

PAID IN FULL

Novelized From
Eugene Walter's
Great Play

(CHAPTER XVII.)

"Very well," she assented, turning from the door; "if that's the way it's going to be I'm perfectly willing."

"Then answer me."

"I intend to do that, but I intend to do something more than merely answer that question. If you don't mind we'd better sit down."

She motioned him to a chair and seated herself so that the table was between them.

"In the first place," she went on, very calmly, "in order to relieve your mind I might tell you that I have done nothing tonight which can reflect upon me as a good woman. I had no intention of doing any such thing. So far as I can find out, you are the only person who had my degradation in mind and was willing that it should happen if it resulted in your escaping the consequences of being a thief."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that Captain Williams did not have the slightest idea of putting a price on your freedom toward which I in any way would have to contribute. You seem to be the only one who thought that I, with all I hold precious, was a fair figure to offer. Had I gone, had he demanded, had I submitted and brought back that paper and given myself to you again, as well as your freedom, you would have been contented and happy."

"You know that's not true, Emma," he protested. The white heat of his ire had been dulled by her quietness, and little by little he was becoming calmer.

"I know it is true, Joe, and so do you. I wanted to go to mother without having all this talk, but now that we have to talk let's be frank with each other and with ourselves. And you try to appreciate the truth as much as you are able. To begin with, it seems that I have been alone in not realizing how worthless you are. My father when we were to be married warned me not to take you unless I thought you indispensable to my happiness. You know that every one else put it a little more bluntly. But I thought I loved you—I'm sure I did. Now it seems utterly beyond belief. But then it must have been love. I mistook your eagerness for a deeper sentiment, a determination of purpose, and I thought in my giddy way that the things you preached about socialism, the cruelty of the rich and all that sort of thing, were noble, self-sacrificing, even brilliant. Now I

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EUGENE WALTER.
Author of "Paid in Full" and "The Easiest Way"

By
John W. Harding

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"Brooks," said Smith, "you have no more rights. You relinquished them all under the terms of your deal with Emma, and you have been paid in full. Of course if you repent of the bargain Captain Williams, as a party to the contract, may be induced to cancel the receipt and leave the matter as it was earlier in the evening. I will get him on the phone in a jiffy if you say so."

A smile so sickly, so distorted with baffled rage, that it became a hyena-



"I have been born again—awakened to a new life."

like grimace, flickered on Brooks' visage.

"I see," he said. "You're all turned against me now you think I'm down. Well, as you like. Consider I've been paid in full. I'm agreeable. I've done nothing but slave for her for five years and been kept down by her. I didn't send her away; but, seeing she's going against my wishes, she'll stay gone. It lets me out. In future I'll only have myself to think of, and you bet I'm going to do it."

"That's up to you," retorted Smith sentimentally.

Without saying good night he turned and left the room to rejoin Emma, who was waiting for him at the bottom of the elevator shaft.

CHAPTER XVIII.
WASHED with rain, the stars, "forgetmenots of the angels," blinked dimly from the sky of violet blue.

The moonlight flooded the country, percolated in soft, refractive cascades through the spruces and hemlocks and traced with its witchery weird arabesques in the glades.

On the road that ribboned through the forest and up from the lake walked Emma Brooks and her sister Beth, the latter grumbling.

"You are the queerest girl," she complained. "No one but you would think of coming out in such weather—not a soul. My shoes are so heavy with mud I can hardly lift my feet."

"Oh, I just had to. I love it," replied Emma. "I simply could not stay indoors. I know now what a bird must feel like when it is caged. You must humor me, little sister. I have been born again—awakened to a new life. My soul, snatched from the swirls of worldliness, of sorrow, of base-passions, that seared it, must expand or burst. My life for so long was compressed in the fog, like that we came up through today to emerge at last into the brightness of the mountain tops. It is hard to realize that I have left all this behind and am free in the light."

"You certainly have had a hard time of it with that beast," admitted Beth, stopping to take breath.

"Listen!" went on Emma. "Don't you love that chorus of the frogs and the grasshoppers? I think there is something weirdly exquisite in these noises of the night that we do not hear in the city, that I have not heard for ages and ages. Oh, I wish the woods here were full of the old world nightingales that the poets say fed the heart of the night with fire, satiate the hungry dark with melody, don't you? And don't you love this incense of the soaked earth and its verdure? It lifts me to the clouds there that drift like silver snow past the moon."

