Lou. Why do you remain in the photography racket if you feel that way?"

The other jerked his thin shoulders in a shrug. "It's all I know. I'm caught in a system. But for that matter, I'm not doing any more harm than other shutter artists. I seldom take pictures of the same people more than once. My conscience is clear enough."

Brissac returned his attention to Doreen. "I hope you will forgive me if I have frightened you, Miss Sutton. But I do want you to keep my warning in mind. There is a deep truth in it—truth of a type the world at present ignores."

"I won't forget," Doreen said. "It's nice of you to be so concerned about me."

But as the evening wore on, Brissac's words slipped into the back of her mind, remaining only as a vaguely unpleasant memory. She became the center of attraction for an admiring group of men, and she became lost in the task of making herself as interesting and full of charm as she possibly could.

Afterward, measuring her efforts in terms of her career, she knew she had been successful. Calls for her services as a model increased, as did the fees she received. She moved out of the small apartment, which she had been sharing with two other girls, and into one of her own, much larger and more expensive.

Men who were all wealthy and important in one way or another became her escorts. She grew as familiar with

luxurious homes and exclusive night spots as she was with her own face. Her meteoric ascent became the envy and despair of other models. Her little idiosyncrasies of dress or makeup created new fads. Her endorsements increased the sales of such items as cigarettes and toothpaste. Her name was linked romantically in gossip columns, and her presence at parties and social gatherings often spelled the difference between publicity and the lack of it.

AT INTERVALS she ran into Brissac, who kept repeating the warning he had given her at Picket's dinner party. She gradually found herself trying to avoid him. His persistence irritated her. She tried to tell herself there was no truth in his words, but a doubt somehow remained.

She saw Pryor occasionally, when she could find time away from dates with more influential men. She had not dismissed him to a back seat in her mind. On the contrary, her liking for him had steadily grown. For her increasing experience with men gave her the opportunity to compare and weigh, and she found that Pryor's good qualities were seldom if ever equalled. He never failed to be understanding and kind. She knew his feelings toward her had reached the serious stage, but he did not seem to be hurt or resentful over being neglected.

"You've become quite a celebrity," Pryor remarked during one of the rare evenings she was able to spend with him. "I've been reading about you in the papers and seeing your pictures in the best magazines. How does it feel?"

"Swell," Doreen said. She glanced around the small but popular nightclub in which they were sitting, aware that numerous persons were watching her. "It's what I've always wanted—

fame, beautiful clothes and surroundings, being acquainted with important people. You see, Dick, my parents were terribly poor. My father was in an accident when I was still very young, and he was never well after that. I used to be horribly envious of other kids, who had things I was unable to have. I told myself I would do anything to get what I wanted. If my chance ever came, I would take everything I could get my hands on."

"Your chance has come, Doreen."

"Not quite. This is only the beginning. You see, Rick, I've had an offer from Hollywood."

"Hollywood!" he gasped.

She nodded quietly. "I'm holding out until they meet my terms. I want a lot more money than they're offering me."

Pryor stared at her a moment longer, then slowly transferred his gaze to the glowing tip of his cigarette. Doreen touched his hand questioningly.

"You don't seem glad, Rick."

"I'm not."

"Why?"

"I guess it's that I don't like the idea of having you go away."

"But I'll still see you once in a while, Rick."

"That isn't quite what I meant."

Pryor hesitated and was about to continue, when a visitor stopped at the table, forestalling him. Doreen felt an abrupt dismay as she saw that it was Brissac.

The photographer was smiling in his sad and tired way. "I hope I am not intruding."

"You know darned well you are," Pryor growled. "But since you're here, you might as well sit down."

"Your manners are delightful, friend Rick." Brissac drew up a chair. "Now, what were we talking about? Romance, perhaps?"

"Romance!" Pryor snorted. "Doreen's running out on me."

"Ah! A rival?"

"Hollywood. Doreen's dickering with the movie moguls, and I'd say the odds are in favor that they'll meet her terms."

Brissac looked at Doreen and shook his head slowly. "It's the worst thing that could possibly happen. I hope you haven't chosen to ignore my warnings. I meant them, you know. I wasn't playing a clumsy joke."

"They seemed so fantastic," Doreen murmured, fighting to remain calm.

