

PAID IN FULL

Novelized From
Eugene Walter's
Great Play

By
John W. Harding

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CHAPTER XIV—(Continued).

"Mrs. Brooks," he went on, ignoring the snail, "a sailorman always finds romance in an evening spent with a pretty woman. I can remember well when the Sally Moran put into Nagasaki for water and fresh provisions a little Japanese girl called on me, and I had a terrible time. I wanted to make things right nice and pleasant for her, but, Lord, she couldn't talk a word of English. There she sat all the evening, grinning and making signs, while I was talking my head off trying to tell her how much I loved her. All my pretty speeches were lost."

He laughed aloud as the scene rose before his mind's eye.

"Now," he continued meaningly, with an intonation intended to be tender, "when I have a girl like you, who can understand—"

"I beg your pardon, captain," she said, very coldly and sternly. "I must tell you that I did not come here to make a social call. I never came to a place like this, at a time like this, to talk to a man like you before, in my life."

CHAPTER XV.

CAPTAIN WILLIAMS' lower jaw advanced, and his plucked eyes contracted. He threw off his too amiable demeanor. His voice became harsh and cruel as his natural brutality asserted itself.

"A man like me, eh?" he rasped. "That's pretty hard language, Mrs. Brooks."

"Please forgive me and let me talk." "If you didn't come here to see me sort of socially, what did you come for?"

"About Joe—my husband."

"What about him?"

"I asked you the amount of the defalcation."

"You said it was your business. Well, it's more than \$10,000."

Emma was astounded, and her heart sank. She had not imagined that it could be so large a sum.

"Is that the truth?" she asked.

"I ain't never been noted for lying."

"Captain Williams, I've come here to plead with you to save Joe and me and my family from disgrace—to keep him out of jail. You knew my father. You were in business with him. You always liked him and knew he was an honest man."

"He was square in his business dealings with me, Mrs. Brooks, but that's not more than every man has got to be who deals with me."

"I know that," she said, her manner becoming supplicating. "I know that, but you must have some respect for his memory. You must have had some affection for him at the time—everybody had—and some pity for me in this trouble. I thought all these things might soften you, might open a way to some arrangement that would save me from the exposure that seems now bound to come tomorrow morning. Isn't there some way out of it?"

But he was all business now. He had satisfied himself that he had wasted his time with her.

"Have you got the money?" he snapped.

"No."

"Then what's your proposition?"

"I have none," she confessed hopelessly, hanging her head.

"Ain't he grunted, setting himself in his chair."

"I thought I thought you might be a little more charitable and suggest some way," she murmured.

"Your husband sent you here, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"What did he say to you?"

"Told me I might have some influence with you."

"Put the blame on you for stealing the money, didn't he?"

"How did you know that?"

She raised her head and looked at him in surprise.



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

that had been under such severe strain, were getting beyond control. She rose, flushing angrily.

"You know what I mean by 'honorable'?" You know what any good woman means when she says 'honorable'?"

You're beating about the bush, Captain Williams. If you want to come to the point, come to it and come to it quickly. I am going home."

"Now you're talking my language," he said grimly, getting up also, "and I'll talk right back to you. If I took your opinion of me and that of your thieving husband I wouldn't have to talk. I'd tell you in plain words that if you wanted to go to San Francisco with me I'd take a chance on the overeating and wouldn't put you on a diet like I put the rest. What would you do then? What if I did make the proposition that in your mind and was in the mind of that sneaking husband of yours when he tried to put you on the bargain counter and send you over to me to see if I'd put the price up to sixteen thousand? What if I looked you over and was pleased and thought you cheap at that figure? You say I've killed men. Yes, I have—wrong their heads off with this hand like you'd sling a chicken in the air. You came here for a purpose. You ain't no child. What if I am the beast and the brute you say I am? What'll you do then? I said you was the first lady to come in here. Maybe I made a mistake, but if I did I'll find it out before you leave this room, you understand? I've talked; now you talk."

