

THE SIN OF HAGAR.

By Helen Mathers.

Author of
"Cherry Ripe"
"Coming into the Rye"
"My Lady Greenleafy,"
Etc.

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THE SIN OF HAGAR

SCENES.—CHAPTER I.—At Chudleigh Salston, in Devonshire, England, Lord Straubenzee and his daughter Nannie become involved in a strange couple, father and daughter, the father being called the Wizard. II.—The Wizard is murdered, and the murderer is unknown. Lord Straubenzee returns home to live with his daughter Nannie, and Nannie's lover, Lord Straubenzee's son, Lord Will Casillis, is warned against Hagar and Will Casillis, who is warned against Hagar and Will Casillis, who is warned against Hagar and Will Casillis.

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But when he did not "tease" her like this there were times when his dominant personality attracted her, she being that gentle, dependent order of woman that a strong man fights for and cherishes as long as there is breath in his body, eye, and loves as the self-sufficing, strong woman never is, never can be loved. Nannie's image, sweet, kissable, most womanly and lovely, was sealed on Trelawny's eyes, and through it he saw only vague shapes of other women who came and went. There are few men capable of such absorption in one image, and these not always of the best kind, but those who are usually carry it stamped upon them to their graves and after. And this morning, walking in the long, cool shadows of the giant trees in the park, he strained every nerve to put the girl off her guard, to soften her toward him when presently he should ask her for the last time what he had so often asked before in vain.

And Hagar walking beside them, her pale, unadorned face, her thoughts her own, knew that she had come to a turning of the ways, that the time when she should be able to show gratitude to God for the one chance, so passionately prayed for, so mercifully vouchsafed, or prove herself ingrate and worse than ingrate had arrived, and had there been no Will Casillis her path would have spread broad and easy before her, but she loved him, and all was said.

A young man's cool, penetrating, impertinent glance may sometimes prove as fierce a torch to a woman's heart as another's fervid devotion, and if you ask why Hagar loved this very ordinary young man I say that love has no reason for his wildest vagaries and excesses himself never.

"Why should not Nannie marry Trelawny?" whispered the devil in Hagar's ear. "He would worship her all his life. There would be no shadow of turning in such love as his. And Will Casillis few might with favoring opportunity cut his eyes at last on her and behold that she was fair."

They had come to a rustic summer house, and by a gesture Blake stopped Hagar as she was following Nannie across the threshold. "Think of her influence here," he said in a swift whisper as he pushed her toward a clump of trees hard by, then entered the summer house and sat down by Nannie, who had forgotten her fears and was thinking of Willie.

"Where is Hagar?" she cried starting up, but Trelawny drew her down beside him, both her hands clasped in one of his.

"My love, my little love," he said in his strong deep voice, his dark face one flame of longing. "I want you, I want you without you. Come to me, sweet-heart—wife!"

Then a strange thing happened. Nannie's eyes grew soft and tender, as though kindled by the fire of his, her little face, with a delicious look of yielding, of intoxicated happiness, sank slowly toward his breast, but even as he strained her in his arms, before his lips could touch her, she had torn herself from his embrace, and crying out, "Willie! Willie! Willie!" like one mad, rushed from the place.

CHAPTER XI.
Dinner was over, and on the rose-colored couch placed on an estrade, which was supposed to have been the ambassador's favorite seat, and which wore indeed a semitropical air, Hagar and Nannie were sitting, a large and a small white speck in the glowing color of the room.

Nannie seemed almost lost among the billowy cushions, her face was as white as her own, but there was an unusual note of character in it, and also in her voice as she addressed Hagar. "I don't understand it," she said, "why you have always gone against Trelawny; why you are trying now to make me unfaithful to my sweetheart, as if, God knows, I were not enough under Blake's evil influence without my heart proving traitor as well!"

Her voice was sharp with anguish, she covered her face, suddenly grown burning red, with her hands. Should she ever, ever get the brand out of her soul of those mad, shameful moments in which she had almost passed into Blake Trelawny's possession?

"I don't know if there is a mad strain in our blood," she went on brokenly, "I will ask father, but how when every beat of my heart and drop of my blood is Willie's could I suffer that man to make love to me? I can never, never be clean again."

