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EVERYTHING
HE LOVED
HE HELD ON TO.
EVERYTHING
SHE LOVED
SHE SET
FREE.

Palaces

A
NOVEL BY
**NEAL
TRAVIS**
BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF
CASTLES

Pathways

NEAL TRAVIS



AVON

PUBLISHERS OF BARD, CAMELOT, DISCUS AND FLARE BOOKS

PALACES is an original publication of Avon Books. This work has never before appeared in book form.

AVON BOOKS
A division of
The Hearst Corporation
959 Eighth Avenue
New York, New York 10019

Copyright © 1983 by Neal Travis
Published by arrangement with the author
Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 83-90753
ISBN: 0-380-84517-2

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First Avon Printing, August, 1983

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LOVE AND CHOICES

Miriam McDonald

Her husband forced her to the most difficult choice she would ever have to make. But if marriage meant giving up her whole life for his success, she had to give up the man she once loved more than herself.

Joe McDonald

It had always been just the two of them. Until she wanted to count as an individual. She had helped him to the top. Now she wanted something of her own.

Fletch Harbor

He wanted to love her and be part of her life. But he was so young that if she chose to love him, it could only end badly for one of them.

Howard Veitch

He offered her power at the studio and a shot at big-budget movies. But in choosing to betray her, he underestimated the woman she was.

Andy East

He was now a very rich man, but his feelings for her hadn't changed since they were high school sweethearts. If she chose his love, would he understand how much she had changed?

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CASTLES

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Parlance

PART
ONE

Chapter One

THEY HOARDED THEIR GOOD NEWS, EACH WANTING the other to tell first. Miriam and Joe opened a bottle of champagne, sipping the cold wine and catching glimpses of river traffic that went with the East Fifties apartment. They hugged each other, and hugs led to caresses and they made love on the rug knowing that the draperies were open to the early evening light and the people in the highrise across the street. Finally, giddy, Miriam insisted Joe tell.

"Give," she said, grinning at him lying on the floor, spent and naked, wine running down his chest and mingling with the sweat. "What did Penton say?"

Joe McDonald sat up slowly, refilled his glass and reached out to Miriam. She sat down on the floor beside him and drank from his glass. The sun

reflected into their big living room from the windows across the way, lighting the two of them with a reddish-gold glow. The long, awful New York winter was over. Miriam had never in her life felt more filled up.

"Mr. Penton," Joe said, slowly, "thinks the outline is, and I quote, 'a sure-fire, number one best seller.' He says all I have to do is put in a couple of extra chapters on the Los Angeles scene and maybe a bit of Midwest color, and we've got a national hit." He drank some more and fondled Miriam's breasts under her blue sweatshirt. "And Mr. Penton says when I've done that he will give me the first third of the advance." He stopped talking for a moment. "The advance is 265,000 dollars."

She began to cry. All the years of prodding, of boosting up Joe's ego. Now Joe McDonald was going to be a famous writer and they were going to live happily ever after.

"I thought he was going to reject the book," Joe continued. "We had lunch in the Rose Room, at the Algonquin, and he was bullshitting on about all the great writers who'd drunk there. Being so nice about what a good columnist I was, but kind of hinting that I was a newspaperman and the fucking ghosts in the Algonquin were *writers*. So I was prepared for the let-down. Then, just as the waiter brought coffee he said, 'How would 265,000 dollars suit you for the advance?' All I could think was

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that's an odd figure. Why not something round, like two fifty or three hundred? And then it started to sink in. Oh, shit, honey, I thought I was going to break down and cry. The book is going to happen, and you got me to do it."

Joe had spent the afternoon dazed and drinking, but even so, he was aroused and they made love again on the rug. He was still deep inside her when she told him her own triumph.

"Mike Benedict finally got the money for his movie," Miriam said. "Not enough to finish it, but enough to start." She ran her hands up and down his bare back and felt the goose bumps. The sun had gone and the room was growing cold. "Put something on, darling," she said. "We can't have the famous writer catching cold." She felt him slip out of her and they lay side by side, staring up at the ceiling. "He can't pay me much, and most of that will have to be deferred, but he wants me to be the assistant director."

Joe held her to him.

"Assistant to Benedict! Anyone would pay for the chance to work with a director like him. I'm so proud of you! You've worked so hard for this. You're going to kill 'em. I knew you'd make it."

"It's all so much at once," Miriam said. "We're too lucky. You get your book. I get my movie. I'm almost scared, Joe. Is there some price we're going to have to pay?"

He held her tight and stroked her back.

"We have paid it," he said. "All those years in all those towns, you following me from one shitty newspaper to another, nowhere to call home, no way to have kids . . . we paid our dues. Now we're going to enjoy it."

He stood up and, naked, waved at the old man across the way whose binoculars glinted.

"Show's over, fella," Joe said happily. He reached down and helped Miriam up. "I blew away the whole afternoon. God knows what I'm going to put in tomorrow's column. I'll have to be everywhere tonight. And all I want to do is stay home with you and celebrate. You better come on the rounds with me. The shape I'm in, I need someone to guide me. Actually, there're a couple of okay parties, and then we can stop by Elaine's. Sinatra's in town. He'll be there. I can always get a line out of him."

"I can't, Joe," she said. "I've got to start working on schedules for Mike. The money's so tight, we can't waste a day."

He shrugged. "All right. I'll face the glitterati on my own, drink Perrier, and conceal my joy. Don't wait up, though. It's going to take all night to put a column together."

