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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE CO-CITIZENS ***

THE CO-CITIZENS

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A Circuit Rider's Wife
Eve's Second Husband
The Recording Angel
In Search of a Husband



"Do you know what he means, Selah, sending for the oldest and fairest woman in Jordantown to meet him at this outrageous hour of the afternoon?"

THE CO-CITIZENS

BY

CORRA HARRIS

Illustrated

By Hanson Booth

GARDEN CITY

NEW YORK

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1915

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["You may be mayor of this town before you are thirty. A fat mayoress would never do!"](#)

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CHAPTER I

When Sarah Hayden Mosely died, she did something. Most people do not. They cease to do. They are forgotten. The grass that springs above their dust is the one recurrent memory which the earth publishes of them long after the world has been eased of their presence, the fever of their prayers and hopes. It was the other way with this dim little old woman. During the whole of her life she had never done anything. She was one of those faint whispers of femininity who missed the ears of mankind and who faded into the sigh of widowhood without attracting the least attention. She was simply the "relic" of William J. Mosely, who at the time of his death was the richest man in Jordantown. And by the same token, after his death, Sarah became the richest woman. She had no children, no relatives. She was detached in every way, even from her own property, which was managed by the agent, Samuel Briggs, and was still known as the "William J.

Mosely Estate." She attended divine service every Sunday morning, always wearing a black silk frock and a black bonnet tied under her sharp little chin, always sitting erect and alone in her pew, always staring straight in front of her, but not at the minister. Recalling this circumstance afterward, Mabel Acres said:

"She must have been thinking of *that* all the time, not of the sermon."

She paid one dollar a year to the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary Society and twenty cents extra for "incidentals." She contributed five dollars each quarter toward the Reverend Paul Stacey's salary. And she never, under any circumstance, gave more, no matter how urgent the appeal. She was suspected of being a miser. There was nothing else of which she could be suspected. So far as any one knew in Jordantown, she permitted herself only one luxury: this was a canary bird, not yellow, but green. It was a very old bird, as canaries go. Somebody once said: "Old Sarah's making her canary last as long as possible!" Every night when she retired to her room, she took the cage in with her, hung it above her bed on a hook, and threw her petticoat over it to keep the bird quiet during the night.

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On the morning of the 6th of April Mrs. Mosely did not appear at the usual hour, which was six o'clock. The maid waited breakfast until the toast was cold. Then she went to the door and knocked. No reply. She opened the door, and fell with a scream to the floor. Something soft and swift like wings brushed her face. She could not tell what it was. She saw nothing.

The gardener, hearing her cries, ran in. They both approached the bed. They beheld the face of their mistress looking like the yellowed dead petals of a rose, wrinkled, withered, awfully still on the pillow.

The woman screamed again.

"She's dead! it was her spirit that brushed my face just now!"

"No, it was the canary. The cage is empty," said the gardener.

"I tell you the thing I felt was white!" cried the woman.

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"Felt! If you'd looked, you'd have seen it was that green canary!" persisted the man.

This was the beginning of a great whispering uproar in Jordantown, of violent curiosity and anxious speculation.

No one ever called upon Sarah, and she never made visits. Now every one came. They listened to the maid's story. All the little boys in town were looking for the canary. They never found it.

"I told you so!" sniffled the maid.

On the day of the funeral all the business houses in Jordantown were closed. It was as if a Sabbath had dropped down in the middle of the week. Pale young clerks lounged idly beneath the awnings of the stores. Servants stared from the back doors. Sparrows rose in whirls from the dust and screeched ribald comments from the blooming magnolia trees. The funeral procession was a long one, and included all the finest automobiles and all the best people in Jordantown—not that the best people had ever known the deceased, but most of them sustained anxious, interest-bearing relations to the William J. Mosely Estate. No one was weeping. No one was even looking sad. Everybody was talking. One might have said this procession was a moving dictograph of Sarah Mosely, whom no one knew.

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The Reverend Paul Stacey and Samuel Briggs occupied the car next to the hearse. They were at least the nearest relations to the present situation.

"She was not a progressive woman," Stacey was saying.

"No," answered Briggs, frowning. He was thinking of his own future, not this insignificant woman's past.

"No heirs, I hear?"

"None."

"In that case she would naturally leave most, probably all, of the estate to the church or to some charity. That kind of woman usually does," Stacey concluded cheerfully.

"This kind of woman does not!" Briggs objected quickly. "She was the kind who does not make a will at all. Leaves everything in a muddle. No sense of responsibility. I have always contended that since the law classes women with minors and children they should not be trusted with property. They should have guardians!"

"You are sure there is no will?"

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"Absolutely. If she had drawn one, I should have been consulted," answered the agent.

"It seems strange that she should have been so remiss," Stacey murmured.

"Not at all. Making a will is like ordering your grave clothes. Takes nerve. Mrs. Mosely didn't have any. She was merely a little old gray barnacle sticking to her husband's estate. She—hello! What's the matter?"

The procession halted. Both men leaned forward and stared. An old-fashioned brougham was being drawn slowly by a very fat old white horse into the too narrow space between the hearse and Briggs's car. Seated in the brougham was the erect figure of a very thin old man. His hair showed beneath his high silk hat like a stiff white ruff on his neck. His hands were clasped over a gold-headed cane. His whole appearance was one of extreme dignity and reverence. The procession at once took on the decent air of mourning.

"Judge Regis! What's he got to do with this, I'd like to know!" growled Briggs.

After the brief service at the grave the company scattered. The men gathered in groups talking in rumbling undertones. The women wandered along the flowering paths. [Pg 9]

"We must do something about that baby's grave over there. The violets are not blooming as they should. The ground needs mulching," said Mrs. Sasnett, who was the president of the Woman's Civic League and Cemetery Association.

"I think we made a mistake to trim that crimson Rambler so close in the Coleman lot. It is not blooming so well this year," said Mrs. Acres.

"No place for a crimson Rambler, anyhow. I told Agatha she should have planted a white rose."

"If we are to take care of this cemetery, I think we should have something to say about what is planted here, anyhow," added Mrs. Acres petulantly.

"We will have. There's been a committee appointed to draw up resolutions covering that," answered Mrs. Sasnett, who was also a firm woman.

"I hope Sarah Mosely has left something to the Civic League and Cemetery Association," said another woman walking behind.

"I doubt it, she had no public spirit. We could never interest her in the work. Such a pity."

"And in these days when women are taking hold and doing things. I called on her myself when we were putting out plants along the railroad embankment beside the station and asked her for a contribution, even if it was only a few dozen nasturtiums. But she said she wasn't interested." [Pg 10]

"I wonder what she has done with her money. Nobody seems to know."

They stood staring back at the grave, which was now deserted except for the sexton's men, who were filling it, and a tall thin old man who stood with his head bare, leaning upon his cane with an air of reverence. Beneath the coffin lid below Sarah Mosely lay with her hands folded, faintly smiling like a little withered girl who has done something, left a curious deed which was to puzzle those who were still awake when they discovered what she had done. And it did.

It was the afternoon of the same day. The doors of all the business houses were open. Jordantown had taken off its coat and was busy in its shirt sleeves trying to make up for the trade lost during the morning. Customers came and went, merchants frowned, clerks smiled. Teams passed. Children returning from school added, by their joyous indifference, irritation to the general situation. All the sparrows were back in the dust of the street discussing its merits. And everywhere men were gathered in groups talking about something—the Something. The business of the town was like a house toppling upon sand as long as no one knew what was to be the disposition of the Mosely Estate. This was what every one was talking about. [Pg 11]

Jordantown is one of those old Southern communities large enough to have "corporations," a mayor and council, but small enough for members of "the best families" not to speak to members of other "best families." Everybody had "feelings" and they showed them, especially if they were not agreeable. It was not a progressive place, due, partly, to its ante-bellum sense of dignity, but more particularly to the fact that when a business firm was about to fail, it did not fail. It borrowed enough to "tide over" from the agent of the William J. Mosely Estate. This interfered with that natural law in the business world as everywhere else, the survival of the fittest. Everybody survived, the fit and the unfit, which is death to competition and that arterial excitation without which trade becomes stagnation. [Pg 12]

Three men sat in the private office of the National Bank, the windows of which overlooked the town square. They were the tutelary deities of all public occasions in the town. They always sat on the platform behind the speaker on Decoration Days. They were supposed to control municipal elections, but not one of them had ever "run" for an office. Deities don't. They are the powers behind the throne. These men represented Providence in Jordantown. And Providence is always behind the scenes. The trouble now was that by an ordinary and inevitable process of nature they had lost control of the situation. A little old woman had died who had no sense, and who for that very reason might have done something foolish with the William J. Mosely Estate, which was the very foundation upon which all deities and providences rested in that place.

"The Estate owns your National Bank Building, doesn't it?" asked Martin Acres, who knew that it did.

"Yes, and a controlling interest in the stock besides, more is the pity! I never like to have a woman own stock in my bank," Stark Coleman answered, throwing himself back upon the spring of his revolving chair. [Pg 13]

"Why?" This from Acres, who did like to have women make accounts at his store.

"Dangerous. It is well enough for women to owe—that's their nature—but not to own. Look at the New York, New Haven & Hartford Railroad scandal!"

He was a short fat man with large blue eyes beneath swollen lids, and at the present moment some inner pressure seemed to increase their prominence.

"What has that to do with women?"

"Proves my point. Wouldn't have been such a racket over that scandal if half the widows and orphans in New England hadn't been pinched. Men are good losers. They keep quiet. Know better than to destroy their credit by squealing. Women have no credit, so they all squeal. And the sentimental public always adds to the clamour," Coleman concluded, mopping his face.

"Briggs collects rent from every store and business house around this square," Acres went on.

"And he told me he handles mortgages on nineteen thousand acres of land in this county," laughed the third man, who was young and who had been listening with the detached air of a humourist.

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"You can afford to laugh, Sasnett," retorted the banker; "you are one of the few men in this town not affected by this—er—disaster. But a good many of the rest of us may find ourselves in a hell of a hole if that woman has willed everything she had to the church or to some orphan asylum!"

"Why?" asked Sasnett, still smiling in the provoking manner of a man who has nothing to lose.

"I couldn't do business with every loan and investment to be passed upon by a board of directors reeking with preachers and eleemosynary trustees. They are all dampholes, with empty breeches pockets, and craws filled with morbid scruples. How do I know there won't be a woman among them! Good Lord! Think of a woman on the board of directors in a bank!" snorted Coleman.

"Well, it couldn't be as bad as that," said Acres, as he pulled at the ends of his wiry gray moustache.

"Yes, it can! It can be as bad as hell, I tell you. Nobody knows what that woman's done. And when you don't know what a woman's done, you may be sure it's worse than you can imagine!" Coleman insisted.

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"Carter is beside himself. Briggs holds a mortgage of sixteen hundred on the *Signal* and he was to let Carter have four hundred more to-day. Now the loan's called off. He tells me the *Signal* must suspend publication if he can't raise the money," Sasnett put in.

"At least he'll sell a few hundred copies extra Saturday if he prints Sarah Mosely's will," said Acres.

"But if there is no will?"

"What does Briggs say?"

"Oh, Briggs!" laughed Sasnett, "he's as mad as a horsefly that's been slapped off. He says there is no will. But he doesn't really know. He's zooming around wondering if he'll be able to light again on the flanks of the estate."

"Regis made himself rather conspicuous at the funeral to-day—wonder why," remarked Coleman thoughtfully.

"Whim. Old men like to show up on such occasions. They are next of kin to funerals, feel their dust shaking on their bones when anybody dies."

"There he comes now!" exclaimed Acres.

The Judge was indeed approaching, walking smartly up the street to the National Bank Building. He was one of those old men who somehow recall a cavalry sword, slightly bent, of exceedingly good metal. He retained, you might say, merely the skin and bones of a splendid countenance. The skin was brown as parchment, and wrinkled, but the bones were elegant—Hamlet's skull, not Yorick's. His eyes were perfectly round, gray below a kind of yellow brilliance, as if an old eagle within looked out beneath the steel bars of those bristling brows. His nose belonged to the colonial period of American history. It was an antique, and a very fine one, well preserved, high bridge, straight, with thin nostrils which drew up at the corners to hold the singularly patient whimsical smile in place which his mouth made. All told, the Judge's countenance was one of those *de luxe* histories of a gentleman not often seen outside of the best literature, but sometimes seen in an old Southern town where some gentleman has also managed to retain the exceeding honour of being a man as well.

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His long black coat-tails clung as close as a scabbard to his thin legs. He wore a high silk hat and a white carnation in his buttonhole. He looked neither to the right nor to the left. Apparently he was the one man in sight who was not concerned about the question of what had become or would become of the William J. Mosely Estate.

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As he approached the Bank Building, a very large red-faced old man with a white moustache and goatee turned his head in the opposite direction, wrinkled his nose, which was naturally Roman and cynical, and grunted. This was Colonel Marshall Adams. He and the Judge did not "speak." They had not spoken to one another in thirty years. This requires great firmness of character

when you live within speaking distance in a town where talking is the chief occupation. They both had that—firmness. It was always one of the agreeable sensations in Jordantown to see these two old men come near enough together to exchange a word or a salutation. The sensation consisted in the fact that they never did it.

The Judge tucked his gold-headed cane under his arm and ascended the stairs which led to his office on the floor above the bank. The Colonel went off, rumbling through his Roman nose, down the street. He did not walk, he paced, as if he were stepping upon pismires, with his feet wide apart. This was due to the fact that so much of the time walking was a matter of carefully balancing himself against the strange unsteadiness, the heaving and rolling of the ground beneath him. And this was due in turn to the fact that the Colonel was never himself except when he was "not himself," but had been exalted about four fingers in a glass above the level of the common man—a condition which has always affected the flat permanency of the earth, often causing it to rise unaccountably before such persons, to meet them even more than halfway. The Colonel had had long experience in this matter, and he walked warily from force of habit even when he was sober.

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The difference between Judge Regis and Colonel Adams was this: when the Judge perceived that he was about to meet the Colonel face to face, he never turned aside. But when the Colonel perceived that he was about to meet the Judge, he always did. It was the way each of them had of expressing his contempt for the other.

As the Colonel negotiated himself around the next corner with the rotary motion of a slightly inebriate straddle-legged old planet, he almost collided with another body which was more nearly spherical and which had apparently no legs at all, only two wide-toed "Old Lady's Comforts" showing beneath the hem of her dress. These toes were now set far apart. The very short old lady above them seemed to have caved in above the waistline, but below it she was globular to a remarkable degree. Her face was wrinkled like fine script and very florid. Her upper lip was delicately crimped and sunken. Her lower lip stuck out and reached up in an effort to meet the situation, the situation being more and longer teeth in the lower jaw. Her nose was that of a girl, retroussé, still impertinent.

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She stood regarding the Colonel with that contradictory uplook of her faded blue eyes which was pathetic, and that tilt of her nose which was offensive, with her lips primped tight after the manner of a woman who is getting ready to wash behind the ears of a small boy. She always put the Colonel in this class when she looked at him, and he resented it. He resented it now by removing his Kentucky Colonel straw hat and glaring his bow at her, as if that was a concession he made to his own dignity, not to her.

"Good afternoon, Colonel Adams! Well, who are you running from now?" she said by way of seizing his ears.

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"Madam!" he exclaimed, puffing out his breast, "no man would dare ask such a question! For four years the enemy of my country never saw the back of Marshall Adams—and——"

"And you've been retreating ever since," she added.

"From what?" he demanded, slowly purpling with impotent rage.

"From the Present, from things that are," she answered.

"Madam, I'm an old man, I prefer the grandeur of the past to those follies to which you, and women like you, would commit the present."

"But there's Selah, she at least belongs to the Present."

"Selah belongs to me, thank God!"

"She belongs to herself. You are robbing her of her own life."

"No woman ever belonged to herself, Madam, especially a young and beautiful woman. She is an ineffable estate which all men buy with love and hold with all the strength they have."

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"For shame, sir! You are a brigand keeping your daughter in a cave."

"My house is not so fine as Selah deserves, but it is not a cave," he retorted, flattening himself sidewise in order to pass.

"All the same you are a brigand, robbing your own flesh and blood of life and happiness," she thrust at him as he went by, waddling on herself after the manner of a fat old duck.

This was Susan Walton, the one celebrated character Jordantown had produced since the Civil War, and she was a source of embarrassment rather than pride. According to the ethics of that place no woman should be known beyond her own church and parlour, much less celebrated. Judge Regis was a distinguished jurist, of course, and Marshall Adams had been a famous leader of forlorn hopes in the Confederate Army. But it is one thing to be distinguished at the bar or famous in battle fifty years ago, and quite another thing to be celebrated in the present. Susan was that thing. It was said of her that she had kept her husband, an elegant soft old gentleman, in Congress for a quarter of a century and up to the very day of his death by being a thorn in the side of the political life of the state. She kept scrapbooks in which she pasted dangerous and damaging information about politicians and prominent men generally. Whenever one of them

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became a candidate in opposition to her husband, she prepared an awful obituary of him from her encyclopedia of past records; and he usually withdrew from the race or was defeated. Few men live who can face their former deeds in a political campaign. She made public speeches at a time when no other woman in the South would go further than give her "experience" in church or read a missionary report before the Woman's District Conference. She was for temperance and education even before the days of Local Option and when the public school system consisted of eight weeks in the summer. She was the only woman who had ever had the honour, if it was an honour, to address the State Legislature when a bill was pending there concerning Child Labour; and she did it in the high falsetto voice of a mother who calls her sons out of a bait game in the public square. It was said that she actually did address that dignified body as "boys," and that the "boys" liked it. She had the brains of a man and the temper of an indignant but tender-hearted woman. This is an exact description of her literary style, which was not literary, but it was versatile in wit and sarcasm and outrageous veracity. She used it as an instrument of torture and vengeance in the public prints upon the characters of political demagogues, liquor interests, and the state treasury. And what she said was violently effective. Her victims might persist in the error of their ways, but not one of them ever recovered from the face-scratching fury of her attack.

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Add to this the fact that she was a suffragist in the days when there was only one other woman in the state who believed in citizenship for women, and that she never ceased to "agitate" for suffrage, and you receive a faint impression of this old termagant celebrity who had put Jordantown "on the map" and had given it a reputation for broadmindedness at a distance which it in no way deserved.

Susan did not herself press the point of being a celebrity in her own appearance. She did not look the part. She did not even try. She was sixty years old, wore black frocks which touched the pavements behind as she walked and were raised some eight inches above it in front, owing to that perfect frankness with which age is always willing to confess its stomach. She had worn the same bonnet for five years, tied under her protruding chin. Sometimes she changed the ribbons, but she never changed the "shape."

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She nodded to the three men seated near the open window in the bank. Then she paused at the bottom of the steps which led to the second floor and sighed.

"This staircase was built for men to climb," she grumbled as she began the ascent. She stood on the step below and put her right foot on the one above, but she did not alternate with the left. The gears in her left knee were not strong enough to bear the necessary lift. Her feet made a flat all-heel-and-toe sound as she went up, very emphatic. When she reached the top her face was red, and she was "out of breath." But she went on panting down the hall, looking at the lettering on the doors of the various offices. Printed on a large ground-glass door she saw "Mike Prim." She wrinkled her nose, adjusted her spectacles, poked out her neck and stared at it.

"Humph! Mike Prim! Nothing else! What does he do? How does he make a living? Every man in this town knows, and not a single woman!" she said to herself.

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She came to the door at the end of the hall upon which was printed, "John Regis, Attorney-at-law."

She opened it without knocking and stood upon the threshold.

"Well, John Regis, you must think you are still a young man, keeping your office at the top of this ladder staircase," she complained, raising her handkerchief and dabbing her face.

"Come in, Susan, and take this chair by the window," said the Judge. Rising from his desk and coming forward, he conducted her elegantly to the chair.

"It's forty years since I was here," she said, looking about her, "and you've not changed a thing. You are scarcely changed yourself, John."

"The man is changed, Susan. Forty years make more difference in a man than they do in things," he answered gently.

"The same books, all so thick and awful looking. I remember that day I thought you must be the wisest man in the world—to know all that was in them."

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"I didn't know, and I don't know yet," he put in, smiling.

"The same chairs, the same brown prints on the wall. And that little vase, isn't it the one you had on your desk that day?" she asked, bending forward to look at it more closely.

"The very same. You put a rose into it that day, do you remember?"

"No, but I do remember that I was in love with you, John. A woman of sixty may admit that now!" she laughed.

"I wish you had admitted it then. I tried hard enough to win you, Susan. We should have been a team!"

"No, we should not. We are both headstrong. We should have obstructed each other. I married the right man."

"I suppose so. Certainly you never could have henpecked me into Congress the way you did Jim

Walton! Why did you do it?" he asked, showing the ends of a sword smile as he regarded her.

"Well, you see I couldn't go myself," she laughed.

"So you sent your husband, next best thing."

"It wasn't so bad. I helped him, you know."

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"Wrote all his speeches, kicked up all of his dust for him, didn't you?"

"Not all, but I helped."

"With your scrapbooks, for example?"

"Yes," she admitted.

"If you had been a man, Susan, you'd not have survived some of the things you've said and done."

"If I'd had the rights you men keep from us I'd never have done them!" she retorted quickly.

"I don't know," he replied, wagging his head and smiling. "Having rights, including the ballot, would not change the nature of a woman! Tell me, Susan, have I escaped the scrapbooks? I've wondered many times if you were keeping record of me, too."

"You never did—anything I could put in. And if you had——" she hesitated.

"Would you have pasted it down against me?" he finished.

"I don't know. I'm glad I wasn't tempted. How have you kept yourself so aloof all these years, John—so far above the furious issues of our times?"

"Not above, not above, my dear," he objected; "I've been busy. The law is a legal profession, not an illegal one, like politics."

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They looked at each other and laughed, then the Judge added:

"And it may be I was afraid of your famous scrapbooks!"

"You were never afraid of anything," she returned.

"Yes, I am. I'm afraid of something now," he answered, flipping the pages of some papers which lay upon his desk. "I'm an old man holding in my hands a fuse which I must light presently, and I dread the consequences."

"What are you talking about?" she exclaimed, leaning forward and staring at him in faint alarm as if she did indeed smell something burning.

"I cannot tell you yet. I'm waiting for the other party," he answered.

"The other party? Whom do you expect? What does all this mean, anyway? Why was I summoned here? Have we not had enough excitement for one day, with the funeral this morning, and with every man in this town holding his breath for fear of what will happen to him when the William J. Mosely Estate is wound up? I've heard nothing else for two days. Not a word about the poor woman, who might as well have been a shadow on the wall of her house for all she meant to anybody until she died," she said, fanning herself and looking at him irritably.

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"She was a great woman," he said simply.

"Well, I'm just a tired woman. I spent the whole morning tacking white pinks on an anchor design for the funeral. Then I went to the cemetery with the procession. And all the time I heard nothing but speculation about what she had or had not done with her money. I was just composing myself for a little rest before going to the Civic League and Cemetery Association at four o'clock when your messenger appeared at the door. Now I want to know what it's all about."

"Are you very much interested in the Woman's Civic League and Cemetery Association, Susan?" asked the Judge, by way of avoiding an answer.

"Certainly not! It's a nuisance. But the women of this town must do something. They have caught the public-spirit infection, and they show it like little meddling girls, childish. Have you seen the nasturtium beds they've planted around the railroad station? That's feminine civic enterprise! Last week they had a committee appointed to see the mayor about keeping the cuspidors clean in the courthouse! And the cemetery! It's the liveliest-looking place in Jordantown, more things living and growing there than anywhere else. Even more women. They are there every day, gardening above the dust of the dead!"

