

The Awakening of the Lieutenant–Governor

Susan Glaspell

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I.

THE Governor of Iowa was sitting alone in his private office with an open letter in his hand. He was devoutly and gloomily wishing that some other man was just then in his shoes. The Governor had not devoted a large portion of his life to nursing a desire of that nature, for he was a man in whose soul, as a rule, the flame of self-satisfaction glowed cheerfully; but just now there were reasons, and he deemed them ample, for deploring the fact that fate had made him chief executive of his native State.

Had he chosen to take you into his confidence — a thing the Governor would assuredly choose not to do — he would have told you there were greater things in the world than the Governorship of Iowa. He might have suggested a seat in the Senate of the United States as one of those things. It was of the United States Senate that his excellency was thinking as he sat there alone moodily deploring the Gubernatorial shoes.

The senior Senator from Iowa was going to die. He differed from the other Senators in that he was going to die soon, almost immediately. He had reached the tottering years even at the time of his reelection, and it had never been supposed that his life would out-stretch his term. He had been sent back, not for another six years of service, but to hold out the leader of the Boxers, as they called themselves — the younger and unorthodox element of the party in Iowa, an element growing to dangerous proportions. It was only by returning the aged Senator, whom they said it would be brutal to turn down after a life of service to the party, that the "machine" won the memorable fight of the previous winter.

From the viewpoint of the machine, the Governor was the senior Senator's logical successor. Had it not been for the heavy inroads of the Boxers, his excellency would even then have been sitting in the Senate Chamber at Washington. It had not been considered safe to nominate the Governor. Had his supporters announced that the time was at hand for a change, there would have been a general clamor for the leader of the Boxers — Huntington, undeniably the popular man of the State. And so they concocted a beautiful sentiment about "rounding out the veteran's career," and letting him "die with his boots on"; and by the omnipotence of sentiment, they won.

Down in his heart the venerable Senator was not seeking to die with his boots on. He preferred to sit in a large chair before the fire and read quietly of what other men were doing in the Senate of the United States. But they told him he must sacrifice that wish, for if he retired he would be succeeded by a man whose lack of conservatism would bring discredit upon Iowa. And the old man believed them, and went dutifully back into the arena.

And now it seemed as if a voice from somewhere beyond the dictation of man was declaring against the well-laid plans of the machine. As the machine saw things, the time was not ripe for the senior Senator to die. He had just entered upon his new term, and the Governor himself had but lately stepped into a second term. They had

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estimated that the Senator would live on for at least two years, but now they heard that he was going to die almost at once. It would hardly do for his excellency to name himself for the vacancy, and it seemed dangerous just then to risk a call of the Assembly. They dared not let the Governor appoint a weaker man, even if he would consent to do so, for they would need the best they had to put up against the leader of the Boxers. With the Governor, they believed they could win, but the question of nominating him had suddenly become a knotty one.

The Governor himself was bowed with chagrin. He saw now that he had erred in taking a second term, and he was not the man to enjoy reviewing his mistakes. As he sat there reading and rereading the letter which told him that the work of the senior Senator was almost done, he said to himself that it was easy enough to wrestle with men, but a little hard to try one's mettle with fate. He spent a gloomy and unprofitable day.

Late in the afternoon a telegram reached the executive office. Styles was coming to town that night, and wanted to see the Governor at the hotel. Things always cleared when Styles came to town; and so, though still unable to foresee the outcome, he brightened at once.

Styles was a railroad man, and vulgarly rich. People to whom certain things were a sealed book said that it was nice of Mr. Styles to take an interest in politics when he had so many other things on his mind, and that he must be a very public-spirited man. That he took an interest in politics, no one familiar with the affairs of the State would deny; but the real nature and extent of that interest was the subject, in some quarters, of no little speculation. The orthodox papers painted him as a public benefactor, but the Boxers arrayed him with hoofs and horns and clothed him in a flaming suit of Mephistophelian red.

The Governor and Mr. Styles were warm friends. It was said that their friendship dated from mere boyhood, and the way in which the two men had held together through all the vicissitudes of life was touching and beautiful — at least, so some people observed. There were others whose eyebrows went up mystifyingly when the Governor and Mr. Styles were mentioned in their Damon and Pythias capacity.

That night, in the public benefactor's room at the hotel, the Governor and his old friend had a long talk. When twelve o'clock came they were still talking; more than that, the Governor was excitedly pacing the floor.

"I tell you, Styles," he expostulated warmly, "I don't like it! It doesn't put me in a good light. It's too apparent, and I'll suffer for it sure as fate. Mark my words, we'll all suffer for it!"