Her reply came with withering scorn:

"Now I know that you're everything people say you are."

"All right," he said, making a step toward her. "If I am what everybody says I am—what you think I am—you know what to expect, and I don't need to talk."

The peril of her situation roused her to desperation, and with it came the courage desperation sometimes imparts, the courage that impels a defenseless animal hunted into a corner from which there is no escape to turn and fight for its life.

"You think I'm afraid of you?" she cried, throwing up her head and clenching the hands at her sides. "I tell you I'm not. We've been too long at cross purposes. What you want me to do I know; what my husband sent me for I know. You can be the beast and the brute that you are; he can be the contemptible cur that he is. He can offer me for sale, and you can stand ready to buy me. But I've got something to say about it, and I deserve you to know that if I wanted to place myself on the market, as you say, I couldn't! You disgust me, but I shan't shrink, and I am not afraid of you or of him or of any one here!"

She turned quickly, locked the door, threw the key at his feet and confronted him unflinchingly again.

"There's the key to your room. The door is locked, and I am alone with you. You kill men? You wring their necks? Well, Captain Williams, here's your first chance to kill a woman, for that's just exactly what you'll have to do!"

She saw the glare in the little savage optics under the beetling brows fade out, to be replaced by a gleam of admiration, not the covetous admiration of her shapely, panting form, of her handsome, resolute face, but honest admiration of the pure soul that shone in her eyes.

"I knew you were that kind of a woman," he said, thankfulness and real tenderness in his voice. "If you hadn't done just what you did I'd 'a' been the most disappointed man in the world."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," he continued, almost reverently, "that I banked on you being good, and you are good. I know women. I've bought mine all over the world, from Hindoos to niggers. But I paid for 'em, and they was always willing to sell. There ain't but two kinds, the good and the bad, and there's no halfway. When they're bad they're bad through and through and can't be good, and when they're good they can't be bad, and they're next to heaven. I figured you good."

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and if you hadn't been it would have hit me, and hit me hard. You're safer here, young woman, than with your mother, because I'd fight for you, and don't forget I can wring men's necks like chickens."

Emma could not comprehend it. "I don't understand you," she faltered. "Maybe you mean you don't believe me," he said, going to the table and taking the paper he had written upon



"You came here for a purpose. You ain't no child."

and then slipped between the pages of one of the magazines. "Here, I've had this waiting for you. Read it."

She made no motion to take it from his hand.

"Well, I'll read it for you," he said. "It's addressed to that husband of yours."

"Your resignation is accepted. I wish to thank you for your service, and to assure you that your accounts with the Latin-American Steamship company have been audited and found to be correct."

"Now, Mrs. Brooks, if you'd acted in any way but what you did you would not have got this, but I knew you were good, and you are good."

He added with deep feeling, holding out the paper to her again:

"It's worth that much to me and a lot more to have a good woman for a sort of daughter. Take it."

This time she accepted it mechanically.

"Thank you, Captain Williams," she said.

The words came in a whisper, almost inaudibly.

She tried to read the writing, but tears in her eyes blurred her sight.

"You know, Mrs. Brooks," said Williams in a light tone and his usual voice, seating himself in his chair and looking away from her, "before we got to discussing this business I was talking you about the Sally Moran, my first ship. Now, that ship—bear me as ship?—she was only a schooner."

She walked up to him and interrupted him, smiling gratefully through her tears.

"What can I do now, captain?" she asked.

The telephone bell rang as she spoke. "You might answer the phone," he told her. "I'm getting mighty lazy."

She did so.

"It's Jim—Mr. Smith," she announced.

"I kind of thought that fellow'd be nosing around instead of going to Boston," he soliloquized. "What's the trouble?"

"He's downstairs and wants to know if he can come up."

"Sure be can!"

"Yes, come up, Jim," she called. The captain stroked his face thoughtfully.