"Blake's love might compel any woman, just as he bends every one to his will," said Hagar, who was also pale.

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blue eyes, "and if you had not met Will Casillis you might be supremely happy as Lady Trelawny. No one will ever love you as well. Not Will or any other."

"And yet you hate him!" said Nannie, with one of those flashes of intuition that occasionally startled Hagar, as proving how little she understood the girl. "You can't keep it out of your face and voice, try as you will, and yet you would have me marry him!"

Hagar was silent. Yes, she hated him. We may flagellate our sins with every savage word of obloquy we can command in our private thoughts, but the obvious contempt of others is hard to bear, especially when in this special instance we have done nothing to deserve it.

"And I feel," said Nannie, her heart beating very fast, but with a courage astonishing to herself, "that, much as I love you, I do not understand you, Hagar, as you understand me. You can make me believe black is white, but—"

"Explain yourself," said Hagar, sitting erect and speaking with the pride of Lucifer.

"I will. That scene in the Knowle gardens when you begged and prayed for something—"

The room, with its colored lights of different shades, its French furniture and exotics, looked like some huge exquisitely tinted rose and was a feast to the eye, but its beauty was far from the thoughts of either of its occupants just then.

"Because I begged and prayed of him not to give himself up, not to drag me through all the horror of accusing and delivering him over to a shameful death," said Hagar calmly when they were once more alone, "and you blame me because I did not bind him down—the man who had given me freedom."

Nannie was silent. An ineffaceable impression had been left on her mind of Hagar importuning for herself, and though thrust on one side it persistently recurred now that her friend had joined a conspiracy to make her forget Willie.

"And in many things you are strange, Hagar," she said. "Do you remember how often you used to go up to the moor and would always stop beside an old disused well and stare down into it? I asked you one day why it held such interest for you, and you said because you hoped all your sins lay buried there. But how can you have had any?"

Hagar turned, and with a sudden, fierce gesture snatched Nannie to her arms. The soft, yielding little body trembled and sickened through and through at a thought it had been held last against Trelawny's breast.

"Nannie," said her friend tenderly, and laying her cheek against the fair, curly head, "can't you trust me? Only love me, and such thoughts will be impossible to you. Will Casillis returns to-night. No one can come between you. It is Blake Trelawny and I, like my namesake, who will go out into the desert and suffer."

"I am a little beast," said Nannie, feeling a great stone rolled away from her heart, "but I have got so nervous waiting for Willie—and that summer house. Oh, I never, never can face him!" she added, despair rushing back upon her.

"Forget it," said Hagar resolutely. "You did no wrong, and you must never tell Willie!"

Nannie drew herself out of Hagar's arms, her brown eyes shining. "I must. I can't go to Will on false pretenses."

"Do you want murder done?" cried Hagar. "There is bad enough blood between the two men now, and to rouse Trelawny's passions is to create an inferno, in which Will, not himself, will be sacrificed. You have no earthly thing with which to reproach yourself, and if your lover has remembered you with the scrupulous faithfulness you have shown him there won't be a happier pair of lovers on earth than you at this time tomorrow night."

"If!" said Nannie gravely, her thoughts going off on a new track. "Of course women must like him, he is so lovable, and I think he is very handsome, don't you, Hagar?" she added, blushing.

"He is straight and tall and strong, and he has nice ways with women," said Hagar slowly, "and that's enough. If men only knew how thoroughly we women appreciated them when they are in our blood," she went on brokenly, "I will ask father, but how when every beat of my heart and drop of my blood is Willie's could I suffer that man to make love to me? I can never, never be clean again."

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most immediately Nannie sank back on the pillows asleep.

For awhile Hagar watched her; then, with a sudden gathering together of all her forces and an upward lifting of her body, she concentrated her whole attention on Nannie, who presently stirred and murmured in her sleep.

Hagar listened, breathless. Then she smiled, for the girl had said, "Trelawny," not "Willie."

"Sir William has arrived at the castle, my lord," the old butler announced to his master as the latter sat over his wine alone in the sealing wax red dining room that evening.

"Thank God!" cried his master fervently and from his soul, for he had long ago regretted sending Will on his travels and felt disagreeable quins at Blake Trelawny's persistent pursuit of Nannie, but he could not forbid his neighbor the house, and now Will was here to protect his own, and matters were going to turn out all right after all.

