

It is better, as far as getting the vote is concerned I believe, to have a small, united group than an immense debating society.

—Alice Paul, American Suffragist

PROLOGUE

Spring 1894

The Flint Hills Outside Sycamore Falls, Kansas

Kathryn Wolfe vaulted over the boulder. An outcrop loomed above. This was the fastest she'd ever made it this far.

“Trailing and climbing on rocks is no place for a lady,” she had heard too many times.

She loved the exertion of trailing up hills—and if boulders got in the way all the better—but as she reached up for a handhold on the craggy ledge and was about to call up to her friend Mary, she gave in to the temptation to glance out at the sea of green hills rippling to the horizon.

She shouldn't have. At least the grassy area a little ways down was free of rocks.

This was Kathryn's second attempt to scale that rocky protrusion. And on its second attempt, Suffrage failed to pass in Kansas that year.

CHAPTER ONE

September 1911

Sycamore Falls High School

During the fourth week of school, lockers and the lingering scent of freshly painted walls greeted civics teacher George Fielding as he walked the long, echoing hallway. He stopped outside Principal Holt's office when Violette emerged and handed him a string-clasped envelope. He peeked inside to find Suffrage leaflets and other printed materials.

Violette looked around the hallway. "It arrived today from The Kansas Equal Suffrage Association," she whispered.

He thanked her and continued to his classroom where several students stood laughing next to the open door. They looked away when he approached. Upon entering the classroom, some students tried to suppress their snickering. Their glances toward the blackboard revealed what amused them.

George saw a caricature of himself wearing a dress while holding a sign that said, "Women Vote."

He smiled and turned to the class. "I see some of you are interested in Women's Suffrage, and I commend the artist for making me more handsome than I actually am, but that dress should persuade you not to pursue a career in fashion design."

Jesse Gaines raised his hand. "Mr. Fielding, does that mean we're not in trouble?"

"Do you think you should be in trouble, Mr. Gaines?"

Jesse sank down in his chair and shook his head.

George stepped beneath the portrait of Lincoln next to the blackboard and held up a stack of printed material. "Mr. Gaines's artwork is timely," he said. "Since the Women's Suffrage referendum was passed in February, it will be on the ballot in next year's election. I am authorized to invite all of you to write an essay for the county contest about why Kansans should vote for Women's Suffrage. The essay is voluntary, but I will offer extra credit for anyone who participates, something that should help your grade, Mr. Gaines."

Laughter.

“All right, everyone, Mr. Gaines isn’t the only student here who can use extra credit.” George held up the papers again. “Come by my desk after class and take notes from this material for good information on Women’s Suffrage.”

CHAPTER TWO

May 1912

The Flint Hills West of Sycamore Falls, Kansas

Kathryn steered Annabelle over the rough terrain on the grassy hillside and pulled her up to a stop when they approached the top of the hill. On this warm day in May, there was nothing like the breeze through one's hair while taking in the commanding view from up here on horseback, the rooftops of Sycamore Falls in the valley, the sea of green prairie hills all around. Mary caught up to her, and then urged her horse to a gallop. Kathryn took the challenge, dismissing that little voice in her head that said no.

* * *

She didn't think anything was broken and her impaired leg felt all right. She decided to lie still and not try to get up too fast. Annabelle stood nearby and snorted an apology while shaking her head up and down, even though the spill wasn't the horse's fault. Mary stood over Kathryn, her silhouette blocking the blazing midday sun.

Kathryn sat up and brushed off her riding clothes. Her hat sat in the grass a few feet away and she put it back on after Mary fetched it.

"Don't move, Kathryn," Mary said as she knelt next to her. "Let me check you over."