

# Fine Feathers

Novelized from Eugene Walter's Drama by the same name.

By WEBSTER DENISON

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## SYNOPSIS.

Mr. and Mrs. Reynolds move into their new bungalow—\$600 down, balance same on rent—on Staten Island. Mrs. Collins, a neighbor, calls before the household gods are set in order. Spring Dick Meade, newspaper man, cynic, socialist, takes dinner and spends the night. The Reynolds seem comfortable in their home, but with a hint of loneliness.

## CHAPTER III—Continued.

"I know just how you feel, my dear," she said. "All my younger days were wasted on sentiment and when I finally let my heart run away with my caution I landed on Staten Island."

"But I suppose we ought to be happy," Jane ventured resignedly. "We have our homes and I know I have the best husband in the world."

"That's what they all say. Oh, mind you, I am not complaining about mine, but there are times I am aggravated by the smallness of his income."

"But we mustn't think of money, Mrs. Collins. After all, we are out here in the country with the fresh air and sunshine and when we think of all those people in the crowded tenements in New York, who are so much worse off than we are, I suppose we ought to be contented."

"That's all very nice, Mrs. Reynolds, but the fresh air don't chop the kindling wood or put quarters in the gas meters. Those that prefer the country can have it. For my part I would rather be in my little flat with someone around. Here it's shut up the house all winter to keep the warm air in and fight all summer to keep the mosquitoes out. Why, even the cats sneak away from Staten Island when it's cold."

"I know. It is terrible lonely, sometimes, and nothing but the same old grind—dishes and cooking and cooking and dishes—"

"Well, that's something to bring you back to earth, anyway, and I guess I had better be getting back home to fix James' supper. Some people complain because their husbands stay away too much, but I will say for mine that he hasn't missed a meal in ten years. And I wouldn't mind if he did now and then."

"Oh, goodness!" exclaimed Jane. "What do you think I've done? I've been so excited over the matinee that I forgot about our dinner entirely and Bob will be home any minute. There isn't a thing in the house, I know. Not even eggs. I can't imagine what to say to him either. I don't like to tell him that I've been to the theater."

"Gracious, you are a slave. Does he object to that?"

"No, not in the way you mean, Mrs. Collins, but there's the money for the tickets. You see, I saved it out of the household expenses and I don't want him to know."

"Well, you saved it, didn't you? Any time I can do that I spend it where and when I please. I figure that's my business and not James'."

"But we haven't much money for that sort of thing, and you see there's this, too," added Jane, hurriedly removing her new hat. "I got this out of the household money also, and I'm afraid it would be hard to explain such extensive economy."

"Well, I wouldn't worry, dear. Just put it away for a while and avoid unnecessary arguments. I know men do argue so. They want a woman to drudge and drudge and never derive any benefits from it."

"Oh, Mrs. Collins, Bob isn't that way at all. We do have to figure in nickels and cents and dimes, and I get so tired of being poor, but he tries to give me everything he can. That's what makes me feel bad, and I'm just wretched over the dinner. You'll pardon me, Mrs. Collins, but I guess I'll have to run out."

"I'd like to help you out, dear."

"Oh, could you?"

"I'm afraid not. It's Wednesday—stow night with us, and James will be eating the last of Sunday's roast."

"I didn't mean to bother you, Mrs. Collins, but it's the first time in my life that this has happened and I feel that I just can't face Bob, that's all."

"Why face him? Have him face you."

"It's the same thing."

"No, my dear, it isn't the same thing. When you have been married as long

as I have you will find that the only way to get around your husband is to have him sorry for you. Don't ever let him get a chance for you to be sorry for him. It took me quite a while to get on to that and I'm giving you the benefit of my experience."

"How do you mean?"

"Honor bright, haven't you ever played possum?"

"Why, no."

"Then that makes it all the easier. You know—anything from a sick friend to a case of cholera. Why, even a headache would answer in your case if this is the first time."

"But I don't believe I could do that."

"Certainly you could. Now, if you're down with a sick headache you can't be expected to be taking care of household affairs, can you? What chance has a hot dinner against a case of hysterics?"

"But I wouldn't know how," Jane persisted.

"This little play doesn't need a rehearsal. Just get into your kimono, dear."

"But it's such a terrible fib, and I just hate to see Bob go hungry. I love him, Mrs. Collins. I do, really, and I just can't bear to deceive him this way."

"That's just it. Don't let him be disappointed in you because there aren't a couple of scrambled eggs in the house. I know men and when they're hungry, they're—well, not sentimental. But if he really thinks you are ill he'll be sorry for you."

"I'll try it then, but I know that I will never go through with it. I'll laugh right in his face."

"Then don't blame me if there's a scene. I've shown you the way and it has stood the test. Hurry up and get into the costume. I'll do the explaining."

Jane went into her room. There was a ring at the door.

"There he is now," exclaimed her sophisticated neighbor. "I told you, you were wasting your time."

"No, that isn't Bob, Mrs. Collins. He has a key. Would you mind seeing who it is?"

