

BRAND

WHITLOCK

HER INFINITE

VARIETY

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Her Infinite Variety

«Public Domain»

Whitlock B.

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To My Mother

I

AMELIA came running eagerly down the wide stairs, and though she was smiling with the joy of Vernon's coming, she stopped on the bottom step long enough to shake out the skirt of the new spring gown she wore, with a manner that told she had it on that evening for the first time. Vernon hastened to meet her, and it was not until he had kissed her and released her from his embrace that she saw the dressing-case he had set down in the hall.

"What's that for?" she asked in alarm. Her smile faded suddenly, leaving her face wholly serious.

"I have to go back to-night," he replied, almost guiltily.

"To-night!"

"Yes; I must be in Springfield in the morning."

"But what about the dinner?"

"Well," he began, helplessly, "I guess you'll have to get somebody in my place."

Amelia stopped and looked at him in amazement.

"I thought the Senate never met Mondays until five o'clock in the afternoon?" she said.

"It doesn't, usually; but I had a telegram from Porter an hour ago; there's to be a conference in the morning."

They started toward the drawing-room. Amelia was pouting in her disappointment.

"I knew something would spoil it," she said, fatalistically. And then she added, presently: "I thought that Monday afternoon sessions never lasted longer than a minute. You never went down before until Monday night."

"I know, dear," said Vernon, apologetically, "but now that the session is nearing its close, we're busier than we have been."

"Can't you wire Mr. Porter and get him to let you off?" she asked.

Vernon laughed.

"He isn't my master," he replied.

"Well, he acts like it," she retorted, and then as if she had suddenly hit upon an unanswerable argument she went on: "If that's so why do you pay any attention to his telegram?"

"It isn't he, dear," Vernon explained, "it's the party. We are to have a very important conference to consider a situation that has just arisen. I must not miss it."

"Well, it ruins my dinner, that's all," she said, helplessly. "I wanted you here."

Vernon had come up from Springfield as usual for the week's end adjournment, and Amelia had counted on his waiting over, as he always did, for the Monday night train, before going back to his duties in the Senate. More than all, she had counted on him for a dinner she had arranged for Monday evening.

"What time does your train leave?" she asked, in the voice of one who succumbs finally to a hopeless situation.

"Eleven twenty," he said. "But I brought my luggage over with me, so I could start from here at the last minute. I'll go over to the Twenty-third Street station and catch it there."

Amelia had had the deep chair Vernon liked so well wheeled into the mellow circle of the light that fell from a tall lamp. The lamp gave the only light in the room, and the room appeared vast in the dimness; an effect somehow aided by the chill that was on it, as if the fires of the Ansley house had been allowed to die down in an eager pretense of spring. It was spring, but spring in Chicago. Sunday morning had been bright and the lake had sparkled blue in the warm wind that came up somewhere from the southwest, but by night the wind had wheeled around, and the lake resumed its normal cold and menacing mood. As Vernon sank into the chair he caught a narrow glimpse of the boulevard between the curtains of the large window; in the brilliant light of a street lamp he could see a cold rain slanting down on to the asphalt.

“How much longer is this legislature to last, anyway?” Amelia demanded, as she arranged herself in the low chair before him.

“Three weeks,” Vernon replied.

“Three—weeks—more!” The girl drew the words out.

“Yes, only three weeks,” said Vernon. “And then we adjourn *sine die*. The joint resolution fixes the date for June second.”

Amelia said nothing. She was usually disturbed when Vernon began to speak of his joint resolutions; which was, perhaps, the reason why he spoke of them so often.

“Of course,” Vernon went on, with a certain impression of relief in his words, “I have another session after this.”

“When will that be?” Amelia asked.

“Winter after next. The governor, though, may call a special session to deal with the revenue question. That would take us all back there again next winter.”

“Next winter!” she cried, leaning over in alarm. “Do you mean you’ll have to be away all next winter, too!”

The significance of her tone was sweet to Vernon, and he raised himself to take her hands in his.

“You could be with me then, dearest,” he said softly.

“In Springfield!” she exclaimed.

“Why not?” asked Vernon. “Other members have their wives with them—some of them,” he qualified, thinking how few of the members cared to have their wives with them during the session.

“What could one do in Springfield, pray?” Amelia demanded. “Go to the legislative hops, I suppose? And dance reels with farmers and West Side politicians!” She almost sniffed her disgust.

“Why, dearest,” Vernon pleaded, “you do them a great injustice. Some of them are really of the best people; the society in Springfield is excellent. At the governor’s reception at the mansion the other night—”

“Now, Morley,” Amelia said, with a smile that was intended to reproach him mildly for this attempt to impose upon her credulity.