Mr. Styles was sitting in an easy attitude before the table. The public benefactor never paced the floor; it did not seem necessary. He blew several artistic rings of smoke and watched them fade gracefully into nothingness. Then he raised himself a little in his chair.

"Well, have you anything better to offer?"

"No, I haven't," replied the Governor, almost tartly, "but it seems to me you ought to have."

Mr. Styles blew another ring, and seemed absorbed in contemplating the fineness of its tissue until it spent itself in space. There were times when the philanthropic dabbler in politics was irritating.

"I think," he began presently, "that you exaggerate the unpleasant features of the situation. It will cause talk, of course; but isn't it worth it? You say it's unheard-of; maybe, but so is the situation, and wasn't there something in the copy-books about meeting new situations with new methods? If you have anything better to offer, produce it; if not, we've got to go ahead with this. And really, I don't see that it's so bad. You have to go South to look after your cotton plantation; you find now that it's going to take more time than you feel you should take from the State; you can't afford to give it up; consequently, you withdraw in favor of the Lieutenant-Governor. We all protest, but you say Berriman is a good man, and the State won't suffer, and you simply can't afford to go on.

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Well, we can keep the Senator's condition pretty quiet here; and after all, he's sturdy; and may live on to the close of the year. After due deliberation Berriman appoints you. A little talk? Yes, but the American people, in Iowa at any rate, are excellent at forgetting. It seems to me the thing works out very smoothly!"

II.

WHEN Mr. Styles leaned wearily back in his chair and declared a thing worked out very smoothly, that thing was quite likely to happen. In three days the Governor went South. When he returned, the newspaper men were startled by the unexpected announcement that business considerations which he could not afford to overlook demanded his withdrawal from office. Previous to this time the Lieutenant-Governor and Mr. Styles had met in one of the cities of southern Iowa, but the result of their meeting had not been made a matter of public record.

As the Governor had anticipated, many things were said. Inquiries were made into the venerable Senator's condition — which, the orthodox papers declared, was but another example of the indecency of the Boxer journals. The Governor went to his cotton plantation. The Lieutenant-Governor went into office, and was pronounced a worthy successor to a good executive. The venerable Senator continued to live. As Mr. Styles had predicted, the gossip soon quieted into a friendly hope that the Governor would realize large sums with his cotton.

It was late in the fall when the senior Senator finally succumbed. The day the Iowa papers printed the story of his death, they printed speculative editorials on his probable successor. When the bereaved family commented with bitterness on this ill-concealed haste, they were told that it was politics — enterprise — life.

The old man's remains lay in state in the rotunda of the State Capitol, and the building was heavily draped in mourning. Many came and looked upon the quiet face; but far more numerous than those who gathered at his bier to weep were those who assembled in secluded corners to speculate on the wearing of his toga. It was politics — enterprise — life.

Mr. Styles told the Lieutenant-Governor to be deliberate. There was no need of an immediate appointment, he said. And so for a time things went on about the State House much as usual, save that the absorbing topic was the Senatorial situation, and that every one was watching the new chief executive with alert and untiring eyes. The retired Governor now spent part of his time in the South, and part in Iowa. The cotton plantation was not demanding all his attention, after all.

It could not be claimed that John Berriman had ever done any great thing. He was not on record as having ever risen grandly to an occasion; but there may have been something in the fact that an occasion admitting of a grand rising had never presented itself. Before he became Lieutenant-Governor, he had served inoffensively in the State Senate for two terms. No one had ever worked very hard for Senator Berriman's vote. He had been put in by the machine, and it had always been assumed that he was machine property.

Berriman himself had never given the matter of his place in the human drama much thought. He had an idea that it was proper for him to vote with his friends, and he always did it. Had he been called a tool, he would have been much ruffled: he merely trusted to the infallibility of the party.

The Boxers did not approach him now concerning the appointment of Huntington. That, of course, was a fixed matter, and they were not young and foolish enough to attempt to change it.

One day Governor Berriman received a telegram from Mr. Styles suggesting that he should "adjust that matter" immediately. He thought of announcing the appointment that very night, but the newspaper men had all left the building, and as he had promised that they should know of it as soon as it was made, he concluded to wait until next morning. There was no pressing hurry.

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Governor Berriman had a brother in town, attending a meeting of the State Agricultural Society. Hiram Berriman had a large farm in southern Iowa. He knew but little of political methods, and held primitive ideas of honesty. There had always been a strong tie between the brothers, despite the fact that Hiram was fifteen years the Governor's senior. They talked of many things that night, and the hour was growing late. Both were thinking of retiring when the Governor remarked, a little sleepily:

"Well, to–morrow morning I announce the Senatorial appointment."

"You do, eh?" returned the old farmer.

