

II. EUGENICALLY SPEAKING

A One-Act Play

Runtime . 23 minuzes

By Edward Goodman

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"Eugenically Speaking" was produced by the Washington Square Players, under the direction of Philip Moeller, as part of their first program at the Bandbox Theatre, New York City, beginning February 19, 1915.

In the cast, in the order of their appearance, were the following:

<i>UNA BRAITHEWAITE.</i>	<i>Florence Enright</i>	<i>GEORGE COXEY.</i>	<i>Karl</i>
<i>Karsten</i>	<i>MR. BRAITHEWAITE.</i>	<i>George C. Somnes</i>	<i>JARVIS a manservant</i>
<i>Ralph Roeder</i>			

The scene was designed by Engelbert Gminska and Miss Enright's costume by Mrs. Edward Flammer.

"Eugenically Speaking" was subsequently revived by the Washington Square Players at the Comedy Theatre, New York City, beginning August 30, 1916. In this production Arthur Hohl played the part of George Coxey; Robert Strange, Wm. Braithewaite; and Spalding Hall, Jarvis.

CHARACTERS

<i>UNA.</i>	<i>A girl</i>
<i>GEORGE COXEY.</i>	<i>A bis conductor</i>
<i>MR. BRAITHEWAITE.</i>	<i>A financier</i>
<i>JARVIS.</i>	<i>A butler</i>

TIME: Between to-day and to-morrow.

SCENE: A room in the Braithewaite mansion, richly but tastefully furnished. Among these furnishings it is necessary for the play to note, besides the door at the back, only the table that stands a little to the right of the centre of the room, with a statue on it, and three chairs which stand, one to the right, one to the left, and one in the middle. It is a winter afternoon, and the room is illuminated by invisible lights.

Enter UNA, followed by GEORGE COXEY. UNA is a charming, fashionable girl of twenty with a suave blend of will and poise. GEORGE COXEY is a handsome, well-built, magnetic-looking youth of about twenty-five. He is dressed in the garb of a street-car conductor and carries the cap in his hand. Although somewhat inconvenienced and preoccupied with the novelty of his surroundings and his situation, he remains, in the main, in excellent self-possession, an occasional twinkle in his eye showing that he is even quietly alive to a certain humor in the adventure. Above all, his attitude is that rare one, which we like to feel typical of American youth, of facing an unusual situation firmly, and seeing and grasping its possibilities quickly.

He stands near the door, waiting, examining the room and warming his hands, while UNA goes to the bell and rings it and then proceeds to the mirror to primp a little. When she is finished she turns and notices him.

UNA. Why, my dear man, sit down. [She points to a chair at the right.]

GEORGE. Thanks, after you.

UNA [laughs]. Oh! Excuse me. I forgot. You're a car conductor. Naturally you're polite.

GEORGE. Not naturally, Miss. But I've learned.

UNA. An apt pupil, too. Let me teach you then that the ruder you are to a woman, the more she'll hate you—or love you. [She goes up to him and invites him with a gesture.] Sit down.

[GEORGE remains immobile.] The polite are not only bourgeois, they're boring.

GEORGE. When I know I'm right, I stick to it.

UNA. But you must grow tired of standing.

GEORGE. If I did, I'd lose my job.

UNA. You have already. Sit down.

GEORGE [firmly]. After you.

UNA [taking the chair, centre, and sitting on it]. You're splendid. Now!

[GEORGE sits in the offered chair a little stiffly.]

UNA. Isn't that better than ringing up fares?

GEORGE [smiling at his attempt at a pun]. Fairly.

UNA [rising, perturbed]. No! You mustn't do that. That's vulgar.

GEORGE [rising in alarm]. What have I done?

UNA [vexed again]. Sit down. You mustn't jump up when I do. [He remains standing. Vexed but smiling she sits.] Well, there! [He sits down.] You punned! You mustn't. We all like puns, but it's good form to call them bad taste.

[Enter JARVIS the Butler.]

JARVIS [starts slightly at perceiving the situation, but controls himself]. Did you ring for me, Miss?

UNA. Yes. Please tell my father that I'd like to see him at once.

[JARVIS goes out.]

UNA. Do you know the reason that you are here?

GEORGE. The hundred dollars you gave me.

UNA. No— —

GEORGE. Yes. I wouldn't have left my job if you hadn't given me that.