“And besides,” Vernon hurried on, suddenly taking a different course with her, “you could be a great help to me. I never address the Senate that I don’t think of you, and wish you were there to hear me.”

“I should like to hear you,” said Amelia, softening a little. “But of course I couldn’t think of appearing in the Senate.”

“Why not? Ladies often appear there.”

“Yes, overdressed, no doubt.”

“Well, you wouldn’t have to be overdressed,” Vernon retorted. He seemed to have the advantage, but he decided to forego it. He sank back on the cushions of his chair, folding his hands and plainly taking the rest a senator needs after his legislative labors.

“Of course,” he said, “we needn’t discuss it now. The governor may not call the special session. If the party—” but he paused, thinking how little interested she was in the party.

“I wish you’d let politics alone,” Amelia went on relentlessly. “It seems so—so common. I don’t see what there is in it to attract you. And how am I ever going to explain your absence to those people to-morrow night? Tell them that *politics* detained you, I suppose?” She looked at him severely, and yet triumphantly, as if she had reduced the problem to an absurdity.

“Why,” said Vernon, “you can tell them that I was called suddenly to Springfield; that an important matter in the Senate—”

“The Senate!” Amelia sneered.

“But dearest,” Vernon began, leaning over in an attitude for argument.

She cut him short.

“Why, Morley, do you think I’d ever let on to those Eltons that I *know* any one in *politics*?”

“Don’t they have politics in New York?” he asked.

“They won’t even know where Springfield is!” she went on irrelevantly.

“What’ll they say when they receive our cards next fall?” he asked with a smile.

“Well, you needn’t think your name will be engraved on them as *Senator*, I can assure you!”

Her dark eyes flashed.

Vernon laughed again, and Amelia went on:

“You can laugh, but I really believe you would if I’d let you!”

They were silent after that, and Amelia sat with her elbow on the arm of her chair, her chin in her hand, meditating gloomily on her ruined dinner.

“If you did any good by being in politics,” she said, as if speaking to herself. “But I fail to see what good you do. What good do you do?” She lifted her head suddenly and challenged him with a high look.

“Well,” he said, spreading his hands wide, “of course, if you don’t care enough to look in the newspapers!”

“But how could I, Morley?” said Amelia. “How was I to know where to look?”

“Why, in the Springfield despatches.”

“I began by reading the papers,” Amelia said. “But, really now, Morley, you know I couldn’t find anything in them about you.”

“The most important work in the legislature isn’t done in the newspapers,” said Vernon, with a significance that was intended to hide his inconsistency. “There are committee meetings, and conferences and caucuses; it is there that policies are mapped out and legislation framed.”

He spoke darkly, as of secret sessions held at night on the upper floors of hotels, attended only by those who had received whispered invitations.

“But if you must be in politics,” she said, “why don’t you do something big, something great, something to make a stir? Show your friends that you are really accomplishing something!”

Amelia sat erect and gave a strenuous gesture with one of her little fists clenched. Her dark eyes showed the excitement of ambition. But Vernon drooped and placed his hand wearily to his brow. Instantly Amelia started up from her chair.

“Does that light annoy you?” Her tone was altogether different from her ambitious one. She was stretching out a hand toward the lamp, and the white flesh glowed red between her fingers, held against the light.

“Never mind,” said Vernon. “It doesn’t bother me.”

But Amelia rose and twisted the shade of the lamp about, and then, as she was taking her seat again, she went on:

“I suppose it’ll be worse than ever after—after we’re—married.” She faltered, and blushed, and began making little pleats in her handkerchief, studying the effect with a sidewise turn of her head.

Vernon bent over and took both her hands in his.

“If it were only Washington!” There was a new regret in her tone, as there was in the inclination of her head.

“It shall be Washington, dear,” he said.

Amelia’s eyelids fell and she blushed again, even in the glow the lamp shed upon her face. They were silent for a moment, and then suddenly she looked up.

“Washington would be ever so much better, Morley,” she said. “I should feel as if that really amounted to something. We’d know all the diplomats, and I’m sure in that atmosphere you would become a great man.”

“I will, dear; I will,” he declared, “but it will be all for you.”

II

WHEN Vernon went into the Senate that Tuesday morning and saw the red rose lying on his desk he smiled, and picking it up, raised it eagerly to his face. But when he glanced about the chamber and saw that a rose lay on every other desk, his smile was suddenly lost in a stare of amazement. Once or twice, perhaps, flowers had been placed by constituents on the desks of certain senators, but never had a floral distribution, at once so modest and impartial, been made before. Several senators, already in their seats, saw the check this impartiality gave Vernon's vanity, and they laughed. Their laughter was of a tone with the tinkle of the crystal prisms of the chandeliers, chiming in the breeze that came through the open windows.