"The truth often seems fantastic—but that doesn't make it any less true," Brissac said. He leaned forward, a desperate earnestness twisting his face. "Doreen, keep away from Hollywood. Get out of the picture business entirely. You're in danger of losing a large part of the most precious thing you have—your soul. Nothing you can possibly get in a material way can make up for it. Wealth and fame are just soap bubbles compared to what you have inside you."

Doreen forced a laugh. "How do I know I have a soul in the first place? I've never seen one. Nobody has that I've heard of."

"That doesn't mean you don't have one," Brissac insisted. "Proof of a thing doesn't necessarily lay in the ability to see and handle it."

**D**OREEN'S amber eyes blazed with the anger she could no longer control. "I don't intend to argue with you! As far as I'm concerned, this nonsense has gone far enough. I want you to stop annoying me. What I do is entirely my own business. If you think I'd give up a Hollywood career because of your silly ideas, you'd better guess again."

Brissac looked stunned. "I'm sorry.

I was only trying to help. It didn't occur to me that I might be annoying you. But you can be certain it won't happen again." Nodding to Pryor, he rose stiffly and strode away.

Pryor was frowning. "That wasn't like you, Doreen. You should have known Lou meant well."

"I'm just tired and irritable, I guess. I've been working too hard and going out too much." She made a sudden gesture. "Let's get out of here, Rick."

In her apartment Doreen mixed drinks and dropped into a deep chair. Across from her Pryor gazed musingly into his glass. He had turned on the radio, and the music of an orchestra flooded softly through the sleek, modernistic room. Only a few lamps were lighted, but a cozy atmosphere was somehow lacking.

"What are you thinking about, Rick?"

"About you."

"Should I feel flattered?"

"I'm afraid not, Doreen. You see, I've been thinking that you've changed. You've become a little less sweet . . . a little too impatient with people."

"You aren't hinting that Lou Brissac might be right?"

"Not in a certain way. I don't know about that. But I think he's right about one thing. I wish you would get out of the modeling business. I wish you would keep away from Hollywood."

"But what else could I do?"

"You might marry me." Pryor leaned forward with suddenly increased earnestness. "I meant it, Doreen. I've been in love with you for a long time. I have enough money put away, and we could buy a small home somewhere out of the city. I've always wanted to—"

The telephone rang. Doreen picked up the receiver, spoke briefly, and listened. She spoke again, her voice breathless and excited. Her features

were radiant when she finally hung up and returned to Pryor.

"Rick—I'm in! My terms have been accepted. They want me to come to Hollywood."

He said slowly, "And the offer I made you?"

"It was sweet of you, Rick. But please try to understand. This is an opportunity I've been hoping for. I couldn't pass it up."

"I don't suppose you could." Pryor put down his glass and rose. "I know when I'm licked. Guess I'll be running along. You'll have packing to do, and a lot of other details to look after."

"That can wait a little. Let's go somewhere and celebrate, Rick."

"There's nothing to celebrate, Doreen."

She searched his face, her enthusiasm draining. "Rick—are you angry with me?"

"No. I'm afraid for you. I don't want you to change any more than you have already. But I'll be hoping for the best." He touched her cheek and managed a grin. "So long—and good luck." Then he turned, picked up his hat and coat, and strode toward the hall. The door closed quietly behind him.

Doreen gazed after him for some moments, her emotions clashing. She was puzzled and at the same time hurt and indignant. She thought of Pryor's last words and wondered if he could have had Brissac's warning in mind. A chill touched her.

And then she shrugged, her indignation predominating. She hurried toward the telephone. Rick could act as stiff-necked as he pleased. If he wouldn't help her celebrate, there were other men who would. . . .

A group of them later saw her off on the train. Pryor was not present, but her disappointment was submerged in



the excitement she felt at what lay ahead.

**H**OLLYWOOD . . . the glamor and tinsel glitter of the motion picture industry. Huge sets and glaring Kleig lights. Scripts and shooting schedules. Famous names and faces superimposed against a background of lush nightclubs and lavish parties.

Doreen was caught up in it and became a part of it. She bought a large home and had a swimming pool built. She hired servants and drove a luxurious roadster. Her clothes and jewelry were especially designed for her by the most exclusive shops.