She laughed aloud in her light heart, and the joyous peal went echoing through the wood.

"Lor, Emma, how you talk!" said Beth, marveling at her sister's exaltation, which she did not understand. They trudged on and upward in silence through the mud, past cheerful lights that glowed through windows of bungalows and cottages among the trees, until they came to a miniature

dwelling ensconced in a bower of laurels.

At the door stood Mrs. Harris. She was displeased.

"For goodness' sake! Where have you been?" she exclaimed as the girls entered. "I began to think you had fallen into the lake or off a rock or that some other dreadful thing had happened to you and was scared to death."

"Emma," said Beth, dropping into a chair, "is impossible. She insisted on walking right to the lake, though the roads were awful and ankle deep in mud so sticky that I thought I'd have to leave my rubbers in it. Don't forget, too, that all uphill coming back."

"Oh, I never enjoyed a walk so in my life!" declared Emma. "It was magnificent! I couldn't have slept, I couldn't have stayed in bed, if I hadn't taken it."

But Mrs. Harris refused to be mollified.

"And I won't be able to sleep because you've made me so nervous," she complained.

Emma went to her, put her arm about her and kissed her.

"Don't be cross, mother," she pleaded. "You know this is my first sniff of real country for a century, and I have never been in the Catskills before and therefore never so near heaven. I am a little girl again, as full of childish joy as I used to be when father took us on those trips which now seem like a dream, they were so long ago."

"If your father hadn't been so 'easy' we'd be owning a handsome cottage at one of the fashionable places in the Adirondacks instead of hiring a mean little bungalow here," lamented Mrs. Harris. "No fashionable people ever come here, and one has to be so particular. But what is one to do? One can't remain in New York in the dog days."

"For me, I'm sick and tired of the mountains," announced Beth. "I'd like to go to Newport, where we've stood in chance of meeting somebody and where anyhow we'd be able to see real society people."

"Society society!" said Emma happily.

Both her mother and Beth looked shocked.

"Emma, how can you say such a thing?" reproved Mrs. Harris, enveloping herself in an air of loftiness. "I hope you have not allowed yourself to be influenced by the anarchistic vapors of your—of that unseemable person whose name is not to be mentioned."

"I've read somewhere that fine society is only a self-protection against the vulgarity of the street and the tavern," chirped Beth primly.

"That all depends on how you define 'fine society,'" Beth said Emma.

"I mean the society of wealth, the Four Hundred, of course. I pray every night that I may marry a duke or a count."

"Beth has such elevated ideas!" commented her mother admiringly.

"Such petitions," observed Emma, becoming grave, "never reach the mercy seat. It is said that at midnight every New Year's eve, when the bells of the churches ring out the dying year, there issue from the bell-towers streams of vapors spirits with distracted, terrified faces, their hands clasped to their ears. They are the prayers that never rose any higher, prayers of worshippers in the churches who repeated them mechanically, as they are accustomed to do every Sunday, without realization of the significance of the words they utter; prayers muttered by those whose thoughts were on other things; prayers of the hypocrite; prayers of the humbug; supplications to the most high for the preposterous and the impossible; prayers of those who do not practice what they preach; prayers of those who do those things which they ought not to do and leave undone those things which they ought to do and think their weekly gifts contribution of it and their obolus in the collection plate absolve them. With the jangling and clanging of the bells they are borne by the winds over mountains and sea and are lost forever in the eternal void between the worlds. All such prayers wherever uttered must share this fate."

By this time Mrs. Harris was again too astonished to utter a word.

"Oracular," Emma gasped Beth. "You talk like a book. I don't know what's come over you."

"It is my new birth. I told you it was as though I had been born again. I hope you will marry a duke or a count if you want to, Beth. As a rule, I believe they are real men, every whit as worthy as good men who don't bear this distinction of title. Still, the field is necessarily restricted, and you mustn't forget that there are other noble men as distinguished from noblemen—men of sterling value, who bring true under every test."

"Like-like Jiminy," ventured Beth with a dubious air, casting about on the spur of the moment thinking of none other she knew who would fit the description.