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"Why do you belong to it?" he asked.

"In self-defence, of course! There is to be a report from a committee about things they want changed at the cemetery this afternoon, and I'm not on the committee because one object of it is to condemn the arbor-vitæ trees in my lot there. They want to cut them down. Now I will not have it! And I must be there at four o'clock to tell them so!" She began to fan herself vigorously.

"Listen to me, Susan; let the non-essential go. Don't be the occasion of a split in your ranks for the sake of a couple of shrubs. That's what destroys the strength of parties. If the whole Democratic party voted for any one man or issue, we should always have a democratic

government. If the entire Republican party——"

"Listen to me, John Regis! Women are not parties. They are always factions, little, little factions, the one working against the other, because they have no really important issue at stake. Now, my arbor-vitæ trees——"

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The door opened and a young girl stood upon the threshold hesitating, as if she was not sure she was in the right place.

She was very tall, one of those cool, gray-eyed, ivory-skinned brunettes who always remind the beholder of white lilies blooming in the dark. Her lips were full, faintly pinkly purple, and affirmative, not beseeching. She stood with one hand upon the knob behind her, bent a little forward, the skirt of her white dress blown by the wind through the door, her eyes showing almost black beneath the brim of her white hat.

"Selah! Is it for you we've been waiting?" This from Mrs. Walton.

"Come, Selah, you are almost late! That would have been a bad beginning," said the Judge, rising, taking her hand and leading her to a chair.

"You sent for me?" the girl said, as if there might still be some mistake about that.

"Yes, yes! Sit down!"

"Mercy on us! What does the man mean? Do you know what he means, Selah, sending for the oldest and ugliest and the youngest and fairest woman in Jordantown to meet him in his office at this outrageous hour of the afternoon?"

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"How do you do, Mrs. Walton?" Selah greeted.

"I don't do at all, my dear; I'm tired of doing. I should be taking my nap!"

For a moment after Selah Adams disappeared into Judge Regis's office the hall outside was silent, a gloomy tunnel between gray walls with a square light from the window at the end above the staircase. Then a singular thing happened: the ground-glass door at which Susan had stared with so much contempt opened very softly as if Silence himself was behind it. The enormous head and face of a man appeared. His features were concealed in fat, his nose merely protruded, a red knob with nostrils in the end; his mouth was wide, sucked in above a great chin covered with short black stubble; his jowls hung down, the back of his neck rolled up, and the hair upon it stuck out like bristles.

He looked up and down the hall, listened. He opened the door wide, but very softly, and came through it tiptoeing, a huge figure, almost shapeless in its monstrous rotundity. He moved with astonishing swiftness to the staircase, looked down, then fixed his black eyes with a kind of animal ferocity upon the closed door of the Judge's office until he reached it, and laid one of his little red ears to the keyhole.

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If we were permitted to observe any man or woman of our acquaintance when that person supposed himself or herself to be absolutely alone, we should be astonished and often horrified at the unconscious revelations we would receive. The woman with the Madonna face may unmask and show the lineaments of a common shrew in her chamber. And the virago may soften into the gentleness of a saint as she gives way to the penitence of her own thoughts. The dignified man with the air of virtue and authority might show himself as a nimble-motivated rascal, timid and furtive, if he believed only God saw him. Not one of us ever acts absolutely true to what we know we are except when the door between us and every other man is closed. It is barely possible that sometimes in the presence of a very young child we do play the rôle, but never before any other creature, however near, neither wife nor husband nor friend. It is the nature of the human to act before the footlights of the world even in the broad open day, and even if there is no one to witness the performance but a beggar who never saw him before and never will see him again. It is only when he is alone that the best man does not practise at least the deceit of conceit, or cast himself for some other part in the *play of man*.

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Mike Prim was alone. He was known as a jolly, blarney-tongued, slovenly wit, who for a consideration managed the political affairs of Jordantown and the county in a manner which was agreeable to the "deities" already mentioned, who were not willing to do all the things in this business that must be done. He was accustomed to call himself the "servant of the people." And naturally they paid for his services. He managed campaign funds and manipulated election returns in a manner which was highly satisfactory. In short, he was a fat, good fellow, elastic morally, but a good fellow, popular with men, and never introduced to women. This was the rôle he played in the town.

But now, with his ear glued to the keyhole of the Judge's door, he was not on the boards. He was behind the scenes acting according to the laws which governed his nature. And judged by the changes in his expression as he listened, one must have inferred that his personal standards were savage beyond belief. At first he showed only amusement, as if presently he might snort with mirth. His mouth worked like a worm, stretching in a grin, then a sneer. But when at last the three-cornered conversation within ended and the Judge's voice alone reached him, his whole body seemed to stiffen. He clenched his fat fists. Amazement fled before rage upon that furious face, perspiration streamed from every pore. His eyes shot this way and that like black bullets. No other man in the world can become so infuriated as the coward, for the brave man knows that

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he can satisfy his anger. He reserves it as a force to use in vengeance. He is temperate in that. But the worm-soul, which must crawl and be satisfied with merely stinging the heel of his enemy, knows no such temperance. He is the victim of his impotent fury.

Mike Prim was such a worm now, and it seemed that he must be consumed. He was a hideous conflagration flaming against the door of the Judge's office, scarcely touching it with his huge bulk, his mind leaping to seize upon every sound from within.

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Suddenly, without taking time to stand erect, he sprang back and fled, his legs working like those of an enormous cat, with noiseless swiftness. His door closed as gently as a feather blown in the wind, and the next moment Prim had seized his 'phone.

"Two-five-six! yes, Acres's store! What? Not in? Well, damn him!" he muttered, as he rattled the receiver and began again.

"Give me the National Bank, Central! What? The number? You know the number! yes, five-two-four! What? Bank closed? I don't give a hang if it is. Coleman's in his office. Saw him there myself."

During the next hour Mr. Michael Prim called the telephone number of every prominent citizen in Jordantown. Treason was abroad in the air, much treason, that was conducted by Prim. And something akin to treason apparently was still going on in the Judge's office.

Meanwhile the streets of the town had taken on a lighter, more frivolous aspect. Prettily dressed women were mincing along the pavements, their parasols bobbing up and down like variegated mushrooms. They bowed, smiled coquettishly at the men. The men swept off their hats and smirked. All of them were lovers after the manner of lovers in the South. That is to say, they adored all women, and these ladies were accustomed to being loved after the manner of Southern women. They lived for that, nothing else. Pretty goods, expensive goods, and nice, virtuous little baggages. Speculators in love, but not deliberate moral beings. They had nice consciences, easily satisfied. They had nice minds, easily blinded. Some of them were little termagants, all the dearer for that to men who like to conquer the shrew in a woman, if they do not have to do it too often. Besides, these little doll ladies were public spirited. They did dainty things about town, and they were charming while they were doing them. At this very moment they were on their way to the Woman's Civic League and Cemetery Association, which was meeting with Mabel Acres, who was the wife of the most prominent merchant in the town, and by the same token she always served the most expensive refreshments. Not a single one of them as they passed beneath the windows of the National Bank Building would or could have believed that her whole nature and attitude toward man was to be changed before night.

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Susan Walton, strangely excited and enhanced, now happened to glance through the window, and the sight of the fluttering feminine pageant below reminded her of something.

"Come, Selah!" she exclaimed, rising with unexpected alacrity. "We are due at the Civic League and Cemetery Association, and we have work to do there!"

"If I'm not mistaken in your expression, Susan, this will be the last meeting of that organization," said the Judge.

"I'm hopeful that it is. The women in this town only want something to do. And we've got it at last, if only we can make them see it!" she said, as she passed through the door which he held open for her, accompanied by Selah, who wore the half-baptized look of a vague young soul still in doubt.

"Not a word about her arbor-vitæ trees," said the Judge as he returned to his desk. "I doubt if they'll ever be mentioned again. The weeds will take the cemetery, and the women will stop fussing about clean cuspidors in the courthouse. But what a din we shall have in this town when they really get going. Well, God help us, it had to come! They are no longer one flesh with us."

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A town without women in the streets is like a meadow without flowers, a bay tree without leaves, like the air without the wings of birds in it and the sweet sounds they make there about their feathers and affairs.

Now since four o'clock not a woman had been seen on the streets of Jordantown, if one excepted an occasional bandanna-headed negress. Not a fan had been purchased, not a paper of pins, nor a yard of lace. Trade languished. Nobody knew yet what was wrong, but every man on the square missed something. They thought they were still worried about the Mosely will, and they were. But over and above that they had a sense of not being entirely present. For a man to be sufficiently conscious of himself, there must always be the possibility of a woman in sight before whom he may magnify himself at least in his own imagination. The Jordantown Square citizens lacked this mirror. They wandered from corner to corner expecting to find it, to see somewhere near or far the flutter of a woman's skirt, the sky of a woman's eyes. But they did not know that this was what they were after. Each one pretended to himself that he was looking for another man. And when two of them met, they went on to the next corner together, both looking for some one else. Then they separated, excused themselves, each hurrying in the opposite direction.

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The afternoon passed. Clerks were idle; they stood in doorways looking up and down the street.

Prominent citizens left their chairs beneath the courthouse awning to avoid other prominent citizens whom they saw approaching. Still they could not avoid one another.

"Any news?" asked Acres of Coleman, whom he met coming out of the courthouse.

"Not a thing. Clerk says no will has been probated there to-day. Briggs was right. There isn't any. He thinks the court will appoint him administrator."

"And he looks his thought," sneered Acres; "been strutting around all the afternoon, swelled fit to burst."

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"Well, he may, nobody can tell. See you later," said Coleman, hastening his steps.

"Wait! hold on! I thought you were going in my direction. I wanted to ask you something," exclaimed Acres, detaining him.

"No, I'm going back to the bank. What?"

"Have you seen Mike?"

"Yes, just from his office. Sent for me. No, he says he's in the dark, too," answered Coleman, still struggling against this companionship.

"He's always in the dark. Would be if he knew all about it," Acres grumbled.

At this moment the huge amorphous figure of a man emerged sidewise from the staircase of the National Bank Building. He looked back up the stairs, shot a glance up and down the street, then he moved like a blur around the corner into the darkening shadows. This was a habit he had which the innocent people of the town had not sufficient experience to interpret. He never started forth without looking both ways. He never walked any distance without looking back over his shoulder.

"That's Mike now!" exclaimed Acres. "Not a dollar in his pocket, and he owns this town."

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"Yes, he has got dollars in his pocket, plenty of 'em. He's been collecting for the campaign fund this afternoon—quarterage you know!" sneered Coleman, who had just paid his.

"Aims to be the next mayor, doesn't he?"

"No, worse than that: he's going to be representative from this county in the next legislature!"

"Bob Sasnett will have something to say about that. He told me to-day he might run. That means he will."

"Well, he hasn't got anything else to do. He's the only man in town who is independent of Mike. He can furnish his own campaign fund. Good night!" said Coleman, determined to be gone this time.

"Wonder what's the matter with Coleman," muttered Acres, hurrying to meet Carter, the editor of the *Signal*, only to see him vanish into the drugstore. "Wonder what's the matter with everybody. Hello, Colonel Adams, that you?"

"Yesh, it's me, Mabel; whatcher want," answered the Colonel, bracing himself against the courthouse. He always called Acres "Mabel," after his wife.

"Well, how do you feel—pretty good?" said the little gossip, grinning up in the old red face.

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"No, shur! I do not. I feel like a child on a cold night wish all the bedclothes pulled off me—thatsh how I feel. How do you feel?"

"Same here, Colonel!"

"Mabel, me boy," whispered the old man, swaying gently as he attempted to fix his eyes upon the other's face, "I want to ash you a delicate question: where ish the ladies? I haven't sheen a woman in four hours, Mabel! Think of that and in a town full of the pretties' women in thish state. What does it mean? Thash what I want to ash you. I'm famished, I'm thirshty, for the shight of a pretty face!"

"That's so," said Acres; "what does it mean? Hadn't thought of it before, but——"

"Oh, my God! what would thish world be without the ladies, Mabel! If we wish 'em like thish in four hours, how could we live wishout 'em forever! We could not, shur!" He began to weep, a poor old man of the past, standing in the twilight of the village street, looking up and down like a lost child crying for its mother. Then he moved on, refusing "Mabel's" arm.

Men began to close their offices and shops; window sashes banged; keys rattled in locks. More men appeared upon the streets. They lighted cigars, loitered, not quite ready yet to go home. When a man knows his wife and daughters are at home, he feels safe. He is in no hurry to be there himself. This was the hour when every man in Jordantown was accustomed to know that. If any one had asked a single one of them the question, "Where's your wife?" he would have answered, "At home, of course!" It was only the Colonel, half seas over, who had his doubts, but the Colonel was notoriously psychic where women were concerned.

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At this very moment a queer thing happened: a

stream of women poured into the square and took their way down both sides of it, almost treading upon the toes of the men as they passed. And they were walking leisurely.

These were undoubtedly the same women who had passed at four o'clock on their way to the Civic League and Cemetery Association. Every man in the streets recognized them. Yet they were not the same. They did not return salutations. For the first time the men were ignored, not exactly snubbed, but literally not seen by the women in Jordantown. And each man was alone, there were not enough of them together to talk about it; they could only feel and wonder, as they stood staring in amazement at those fluttering white and black and blue and pink figures disappearing around corners and down the avenues.

The sense of femininity is only a sense of weakness. And what we call masculinity is only the sense of strength, which may belong to women as well as to men under the same conditions. The men on the square had just witnessed a miracle, never seen before in this world—the rise of egotism in the feminine portion of the community, which caused every one of them to enter that zone of man on an equal footing with men in consciousness. And naturally the men did not understand that. They were so dazed that they could not even discuss it with one another. What they had experienced was too subtle to put into words. Not a man of them looked any other man in the face as they followed those women home. But every one of them was asking himself some question: "What's my wife doing out so late?" "Why didn't Selah Adams speak to me?" "What in hell's that old cat, Susan Walton, up to now, wading by me as if she owned the town?" "Oh, it's nothing! they were embarrassed at being out so late!" "But why then did they walk so infernally like Odd Fellows coming home from the lodge at midnight?"

"I'll know presently!" said Magnis Carter, as he flirted around the corner into the avenue. "I'll ask Carrie!"

And, as good as his word, he did.

"Carrie, what's the Civic League and Cemetery Association mean by keeping such late hours?" he asked as he sat down to dinner.

"There is no such organization here any more, Magnis."

"Isn't? What's become of it? You women get mad and tear up your Magna Charter?"

"No, we've changed it, going to get out another charter."

"So, you've changed it? Going to be an Odd Fellows lodge now?" he laughed.

"Something like that," she answered coolly.

"Can't afford it, my dear; to be an Odd Fellow costs like thunder!"

"We have plenty of funds," was the astonishing reply.

"Speak as if you'd inherited the Mosely Estate."

Silence on the part of Carrie, who sat at the other end of the table like a Dominique hen brooding strange eggs.

"Hear anything about the will?"

When there was no answer to this question, Carter looked up at his wife.

"I say did you hear anything about Sarah Mosely's will?"

Still no reply.

"Then you did hear something? What was it?" His manner had become suddenly serious.

"You'll know soon enough, Magnis."

"Can't you tell me?"

"No, I cannot!"

"Secrets from your husband?"



**"I want to ash you a delicate question—
where ish the ladies? I 'aven't sheen a
woman in four hours"**

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"I never resent your keeping your affairs from me, why should you object to my keeping mine from you?" she answered coolly.

"Good Lord, Carrie, you look at me as if you'd filed papers for divorce! And when did the Mosely will become one of your affairs, I'd like to know?"

She declined to tell him that. She poked her foot about under the table with the absent-minded stare a woman always has when she is trying to find the electric bell with her extremities. She found it and pressed all the current on, so that the maid came with an injured put-upon air to clear the table.

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Carter continued to regard his wife as if she had become a phenomenon, and as if he was entirely ignorant of the laws which had exalted her into the unknown. When the servant disappeared with the tray of indignantly rattling dishes he began again.

"Look here, Carrie, if there's any news about the disposition of that woman's estate, I ought to have it for the *Signal*. We go to press to-morrow."

"You'll get all the news you are entitled to have in time to publish this week, Magnis, and through the proper channels."

Three doors farther down the avenue Selah Adams sat upon the front veranda, looking like the vestal virgin of the moon.

She had taken the precaution to enter the house through the back door when she returned with the other women. The Colonel was fuming in the library. She could hear him through the open door as she fled noiselessly up the staircase.

"Not a light in the house, by Jove! First time in forty years I've come home to a darkened house. No candle in the window to guide an old man's wandering feet, nobody to greet me, no slippers—no nothing!" he moaned.

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And Selah, leaning over the banisters above, could hear him stumbling over the chairs. She knew what that meant. The Colonel regarded all chairs as his mortal enemies when he was in a certain condition. She heard the crash of the big Morris chair as it struck the wall, and feet attacking it furiously. Then the Colonel lumbered out into the hall.

"Hey, there! Tom! Becky! Where's everybody? By Gad! if somebody don't come, I'll—I'll——"

"What is it, father?" came Selah's voice, tinkling like ice in a glass.

"Selah! whatsh thish mean?" he roared.

"What does what mean, father?"

"No light! I've just been asshaulted in my own house!" he shouted.

"Assaulted?" she giggled, turning the switch.

The hall below was instantly flooded with light. She beheld the Colonel leaning against the newel post, looking up but not seeing her. He was lifting first one foot and then the other and feeling them tenderly with his hands.

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"Yesh! thas what I shaid! That Morris chair met me at the door and barked every shin I've got. Get out of here!" he roared at the two servants who had entered from the kitchen. "Selah, where've you been?"

"I'm up here, father. I didn't know it was so late. I'll be down in a minute."

To lie is not the nature of women, but it is often their necessity.

"Bring the arnica with you, me dear— I'm a wounded man! But I'm glad you were at home. I've been nervous 'bout you all day; there's something wrong in this town!"

All that had happened an hour ago. The Colonel was now peacefully snoring with both feet bandaged and elevated upon pillows; and Selah was waiting upon the veranda. She was evidently waiting. When a young and beautiful woman is not waiting for a lover, she does not look so calmly, sweetly indifferent. She is restless. She rises and looks at the moon. Now the moon was looking at Selah, embroidering her white dress with the fairy shadows of leaves, covering her face with a soft splendour, glistening like a crown of light upon her dark hair. That was the difference.

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Footsteps sounded upon the gravel. The figure of a man, tall, slender, regnant, was swinging up the walk. Selah did not move. She was that fairest thing in a darkened world, the presence achieved when a woman combines herself with silence, stillness, and moonlight.

The man sprang lightly up the steps.

"Hush!" she whispered, "don't ring the bell!"

"Selah!" he exclaimed, advancing to her. "What a vision you are!"

"Don't speak so loud," she whispered, motioning him to a seat beside her.

"I didn't, darling. I'd as lief shout before an altar as lift my voice in this chapel of the moon," he answered, taking her hand and lifting it to his lips.

"Father is not well. He's just dozed off!" she exclaimed.

"If I know anything about such dozing, it would take an earthquake to rouse him now!" he answered, laughing.

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Selah sighed and withdrew her hand.

"If you do that, dear, I shall seize more!" he whispered, leaning forward and slipping his arm around her waist.

"Don't, Mr. Sasnett!" she said so coolly that he drew back and stared at her.

"'Mr. Sasnett,' and when did I cease to be Bob, pray? I've been Bob for a good many years to you, Selah. What's the matter? Have you seen me flirting with another girl? You have not! Have you heard of my calling on Mike Prim? You have not! Has some one told you of the last murder I committed? Certainly not! I haven't killed a man yet. Shall not do so until he becomes my rival in your heart. Now what is it? Why am I 'Mr. Sasnett' upon this beautiful moonlight night when of all times I should be most tenderly Bob?"

"I can't explain," she answered.

"What is the matter with everybody in this town, especially the women? It hasn't been an hour since mother came home and said *she* couldn't explain when I asked her why she was so upset."

"She was upset then?" asked the girl curiously.

"Most awfully! She got out of the car like a flying squadron of rage, eyes blazing, face pale. And when I asked her what the trouble was she said I'd know soon enough. Now what did she mean?"

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"You'll know soon enough," repeated Selah, smiling.

"Good heavens! What's the game, Selah?"

"We've drawn trumps at last," answered Selah.

"We! Who are we? Certainly not mother! As she dashed—really dashed, you know, and at her age!—upstairs to her room she informed me that she had resigned from the presidency of the Civic League and Cemetery Association, and that never again would she be mixed up with women who had so far forgotten their dignity and womanhood. Then she banged the door."

"She did take it rather hard. I imagine your mother is a very old-fashioned woman."

"Well, she's quite the lady, if that's what you mean, and something of an autocrat. Did you depose her from the presidency this afternoon?"

"No, we dissolved the organization. There is no Civic League and Cemetery Association now!"

"Then we'll all have weeds on our graves—and untidy streets!" he murmured between a snigger and a sob.

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"Was that all your mother said?" asked Selah.

"Not quite. The fact is that's why I came over to-night. She's got her neck feathers up at you, too, it seems. I asked her through the door if we were to come by and pick you up for the drive we had planned, and she——" he hesitated.

"Well?"

"She said, 'Don't mention Selah Adams to me, Robert,' just like that, as if she'd seen you leading a riot or addressing a mob!"

"Yes, I know. You are a dramatist, Bob, better than you suspect!" answered Selah.

"Thanks for the 'Bob,' anyway. Now let's forget it. Mother will come around all right. She really loves you. She's only ruffled over some of your cat-scratching politics in the league. Now be a good girl and kiss me, dear!" he pleaded.

"I can't, Bob."

"You mean you won't; well, I can and will," he exclaimed, placing his palms upon either side of her face and drawing her to him.

"You must *not*!" she objected, evading him.

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"Why? Aren't we engaged?"

"We were engaged," she answered with a sob.

"Who's broken it? Not I?"

"You will, when you know! Besides, I wish to be released from—from——"

"Say it! You'd as well to say it as to wish it!" he exclaimed with sudden passion.

"I don't want to say it, but I must give you your liberty, dear."

"Well, I'll not have it so long as you call me 'dear' in that tone!" he cried.

"But I want mine!" she said, looking at him gravely.

"Don't you love me, Selah?"

"Love is not everything. There are—other things more important than love. Every man knows that!"

"No woman ought to know it! Besides, love is everything. It's the face of every flower. It's the leaves on the trees. It's the breath of heaven. It's the blush on your cheek, the blood in your veins and mine, dear."

"No, liberty is more than love. And liberty is the enemy of love," she answered.

"You speak like a—like a——" He searched his imagination to find what she did speak like, and she finished for him: [Pg 56]

"Like an enemy!"

"No, not quite so bad as that, but you are morbid, dear. This isn't a meeting of suffragists, this is a sacrament. You and I are alone before the altar of love. We must not deny one another this sweet bread of life!"

"You said something just then about suffragists. Do you believe in suffrage for women, for your wife, for example?"

He sat up and looked at her. He began to smile teasingly, as if she were a little girl and he a patient elder person with a beam in his eye.

"So that's it, hey? You want to be a suffragist and with the suffragists stand! Of course I believe in it. I believe in letting every woman have what she wants. Now kiss me, Selah, like the dear little suffering suff you are!"

"No, I must be sure you mean that. Men say things to women they do not believe, just to humour them, just to get——"

"A kiss, yes! I'd vote for you for coroner, Selah, for one kiss to-night!" [Pg 57]

"Well, you won't get it, Mr. Sasnett, not until I am *sure*, absolutely sure, you are for us, not against us."

