

PAID IN FULL

Novelized From Eugene Walter's Great Play

Her reception of his overtures had practically dispelled the glamour of



The word "Refused" was written across the envelope.

romance in which he had clothed her in his visions, but he resolved to make one final attempt to soften her by means of a letter, and he set about it forthwith. It was an epistle of many pages, a melodramatic jumble of contrition and despairing supplication, for he was no master in the art of writing. But he was highly satisfied with it. To make it the more impressive he blurred it here and there with drops of water, thinking this would convey the idea that he had been moved to tears as he penned it.

"If this doesn't do the trick nothing will," he muttered after he had perused it for the third time. "And if it doesn't I'll quit. She'll never get another chance from me."

He addressed it to her, care of Jimmy Smith, knowing the latter would see that it reached its destination. It came back under cover through the same medium, unopened, with the word "Refused" written large across the envelope in Beth's handwriting. The word was a full confirmation of Jimmy's report of his mission.

Brooks gnashed his teeth, banished his dreams of a renewal of happiness with his wife and clenched a resolution that had been forming in his mind as an alternative to seek relief in another and facile love from the depression of his solitary existence.

CHAPTER XXIII. AUTUMN, chilly and wet, had brought sojourners in the country early to town, among them Mrs. Harris and her sister. Mrs. Harris had requested Jimmy Smith's services before she descended from the mountains. There was a lot to do on their arrival. Would he mind attending to this and that for them, and would he meet them? Jimmy duly attended to this and that, met them in his old genial way, saw them installed in their home, dined with them, as per Mrs. Harris' schedule—and, although the winter was well advanced, had never been there since, except to make a brief call at Christmas.



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

ever and with which all unmetamorphosedly, Emma had had a good deal to do. He had anchored himself to the family as his one connection with refinement and home life. But it had been a cautious anchoring, maintained with distrust and carrying with it no reciprocity in the shape of business or any other favors. A fighter who had got nothing out of existence without fighting, ever on the alert to forestall an expected treacherous blow, his hand had flown to his hip pocket, so to speak, at the slightest movement that appeared to him to be suspicious.

As time wore on, however, his distrust had vanished, and Mrs. Harris and her daughters had become a necessity to him. He was being civilized. He preferred Emma to the others, which is saying that she was the person he liked best on earth, but his manner of showing it had been repellent because misunderstood. In the first place she had hated him for his supposed injustice to her husband, whereas, having read Brooks through from the start, he despised him and would not help him even to make her lot easier. When reawakened distrust, battling with unwillingness to believe that his high estimate of her had been unmerited, had caused him to try her out relentlessly on the occasion of her appeal for Brooks, alone with him and at his mercy in his room, she had seen that a warm heart, full of pure regard for her, beat beneath his forbidding exterior. From that night she had learned to respect him and judge him at his real value. His actions and idiosyncrasies received at last their true interpretation.

As for Williams, the proof that he had not been deceived in her fortified his faith and made him really happy. He was getting old. He had won his hard fought, lifelong battle with the world and was as rich as he cared to be. The devil was disposed to turn monk. The yearning for affection, which came with the approach of life's sunset and which was not to be found elsewhere was gratified there. He put on slippers, smoked his pipe, had his favorite chair, expressed his views in his authoritative way and liked to be consulted.

But he never ceased to be impressed with the ostentatious proclivities and aristocratic airs of Mrs. Harris and Beth, though he laughed indulgently at many of the mother's follies. To him the two women represented the beau monde and were authorities on all that pertained thereto. He deemed it a privilege to place one of his automobiles at the family's exclusive command, and it was the most luxurious vehicle money could buy. That he did not give it outright was because he knew their circumstances would not enable them to maintain it.

Emma was different from her mother and sister. She never gave herself airs. He felt himself nearer to her, and the more intimate they grew the more she became endeared to him. She had changed much since she had left Brooks. A spirituality that he had not, of course, known in her in the old days had increased the charm of her personality, but her sensible, unaffected manner, her gentleness, were always the same. More than once he had surprised a wistful expression of melancholy, and his solicitude had been aroused. Something caused him to refrain from questioning her, but he did considerable pondering about it.

"What a shame it is that a girl like Emma isn't married to some nice fellow worthy of her," he remarked one evening, uttering his thoughts aloud. "There are some things that no man can understand, and this is one of 'em—that she should be handcuffed to a dirty scoundrel like Brooks."