"Like Jiminy," assented Emma emphatically.

"But he's so ungrammatical, so—er—er—on education, besides which he hasn't any money," objected Mrs. Harris.

"None to speak of," seconded Beth, pursing her lips deprecatingly.

"Aside from that, though," conceded Mrs. Harris. "I must say Jiminy's a real good man and most obliging. He can't help his upbringing."

"How about Captain Williams?" questioned Emma. "How would you class him?"

"My dear," answered her mother, "you wouldn't put him in the same class with Jiminy—I mean socially. He's so rich! I wouldn't be surprised

if he were several times a millionaire. Remember, he has two automobiles. And the handsome way he treated you! Why, he crossed out the \$16,000 that abomination stole as though it were a matter of 16 cents."

"A man's true wealth is the good he does in this world, mother, according to Mohammed."

"That is how it may have appeared to that foreign prophet in the year 1," retorted Mrs. Harris with a tone of finality. "But in this age of horse sense in the United States a million dollars in the bank is the real standard of wealth. With money you can do anything. If you have plenty of it you can do plenty of good, and everybody else will sit on the fence and clap but if you haven't any you are no good to yourself, can do no good to others, and everybody else will get down from the fence to kick you."

Left to his own devices, Brooks took a survey of the position in which he found himself, and his conclusion was not without gratification to him. The clean "bill of health" she had been the means of obtaining for him from Captain Williams had in fact left at his free disposal as his own property several hundred dollars from his stealings and from his last "plunge" on the horses, which had been a winning one. Then there was the furniture. The piano was supposed to be Emma's, and he felt sure she would send for it, but he had no intention of surrendering it. Not one stick, not one penny, would she ever get out of him after the way in which she had treated him. The very day after her departure he sold the instrument to the piano house from which it had been purchased.

Within three days he had removed from the hotel where they had lived in state for such a brief period and transferred such furniture as he required to one room in a bachelor apartment house. The rest he disposed of for cash. He was a bachelor again to all intents and purposes, and he resolved to enjoy his liberty to the full. He had had enough of married life, with its cares and the discipline of restraint it imposed. Once more he was "one of the boys." To make his position unmistakable and discourage any disposition on his wife's part to return to him he forwarded, care of her mother, her portrait, that had been conspicuous on the parlor mantel, after taking it from the gilded frame in which it had stood. On the back of it he wrote a verse of an old song:

My wife she ran away from me
Some two or three weeks ago,
And now she wants to come back again.
But I tell her it's no go.
"Once bit twice shy," is my reply,
And if it was to rain
Cats and dogs and muskies and frogs
I'd never have her back again.

There was no word of explanation beyond this insulting doggerel, and he was careful not to give his address. He chuckled as he put it in the letter box. At times he was a little uneasy lest she should seek to discover his whereabouts for the purpose of making a claim for support, but as the weeks wore on and nothing was heard from her he became reassured.

He had had little difficulty in procuring work, thanks to Captain Williams' note accepting his resignation, and soon was established as assistant to the receiving teller in a bank with a salary of \$25 a week. With this and the money already in his possession he deemed himself rich, and his little optimism obtained the ascendancy once more in its usual extravagant form. But his escape from arrest had been a lesson that had sunk in deeply. He vowed never again under any circumstances to "borrow" from the funds he handled in the course of his duties. He eschewed horse racing also, knowing that if the bank officials became aware that he was gambling he would lose his place that very instant.

After awhile his fellow employees noticed that Brooks, the spy, genial Brooks, who had won the good will of everybody, as he had in the general office of the Lath-American steamship company, manifested a tendency toward moroseness, that his face at times assumed an expression of melancholy. Despite his love of self, he was of these natures which do not thrive in solitude.

He never had cared much for the companionship of men. His inclination always had been toward that of the opposite sex. Accompanied also as he had been for so long to the seclusion of his home life, to the thoughtful, affectionate ministrations and bright presence of Emma, he was bound sooner or later to miss her.