Joe went off to shower and dress and Miriam checked the refrigerator to see if there was something for her own dinner. It was often like this: She

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didn't care that much for the endless round of party-going that comprised Joe's job. At least tonight she had a job of *her* own.

She fixed a tuna salad sandwich, put on a pot of coffee, and lit the fire in the living room. Joe came in, fresh and glowing from his shower, elegant in a soft blue tweed suit but looking boyish and excited. He seemed to be bouncing on his toes.

"Sure you won't come with me?" he asked. "We could make it a celebration instead of just another night of digging up gossip for the voyeur readers of the *Globe*."

"I'd love to, darling," she said. "But I've got to get to work on the figures, start calling people. You know what Mike's like—best underground filmmaker in the business, but the worst businessman. I'm going to have to be virtually the producer as well as assistant director."

"You want me to give him a plug in the column tomorrow?" Joe asked. "It might bring some more money in."

"Thanks, but it's too early for that yet," Miriam said. "You've done so much for Mike already. He's very grateful. Ever since you started writing him up, the industry has been taking him seriously." She frowned. "I'm not sure that isn't why he's hired me as AD."

He kissed her and laughed. "Honey, you got the job on merit. You know no one works harder than

you, no one's learned more about the business in such a short time as you. The only thing I did was introduce you to Mike Benedict. After that, you were on your own with just talent going for you."

"And the fact that I can afford to work cheap, thanks to a successful husband," she said. She hugged him. "I do appreciate what you're letting me do, Joe," she said. "A lot of men would demand their wives stay home, wash their socks, warm their beds. But you've put up with all the mad hours and hopeless projects I've been involved in. I love you so."

"I love you, too," he said. "It's I who owe you. All the jobs you had to give up, all the moving, the nights waiting up while I worked the lobster shift. If I have to give up a little tender loving care at home for the sake of your career, you earned it."

"I don't want you to have to give up anything, Joe," she said. "I just want us to go on being happy and in love. Don't let your success—or mine, if success ever comes—do anything to us."

"It won't, darling," he said. "We're too smart to let anything come between us." He glanced at his watch. "But right now my deadline looms and I've got to hit the streets. A good gossip columnist is never found in his own living room after the sun goes down."

She kissed him good-bye and went back to the fire and the script of Benedict's movie. It was so good,

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the closest thing to commercial work Mike had ever attempted. A simple story of three friends growing up in Manhattan. Almost none of the dark symbolism serious critics had praised in his past low-budget efforts but which had kept the audiences away in droves. She made notes on a yellow legal pad as she read: location pointers, sound and light problems, permits and permissions that would be required. She felt wonderful, in control but easy with it, the warmth of the fire on her.

Film. Movies, they'd called them when she was a child. Her father took home movies of birthdays, end-of-summer picnics, Christmas, everything.

"Dadsi!" She had never called him anything else, though Deborah always said, "Dad."

"Dadsi, you didn't get Mother in the kitchen."

He took the same scenes every year, pictures of what he called his princesses in their palace, unwrapping gifts he arranged by height, wrapped for maximum color. Deborah hugging an endless series of dolls, Pete the hound racing across the yard, skidding in the snow.

"Dadsi, you forgot Pete. And the tree, did you get it? Maybe you better film the living room again."

Eight years old; her father's AD. He held all their lives. Odd, but she'd never looked at the home movies since her father's death of a heart attack five years ago. No curiosity. She had helped him

make his movies: It was enough that she had helped, enough to have made sure, year after year, that he left nothing out. She didn't need to see what he'd filmed. What could she possibly not know?

Odd, too, she thought, that viewing rushes or a finished film she'd worked on didn't have much impact on her even now. She pretty much knew what any shot would look like, and what went on during filming. Preproduction was all she cared for. Playing it out on the screen seemed an afterthought.

When the phone rang she cursed and went into the hall to answer it.

"Hey, big shot! You don't call your friends anymore, now that you're working?" Claudia Dennis, her best friend in New York, the one who shared all the frustrations of trying to break into the low-budget film business.

"I was going to, tonight," Miriam said. "You were the first person I wanted to tell, after Joe."

"You ought to know our business by now, kid," Claudia said. "One of us gets a job, we all know instantly. But, shit, AD to Mike Benedict is really something. I hear he's even going to pay you."

"Well, kind of," Miriam said. "Nothing like scale, of course, and the hours are going to be awful and we've only got about half the budget so far. But, yes, he's paying me."

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"And does this epic run to a semiprofessional cast and crew?" Claudia demanded. "I mean, what's in it for me?"

"You, of course, are going to do the sound," Miriam said triumphantly. "Mike thinks you did great work on that children's documentary and he jumped at your name when I put it up."

"I bet," Claudia said. "He knows I come cheap. But just how cheap?"

"Seventy-five a day, no penalties?" Miriam said.

"Shit, I could make more than that just hiring out my Nagra," Claudia said. "But this sounds like more fun. I'll take it, of course. And thanks, Miriam. I won't let you down."

"We won't let each other down," Miriam said. "Not after all we've been through. We'll show everybody."

"You want to come over to my slum and open a bottle of wine to celebrate?" Claudia said. "Or, better, I come to you. Thank God Joe doesn't think three bottles of Raspberry Ripple make up a cellar."

"I forgot to tell you about Joe!" Miriam said. "They've bought his novel. Big, *big* money. He's made it! Can you believe it? All in the same day, I get a movie and Joe gets a book."

"Oh, Miriam, I couldn't be happier for you both," Claudia said, abandoning her usual cynicism. "Tell Joe congratulations from me. He de-