"Us! One at a time, Selah, I say. You wouldn't have me be for all women, would you? A man loves one woman, but he can't stand 'em *en masse*. He'd romp like a four-year-old in a crowd of men, but a crowd of women, a commonwealth of women! Good Lord! it would be awful. Don't ask me to kiss them all, dear!"

"You are making fun of us. I knew you were not for us," she said.

"But I'm for *you*, heart and soul. When are we to be married? You promised to name the day."

"It will not be this year, if ever," she answered coolly.

"Not this year? It must be this year! I'm going to be representative from this county, and I want to take my bride to the Capitol with me."

"You don't know whether you will be elected or not, yet, Mr. Sasnett. It depends upon conditions of which you do not now dream. When is the election?"

"In November," he answered. [Pg 58]

"Before that time there will be five thousand more voters in this county than there are now!"

"Where'll they come from?"

"They are here now."

"In your pocket, is that what you mean?"

"They may be," she answered, smiling darkly.

"You speak as if you were Mike Prim, Selah. It's scandalous!"

It was Saturday afternoon, two days since the funeral and two days since Mike Prim bent listening with such furious excitement at the keyhole of Judge Regis's office. Jordantown had become the stage upon which a mystery play was being enacted with all the farcical features of a comedy. Every man, especially, was doing exactly what he would have done and said if there had been footlights and an audience in front, only not one of them knew that this was so. Providence is the Great Dramatist, and secures perfectly natural effects by providing emergencies which call

for action, and by keeping every man under the delusion that he chooses his own rôle.

The suspense concerning the disposition of the Mosely Estate was only partially balanced by the confounded indignation of many citizens who came and went from Mike Prim's office. [Pg 59]

"Sent for you again, too?" exclaimed Coleman when he met Acres as he descended the stairs.

"Yes, what's the matter?" asked Acres anxiously.

"You'll find out when you get up there. He's as mad as a rhinoceros horning sand in a desert."

"But what does he want?" Acres insisted.

"Wants you to double your subscription to the campaign fund. Better not go up if you can't do it. He got me for a cool hundred."

"What's he in such a hurry for? The campaign doesn't begin for months yet!"

"He says it's on, began two days ago. Says the liberty of every man in this county is at stake. Says he needs a fund of four times as much as usual to meet the situation," answered Coleman.

"What's he doing with it?"

"Can't tell you; not a cent of it is deposited in the bank."

"Well, I know he has taken in over a thousand dollars in the last two days."

"It's no time to collect now with everybody in suspense over this Mosely will," groaned Coleman. [Pg 60]

"I'll be hanged if it doesn't look like blackmail to me!" exclaimed Acres.

"Why submit, then?" demanded Coleman with a grin.

"You know we are all in too deep with Prim. You submitted, didn't you?"

"Yes, and you will, too, when you see him. He's got conviction in his manner and compulsion in his tongue," said Coleman as Acres passed him upon the stairs.

"Mabel, my boy, can you lend me fifty dollars?"

Acres beheld Colonel Adams standing in the deep shadows at the top of the stairs. He wore a yellow seersucker coat, brown linen trousers, carpet slippers, with the toes of his right foot bandaged and exposed through a slit in the red leather. He was forlornly sober, pale, with his moustache drooping like a rooster's tail in the rain.

"Fifty dollars, Colonel!" exclaimed Acres.

"I'm absolutely obliged to have it, Mabel."

"Make it fifty cents and I'll be glad to accommodate you."

"Very well, fifty cents then. Thank you, Mabel. I'll just go down with this. No use to face Mike with half a dollar. He wants fifty." [Pg 61]

"Shearing you, too?"

"No, you can't shear a sheep that's been plucked as clean as your hand. Prim keeps me mighty cool."

"What's he want with so much money, do you know?"

The Colonel limped forward very painfully, placed one hand upon Acres's shoulder, ogled Prim's door, and whispered:

"There are only two things in this world more expensive than women and wine, Mabel: politics and piety."

"You ought to be able to economize on piety," Acres retorted.

"When you do that, you get in deeper with politics—comes to the same thing—and I've never held an office in my life!" he concluded with a groan, as he placed his good foot on the second step of the stairs and drew the other tenderly after it. When he had descended three in this manner, he beckoned to Acres.

"Say, Mabel, if Mike asks about me, tell him I'm standing on the courthouse steps, with both feet bandaged and my trousers rolled up showing my barked shins. Tell him I'm begging for the cause, and as soon as I've got fifty dollars I'll be up to see him!" [Pg 62]

The next minute Acres was facing Prim, who sat with his hands spread upon the desk in front of him, his elbows sticking out, his hair bristling, his mouth sucked in, and his eyes spitting venom. He looked like a reptile about to spring, and Acres had much the expression of a rabbit facing the reptile, slowly being drawn to his fate.

"But a hundred dollars, Mike! I can't spare that much now. Besides, what's the hurry?" he was protesting despairingly.

"Look here, Acres, who's kept this town wide open for five years? Mike Prim! Who's profited by

that? Every business man in it! Who's given Jordantown an easy reputation that draws workingmen and all kinds of men who spend liberally what they make for what they want? Mike Prim! Who's profited by the jug business in the back of Bill Saddler's livery stable? Not Prim! I get my liquor cheap, that's all. Who's borne the reputation for the dirty work in your elections while you fellows played the part of law-abiding citizens and deacons and elders in the church? Prim! But who hired me for this job? You fellows with the ornamental virtues of society. I was to provide all the profits of vice to support your position. By God! do you think I haven't kept your letters of instruction about the Wimply campaign—that suggestion you made about counting the election returns? I've got it! And Coleman's order for liquor and funds to be used in the Dry Valley district, I've got that, too. And I have the agreement Wimply signed to keep the town open that year you fellows were masquerading on that Law and Order Committee: You all voted for Wimply! I've enough signatures here to put half of you in stripes!" he exclaimed, striking the desk with his clenched fist.

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"That's all right, Mike. I just wanted to know what——"

"What I'm up to? Well, I'll tell you I aim to be the representative from this county. It'll take a damn sight of money to elect me, and I'm going to be elected."

"Of course, we understand that. But what's the hurry? Campaign doesn't begin now."

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"That's all you know about it. But *I* know we are facing a crisis in this county *now*. Everything I've worked for, everything you fellows have stood for secretly and made *me do*—all of it may be swept from under our feet in sixty days. That's why I want money, and——"

"All right," Acres interrupted, taking out his check book, "here's mine. And it's more than I can spare."

"Not if I need more!" growled Prim, listing the check with a dozen others.

If an outlaw, armed to the teeth, had passed up and down the streets and robbed every man in Jordantown, they could not have appeared more dejected and, at the same time, alarmed. Conversation languished beneath the awnings. Men sat in their shirt sleeves, side by side, perfectly silent. You do not discuss the thorn in your side—and they all had two thorns. They were not only outraged by Prim's demands, they were suffering from the neuralgia of suspense in regard to the Mosely Estate.

"It's about time for the *Signal* to be out," said Coleman, looking at his watch.

"Never is anything in it when it does come——My God! What was that?"

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The air was rent, torn to mere tatters of air, by a long blood-curdling yell, a yell which seemed to catch its breath with battle fierceness, and then come again.

The two men rushed to the door of the bank. They beheld a scene of the wildest confusion. The square, which a moment before had been sunken in apathy, was now filled with terrific excitement. Men were running from every direction toward the post office, stumbling over yelping dogs, shouting, waving their arms as they ran.

In front of the post office, in the yellow flare of the setting sun, Acres and Coleman beheld a scene which contained all the elements of dignity, rage, pathos, and comedy.

Judge Regis stood with his silk hat perfectly level upon his head, his cane tucked under his arm, and he was looking over the spread sheet of the Jordantown *Signal* very much as if he stared at an enemy over the top of an impregnable fortification.

In front of him Colonel Marshall Adams pranced like an old bird kicking his wings. His hat and coat lay upon the pavement. His face was a red map of rage. He held a copy of the *Signal* between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand, and at arm's length, as if closer contact with it meant unbearable pollution. And as he trod his measure, his right fist shot out at regular intervals, each time nearer and nearer the Judge's nose, and with each motion the Colonel sent forth that ear-splitting yell which had not been heard in Jordantown since a Confederate regiment charged a Federal division there in 1864.

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Bob Sasnett was the first to reach the scene. He seized the Colonel around the waist from behind, dragging him back so that his red slippers turned up on the heels and showed the soles.

"Look at him, gentlemen! That man has committed a crime!" the Colonel shouted to the gathering crowd as he shook an accusing finger at Regis.

"A crime?" came an incredulous voice.

Regis, calmly folding his paper, looked over the head of his accuser and addressed Sasnett.

"Thank you, Sasnett, for saving his dignity. He was a brave soldier. We must never forget that," he said, lifting his hat impersonally to courage as he made his way out of the ring of staring faces.

"Let me go, Bob!" screamed the Colonel, struggling. "Did you hear him? *Was* a brave soldier. By Gad, what am I now? And this from a man who would destroy the sanctity of fair womanhood, and then barricades himself behind a newspaper when I demand shatisfaction."

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"What's the old boy talking about?" demanded Briggs, stretching his neck to get a view of the Colonel.

"If you don't believe what I shay, though I dare any man to doubt my word, read that!" he cried, flinging the paper from him.

The *Signal* fell flat and smooth upon the pavement; there was the scraping of many feet as the crowd pushed forward, a mere instant of silence as they read:

"The Last Will and Testament of Sarah Hayden Mosely";

then a furious rush for the post office, where every subscriber to the *Signal* hastily snatched his copy.

The Colonel, bereft of Sasnett's support, slid gently to a sitting posture against the lamp post, his legs wide apart, his red slippers half off. Tears filled his eyes. He wagged his head and sobbed:

"Selah! Selah! Sharper than a sherpent's tooth——" He could not recall the rest, he merely felt it. [Pg 68]
He was a poor old man, alone, forsaken, he knew that.

No one noticed him. One after another the men filed out, each with the *Signal* wide open, and with his eyes fastened upon a certain column.

They scattered beneath the various awnings, singly or in groups. Not one addressed his neighbour. Each remained concealed behind the wide enveloping sheets which literally tittered in their trembling hands. [Pg 69]

CHAPTER II

Silence is the luxury of wise men and the necessity of fools—which indicates how few men are wise. It is usually the man who does not know what to say, or who has nothing worth saying to impart, that does the talking. It is a form of verbal hysteria, a kind of babbling dust which he stirs by way of concealing his incapacities. And the discourse is more characteristic of women than of the opposite sex, because the lives they live tend to the innocuous, if they do not tend to neuralgia and despair. Silence in a woman is always supernatural. But there are emergencies in life so dumbfounding and sinister in their aspect that they bind the tongue and inform even the foolish with the momentary wisdom of silence and prudence.

Magnis Carter as editor of the *Signal* was naturally loquacious, especially in print. He published the news with all the fluency which liquefied language permits. It was only in this manner that he was able to fill the few inside columns of the *Signal*. The outside pages were "patented," of course, and contained matter taken from other papers and magazines. News was so scarce in Jordantown that if a stray dog trotted across the square, it was almost a sensation. Not to know whose dog a dog was afforded an opportunity for speculation and for a change in the topic of conversation. [Pg 70]

The singular brevity therefore with which Carter published the most important information ever needed and yearned for in Jordantown, was significant. Even the weekly local column was exceedingly reserved, as if some prescience of the future had rendered every man and woman cautious of performing a single act worthy of interest. Nothing was said of the last meeting of the Ladies' Civic League and Cemetery Association. There was no flamboyant boasting concerning the various enterprises.

But at the top of the first column on the editorial page, between two wide black lines, appeared this notice:

"Death of an Estimable Christian Woman."

The obituary of Sarah Hayden Mosely followed below. This was so brief that it might have been placed in capital letters on her tombstone without crowding the margins. It appeared to have been written with the circumspection of a person who desired his readers to understand that he was in no way responsible for the deceased nor for her deeds. The title was stereotyped. Every woman who died in Jordantown appeared in the *Signal* obituary tribute as "An Estimable Christian Woman." [Pg 71]

It was at the next column that every man stared with amazement mixed with fear and indignation. This contained "The Last Will and Testament of Sarah Hayden Mosely," the title written in smaller, paler type. The text of the will followed:

In the name of God, Amen.

I, Sarah Hayden Mosely, being weak in body but of sound and perfect mind, do make this my last will and testament:

I give and dispose of my entire estate, real and personal, to a self-perpetuating Board of Trust, the members of which are hereinafter named.

The said estate shall no longer be known as the William J. Mosely Estate, but it shall be called the Co-Citizens' Foundation Fund of Jordan County.

This fund shall not be subject to liquidation, but the income from it, or such part of it as is necessary, shall be spent each year in the effort to obtain equal suffrage for the women of Jordan County.

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No part of the said income shall be spent for any other purpose until the said women shall have the right to vote in all elections held in the said county.

But after they have obtained the ballot, the said Board of Trust shall found and maintain at the expense of this fund a department of Common Law in the Jordantown Female Seminary. And all possible efforts shall be made to establish here a school of law for the women of this state where they may receive that legal training which alone insures to women the proper knowledge and mental discipline necessary for the preservation of their property and their rights as citizens of this commonwealth.

This self-perpetuating Board of Trust shall consist of three members, one man and two women.

Each shall receive a salary of twelve hundred dollars a year for services rendered.

I appoint John Regis, Susan Walton, and Selah Adams members of this self-perpetuating Board of Trust and executors of my will. And they shall not give bond nor be held accountable to the court for the manner in which they exercise these functions.

If any member or members of the said board appointed in this will shall refuse to serve, the remaining members or member shall choose and elect a suitable person or persons to fill each vacancy.

No monument or stone shall mark my grave until the conditions of this will have been fulfilled.

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In witness whereof I have hereunto set my hand and seal this the 3d day of April, 1914.

[Seal]

SARAH HAYDEN

MOSELY.

Signed and sealed by the above named Sarah Hayden Mosely as her last will and testament, and by us in her presence and at her request subscribed as witnesses.

ENOS CANN.
MARY CANN.

In a brief paragraph beneath this extraordinary document the editor added that in an interview Judge John Regis admitted that all the trustees had accepted, that they were confident of carrying out the terms of the will, but that the board was not ready now to give information concerning its plans.

No woman had ever been "interviewed" in Jordantown by a newspaper reporter. This may have accounted for the fact that Carter did not call upon either Mrs. Walton or Selah Adams before going to press. Besides, the sixteen-hundred-dollar mortgage on the *Signal* was now owned by the Co-Citizens' Foundation. He could not trust himself even in the presence of these powerful women. The very form of his question, his manner, might betray his secret feelings and do incredible damage.

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In fact all domestic conversation in Jordantown was now censored as carefully both by the men and the women as if they belonged to opposing armies. Every man regarded his wife with suspicion, and he was at the same time conscious of a strange cheerful indifference on the part of his wife that was unnatural and offensive. Half the clinging-vine love with which women entwine their husbands is not love at all, but a nameless anxiety due to their sense of helplessness. Transpose the conditions of each and the same beseeching look so often seen in women's faces will be ludicrously mixed with the whiskers on the faces of their lords. The only ineradicable difference between men and women is gender. They are singularly alike in every other particular. Give a woman liberty, and she will go a man one better in license. Take a man's liberty from him, and he surpasses any woman in timidity. If men have more strength, women have more endurance. If the one is more active, the other is the more persistent. And it depends entirely upon the emergency which will show the most courage. Place them side by side under the same conditions to accomplish the same thing, and while each will go about the business in a different manner, the same proportion of both sexes will succeed at the job.

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The difficulty is that men and women neither live nor work under the same conditions. The former have the overwhelming advantage, owing to the fact that they create their own public opinion and hold the balance of power, prestige, and influence.

This was precisely the balance which had been destroyed in Jordantown. The women now had all the advantage. It was monstrous and called for the exercise of all the furnace language of which

men are naturally capable.

The one hope expressed everywhere was that, being the timid things that they were, the women would not know how to keep the grip they had upon the situation.

"Hang it! They are our wives and daughters. We ought to be able to do what we always have done, direct them and control them through their affections," said Acres, turning up the ends of his moustache with a kind of bantam bravado.

"If a woman has nothing but her affections it is easy enough to manage her, but nobody knows what use she may make of her heels if she has everything else besides," growled Coleman, who had just come from a breakfast table where his wife, Agatha, had pointedly refused to give him certain information about the Co-Citizens' Foundation which he knew she had. [Pg 76]

"It's all a huge joke, that's what this damphule will is," said Briggs gloomily.

"Of course the suffrage part of it is a joke. The state constitution is plain on that question. Only males can vote," Acres agreed.

"But, hang it! They've got this vast estate, which affects every business interest in this town, and the devil only knows what they will do with it!" exclaimed Coleman.

"Ask your wife," Sasnett suggested.

"I did ask Mabel," Acres admitted.

"What'd she say?"

"Said they'd collect the rents and interest first thing."

Sasnett laughed, and Briggs seized his hat and left the room with the air of an injured man.

While these desultory conferences were being held all over the town Monday morning, where two or three were gathered together on the streets, Susan Walton was sitting opposite Judge Regis in his office. Her knees were wide apart, her hands folded above her fat stomach. She had untied her bonnet strings, which was a bad-weather indication. [Pg 77]

The Judge was listening with his eye fixed keenly upon her, the hair above his temples sticking out like owl's ears.

"I've bluffed it so far, John Regis. I've reorganized the Civic League and Cemetery Association into the Co-Citizens' League, which was no small undertaking, I can tell you. Half the women would not have joined if they'd known what they were doing. I got them by not explaining how immediate the business of getting suffrage is, and by offering scandalous committee appropriations. But I'm shaking in my shoes. I don't know how we are to carry out the conditions of this trust. The more I think of it, the more I suspect Sarah Mosely of being plain crazy!"

"She's the first woman in this country to meet the issue of suffrage for women with the sanity of practical common sense," he answered. [Pg 78]

"But she's limited her bequest to use in this county. Suffrage is a state issue. I should know. I have given years of thought to it."

"Yes, you've spent your energies like the rest of them, Susan, in mere agitation, in parades with transparencies bearing the legend, 'Votes for Women!' The last one of you might as well be blowing your breath against the order of things. Nothing could be more futile."

"We are beginning to create a sentiment for suffrage," she protested.

"Yes, in women. But can women give it to you? What's the good of undertaking the impossible? The income from this Foundation will not exceed twenty thousand dollars a year. That would not be a drop in the bucket in a state campaign, where you would be compelled to fight the most powerful political machines, and the graft and vice elements of the cities, all of which are naturally opposed to suffrage for women."

"Still, I don't see what we can do here in this county alone with the whole state against us," she objected.

"That is the question Mrs. Mosely answered. This little old woman fading into a mere shadow behind the doors of her house saw the solution which the rest of you missed with all your breadth of vision—too much breadth of vision, Susan, is as bad as not having any at all. No focus to it, not enough rays to burn through." [Pg 79]

"I think you know I have had some experience in political affairs, more than most women, and I must say I don't see yet where Sarah Mosely focussed her rays," snapped Susan.

"I had several conferences with her. It appeared that she had thought of nothing else for years but this Foundation. She got the idea, she told me, from living with her husband. He was a man whose wife was his rib, not a separate human being. He was kind to her, but she had no more liberty than a child. She never knew anything of his affairs. She told me that she was and had always been absolutely incapable of attending to any business. She had been obliged to trust an agent. In any case she would have been forced to trust some one. She thought most women were in this condition of helplessness, and that they would remain so, always the prey of circumstances

of the forces about them. And she wished to change that."

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"Go on," the old lady commanded as the Judge paused.

He did go on. He called attention to certain laws governing county elections.

"With all your knowledge of the needs of women, and your bitter sense of injustice, you women never thought of this simple means by which you may win. And it was the thing Sarah Mosely grasped. She was the first woman in America, so far as I know, to grasp the significance of this easy and effective method of obtaining suffrage for women. And instead of leaving her money to a hospital, or to endow a chair or two in some university, she has left it for this purpose. It's amazing—her vision, and the directness with which she reasoned to the right conclusion!"

"Still I don't see how we can *force* this issue here," Mrs. Walton insisted.

"Do you know, Susan, why men have the ballot and why women have not got it?"

"I have my suspicions, John. It's because they've got everything else, including us. Because they've got pockets in their breeches, for one thing."

"Exactly! now you've got pockets in your skirts, with something like twenty thousand dollars to spend for a certain purpose. And that is not all you have. This Board of Trust owns the majority of stock in the National Bank, and has loaned money to nearly all the business houses in town. You hold mortgages on nineteen thousand acres of land in this county. You practically own the *Signal*. There is not a politician anywhere who would not know he held this county in the hollow of his hand if he had that much influence to back him. Influence, Susan, is not mere influence ever. It's power! You've got that!"

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"When did you become such an ardent suffragist, John?" Susan suddenly demanded.

The Judge laughed.

"I've been a kind of mugwump of the cause for years. If I were younger, I doubt if I should be ardently in favour of it now. I admit that I prefer the dear woman to the abler ballot-bearing woman—every man must—but before your sex can become entirely like my sex except in gender, Susan, I shall be where Sarah Mosely is now. It will not matter to me. I admit, however, that I was converted to active partisanship by Mrs. Mosely. I have been more impressed by that dim little old woman than by all the arguments you, for example, ever made for suffrage. She was herself an unanswerable plea for the rights of women to *live*, for she had never really lived at all. She looked as if every mortgage held by her estate had been foreclosed at her expense."

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"Yes, I know," said Mrs. Walton with a sigh. "She was pathetic in her submission. Most women submit, but still have enough to fuss about from time to time to keep them alive."

"She was really the least submissive of you all. She put on her thimble, threaded the needle of her robin-headed brain, and worked all your fuss and agitations and futile parades down to a formula by which you can actually obtain the ballot," he put in.

"Well, coming down to this formula, what shall we do with Briggs?" she asked shrewdly. "He looks like a dangerous factor in it to me."

"Briggs will be of use. All he needs is an expert accountant to overhaul his books occasionally. And we shall need him as we need a pair of tongs to handle live coals. Besides, we cannot afford to dismiss him now and incur his enmity. We are not working up antagonism. We have one man against us already who counts for all we can overcome."

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"Who is that?"

"Mike Prim. He owns nothing visible. So we have no mortgage to hold over his head. But he practically controls this town, politically speaking."

"How?"

"Don't ask me! He is not a merchant, nor a lawyer, nor a real estate agent, nor a banker, nor a broker, nor anything else that has a name, but more men—prominent citizens, farmers, labourers, tramps, beggars, anybody and everybody—go and come from his office than to and from any other office in this town. He is the power of darkness in this county to be overcome before you can win suffrage, I can tell you that."

"Well, at least Prim is tangible. He is in my line. I shall know what to do with him," answered Susan grimly.

The Judge threw back his head and laughed.

"Now you are coming, Susan! I want to see you dragging your wings before Prim!"

"I do my best work in private, John, but I'm beginning to see light. This thing really is possible. Now let us get down to business. I have an appointment with Selah Adams. She couldn't come up here this morning. I feel anxious. Her voice sounded like that of a child being kept in after school. Shouldn't wonder if that old family sword of a father were making trouble."

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"We need Selah; her beauty and enthusiasm are real assets to this movement," said the Judge.

"Oh, we shall keep her on the board if I have to fight a duel with Marshall Adams," she replied with a cackling laugh.

The conference which followed was of a nature so private that they instinctively adopted the tones of conspirators as they turned the pages of ledgers which Briggs had been required to submit for inspection.