By John W. Harding

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cause he stands between her and the fair pasture lands." "Why, captain," smiled Emma, "I'm happy enough. What more could I want than the peace I have?" "Are you sure, girl?" he answered, shaking his head doubtfully. "I don't know—I don't know." "Certainly she's happy," put in Beth. "And, as for getting married again, I should think she's had enough of that to last her all her life." "It's your turn now, Beth," observed Emma.

"Me? Oh, I shall never marry." "It doesn't follow because I have been unfortunate that you should be," said Emma. "It is easy to conceive of perfect happiness with the right husband."

"Of course I mean I won't marry until the proper man comes along. I should never make the mistake of binding myself to such a man as—that, or even Jimmy, for instance, though I'm not comparing Jimmy with him in any way."

"What's the matter with Smith?" grunted the captain. "Well, you would never think of him as a lover. He's so old and unromantic. Besides, his education's terribly defective."

"And he isn't rich," added her mother. "When Beth marries I hope it will be to a gentleman in the position to keep her as she ought to be kept."

"I wonder why Jimmy doesn't come around any more," said Beth. "He hasn't been here since Christmas." "He says he's too busy," observed Mrs. Harris. "Captain, you must be working him to death."

"Smith's a good man, a corking good man," replied the captain thoughtfully. "He's doing more work than any three. There ain't no necessity that I know of for him to work all night, though, if that's what he's doing."

Emma appeared to be absolutely indifferent to the turn the conversation had taken, though in truth she was listening greedily to Williams' encomiums.

"If you know," went on the captain, "I've often thought that a man like Smith would be just the right kind of a husband for Emma."

"Like Jimmy?" Mrs. Harris laughed. She did not know whether he was joking or not, but thought he was.

This time a sudden flush dyed Emma's cheeks and deepened over her face to the very ears. No one noticed it.

makes up for a lot of other things, and without it—what? Here's Emma, married for seven years, separated from her husband, can't get a divorce unless it's of the Dakota sort, which I'd never consent to, hasn't got a cent in the world and couldn't collect a cent of alimony if she had the right to it because the beast's a pauper."

"No, and if he were as wealthy as the grand Turk I'd starve to death before I'd touch any money or anything else belonging to him," commented Emma. "Mrs. Harris," answered the captain, with deep feeling, "money, while it's a whole lot, ain't everything, as I've found, though it's taken me sixty-five years to do it. It's no fault of Emma's that she's poor, and I tell you that if she was to marry a man like Smith I'd settle \$500,000 worth of Latin-American line stock on her for a wedding present. I would, by Sam, ma'am."

"You would do that?" asked Mrs. Harris, overwhelmed with astonishment. "This minute."

"Well," it was all she could find to say about the reiteration. But if the family were amazed Williams was evidently alarmed at having allowed his feelings to get the better of his discretion in this way, for he lapsed into gloomy silence and very soon departed abruptly.

CHAPTER XXIV. M. R. BROOKS would like to see you, sir. I told him you were in, but he would not come up and asked me to let you know he was downstairs."

"Tell him it's all right. I'll see him." "You mean that he's to come up?" "Yes, if he doesn't mind."

The landlady went out, gathering from the visitor's unusual request and her boarder's reply that there had been trouble between them. Jimmy pushed away the book he had been reading and leaned back in his chair to await his former friend's coming.

Brooks shuffled rather than walked in. He did not offer to shake hands, but, with a subdued "Hello, Jimmy," seated himself on the edge of the armchair that in former days he occupied as his own. Then he seemed to forget where he was, sank back, shrinking into his overcoat, and sat as though stupefied, twisting his hat in his hands slowly and mechanically.

Smith was shocked at the change in his appearance. His face was white and thin, and the eyes, which were almost expressionless, were deep sunk in the sockets. There was stubble on his chin; his formerly neatly plastered hair was disheveled.

"Boy, you're ill," said Jimmy with concern. "Let me get a bracer for you." He rose and produced a decanter of whiskey, but his visitor declined, this time with a wan flickering smile of appreciation.

"No, thanks, Jimmy. I don't feel like it just now. I've been drinking too much of the stuff, and I haven't eaten since last night, I think."

"For heaven's sake!" exclaimed Jimmy. Brooks would have restrained him but he was out of the door and bounding downstairs three steps at a time. Brooks sank back into the chair and relapsed into his condition of hebeteude.