The lieutenant-governor was just ascending to his place. He dropped his gavel to the sounding-board of his desk.

"The Senate will be in order," he said.

The chaplain rose, and the hum of voices in the chamber ceased. Then, while the senators stood with bowed heads, Vernon saw the card that lay on the desk beside the rose. Two little jewels of the moisture that still sparkled on the rose's petals shone on the glazed surface of the card. Vernon read it where it lay.

"Will the Hon. Morley Vernon please to wear this rose to-day as a token of his intention to support and vote for House Joint Resolution No. 19, proposing an amendment to Section 1, Article VII, of the Constitution?"

The noise in the chamber began again at the chaplain's "Amen."

"New way to buttonhole a man, eh?" said Vernon to Bull Burns, who had the seat next Vernon's. "What's it all about, anyway?"

Vernon took up his printed synopsis of bills and resolutions.

"Oh, yes," he said, speaking as much to himself as to Burns; "old man Ames's resolution." Then he turned to the calendar. There it was—House Joint Resolution No. 19. He glanced at Burns again. Burns was fastening his rose in his buttonhole.

"So you're for it, eh?" he said.

"To hell with it," Burns growled in the gruff voice that spoke for the First District. In trying to look down at his own adornment he screwed his fat neck, fold on fold, into his low collar and then, with a grunt of satisfaction, lighted a morning cigar.

"But—" Vernon began, surprises multiplying. He looked about the chamber. The secretary was reading the journal of the preceding day and the senators were variously occupied, reading newspapers, writing letters, or merely smoking; some were gathered in little groups, talking and laughing. But they all wore their roses. Vernon might have concluded that House Joint Resolution No. 19 was safe, had it not been for the inconsistency of Burns, though inconsistency was nothing new in Burns. Vernon ventured once more with his neighbor:

"Looks as if the resolution were as good as adopted, doesn't it?"

But Burns cast a glance of pity at him, and then growled in half-humorous contempt. The action stung Vernon. Burns seemed to resent his presence in the Senate as he always resented the presence of Vernon's kind in politics.

The rose still lay on Vernon's desk; he was the only one of the fifty-one senators of Illinois that had not put his rose on. He opened his bill file and turned up House Joint Resolution No. 19. He read it carefully, as he felt a senator should before making up his mind on such an important, even revolutionary measure. He remembered that at the time it had been adopted in the House, every one had laughed; no one, with the exception of its author, Doctor Ames, had taken it seriously.

Ames was known to be a crank; he was referred to as "Doc" Ames, usually as "Old Doc" Ames. He had introduced more strange bills and resolutions than any member at that session; bills

to curb the homeopaths, bills to annihilate English sparrows, bills to prohibit cigarettes, bills to curtail the liquor traffic, and now this resolution providing for the submission of an amendment to the Constitution that would extend the electoral franchise to women.

His other measures had received little consideration; he never got any of them out of committee. But on the female suffrage resolution he had been obdurate, and when—with a majority so bare that sick men had to be borne on cots into the House now and then to pass its measures—the party had succeeded, after weeks of agony, in framing an apportionment bill that satisfied every one, Doctor Ames had seen his chance. He had flatly refused to vote for the reapportionment act unless his woman-suffrage resolution were first adopted.

It was useless for the party managers to urge upon him the impossibility of providing the necessary two-thirds' vote; Ames said he could get the remaining votes from the other side. And so the steering committee had given the word to put it through for him. Then the other side, seeing a chance to place the majority in an embarrassing attitude before the people, either as the proponents or the opponents of such a radical measure—whichever way it went in the end—had been glad enough to furnish the additional votes. The members of the steering committee had afterward whispered it about that the resolution was to die in the Senate. Then every one, especially the women of Illinois, had promptly forgotten the measure.

As Vernon thought over it all he picked up the rose again, then laid it down, and idly picked up the card. Turning it over in his hand he saw that its other side was engraved, and he read:

MARIA BURLEY GREENE

Attorney and Counselor at law

***The Rookery* CHICAGO**

Then he knew; it was the work of the woman lawyer. Vernon had heard of her often; he had never seen her. He gave a little sniff of disgust.

The Senate was droning along on the order of reports from standing committees, and Vernon, growing tired of the monotony, rose and sauntered back to the lobby in search of company more congenial than that of the gruff Burns. He carried the rose as he went, raising it now and then to enjoy its cool petals and its fragrance. On one of the leather divans that stretch themselves invitingly under the tall windows on each side of the Senate chamber sat a woman, and about her was a little group of men, bending deferentially. As he passed within easy distance one of the men saw him and beckoned. Vernon went over to them.

