

Gloria's Romance

By Mr. and Mrs. Rupert Hughes

The Wages of Sin

Novelized from the Motion Picture Drama of the Same Name by George Kletts. FEATURING THE NOTED STAR, MISS BILLIE BURKE. Copyright, 1916, by Adelaide M. Hughes.

SEVENTH INSTALLMENT.

Freneau in his office going over the morning's mail was in a beastly temper. He snapped at his clerk when that cheery young man wished him a bright "Good morning." He made short work of the mildly flirtatious stenographer's attempt to begin the day breezily for him.

The air of the office was clouded with Freneau's gloom when his partner, Mulry, entered gayly and slapped him on the back. The clerk and stenographer paused, expectant, but before he spoke to Mulry, Freneau snarled to them: "Get out and stay out till I send for you."

They got out. Mulry was amused at his friend's bad temper. He chuckled: "Wrong side of the bed this morning, old bear? What seems to be your little trouble now?"

Freneau rose, threw his cigar away, stuck his hands in his pockets, and, pacing the floor, proceeded to acquaint Mulry with the dire state of his love affairs. Mulry continued to be mildly amused until he realized that their financial security was again at stake; then he became serious at once.

Freneau told him that Lois Stafford, whom he was attempting to get rid of, had learned of his engagement to her sister-in-law, Gloria, and had become unmanageable.

"She threatened that, unless I gave up my proposed marriage, she will confess the whole affair and then kill herself."

Principally this meant to Mulry that the firm would have to refund the large sum of money Freneau had just borrowed from Gloria's father on the strength of the engagement. Mulry began pacing the floor also, chewing his cigar. At last he chewed out an idea that pleased him.

"You make the trip to the branch offices in my place, and take your fair tormentor along. Perhaps you can appease her and get her into a reasonable state of mind."

Freneau did not care for the scheme. He shook his head in dejection. Mulry urged:

"At least it would gain time for us."

"No, it's out of the question; try again," Freneau snapped. "She is going to the Catskills for a week and she insists on my tagging along."

Mulry rubbed his head. His message seemed to conjure up another idea, for he began to rummage through his desk. He beckoned to Freneau to come over to him and held up delightedly a handful of miscellaneous papers. Freneau looked and saw merely a number of sheets of writing paper and envelopes from various big hotels about the country. They meant nothing to him.

Mulry laughed and swung his huge bulk back in the swivel chair till he almost capsize. Freneau, saving him from a fall, demanded the reason for the gay outburst. Mulry waved the blank sheets of paper and envelopes at him and exclaimed:

"When I stay at a hotel I always annex a lot of its paper and envelopes."

"Yes? And what have your parsimonious habits to do with our present trouble?" queried Freneau patiently.

Mulry was disgusted. "Why, don't you see, you poor Don Juan? You take these letterheads and write love letters on them to your sick fiancée. I take them with me and mail them from the different towns I make. Then Miss Stafford will think you are there. Meanwhile you can go to the Catskills and meet your troublesome Lois. If you can't rig up some story to get your letter back from her and keep her quiet until after your marriage, why're not the little bright eyes I always took you for. See now?"

Freneau did see. He was not enthusiastic, but this seemed the only possible way to tide over the present reef in his way to the harbor of matrimony. At least it was a chance and he would use it. It was the only one he dared to try.

Freneau was dishonorable, Freneau was unmistakably an adventurer and what the world calls a cad, but he was born of gentle people; he had good blood in his veins, as his worldly graces showed. He truly adored Gloria and wanted only her. There was sharp torment in the agonies he endured fearing the loss of her through his previous sins. His punishment was not far off and he was to meet it with neither peaceful thoughts nor clear conscience. He had enmeshed himself in so complex a web of intrigue and wrongdoing that the problem of escape was ever more complex. He had courage of a kind and a great belief in his own resources. But he was growing skeptical of his ability to fight so many enemies at once.