She starred in musicals and light comedies. She played a number of straight dramatic roles. Her pictures were moderately successful—or at least they brought the usual reactions from a public ingrained with the habit of attending movies and somehow conditioned not to be too critical. She received the usual publicity in magazine articles and newspaper gossip columns, some of it gushy, some of it barbed. She had the usual quarrels and feuds with other stars.

All in all, she had the usual type of Hollywood career. A nova-like blaze of prominence—and then a slow fade-out. After four years she suddenly awoke to the fact that she was treading a downhill path to obscurity. Good parts had become more and more rare, assignments fewer and farther between. Finally the studio refused to renew her contract.

She tried other studios, but they were interested only in new faces. She hung on for a while. She took bit parts. She dismissed her servants, sold her house and car. She moved into a modest apartment and hoped—as so many had hoped before her—for the chance of a comeback.

The bit parts dwindled. People had somehow completely lost interest in her. In the end she returned East.

She tried the model bureaus first, but she was told she wasn't the type now in vogue. She obtained small roles in a number of plays. She sang in a night club. After a while she managed to land an unimportant but steady spot on a radio show.

She was working at this when she saw Pryor again. He was waiting for her in the hall when she left the radio studio one evening.

"Rick!" she cried. "I can hardly believe it's you."

He was grinning, but his eyes showed an odd reserve. They seemed to measure and search from a distance. "I heard you were working here, and thought I'd look you up. Shall we go some place where we can talk?"

"That'll be swell, Rick."

A few minutes later they sat facing each other across a table in a small restaurant. Doreen felt a strange shyness. It was something she had never expected to feel again.

"What have you been doing with yourself, Rick?"

"Writing books—believe it or not. It's something I've always wanted to do."

"Novels?"

He nodded. "I'm working on the third one now. According to my royalty checks, the last two went over surprisingly well, and my publishers have been begging for more. They claim our civilization needs a moral reawakening. What I've been doing in my books, you see, is preaching against the general rottenness caused by advertising and movies."

"But why that, Rick?"

"Because of the way they tear people down."

She looked away, her mouth twist-



She ran wildly, in utter terror, and the night seemed to reach out for her . . .

ing. "I suppose you're thinking of me. I know I haven't been much of a success."

"Maybe I was thinking about you, Doreen. Maybe I was thinking about a dozen other people I've known, who went down in the dizzy chase after quick fame and easy money."

Pryor went on, and in some way he managed to steer the conversation into impersonal channels. Doreen began to feel more relaxed and at ease. She felt her old liking for Pryor return—this time with a new, strange intensity. She realized abruptly that she had been in love with him all along, and she told herself that she had been a fool to refuse the opportunity he had once offered her. A hand seemed to clutch at her heart as she wondered if it was too late. She decided to find out.

**H**ER chance came during a moment when something of the old intimacy between them flashed once more into existence. She leaned forward, placing her hand on Pryor's wrist.

"Rick, I haven't forgotten that night you proposed to me. I've thought of it often. There were times when I hated myself for having turned you down." She tensed herself—and took the fatal plunge. "Rick—I made myself a promise. I promised I wouldn't turn you down if you proposed a second time."

He looked down at his empty cup. He was silent. There was a stillness about him somehow deathly.

Despair welled up in Doreen—despair and grief. She knew she had lost even before Pryor moved or spoke.

"I'm sorry, Doreen. I don't intend to propose a second time. I came to the studio this evening, hoping that you hadn't changed, that you were still the Doreen I remembered. But you had changed. Hollywood had taken some-

thing away from you." He paused, hesitating. And then his words came in a sudden rush. "Doreen, I've often wondered about those things Lou Brissac said. Now I think . . . I'm sure he was right."

A sudden thunder beat in her ears. There was a distorting mist before her eyes. She was aware of this somehow, though afterward she had no clear recollection of the next few moments. She had only the nightmare-like memory of snatching up her purse and gloves, of bumping into chairs and tables in her blind flight out into the darkness and solitude of the street, running wildly amid great sobs that shook her body as a gale shakes a tree. Then she walked. She didn't know how long she walked. But she remembered in a blurred way that she was exhausted when finally she reached her tiny kitchenette apartment and threw herself across the bed.

The days and weeks that followed took on a bleak emptiness. She did not see Pryor again. She knew he had gone forever from her life. But there were other men. They were not the type of men whose requests for dates she would have accepted under other circumstances. Now, however, she no longer cared. She was willing to grasp at anything that would cast even a momentary glow upon the drab, meaningless pattern into which her life had become woven. She threw herself into a frantic search for happiness.