“Miss Greene,” said Senator Martin, “let me present Senator Vernon, of Chicago.”

Miss Greene gave him the little hand that looked yet smaller in its glove of black *suede*. He bowed low to conceal a surprise that had sprung incautiously to his eyes. Instead of the thin, short-haired, spectacled old maid that had always, in his mind, typified Maria Burley Greene, here was a young woman who apparently conformed to every fashion, though her beauty and distinction might have made her independent of conventions. Physically she was too nearly perfect to give at once an impression of aristocracy; but it was her expression that charmed; it was plain that her intellectuality was of the higher degrees.

As Vernon possessed himself he was able to note that this surprising young woman was clad in a black traveling gown that fitted her perfectly. From her spring hat down to the toes of her boots there

was nothing in her attire that was mannish, but she was of an exquisite daintiness wholly feminine and alluring.

All these superficial things faded into their proper background when, at last, his eyes looked full in her face. Reddish brown hair that doubtless had been combed into some resemblance to the prevailing fashion of the pompadour, had fallen in a natural part on the right side and lightly swept a brow not too high, but white and thoughtful. Her other features—the delicate nose, the full lips, the perfect teeth, the fine chin—all were lost in the eyes that looked frankly at him. As he gazed he was conscious that he feared to hear her speak; surely her voice would betray her masculine quality.

She had seated herself again, and now made a movement that suggested a drawing aside of her skirts to make a place for some one at her side. And then she spoke.

“Will you sit down, Senator Vernon?” she said, with a scrupulous regard for title unusual in a woman. “I must make a convert of Senator Vernon, you know,” she smiled on the other men about her. Her accent implied that this conversion was of the utmost importance. The other men, of whom she seemed to be quite sure, evidently felt themselves under the compulsion of withdrawing, and so fell back in reluctant retreat.

III

THE surprise had leaped to Vernon's eyes again at the final impression of perfection made by her voice, and the surprise changed to a regret of lost and irreclaimable opportunity when he reflected that he had lived for years near this woman lawyer and yet never had seen her once in all that time. When Miss Greene turned to look him in the face again, after the others were gone, Vernon grew suddenly bashful, like a big boy. He felt his face flame hotly. He had been meditating some drawing-room speech; he had already turned in his mind a pretty sentence in which there was a discreet reference to Portia; Vernon was just at the age for classical allusions. But when he saw her blue eyes fixed on him and read the utter seriousness in them he knew that compliments would all be lost.

"I am one of your constituents, Senator Vernon," she began, "and I am down, frankly, lobbying for this resolution."

"And we both," he replied, "are, I believe, members of the Cook County bar. Strange, isn't it, that two Chicago lawyers should have to wait until they are in Springfield to meet?"

"Not altogether," she said. "It is not so very strange—my practice is almost wholly confined to office work; I am more of a counselor than a barrister. I have not often appeared in court; in fact I prefer not to do so; I am—well, just a little timid in that part of the work."

The femininity of it touched him. He might have told her that he did not often appear in court himself, but he was new enough at the bar to have to practise the dissimulation of the young professional man. He indulged himself in the temptation to allow her to go undeceived, though with a pang he remembered that her practice, from all that he had heard, must be much more lucrative than his. Something of the pretty embarrassment she felt before courts and juries was evidently on her in this her first appearance in the Senate, but she put it away; her breast rose with the deep breath of resolution she drew, and she straightened to look him once more in the eyes.

"But about this resolution, Senator Vernon; I must not take up too much of your time. If you will give me your objections to it perhaps I may be able to explain them away. We should very much like to have your support."

Vernon scarcely knew what to reply; such objections as he might have found at other times—the old masculine objections to women's voting and meddling in politics—had all disappeared at sight of this remarkable young woman who wished to vote herself; he could not think of one of them, try as he would. His eyes were on the rose.

"Perhaps your objections are merely prejudices," she ventured boldly, in her eyes a latent twinkle that disturbed him.

"I confess, Miss Greene," he began, trying to get back something of his senatorial dignity, such as state senatorial dignity is, "that I have not devoted much thought to the subject; I am indeed rather ashamed to acknowledge that I did not even know the amendment was coming up to-day, until I was—ah—so delightfully reminded by your rose."

He raised the rose to inhale its fragrance. She made no reply, but she kept her eyes on him, and her gaze compelled him to go on. It was hard for him to go on, for it was now but a struggle against the formality of a surrender that had been inevitable from the beginning. But his man's pride forced him to delay it as long as possible.