Who knows? If Gloria had been a woman when he first saw her, the woman she now was, instead of the child then, she might have saved his soul and his life. But he had to take the present as the past gave it to him, and hope for a future of more straightforward life.

Late that night in his apartment Freneau started the batch of love letters and telegrams for Gloria. He became interested in them, and so carried away by the fervor he infused into them that early dawn and his valet found him asleep at last with his head resting on sheets of paper that bore such messages as:

"Dear Darling Gloria: As I telegraphed you, I arrived safely, but missed you terribly. This week of absence will seem an eternity."

This was on a letterhead of the Hotel Ten Eyck in Albany. Others were written from other hotels. The last one he had written was on the paper of the Fort Pitt hotel, Pittsburgh. In it he said:

"The eternity of this long week is over. I return tomorrow to your arms."

He sealed the letters, wondering what would be the answer to them. He took them to the office, and the next day when Mulry took his train to Albany he carried with him these letters. He was well pleased with the network of lies that he and Freneau had woven to deceive Gloria. But it is much easier to carry out plots in fiction than in fact.



WHEN MULRY TOOK THE TRAIN HE WAS WELL PLEASED WITH THE NET WORK OF LIES THAT HE AND FRENEAU HAD WOVEN TO DECEIVE GLORIA.

pale and somewhat weak. She submitted, rather than invited, the in-law kiss that Lois brushed over her cheek. Then she turned to David and pouted: "Oh, dear, some people have all the luck. You are going to hear Geraldine Farrar in 'Madame Butterfly,' while I must lie here doing nothing. They won't even let me read the stinky old things!" she made a mouth at her nurse. "And I do despise to be read to. Just wait until I get out of their clutches. I'll make up for this; I'll be Madame Butterfly all over the place."

David smiled at her innocence in the allusion to Butterfly, but neither he nor Gloria knew that Lieutenant Pinkerton was a white woolly lamb compared to Gloria's own lover, Freneau.

Lois had moved away from Gloria toward the bedside table, where a framed photograph of Freneau looked tauntingly at her. A jealous desire for possession came over her. She longed to take the image of the man from Gloria as well as the man himself. The whim became immediately a necessity to her. She glanced across at the group about Gloria. No one was looking her way. A smile curled at the corners of her lips and a triumphant gleam shot for a moment into her handsome, sullen eyes as she slipped the picture into her opera bag.

Lois was utterly maddened and desperate in her passion for Freneau now, for the knowledge that she was to lose him made her utterly ruthless to herself as to all who might stand in the way of her last days with him. She hardly knew what she was doing; she had but one idea on earth. Even if she had known of the anonymous letter her husband had received, and of the suspicions aroused in Royce's mind, it is doubtful if she would have acted differently.

She must be alone with Freneau uninterrupted to plead with him to give up Gloria and to run away with her—or, failing that, to get back her letters and gain time to reconstruct her life and recover from her loss.

The next morning, as she was going over Freneau's letters, her father dropped in unexpectedly. One of Freneau's envelopes had fallen to the floor, unnoticed by Lois. The judge stooped to pick it up for her. He saw Freneau's name and, trained as he was in the wiles of criminals, he suspected Lois at once and flatly accused her of an intrigue with Freneau. She merely flounced away in a temper, saying:

"I am old enough to take care of myself. If you want to believe evil of your own daughter—why, believe it."

She left Judge Freeman dumfounded and distracted. In the afternoon, while David was at his office, the worried father again visited Lois to try softer words. In the hall he met her houseman carrying a trunk downstairs for the express. Freneau had advised Lois to send her baggage by train and motor up with him in the Catskills.

Judge Freeman took the liberty of reading the tag on that trunk. He saw that it was checked to Blendick, a village in the Catskills.

Going to Lois' room, he questioned her. She answered that as David was going away that evening she thought she would run out to Lenox to visit Aunt Kate.

"Aunt Kate has gone to Florida, as you know," her father answered sternly. "I forgot, but anyway, I have to get off by myself for a few days; my nerves are in ribbons. Please leave me alone," Lois said, and burst into tears.