"When you let him in you sort of smile and look into his face," he said. "He's a kind of an old baby. Smith is, and it does him a lot of good."

"I always smile at Jim," she replied. "No one could help that, could they?"

"He is an amusing cuss," he conceded.

He reached for the tin of tobacco.

"That's telling," he added, puffing stolidly at his pipe. "You're going to have a hard time letting that man in if you don't find the key you threw around so careless like."

She picked up the key and unlocked the door. As she did so Smith knocked, and she let him in. He looked keenly at her as she smiled up into his face, and he took the hand she extended.

"We've been waiting for you, Jim," she said.

A glad light came into his own eyes. "Emma," he observed, "I think that's the prettiest smile I ever saw you smile."

"Hello, Smith, ain't going to Boston tonight, eh?" queried the captain.

"No; I guess them docks will be there tomorrow," he replied.

He drew his revolver, extracted the cartridges with even more than ordinary deliberation and threw them on the table.

"I just thought I'd take the pegs out of the heel of that shoe we were discussing some time since and hand 'em to you as souvenirs," he remarked.

"Thank you," was the dry rejoinder. "I'd give you the whole darn shoe," added Jim with heartiness, "only a fellow never can tell when he's going to have another sore foot."

"The trouble with you is, Smith, your foot hurts you before you stub your toe," commented Williams.

"I guess that's right," he avowed. "Ready to go home, Emma?"

"You wait for me a moment, Jim. I want to speak to the captain," she said.

"All right," he responded, going outside to ring up the elevator.

"Captain, this paper—shall I give it to him?" she inquired.

"Who—Brooks?"

"Yes."

"I would. It clears you."

"And you? How can I thank you?"

"Don't mind me. Only some time when you get settled down and are living happy again invite me up to tea. Let me put on my slippers and smoke my pipe in the parlor."

"Indeed I will. Good night."

"And, Emma," he added ere she had reached the door, "I suppose I can call you Emma now, can't I?"

"Always."

"Pay a lot of attention to that fellow Smith. He's an awful good friend of yours."

"I've found that out tonight," she answered. "Good night."

"Good night, Emma."

When she had gone the old man sat for some time smoking his pipe meditatively. Finally he kicked off his slippers, rose, stretched himself, sat down again, smiled and uttered his thoughts aloud.

"Well, Captain BIL," he told himself. "I guess you've paid up a part of that debt you've owed decency for such a long time."

CHAPTER XVI.

"H, there you are!"

Mrs. Harris stood glaring at her son-in-law.

"I thought you were going to meet us," said Beth, with a toss of her head.

"We waited until every one had left the theater," snorted her mother, dropping into a chair and fanning herself vigorously.

"I'm sorry I forgot," explained Brooks, who this time spoke the truth.

"Forgot, forgot! That's a nice excuse!"

"I said I was sorry," he snapped. "I've been worried about something else."

"Just spoiled the whole evening, leaving as there to be insulted by a lot of cuss," declared Mrs. Harris. "When we were standing in front of the theater, waiting for you, a snip of a boy came up to me and said, 'Hello, little one, aren't you lonesome?'"

"Why, I thought he spoke to me!" affirmed Beth.

Her mother looked at her indignantly.

"No, he didn't," she retorted, with asperity. "I guess I know when I'm spoken to. The very idea! Where's Emma?"

Brooks told her that she had gone out for a few minutes.

"Who with?" demanded Mrs. Harris promptly.

"I think she went alone."

"You think she went alone! Don't you know? I don't see how you dare let your wife go out alone in this part of New York at this time of night."

"Well, nobody stole you," growled Joe, "so I guess Emma'll get home safely. Something has probably detained her. That's all I know about it. If she wants to tell you more when she comes that's her business, not mine."

"I certainly do not approve of her being out without a proper escort. It isn't ladylike."

"What I want to know is, where did she go?" insisted her mother.