At two o'clock Selah Adams slipped softly out of the house, crossed the street, and entered Mrs. Walton's front door.

"She says come right up to her room, Miss Selah; she's busy and can't come down," said the negro maid, rolling her eyes and stifling either a snigger or a sob by slapping her hand over her mouth.

The next moment Selah stood in the door of Mrs. Walton's bedroom, staring with horrified eyes. [Pg 85]

Susan Walton, clad in only her essential underwear, lay flat upon her back on the floor. She was slowly lifting first one stockinged leg, then the other, to a right angle with her body, at the same time thrusting up one arm and then the other. She was staring at the ceiling and muttering a certain formula under her breath.

"Oh! Oh! What is the matter, Mrs. Walton? Is it a fit?" cried Selah, staggering back.

"No! Exercise. Just had my lunch! One—two—three! Never allow yourself to get fat, Selah!" Up shot the other foot and arm.



"You may be mayor of this town before you are thirty. A fat mayoress would never do!"

"If I'd known what was before me twenty years ago, I'd have been more careful. One—two—three! Can't do what's before me unless I reduce. Avoid oatmeal and cream, that's what does it! You may be mayor of this town before you are thirty. A fat mayoress would never do. It would suggest beer! And look at me. I'm already so fat I have to lie down to take my exercise! But Regis and I have planned enough work to keep you lean this summer," she added, sitting up apparently satisfied with her state of exhaustion.

"That's what I came to see you about," said the girl, seating herself and looking down sorrowfully. "Father is dreadfully upset. He has forbidden me to mention woman suffrage in the house." [Pg 86]

"Well, don't, then; don't speak of it at all to him."

"But he will never consent to my holding this trusteeship."

"Aren't you twenty-one?"

"I'm twenty-four, as to that, but——"

"If you were your father's son, do you think he would forbid your having your own convictions and living up to them?" the older woman interrupted.

"No, but I'm only his daughter!" Selah said.

"Can't you see that is provided for? If he forbade you the house, you still have twelve hundred dollars a year, which is certainly more than he could afford to give you."

"That isn't it: he can't do without me, he needs me."

"Listen to me, Selah! Men have been our little children for so long that we do not know how to wean them. Here you are, ready to resign the greatest opportunity any young woman has ever had in this state in order to stay at home and break your father's breakfast eggs and putter over him and keep him soothed by agreeing with everything he says. That's why men can vote and we can't. That's why they get everything, and we get nothing but our board and clothes. We've humoured and pampered them until they have no sense of us and our needs," she concluded, twisting her hair angrily into a tight knot on the back of her head. [Pg 87]

"Oh, I wish I knew what was right!" cried the girl, clasping her hands.

"We've tried the old sacrificial righteousness long enough, Selah, to know that it is not contagious so far as we are concerned. Now you just take my advice, and we'll have the new righteousness for women proved in Jordan County before the end of this year!"

"As soon as that?" cried the girl, enthused in spite of herself.

"Yes, if we can win at all we can do it in a few months. Regis and I planned the whole campaign this morning. Give me that kimono. Now let me have your hand. It's not so easy to get to one's feet at sixty, Selah!"

She was sublimely unconscious of the figure she made moving across the room with the ends of her kimono trailing back like the gray wings of an old duck-legged hen. She gathered up some loose sheets from her desk.

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"Here's the whole thing—all divided into three parts. Yours will be in some ways the most difficult. You'll have the organizing to do among the women in the country districts. But we've decided to get a good motor. You'll need to cover distances rapidly. That will be one agreeable feature at least. You and Bob Sasnett may find it convenient to do your canvassing together!" she laughed, while Selah blushed.

If by some miracle a modern man should awaken some morning to find himself thrust back a hundred years in time, although in the same place where he had always lived, he could not believe in the reality of a single thing he saw. Every man and every woman would be merely characters in an historical romance. Every sentence he would hear would sound like fiction. All manners and customs would seem exaggerated, sentimental, and he himself would give the impression of being a monster without breeding or a single attribute becoming to proper manhood.

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If, on the other hand, he should by some incantation be projected forward only fifty years in time, still in the place of his birth, the effect of unreality would be even more startling, especially if those things should have happened which prophets predict and toward which all progress tends. Conditions would be unendurable, manners offensive. No man would seem quite a man. No woman would seem modest. Clothes, customs, beliefs, ambitions, and ideals would all have changed. And he himself would seem to them a pitiable reversion to type, ludicrously unequal to meeting the emergencies of advanced civilization. In short, there are no lasting standards of living. Education, morals, economics, finance, and politics are only the cards we play every generation in the progressive euchre of evolution. The honesty with which we play the game determines the worth of society.

At the end of a month Jordantown had not undergone so great a metamorphosis as fifty years would make, but it was in the throes of a frightful evolution. The changes already wrought were so amazing that the author may be excused if this record fails to convince the reader of their reality. At least half the citizens themselves did not and could not believe that they were not walking in a hideous nightmare from which they hoped to awaken and find their womankind properly subdued and returned to the less conspicuous sphere of womanhood.

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The first bomb exploded when Samuel Briggs resigned as director of the National Bank. Mr. Briggs had been elected to represent the stock owned by the Mosely Estate. He had not only resigned, but he had ventured to propose the name of Mrs. Susan Walton as a suitable person to represent the same stock which was now owned and controlled by the Co-Citizens' Foundation Fund. He did not add that he had been able to retain his position as agent only by signing a contract with the Board of Trust to obey every instruction given him with all the energy and influence he possessed in the town. This demand, that he should resign as director in favour of Mrs. Walton, was the first test made of his obedience.

Having offered his suggestions Briggs leaned back in his chair, smoked, and stared at the ceiling, while the eleven other directors stared at him with the horror of honest men contemplating an armed traitor.

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"If this is going to be a hencoop instead of a bank, I'll draw every dollar I have in it out, and sell my stock to the lowest bidder!" exclaimed a frowsy old man, clawing his whiskers. This was Thaddeus Bailey. He owned three grocery stores in Jordantown, and had a monopoly on that trade.

"I don't know how much money you have on deposit, Thad, but it will take more stock than you own to satisfy that mortgage you owe to this new-fangled female suffrage fund," answered his neighbour.

"What'll we do with her if we elect her?" asked Acres.

"Better ask what she'll do with the bank?" some one replied.

"She'll run it, that's what! Didn't she run her husband for Congress till his tongue hung out? Ain't she running the whole female population of this county at the present time?"

"Hang it! I'd rather close the doors of this bank than elect that woman a director!" exclaimed Coleman.

"Come to the same thing if you didn't," replied Briggs. "Take it from me, the trustees will withdraw the last dollar they have invested in it. You couldn't pay. And then they'd declare you insolvent, appoint Susan Walton receiver, and take the whole thing over!"

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"I move we let her in, gentlemen, and appropriate fifty dollars to add a ladies' dressing-room. Susan's looking up. She'll need it. She's beginning to powder her nose, and she's bought a new bonnet, thank God!" said Bob Sasnett with his usual laugh.

When the directors were leaving the bank after indignantly electing Mrs. Walton to the board, Coleman looked at Sasnett suspiciously.

"Where do you stand in this damn business, anyhow, Bob?" he demanded.

"Oh, I'm not standing at present, Stark, I'm crawling on my umbilicus same as the rest of you; the only difference is that I retain the charm and radiance of my countenance."

"When do you purpose to announce your candidacy for representative?"

Sasnett looked at him so quickly that even his smile scarcely veiled the shrewdness of his glance.

"Waiting for the women to settle Mike Prim," he answered. "If they don't, you fellows may elect him. Mike's so deep rooted in your affairs a man couldn't dig him up without soiling his hands." [Pg 93]

"Think the women can?"

"Not a doubt of it if they get wise to him, and they are so naïvely unscrupulous, bless their hearts, that they'll do some things to accomplish their purpose a man can't afford to do."

"And if they settle Mike, you'll run on the crinoline ticket, I suppose?" Coleman answered.

"Can't say yet, Stark; don't want to give myself away, but I'm buying my collars at the Co-Citizens' Coöperative League Emporium!" he said, winking his eye and drawing up the corner of his mouth in a most offensive manner.

This reference to the women's coöperative store was far from being a joke.

The first floor of the old Mosely residence had been divided in half with a partition. The walls between the rooms on each side had been fitted up in a modern and expensive manner with shelves and counters, middle-aisle showcase, and so forth. The right-hand division was a drygoods and millinery department, with such a display of hats and finery as never had been seen before in Jordantown. The left division contained everything necessary to thrifty existence, from horse collars to hams, sugar and molasses, flour and corn meal. [Pg 94]

The upper rooms of the house were used as offices for the female trustees of the Fund, and for the various committees, of which there were an amazing number in order that as many women as possible should have prominent and executive relations to the Co-Citizens' movement.

The whole front of the place was ablaze every night with electric signs. "*The Co-Citizens' League Headquarters*," winked across the front of the upper story. Beneath that "*The Women's Coöperative Department Stores*" winked in blue, red, and white light splendour.

This was not the worst of it: Susan Walton, aided and abetted by John Regis, had secured the services of foreign female talent, expert saleswomen, bookkeepers, and a general manager, also a female. With the assistance of these experienced persons they had purchased such a stock and assortment of goods as no merchant in Jordantown could afford. They paid cash, and counted the discount as part of the profit. They figured to a cent the cost of the stock and the expense of running the store, and they sold without reference to making any profit at all. What they lost or failed to collect was charged up as "campaign expense" against the Foundation Fund! [Pg 95]

"This store is a kind of suffragist flypaper put out to catch as many as we can by offering bargains and credit to possible voters," said Susan to Judge Regis.

"But, my dear woman, bribing voters is a penal offence," exclaimed the Judge, laughing.

"This is not bribery, John. This is a premium we are offering to get men to vote on this measure at all. That is going to be the great difficulty. Even if we get enough of them to sign the petition to hold the election, they may outwit us by remaining away from the polls. When men have employed every other argument to get their way with women, they cease to argue, back their ears, plant their fore feet, and balk. We shall cause it to be known that credit can be had at this store only by persons who furnish sufficient assurance that they will vote in the election!" she explained.

"But in case they vote against suffrage?" he asked, smiling grimly.

"Before time for the election we shall have convinced the men of this county of so many financial disasters to follow upon such perfidy, that the majority will not dare cast their ballots against us," she retorted. [Pg 96]

"Intimidation is also a penal offence at the polls, Susan!"

"Do you think men will ever admit that they have been intimidated politically by women? Never! It was you yourself who said influence is not influence, it's power! We've got that. Before the spring season is over, we shall have forced all the merchants in this town into bankruptcy, or we shall have proper assurance of their support. When Acres and the rest have kicked against the pricks long enough to realize the situation, we will let them know upon what conditions only this store will charge regulation prices for goods. We may offer to sell out to them. The mercantile life does not appeal to me. This store is not a financial venture. It is a political guide to the polls of

the county!"

"Well, you must hurry the issue, Susan. Twenty thousand dollars will not last six months the way you are spending it. That suffragist motor car we bought last week cost twenty-two hundred dollars!" he warned.

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"If we win at all we shall do it in less than six months," answered the valiant old termagant.

Meanwhile all was confusion in the stores on the avenue. Drays piled high with boxes and barrels were drawn up before the doors of the League store. A perfect thunder of industry went on within, while the ladies of the town crowded the street from one end of the block to the other. They talked, they inspected, they matched samples as fast as the laces and dress goods were placed upon the shelves and counters. They compared prices; they were excited, elated beyond measure. On the square trade was not exactly languishing yet, but it stood with hands raised in dumb astonishment. Business men had not been informed of the projected store. They did not conceive of such outrageous competition until the thing was actually ready to open its doors. Even then they were not prepared for the cut in prices. Acres continued to sell fifteen pounds of sugar for a dollar a week after the Coöperative Store began to sell twenty pounds for the same price. Percale that could be bought for ten cents a yard on the avenue, sold on the square for fifteen cents.

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"They can't keep it up!" Acres predicted. "Just shows how unfit women are for business."

"But a damphule ought to know that ham can't be sold for twelve and a half cents per pound!" cried Thad Bailey furiously.

They had both failed to get the usual spring loan from the National Bank, due entirely to the fact that at the first directors' meeting, the new director had demanded to know exactly how much they owed already, and she refused to sanction the advance of another dollar to any merchant in Jordantown.

"Gentlemen, I have reason to know that these men will not be able to pay the interest upon the loans this bank has already made to them. We cannot afford to risk another advance," she explained.

Fortunately, the two victims had absented themselves from this meeting. But no argument or appeal from the others could move her.

Every one suspected the worst, but no one really knew what was on foot, for up to this time not a word was heard of suffrage for women.

Only one man besides Judge Regis seemed to know what was going forward. This was Magnis Carter, and he refused to tell what he knew. He merely explained that he was preparing certain announcements for the *Signal*, which would of course include an advertisement of the new store. If anybody wanted to know what was going on, let them read the *Signal*. It always contained the news. He was tremendously puffed up. He was inclined to snub the curious. Lord save us! did anybody think he was going to give away his own scoop?

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He was also silent about a certain transaction between him and Susan Walton.

Three days before the formal opening of the Coöperative Store, she surprised him at his editorial desk. This was a deal table in a corner of the printing office. It was littered with proof, scratch paper, scissors, mucilage, pencils, inkwells, and a case of "pie." He was engaged in sorting this. His collar and cravat hung upon a nail on the wall above the table. He was in his shirt sleeves. His hair was rumpled, his fingers inky.

But the first thing he thought of when he saw the old lady picking her way between bales of paper near the door of the office, was his socks. The day was very warm, and he thought he remembered pulling them down to cool his legs. It was impossible to make sure. You cannot pull up your socks in the presence of a woman, even an old woman. Besides, she had her mouth primped severely and her eyes fixed with a soap-and-water expression upon him.

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He leaped from his chair, showing a purple rim around each ankle and the bare skin above. He cast a despairing glance at his collar, and made a dive for his coat.

"Oh, good afternoon, Mrs. Walton! Excuse me," he exclaimed, thrusting his arms in the sleeves. "I was not expecting this honour, as you see!"

She advanced and deliberately seated herself in the chair he had vacated.

"Don't trouble to put on your coat, Mr. Carter. It's very warm in here," fanning herself. "I think we shall have to move the *Signal* to the Woman's Building on the avenue. There is still the kitchen and pantry we could use—very large pantry—make an excellent private editorial office."

"I beg pardon, Madam, what did you say?"

He had forgotten his socks. His eyes protruded. She laughed—it was the triumph of mind over matter—that laugh, an old woman's cackle, he being the matter. He did not like it. He stood waiting for an explanation, seeing that she occupied the only chair. He felt that it would take a good deal to explain how and why she thought she could induce him to move the office of the *Signal* into the kitchen of that female rat trap on the avenue.

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She came immediately to the point, a thing you never do in business unless you are sure you have the drop on the other fellow.

"The Co-Citizens' Foundation Fund holds a mortgage on the *Signal*, Mr. Carter?" She put this affirmative in the form of a question.

"Er—I believe there was a small mortgage held by the Mosely Estate," he admitted.

"And with the four years' interest due, I believe it covers the value of the property now, doesn't it?" She had taken out another pair of spectacles and adjusted them upon her upturned nose.

"About," he added, dazed.

"We shall be glad to retain your services. That is what I am here for this afternoon, to make arrangements with you, if possible."

Carter raised his hand, scratched his chin through his beard, squinted one eye, and took sight along the barrel of his personal interest at Susan. [Pg 102]

"We are prepared to bear all the expense of publication and offer you a salary of one hundred dollars a month to conduct the paper; but of course we should expect to control the policy of it absolutely. We purpose to make it the organ of the Woman's Suffrage Movement here. I should myself dictate most of the editorials."

"You should, Madam?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"And where would I come in?"

"Oh, we should want you to do the work, get up advertisements, write special articles along such educational lines for the movement as we should suggest. You would 'come in' a great deal, Mr. Carter. You would be the busiest man in Jordantown."

"But, good Lord—beg pardon! You want me to become a woman suffragist, Madam—and I'm a man!"

"We should certainly require you to work for it. Suffrage for women is not a matter of sex. It's a question of common justice." [Pg 103]

"At what salary did you say?" he asked after a thoughtful pause.

"One hundred dollars a month, and we pay the expense of publication," she answered.

Carter had never cleared a dollar as editor of the *Signal*. He could not even have supported himself if he had paid the interest on his mortgage. Still he hesitated. He was not sure that this offer did not mean the sale of his manhood, on the installment plan, at so much a month. He wondered what the men would think of this arrangement. His wit in the paper had long consisted in humorous comments upon the modern woman, and the Suffrage Movement in particular.

"Give me time to think it over," he said.

"Until to-morrow morning," she said, rising. "In case you accept the position we shall expect you at nine o'clock. There is some advertising stuff for the next issue, and I shall want to dictate an editorial."

"And if I do not accept?" he put in as she advanced toward the door.

"In that case we shall take charge of the *Signal* as soon as we can foreclose the mortgage," she answered without looking back. [Pg 104]

"Er—good afternoon, Mrs. Walton!" he suddenly called after her.

"Good afternoon. Remember, promptly at nine o'clock!" she returned, still without looking back.

Carter sat for an hour after her departure scratching his chin. He crossed his legs, shook his elevated foot, showed every sign of profound concentration. He was making up his mind to become a decimal point in the Woman Suffrage Movement. It was like making up his mind to be born again, and not so well born at that!

But "promptly at nine o'clock" the following morning he appeared at Susan's office in the Woman's Building, accepted the nominal editorship of the *Signal*, and submitted to the indignity of taking down the editorial which she dictated.

On Saturday the *Signal* appeared. It was a wonder. The entire front page was taken up with an advertisement of the Women's Coöperative Store. The quality of everything was the best. The prices quoted were far below what they had ever been before in Jordantown.

But that which paralyzed the whole male population in the square was this announcement at the top of the editorial page: [Pg 105]

*Susan Walton,
Managing Editor.
Magnis Carter,
Assistant Editor.
Price \$1.00 a year.*

*Advertising rates reduced one half to all women and
to friends of the Suffrage Movement in Jordan County.*

This was bad enough, but the crowning affront was the leading editorial.

"The *Signal* has become the property of the Co-Citizens' Foundation Fund, bequeathed by the late Sarah Hayden Mosely for the purpose of obtaining suffrage for women in Jordan County," was the opening sentence. "Henceforth the paper will be published in the interest of the Suffrage Movement and in any other interests which do not conflict directly or indirectly with this movement. No matter containing adverse criticism of suffrage for women will be published. And no advertisements from any source not known to be friendly to the movement will be accepted. For this reason all those which have not been paid for in advance have been excluded. Business men who desire the use of our columns for advertising should call at the office of the *Signal* at their earliest convenience, to give assurance of their support of the policy of this paper in order that they may still use its columns as an advertising medium."

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The paragraph which followed stated brazenly that the majority of the citizens of Jordan County were heartily in favour of suffrage for women, and that they were determined no longer to endure "taxation without representation," and so forth and so on. There was no hysterical railing about the partialities of men for men in the administering of law and the interpretation of the rights of citizenship.

The astonished readers understood for the first time, however, that Jordantown and Jordan County were in the grip of something stronger than feminine sentimentality or even the Democratic party.

The office of the *Signal* had actually been moved to the Woman's Building. The transit took place some time during the night. No one knew when. Carter came and went through a side entrance formerly used by delivery wagons when they brought Sarah Mosely her meagre household supplies. He remained in seclusion there, as modest as a girl, and only Susan Walton knew with what diligence he laboured. No man dared to seek him in the seclusion of that place. And when Mike Prim called him over the 'phone, after the first issue of the *Signal* under the new management, demanding that he should come to his office at once, Carter declined to obey the summons. This was incredible. For years he had been the henchman of Prim. He had received from time to time modest sums for publishing copy prepared under Prim's supervision and designed to influence public opinion in proper Prim channels.

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However, late one night when Carter slipped into the quiet side street with a roll of proof under his arm, he walked not exactly into the arms of Mike Prim, who was standing in the shadows just outside, but it would be more exact to say that he slipped directly in vocative range of Mike's rage.

"Look here, Carter, what the — do you mean by selling the *Signal* to these blankety-blank-blank women?" he exclaimed as the editor started back astonished and for the moment disconcerted.

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"Didn't. The Mosely Estate owned a mortgage covering the paper; you know that!" he answered quickly.

"And *you* know the *Signal* was the official organ of our party. And you've betrayed like——"

"Stop!" hissed Carter, lifting his roll of proof over Prim's head as if it had been a policeman's billy. "Don't you insult me, Mike! I don't have to take any more of your damn impudence and I won't!"

"Well, what did you sell out for?" growled Prim.

"I tell you I didn't. They owned the paper. They'll own this town inside of six months. They've got the last one of you like 'possums with their tails in a split stick! And you'll find it out. Don't talk to me about selling the *Signal*! The people who own a paper always control its policies."

"And what's become of your political convictions, Magnis, with your apron-string editorials?" the other sneered.

"A really intelligent, progressive editor, Mike, moulds public opinion. He don't get it from a village boss. I'm becoming intelligent. I'm following the trend of our times."

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"The hell you are! You're sitting on that old she-cat's footstool taking dictation!" he snorted, turning upon his heels and slumping off down the street.

If there is anything more exasperating than a Republican to an old Adam Democrat of the South, it must be the little political Eve-rib in his side turned into a maverick female suffragist with no traditions and no fears of consequences to keep her inside established party lines.

The scene which Jordantown presented by the 1st of June is as difficult to describe—the mere physical changes—as it is to interpret these changes. The square was practically deserted; the Acres Mercantile Company was not even able to hold its country trade. Every farmer made straight for the Women's Coöperative Store. The avenue was filled from morning till night with wagons and buggies and a slow-moving procession of men in hickory shirts, and their wives and daughters. They were drawn by curiosity and cupidity. Both were gratified. They received more in barter for their country produce; and, besides that, there was always a "committee of ladies" on hand to show them through and to enlighten them upon many things besides the price of commodities.

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There is a theory to the effect that women follow men. It is based upon one-sided experience for the most part. The reason they do is because so far they have never had the opportunity to lead. The present situation in Jordantown afforded this opportunity. Women were rarely seen now upon the square, but the avenue literally teemed with men. They crowded the aisles of the stores; they blocked the sidewalks. Only the victims held aloof. Acres, Thad Bailey, and the other merchants remained bitterly faithful to the square. The usual groups of loafers occupied the courthouse veranda. Colonel Marshall Adams had apparently retired from public life. He spent his days on his farm, which lay upon the outskirts of the town. He could be seen returning late in the evening, seated upon an old pacing horse like a wounded warrior barely able to keep in his saddle.

There was a report in Jordantown to the effect that real estate had fallen in value, that the workingmen were leaving, that bankruptcy and starvation stared every man in the face. But if this was so, there was no way to warn the people. The *Signal* published every week glowing accounts of the prosperity of the town. The most amazing information appeared from week to week concerning the growth of sentiment in favour of suffrage for women. The locals were filled with complimentary notices of the comings and goings of country matrons and country belles who had never seen their names in print before. And there was an occasional interview from some woman prominent in the suffragist movement.

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Martin Acres reached the infuriated end of his patience when he saw the following quotation from Mabel, who had permitted herself to be interviewed.

"Do you think women know better how to buy and sell than men?" Mrs. Acres was asked.