UNA. I suppose not. But I mean, do you know why I brought you here?

GEORGE. I'm waiting to see.

UNA [enthusiastically]. I wonder if you'll like it.

GEORGE. Your father?

UNA. No. Dad's a dear. That is, he is when he sees you mean business.

[Enter MR. BRAITHEWAITE. He is a well-preserved man near sixty, almost always completely master of himself. On seeing COXEY he, too, gives a little start and then controls himself.]

BRAITHEWAITE. Una, dear?

UNA [jumping up in excitement]. Oh, Daddy! I'm so glad you were in. [To GEORGE who has risen, too.] Keep your seat. Draw up a chair, Dad—I've done it.

BRAITHEWAITE. Done what?

UNA [bringing up a chair and placing it to her right]. Do sit down, Dad. He's so delicious. He won't sit down till we do—and you know how much they have to stand.

BRAITHEWAITE [looks at GEORGE and UNA and then sits in the chair allotted to him, whereupon UNA sits in hers and then GEORGE sits down]. Now, dear, what is it you have done?

UNA. Selected a husband.

[GEORGE moves a little uneasily. BRAITHEWAITE looks at GEORGE and then speaks to UNA.]

BRAITHEWAITE. You mean?

UNA [pointing to GEORGE]. Him! [GEORGE rises in discomfiture.] Do sit down. We're all sitting now, you see. [GEORGE brings himself to sit down again.]

BRAITHEWAITE. But, my dear— —

UNA. Now don't say a word until you hear the whole story. You read that article by Shaw in the Metropolitan, didn't you? I did. You remember what he wrote? "The best eugenic guide is the sex attraction—the Voice of Nature." He thinks the trouble is at present that we dare not marry out of our own sphere. But I'll show you exactly what he says. [She fusses in her handbag and pulls out a sheet of a magazine which she unfolds as she says:] I always carry the article with me. It's so stimulating.

BRAITHEWAITE [protesting]. You're not going to read me a whole Shaw article, are you? It's five o'clock now and we've a dinner date at eight, dear.

UNA. It's a Shaw article, not a Shaw preface. However, I'll only read the passage I've marked. Listen. [She reads.] "I do not believe you will ever have any improvement in the human race until you greatly widen the area of possible sexual selection; until you make it as wide as the numbers of the community make it. Just consider what occurs at the present time. I walk down Oxford Street, let me say, as a young man." He might just as well have said, "young woman," you know.

BRAITHEWAITE. And?

UNA [continues reading], "I see a woman who takes my fancy." With me it would be a man, of course.

BRAITHEWAITE. For your purpose, of course.

UNA [continuing again]. "I fall in love with her. It would seem very sensible in an intelligent community that I should take off my hat and say to this lady: 'Will you excuse me; but you attract me strongly, and if you are not already engaged, would you mind taking my name and address and considering whether you would care to marry me?'" [BRAITHEWAITE looks uncomfortably at GEORGE who looks uncomfortable, though amused, himself.] Now I have no such chance at present."

BRAITHEWAITE. Exactly. You see, he admits it.

UNA. Yes, but why shouldn't I have the chance? That set me thinking. I decided he was right. I am intelligent, am I not?

BRAITHEWAITE. I refuse to commit myself, dear, until I hear all your story.

UNA. Well, I decided I'd make the chance. You see, I—I've been led to think recently that I ought to be getting married.

BRAITHEWAITE. May I ask why?

UNA. Yes, dear, but I'd rather not answer.

BRAITHEWAITE. I beg pardon.

UNA. And when I looked about me for the possibilities in my own set, I—[she makes a face]—well, I wasn't attracted.

BRAITHEWAITE. I admit, in society, as a rule, the women grow stronger and the men weaker.

UNA. Exactly. And I knew you wanted to be a proud grandfather.

BRAITHEWAITE. You're mistaken, dear. I hadn't given the subject any thought; so I had no desires.

UNA. Well, I have... [BRAITHEWAITE slightly shows that he is perhaps shocked. UNA notices this and continues in explanation] given the subject a good deal of thought. I've spent days buying second-hand clothing to give away at the missions and lodging houses in order to have a look.

BRAITHEWAITE. At least there was charity in that.

UNA. Yes. You see I didn't want charity to have to begin at my home. Self-preservation is the first law of Nature.

BRAITHEWAITE. And self-propagation, I suppose, the second.