The search led her on a constant round of nightclubs and wild parties. She drank too much, and her health suffered, affecting her voice. It was this as much as her growing indifference to her job that finally resulted in her dismissal from the radio studio.

She sang in nightclubs again, though now the difficulties with her voice limited her to the more cheap and tawdry

places. She knew it was the end. And she prepared for it. The bottle of sleeping pills was easy to obtain.

She was holding the bottle one evening as she stared at her reflection in her dressing room mirror. For a moment she had doubted that she would be able to go through with it. But now, looking at her image in the glass, she realized there was nothing else left to do. For she *had* changed. She was no longer even pretty—merely attractive in a hard, sophisticated way. She was thinner than she had ever been. The golden tint in her skin and hair had faded. There were lines in her face that hadn't been present before.

She thought of herself as she had looked that night at Whitney Picket's dinner party—and sudden grief rushed over her. She dropped her head on her arms, and the bottles on the dressing table rattled faintly with the force of her sobs. She was unaware that someone had entered the room until a voice spoke behind her.

"Why, Miss Sutton, what's the matter?"

It was Lucy, the wardrobe mistress. The old woman held a gown which she had repaired for Doreen, and her wrinkled features, framed in untidy gray hair, were twisted with concern.

"Nothing, Lucy." Doreen wiped her eyes quickly.

"You wouldn't be crying over nothing." Lucy laid the gown across a chair and regarded Doreen from faded, wise eyes. "You aren't happy, that's what. I've known it for a long time."

**D**OREEN returned the older woman's glance a moment. There was something odd about Lucy that she had never been able to explain. A sort of furtive, watching quality. But Lucy was kind and sympathetic enough, and sympathy was what Doreen wanted

now more than anything else. She found herself blurting out her story, telling Lucy of her rise to wealth and fame and of her tragic descent back into obscurity.

The old woman studied Doreen thoughtfully. "You'd like to be famous and have money again, wouldn't you?"

"More than anything else in the world! But look at me!" Doreen threw out her hands in a gesture of despair. "How could I get them back the way I look now?"

"There's a way." Lucy reached into her wrinkled smock and produced a card. "Just call up this number. Tell *him* you want to make an appointment."

"But who is it, Lucy? How can he help me?"

"*He* can help you. I know. I'm working for him. That's why I'm here—watching for people like you."

"I . . . I don't understand. What is this all about?"

"You want to be beautiful again. You want to be famous and have money. You can get all that by calling up this number. *He* can help you. There's a price, of course. The price is . . . your soul." Lucy placed the card carefully upon the dressing table and walked quietly from the room.

It wasn't until several minutes had passed that Doreen finally understood. And somehow, amid the waves of shuddering cold that washed over her, she found herself thinking of Brissac.

She knew there was no remaining avenue of hope, but two days passed before she called the number on the card. A deep voice spoke from the receiver at her ear.

"You wish to make an appointment?"

". . . Yes—yes!"

"Are you prepared to pay the price?"

"Yes."

"Your name?"

"Doreen . . . Doreen Sutton."

"Just a moment, please, while I look through my files."

She waited. The fear had drained from her. She felt something that was almost eagerness. She thought of herself being beautiful and compelling again, having lovely things to wear and a fine apartment to live in. She thought of herself being famous again, drawing the attentions of important men—men like Rick Pryor. Her heart seemed to beat in her throat, making it difficult to breathe.

She could have all these things once more. The price was her soul. Brisac had been right. But now it did not seem too great a price to pay.

The deep voice came back. "I am sorry, Miss Sutton. My records show

that it would serve no practical purpose to make a bargain with you."

"But . . . but what is wrong?"

"Your activities of the past several years indicate that your soul no longer possesses the required vitality. It has been . . . exhausted, we might say. I am sorry. Good-bye."

The receiver clicked with a note of finality.

After a long moment Doreen hung up. She crossed the living room slowly, moving with a bleak, trance-like deliberation. She took the bottle of sleeping pills from her purse. Then she filled a glass with water at the sink in the tiny kitchenette.

Standing before the living room windows and staring blindly into the gathering dusk outside, she began to swallow the pills one by one.

THE END

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