"Of course they do. Isn't it women who have to cook, or see to it? Then why shouldn't they know better than men what is proper food for their families? And isn't it women that make the clothes and who wear most of them? So we naturally know better what stuffs we need for clothes. If you could see the ugly dimities and gingham and calicoes we have worn in this town all our lives, chosen by colour-blind merchants who do not know what is becoming to us! Things are different here this spring, our groceries are of a better quality, and our frocks are infinitely more becoming."

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There was more in the same tenor. But Acres was too angry to read further. He rushed into his wife's room with the *Signal* in his hand.

"Did you say that, Mabel?" he shouted, thrusting the offensive page beneath her nose.

"What, Martin?" she exclaimed, lifting her hand to thrust it aside as she stared up at her husband.

"Did you give out this scandalous interview criticising me and my business?" he insisted.

"Why, Martin, how could you think such a thing! I never uttered a critical word of my husband in my life!"

"Then you didn't say it?"

"Let me see what you are talking about," she said, craning her neck to see the print. "Oh *that!* Yes, Mrs. Walton asked me to say something to show how natural it is, and how right, you know, for women to keep a store, do the sedentary things while men do the hard things—till the ground, and all that. Did you read——"

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"No, by Gad! I didn't read far enough to see that you wanted me to become a day labourer!"

"Oh, I wasn't speaking of you, dear, I was just promulgating one of the theories of our movement. I was so flattered when Mrs. Walton asked me——"

"Your movement be damned, Mabel! Enough of a thing is enough. You will resign to-morrow from this plagued movement which is carrying us all to the devil!"

"But, Martin, I can't; I'm chairman of the Finance Committee. Mrs. Walton——"

"Don't let me hear that old viper's name again in this house. She's the serpent in this town tempting the last one of you to——"

"I can't have you speak disrespectfully of our chief, dear," said Mabel with frigid dignity.

"And what's your husband, I'd like to know!"

"Why, you, you are just my husband, Martin, as I used to be just your wife!"

"Good Lord, Mabel, you are crazy! Don't you know you are helping that gang to drive me into bankruptcy!"

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Mrs. Acres was the living feminine likeness of Pin Money. She was very small, very fair, with faded blue eyes. Her clothes were always too tight, and she wore narrow ruffles like the hope, the mere hope, of feathers and wings to come.

She looked up now into her husband's face with a curious little white smile.

"I know that I am all that stands between you and ruin, Martin. I've been waiting to talk to you, to give you a hint, but our affairs are not entirely in shape. We are not ready to show our hand."

"To show her hand! And this from my own wife!" groaned Acres, beginning to stride up and down the room.

"Listen, dear," said Mabel, rising and following him. "I ought not to do it, but I will give you just one little hint."

"All right, *hint!*" he sneered.

"Call on Judge Regis to-morrow, and tell him you are very much interested in suffrage for women in this county. Say that you'd like to take your part in bringing it about. Just that, no more. And you'll see what happens." She turned her head to one side and looked at him with treacherous sweetness.

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"I'll be hanged if I do!"

"Be reasonable, Martin!"

"Don't talk to me about being reasonable. I'm one of the few reasonable beings left in this town."

"Well, that kind of reason is out of fashion now. You've got to share our reasons, Martin. Women have a rationality you men do not recognize; now you've got to."

"I will not! But suppose I do?"

"You'll get immediate relief from your present financial pressure, for one thing."

"Tell that to the marines!"

"Very well. I'll stand between you and—and ruin as long as I can, but if you don't give in I can't save you!" she whimpered.

"And what about Thad Bailey and Baldwin and Saddler and all the other merchants?" he asked curiously, with his nose pointed like a terrier who smells a rat.

"The sooner you or somebody persuades them to go to Judge Regis and make the same agreement, the sooner you'll get what you want," she replied.

"And what we don't want! Do you think for a moment the men in this county would give women the vote even if they could, Mabel?"

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"I don't think about it, Martin, I know you are going to be forced to do it, and I want you to give in before it is too late to save your credit; you'll be a day labourer before you know it if you don't listen to reason," she concluded tearfully.

"Reason! Reason! A set of crazy women dictating to men. What is reason?" shouted the furious little merchant as he rushed from the room.

The domestic atmosphere of Jordantown from one end to the other was charged with thunderstorm possibilities. The wives of all the citizens were attending hurriedly to their household affairs, and then attending to other affairs which were not household. Every day some council or committee met in the Woman's Building. They even met in the evenings. Putting on their hats and taking the latchkey, they went out as nonchalantly as ever their husbands had gone. They weathered the rage of these husbands with singular calm, very much as mothers cheerfully witness the tantrums of their growing children. The fact that they went out in the evenings was not remarkable. The women of Jordantown were pious. They attended prayer meetings regularly: they made up the congregation on Wednesday evenings. But now they neglected this service and gathered in the upper chambers of the Woman's Building. The community was going to the dogs. Every man said so to every other man he met on the square, but no man confided to the other that his wife had been out until half-past ten o'clock the night before.

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One evening Stark Coleman was in the library reading the *Signal*. His wife came in, seated herself, and overflowed the low rocking-chair on the other side of the table with her voluminous skirts. She was tall and very large. Her face was as placid as that of a clock which has just marked the last hour of the day and has nothing to do but tick-tock until bed-time.

This was the one hour of the day when they were alone together after the children had been put to bed. They usually spent it in silence. Probably no two people in the world have as little to say to one another as a husband and wife after they have been married a dozen years. Each knows all the other thinks. They become fearful mind readers of one another's most secret thoughts. Long ago they settled all their differences in the struggles of their first ardent loving years. Henceforth

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one commands while the other obeys. Everything is finished between them but their lives. These go on like weary vegetation from which their children gather the fruit.

Coleman had enjoyed several years of this kind of peace. It never occurred to him to wonder if his wife did. She had the children. He liked the quiet evenings after the noise and bustle in the bank, with his wife for a mere presence. And without being aware of the fact, he liked the diffidence with which she always awaited his pleasure, never breaking in rudely upon his rest with her feminine affairs unless he signified his willingness to listen.

During the past two months, however, he was aware of a different quality in Mrs. Coleman's silence. She held to it even when he wished to talk, answering him in monosyllables. She was preoccupied. The senseless turmoil in which the town had been thrown by the Co-Citizens' agitation was foreign to all he had ever known of her nature and retiring disposition, and he was loath to connect her with it. But he could not help knowing that she was interested, to what extent he did not know, owing to this growing reserve. Still he did his best to defend her in his thoughts. She had spent the whole of her married life bearing children very much as a tree puts out leaves every spring. This year it seemed to have occurred to her that she would not have a baby. At least she did not. Instead of that she had taken a verdant new lease on life herself, apparent in the figured muslins which she got from the Coöperative Store. Coleman attributed her activities, which he called "social," to the fact that she could "go out."

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She looked now in the soft lamplight like an enormous azalea in full bloom. She sat with folded hands humming a tune, not any known air, but one of those nasal harmonies women sometimes accomplish through their noses as a cat purrs to signify content.

The humming annoyed Coleman. Everything annoyed him these days. He fidgeted, slapped one knee violently over the other, and jerked the *Signal* open as if he would rend it sheet from sheet.

"Hu-u-m, hu-e-e-u-m hum!" droned Mrs. Coleman, her eyes fixed upon a large chromo of the Virgin Mary and the Infant Jesus hanging upon the opposite wall.

Perspiration broke out in beads upon her husband's brow. He uncrossed his legs and brought his foot down with a bang on the floor. Surely she would understand that he was disturbed. She did not. She went on.

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"H-u-m, hu-e-e-um, hum——"

He leaped from his chair, strutted into the hall and out upon the veranda.

"Hu-u-e-e hum!"

It followed him through the windows of the library, which were open.

He rushed back, his hands clenched behind his back, his whole body inflated with rage.

"Agatha!" he exclaimed, planting himself squarely in front of her. "Will you stop making a trombone of your nose?"

"You must be nervous," she said, looking up at him serenely.

"I *am* nervous, I'm nearly crazy. This town is going to hell!"

"Your language, Stark! If——"

"Don't talk to me about my language, Agatha! The native speech of hell is blasphemy, and I've been in it for two months. I should think you would have noticed the condition I'm in."

"I have."

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"Then why do you make that infernal noise through your nose?"

"I suppose it's because I am happy." She said that!

"Happy! Look here, I must prepare you for what's coming. The bank's going to fail."

"Oh, no!"

"Yes, it is. We haven't made a loan in six weeks. We've been obliged to turn down nearly fifty thousand dollars' worth of investments since that woman became director. She represents a majority of the stocks and she refuses to lend a dollar or to risk a single cent on anything in this town. The bank might as well be a miser's box. Business is at a standstill."

"Not on the avenue. We are doing splendidly in the Coöperative Store."

"We? Are you in that thing, too?"

"Nearly every woman here is, except Mrs. Sasnett, even the poorest. You have no idea how interested they are. I never dreamed so many women of all classes wanted the ballot."

"Agatha, I must insist upon your withdrawing from that bedlam in the Woman's Building. I did not suspect that you were really interested. It is unwomanly."

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"I can't, Stark. I'm chairman of the Income Committee, and——"

"Who's chairman of the Dead Cat Committee?" he sneered.

"Mike Prim, we think," she laughed.

He gasped. It was a kind of pollution for a woman even to know of Prim's existence.

"And I'm enjoying the work so much," Agatha went on.

"You are enjoying ruining your husband! That's what you mean, even if you do not know it," he accused.

"On the contrary, I'm saving you, Stark. If it was not for the prominent part I've taken in this movement, and the influence I'm expected to exert over you, you would not now be president of the bank."

"Upon my word!"

"I've been waiting to talk to you, dear, to explain. I've only waited until you should realize the situation. I knew you wouldn't listen before," she went on kindly.

"Very well, the first thing I want you to explain is what good you think this damnation Foundation will accomplish by destroying the business and credit of this town?" he said, drawing up a chair and seating himself belligerently in front of her. [Pg 123]

"We shall induce you to favour the cause of suffrage——"

"Even supposing it is possible according to the constitution of this state for us to give women the ballot, don't you know that you are only exciting antagonism, making an enemy of every voter in the county?" he interrupted.

"Until you understand, yes, possibly. But when you do realize that we hold the situation in our hands, your common sense will compel you to surrender in order to escape the pressure. It's so simple," she smiled.

"It is! It's damn simple! Only a set of foolish women could have devised such a plan! Think I'm going to knuckle to that old Walton cat! She's taking all of the cash out of the bank as fast as it comes in to run her schemes, and——"

"She is only taking the rent and interest on the property of the Foundation as it is deposited. I suppose you were in the habit of lending it."

"Of course, what do you think a bank is for?" [Pg 124]

"You'll never have the use of another dollar until you give in."

"It's all nonsense this ballot for women, Agatha; we can't give it to you, and God knows I don't want to!"

"Why?"

"It's against nature. Women lack the wisdom, the experience, the er—the shrewdness to conduct the affairs of government. You have no idea how many wheels within wheels there are."

"Yes, we have, Stark, we know all about Mike Prim! If you are wise you will not drive us to deal with Prim!" she said, looking at him queerly. "And besides," she went on, "we have had the shrewdness, as you call it, to block the business of this town. You'll never be able to do anything so long as we hold you up."

"You can't stop the commerce of a whole county with twenty thousand dollars, Agatha. You may inconvenience us for a time but——"

"It isn't the interest we count upon, you see—that's the smallest part of it. It's the way we have our capital invested. It's the land beneath your feet, the boards above your head, the stock in your bank, the goods in your stores. We've got most of it! I wish you would listen to reason, Stark!" she concluded. [Pg 125]

He had not heard half of it. He was wondering what she meant by that reference to Prim. But he caught the last sentence.

"And suppose I do listen to reason, as you call it. How would I go about it?" he asked as he would have tested the strength of an enemy, not that he had the remotest intention of following her advice.

"Go to Judge Regis in the morning and tell him that you are interested in suffrage for women. Say that you are heartily in favour of it and——"

"I'll be hanged if I do! I'll——"

The telephone bell rang. Coleman went out in the hall to answer the call.

"Yes, I'm here," his wife heard him say.

"What's the matter? Oh, all right, be glad to see you."

He returned to the library still frowning, very angry, but really thankful for any diversion which seemed to lead from an offensive discussion.

"Wonder what's up now. Stacey has just called. Wants to see me at once. Coming right over," he explained.

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"Church business. I'll go up and see if the children are comfortable. It's very warm," Agatha said innocently as she left the room.

Five minutes later Stacey came in. He looked like a good man whose salvation had been mortgaged for its full value. He parted his long coat-tails and sat down. He regarded Coleman with a watery expression. His mouth was pulled up in the middle and drawn down at the corners.

"I suppose Mrs. Coleman has already informed you?" he began in sepulchral tones.

"About what?" asked Coleman, who warily avoided admitting that he was not in Agatha's confidence.

"About what happened this afternoon at the Woman's Home and Foreign Missionary meeting."

"My wife is still upstairs with the children," he evaded.

"I saw Mrs. Sasnett as soon as it was over. She came straight to me and told me all that had occurred. Really I could not have believed such a thing could happen in a Christian community!" he groaned.

"What did happen? Has that Walton woman garnisheed the missionary collection?" asked Coleman impatiently.

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"Worse than that! I fear there will be no collection," he answered, wagging his head. Then he went on:

"Mrs. Sasnett, as you know, is a very loyal worker. She's president of the society here. She did what she could to prevent the catastrophe, but she was powerless. Then she resigned. This was Rally Day, you know. The women from all the county churches came in. There must have been two hundred of them. We looked forward to a very profitable meeting. I prayed the opening prayer myself. Then I had some calls to make. It was after I went out that it happened," the inference being that had he remained it could not possibly have happened. "The minutes were read. Mrs. Sasnett made an address. Then, as is the custom, she opened the meeting for general discussion.

"She said that before any one else had time to get up, Mrs. Walton arose and began to speak. As president, Mrs. Sasnett told me she tried to stop her when she realized the iniquitous trend of her remarks. But she was unable to do so. The women in the congregation actually clapped their hands and insisted that she should be allowed to go on.

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"That woman— I can hardly bring myself to speak of her with respect—began by saying that she had long felt called as a Christian citizen—she used the term citizen—to inform the women of our church of the mistake they were making with their missionary dues. She had too much confidence in their motherhood to believe they would be guilty of such heathen conduct if they really understood.

"The report Mrs. Sasnett gave was so vivid I'm able to quote the very words of Mrs. Walton's outrageous assault upon the church.

"This state ranks third from the bottom in the United States in illiteracy, and Jordan County ranks third from the bottom in this state! We have a public school system which lasts only five months in the year!' That was her opening sentence.

"Do you know what this means, women of Jordan County? That your children will be the bond servants of the next generation. That they will not be fitted to hold any but the lowest positions in society and in the industrial world. If your daughters marry they must marry ignorant men. If they do not marry and seek to better their condition in the world, they cannot do so, they must enter factories, become servants. They will not know how to spell well enough to be stenographers even. If your sons remain on the farms, they will be renters; they cannot hold the land. Ignorance means bankruptcy for the poor farmer now. If they leave the farm for the cities, they will become street-car drivers, porters, janitors, day labourers. The time has passed when a country boy without education can go to the city, make a hit, and become President of the United States. Instead of that they are forced to accept the lowest society the city affords. They are the victims of its vices.

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"Now listen to me. The women of this state pay more to home and foreign missions in the various churches than the state does for the common school fund. Where does your money go? To found schools in Soochow, China, and Yokohama, Japan, and in Kobe, and in Siam, and in Africa. You do not know it, but you women pay two thirds of all the money that goes to support the church. You do that much toward building churches, supporting connectional officers, prelates, pastors, missions, the whole thing, and you are not even allowed a voice in determining the way your money shall be spent. You do the "Lord's work," and the men profit by it. You pray most of the prayers that are prayed properly in secret. You furnish four fifths of all the piety—and your own children grow up in ignorance. Do you think the Lord blesses such labour and sacrifice? I tell you He will not. Look at your children, mothers, you women from the farms, who left them this very day working in the fields, when they should be in school!"

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"Mrs. Sasnett says that she wrought so upon the emotions of those women that they actually

wept.

"She went on reminding them of the sacrifices they made to raise their missionary dues. She even went so far as to call attention to their clothes, their hats that were so old-fashioned. She calculated what they contributed one way and another to the church, Coleman, as if that were a crime. Then she concluded by telling them that they could have schools nine months in the year for their own children with the best teachers if they would only do the Lord's work and pay the same amount for this purpose. And when Mrs. Sasnett tried to interrupt her, she grew violent.

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"Hold up your right hand, every woman present who is willing to pledge herself to give never another dollar to foreign missions or to the support of the church until her children have schools nine months in the year!"

"And would you believe it, nearly all of them held up their hands. Some of the old women shouted! Mrs. Sasnett said it resembled a love-feast. She said they crowded around Mrs. Walton as if—well, as if she'd been a preacher!"

He sighed and looked at Coleman, who made no comment. He was chairman of the Board of Stewards in the Jordantown church, and he was making a rapid mental calculation of the deficit that was likely to occur.

"Of course," Stacey went on, "they were excited. There will be a reaction when we remind them of their vows to support the institutions of the church. But what am I to do, meanwhile? I have not taken any collections for this year."

"Don't take them now!" said Coleman quickly.

"It may be worse later on. You know that Miss Adams has been canvassing the county for weeks, arranging those Co-Citizens' Leagues in every voting precinct. I hear that she has made capital out of that failure in Porter County where they tried to float a bond issue to secure a full school term. The men voted it down, especially the farmers. Claimed that they needed the children to work the crops and gather them. She's using that to prove that we need compulsory education in this county and that we'll never get it until the women can vote."

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"I don't know what Marshall Adams can be thinking of, allowing his daughter to get into this mess!" said Coleman.

Stacey looked at him. He wondered if this man knew how deep his own wife was in the same "mess."

"I suppose you have heard that they are getting ready for a big mass meeting here?" he ventured.

"That so?"

"Going to announce their plans, I hear."

"Well, I hope they do. When we know what they are up to, we will know how to stop them."

"You think we can?"

"Certainly! Can women force us to the polls, or compel us to vote for this silly measure? Besides, the state constitution is a perfect protection; only males can vote. This is all a form of feminine hysteria, Stacey; it's bound to pass. Just sit tight in the boat and wait. I don't mind telling you that the trustees of this—d—er—this Foundation are spending their income like water. When that gives out, they'll be at the end of their tether. They can't touch the principal."

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"But they might borrow on it," Stacey put in doubtfully as he arose to take his departure.

This was a devilish possibility of which Coleman had not thought. He was angry with Stacey for suggesting it.

"Damphule to leave the church with Susan Walton in it!" he grumbled as he went upstairs.

Agatha was already in bed. She lay with her hands crossed above the coverlid, her eyes closed, her face resting upon the pillow as serene as the epitaph of a good woman on a large white tombstone.

He undressed stealthily. He would no more have disturbed her than he would have thrust a thorn in his side. He turned out the light and lay down beside her, scarcely allowing himself the relief of a sigh.

Instantly Agatha's eyes flew open. She lay very still watching him. She could make out his nose in the dark. It was a powerfully built, upstanding nose which even the shadows of the night did not entirely conceal. Slowly she divined his features one by one. A man, even the ablest, looks very helpless in his sleep. She saw his chin drop, his mouth open. Then the silence was parted by a certain sound, exactly the same sound she had heard every night since she had married—"Ha-a-w-s-ah! Ah-ha-a-w-sah." It was a cross between the bray of an ass and the excruciating grief of a cat.

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Most men come down to this the moment they sink into the unconsciousness of slumber. It is a kind of reversion to type which they suffer without knowing it.

Agatha had often lain awake resenting the blasts which Coleman sent through his nose. But to-

night the sound touched some cord of tenderness. It reminded her of the years and years they had lived together as they could never live again. She laid her hand gently upon his breast. He gave a terrific snort, then groaned. Even in his sleep he was troubled. She, his wife, had failed him in some dear intimacy of the soul. She wondered how she would be able to hold out against him. It was no use to pretend that she was not against him. She knew that she was, that nothing but an incredible change in the order of things could unite them again as they had been; that even then they would be different. They would spend the remainder of their lives adjusting themselves to strange conditions. She began to weep softly. She was glad that at least nothing could change Stark's snore!

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One reason why more men do not join the oldest order in the world—the Brotherhood of Man—is because its constitution and by-laws are neither secret nor cryptic. Everybody knows what they are, and everybody knows what they mean. "Love thy neighbour as thyself," "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," "Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again."

There is a whole Book filled with these regulations for the governing of this ancient order. But it has the largest circulation of any book in the civilized world, and any one is eligible to membership by some profession of faith. So you cannot choose your brethren. This is directly opposed to one of our strongest instincts as social animals: the instinct of election and selection in this present world. The Brotherhood does what it can, of course, to segregate the different classes and caste of men into creeds and missions and saints and sinners. But it is not successful, and the failure has resulted, especially among men, in the founding of innumerable secret orders—to say nothing of adolescent college fraternities, where youths are trained in snobbishness, and to all the traditions and mysteries which mask these orders. There is no more virtue in being a Mason, or a Knight of Pythias, or an Elk, or an Odd Fellow than there is in being a Christian gentleman, but there is more distinction among men. So they are complimented to be chosen and elected to one of these goat-riding organizations.

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Women have never been accepted as members of these orders, though they are sometimes annexed under a separate "star," for example, or as mere useful "Rebecca" appendages. Enough "Eastern Stars," or "Rebeccas" in a town will do all the drudgery, bake all the cakes, and get ready generally for the annual celebration of the real order to which they have been annexed, you understand. But they never share the inner shrine privileges with their lords. They do not wear the royal purple, nor the red-and-gold-lace uniforms of the Knights, nor carry banners. If you see them at all they will be tacked on to the end of the parade, with cotton-ribbon badges pinned to their bosoms just to show that they sustain a meek cup-bearing culinary relation to the Sons of Heaven prancing in front.

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Still, if they could, women would indulge in the same vanity of secret orders. The trouble is that they are so situated in life that they cannot hold together, unless they are in a shirtwaist factory and join a labour union. The great majority are confined, one in a house, or in the innocuous desuetude of society, where there is no bond of common interest, but violent feminine competition. They have no issue which unites them; they do not hold together. They do well to hold the men. This keeps them anxious, tearful, deceitful, and busy, besides being dear and sweet for the same purpose.

But of all creatures they do crave mysteries. And they do love secrets—something to whisper.

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Selah Adams, by virtue of the fact that during her college years she had belonged to a sorority with Greek letter coverings and many gruesome rites within, was the one person engaged in the suffrage campaign who recognized the advantage to be derived from secrecy in organizing the women for the struggle. She perceived the appeal that this would make to their pride and ambition. It was at her suggestion that all the work of committees in Jordantown should be conducted as quietly as possible. The women were pledged not to betray plans to any one but women belonging to the League. So when women of all classes discovered that they would be received most cordially in an organization fostered by the leading ladies of the place, they hastened to join. For the first time social lines in Jordantown disappeared. The banker's wife walked down the steps of the Woman's Building arm in arm with the grocer's wife. In their first stages of growth all political movements are divinely democratic. It is not until the thing has been reduced to a working formula that some boss seizes the formula and the tyrannies of monarchical methods begin.

Selah adopted the same plan of secrecy in organizing women's Co-Citizens' Leagues in the country neighbourhoods. This was her part of the work. She was not only beautiful in a grave and dignified fashion, she had the adorable gift of youth when it came to relating herself to elder women.

