

Eliza's Diary

Dear Diary,

I never knew the true importance of the saying “what goes up must come down” until the quakes. Before that Wednesday I took everything in my life for granted. I was an unknown company owner that profited somewhere between 1.2 million to 1.7 million dollars today in its time, as a woman in the early 20th century. The year was 1906, I had made a deal with a man whose name I will never speak of again. Over the years as I’ve thought of that dreadful April morning, I’ve concluded I will refer to him as Mr. Money Hungry. Simply put, that's all he was, a money-hungry coward who had no care for anyone in the world besides himself.

I met Mr. Money Hungry (M.H.) when I was married to my ex-husband, Mark. Mark was a marvelous man when we first met, passionate, loving, intelligent, strong, confident, assertive, everything that would catch my eye. However, over time my intelligence, confidence, and assertiveness outgrew his. I was providing 80% of our household income at the end of our marriage, and I was a woman in 1906, unimaginable. However, I was a nanny and a maid full-time in the upscale end of San Francisco. We lived in a little suburb south of the city, and Mark was an aspiring, and failing trumpet player. He was ahead of his time per se, as we were both. I’m sure Mark would have made an amazing trumpet player if he lived past that horrific morning. Maybe that's what made us fall for each other, we both were so advanced and eager or perhaps we were eager for different things and that's what made us fail. As time went on, many of my employers and their families began to love me and consider me a part of their family. I felt more loved and welcomed by these other families than I did by my husband. We were drifting

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and talking less and less every day. I was falling out of love with Mark, and then Mr. M.H. approached me one day in the supermarket.

He startled me when he called me by name and knew exactly who I was. It hit me like a wave of anxiety and fear when I felt my name being projected into my back “Eliza Strong?” Surprised, I weakly responded to him “Um, yes?” Though beginning with fear and anxiety, the conversation itself was quite short, sweet, and to the point. “Mrs. Strong, I represent several of your employers' financial affairs. Mr. and Mrs. Rogers created a fundraiser and organized a lineup for you to have your own, out-of-home nanny service. Many eager women would love to work for a woman-operated cleaning business.”

Later that week, after lots of arguments with Mark and a lovely visit to see the Rogers' I was sitting in the waiting room of McBrook Financial Affairs Handling and Helping, waiting for Mr. M.H. and for what I didn't know at the time, my miserable fate. Once his secretary called my name, I shuffled my way into his large office with floor-to-ceiling windows covering the back wall. Everything on his desk was orderly and proper, not a smudge to be seen. He was quick, blunt, and to the point “We have an extra floor with office space in one of our buildings in downtown San Francisco. We would like to set you up with a crew, supplies, and whatever materials you need. However, since I was generous enough to lend you my empty floor I need to make up for that profit. I propose the easiest way to handle that would be for me to cosign on the licensing, and perhaps it may be a bit easier and quicker for me to get it.” It was astonishing how he so quickly gave so much information at once with no reaction. Then it hit me, he handles money affairs as an occupation, and he must be damn good at it to own so many beautiful buildings. This man knows how to build up a business and he knows exactly how to help me pay the bills on time. A contract I now wish I never would have signed.

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I had decided to name my company the name *Lady's in Yellow Cleaning & Care*. We wore floor-length yellow and white plaid skirts and yellow blouses with white loafers. The company grew rapidly and was widely successful throughout the city. The unique design and color pattern of our uniforms quickly led people to distinguish exactly who we were and what we did. The ladies were consistently praised for how efficient and effective we were with our work and we frequently heard "This place hasn't looked this clean in years". Families were eager to get on the waiting list to get their pick from the best nannies in all of San Francisco. I personally trained each single one of my ladies to be the very best lady they could be. However, there were always those difficult times when I had to discipline and/or release someone. Other than that, I had a great relationship with the ladies and many of them were very pleased with the work we did and the profits they received. As the ladies began to get more successful, I began working more and more. I wasn't going home until late and I was always cranky.

Sometimes I wonder if that's what led Mark to do it. If my working all of those hours and overpowering him, tinted his masculinity. Then I remembered that we said vows and we fell in love and we promised each other. Maybe those promises weren't enough, maybe I wasn't enough. Whichever it was, it led me to find Mark and his group's lead singer in our bed when I came home from work early one night.