"We must wake up, Bell," he said briskly as he walked, in his elation, up and down the room. "There's Miss Nannie's coming out ball, and my Lady Lirriper arriving, and presently, I suppose, there will be a wedding, Bell." He went on, almost intoxicated by his intense sense of relief, "and there will be all the falals to buy, and the old place turned topsy turvy."

The stocky little figure went out of the room almost dancing, and Bell smiled as he turned to remove the wine.

"Bless 'em!" he said warmly, "they'll make a pretty pair, and that black devil's nose will be fairly put out of joint. Flesh and blood's dirt to him, 'cept when he wants it, as he wants our young lady. So my Lady Lirriper's coming. Lord, she'll make us sit up! She'll be making my two nuns' skulls drop the dishes they're carrying by her stories, and I wonder how she and Miss Gregorius will hit it. Both too clever by half and bound to fall out, say I."

CHAPTER XII.

A deer park at 5 o'clock of a summer's morning is a beautiful thing, and the deer know it as they wander over the pebbled grass and sniff up those clear, rarefied scents that cool night has shaken from her skirts when hastening away from break of day.

And a young man who could scarcely be said to have gone to bed all night knew it, as he obtruded his unwelcome presence among the denizens of the woodland, when scarcely a blink of day had come and he could barely see the white blind of a distant window behind which the apple of his eye slept.

How could she sleep and he wandering out here alone? How could he call so urgently to her to wake and she not know it? Did not everything shout out to her: "The time is up, is up! and he is out yonder waiting? The time of trial is over; springtide is here. Come out, come out, to join your impatient lover!"

The moments dragged like hours. Long before the sun was fully up, Will, his eyes glued to that immovable blind, had in imagination seen it thus fixed to all eternity, and Nannie passing through the successive stages of Blake Trelawny's unwilling sweetheart to his willing one, and thence by slow degrees to the altar, where he finally took leave of her, and all because an innocent white blind refused to go up at an unholy hour of the morning!

But was it all? A word in his ear overnight from an old servant had set a torch to his fears and bred in him the first real doubts he had felt of Nannie since he had left her.

"My lord, Trelawny is a great deal at Straubenzee," the butler said when giving the news of the country for which his master had asked. "Lady Annabella and Miss Gregorius had been at home some weeks now," the old man concluded, and it might be fancy, but Will scented something significant and even warning in his retainer's tone, who had also added that there was to be a grand ball to celebrate Lady Annabella's coming out in September, and my lord's sister, Lady Lirriper, was coming to do the honors.

Will had plenty of time to digest these facts, as at last, growing reckless, he stood in the midst of the great gravel sweep opposite the colonnade and immediately below Nannie's window, heedless of early housemaids and gardeners, heedless of everything save the moment when that hideous square of white should give place to his dear little girl's sweet face.

As the clock struck 5 it came. Up rushed the blind, the window followed, and there, in her pink cotton frock, was Nannie, who stretched out her arms to him, all wild with joy, as if she would precipitate herself bodily into his arms, and for awhile they took their fill of gazing at each other, while broken words of love fell from their lips. Then the window yawned empty, and Will rushed round in ecstasy to one of those hooks in which the vast place abounded and by instinct told him she would join him.

She must have flown. He heard a key turn, and in a moment they had rushed into each other's arms.

The hens with large families who had made this half ruined colonnade their special hunting ground wondered what all the fuss was about and pursued their daily avocations with unruffled calm, showing satisfaction, however, when the interlopers retired to a sumptuously painted and decorated room now used by the gardeners for their odds and ends, and then sat down on two inverted tubs that touched and gazed at one another.

"You look much older, Will, and so brown!"

"And you are quite grown up, Nannie, and so pretty! I haven't seen a girl fit to tie your shoestrings. You haven't been flirting!" he added, taking her face in his brown palm, and scrutinizing it narrowly.

"I haven't had a thought in my heart you might not see," said Nannie steadily, though a rush of color dyed her face. "I've been a perfect nuisance to

everybody with my lovestruck condition, and pray, sir, have you had no thought, no fancy, I may not know?"