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She was one of the sensations, blessing the eyes and stimulating the imagination of all travellers along country roads as she passed in her car from one neighbourhood to another. She was invariably accompanied upon these expeditions by some farmer's wife who was already an officer in some other League. She wore white linen tailored clothes and a three-cornered white turban, with a pair of white wings spread and lifted high at the back of her head, which is the one proper place for wings on a mortal. The brain of a man or woman is the only soaring part of them. Sublimated spiritual bodies may look naturally supernatural with wings attached to the

breastbone or between the shoulders behind, but the fairest, most spiritual, woman would appear a trifle ludicrous with them anywhere else unless she should be dancing a ballet with no skirts on worth mentioning. Selah achieved a sort of glorified presence very grateful to the eyes of the farmers' wives and daughters, who did not understand how much of it was due to the wings on her hat.

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Her method was simple after she had made the first round of the county, visiting the women in their homes and explaining the purpose of the Co-Citizens' Leagues. Each week the *Signal* published her itinerary. She would meet the women of Possum Trot on such and such a day. She would address the Co-Citizens' League of Sugar Valley on Tuesday afternoon. She would meet with the Co-Citizens of Dry Pond on Friday afternoon—always at the schoolhouse.

In addition to this the *Signal* invariably gave glowing accounts of the progress of the suffrage sentiment everywhere. There was no means of proving that the *Signal* was lying. It was the only paper published in the county, and it was sent free of charge to every woman in the county. But never was there a single line reporting what transpired at any of the meetings. The Odd Fellows, who were exceedingly plentiful all over the county, were almost open books compared to the secrecy and mystery attending these meetings of their women.

It is not generally known, but nearly all farmers' wives are in favour of suffrage for women. It is not known, because almost without exception they deny that they are if there is a man within earshot of their protestations. The patriarchal hold upon them is stronger in the country places, because the economic necessities of the situation uphold the patriarch and not his wife. She obeys, not only her husband, but the laws of the seasons with the labour of her hands.

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There were at first many timid souls whom Selah Adams could not draw into her conspiracy. But these were strengthened from week to week with the amazing assurances they read in the *Signal*, to the effect that Jordan County was coming out of the dark ages: "Men as well as women are impatient to see their wives and mothers and daughters exercise the inalienable right of every freeborn American Citizen!" And so on and so forth.

"Who are the men?" asked every man.

Echo answered:

"Who?"

No one believed there were any such cowardly males among them, but they could not prove it. The men were growing more and more silent, partly through anxiety and partly with grim confidence that no way could be found to force this issue of suffrage on the voters of the county. The women remained maliciously silent on this point. If they had any plan, not the most ingratiating persuasions from their nearest mankind could induce them to reveal it.

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The lives of most women on remote farms are tragic beyond belief. They appear natural and commonplace only because the victims are trained in endurance, not in the vocabulary of expression. There are thousands of farmers' wives in every rural community who endure hardships undreamed of in the sweatshops of commerce. There are no laws to protect them from long hours, nor any to protect their children. They average sixteen hours a day, while the hardest working man takes at least two hours at noon in which to rest. They may complain of backache, of rheumatism, of any number of stitches in their sides, but they never complain of the long, long day's work. On the contrary, if the worst comes to worst, especially during the harvest season, they think they will get up an hour earlier the next morning and maybe "get through" what they have to do.

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When one of them dies of the strain, she just dies. The obituary notice of her as the wife of so-and-so never tells how she just "gave out," having borne eight children and having done the cooking, washing, ironing, and sewing for the family, besides "helping in the fields."

It was to these women that Selah came with her definite plans for better conditions for them and their children. She brought them the refreshment of social intercourse, and united them in a secret common cause. It was difficult to accomplish against the order and very nature of their lives. Sometimes she failed.

One day she called at a little farmhouse hidden away from the public road in one of the mountain coves. There were no children about, no noisy cackling of cocks and hens, no flowers in the yard, not a sound to break the awful silence of the accompanying hills. It was as if life died there long ago and left behind only the rickety skeleton of a house as a mournful epitaph.

But inside, an old woman sat mending bags. She wore a gray calico slip, tied in around the waist with her apron strings; both were ragged, abominably soiled. Her hair was white; strands of it hung around her neck from a little knot twisted tight on the back of her head. Her face was ghastly white, wrinkled, toothless, but the pale blue eyes, rolling wildly, senselessly, in the cavernous sockets, gave her an expression so terrible that Selah started back involuntarily as she lifted her head, stared at her, and went on with her mending on the ill-smelling meal sack. This was the wife of Jake Terry.

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The Terrys had had nine children. They all worked in the field. None of them had ever gone to school. They were poor with a desperation of poverty undreamed of even in the slums.

But Terry had a sawmill. At last when his sons were old enough to work, he began to make

money. The wife and daughters did the farming. Then, quite inconveniently, Mrs. Terry took leave of her senses. She was violent in her efforts to throw herself in the mill pond. She was sent to the asylum and remained there three years—until she was no longer violent. Then she was brought home, still witless, but able in a mechanical way from long habit to do the things she had always done. Terry thought that this was better than hiring some one. His children had married or "run off" and left him. So the old wife went back into the treadmill. She was obsessed with the idea of work. She would not sleep. Sometimes she would spring out of the bed in the dead hours of the night, kindle a fire in the slatternly stove, and "start breakfast." She was always hurrying from one task to another.

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"How do you do, Mrs. Terry?" Selah ventured, still standing in the doorway.

"My hens is all dead!" cried the old woman.

"I've come to see you about something," Selah said, advancing.

"No, you ain't; nobody ever comes here. My children are all dead, too!" she wailed.

"They are not dead, they are married," Selah said soothingly.

"My hens is all dead, and my children is all dead, and I'm dead, too. Women don't live, you know, they jest work." This last in a low, confidential tone as she stretched the wrinkles of her face into a ghastly grin. "I've heard of you," she went on. "You think you are going to make the women live same as men. You can't do it. We ain't for ourselves, we are jest made for them. I wouldn't mind it so much if my hens hadn't all died!"

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Selah fled from the house, climbed into the car, and commanded the chauffeur to drive on.

"I knew it wasn't any use for you to go in there," said Mrs. Deal, staring at the girl's stricken face. "Did she tell you all her hens were dead?"

"Yes, but it wasn't that, nor her forlorn condition; it was something else. She said she was dead, too: 'Women don't live you know, they just work!' Ah, it was awful!"

"We've had four women from this settlement sent to the asylum just like that," Mrs. Deal added after a pause as they moved swiftly along the fragrant June road.

It was Saturday afternoon; they were on their way to a meeting of the Co-Citizens' League at Possum Trot. Mr. Deal, a prosperous farmer, was also the justice of the peace in the tiny mountain village; and this also happened to be the day when he retailed justice in small sentences in the usual neighbourhood squabbles.

Court had adjourned as they entered the village. Men stood in groups before the one store, talking in undertones as women passed—all going in the direction of the schoolhouse, which stood exactly opposite. Deal was "dressed up"—that is to say, he wore his coat, collar, and tie. He stood combing his whiskers and looking over his steel-rimmed spectacles at Mrs. Deal, who descended from the automobile and followed Selah into the house.

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Presently another man flirted his head to one side, spat on the ground, and looked at Deal, whose face above his whiskers was puffed out in a fat smile.

"Helendamnation, Squire! what does all this female gaddin' and gittin' together and whisperin' mean?" he snickered.

"Nothin'!" answered Deal.

"What we goin' to do about it?"

"Nothin'!"

"But they tell me they're fixin' to vote or bust."

"Well, they won't! it's just a piece of devilment started by Susan Walton to pretend she's earnin' her salary as trustee of that fool Fund the Mosely woman left. She's puttin' the Adams girl up to this. 'Tain't nothin'. Susan Walton ain't the husband of my wife nor the head of my family. What I say goes in my house!"

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"I don't know, things is gittin' mighty queer, especially the women. My wife's quit talkin'! I hear they're fixin' to boycott us durin' the harvest season if we don't vote for 'em!"

"I've been married twenty years, and my wife's never refused to do what I tell her yet. I don't reckon she'll begin now by refusin' to cook for me and them that sets at my table."

During this exchange of opinions both men had made their way slowly across the street and entered the group of men who were gathering about the schoolhouse door.

Far down in the cool brown shadows within, Selah Adams was standing upon the teacher's rostrum. She was speaking in low terms which could not be heard from the door, which had been left open for coolness. Fifty women sat below her in creaking split-bottom chairs, with faces as rapt and attentive as if they had been listening to a revival sermon. Some of them were mature maidens of thirty years; some were young wives who had reached that stage of feminine dissolution when women cease to curl their front hair and permit their short back locks to hang down in a doleful fringe upon the back of their necks. The majority of them, however, were

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elderly matrons. Their shoulders had that noble giving droop which only women show who have reached the sublimity of nurturing many children at their breasts. They were all moving palmetto fans with the serene air of fat, ugly old goddesses who had passed out of the desire of man and had now returned to their own woman's sanity.

"Squire, I don't like them goings on in thar!"

"What you talkin' about?"

"That gal, she looks damn dangerous seditious. I can't hear what she's sayin', but them women they can, and they look like they was bein' converted. They got the same expression females always have durin' a revival, when they've made up their pra'r-meetin' minds to do what the preacher tells 'em if they burn at the stake for it! I tell you that gal's got 'em. They'll follow her as if she was a 'pillow' of cloud by day and of fire by night, leadin' 'em through the Red Sea to the Promised Land!"

"I'll show you who one of 'em will follow!" exclaimed Deal, advancing to the door.

His long forked shadow fell across the silent figures in the audience as he thrust his head in and craned his neck until he caught sight of Mrs. Deal seated at the far end of the first row. [Pg 150]

"Molly!" he called sternly.

The even rhythm of Molly's fan did not change. She did not so much as turn her head. Her large blue eyes upturned beneath their thick lids never wavered from Selah's face.

"Molly, come out! I'm waitin' for you!" shouted the Squire in a louder, unmistakable voice of command.

Selah paused, nodded to a young girl, and murmured, "Close the door, Mary," very much in the same preoccupied tone she might have used if she had said, "Mary, shoo the chickens out!" It was a splendid triumph for Selah.

The next moment a roar of laughter went up in the street beyond the closed door. A red spot flamed upon Molly Deal's cheeks, but her fan went on swinging gently to and fro. Her eyes were still fixed upon Selah's smiling face.

The meeting was important. The day and even the hour was fixed when the women would announce the plans by which they were determined to obtain suffrage in Jordan County. So far the men had not received a hint as to what these plans were. The whole movement seemed senseless and hopeless, merely causing furious antagonism and outrageous embarrassment; for Mrs. Walton's perversities as director of the bank had been felt far and wide in the country districts, where farmers were not only unable to secure loans, but many who had mortgaged their land to the Mosely Estate now found themselves facing the possibility of foreclosure. [Pg 151]

There was to be a mass meeting in Jordantown the first Saturday in July. Selah informed the Leagues of this as she made this tour from one community to another. The purpose of the great mass meeting was fully explained, and plans were laid for getting as many people to attend as possible.

At last, as the shades of evening fell, the women filed out of the schoolhouse, strange, exasperatingly potential figures to the Odd Fellow husbands who had waited impatiently outside for them. Molly Deal climbed silently into the red-and-green spring wagon beside her equally silent husband. Selah waved her hand prettily from the car as she passed up the road in the direction of Jordantown. She was fairly contented with the progress made in the County Leagues. She had worked indefatigably for nearly three months, organizing, teaching, and inspiring the proper spirit of life and hope, as she called it, in the women. [Pg 152]

But the test was yet to come. All depended upon the success of the mass meeting, its effects upon the men. Would they understand the gravity of refusing to coöperate with the women? She refused to contemplate the disasters, the bitter suspense and disappointment if they did hold out. It seemed strange that not a single man had guessed the method the suffragists would adopt to win. She was excited, elated, hopeful, and at the same time she was sad. She thought of her father, so bereaved by her conduct. Her eyes filled with tears at the vision of him mournfully silent in the evenings, too much cast down to even reproach her with her perfidy. Then she began to laugh as a certain thought came to her. He had ceased to show his diminished head on the streets of Jordantown. He had been sober for two months, spending all of his time attending to his farm. He was like a good soldier, who in the face of a decisive battle indulges in no weakness, keeps his wits about him. She was sure he was camping in the spirit beneath her walls, waiting for the citadel to fall. They practised the fine honour of noble enemies. He never asked her any question about what was going forward in the suffrage ranks. He even broke his own eggs at breakfast with the proud air of a man who neither asks nor gives quarter. [Pg 153]

"Father," she would say at the breakfast table, "let me break your eggs!"

"No, Selah, I'm an old man, I've come upon evil days in my own house, but I am still able to attend to my simple wants. Pray don't let me detain you"—seeing that she wore her hat, and that the abominable car would be purring at the curb.

"Very well, then, I'll be off, but expect me back before night," she would say, kissing him on the forehead.

"No, I do not expect you home before night. I never do. It would not surprise me if you didn't get in before midnight. I'm prepared for anything now!" he would answer without looking up.

Nevertheless, she made it a rule always to get back from her engagements before he came in.

"Is that you, father?" she would call down the staircase.

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"Yes, just came in, but I didn't expect to find you here," he would answer accusingly.

It could not be said that they kept the peace. Rather they kept a truce, smiling on the part of Selah, coldly dignified on the part of the Colonel.

One evening she came down unexpectedly, and surprised him sneaking in with one enormous bunch of June roses which he had brought in from the farm.

"How lovely, and how sweet of you to think of me!" she exclaimed.

"I did not think of you, and these are not for you. If I'd been gathering flowers for you, Selah, I should have brought bachelor buttons!" he answered as he passed out into the darkened avenue, still carrying his posy ludicrously upside down.

It was another month before she or any one else knew what he did with them.

She had tried to put Bob Sasnett out of her thoughts, but not very successfully. Love is the finest logic nature ever achieves. Nothing, no argument however reasonable and expedient, can withstand it. She thought continually of him as an enemy she must face sooner or later. She loved him—at least she feared that she did. But she was still so young that she longed for sacrifice. She wished to give the whole of her life to women. She could not do that and give the whole of her heart to Bob. She did not reflect that this is the law of women's hearts with which no privilege of citizenship can interfere, and that all the other women for whom she sacrificed herself would be doing just this thing if there should be enough men about to receive their hearts. One thing was certain: she had "grown." She was no longer the girl she had been, shrinking, timid, yet filled with longings to live her own life, to do things. Three months ago she had but one outlook, that of marrying Bob Sasnett and spending the remainder of her days as Mrs. Sasnett's daughter-in-law—that is to say, in total eclipse. Now, she reflected, as the car rolled silently toward the distant courthouse dome, showing gray above the trees of Jordantown, now some day she might become a lawyer and plead a case beneath that very dome!

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"Good evening, sweet Goddess of Liberty! Deign to bend your far-seeing eyes upon your humble slave!"

"Mr. Sasnett!" exclaimed Selah, as he advanced from the deep shade of an elm tree beside the road, where he appeared to have been standing.

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"No, not 'Mr. Sasnett!' I left him an hour since, vainly contending with Susan Walton, in the effort to gain her consent for the bank to extend the loan to the Acres Mercantile Company another six months, and——"

Selah laughed.

"Don't interrupt, Minerva! I say that I left this fellow Sasnett imploring her, paying her undue compliments with this charitable end in view, while Acres waited outside the door of the directors' room. This poor adventurer whom you behold bound at present to your chariot wheel, is none other than 'Bob,'" he concluded, smiling up at her with whimsical audacity.

"But what are you doing out here at this hour? It's almost tea time," she exclaimed with well-simulated innocence.

"Waiting for you," he replied, accusing her innocence with a stare so bold that she blushed.

"That was kind of you. Get in!" she said, thrusting the door of the car open and making room for him on the seat.

"It is not my idea to return to the er—goddess-ridden metropolis of Jordantown as the obvious captive of Minerva," he replied, backing off. "I ventured to hope that you would descend and walk back with me," he explained.

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"I can't," she objected, "I always try to be home when father comes, and it's already late."

"Old boy won't be in for another hour. He's having his wheat thrashed; met one of the men taking more sacks out just now. He says it will be nine o'clock before they finish."

Still she hesitated, looking down at him.

"Come!" he insisted, "I've something very important to tell you."

"Are you sure it's important?" she asked waveringly.

"Absolutely! Whole future of your movement, as you call it, may depend upon it!" he assured her with suspicious gravity.

"Very well, then, I'll come," she agreed, allowing him to assist her down into the road.

"Drive on, Charles!" Sasnett commanded, surreptitiously placing a dollar in the negro's hand to

insure a quick departure.

The car sprang forward, disregarding all speed limits, leaving the two lovers veiled in yellow dust, which lifted presently, wind blown, rolling out over the fields beyond like dried sunlight. The road lay before them, a golden band between widespreading trees, fading into the shadows of evening.

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They walked in silence, Selah waiting for what he should tell her, wondering vaguely if at last the men had divined their plans, and if this was the news he brought. She feared it might be something disagreeable, since he was in no hurry to begin. She looked at him surreptitiously, and flushed to find that he was also regarding her in the same sidewise, secret manner.

"Well, what is it?" she demanded quickly to cover her embarrassment.

"What is what?" he asked innocently.

"The important something that you have to tell me."

"That I love you," he answered shamelessly.

"Oh!" exclaimed Selah, looking unutterable reproach.

"Isn't that important? Do you think the ballot will satisfy your whole heart and nature, make life one glad song? Will women cease to love men when they can vote? Not on your life, dear! Look at your Co-Citizens now. Didn't Susan Walton have a husband who honoured and obeyed her till the day of his death? Doesn't the fact that they have husbands add to the interest Mabel Acres and Agatha Coleman have in the suffrage question? Do you think poor Miss Mary Heath would refuse a proposal of marriage, even if she controlled every man's vote in the town? Believe me, those little adolescent Citizenesses-to-be, the seminary girls, do not primp and pile their curls bewitchingly over their ears because they want the ballot. It's the daily petition they make of themselves for lovers!"

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"That is your egregious masculine conceit, Bob, imagining every woman is thinking of winning lovers and husbands. We love ourselves. We do our best to look well because we have a satisfaction in our own appearance!" Selah exclaimed with indignant heat.

"Of course, and I must say you bear charming witness to your own sweet perfection, dear," he laughed, "but you don't see my point."

"I will not! It is not a point anyway, it's—it's—a joke you make at our expense!" she accused.

"No, beloved, it really is well taken, my position. But your mind is so obsessed, all of your thoughts are so focussed upon one of the mere incidents of life, that you are missing the real issue of happiness. Let me explain."

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"You can't do it, but you may try," she conceded.

"Love, Selah, is the one thing that must always come to pass in the hearts of men and women. It doesn't matter under what conditions they live, they must love or die unfulfilled in the very purpose for which they were created. It is a season in the life of us, dear, a *season*, you understand—the time when nature blooms in us, when the fragrance of our very spirits ascends in tender emotions, in the perfume of language, in looks such as the gaze with which I now behold you, and which makes your cheek one anthology of roses!" he concluded, as the warm colour rose like a red wreath beneath her ivory skin. "But listen, dear, the season passes. The rose fades. The strength of man changes, passes into the strength of achievement or into the dead leaves of failure. Then where will we be, Selah, you and I?"

"Well be doing our share of the world's work, sanely and well, I hope," she answered quickly.

"Granted, though it's an awful gamble. But suppose you succeed. Suppose you win everything and more than you are now contending for. Suppose at forty you are nominated for Congress from this district, do you think I'd ask you then to be my wife? Not if I had failed as much as you had succeeded! I would not, because I could not love you as I love you now. Don't cry! But I swear I will not marry you then!" he ended, laughing.

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"And do you think I'd want to marry you then?" she asked, amazed.

"Yes, I know you will; if not me, some other man. You will have discovered that doing the world's work even well is a thankless job, and that fame and success are the husks that swine do eat compared with even the tears and griefs of love. But you will not be lovable then, Selah; you will only be horribly intelligent and capable. I can see that, the way you are tending now. You will have gray hair, thin, too. You will draw it back like a conviction, and wind it in a knot at the back of your head as tight as a narrow-minded conclusion. You will have lost the damask flush of youth. I think your cheek bones will stick up, too prominent, you know, as if your character had knobbed up under your eyes. There will be a staircase of political wrinkles upon your forehead. Your eyes— Oh, my God! I cannot bear the vision I see of you, with your eyes showing like gray stones casting eddies of wrinkles! And you'll be lank, the skeleton left by the passing of a great and successful movement undertaken for the emancipation of woman!"

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"And if I married you, how should I look at forty?" asked Selah with shrewish shrewdness.

"Oh, my beloved, I don't know. I should not know even then. You would be my wife, the mother of

my children—as sacred as that—the memory of my youth distilled, the citadel of my mature years, the alabaster box of my hopes and faith in the life to come! I couldn't see you at all, Selah, for you would have become everything to me, and a man can't see or foretell that much."

She looked at him, her eyes shining behind her tears like distant windows of light through the rain on a dark night. How could she keep faith with the Cause of Woman while the Cause of Man stood before her so gallantly portrayed!

"Bob," she whispered, "I—you are so dear. You cannot know how dear you are to me. I've just found out myself, but——"

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"But what?" he cried impatiently.

"You must wait. I can't, I just can't give you my whole heart now. It seems to have gone from me, some fierce energy of life. I've got to do this thing that we've set out to do before I can promise, before I'll know myself."

"Well, for God's sake, hurry then and do it," he answered, not pleased.

"You'll help, won't you?" she asked softly.

"There are times when I fear I'd help you commit murder if the victim stood between us, Selah, but really I don't know how I can help you win this fight for suffrage in Jordan County. The whole thing seems so far fetched. I can't see what you are driving at. You have effectually tied up things for the men, but what good will that do? I don't want to discourage you, but I can only think harm will come of it without your having accomplished your purpose."

She was singularly serene under this discouragement. She even changed the subject.

"When do you begin your campaign as candidate for representative?" she asked as they entered the avenue.

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"Two bodies cannot revolve in the same orbit. I'm waiting until you quit revolving in the county. I hear you make the Co-Citizens write their names in their own blood when they sign the vow not to reveal the secrets of the League. Is that so?" he laughed.

"Not quite so bad as that. But they do keep the vow, don't they? Not one of you will know our plans until we reveal them ourselves at the mass meeting. But you are going to run for the legislature?" she insisted, returning to that.

"I'm not sure; I'm waiting to see what Prim's going to do. I——"

"We will take care of Prim," she put in.

"Oh, you will? And which one of you has been chosen to murder him, you or Susan? Nothing short of death, I think, will rid this town of him."

"We shall not resort to capital punishment unless it is absolutely necessary," she laughed, "but I think I can assure you of one thing: Prim will not be a candidate."

"Thanks!" he said, but without conviction. "Does Prim know he is not to run?" almost sarcastically.

"Not yet," she laughed.

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"Good night, Minerva!" he murmured, kissing her hand.

"Good night, Bob, and remember you can go ahead. Prim will not be in your way."

"I'll wait, thank you; I'm young; I can afford to take my time gathering county laurels for my brow. And no decent man could oppose Prim without getting smeared with political slime. Sticks, too!"

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CHAPTER III

One very hot morning early in July Mike Prim came up the staircase of the National Bank Building. He stood for a moment in the hall, breathing heavily from the exertion of bearing his great weight up the steps. He took off his straw hat and mopped his red face. Then he glared at the door of Judge Regis's office.

"That's the long-legged old devil's horse who's put the women up to all this damnation!" he growled as he entered his own office and closed the door.