"Yes, there's no need of waiting any longer, and it's getting on to the time the State wants two Senators in Washington."

"Well, I suppose, John," Hiram said, turning a serious face to his brother, "that you've thought the matter all over, and are sure you are right?"

The Governor threw back his head with a half–scoffing laugh.

"I guess it didn't require much thought on my part," he answered carelessly.

"I don't see how you figure that out," said Hiram warmly. "You're Governor of the State, and your own boss, ain't you?"

It was the first time in all his life that any one had squarely confronted John Berriman with the question whether or not he was his own boss, and for some reason it went deep into his soul, and rankled there.

"Now see here, Hiram," he said at length, "there's no use in your putting on airs and pretending you don't understand this thing. You know well enough it was all fixed before I went in." The other man looked at him in bewilderment, and the Governor continued, rather tartly: "The party knew the Senator was going to die, and so the Governor pulled out and I went in just so the thing could be done decently when the time came."

The old farmer was scratching his head.

"That's it, eh? They got wind the Senator was goin' to die, and so the Governor told that lie about having to go South just so he could step into the dead man's shoes, eh?"

"That's the situation — if you want to put it that way."

"And now you're going to appoint the Governor?"

"Of course I am; I couldn't do anything else if I wanted to."

"Why not?"

"Why, look here, Hiram, haven't you any idea of political obligation? It's expected of me."

"Oh, it is, eh? Did you promise to appoint the Governor?"

"Why, I don't know that I exactly made any promises, but that doesn't make a particle of difference. The understanding was that the Governor was to pull out and I was to go in and appoint him. It's a matter of honor;" and Governor Berriman drew himself up with no little pride.

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The farmer turned a troubled face to the fire.

"I suppose, then," he said finally, "that you all think the Governor is the best man Iowa has for the United States Senate. I take it that in appointing him, John, you feel sure he will guard the interests of the people before everything else, and that the people — I mean the working people of this State — will always be safe in his hands; do you?"

"Oh, Lord, no, Hiram!" said the Governor irritably. "I don't think that at all!"

Hiram Berriman's brown face warmed to a dull red.

"You don't?" he roared. "You mean to sit there, John Berriman, and tell me that you don't think the man you're going to put in the United States Senate will be an honest man? What do you mean by saying you're going to put a dishonest man in there to make laws for the people of Iowa, to watch over them and protect them? If you don't think he's a good man, if you don't think he's the best man the State has" — the old farmer was pounding the table heavily with his huge fist — "if you don't think that, in God's name, why do you appoint him?"

"I wish I could make you understand, Hiram," said the Governor in an injured voice, "that it's not for me to say."

"Why ain't it for you to say? Why ain't it, I want to know? Who's running you, your own conscience or some gang of men that's trying to steal from the State of Iowa? Good God, I wish I'd never lived to see the day a brother of mine put a thief in the United States Senate, to bamboozle the honest, hard–working people of this State!"

"Hold on, please — that's a little too strong!" said the Governor.

"It ain't too strong. If a Senator ain't an honest man, he's a thief, and if he ain't looking after the welfare of the people he's bamboozlin' them, and that's all there is about it. I don't know much about politics, but I ain't lived my life without learning a little about right and wrong, and it's a sorry day for Iowa, John Berriman, if right and wrong don't enter into the makin' of a Senator!"

The Governor could think of no fitting response, so he made none. This seemed to quiet the irate farmer, and he surveyed his brother intently, and not unkindly.

"You're in a position now, John," he said, and there was a kind of homely eloquence in his serious voice, "to be a friend to the people of Iowa. It ain't many of us ever get the chance of doin' a great thing. We work along, and we do the best we can with what comes our way, but most of us don't get the chance to do a thing that's goin' to help thousands of people, and that the whole country's goin' to say was a move for the right. You want to think of that, and when you're thinkin' so much about honor, you don't want to clean forget about honesty. Don't you stick to any foolish notions about bein' faithful to the party; it ain't the party that needs helpin'. No matter how you got where you are, you're Governor of Iowa right now, John, and your first duty is to the people of this State, not to Tom Styles or anybody else. Just you remember that when you're namin' your Senator in the morning. Guess I'll go up to bed now. Good–night!"

III.

IT was long before the Governor retired. He sat there by the fireplace until the embers had shriveled to a lifeless heap, and he was too deeply absorbed to grow cold. He thought of many things. Like the man who had preceded him in office, he wished that some one else was just then encumbered with the Gubernatorial shoes.