"Not one," said Will soberly, truthfully. "I didn't want to go away from you. I'm off my head with joy to get back to you, and whenever I did talk to a woman it was about you."

"Oh, what a treat for her!" cried Nannie, all her fears gone. He was here and could shield his own.

"And Blake Trelawny," said Will, and the glory of the hour was over, "I hear he has been up here a good deal. I suppose he has not got over it?"

The girl's fresh face went wan in a moment. She looked away and made no answer. A moment ago how sweet the geranium leaves had been, how subtly satisfying the blending of colors on the opposite wall, and now Blake Trelawny had spoiled it all.

Will's heart smote him.

"My poor little love," he said, "you can't help the man's loving you; so long as you don't love him, I'm satisfied."

"I hate him," she said very low, "I hate him—hate him. And now he has spoiled our first hour together."

The slow tears formed and rolled miserably down her cheeks.

"My sweetheart!" cried Will, half beside himself. "Don't cry. He can't spoil everything for us so long as we love one another as we do, we do! Has he been bullying you?" he added fiercely after a pause devoted to those imbecilities that make the lover's heaven.

"No. And you are not to quarrel with him, Will. If you do I—I won't marry you!"

"But I shall make you. How about this coming out ball when you'll immediately go in? Because we can't possibly wait to be married more than a month!"

"Father wished it," said Nannie; "it's a good deal Aunt Lirriper's doing, I think."

"Gay old girl," said Will, bursting out laughing, "she's three years older and wickeder than when I saw her last, and I should have thought that to be impossible!"

"Father wouldn't go to the sea this year," said Nannie, whose worst enemy could not have twitted her with pale cheeks now. "I think he was sorry he sent you away, though he never said so."

"He deserves to be sorry," said Will, with immense energy. "It wasn't his fault, Trelawny didn't carry you off—flinty hearted old wretch—and I never will forgive him. So Miss Gregorius is here? I suppose you are as great friends as ever. I was hard on that poor girl, and often and often I've thought of it since. When you're truly wretched yourself, you remember how you've made other people suffer and feel ashamed yourself."

He stood up, a straight, long limbed young fellow with something eager and earnest in his brown face that used not to be there, but well became it.

"We must try to pass some of our happiness on, darling," he said. "I feel this morning as if I had enough for the whole world."

"Like the old woman who, when she first beheld the sea, said that at last she saw what was enough for everybody," said Nannie as she tried to remove the mold marks from her white gown. "Willie, aren't you hungry?"

"Frightfully," said Willie, and moved her heart to pity by the relation of how he had roamed the park and ob-jurgated her window blind in vain.

"Poor boy!" she said, then danced a step or two, and said:

"You'll come in to breakfast, of course?"

"And both burst out laughing. "And to break the shock," said Will, offering his arm with exaggerated respect, "we will take a public walk round the premises, selecting for preference those portions where your father is sure to see and admire us."

And they did. And Lord Straubenzee, shaving himself close to a window, and appearing to look out, cut his chin in his extravagant delight and executed a sort of dance that simply appalled Coleman, who entered while it was progressing, and thought his master had suddenly gone mad.

But a glance out of the window explained the situation, and all class distinctions forgotten, the two old boys literally beamed on one another.

"I always did like Sir William," said Coleman in the servants' hall later, while the love story up stairs was causing many a flutter under neat cotton frocks, "but it's a good job he's back—a very good job, for accidents will happen." And he nodded with a profound sagacity that scorned to explain itself to the lumbering wits around him.

And in the sealing wax red dining room Will had come up to Miss Gregorius as she entered, and in the mauniest, nicest way told her how glad he was to see her again, and looking so well, too, and his warm handshake had thrilled through her whole body, and the pride in her had triumphantly asserted his right to be loved, and with no shame to herself, so strong was he, so dear, so kind.

"I can't, I won't harm you," she said to herself then, but later in the day, when she had incautiously wandered rather far afield, Blake Trelawny swooped down on and bullied her.

"Stop those fools," he said, his black eyes with their topaz lights gleaming dangerously. "I don't know how you do it, but do it you can, if you choose; you brought her into my arms yesterday, but not long enough." He hugged them on his breast as if he still felt her there. "They're billing and cooing like two sick turtles out yonder—callow idiots—and not one of them can even teach the other what love means."