In a little while Smith returned, a plate heaped high with sandwiches in one hand and a bowl of hot bouillon in the other. Brooks refused the sandwiches, but he took the bowl, and, holding it to both hands—which trembled—slipped its grateful contents. "Jimmy, you're awfully good," he sighed.

"Oh, Jimmy, if you would only kill me and end it all," he moaned. "Oh, if I only had the courage to kill myself!"

Smith, greatly agitated, looked at the miserable man in perplexity. "I wish I could help you, Joe," he said. "But this time I don't see how you can be helped."

"It isn't possible. There's nothing you could do. I'm done for. It's my own fault. I've brought it all on myself. I have been weak—oh, weak—and a fool. And now it's come to this. No, nobody's to blame but myself—unless it's Emma."

He rose to go. "Shake hands with me, Jimmy," he begged. "It's the hand of a thief, a criminal's hand, but you were glad to take it in friendship once, when it was honest, and it's the last time I'll ever ask you to do anything for me. You'll never see me again."

Smith grasped the hand held out to him, and his pressure was more eloquent of his feelings than mere words could have been. He could find no phrases adequate to express them, so he remained silent, but he slipped into the wretched man's pocket a bundle of banknotes that he had taken without counting from a drawer.

Snow had begun to fall. A high wind, blowing apparently from all quarters, hardened the flakes and propelled them with stinging force into the faces of the people in the streets. Brooks had no umbrella, nor had he gloves, and the wind cut to the bone. Yet he paid scant heed to his discomfort and ambled away from Smith's abode. He turned up his coat collar and pulled his hat over his eyes. More than once when he thought he was being followed he went sick with fear. Every minute he expected to feel a hand on his shoulder.

Why should he lack the pluck to kill himself? A fugitive from justice, friendless and penniless, everything that was worth while in life gone for ever, what had he to hope from living? The prison door from which he had shrunk with such dread before now was wide open to receive him, would receive him as inevitably as day would follow the night. He remembered having read that a man shot through the brain never felt the messenger which snuffed out his life. In the drawer of his bureau was a loaded revolver that he had long kept there for self protection in case of need. A movement of his finger would end all. A feeling almost of relief came with this thought, and he quickened his steps. There was only one thing to fear now—that he would be caught before he could reach his room. As he trudged along he found himself at the corner of the street in which the Harrises lived.

Emma! How different she had been from the other! She had not taken; she had given. Love had not been dependent upon the bringing of gifts; it had been lavished upon him. When he had been despondent she had comforted him; when things were going wrong she had encouraged him; when his head ached she had rested it on her bosom. And it had come to this—that he had lost her and, with her, all that he had an outpost at last door.

An insane desire to see her took possession of him. It grew, became overpowering, swept aside all the objections of reason. He was a dying man, and nothing was denied to the dying. He retraced his steps and rang the bell. The door opened, and he ascended the well remembered stairs. Mrs. Harris' flat was on the first landing. A maid who did not know him answered his ring.

"Is Mrs. Brooks at home?" he asked. The girl shook her head. "Mrs. Brooks? No; no one of that name lives here. This is Mrs. Harris' apartments. Mrs. Harris and Miss Beth have gone out. Miss Emma is in."

With bowed head he went toward the door, stopped and turned to her with outstretched arms, pleading in his eyes.

"Emma, one kiss—my pardon and absolution before I die." She retreated, shuddering, resolved to take by force what she would not give to feel once more in his arms the little form that once had nestled tenderly.



Williams dealt him a smashing blow.

Mrs. Harris, Beth and Captain Williams were just entering, and they rushed in with the maid. Brooks turned to escape as Emma, almost hysterical with horror and fear, uttered a scream after scream. He ran right into Williams, who recognized him at once and dealt him a smashing blow that sent him to the floor. Then the captain grasped the half-stunned man, and pulling him to his feet, held him while he inquired what had happened.

Emma, calmed by her mother and sister, tremblingly explained. Williams looked at his prisoner, undecided what to do. Brooks did not open his mouth. The captain walked him out on the landing and, threatening to kill him if he ever dared to molest Emma again, threw him down the stairs.

CHAPTER XXV. BRUISED and dazed, aching all over and very weak, Brooks picked himself up and made his way to the street. He had now reached the extreme of hopelessness and desperation. Everybody, except Jimmy Smith, and he could do nothing for him. The only being who had loved him had shrunk from him with dread, refused him the sacrament of a last kiss, besought in charity.