UNA. Well—the missions were no good. They were all so starved and pinched-looking there I couldn't tell what they'd be like if they got proper nourishment. And I didn't want to take a chance. So I went to some coal yards.

BRAITHEWAITE. To find the devil not so black as painted?

UNA [with a grimace]. Blacker! I couldn't see what they looked like. Of course if I could have asked them to wash their faces.

BRAITHEWAITE [looking at GEORGE]. Considering what you have done, I don't see— —

UNA. I did ask one, but he made some vulgar remark about black dirt and red paint. So I left him.

BRAITHEWAITE. And then?

UNA. I spent all to-day riding up and down town in street cars. It's very fascinating, Dad. All you can see for a nickel! I never realized what a public benefactor you were.

BRAITHEWAITE [modestly]. Oh, I am amply repaid.

UNA [in explanation to GEORGE]. Dad's the president of your traction company, you know. [GEORGE rises in fright.] Oh, that's all right. I've lost you your job, but I'll get you a better one as I promised. Don't be afraid of Dad—in the parlor. Sit down.

BRAITHEWAITE [to GEORGE]. You might as well make yourself physically comfortable, you know. There's no telling how my daughter may make us feel in other ways.

[GEORGE sits down again, regaining his composure a little.]

BRAITHEWAITE [to UNA]. And so to-day you investigated travelling in street cars?

UNA. Yes. "Joy-riding," you know. Then I saw him—and decided. I knew he wouldn't dare to propose to me—under existing conditions.

BRAITHEWAITE. So you asked him to marry you?

UNA. Certainly not. I've too much consideration for you, dear.

BRAITHEWAITE. But I thought you said— —?

UNA. I decided to bring him home to get your consent first. [BRAITHEWAITE starts to say something.] I knew you'd approve when you saw him. But I wanted to be sure I hadn't overlooked anything. And if I had, I didn't want to have raised his hopes for nothing. [To GEORGE.] Would you mind standing a moment, now, until Dad looks you over?

[GEORGE fidgets a little in embarrassment.]

BRAITHEWAITE. My dear, do you think the gentleman— —?

UNA. "Gentleman!" Oh, yes, I forgot. I needn't have been so clumsy. [She rises. GEORGE rises automatically. She continues to GEORGE.] I apologize.

BRAITHEWAITE [also rising and moving his chair aside]. I fear you have been too rude.

UNA. So do I. I've never even introduced you. Father, this is—this is— — [To GEORGE.] By the way—I forgot to ask—what is your name?

GEORGE. Coxey, Miss.

UNA [sounding it]. Coxey. What's the first name? I can't call my husband "Coxey," you know.

GEORGE. George, Miss.

UNA [triumphantly]. George! There's a fine virile name for you. George Coxey! How strong that sounds! One of those names that would go equally well in the blue book or the police blotter.

GEORGE. I never— —

UNA. Don't disclaim. I know you've never been arrested. One can see your goodness in your face.

BRAITHEWAITE [reprovingly]. Many of the best people go to jail now, dear.

UNA. I know. But he's not rich and thank heaven he's not a fanatic. Isn't he good-looking? And I'm sure he's strong. See those hands of his—a little rough, of course, but I like that, and so firm and, for his job, wonderfully clean. Don't hide them, George. They attracted me from the start.

BRAITHEWAITE. How did you come here with my daughter at all, sir?

UNA [quickly]. I got off with him at the car barn when he finished his run and asked him.

BRAITHEWAITE. Didn't you know you would lose your job by leaving that way?

GEORGE [with a suppressed smile]. Yes, sir.

BRAITHEWAITE. And you came at any rate?

GEORGE. You see, sir, she gave me— —

UNA [interrupting hurriedly]. A beseeching look. Just one. I didn't use more than was necessary. [Pointedly to GEORGE.] You see, George, I have learnt economy from father. He hates me to be extravagant.

BRAITHEWAITE. That, my dear, is the chief objection I have to this episode—it's extravagance.

UNA. Please don't call it an "episode," father.

BRAITHEWAITE. You must admit it's—rather unusual.

UNA. In England, lords always marry chorus girls.

BRAITHEWAITE. But he is a conductor.

GEORGE [angry]. Yes. And conductors are— —

UNA. As hard working as chorus girls—only. Don't be snobbish, George. Of course a conductor is more unusual, I admit. I can't help that though— — [To her father.] You shouldn't have called me "Una," if you didn't want me to be unique.