"What assurances have you from other senators?" he asked. "Though, perhaps, I need not ask—they have unanimously mounted your colors." He looked at his colleagues, sporting their roses. Miss Greene gave a little exclamation of annoyance.

"Do you think I don't know," she said; "that I don't understand all that? I might have known that they would not take it seriously! And I thought—I thought—to put the matter so easily to them that I should be spared the necessity of buttonholing them!"

"It was a novel way of buttonholing them," he laughed.

“Oh!” she exclaimed, catching her breath, “they wear the roses—and laugh at me!”

Her eyes flashed through the mists of vexation that suggested tears.

“You are all alone then?”

Vernon said this in a low, solicitous tone, as if he were dealing with some deep grief.

“All alone.”

“And you represent no one—that is, no society, no club?”

“I am not a paid lobbyist,” she said, “though I believe it is not beyond the proprieties of our profession. I do what I do only from a love of principle. I represent only my sex.” She said it impressively, and then with a quick little laugh that recognized the theatrical that had been in her attitude, she added: “And that, I suspect, without authorization.”

“The ladies, generally, do not seem to be interested,” Vernon acquiesced.

“No,” she shook her head sadly, “no, on the contrary, I suppose most of them oppose the measure.”

“I have generally found them of that feeling,” Vernon observed.

“The slaves, before the war, often petitioned congress not to set them free, you will remember.”

Miss Greene spoke with a bitterness. Then quickly she collected herself.

“But your objections, Senator Vernon?” she said. “Really, we must get down to business.”

She raised the little chatelaine watch that hung at her bosom and looked down at it. And then suddenly, without waiting for his objections, as if she had quite forgotten them indeed, she impulsively stretched forth a hand and said:

“You will help me, won’t you?”

Vernon looked into her eyes. His gaze, after an instant, fell. He tried to run the stem of the rose through his buttonhole. The thorns caught in the cloth.

“You’ll have to do it,” he said, helplessly.

From some mysterious fold of her habit she took a pin, and then, leaning over, she pinned the rose to his coat, pinned it with its long stem hanging, as a woman would pin a flower to a man’s lapel.

“Thank you.” He was looking into her eyes again.

“Rather let me thank *you*,” she said. “It’s so good of you to vote for my measure.”

His eyes widened suddenly. He had quite forgotten the resolution. She must have perceived this, for she blushed, and he hastened to make amends.

“I’ll not only vote for it,” he rushed ahead impulsively, “but I’ll make a speech for it.” He straightened and leaned away from her to give a proper perspective in which she could admire him. He sat there smiling.

“How splendid of you!” she cried. “I feel encouraged now.”

Then Vernon’s face lengthened. He stammered: “But you’ll have to give me some data; I—I don’t know a thing about the subject.”

“Oh,” she laughed, “I brought some literature. It shall all be at your disposal. And now, I must be about my work. Can you make any suggestions? Can you tell me whom I should see, whom I should interest, who has the—ah—pull, I believe you call it?”

“I’ll bring them to you,” Vernon said. “You sit here and hold court.”

He rose and his eyes swept the chamber. They lighted on Burns, and an idea suddenly came to him. He would revenge himself on Burns for all the slights of the session.

“Of course you’ll have to see Sam Porter, but I’ll begin by bringing Senator Burns—familiarily known as Bull Burns.”

“I’ve read of him so often in the newspapers,” she said. “It would be an experience.”

Vernon went over to Burns’s seat and touched him on the shoulder.

“Come on,” he said in a tone of command, speaking for once from the altitude of his social superiority. And for once he was successful. The burly fellow from the First District stood up and looked inquiringly.

“Come with me,” Vernon said; “there’s a Chicago lawyer back here who wants to see you.”

Burns followed and an instant later Vernon halted before Miss Greene. The other men, who had quickly returned to her side, made way, and Vernon said:

“Miss Greene, may I present Senator Burns, of the First District?”

Miss Greene smiled on the big saloon-keeper, who instantly flamed with embarrassment. She gave him her hand, and he took it in his fat palm, carefully, lest he crush it.

“I am delighted to meet Senator Burns; I’ve heard of you so often,” she said, looking up at him. “And do you know I count it a privilege to meet one of your acknowledged influence in our state’s affairs?”

Vernon stood back, delighted beyond measure with the confusion into which Burns for once had been betrayed. The senator from the First District was struggling for some word to say, and at last he broke out with:

“Aw now, lady, don’t be t’rowin’ de con into me.”

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