

Storyteller.

COMRADES EVER.

CHAPTER V.

Swiftly the passing months brought Gipsy Lewis to the opening day of Parliament. She had not passed the interval in idleness. Like most of the leaders in Social Reform she had felt keenly their failure to secure National Prohibition. But she belonged to the victorious White Ribbon Army, which never accepts defeat, and knew surely, by Faith's intuition, that though another battle in the long campaign had gone against them, yet in the end success was sure. Their Annual Convention met in the Empire City, and as the time of defeat is just the time to increase your efforts they planned a vigorous campaign. Mrs Lewis had spent her time going round their various branches, urging and inspiring them to prepare for their long struggle. Three years of preparation they had, they could not afford to waste a minute of it, therefore let them get busy at once.

Now the fateful day had arrived, and she stood in the Legislative Hall of her Fatherland, and took the oath to loyally serve her King and Country. The Prime Minister spoke kind and courteous words of welcome, and several members expressed pleasure at greeting their first woman M.P. The majority of members showed a kindly desire to make her feel at home in her new sphere, but well she knew that some of the old school bitterly resented the intrusion of her sex into politics.

In a few dignified words, very nervously spoken, she thanked the Premier and her fellow-members for their kindly welcome, and expressed the wish that they might find her so useful in the House that they would at next election secure the return of more women members.

For the first few weeks, Mrs Lewis listened, watched and learned. Her quick brain and ready observation enabled her in a comparatively short time to master the rules, regulations and forms of etiquette observed by members and Speaker. She was a member of one Parliamentary Committee, and there won golden opinions from the male members, because she never spoke unless she had something to say, and then expressed herself with brevity and clearness. Events moved rapidly in the political world. The majority of the Reform Party was too

slender to give stability to their Government, also they were without capable men for several portfolios. The Liberals were disorganised owing to the defeat of their leader, who, being rejected by his own constituency, had retired from the hurly-burly of politics to the aristocratic seclusion of the Dominion's representative at the capital of the Empire. The Labour Party, returned with increased strength, were well organised, extremely active and aggressive, and had one or two men who were well qualified to act as Ministers of the Crown.

Mr Morton had absorbed many progressive ideas from the statesmen with whom he had sat around the Board at the great Peace Conference. Moreover, he did most earnestly desire to do his very best for the country during the period of reconstruction. He therefore urged upon the Cabinet that they allow him to try for a modified coalition Government. He pointed out the need for capable and expert men at the head of every department, irrespective of party shibboleths; that the time was ripe for a forward movement in the direction of an Elective Executive, which was fast coming within the region of practical politics. He proposed to bring in three Ministers from outside their own ranks, thus leaving them a strong majority in the Cabinet.

The debate was long, and at times acrimonious. Even his old friend and colleague, Sir Walter Ross, opposed him bitterly, and demanded whom he proposed to bring into the Cabinet.

"Well," said Mr Morton, "I propose to offer the portfolios of Health and Education to our lady member. I have watched her closely; she has a quick brain, a ready grasp of all questions, a great willingness to learn, and, moreover, is an admitted expert on the question of Education. We are often told that the health and education of the rising generation is the work of women."

"I think you are in your dotage," hastily interrupted Sir Walter. "A woman in the Cabinet!"

"Yes, my old friend, a woman in Cabinet. Both in England and America women have been put in responsible positions, and have proved themselves quite as capable as men; some politicians say more so. And I firmly believe that Mrs Lewis will do as good work as any man we could put into the position."

"And I presume Mr Dutch" (naming a famous Labour agitator) "will be Minister of Labour."

"Well, not exactly," smiled the Premier. "I thought of Mr Ford for that portfolio. He is sensible and modest, and has the confidence of the great body of workers."

"It might have been worse," admitted Sir Walter. "And who's the third addition?"

"Mr George as Minister of Railways. He is a Liberal-Labourite, and he knows our railway system from A to Z. And I'm sure," said Mr Morton, looking around the circle, "that you'll all admit that this branch of the service is in great need of improvement."

After much discussion, both Cabinet and Caucus agreed to give their Leader a free hand, and the minority promised a loyal support to the three "while they behave themselves," one stalwart grunted out.

Next afternoon Mr Morton stopped Mrs Lewis as she was leaving the Chamber, and with his winning smile, said, "Will you allow me the pleasure of taking you for a cup of tea?"

Wondering much, Gipsy followed the Leader of the House to his private room. While the attendant prepared the tea table, Mr Morton looked at his visitor, and marvelled that this woman, whose brain and ability equalled that of any of his male supporters, and exceeded most of them, yet in her simple, well-cut gown, relieved with pale silk collar, looked the ideal of a wife and mother. Her husband had loved and trusted her, her children adored her, and now in her wider sphere, the same kindly courtesy and comradeship was making her popular in the House. With the intellect to grasp the statesman's ideals, she had the mother heart to feel for all, to work for all.

At length Mr Morton broke the silence with: "Mrs Lewis, I have heard you say that woman's point of view should be heard in the House; I want your point of view on the question of party politics. Would you step over party lines to be of use to your country?"

"I don't quite understand you. What do you wish me to do?"

"To speak plainly, would you be willing to take the portfolios of Health and Education under my leadership? You have specially studied these subjects, and I feel convinced would make a capable and efficient Minister."