Again her father left her, his anxiety greater than before.

When Dr. Royce made his morning call on his beloved patient, Gloria, he found her still progressing toward complete recovery from her illness. But her spirits did not seem joyous as they should be. He thought bitterly that this might be due to his orders that she should not be allowed to see Freneau. He told her that he withdrew the embargo and her rapacity confirmed his fears.

his temples. Lois' arms were about Freneau and his about her. Royce heard her saying:

"At midnight by the pavilion, near the soldiers' monument. I'll be there. Don't fail me."

Royce dropped the curtains noiselessly and stepped back as David approached, talking briskly. Royce was thankful for the sound; it would give the vulgarly guilty pair time to separate and spare David a hideous knowledge, at least for the time being.

Royce and David entered, and Lois greeted her husband warmly. Royce sickened at the sight. He would not speak; but he refused Freneau's hand. Freneau, a trifle jolted, said that he had dropped in to inquire about Gloria. After a few minutes he left. Royce said he would go along, as he had something to discuss with Freneau.

He told David that he would see him later, and for very pity did not look him in the eye.

But he gave Lois a meaning look of wonder at her evil recklessness. Then he followed Freneau with wrath boiling in his heart.

Without waiting for an invitation, he jumped into Freneau's car, and as soon as it was under way Royce burst forth:

"You infernal hound! You couldn't play fair if you tried, could you? And you wouldn't, would you? But now you've got to give up Gloria and get on the other side of the globe or you'll wish you had never been born. I know what you are up to and I advise you not to undertake it. I mean it. I warn you that I will stop at nothing to prevent you from wrecking both of those homes."

A spark of manhood flickered yet in Freneau's soul, and he attempted to explain in some part his own helplessness, but Royce cut him short. The facts as he had seen them permitted no explanation.

"Of course you won't listen; you want Gloria yourself. You are only too anxious to get me out of the way. But don't let your jealousy drive you absolutely insane."

Royce stopped the car and got out. "I've warned you," was his parting shot.

All the rest of the day Royce pondered over where his own duty in this matter lay. He could not tell Gloria what he had seen. The shock might have thrown her back into a fever. He could never bring himself to smirch her love and young faith in his rival's honor. He could not put the responsibility and the horror of full knowledge on his friend David, nor cast the burden on David's old father. It was not Royce's nature to shift responsibilities on other shoulders.

There seemed to be only one way: He alone knew everything; he alone must save the Stafford family from scandal. But how?

He tried to clear his brain by forgetting. He took up a medical book for study, but between his eyes and the page came a vision of Freneau as a leering Satan. It laughed and mocked at him, seeming to say:

"I will destroy Gloria and Lois and David, and you cannot stop me."

Royce jumped up and closed his book, a look of set purpose coming to his grim face. It was nearly midnight when he took from the drawer of his desk table a revolver and slipped it into his pocket.

When Royce met David, David had not told him that he was leaving town for a week. David was not sure what would happen, and Lois was the only one he wanted to deceive. She was so busily duping him that she had no thought of his returning the compliment. It was difficult for him to play the part he had assumed, and if she had been more on the alert she would have seen the constraint in his manner.



A SMILE CURTED AT THE CORNERS OF HER LIPS, AND A TRIUMPHANT GLEAM SHOT FOR A MOMENT INTO HER HANDSOME, SULLEN EYES AS SHE SLIPPED THE PICTURE INTO HER OPERA BAG.

train had pulled out. David, making sure that she had not caught sight of him, took his miserable doubts with him to one of his clubs.

Judge Freeman found him there, and, noting his expression, asked him what had kept him from taking his train. When David saw his father-in-law the smoldering of his trouble burst into flame. He snatched the anonymous letter from his pocket and was on the verge of showing it. But he withheld it, though he could not check the bitter words: "If this letter is true I may have to kill a man."