He took off his coat, then his collar and tie, flung them with his hat on a chair, and sat down to his desk. Then he unbuttoned his cuffs and rolled up his sleeves. He placed his elbows on the desk and his enormous folded chin in his two hands. So he sat, a monstrous figure, with his great paunch filling his white shirt like a concealed balloon, with his hideously hairy arms naked halfway, and his thick hands purple beneath the weight of his amorphously fat face, his little reptilian eyes staring at the opposite wall.

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He was at his wits' end. He was not making good at his business, and he knew it. What was worse, everybody else knew it. He had had few callers of late. Campaign collections had dwindled to almost nothing. They were getting bold in their refusals to contribute at all. "Why didn't he do something?" "What were they paying him for if it was not to do something?" "Was he going to let a set of fanatical women down him and take things in their own hands?" These were some of the questions they asked him which he could not answer satisfactorily. In vain he advised patience, and even more vainly he vowed he could and would stop the women's dampfulness at the proper time. They did not believe him; they pointed out that business had already stopped. From being the one who threatened, he had become the one who cajoled, while every man who came in offered him veiled threats instead of dollars.

He was furious, and he was obliged to conceal his fury. He hated these rebellious men even more than he hated the upstart women. He was determined, if the opportunity offered, to be revenged upon them for their insolence. But how? This was the matter he revolved in his snake-licking mind as he stared at the wall, and he was in a hurry to reach a solution of his difficulty. Stark Coleman had called him before he was out of bed that morning to say that there had been a citizens' meeting the night before, and that he, Coleman, would be up to see him at ten o'clock. In the first place, why had he not been notified of the citizens' meeting. He usually presided on these occasions when the tutelary deities of Jordantown gathered in Coleman's office, or more frequently in his own office, to discuss the ways and means by which the principles of the Democratic party could be made to contribute most liberally to the liberty of man, especially in Jordantown. In the second place, the tone of Coleman's voice was cool, offensively so. He detected a note of command in it. Suppose Coleman should be coming up to inform him of certain changes in the policy which would govern the manifestations of the democratic principle? In short, suppose he was about to be dismissed from his office? True, it was an office without a name, but it had been a lucrative position.

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There was a knock upon the door. He flung himself back, looked hastily at his watch and saw that it was barely nine o'clock. Coleman must be anxious, he thought, to keep an appointment in such a hurry, which was a good sign.

"Come in!" he shouted, whirling around on his swivel chair to face the door.

It opened with a quick inward thrust and Susan Walton walked in. She carried her everlasting little black reticule in one hand, and in the other she held—of all things in this world—an empty brown-linen laundry bag, swinging by the strings!

"Good morning, Mr. Prim!" she said, looking at him pleasantly over the top of her spectacles, as if it was the most natural thing for her to drop in informally.

He was too amazed to return her salutation. He stared at her, then he bowed his thick neck and stared at the flabby bag. He did not even offer her a seat, but she was in no way disconcerted by that. She chose a chair, drew it up in front of him, sat down, and crumpled the bag up in her lap.

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"I came to see you on a matter of business, Mr. Prim," she said, coming briskly to the point. "I suppose you've been expecting me?"

"No," he managed to say.

"I'd given you credit then for more sense than you seem to have, for I'm the only hope you have now."

She said that in tones of conviction.

"You are the last person in the world I'd look upon as a—hope!" he returned slowly, widening his lips into a grin which was also a sneer.

"You are at the end of your rope. You've been so for a month. You can't squeeze another dollar out of this town for your campaign fund. The men have lost confidence in you."

"How'd you come by so much useful information?" he interrupted.

"I have it. That's the point. You'll never dare announce yourself a candidate for representative. You gave that up three months ago."

"What makes you think so?" he asked, fixing his eyes upon her face with deep reptilian concentration.

"I don't think, I know it. You went on with your collections for private, personal reasons. But you did not deposit a single dollar of it in this bank, and you knew from the day Sarah Mosely's will was read up here in Judge Regis's office that you did not have a ghost of a chance to be elected, and you made up your mind that day not to run."

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"Your powers of penetration are well known, Madam, but again I must ask you how you have penetrated so far into my secret thoughts, granting of course for the sake of argument that you have done so?" he said, now in complete possession of his faculties, and coolly on guard.

"I saw you listening at Judge Regis's office door the day the will was read, and the day we first discussed our plans for winning equal suffrage for women in this country. You are the only man in it who has known positively from the first that we can do it!" she answered, and showed her nerve by keeping her gaze fixed imperturbably upon him.

He bent forward, his face slowly purpling with rage, his fists clenched, his upper lip skinned back from his teeth as he hissed: "You are a—you did not see me!"

"I didn't see you, that's a fact, but I saw your shadow in the ground-glass door, cast by the light from the window at the end of the hall. Nobody could mistake it for any other shape who'd ever seen you, Mike Prim!"

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They sat for the briefest moment measuring each other, he with incredible ferocity, and Susan with her lips primed, grimly fearless.

"Now that we understand each other, let's get down to business!" she began.

"To business?" he snarled.

"Yes, this is the situation: you can't run for the legislature; you don't want to! You have squeezed every dollar you can get out of the Democrats here." She sniffed at the word. "They have lost confidence in you as manager of their political ends. They've begun to suspect your game. It's only a question of hours, I might say of one hour, before you get your walking papers, so to speak; for they are mad, Mike Prim. They are as angry as men always are when they realize that they've been duped and robbed——"

"If you were not a woman you couldn't sit there and say such things to me. Anyhow, I won't stand it! What's your business, as you call it?" he exclaimed, heaving his huge bulk from the chair and coming to his feet.

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"Sit down! Sit down, Mr. Prim. I am here to make you a definite proposition!"

"Make it!" he growled, still standing, his feet wide apart, glowering down at her.

"The Co-Citizens' Foundation is prepared to purchase your papers——"

"My papers?"

"Yes, your letters, your political correspondence."

"Think they are valuable?"

"We can get on without them, but we are willing to pay a reasonable price for them. We know that they are valuable to a certain extent."

"How?"

"You remember your conversation with Stark Coleman the day you threatened him with certain letters you had of his and of other prominent citizens here. Miss Adams heard what you said on that occasion."

"So she's added eavesdropping to her other accomplishments?" he exclaimed venomously.

"Not eavesdropping, but Coleman left the door slightly ajar; she had come back up here to get some papers from Judge Regis, and, hearing such interesting conversation going on, naturally she listened. What will you take for these letters?" she demanded.

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"I'd have to think about it," he said, sitting down.

"I'll buy them now or not at all" she said.

"Aim to publish them?" he asked, grinning. He was beginning to be in a very good humour.

"That's our affair, but I don't mind telling you that we do not intend to publish them."

"And if I refuse?" he held out.

"In that case you must abide by the consequences, you and the men who wrote the letters. We shall publish all we know about them, what you yourself claimed for them, and leave the next grand jury to make the proper investigations."

"Humph!"

"Naturally we should try to see to it that you did not escape," she added.

"What will you pay for them?" he demanded.

"Five hundred dollars for every scrap of paper in this desk, and immunity for you—for turning state's evidence you know!"

"They are worth more than that," he said, taking no notice of the insult.

They bargained back and forth. Prim was really in a hurry to close the trade. He wished to be able to handle Coleman when he came in. It was five minutes to ten o'clock when they finally closed the deal.

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"But I can't take a check," he objected suddenly.

"I thought as much. I've brought the money. A thousand dollars is too much. This bag isn't half full!" she exclaimed, shaking it down, drawing up the strings, and looking at it. Then she counted out the bills on the desk, every drawer of which was now empty.

Some one came up the stairs and walked briskly forward in the hall outside.

Prim had barely time to snatch the fluttering green and yellow bills before Stark Coleman entered the room, without the ceremony of knocking.

It would be difficult to say which showed the greater surprise at seeing the other, he or Susan Walton, tightly clutching her bulging laundry bag.

"Good morning, Mr. Coleman," she said, waddling rapidly toward the door.

"Good morning, Madam!" he returned.

"Fine large day!" She said this from the door as she went out.

Coleman turned angrily to Prim, who was standing reared back, feet wide apart, hands in his pockets, grinning broadly. [Pg 176]

"What's she doing in here?" he demanded.

"Wanted me to help the cause!" he answered shamelessly.

"What'd she have in that bag?"

"Dirty linen—wash day. Taking it to the Co-Citizens' Laundry!"

"Didn't know they had one."

"Yes, they have. She's soliciting patronage!"

"Well, I'll be damned! You don't mean to tell me that woman was up here to get——"

"My soiled office linen," Prim obligingly finished. "She was, and I let her have every scrap of it," he answered symbolically.

He turned, seized his collar and tie, and reached for the button at the back of his neck.

"Look here, Mike, things aren't going right in this town," Coleman began, having lighted a fresh cigar without offering one to Prim, who went on adjusting his collar. "We had a meeting last night and the general opinion was that you are not holding the situation down as we expected you would."

When there was no reply from Prim, who was holding his head back and struggling to make ends meet over his front collar button, he went on: [Pg 177]

"We don't blame you, but the fact is we want to make a change."

"Good idea!" said Prim.

"Glad you feel that way. Knew you would, but the boys thought you might be willing to dispose of the records and papers that have accumulated here." Coleman looked up and caught Prim's eye fixed upon him. "They're of no value to you. And we are prepared to offer you, well, more than they are worth. We——"

"Want my memoirs, do you?" laughed Prim, seizing his coat.

"That's it, for the archives, you know. How much will you take for them?"

"I wouldn't sell them to you, Stark Coleman, for all the cash you could rake and scrape out of your measly little old Co-Citizens' Bank!" he answered, thrusting his arms into the sleeves of his coat, hunching it up on his shoulders, and making for the door.

Coleman could not believe his ears, and now he could not believe his eyes. The man was actually leaving the room. He took the cigar from his mouth, and lifted his hand in a commanding gesture. [Pg 178]

"Hold on, Prim!"

"Hold on yourself if you can! I'm off! A henpecked town is no place for a *man*!" he sneered, banging the door.

Coleman stood a moment stupefied. He heard Prim thundering downstairs. Then suddenly he returned to his senses. He rushed to the desk, and pulled out one drawer after another. Not a scrap of paper remained in a single one of them.

"My God!" he groaned, burying his face in his hands. He had no doubt at all as to the quality of the linen in Susan Walton's laundry bag.

Meanwhile Prim was standing on the platform of the vestibule train tying his cravat. He had not taken the trouble to buy a ticket. He had actually swung on board the train as it moved slowly out of the depot along the track which ran directly behind the National Bank Building.

The Fourth of July fell on Saturday, the day wisely chosen by the Women's Leagues for their mass meeting. Bills were posted advertising this "historical event" far and wide in every post office, and country store, in mills, gin houses, and at every crossroad in the county. [Pg 179]

Co-Citizens' Mass Meeting

Great Historical Event!

At Jordantown Hall, July 4th, 3:00 p. m.

Speeches by Prominent Leaders of the Movement!

Announcement of Election Plans!

Everybody invited!

If anything could have added to the crowds which gathered in Jordantown every year on this day, these impudent circulars were calculated to do it.

"Election plans! by gad!" exclaimed Squire Deal when he found one of the obnoxious bills posted on the door of the little courtroom in Possum Trot. "Who said there was going to be an election, I'd like to know. Darndest piece of impudence I ever saw in my life!"

"Maybe they'll tell us what their rickrack political platform is, too!" said another farmer.

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Nevertheless, they all went to Jordantown on the appointed day. It was their custom to go, and they were determined that this woman foolishness should not interfere with their long-established habit of celebrating the Fourth.

The sun rose blistering hot. Clouds of dust rolled above every highway to the town, and out of it moved a long procession of vehicles, buggies, wagons, even ox carts, all filled with men, women, and children.

Jordantown was doing its best to look glorious. It had thrown off for a moment the lethargy of business depression. Flags waved, the Town Hall was literally swathed in yellow bunting, with a great white canvas stretched across the top of the doors, upon which was printed in black letters a foot long:

Co-Citizens' Mass Meeting!

3:00 p. m.

Don't Miss It!

The square teemed with life and glory. Mules brayed, horses neighed, dogs yelped, man hailed his fellowman. Matrons in calico frocks and sunbonnets walked side by side with their daughters in white muslin and pink sashes, with gala hats on their young heads. The avenue was a sight and a scandal. Strings ran across from house to house high above the heads of the throng, upon which little yellow flags with "Votes for Women" hung thick as waving goldenrod upon October hills, alternating with the red, white, and blue larkspur of the national colours. The Women's Coöperative Store was a seething beehive of activity. There was a cake and lemonade stand stretching across the entire front, where, for the first time in the history of glorious Fourths, you got your lemonade and gluttonous wedges of cake free of charge. This may or may not have accounted for the fact that, as the day advanced, the avenue outdid the square in popularity. The latter was barely able to hold its own by means of a very tall greased pole with a ten-dollar bill sticking on top of it, which was to be had by any boy climbing the pole. The crowd yelled itself hoarse as urchin after urchin slid back to defeat. Finally a little fellow, who had surreptitiously smeared the inside of his breeches with pitch, reached the top and seized the prize. The crowd went wild, threw its hats high in the air over this performance, then, with the fickleness of its nature, it turned again toward the avenue and the free lemonade dispensed by the fairest maidens in Jordantown. But before the stream could turn the corner, a long-legged black pig greased with the lard of its forbears was turned loose—to become the property of any man who could catch and hold him. A wild scramble ensued. The pig darted this way and that, slipped nimbly through detaining hands, until, by much handling, his grease was rubbed off, and he was held, a squealing trophy, by a young farmer. One after another the attractions of the square failed, and the crowd surged into the avenue, where it was fed to repletion—all free of charge. The stomach of man is singularly elemental in its cravings, and not subject to political or any other influence which fails to meet this demand.

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Long before three o'clock in the afternoon the Town Hall was filled and jammed to its doors with men and women. The farmers were in such high good humour that, laying all masculine prejudice aside, they were determined to witness the last feature of the day's entertainment, or rather they would indulge in the humour of gratifying their masculine prejudices at the mass meeting. They stamped their feet, they hooted, they looked at the still empty stage and demanded to know where were the leaders of the "Crinoline Campaign." They whispered and nudged each other and shouted ribald laughter.

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At ten minutes to three o'clock a line of women filed on the rostrum and took their chairs at the back of it. They were the representatives of the Co-Citizens' County Leagues. There were twenty-five of them, and they ranged in age and dignity all the way from Granny White, who was seventy, to the youngest bride from Apple Valley. Granny White looked like a crooked letter of the female alphabet in a peroda waist frock with a very full skirt, and a black silk sunbonnet upon her old palsied head, which wagged incessantly. The bride wore her wedding dress, which was now a trifle too tight for her. She looked like a pale young Madonna scarcely able to bear the weighty honour which had been thrust upon her. Some of the other women were enormously fat,

some were pathetically lean, but they all faced the jeering crowd below with amazing assurance. They represented the harvest of all the virtues and sorrows and sacrifices of women for centuries, and all unconsciously they showed it with a calm accusing majesty.

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The audience, which was largely composed of men, stared at them and grew suddenly silent. They recognized their wives and mothers in those serene faces, and manhood forbids that you should hoot at your own blood-and-bone kin womenfolk. So they changed the subject. They began to talk, a perfect hurricane of inconsequential comments on every imaginable subject except the subject of women and their rights.

Promptly at three o'clock Judge Regis came through a side door upon the rostrum, accompanied by Susan Walton and Selah Adams. The women took their places in two empty chairs among those at the back; the Judge approached the table in the middle of the rostrum, stood for a moment, a tall and elegant figure, looking out over the sea of faces below him. Then, lifting the gavel, he rapped for order.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began in slow, distinct tones, "I have the honour and privilege of opening the most remarkable meeting ever held in this county or state. We are about to make history, which is becoming to this memorial day of American Independence. I shall not address you upon the momentous issue at hand. Others far more capable will speak to you presently on that. I shall only state the purpose of the meeting.

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"We are assembled here to learn for the first time how the brave women who have done such valiant work for the cause of suffrage in this county have succeeded in their efforts beyond their most sanguine hopes—"

"Hear! Hear! Ha! ha! Oh, haw-haw, haw!" The wall shook with the cannonade of masculine mirth.

The Judge waited patiently. Then he rapped loudly for order, and in the lull he went on, not hurrying:

"—and to reveal to you the plans by which this county will have the great distinction of being the first one in this or any other Southern state to give the ballot to our women, who have proved by nearly three hundred years of devotion and virtue and sacrifice for us and our children their worthiness for this trust.

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"The speakers of the afternoon are Miss Selah Adams and Mrs. Susan Walton. I have the honour to introduce Miss Adams, who will address you upon some general aspects of the question under discussion."

"Adams! Adams! Adams!" yelled the audience.

But before the Judge could retire or Selah could rise from her chair, one of those incidents occurred which sometimes inform a public occasion with humour and pathos. At this moment Colonel Marshall Adams entered the hall. He had not heard Judge Regis's "opening remarks," but he had spent an unusually glorious Fourth. He was magnificently befuddled, and for the first time in three months he was the regnant intoxicated ideal of what a gentleman and a soldier should be. He was a man among men, equal to any emergency, capable of leading a forlorn hope, or entering the lists for a lady's hand. He had forgotten, if he had ever known, the object of this meeting; but when he heard his name loudly called, he understood at once; he recalled the fact that he had something eloquent and momentous to say.

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He squared his shoulders, lifted his old standard-bearing presence, and made for the rostrum. Before any one could stop him—if any one in the roaring throng would have done so—he stood beside the table, one hand resting heavily upon it, the other thrust into the tightly buttoned breast of his yellow seersucker coat.

He was received with deafening applause. He waited, as he must have waited long ago at the charge of his regiment when it climbed the breastworks of the enemy in the roar of a thousand guns, his head erect, his nostrils dilated, his eyes glistening—only slightly wavering upon his Fourth of July legs.

"Ladies and gentlemen: It was with surprise not unmixed with pardonable pride that I heard you calling my name upon this momentous occasion. But never has Marshall Adams failed to listen to the call of his country in dishtresh!" he cried, making a determined effort to control his inebriated aitches and waving his sword arm defiantly.

"And we are in dire distress, my countrymen! Never since the bloodstained days of eighteen sixty-five have we been in such need of courage. We face a terrible situation. I address you in behalf of these fair woman whom we shее before us, and who are about to suffer the irreparable loss of their sphere. No greater calamity could befall this great nation. For four long years, through the snows of winter and the heat of summer, we fought for them, my countrymen, to preserve their homes, their traditions, their honour and pride as the fairest flowers in this fair land!" Deafening applause, during which the Colonel waited, sanctified by his emotions; then waving his hand for silence, he went on:

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"And we did preserve them! The Yankees relieved us of the burden of a few unprofitable slaves. They slew the best and the bravest of our men. They took our wealth and reduced us to unimaginable poverty and hardship. But, thank God, we saved our women! We returned to them ragged, wounded, footsore, and despairing, and we found them faithful as the stars in their

courses. More inspiring than 'pillows' of fire by night and of cloud by day, they led us back to hope and love and prosperity. They were the trophies of the brave which no enemy could wrest from us——"

"Oh Lord! listen to him! That thar's a man talkin' up thar!" shouted an old veteran.

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"—and we went on shaving 'em, gentlemen! There has never been another country in the world reduced to ashes by war where the women were not forced to work shoulder to shoulder with the men afterward to reclaim her. But we treasured our women. We did the work, we kept them comely and fine. We educated them when we could not educate ourselves. We poured our wealth at their feet—and that's why they have the smallest feet in America, gentlemen, the fairest skin, the softest palms."

There was a slight sniffing to be heard here among the farmers' wives, but he went on to his conclusion:

"And now, my comrades, we must save them again; they are about to be dragged from the shanctity of the home, from the altar of the fireside, into the grime and dirt of publicity. There is a movement on foot to thrust the ballot, gentlemen, into their unsteady hands! My God! My God! where is your gallantry and courage? Where is your manhood that you think of giving these gentle creatures your work to do, and lose what a hundred to one Yankees could not take from you?"

He looked about him with terrific scorn.

"I did not think that I should ever again appear in their dear defence. I'm an old man, my glory has departed. You shee before you—you shee—before—you——"

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He lifted his hand to his forehead as if suddenly he was dazed, sunken into the dream of years. His knees bent, he would have fallen. Selah sprang swiftly forward, placed his arm over her shoulder, and supported him. He sank slowly into the chair she had just vacated. She made sure swiftly from long experience that he had only reached the coma of a familiar state. Then she went back to the front of the stage and began to speak.

The Colonel looked up vaguely, saw her standing there as one remembers a vision in a dream.

"That's it, Selah, my love! Give 'em 'Curfew Shall Not Ring To-night,'" he murmured, as his head sank upon his breast.

"You have listened to the brave speech of a brave gentleman, my friends," she began, "and I would not if I could subtract one lovely word from that lovely tribute to the men and women and order to which he belongs. What he has said is the truth, raised to the eloquence of a martial soul. Until the present time we women, as he told you, have figured chiefly in religion, poetry, and romance. We have been that part of the imaginations of men which creates creeds, poetry, windmills, and fiction. We have no reputation for any other form of existence. We have been purely imaginary beings living in physical bodies for just men. Our character is a legend invented by men; it could never fit a real human being. Yet we have accepted it, and tried to believe in it. You have indeed kept us, but we have not lived at all except for you. We are not the authors of a single standard governing our lives. Do you understand what that means, you men who live only according to your own will and purpose?"

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They listened to her in silence. They studied her in amazement. But we do not applaud an accusing angel, and they did not applaud Selah, who stood so elegantly fair and tall, a slim figure with earnest dark eyes bent in passionate appeal upon their faces.

"It was men," she went on, "who divided women into three great classes—virgins, wives, and prostitutes, a purely physical classification. You commanded chastity. We have never had the right to choose it. Women have never been real parents. They are only the mothers of the children of men. The small, almost negligible influence they have over their sons proves that. After the years of childhood are passed sons sustain only a sentimental relation to their mothers. They are inspired by them merely as religion or poetry inspires. Your institutions, social, moral, economic, and political, do not represent us nor our needs. But they represent you men.

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"Every civilization is a bachelor civilization, with good or bad provision in it for the protection of women. But we do live, and like other sentient beings we desire to express ourselves in life, not merely in poetry. Listen, men," she said, bending sweetly forward like a lily in the golden gloom. "After they had knowledge, the first pair, man and woman, went out of the garden *together!* But you, with your beautiful but mistaken chivalry, have gone out and left us in the garden, the helpless, kept women of your love and desires. We wish to come out, to be with you. We must come! Once we have tasted knowledge, once we know what better things we are for, we must follow you to the ends of the earth. This everlasting garden where you keep us is no place for a thoughtful person. It is too limited by innocence and idleness. We are no longer innocent, we know the same things you know; we have the same education, the same thoughts, the same aspirations. Disobedience is not always a sin. When the first man and woman tasted of the fruit of knowledge, they simply assumed a terrific responsibility. But they assumed it *together!* You are withholding from us this right to live by your side. We are doing too much, or nothing at all. And you are not sharing justly with us. We are losing our old places in your hearts. After all, this is not the golden age of poetry and knights. The very pedestal upon which we once stood in your regard has been overturned by realities. We have ceased to be your ideals dearly cherished. It is not our

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fault nor yours. No one is to blame. This movement of women is as natural as any other growth. We are migrating out of the legendary into the real; we are passing from sentiment and romance into history. And we have arrived! Nothing can stop us. You only shame yourselves, your manhood, and your honour if you oppose us. We must succeed because we are right!"

She turned suddenly, and went back into the wings.