It was April 17th, 1906. I pulled out my pocket watch and squinted my eyes to see its tiny hands. 11:04 pm. I looked back at my notebook, checkbook, and the other papers scattered across my desk. The ladies received their cash envelopes on the 3rd of every month, which meant the night before I would stay awake and analyze all of their earnings and distribute them into small

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postal envelopes. Suddenly, I heard the stairway door swing open and Mr. M.H. appeared from the shadowy staircase. “Good evening Sir, I was just finishing up the lady’s cash envelopes then I was going to walk home”, his voice was low and unsteady “I’m so proud of you and all you’ve accomplished Eliza. In only 7 months, you managed to create an absolute empire and bring in all of this profit and luxury. I am so so sooooo proud of you Elizaaaa”. It was then I noticed the slur in his words. He kept speaking as he approached me “I always knew you would be great. I heard great things about you, I heard how kind, passionate, and beautiful you are and I just knew”. He was close enough for me to smell the alcohol on his breath. He slowly stuttered and stammered to say “Eliza, you owe me something else. I want something more pleasurable and relaxing and you will be helping me...”.

“Sir...I...um...I don’t think I understand what you mean” It came out exactly how I felt, petrified. “I will have you tomorrow my dear, and don’t forget you can’t tell anyone, you need me. Goodnight sweetheart”, and then he pressed his wet lips to my forehead and vanished back into the darkness. I heard the door slam and his feet stomp down the first few steps then all I could hear was my heart pounding in my chest. I was terrified, what could I do? Where could I go? How will I escape? I knew I wasn’t safe, if I tried to walk home he could jump out and grab me. He could put me into his car kidnap me and do whatever he wanted to me. I curled into a ball under my desk and began sobbing my eyes out. All I could think of was my horrible fate that lay ahead tomorrow as I drifted to sleep under the desk. However, I had no clue.

I was awoken in darkness by a loud crashing and banging sound. I reached up onto my desk to grab my candle lamp and matches. Everything in my office had been knocked around and things were still falling. There was crashing and banging and so much noise, clutter, debris, chaos, everything happening at once, my life flashing before my eyes. It was an earthquake, I

was in the middle of an earthquake. I was in one of the tallest buildings in the busiest part of town during an earthquake. I began to panic, I was in a horrible situation and I needed to get out of the building fast. My company operated on the 20th floor of the building, and it was only 22 floors. I made a run for the stairs and quickly navigated up to the 21st floor. There was a huge chunk of concrete and cement covering the stairway leading up to the 22nd floor and the rooftop door. Then, I heard a loud crash and boom, rocks, cement, and debris began to fall everywhere. The building was crumbling around me with me inside it. I pulled as hard as I could on the debris blocking my path, but the building collapsed. The 22nd floor caved in and collapsed on top of me and I was knocked unconscious.

I woke up 2 months later in a County Hospital. I opened my eyes and let out a small cough, as I heard my mother scream “Baby, baby please tell me you’re awake, baby it’s Mommy, I’m here”. “Mom?” I was groggy and confused, “Wha- what happened?”. She immediately looked so sad and miserable, yet so happy and cheerful. I knew it was a tragic story but she was so happy to see me alive. “Well honey, 2 months ago an earthquake hit San Francisco and other parts of California. You were working late one night, and you must’ve fallen asleep at your desk or something because when the quake hit you were in the building. Nobody even knew you were in the building. The firefighters didn’t find your body for 2 days, you had slipped into a coma when the debris fell on your head. Oh, Dr. Wright said you would be ok, I just knew he would be right, it’s his name”.

My memory slowly came back to me and it was all clear and I sat up, immediate pain shooting to my right arm and left leg as I moved too quickly for my limbs. “Ma’am you broke your right arm and left leg during the accident and we haven’t been able to put proper bandaging on them while you’ve been in the coma for the risk of blood circulation cut off”. Dr. Wright was

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very confident and I could see why my mother believed him, he was an amazing doctor. “A lot of people died from this tragedy, they're saying maybe 3,000 in total. You should be extremely grateful you made it out of their life young lady”. I looked at my mother with a somber face, she must’ve flown all the way here from Georgia when she heard I was in a coma. Then the words left my mouth before I could even think, “Who died?” Although the doctor looked confused, my mother knew exactly what to say. “Mark, your boss or the dude that owns the building or whatever, over half of the ladies, I’m not entirely sure how many or who survived”. Mr. M.H. died, Mark died, Lady’s died, and I lived.

I lived on to reopen the *Lady’s in Yellow Cleaning & Care* and the business became more successful than ever. I met my best friend and business partner, Melanie. We left her sister Lila to run and direct the ladies in San Francisco when I and Melanie moved to New York City, where we opened our 2nd location, and where I met and married my soulmate. Melanie and I opened 72 other locations across the country before we retired. I married the true man of my dreams, Christopher Napson, and we had 3 children together. Marissa, Leroy, and Antoinette were my greatest joy and my best motivation to leave my legacy.

I am 83 years old, in 1964 and I, Eliza Napson made it happen.

Love Always,

Eliza Jean

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