"It's only the postman," she called. "You're safe for a while."

"Is it something for me?"

"I didn't look. No, it's for your husband and from the butcher, too. I think there ought to be a law forbidding the sending of bills through the mails. They're such a disappointment."

Jane emerged clad in her kimono. "Goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Collins. "My dear Mrs. Reynolds, that won't do at all."

"What's the matter?"

"Your color. You'd never make him think you're an invalid with that complexion. Put some powder on."

"All right, but this is silly, my dear. I feel about as ill as I look."

"Never mind. Sh-h. Somebody's opening the front door with a key. Turn out the light and lie down on the bed. I'll meet him at the door."

Whistling an airy tune, Mr. Reynolds entered and was confronted by his buxom neighbor.

"Sh-h," warned Mrs. Collins. "Your wife's ill. Don't wake her."

"Ill? Why, what has happened?" he asked anxiously.

"Nothing's happened. Nothing serious. It's just a headache. I came over to see what I could do for her."

"She's in her room?"

"Yes, lying down."

He pushed past her to his wife's door.

"Why, Jane," he exclaimed. "I'm so sorry. What's wrong, dear?"

"Nothing very bad, Bob. I just sort o' seemed to go all to pieces today, and my head is splitting."

"My poor darling!"

"I'll be going now," called Mrs. Collins. "I do hope you'll be better soon, Mrs. Reynolds. I'll run over in the morning. If there's anything I can do before then, let me know."

"I will. Thank you awfully much, Mrs. Collins."

Reynolds hurried out of the bedroom. "Let me see you to the door, Mrs. Collins. I thank you, too, I am sure. I'll pull Mrs. Reynolds around all right."

He did not repeat his wife's invitation for the morning call. Somehow Mrs. Collins did not entirely appeal to him. He knew that she had been neighborly and a friend to his wife, but he was inclined at times to doubt the value of the friendship. Neighbors were none too plentiful in their colony and, such as they were, the pressing duties of the home kept most of them pretty closely confined. He knew that his wife was in need of company of some kind so he tried to keep his impressions of her quondam friend to himself. But husbands have a way of divining the truth about their wives' acquaintances and he was sure that such influence as she exerted over Mrs. Reynolds was not of the best. Her ludicrous efforts to appear fashionable without the means, her lack of taste and her obvious preference for the petty city life she had left behind stamped her, to his mind, for just what she was. He had grave fears that his wife, despite the superiority of her intellect, sooner or later, would become imbued with the poisonous discontent that

emanated from her neighbor and he dreaded the day of inoculation.

## CHAPTER IV.

### A Confession.

"Bob," called Jane, "I think I'll get up."

"Oh, you musn't, dear. Sitay right where you are. Do you feel as if you could eat something? I'll bring it to you."

"But if I tell you something are you going to be cross?"

"Cross with you, honey? That's impossible."

"But if I've done something awfully terrible, do you think you could forgive me?"

"I don't believe you could do anything I couldn't forgive."

"Supposing I had told you a frightful, black, inexcusable fib?"

"Why, Jane, what's on your mind? Fess up. I guess I can stand it all right."

"I haven't got a sick headache at all."

"That's fine. What were you doing, joking?"

"No, it wasn't a joke at all. It was just a plain lie. I went to the matinee with Mrs. Collins and forgot all about the dinner. I was afraid you might be angry. You'll forgive me, won't you, Bob?"

He stooped and kissed her. "Of course I will, dear. You know that I think more of you than a dinner any time. Was it Mrs. Collins who suggested the headache?"

"Now, don't ask questions, honey; I've confessed and you said you wouldn't be cross. But I'm awfully sorry about dinner."

"That's all right, Jane, only—"

"Only what?"

"There's Dick, you know. It's Wednesday and he hasn't missed taking pot luck with us on his night off since we've been here. He's the only other member of our family."

"I know it, but I forgot all about him, too."

"Well, don't mind. Get yourself fixed up and I'll make it all right with Dick."

A welcome shout outside announced the arrival of the guest.

Beacon Dick and Deacon Dick, Reynolds called him, for he was always preaching his wild theories and yet was cheerful about them. His very presence seemed to bring a ray of sunshine in the Reynolds home. If all socialists could make their listeners smile as often as Dick did the host of converts would swell materially.

"What, ho!" called the visitor as he presented himself at the window. "Lower the portcullis while I enter with a pickle and a bun!"

"What kind of a bun," laughed his friend, raising the sash.

"A Wednesday bun; a regular day off bun. Gangway for the foe of the 'system.'"

"Go around to the door, you loon. What's the matter with you?"

Bob stepped to the door and threw it open. "Come in, come in, and welcome."

"Ah, landlord, what cheer have you tonight? You see I do not come empty-handed, Herr Host," and Dick displayed a huge parcel.

"I do see, Herr Most. What's within?"

"Food and drink; cheer for you and the missus, and three cheers for me." Reynolds reached for the package.