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"What'd she say?" asked a man in a hoarse whisper. "Gol dern if I know! Foreign language to me!"

"The volypuke of the Woman's Movement! Didn't understand one word she said!"

"Well, you'll understand what's coming now or I'll eat my boots!" the other whispered.

He nodded toward the stage, where Susan Walton stood, flat-footed, fat, belligerent, her mouth primped, holding her head very much as if she wore horns instead of the black bonnet tied under her chin. And she was looking over the top of her spectacles at every man, seemingly straight in the eye.

"Don't look at us that way, Susan! Makes us feel like we'd been in washing without your permission!" called some one, imitating a little boy's whine. There was a gale of good-natured laughter.

"Men and women," she began in her high virago voice, "we have listened to two very fine speeches this afternoon, one upholding the sentimentality of the past, the other mystically prophesying the sentimentality of the future. I'm an apostate from the past, and a disciple of the future. I've got one foot in the grave and the other foot on the ballot for women. I shall not deal in sentiment or prophecies, but in cold facts!"

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"Told you we'd understand her, boys!" shouted a voice.

"Go it, Susan! we all know you, and we don't have to give you no quarter!" yelled a bearded farmer standing in the back of the hall.

"Yes," screamed the old lady, shaking her fist at him, "and I know you, Tim Cates. You've been living on your wife's land ever since you married her. And you've made her mortgage it to pay your debts!"

"Git a chip somebody and take po' Tim out on it. She's done ruin't him!"

"Come ag'in, Susan! you drawed blood that time!" shouted the voice.

"I'm coming, and I've got the facts with me!" she cried, flirting her head in the direction from which the voice came. "I know every man in this hall: how he lives, how he votes, what he owes, what he can't or don't pay. I know how hard you farmers work your wives, harder than you do your beasts, in spite of all that fine talk we listened to from Marshall Adams, and I know how little you give them, how little they are allowed to spend. There's one of you standing in plain sight of me right now who took the fancy bedquilts your wife and daughters pieced last winter and sold them to get money to pay his taxes, though he is worth five thousand dollars! You needn't dodge!" she laughed shrilly. "I'll not call your name if you keep quiet and behave. But if you men don't stop your fuss and listen to what I have to say, I'll tell everything I know about you."

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The titters of the women became distinctly audible for the first time in the indignant silence which followed this threat, for they knew that she was as good and could be even worse than her word.

"Three months ago Sarah Mosely died and willed all of her property to the Co-Citizens' Foundation Fund, with the distinct command that the interest on this fund shall be spent to get suffrage for women in Jordan County," she began again. "The property of this Fund consists in mortgages on nineteen thousand acres of land in this county, in the ownership of most of the business houses around the square in Jordantown, in various loans, in 60 per cent. of the stock of the National Bank, and in other properties, including the *Signal*. That is to say, gentlemen, if we do not own this county, we control enough of the property in it to have a right to say how it shall be taxed and governed. And while there is a law against bribing voters or intimidating voters, there is no law against foreclosing these loans and mortgages, nearly all of which are overdue. And I give you my word as one of the trustees of this Fund, that every one of them shall be foreclosed as fast as we can do it if our rights as citizens are not acknowledged with all the privileges that go with citizenship!"

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"And that is not all! Day before yesterday we purchased from Mr. Mike Prim the written records of the political workings of the Democratic party in this county during the past three years—all the letters written by you men who control the county districts with the money you received or were to receive for your services, and other letters even more interesting—but not a single statement of what you actually did with these contributions. I have not had time to go over Mr. Prim's memoirs carefully, but as near as I can make out it has been a blood-sucking business. Some of you have paid as high as three hundred dollars a year to the campaign fund, and some of you have received as much as a thousand dollars for delivering this town, say, in an election, while your wives pinched and scraped to pay the preachers and support missions in foreign fields! The appropriations for county schools have been bitten into with outrageous expense

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accounts which took thousands of dollars from the already meagre appropriations.

"I say these papers and letters are now the property of the Co-Citizens' Foundation; and if necessary we shall use them, spend your reputations as ruthlessly and extravagantly for our ends as you have spent the taxes of this county for your political purposes.

"The time has passed, men, when we are to be deceived by that foolish fallacy by which you have so long even deceived yourselves: that women win by their gentle influence over you. They don't! If they influence you at all it is for your good, not theirs. We are in the position to use the same lever that you have always had—power—and we shall use it. If you defeat us, you must destroy yourselves, your credit, and your reputation.

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"You have been boasting at the impossibility of our even getting this issue as far as the polls. You have been challenging us to tell you how that can be done. That's what we are here for this afternoon: to tell you, and to leave you perfectly free to act as your judgment directs."

The audience moved, drew its breath, crossed and uncrossed its knees, spat its tobacco quids upon the floor, and craned its neck to see her better, to hear more distinctly what she had to say. Every man in Jordan County had been waiting for this news for three months.

"How did you get stock low in this county fifteen years ago?" she asked, and waited.

"Please, Marm, we voted on it!" whimpered the same waggish voice.

"But before you voted, you got up a petition signed by three fourths of the voting register of the county, didn't you? And then you submitted the petition to the Ordinary of the county, who by the laws of this state advertised the election to be held not sooner than thirty days. And you got prohibition the same way! Twenty, fifteen years ago this was the only way to close saloons and grogshops that were open at every crossroad and on the streets of every town and village. We have a state-wide temperance law now as the result of local option laws that were enforced first until public sentiment against liquor was sufficiently strong to control state legislation."

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She paused, opened one palm, and brought her other fist down upon it with a smack that could be heard to the back of the hall, as she exclaimed:

"That, gentlemen, is the way we shall win suffrage for women in this state. We shall get it first by *local option* in this county! Other counties will follow your illustrious example and get it the same way, until the boundaries of these counties shall touch, and the experiment is no longer an experiment but an assured success!"

The women cheered. They made as much noise as they could, they waved their handkerchiefs, and emitted little feminine chirrupings. But the men sat silent, staring in amazement at the little fat old lady who was smiling at them like a gratified mother.

"Now I have told you, and all you have to do at present is to sign that petition," she went on very pleasantly. "We have already secured to-day and yesterday the names of many of the leading citizens of Jordantown. And you will find just outside the doors of this hall two gentlemen whom you all know very well, Mr. Stark Coleman and Mr. Martin Acres. Each of them has a copy of the petition to be signed, and enough extra sheets of paper for every man here to sign his name.

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"Now," she concluded, "we will close this meeting by singing the national hymn, not only because this day commemorates the signing of the Declaration of Independence, but because, for all years to come, we shall look back upon this day as the one upon which the men of this county signed the petition which calls for liberty, rights, and justice for women!"

The twenty-five women at the back of the stage came forward and gathered about her.

"My Country 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty——"

they sang, their voices rising high and keen, unaccompanied by a single bass note. The women in the audience joined in. Colonel Adams, who had slept peacefully since his own masterly effort to protect the ladies, started now, sat up, saw the ecstatic faces of these women, arose, stumbled off the stage. He was satisfied. The dear creatures were singing! Nothing more becoming to women than song! Meanwhile, the men filed out bustling, and whispering, with Acres and Coleman heading the petition. That put a different face on the situation. One was the president of the bank and the other was the leading merchant of the county. If *they* favoured the thing, far be it from the others to oppose it—at least not the petition.

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"Signing this here thing ain't votin' for women. We don't have to go to the polls on election day!"

This whisper went the rounds as they stood in line, looking curious, grinning suspiciously at Coleman and Acres, who had in fact stationed themselves on either side of the door, at little writing stands upon which the petition lay spread, with an ever-increasing list of names beneath as one man after another "put his fist to it," chaffing one another with grievous comments as they did so. And most of them secretly determined that this was the last they would have to do with the iniquitous thing.

But they were sadly mistaken. From opposing suffrage, many of the leading men were now pushing the petition. Coleman, Acres, and Bob Sasnett toured the county in their automobiles to secure signatures. They literally took the movement out of the hands of the Co-Citizens in their

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efforts to hasten the election. There was a tremendous spreading of the news of events going forward in Jordan County. The press of the state published extracts from the *Signal*, with numerous comments, later with serious prophecies of the future effects of this experiment so gallantly undertaken by the men of Jordan County. Reporters were sent down for interviews, which they got from Coleman and Acres, who calmly assumed the glory and responsibility of bringing about the coming election. For the first time in their lives they figured in the headlines of city newspapers, with their pictures on the front page. Susan Walton laughed at their vanity till her fat stomach shook like jelly.

Bob Sasnett figured as the first candidate in Jordan County who would run for office on the crinoline ticket. "Mr. Sasnett is extremely optimistic. He feels sure that he will be elected by an overwhelming majority of the crinoline vote. He is a very handsome young man," was the comment beneath his picture in a great morning daily.

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The necessary number of signatures to the petition having been secured at last, the election was duly advertised for the 16th of September.

The women were hopeful, but they were by no means sure of success. The Foundation did not hold mortgages on all the farms by any means, neither were all the farmers implicated in the Prim papers. The large majority of them was still composed of free men of blameless characters, and with reputations for stubbornness that were alarming. Still, public sentiment was undoubtedly overwhelming in favour of suffrage now, and the county women held frequent secret League meetings at which they discussed plans, the great question being to get their husbands to the polls at all.

The 16th of September dawned upon Jordan County like an irritable old woman with a shawl over her shoulders and a broom in her hands. The sun rose clear, but there was a hint of frost in the air and the east wind was blowing. Ironweeds and goldenrods upon the hills bent low before it. The cotton fields looked dishevelled with white locks flying. The cornstalks, stripped long since of fodder, stood with down-hanging ears like rows of soldiers at attention with knapsacks upon their lean backs. It was as if, overnight, Nature had suddenly got in a hurry to shift her scenes and change the season.

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Whether it was the brushing, brisk, windy character of the day, or the mood of the women owing to other circumstances, no one will ever know, but it is already a matter of history that upon this day every woman belonging to the Women's Co-Citizens' League had a fit of housecleaning. They cooked breakfasts for their respective families in a frenzy, scolding shrilly. They boxed the ears of their little boys, drove their little girls to the churning without mercy, clattered the breakfast dishes furiously, and in various ways indicated to their lords and masters that the day belonged to them, to them exclusively, and that no man could hope to remain in peace within range of their mops and brooms till every vestige of summer dust and dirt was removed, every feather bed sunned till it swelled tick tight, every quilt aired, every rug beaten, every floor scoured, and they themselves relaxed, exhausted, purified, and satisfied at the end of the day.

I say only their Maker could have told what inspired the women of Jordan County to undertake these arduous labours upon this particular day. Women have instincts to which the east wind appeals strongly. It excites their neuralgic energies. On the other hand, it was a curious circumstance, discovered afterward by an exchange of confidence between the desperate male victims, that this cleaning rage was carried on almost exclusively by the members of the Women's Co-Citizens' League in each of the voting districts of the county.

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When a mere society woman desires for any reason to avenge herself upon the man nearest to her in the relations of life, or to bring him to terms, she may engage in a discreet flirtation with some other man. She knows how to exile him from his home with a reception or a bridge party. But when a good faithful wife makes up her virtuous mind to humble her man and declare her own supremacy, she pins an ugly rag tight over her head to keep the dust out of her hair, doubles her chin, draws her mouth into a facial command, tucks up her skirts, moves the furniture out of the living-room, dashes twelve gallons of hot suds over the floor, leaps into it with an old stiff broom, and begins to sweep. At such a moment the most timid, man-fearing woman becomes august. Her nature undergoes a swift change. She is no longer herself, she belongs once more to the matriarchal age when she carried man like a sack on her back and dumped him where she pleased, when she pleased. The most tyrannical husband immediately abrogates his authority when he sees the symptoms of this frenzy developing in her. He takes to his heels and remains away until she puts things in order and returns to her senses. This is the proof of a queer ineradicable cowardice in every man, that the bravest and hardiest of them who does not shrink from marching barefooted through winter snows to meet the enemy in overwhelming numbers will fly before the face of one woman who has made up her mind to wet his feet with scouring water if he does not get out of the way.

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Before nine o'clock in the morning the domestic entrails of Jordan County were out of doors, piled in the sun, hanging upon the clotheslines, flapping in the wind. The swish of wet brooms could be heard in every house, mingled with the sharp voices of scolding women. The air was filled with clouds of dust, the sound of sticks in muffled strokes upon rugs and carpets like the drums of an invading army. These were answered by the strumming of other sticks similarly employed in other farmyards.

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It was a fact, five hundred men had been rendered homeless for that day at least. Nevertheless, they were holding out. An hour later only one ballot had been cast at the polls in Possum Trot. The crowd thickened outside the courthouse door. Men eyed each other quizzically, morosely, some even avoided each other's questioning glances.

"Where's Jake Terry?" some one asked helplessly.

"Who, Terry?" answered Bill Long. "He was the first man here after the polls opened. Said if it was the last ballot he'd ever cast he'd vote against woman suffrage, went and put it in first for an example to the rest of us!"

"Susan Walton ain't got a mortgage on his sawmill, or he wouldn't be so gol dern frisky about votin' ag'in her!" growled Deal.

"What we going to do about this business, anyhow?" demanded one nervously.

"We could get drunk," suggested another. "There's nothing that takes the starch out of women and shows 'em their place quicker than that."

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"But we can't stay drunk. We got to go home some time or other and have it out with 'em after we are sober and penitent," put in still another victim philosophically.

At this moment Tim Cates rode into the edge of the crowd, his mouth stretched in a broad grin, and his goatee working like a white peg in his chin.

"Boys," he shouted, rolling out of his saddle, "you'd as well give it up and take your medicine. I met a man coming from the Sugar Valley just now, and he 'lowed that out of a hundred and fifty votes down there this morning there wan't but three cast ag'in suffrage for women, and one of them was challenged. Susan Walton's got a man stationed at every precinct, with a list of the names of the men in that district that ain't registered nor paid their poll tax, ready to drop 'em if they try to vote!"

"Tim, step up to the store and telephone to Dry Pond and Calico Valley and see how the election is going."

Cates stepped briskly. He was one of these meddlesome persons who would sell his birthright to gratify his curiosity. Presently he returned, cupped his hands over his mouth, and trumpeted the news.

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"Dry Pond, forty-two ballots cast, forty-two for suffrage, nary one anti!" This joke was greeted with a groan.

"Calico Valley, seventy-four ballots cast, sixty-eight for suffrage, six anti-suffrage! Fellow at Dry Pond says the women are beating their feather beds for miles around, and the men air scared to death. He says——"

A tall, well-dressed man, past fifty years of age, joined the group. This was John Fairfield, the only gentleman farmer in the community, and one of the few men whose wife was not implicated in the Woman's Movement. She was an invalid, nearly blind. Fairfield had been the understudy of Prim in controlling the political affairs of the community. He was very popular.

"Mr. Fairfield, how are you going to vote?" some one yelled.

"Yes, tell us what you're going to do!"

"A speech. Give us a speech!" came from a dozen husky throats.

"We air po' wanderin' sheep to-day, away on the mountains wild and bar'!' Put yo' crook around our necks, John, an' lead us home with our tails behind us, so as our Bo Peeps'll know us when we come an' gladden us with their soft black eyes! Ain't that the way the poetry runs?" snickered a drunken wag, dropping on the post-office steps and gazing up with a befuddled air at Fairfield, who had removed his hat and ascended the steps.

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"Gentlemen," he began, "you know me."

"Yes," sobbed the wag, "we know you and we know ourselves, unfortunate creatures that we air—an' we thought we knowed the women in this county. We've dandled some of 'em on our knees. We've drawn 'em in times past to our unworthy bosoms—but now all is changed. We've lost 'em! Where, oh, where——"

"Shet up, you darn fool! and let us hear what he has to say."

The "darn fool" laid his head in the dust, and gave himself up wholly to his grief.

"I was about to say," Fairfield began again, "that you know me——"

"Yes!"

"Shet up!"

"—and you know I have always stood for what was right among you——"

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"Always! Give me five dollars for my vote last 'lection, ginerous man!"

Fairfield lifted his voice and hastened to drown these revelations of his generosity.

"I believe in woman! She has been the 'pillow' of cloud by day and fire by night——"

"Candle in the window, John, don't forget that!"

"—that guides us through the wilderness of the world, and now she has become the bright new star of our better destinies! We must follow her——"

"Dangerous to monkey with female stars!"

"—No man ever loses his way who trusts such women as we have among us."

"Sampson, oh, Sampson, listen to that!" cried the voice at his feet.

"For thirty years I have served one woman faithfully. I owe everything I am and everything I have to this service."

Every man present had a vision of the little, frail, white-haired woman who lay in his house helpless and blind. Never before had he referred to her, but they knew his devotion. He lifted himself in their regard by this one sentence. There are moments when even the demagogue may show the halo of a saint. Fairfield, henchman of Prim, never suspected it, but this was the crowning hour of his life, the one moment when he stood without fear and without reproach like a true knight.

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"My advice to every citizen present is that he vote this day for the women who have cast so many ballots for us in their prayers!" he concluded, bowing to their cheers.

Immediately after there was a rush for the polls.

In Jordantown the day passed quietly. The women were in strict seclusion. All the "prominent citizens" were working earnestly at the polls for the cause of suffrage. At last the hour arrived for counting the ballots. The town had gone overwhelmingly for suffrage for women, but the returns were slow in coming from the country precincts, and great anxiety was felt about the issues there. The rumour was current that the farmers were determined not to vote at all.

About seven o'clock some one came swiftly down the courthouse steps, and rushed across to the National Bank Building. In five minutes the square was in an uproar. Men shouted to men: "We've put 'em in! We've put the women in!"

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Stark Coleman snatched up the 'phone on his desk.

"Agatha, my dear, it's glorious news! Thank God, we've won by a majority of 633! You are now a voter in Jordan County!"

He hung up the receiver and ran out to Acres's store. At the same moment Sam Briggs, who was now a diligent clerk in Judge Regis's outer office, thrust the door open and shouted:

"They're in, Judge, by a good 633 majority!"

"All right, Briggs! finish that list of election expenses. We want to publish it in the *Signal* tomorrow!" he said quietly, as he arose and put on his hat. "I'll go over and tell Mrs. Walton. Think I've earned that privilege, anyhow!" he added, smiling.

"You did it!" exclaimed Briggs, "you worked the whole thing and put it across!"

"No, that speech she made in July did it," he said.

"It was a jo-darter all right, that speech!" laughed Briggs to himself as he went back to his desk.

On his way to Mrs. Walton's residence, the Judge passed two men.

"Bill," one of them was saying to the other, "we can't never get rid of our wives any more, nowhere, not even when we attend a political convention. Apt as not my wife will be my alternate!"

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"Apt as not, you'll be hers, you damn fool!" he retorted.

As the Judge came up on the steps Mrs. Walton appeared in the door. At the sight of him there she threw up her hands and cried:

"Don't tell me we are defeated, John Regis, I can't bear it!"

"Susan, you may now run for sheriff of this county, there are enough more women than men in it to elect you. And you've got 'em in your pocket!" he concluded, laughing as he seized her hands.

"Oh!" she sobbed, sinking down into a chair. "I thought this day would never end. Such suspense!"

"Showed the white feather, too, didn't you? I called at your office early in the afternoon and you were not there," he teased.

"I couldn't stand it. I felt that if we should be defeated, I must hear the news in my own house—in reach of my bed!" she sobbed, half laughing.

"If I was twenty years younger, Susan, I'd ask you to marry me this night by way of celebrating our victory," he said, looking down at her.

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"If I was twenty years younger there'd be no such victory to celebrate, John," she replied, "so you wouldn't have asked me!"

"You should see Coleman and Acres. They are taking all the credit of the election, strutting like fighting cocks on the square!"

"Let them have it. I'd rather the world should think the men gave us the ballot willingly, and that it should never be known that we beat them out of it," she said, heaving a sigh of relief.

A young man and a young woman were seated behind the vine on the veranda three doors down the avenue. His arm was about her waist, her head upon his shoulder. The moon was doing what she could to cover them with the mottled shadows of leaves.

"Could you manage it in two weeks, dear? I want you for my wife before I begin my own campaign! We'd make a honeymoon of it then, canvassing it together!" he pleaded softly.

"I'll marry you, Bob, but not for such a honeymoon as that! Oh, I'm sick and tired of politics. I never want to hear the word again. I'll just barely vote for you, that's all!" she sighed.

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"Upon my word," he laughed, drawing her closer and kissing her. "I thought you'd be keen for the canvass."

"Bob!" she said, sitting up and looking at him solemnly, "I'll make a confession to you, now it's over and we have won; it's been horrid, from first to last. When we are married I want to sit at home and darn your socks—you do wear holes in them, don't you?" She laughed hysterically. "I believe it would relieve some outraged instinct in me if I could iron your shirts! Isn't it awful! I *crave* to do just the woman things—to serve you and father. I feel as if nothing else will ever naturalize me again as a woman!"

After an ineffable pause, during which her lover had laid a laughing tribute upon her lips and brow, she added:

"Poor father, I wonder where he is?"

"Saw him going down the avenue as I came up, with an enormous bunch of flowers in his hand," Bob told her.

"Poor father" was, in fact, approaching Mrs. Sasnett at that moment, who was seated in mournful but resplendent grandeur upon a rustic bench beneath the trees in her yard.

She was indignant at the day's doings. She had been indignant for months, but she thanked God that she was still a lady, and she was determined to remain one, to which end she had contributed that day enough to make up for the deficit in the women's missionary collections of her church. And she had dressed herself in purple and fine linen by way of making out that she was a lady and nothing but a lady.

"Colonel Adams!" she exclaimed softly, as the Colonel approached.

"Madam, the sight of you is grateful after what I've been through this day!" he said, kissing her hand, and depositing the flowers upon the ground at her feet.

"Oh! Colonel, no one can have had more sympathy with you than I have felt during these trying months," she sighed.

"I have felt it," he returned, parting his coat tails and seating himself beside her.

"No one could have sympathized with you so keenly in your sorrow," she murmured.

"I divined as much. I have suffered!"

"I know!" she breathed.

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"My one pleasure has been the offering I have placed upon your doorstep each evening," he sighed.

"So the flowers were from you, then?" she said, gazing at the bouquet so significantly laid now at her feet.

"I trusted your woman's intuition to know that," he answered, with a shade of offended dignity.

"I suspected, of course, but how could I know? You never confessed."

"Who else in this shameless town would have the sense, the feeling, to approach a lady with



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"Bob, I'll make a confession to you. It's been horrid, from first to last. When we are married I want to sit at home and darn your socks—you do wear holes in them, don't you?"

flowers—they give 'em the ballot instead!"

"Don't speak of it!" she implored, lifting her hand tragically as if to ward off a blow.

"But I *must* speak of it, Lula," he exclaimed, seizing the despairing hand. "As much as I hate to mention a matter so indelicate, I must, because it concerns us." They looked at each other like two old doves.

"How should it matter to us?" she asked sadly.

"Because if we do not unite against this awful situation, we—well, we are lost!"

She sighed, as if she saw no hope anywhere in the moonlight.

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"Will you marry me, Lula?"

"Oh! Colonel Adams——"

"Under ordinary circumstances I'd never dare hope for such a boon. I'm unworthy of you. No man can be—but consider what will happen if you refuse?"

"What will happen?" she exclaimed.

"You must pass the remainder of your days, the sweetest, most beautiful years of a woman's life, in intimate daily contact with a suffragist, with a young woman who votes like a man!"

"God help me! What do you mean?" she cried in genuine alarm.

"Bob's going to marry Selah! that's what I mean. You'll have to live with them. And if you don't marry me, I'll have to live with them!"

THE END

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