"I will not," said Hagar, setting her back to the great bole of the beech tree under which they stood. "They are engaged, they will be married!"

"Fah! And your influence with her?"

"Is as nothing in the balance with his. Go your way, Blake Trelawny, and set your heart where you have a chance to win."

"I never look back," he said, "and I never change. Hark ye! There is something in your past that you dread to have revealed. I will rip that past up

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from end to end, and shame you could bid the whole world, if you will not do my bidding in this thing."

Hagar laughed.

"You Cornish gentlemen," she said with an accent on the last word, "do not you, who profess to be so wise in love, know that you may drag a woman's body to your arms, but you cannot compel the spirit within her to drink of love? And something more than the husk, the shell, would be needed to content such a man as you."

"I will take the husk, the shell, so long as it be Nannie," he said. "Now listen. The day you put her hand in mine I will make you a rich woman, so that you shall want for nothing to your dying day. You shall not need to take your disdainful beauty into the marriage market. You may—who knows?—marry Will Casillis in the end. But if you will not help me in this by fair means or foul I will separate those two. I will stick at nothing to gain my ends—no violence, no crime, shall be too black for me. Now!"

"I refuse."

"Then on your own head be it!" And looking like an incarnate force of calamity and evil he strode furiously away in the direction of the house.

CHAPTER XIII.

Lady Lirriper arrived next day with her maid, man, poodle, parrot and a pile of trunks that would not have discredited a Saratoga belle, with the newest thing in bonnets on her wicked old head, as well as the newest scandal up her sleeve—this last for the sole delectation of Blake Trelawny.

She was strongly of opinion that God made town and man the country, and pitied her brother Straubenzee's tastes from the bottom of her soul, for books never taught one anything, she was wont to say, while from the duldest human alive you could always extract something you did not know before and which was sure to come in useful.

"How are you, brother?" she called out in the high, joyous voice impossible to associate with an old woman, "and where are the lovers? H'm—very pretty, indeed," she added, looking with pleasure at the park steeped in golden sunlight, "and who is that?" as she brought up abruptly, staring at Miss Gregorius.

"My daughter's friend." And Lord Straubenzee introduced them.

"If you weren't an old mummy she might be your wife," commented the old lady, taking in every detail of the girl's appearance. "I'll ask her to stay with me in town if she's all right, but my correct brother has seen to all that, of course."

When her maid had taken away her wraps, but by no means the bonnet and veil that seemed indissolubly one with her admirably curled tresses, Lady Lirriper looked round at the green and silver hangings, the whole perfection of the exquisite drawing room, with a long sigh of content.

"If only you weren't a thousand miles from town!" she said, nodding to Bell, who was himself waiting on her with tea and looking really delighted to see her. "What the ambassador—who lived every moment of his life—meant by building such a place here passes my comprehension."

She was looking hard at Hagar, at the outline of her nose and lips and chin against the background of the famous peacock screen that was an heirloom and worth many thousands of pounds.

"And how is Trelawny?" she went on without waiting for an answer.

"He's such a devil—and I like devils. That man's alive—if he walked past a row of dead folks those coals of eyes of



"How is Charles?" said Lord Straubenzee.

his would make 'em all sit up and talk. If I were a young woman," she straightened herself and the osprey on her smart bonnet quivered, "Trelawny would be the man for me, though I suppose two such fizzes as he and I would never agree!"

"How is Charles?" said Lord Straubenzee, not without malicious intent.

"Charles looks 100," said his wife tartly, "and deserves it, too, burying himself in books, neglecting his appearance and turning into dust and ashes before he's dead. As I always told him, and you, too, there's loss of time for sitting down and moldering when we go over to the majority. It's positively sinful not to use up every scrap of time in enjoying ourselves while we are able."

Her brother smiled, and a little natural color augmented the artificial one in Lady Lirriper's cheeks, for she and her husband had gone different ways very early in their married life. He said it was because she insisted on putting two lumps of sugar in his tea in-

stead of one; she, because he had been brought up among and by fools and like most men, couldn't abide a clever woman. So they had agreed to differ.