Brooks turned upon her, and an oath almost escaped him as he snarled:

"You want to know a good many things, but it seems to me that a man and his wife can have some privacy. I told you she went on business. If she wants to tell you, all right, but don't try to mother-in-law it out of me!"

The entrance of Emma and Smith stopped on Mrs. Harris' lips the wrathful retort that had risen to them. She rose and greeted her daughter with an air of maternal solicitude.

"Ah, there you are, dear! Where have you been? We've been so worried."

to touch my cap and do all the chores and errands necessary."

Emma had taken no notice of her husband, whose eyes from the moment of her appearance had been glued avidly upon her. There was nothing in her demeanor to indicate that she had succeeded. Indeed, she appeared haggard and worn out, as she was, for the emotions of the night had left her exhausted to the point of breaking down. His anxiety and apprehension increased as he marked her condition.

"Where did you meet her?" he demanded of Smith, with an effort.

"On the way home," he answered.

Emma went to Mrs. Harris and put her arm around her.

"Mother, I'm very tired tonight," she said appealingly. "You won't mind if I ask you to go home and leave me. I've something to tell you some time, but I want to be alone now."

"You do look all ruckered out, Emma," commented Beth.

"I am. You won't mind, will you, mother?"

"Certainly not. I'm hot and sticky myself."

"I'll take you to the subway and put you on the car," volunteered Brooks.

"You needn't mind," declined Mrs. Harris. "You're too disagreeable tonight. If you bring my purse from Emma's room, Jim will take us. Won't you, Jim?"

"I'm still the utility man," responded the complaisant Smith as Brooks went on the errand.

While Beth was putting her mother's hat straight Mrs. Brooks whispered to Smith:

"Tell mother as much as I told you and then come back."

He nodded.

"Come on, folks," he said as Brooks reappeared with the purse. "You know time and the subway wait for no man."

Tortured by suspense, Brooks stood watching his wife.

She had sunk on to the sofa and sat there, still wearing her hat, the picture of weariness and sorrow.

The color came and went in his sunken cheeks. It was certain from her attitude that her mission had failed, yet he feared to learn it from her lips.

She gave no indication of intention or desire to break the silence or even that she was aware of his presence.

He could bear it no longer.

"He wouldn't do anything? It's all up?"

The words escaped him tremulously. In despairing tone, as though they answered the interrogation.

She did not reply, but rising and drawing from her bosom the paper Captain Williams had given her, handed it to him.

He took it hesitatingly, almost fearfully.

"For me?"

"For you."

As he read it the blood rushed to his face, and he gave a sigh of immense relief. Joyfully he looked over to her, but there was no responsive exultation. She appeared crushed. It might have been his death warrant.

Doubting whether he had read it aright, he perused the acquittal again, with increasing exultation.

"Emma, you've succeeded!" he cried. "This means he won't prosecute and it's all right. You made him do it. You have saved me!"

She nodded her acquiescence, and he went to her, brimming over with relief and gratification, to take her in his arms.

"You're the best little girl that ever happened, the pluckiest!"

Gently she pushed him from her.

"Please don't, Joe."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"I'm tired—very tired."

"Of course you are," he said in a tone of concern and tenderness. "You sit down there. I'll bet you had a hard time. I know what Williams is."

He would have led her to the sofa, but again she repulsed him gently. He went to the table and took up the acquittal he had laid on it.

"Found my accounts to be correct," he muttered. "That means he will have the books fixed up and nothing will show. Did he say much about me?"

"Not very much."

"But I bet he gave you an awful argument. Williams is not an easy man to get to give in. But here it is in black and white, and he can't go back on this. Did you ask him to put it in writing?"

"No."

"Then he did it of his own accord. Wonder if he called the detectives off. Did he say anything about them?"

no disposition to talk.

"Yes."

"Anybody else?"

"He was alone."

"You must have caught him in a good humor. He'd never have done this in one of his usual grouches. I didn't know you were such a diplomat. What did you say to him?"

"A good many things."