BRAITHEWAITE [reminiscently]. That was most unfortunate—most. It was your mother's idea. She believed in symbols—and in a small family.

UNA. Oh! Was that why— —? Well, no matter. I've always thought it meant individuality and I've done my best to live up to it. [She looks at the statue.] That statue ought to be on the other side of the room.

BRAITHEWAITE. I'll have some of the men move it to-morrow.

UNA. I'd like to see the effect now.

BRAITHEWAITE [slightly annoyed at this seeming irrelevance]. I wish I could teach you concentration. I'm not strong enough to move it myself, dear, and— —

GEORGE. Can I?

BRAITHEWAITE. Why—

UNA. Oh! If you would!

[GEORGE goes over to it and then hesitates what to do with his cap which he has in his hand.]

UNA. I'll take that.

GEORGE [giving it to her]. Thanks. [He bends and lifts the statue without effort, while UNA watches him admiringly, fingering his cap. When he reaches the other side of the room he stops, waveringly, awaiting instructions.]

UNA [talking as GEORGE waits]. Look at him. He's as fine as the statue, isn't he? And you know what you think of that. See the strength he has?

BRAITHEWAITE. Well— —

UNA [to GEORGE]. Thank you so much. You may put it back again. That was all I wanted. [After GEORGE has.] I hope I didn't overtax you.

GEORGE. Oh, it ain't very heavy.

UNA [triumphantly to her father]. You see!

BRAITHEWAITE. But he uses "ain't."

UNA [imitating the reproof of her father]. Many of the best people use "ain't" now, dear.

BRAITHEWAITE. Not with his enunciation.

UNA. What was yours like when you were a railroad signalman?

BRAITHEWAITE. Una! The past of a public man should be private.

UNA. George has our children's future before him. All the others I know have only their parents' past behind. You could give him a job suitable for my husband. I'll make my husband suitable for the job.

BRAITHEWAITE. But you don't know him, my dear.

UNA. I don't know myself for that matter. If I don't like him, it's easy enough to go to Reno.

BRAITHEWAITE. Then you insist?

UNA. I'm tremendously eager. It's so unusual.

BRAITHEWAITE. I suppose I could sue Shaw.

UNA. Don't be silly. Sue an Englishman with German sympathies! Where's your neutrality?

BRAITHEWAITE [sinking into a chair]. Very well.

UNA [running up to GEORGE with delight]. Then it's settled, dear. We're going to marry.

GEORGE. Excuse me, Miss, we ain't.

BRAITHEWAITE [shocked]. "Ain't" again!

UNA [correcting]. "Aren't," dear—I mean, we are.

GEORGE. Not.

UNA [backing away]. Why not?

GEORGE. Because—I'm married already.

BRAITHEWAITE [rising]. What?

UNA. How annoying!

GEORGE. Married three years, and expecting a baby, Miss.

UNA [troubled]. Oh, please!

BRAITHEWAITE. You see what plunging means. I told you I believed in eugenic examinations first.

UNA [walking up and down, thinking]. Sh! Be quiet, father. Don't lose your head.

BRAITHEWAITE. Better than losing your heart.

UNA [laughing]. I have it. Of course. How stupid of me not to think. George.

GEORGE. Yes, Miss.

BRAITHEWAITE. Wouldn't you better call him "Mr. Coxey" now?

UNA [paying no heed to her father's remark]. George, you must divorce your wife.

GEORGE. Me? Why she's as good as gold and— —

UNA. That's unfortunate. [Thinking.] Then I'll have to run away with you and let her get the divorce.

BRAITHEWAITE [now really shocked]. Una!

UNA [innocently]. What, Dad? Have you something better to suggest?

BRAITHEWAITE [fuming]. I can't permit it. I didn't mind the uncommon scandal of your marrying a car conductor, but I absolutely draw the line at common scandal.

UNA [a little bored]. Father, dear, why will you sometimes talk to me as though I were the Public Service Commission? There's going to be no scandal. You can keep it out of the newspapers.

GEORGE. Excuse me, but that don't make any difference. I don't want to get a divorce.

UNA. You don't? Why?

GEORGE [embarrassed]. Sounds like a song, I know, but—I love my wife.

UNA [in despair]. And you're the unusual man I'm to marry.