"Wait," said Dick. "I desire the housewife to be in on this that she may pay due tribute to her guest. This is no meager token of my regard. It is the sum total of a dollar's raid on a delicatessen shop."

"What's the idea? Don't you think we have anything to eat here?"

"Certainly, but these are delicacies dear to every woman's heart—and tongue. Here is some Wednesday night tongue; pickled tongue, if you will," and he held up a jar of it. "Here we have the invention of old Mr. Dill; one that has never been improved upon. More pickle. And here is condensed all the aroma of bleating goats and sheep, breathing the spirit of field and farm, and introducing My Lady Limburger! But where is Jane?"

"She's lying down. Had a headache, but she's better now. She'll join us in a minute. Sit down and take off your gloves. Has the system got your overcoat?"

"It would if I gave it the chance, but I haven't bought one, Jane," he called out, "not sick, are you?"

"No, Dick; I'll be with you right away. You can help Bob set the table."

Reynolds stepped to his wife's door. "Jane, dear, what have we got for supper?"

"Now, hush," she answered; "you just tell him yourself. You said you would."

"All right." He returned to Dick. "Young man, for a child of your years you are blessed with a wonderful foresight. Your pickles are as welcome as you are. The fact is, my wife has been to the matinee and it was too much for her. There wasn't a thing in the house to eat till you came."

"Shades of Don Juan! If you've

turned cannibals I think I'll be going. I like to be popular, but not so much so. I brought this for protection." He pointed to his feast. "Won't it suffice?"

"Perfectly. I never could digest socialism and I'm sure I couldn't digest a socialist. Come on. Let us prepare for the royal and hilarious debauch."

Dick assisted with the cloth and silverware. "Ha," he exclaimed. "I knew it. Telepathy. A dynamic thought wave on the corner below told me the ice box was empty. With such hunches I could play the market and beat the system at its own game."

"Forget the system on Wednesday night, Dick. You need a rest."

"I can't. I met a friend of yours today who is part of it."

"Who?"

"Brand."

"Brand? Who is he?"

"Oh, you know him. John Brand. He's the big man in the Hudson Cement company. Said he knew you. Used to go to the same school."

"Oh, certainly. I should say I do know him. That was several years ago, though. I didn't recollect the name at first. How did my name come up?"

"Just the usual way. When you interviewed a member of the system he wants to talk about everything except what you want to talk about. My paper is interested in those big dams that are being built down in Pennsylvania and out West. Brand, through his firm and the subsidiary companies, has practically got a monopoly on the cement part of the deal. The paper sent me against him, but he talked about everything from the time he first grabbed the bottle till he got his college diploma and that's how you came up. He mentioned his class at Cornell and I knew it was yours, so I thoughtlessly asked him if he knew you."

"You bet he did."

"Yes, and I'm sorry for it."

"Why, didn't you like him?"

"Oh, I suppose he's no worse than the others. It's just the breed, that's all. Get the knife and carve the tongue. If I get started talking about Brand and his kind I'll lose my appetite."

"Well, Dick, I'll own up. I was leading you on when I told you I didn't remember him. I wanted to see what you knew. I saw Brand yesterday, though that was the first time since we left college. Strange we should run into him at the same time. He's coming out here tonight."

"What for?"

"Why, because he was to suppose. Didn't he tell you we were schoolmates?"

"I know, but Brand isn't the kind that comes out to Staten Island to renew a social acquaintance that's been dormant for years. He's got something on his mind and you'll have something on yours if you get mixed up with him. I'd advise you to get out the little old armor of boyhood principle and virtue and encase yourself within. Take it from me, when the system smiles at you, you need protection."

"Don't worry, old pal; I guess I can take care of myself with Brand. I was always a little stronger than he at school, both in studies and out. Besides, I don't think he's coming purposely to see me. He said he had to get over this way Wednesday evening and would drop in. I think it's curiosity to see how I live as much as anything."

"Poor Bob! Blinded from the start. The curiosity of Mr. Brand and his like concerning my friend is limited to inquiring into the capacity of his bank roll. It's the bank account first and humanity afterwards, and a long way after. Don't flatter yourself that Brand is interested in you and your \$3,000 bungalow unless he thinks he can use you or steal the house."

"All right, Deacon. Take your seat on the tail of the cart and preach away. I know it all by heart and might save you the trouble."

"Memory, Bob, not heart—you stand corrected. When you have it in your heart, I'll lead you to one of my silent places and let you place the bomb. I have some sweet ones picked out."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

## Tennis Ball Hit the King.

The president's recent experience on the golf course recalls an incident in the apocryphal adventures of the late King Edward. The scene was the tennis court at Homburg, where in the course of the big annual tournament a match was being played between an Austrian and an American, who shall not here be named.

The king, in order to get a better view of the play, moved his seat close up to the sidelines. This interfered with the American player's game, and nettled him considerably. So the first time that he got a chance to serve from the opposite court he deliberately sacrificed one ball. The wild serve went straight to its mark. When the squerries and lords in waiting had revived the king they discreetly set his chair well back of the sidelines.

The American was not arrested for less majesty.

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