He hardly knew how he got there, but he reached home without molestation and mounted by the stairway unperceived to his room. Once inside he locked the door and turned on the light. It was at least gratefully warm there, and he was at last safe from the clutches of the law. Escape lay at his hand. In a moment all would be over.

Nothing had been disturbed during his absence. The revolver was still in the drawer where he had left it. He took it and, gazing at himself in the bureau glass, raised the dream to his right temple. He was appalled as he looked at the ghastly, haggard face before him and the eyes, fear haunted and deeply sunken rims like the optics of an owl. The revolver shook in his numbed hand, and he could scarce bend his finger on the trigger.

What was his hurry? Why not wait until he had warmed his hand and made the deed surer? If the police came for him death was at his beck and would cheat them at an instant's notice. His craven spirit inspired him with the desire to live a little longer. He laid the revolver on the table and rubbed his hands to set the blood circulating. Then he held them over the heat radiator. He remembered that in the clothes closet was a full bottle of whiskey. The stuff would soon warm him. He took off his overcoat to hang it up in the closet and felt in a pocket for his handkerchief. His hand encountered the roll of bills Smith had slipped in there. For a moment a gleam of hope flashed its cheering ray as he contemplated the money. Here was enough to enable him to get away.

With waywardness and inconstance. In the declining years of her life when she needed aid and he was a young man he had kept his earnings selfishly for himself, doing out to her a few dollars at irregular intervals, and he was glad when she had ceased to be a burden by dying in a hospital. He had played his cards well, ingratiated himself into the favor of Mr. Harris, his employer, and by good acting had won the love of Emma. This had been the great coup of his career, but it had availed him little. Fortune, after smiling at him, had turned her back, and life had been a failure ever since.

As he summed it all up and contemplated himself as a pariah, a hunted man at bay amid the wreck of hope, love, life itself, driven to the alternative of a criminal's cell or self destruction, as he brooded over the way in which he had been spurned and cast out by those who might have loved and honored him, tears rolled from his eyes again.

"Yes," he groaned, repeating Emma's words, "yes, I have been paid in full, and I have paid in full."

Then he grasped the revolver and faced himself at the mirror again. This time his fingers were warm and supple. Once more he raised it to his temple. Once more pale fear obtained the ascendancy.

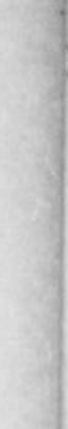
There was plenty of time. Why, since he was to die that night, should he be in such a hurry? Men who were dying or who were about to be speeded into eternity for transgression of the commandment that placed a ban on murder generally prayed, or prayers were said for them. He had not prayed since he could remember. What would happen after his leap into the unfathomable void? He had always derided the idea that anything would happen. Still, he did not know.

He went to the clothes closet, and from among some books, mostly novels, heaped in disorder on a shelf, he brought forth a Bible. It had belonged to his aunt, and he had kept it because it had looked well to have one in evidence in the parlor and because it was nicely bound in soft leather. He opened the book at hazard. Its pages divided at Ecclesiastes, and he began to read. Though the liquor was fast clouding his brain he became fascinated with the great immortal masterpiece of pessimism, the terrible monument of negation in which humanity's everlasting wounds are laid bare and bleeding.

I have seen all the works that are done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight, and that which is wanting cannot be numbered. I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem—yes, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

"That's right," he assented, "that's dead right. Nothing's worth while; nothing matters."

What hath man of all his labor and of the vexation of his heart wherein he hath labored under the sun? For all his days are sorrows and his travail grief—yes, his heart taketh no rest in the night. This is also vanity. The verses succeeded each other with their recapitulation of the futility of earthly things. His head became heavy and the letters indistinct. He began to have difficulty in grasping the meaning of the words.



There was the crash of a report.

Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? A knock at the door roused him from his somnolence, and he looked up with bleared, bloodshot eyes.

He staggered to his feet, smiling vacantly, and his groping hand touched toward the revolver. There was the crash of a report. The apartment house manager who had seen the light in the window, apprising him of the tenant's presence, and had knocked to inquire about the overdue rent, ran shouting for help.

When they forced the door they found Brooks sprawling across the table beside the overturned liquor bottle. He was dead, with a bullet in his brain.



THE END.