"I heard something about Trelawny's being in love with Nannie," she said, taking another piece of cake, which was immensely to her favor. When the sweet tooth survives middle age, there is distinct hope for the person who possesses it, for it proves that a good many of his instincts retain their pristine vigor. "Either Nannie has improved or Trelawny's taste has grown rusty—which is it? Is my niece so good looking?" And she looked point blank at Miss Gregorius. "Family opinions are always biased."

"I think she must be lovely," said Hagar slowly, "as the only two men who have had opportunities of falling in love with her adore her."

"H'm! Nice for Cassilis to live with such a rival as Trelawny at his gates. The days of Lochinvar are not over while Blake lives. But where are these young people? Very rude of 'em, I must say."

"They are constantly disappearing," said her brother, "but then you must remember they have been parted for a year and were only reunited yesterday."

"Marry 'em," said Lady Lirriper concisely. "Put an end to 'em like any other nuisance. Oh, here they are! H'm—h'm! You're no beauty, my dear, but you've got some nice dimples and a sweet little way of your own, and, after all, that's what fetches a man most. How are you, Cassilis? You were a dirty little boy when I saw you last, and you're a clean big one now, and not so picturesque. I think I'll go up and rest before dinner." And with a parting stare at Hagar, who clearly interested her much more than her niece, the old lady graciously accepted Will's arm and whisked her French skirts out of the room.

"Is Trelawny coming to dinner?" she paused to say at the door. "If not tonight, ask him for tomorrow. I can't get on without my Trelawny."

"Father," said Nannie when her aunt had gone, and it struck him how all the radiant happiness had been suddenly wiped out of her face as with a sponge. "Will does not like Trelawny. I fear they may quarrel. Is it necessary to ask him?"

The father looked grave.

"You know what your aunt is," he said. "Amusement she will have at any price, and he is our neighbor, and an old friend of hers, and I know of no reason why I should forbid him the house."

He looked keenly at her, hoping that she would speak, but she did not. Hagar had moved away out of earshot.

"She will invite him here," continued Lord Straubenzee, "and I shall be forced to second the invitation. Will it not be better, as you must inevitably meet him after your marriage, for both Cassilis and yourself to keep an outward appearance of friendliness? Believe me, it is far less trouble, in the long run, to observe the laws of distant politeness than quarrel with any person, the more especially a neighbor."

Nannie was silenced, for she dared not tell her father the truth, and just then Will came in laughing and drew her hand through his arm.

"I was saying," remarked Lord Straubenzee, cordially detesting his task, "that it is not desirable there should be any open coolness between you young people and Blake Trelawny. There was no acknowledged engagement between you and Nannie until yesterday."

"There is now," interpolated Will, kissing the hand on which a great cluster of diamonds and sapphires sparkled.

"And he was free, like any other man, to try to win Nannie, but now that he has failed he is man enough to acquiesce in the inevitable, and no good purpose can be served by excluding him from this house. He is invited to the ball. He came in to see me about magistrates' business today; to ask him to dinner is perfectly natural and in my opinion unavoidable."

"You will not quarrel with him, Willie?" cried Nannie suddenly.

"Of course not. I don't like the beggar, never did. We punched each other's heads ever since we could use our fists, and as he is five years older than I am I always got the worst of it. But I've got the best of it now." He and Nannie melted, as it were, out of sight, and Lord Straubenzee smiled and went over to Hagar.

"You must not mind my sister," he said. "She is very eccentric. She will put you through an exhaustive catechism after dinner and then probably ask you to go and stay with her, as a new sensation."

"And shall I go?" she said rather drearily. "The school is a certainty, and she might tire of me in a week."

"I wish I could see you happily married, my child," said Lord Straubenzee very kindly. "It is the only happy and inevitable fate for a beautiful young woman like you. And what do you wear at the ball Wednesday?" he added in a lighter tone. "I hope Nannie has done you justice; she promised me that she would."

Hagar's eyes lit up. There is not a woman alive who can contemplate her first ball gown unmoved.

"It is white gauze," she said, "over white satin. It has no bows or flowers, only some big clasps of pearls Nannie set her heart on my wearing, and I thank you, sir, a thousand times over for your gift."

He put out his hand deprecatingly.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]