An icy hand seemed to grip at the judge's heart. He knew without seeing it what that letter said. He put his hand on David's arm and was about to speak, when a man slapped him on the back. He turned to face the club's most notorious bore, nicknamed the "White Man's Burden." The fellow was fat and even more impervious to snubs than usual, as he had been drinking heavily. Judge Freeman tried to escape him, but as the Burden had him clasped by the lapel of his coat it was impossible to get away at once without knocking him down. So the judge stood the repetition of an ancient story as well as he could, waiting only for the loosening of the grip on his coat, which came with the roar of laughter the Burden emitted at the end of his yarn.

The judge turned to rejoin David, but found him gone. He started at once in terrified pursuit.

David meanwhile had fled to his own house, where he watched on the outside, eavesdropping on his own property. Presently he saw Lois silhouetted against the light in her own room. She was taking off her hat and coat. The poor young man felt calmed of his fears. She was home. She was taking off her things and she was alone. It was bitter cold in the street, so he returned to his club in chastened mood, calling himself names and glad that he owed Lois an apology. He did not quite dare to face her with it just yet. He would watch her another day.

David had seen Lois divest herself of hat and coat, but had been too easily reassured, for she exchanged them for a fur hat and coat, in the pocket of which she had slipped Freeman's letters.

Judge Freeman, arriving fifteen minutes after David had gone, rang the bell and was admitted by Lois' butler, who told him that she had left the house on foot a few moments before. The butler did not know where she had gone or when she would return. The judge dashed off, leaving the butler to shake his head over the scandalous proceedings of his household.

Gideon Trask, the bargeman, had infinite patience in pursuit of his re-

venge, but so far he had been unwarded. Unable to run down Freneau elsewhere, he picked on the Pierpont Stafford home as the most likely and also the most fitting place to accost him. It was there that he had first seen Freneau in New York. He stood by the iron-barred gate, watching, until a policeman drove him away. Then he crossed Riverside Drive to the Soldiers' and Sailors' monument and resumed a more distant watch over the house.

Freneau was indeed there; he had come to bid Gloria goodbye. He told her he was leaving on a midnight train.

Gloria was reclining on the chaise longue, exquisitely attired in an ivory-colored lace peignoir, the bands of white swansdown which trimmed it no whiter than her own fair skin. Her beautiful hair, drawn lightly into

the door when he entered to enjoy the charm of her, then he crossed to her side with all a lover's eagerness. Her eyes beamed on him with tenderness as she welcomed him and gave him her lips.

"How much do you love me?" she queried, measuring an infinitesimal space with her tiny hands. "That much?"—then, stretching her two arms wide and purring forth her musical laugh—"Or that much?"

Freneau came within the circle of her arms, holding her to him, exclaimed: "The width of the whole world is not big enough to measure my love for you." And he meant it.

Releasing her tenderly to her pillows on the couch, he continued: "I've had such a wonderful day on the market, Gloria. I cleaned up a pile. By Jove, it was thrilling. If I can only keep this up you won't have to be ashamed of your poor husband. And, thank God, I shall have you to work for. Just see what I've brought my little mascot with the first spoils of war." He tossed a leather case into her lap.

Opening two shrine-like doors, Gloria gurgled in delight at the string of pearls within. She made him clasp them about her throat. Then she leaned forward to thank him with a kiss; she saw the corner of a large sealed envelope in his inner pocket. She pulled it forth impudently.

"What's this? More business, or love letters?"

A dull mottled red began to surge up Freneau's face. She spoke so much truer than she knew. It was the packet of letters he was taking to Lois. He had pocketed them to make sure that he should not leave them behind.

"Just business documents connected with my trip," he said, as naturally as he could. Gloria accepted the explanation in perfect faith. It did not occur to her to suspect him of any deceit. She put the envelope back in his pocket, making a little gesture of disgust. "Ugh! I hate your old business! How long must you be away?"

"One whole week, dearest little love," he murmured brokenly. "I'm afraid it will never pass for me, but take good care of your precious self, and get those wonderful roses back in your cheeks. I will write and telegraph you every day."