"There's nothing in this living alone," the avowal came one night after he had spent an evening at the theater with two sociable fellow clerks and he gazed around his silent, cheerless bedroom. Although he had not at any time loved Emma with that meditative passion which is the golden ladder upon which the soul mounts to heaven, yet she had filled a larger place in his heart than he had ever had any complete idea of prior to her absence. His sentiment, fostered by his solitariness, revived with violence under his introspection. He yearned for Emma's smile of greeting and the kiss that accompanied it at his homecoming, for the numberless sweet attentions she had lavished upon him.

How pretty she was, how gentle! How sweetly she had put up with his ill humor! She was different from all of the girls and women he had ever been acquainted with. He was sorry he had sent the photograph, not alone because he felt that he had made gratuitously a false move, but because he wished he had kept it for himself. There was not one personal object remaining that had belonged to her. The little ornaments she had liked, her clothes, the trinkets she had left behind, he had disposed of in his haste to get rid of everything that could re-

call her or to which she might lay claim.

He wondered if she, too, was sorry for their separation. She must be. How could she live under the eternal nagging and fault finding of her mother or amid the leading-provocations of Beth and not long to return to the independence of her own home?

She had loved him. His memory evoked the distant vision of her frail, little form clinging to him as she gazed up into his eyes, her own aglow with the glory of her adoration and its delicious intensity. He felt the blissful pulsations of her heart throbbing against him, its paces of passion; he heard, too, in fancy the red lips murmur her soul's ecstasy in words of flame and beauty, felt the thrill that shivered through him as his fingers threaded carelessly the shimmering cloud of her tresses. That was long ago in their early possession of each other, when she had awakened to knowledge of herself and had worshipped him as a god, fountainhead of joy and light for her on earth.

This transcendent passion had not found in him the responsiveness it craved and which alone could nourish it. Emma had been an enigma to him often, a riddle that had bored him at times. His blunted senses, sharpened by desire of her, perceived that stupidly, ignorantly, he had disdained a treasure beyond price.

But, remembering what he had been to her and that she was still his wife, he believed that a reconciliation could be brought about. Sentiment and desire took counsel with advisability; selfishness weighed the pros and cons. In the end sentiment and desire, being the stronger, adjusted objections to their own point of view. But even then it was some time before he could summon up courage enough to take any steps in the matter.

Summer had given place to winter and returned again since Emma had left him. In all that time he had not heard from or of her. He had made no attempt to see Jiminy Smith or any of his former friends and associates. Now he bent his thoughts upon how best to effect the rapprochement. Should he write Emma, expressing his contrition and begging her forgiveness? His pride stiffened at this proposition. Should he write and request an interview with her? If he could see her he believed he would have little trouble in persuading her. But, counseled by her hateful mother, who always had despised him, she might refuse to see him. Perhaps the best way would be to approach her through some one else. The only person he knew of who by any possibility could act as intermediary was Jiminy Smith, the general utility man.

Requisitioning Jiminy's services did not appeal to him. He had long been jealous of his prosperity and of the fact that he had once been a suitor for Emma's hand, although jealousy was rather the outcome of envy of his success in business. Nevertheless Jiminy was indispensable, and the more Brooks realized this the higher became the degree of favor to which he resorted him. It had been bad policy not to keep in touch with Jiminy, a serious mistake. Smith, however, was such an "easy," obliging, warm-hearted fellow that there would be no difficulty in ascertaining things with him and getting him to act as go-between.

He resolved to call on Jiminy.

CHAPTER XIX.
DESTINY is a strange thing. Under many a quiet exterior smolder fires of volcanic passion that never are fanned into activity because the essential puff of cause has never stirred them. Jiminy Smith had had conceptions of comfort and life on a large scale that he had never attempted to carry out for the reason that the one thing upon which they were based, the one incentive, was lacking—a wife. Given wealth and a woman responsive in the same degree to the profound devotion and large ideas of which he was capable, Smith might have developed into a magnificent nabob, a great statesman or a great "captain of industry," certainly into a great and wise philanthropist. Given such a woman as an inspiration, he might with his strength of mind and self-control have won from nothing to a position that would have enabled him to live in some accord with the aspirations that once had illumined his daydreaming.

As it was, he had banished daydreaming from his plan of existence. He had fixed a rigid line of demarcation between right and wrong for the governance of his own conduct that he never permitted himself to overstep, but the failings of others he was prone to condemn and ever was ready to stretch forth a hand and help a weakling to the straight.

(Continued next week.)

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