Next morning there was a heavy feeling in his head, which he thought a walk in the bracing air might dispel, so he

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started on foot for the State House. A light snow was on the ground, and the atmosphere had a crispness that was reassuring and stimulating. It would make a slave feel like a free man to drink in such air as that. The Iowa air was glorious — Iowa was a glorious State! From the foot of the hill the State House loomed up magnificently before him, its golden dome glistening through the snow. Somebody had asked, once, how they kept that dome so bright. The Governor laughed as gleefully as a boy. Such a question — when the dome was real gold! Everything in Iowa was real gold.

As he walked through the corridor to his office, the officials and clerks greeted him with cheerful, respectful salutations. It made a man feel like living to be spoken to like that. The Governor believed they did respect him, or they wouldn't get so much of it into their voices. Why, of course — why shouldn't they respect him?

When John Berriman reached his desk, he found another telegram from Styles. It was imperatively worded, and as he read it he put his hand to his throat — something seemed tightening there. The briskness and the satisfaction were gone from his bearing in an instant. He walked to the window, and stood there looking down at the city. It was a fine city — he loved that city! There were many fine cities in Iowa, there were great interests to preserve, there were thousands upon thousands of good, honest people to befriend. He wondered if many of those people looked to their Governor with the old-fashioned trust that his brother had shown. His eyes grew a little dim; he was thinking of the satisfaction it would afford his children, if — long after he was gone — they could tell how a great chance had once come into their father's life, and how he had proved himself a man.

"Will you sign these now, Governor?" said a voice behind him.

It was his pardon clerk, a man who knew the affairs of the State well, and whom every one seemed to respect.

"Mr. Haines," he said abruptly, "who do you think is the best man Iowa has for the United States Senate?"

The pardon clerk stepped back in amazement. Then he told himself he must be discreet. Like many of the people about the State House, in his heart Haines was a Boxer.

"Why, I presume," he said, "that the Governor is looked upon as the logical candidate, isn't he?"

"I'm not talking about logical candidates. I want to know who you think is the man who would most conscientiously and creditably represent Iowa in the United States Senate."

"If you put the matter in that way, Governor, Mr. Huntington is the man, of course."

"You think most of the people believe that?"

"I know they do."

"You think, then, if it was a matter of popular vote, that Huntington would be the new Senator from Iowa?"

"I guess they all have to admit that, Governor. The State's strong for Huntington."

"That's all, Mr. Haines. I merely wondered what you thought about it."

Soon after that Governor Berriman rang for a messenger boy, and sent a telegram. Then he settled quietly down to routine work. It was about eleven when one of the newspaper men came in.

"Good morning, Governor," he said briskly; "how's everything to-day?"

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"Very nicely, Mr. Markham. I have nothing to tell you to-day, except that I've made the Senatorial appointment."

"Oh," laughed the reporter excitedly, "that's all, is it?"

"Yes," said the Governor, smiling too; "that's all!"

The reporter looked at the clock and gathered himself hastily together.

"I'll just catch the noon edition," he said, "if I telephone right away."

He was moving to the other room when the Governor called to him.

"See here, it seems to me you're a strange newspaper man!"

"How so?"

"Why, I tell you I've made a Senatorial appointment — a matter of at least some slight importance — and you rush off and never ask whom I've appointed."

The reporter gave a forced laugh. He wished the Governor would not detain him with a joke now when every second counted.

"That's right," he said, with strained pleasantness. "Well, who's the man?"

The Governor raised his head.

"Huntington," he said quietly, and resumed his work.

"What?" shouted the astonished reporter. "What?" Then he stopped in embarrassment, as if ashamed of being so easily taken in. "Guess you're trying to jolly me a little, aren't you, Governor?"

"Jolly you, Mr. Markham? I'm not given to jollying newspaper reporters. Here's a copy of the telegram I sent this morning, if you are still skeptical. Really, I don't see why you think it so impossible. Don't you consider Mr. Huntington a fit man for the place?"

"May I ask," said the reporter weakly, "why you did it?"

Governor Berriman rose with dignity, and his small figure looked almost large.

"I had but one motive, Mr. Markham. You may say in your paper that I thought the matter over, and of all the men in Iowa whom I know, Mr. Huntington seemed best fitted for the place."

Tom Styles reached the State House just as the corners were growing indistinct in the long corridors that afternoon. Mr. Styles was not blowing rings that day, and he was not standing on ceremony. With a face upon which it was not pleasant to look, he rushed past the private secretary and into the Governor's office.

John Berriman was seated alone at his desk. Mr. Styles came close, and leaned down until he almost touched the Governor's face.

"And so you sold out, did you, you little sneak?" he hissed. "Tell me, how much — "

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The Governor slid his hand underneath the desk.

"Mr. Jackson," he said, as the white-haired darky appeared in the door, "please show the gentleman from the room!"