Then his face darkened and he hung his head before her as he added: "I can't give you any address to write to me, as I shall be jumping about so, but I'll telephone you."

When the hour grew late and the nurse began to frown he told her he must leave. She stood up sadly and they clung together for a last embrace. He felt that he could not let her go. The cup of his happiness was a cup of bitterness filled with the dregs of his own perfidy.

Freneau went to his rooms in a new mood. Gloria's trust had touched him more than Royce's threats. He was furious at himself and at Lois. He started to the telephone to call her up and tell her to do her worst. He would not go away with her. As he was about to take the receiver off the hook he looked at his watch. It was late; she would have started for their trying place by now. He caught a glimpse of himself in a mirror and loathed the face he saw. He vowed that he would redeem his soul. He would begin at once. He would meet Lois at the pavilion and tell her that he would carry no further the chains of intrigue.

On his way to the little classic stone pavilion near the Soldiers' and Sailors' monument, where Lois had agreed to meet him, his car broke down. He took that as a further reason for not making the journey. He left the chauffeur to correct the trouble and went ahead on foot.

Gloria had retired after Freneau left her, but lay tossing about on her pillows unable to sleep. The moon

was pouring white glamour on her window. The night nurse, sitting upright by her bed, was sleeping soundly. She had won Morpheus because she was spurning him instead of courting him. Gloria determined to try the same method herself.

Doctor Royce, who seemed to think of everything, had during her illness, made her a present of a pair of binoculars. She had been able to while away many tedious hours with them watching the traffic on the drive and boats on the river.

Now she slipped into a negligee and slippers quietly, not to disturb her sleeping sentinel. She took up the binoculars and moved to the window. The moon cast such a glow on the river that she drew in deep breaths of delight. The columns of the monument stood in the foreground like marble trees clustered about a little temple.

Suddenly her attention was caught by the curious behavior of a man who seemed to be skulking about the monument. He had his hat pulled down and his overcoat collar pulled up and she could not see his face. He was apparently waiting for someone. She saw him take from his pocket something that looked to her like a revolver. Gloria was greatly excited. Before she could decide what to do the skulker walked away. She saw another man come around the column and crouch down for a moment.

She put up the glasses to see more clearly. The figure moved forward beneath a street lamp and Gloria could see distinctly a wild and bearded face. A shudder went through her; unconsciously she drew her robe closer about her.

Turning her glasses down the drive, she saw a third man approaching. He looked vaguely familiar. Coming closer, he stopped to light a cigar. It was Freneau!

She realized it with astonishment. She wondered if he had missed his train. He saw that she looked out of her window. Before she could wave to him a figure sprang from the shadows and leaped upon Freneau, long hands clutching his throat.

Gloria tried to cry out. She could not make a sound. Subconsciously her hands kept their grip on the binoculars and held them to her eyes that she might see the whole of the tragic spectacle.

The struggle that ensued seemed impossibly unreal. Surely she was in some hideous nightmare. But the fight went on. No policeman arrived to interfere. Then suddenly it was over. She saw Freneau's limp body fall to the ground, saw his enemy raise his hands toward the sky and then hurry away.

And still Gloria could not give vent to her terror, she could only watch helplessly. Now the first man she had seen came back along the drive, saw Freneau's body, knelt down quickly and listened to his heart. Gloria was sure that he would help her lover. She continued to gaze, though her strength was ebbing away.

Instead of rendering aid, the shadowy figure began to ransack Freneau's pockets. He found the envelope of letters and put them in his own pocket. Then, startled by the approach of a third man, he also vanished.

The third man came on openly. Gloria felt sure that she would either waken from her nightmare or that aid was at hand. She used all her will to control her reeling senses.

The newcomer did not even see Freneau till he stumbled over the prostrate form. He knelt down by it, seemed to be agast at recognition. Then he, too, began to search through Freneau's pockets. Then Gloria screamed. Shriek after shriek burst through the silence of the Stafford home.

(To Be Continued.)

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