BRAITHEWAITE [with the contempt of a professional toward an amateur]. Stealing nickels doesn't develop the imagination.

UNA [desperately]. How can you love your wife? Some simple, economizing, prosaic, hausfrau who— —

GEORGE [with spirit]. I don't know what you're saying, but you better be careful not to insult my wife. She's as good as you are and a rector's daughter.

UNA [dumbfounded]. What?

GEORGE. Yes. Daughter of one of the biggest sky-pilots in town. I met her at a settlement house. She put the question to me, too.

UNA [angry and doubting]. She— —?

GEORGE. Sure. I've been through something like this before or I'd never been able to stand it so well.

UNA [as before]. Your wife— —?

GEORGE. Had a good deal more pluck than you, though. Up and told her father she would marry me if he liked it or lumped it. He said he'd cut her. And he did. We never seen him since. But Naomi and I don't care. That's her name; so you can see she's a Bible-poacher's daughter. Naomi and I've been happier than any people on earth. [Sternly.] She's taught me to stand when a lady was standing. That's why I wouldn't obey you. She's teaching me how to speak, too, and if I do say "ain't" and a lot of other things I oughtn't to when I'm excited, that ai— isn't her fault.

UNA. Then she—Naomi—has done everything unusual that I wanted to do, before I did?

GEORGE. Sure. You can't be unusual to-day. Too much brains been in the world before.

UNA. How is it I never heard this story, if her father's so well known?

GEORGE. D'you think your father's the only one can keep things out of the papers?

UNA [going over and weeping on her father's shoulder]. Oh! And I wanted to be unique.

BRAITHEWAITE [patting her]. There, there, dear. [To GEORGE.] You'd better go, now, Coxe.

GEORGE. And my job?

BRAITHEWAITE. I'll see you still keep it.

GEORGE. Thanks. I don't want to.

BRAITHEWAITE. No?

GEORGE. I want a better.

BRAITHEWAITE [putting his daughter aside]. Indeed! Pray what?

GEORGE [nonchalantly]. Superintendent or something. I leave it to you. You know more about what jobs there are than I do.

BRAITHEWAITE [controlling his anger]. And on what basis do you ask for a better job?

GEORGE. Naomi always said my chance would come and I could take it, if I had nerve and my eyes open. I think now's the time.

BRAITHEWAITE. Why?

GEORGE. Oh, this story about your daughter wouldn't look nice.

UNA. Oh!

BRAITHEWAITE. You forget the power your father-in-law and I have in the press.

GEORGE. No, I don't. But I remember that you can't keep me from spreading the news among your men. And I don't think — —

BRAITHEWAITE [angry and advancing on him]. I could have you prosecuted for blackmail, sir. Have you no honor?

GEORGE. Sure. My honor says provide for your family. I've got the makings of a big man in me, Mr. Braithewaite. You can't chain me down with a poor man's morals.

BRAITHEWAITE. Well! I— —

GEORGE. I'll work in any job you give me, too. I'm not asking for a cinch, only a chance. If she— [pointing to UNA]—could teach me, Naomi can.

BRAITHEWAITE [after a pause]. Well, call around at my office in the morning.

GEORGE. Thanks. [He goes out.]

UNA [sitting to weep]. And I thought I could be unusual.

BRAITHEWAITE [patting her]. It's easy enough for Shaw, dear. He only writes it.

UNA [jumping up]. That's it. I'll write it. I'll write a play showing it's useless trying to escape the usual. [Running up to her father, GEORGE'S cap in her hands.] That will be unusual, won't it, Dad?

[Reenter GEORGE.]

GEORGE. Excuse me. I left my cap.

UNA [stretching it out to him without looking at him]. Here it is.

GEORGE [taking it]. Thanks. [Approaching her.] Buck up, Miss! You meant well.

UNA. I suppose I was too daring.

GEORGE. If you ask me, I think the trouble was you and that Shaw fellow wasn't daring enough. Marriage is a very particular sort of business. Now if you'd come up to me in the street and just asked me to— — [UNA and BRAITHEWAITE look at GEORGE.] Well—I—I guess I'll go. But remember my tip next try, Miss.

[He goes out quickly, leaving UNA gradually grasping the idea and appreciating it, while her father's shock at what GEORGE has said is increased only by noticing his daughter's reception of the words.]

Curtain.