



Sinclair Lewis

IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE

Political Dystopia

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IT CAN'T HAPPEN HERE (Political Dystopia)

**Foreseeing America's Grim and Totalitarian
Presidential Future**

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The handsome dining room of the Hotel Wessex, with its gilded plaster shields and the mural depicting the Green Mountains, had been reserved for the Ladies' Night Dinner of the Fort Beulah Rotary Club.

Here in Vermont the affair was not so picturesque as it might have been on the Western prairies. Oh, it had its points: there was a skit in which Medary Cole (grist mill & feed store) and Louis Rotenstern (custom tailoring—pressing & cleaning) announced that they were those historic Vermonsters, Brigham Young and Joseph Smith, and with their jokes about imaginary plural wives they got in ever so many funny digs at the ladies present. But the occasion was essentially serious. All of America was serious now, after the seven years of depression since 1929. It was just long enough after the Great War of 1914-18 for the young people who had been born in 1917 to be ready to go to college . . . or to another war, almost any old war that might be handy.

The features of this night among the Rotarians were nothing funny, at least not obviously funny, for they were the patriotic addresses of Brigadier General Herbert Y. Edgeways, U.S.A. (ret.), who dealt angrily with the topic "Peace through Defense—Millions for Arms but Not One Cent for Tribute," and of Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch—she who was no more renowned for her gallant anti-suffrage campaigning way back in 1919 than she was for having, during the Great War, kept the American soldiers entirely

out of French cafés by the clever trick of sending them ten thousand sets of dominoes.

Nor could any social-minded patriot sneeze at her recent somewhat unappreciated effort to maintain the purity of the American Home by barring from the motion-picture industry all persons, actors or directors or cameramen, who had: (a) ever been divorced; (b) been born in any foreign country—except Great Britain, since Mrs. Gimmitch thought very highly of Queen Mary, or (c) declined to take an oath to revere the Flag, the Constitution, the Bible, and all other peculiarly American institutions.

The Annual Ladies' Dinner was a most respectable gathering—the flower of Fort Beulah. Most of the ladies and more than half of the gentlemen wore evening clothes, and it was rumored that before the feast the inner circle had had cocktails, privily served in Room 289 of the hotel. The tables, arranged on three sides of a hollow square, were bright with candles, cut-glass dishes of candy and slightly tough almonds, figurines of Mickey Mouse, brass Rotary wheels, and small silk American flags stuck in gilded hard-boiled eggs. On the wall was a banner lettered "Service Before Self," and the menu—the celery, cream of tomato soup, broiled haddock, chicken croquettes, peas, and tutti-frutti ice-cream—was up to the highest standards of the Hotel Wessex.

They were all listening, agape. General Edgeways was completing his manly yet mystical rhapsody on nationalism:

". . . for these U-nited States, a-lone among the great powers, have no desire for foreign conquest. Our highest ambition is to be darned well let alone! Our only genuine relationship to Europe is in our arduous task of having to try and educate the crass and ignorant masses that Europe has wished onto us up to something like a semblance of

American culture and good manners. But, as I explained to you, we must be prepared to defend our shores against all the alien gangs of international racketeers that call themselves 'governments,' and that with such feverish envy are always eyeing our inexhaustible mines, our towering forests, our titanic and luxurious cities, our fair and far-flung fields.

"For the first time in all history, a great nation must go on arming itself more and more, not for conquest—not for jealousy—not for war—but for *peace*! Pray God it may never be necessary, but if foreign nations don't sharply heed our warning, there will, as when the proverbial dragon's teeth were sowed, spring up an armed and fearless warrior upon every square foot of these United States, so arduously cultivated and defended by our pioneer fathers, whose sword-girded images we must be . . . or we shall perish!"

The applause was cyclonic. "Professor" Emil Staubmeyer, the superintendent of schools, popped up to scream, "Three cheers for the General—hip, hip, hooray!"

All the audience made their faces to shine upon the General and Mr. Staubmeyer—all save a couple of crank pacifist women, and one Doremus Jessup, editor of the Fort Beulah *Daily Informer*, locally considered "a pretty smart fella but kind of a cynic," who whispered to his friend the Reverend Mr. Falck, "Our pioneer fathers did rather of a skimpy job in arduously cultivating some of the square feet in Arizona!"

The culminating glory of the dinner was the address of Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch, known throughout the country as "the Unkies' Girl," because during the Great War she had advocated calling our boys in the A.E.F. "the Unkies." She hadn't merely given them dominoes; indeed her first notion

had been far more imaginative. She wanted to send to every soldier at the Front a canary in a cage. Think what it would have meant to them in the way of companionship and inducing memories of home and mother! A dear little canary! And who knows—maybe you could train 'em to hunt cooties!

Seething with the notion, she got herself clear into the office of the Quartermaster General, but that stuffy machine-minded official refused her (or, really, refused the poor lads, so lonely there in the mud), muttering in a cowardly way some foolishness about lack of transport for canaries. It is said that her eyes flashed real fire, and that she faced the Jack-in-office like Joan of Arc with eyeglasses while she "gave him a piece of her mind that *he* never forgot!"

In those good days women really had a chance. They were encouraged to send their menfolks, or anybody else's menfolks, off to war. Mrs. Gimmitch addressed every soldier she met—and she saw to it that she met any of them who ventured within two blocks of her—as "My own dear boy." It is fabled that she thus saluted a colonel of marines who had come up from the ranks and who answered, "We own dear boys are certainly getting a lot of mothers these days. Personally, I'd rather have a few more mistresses." And the fable continues that she did not stop her remarks on the occasion, except to cough, for one hour and seventeen minutes, by the Colonel's wrist watch.

But her social services were not all confined to prehistoric eras. It was as recently as 1935 that she had taken up purifying the films, and before that she had first advocated and then fought Prohibition. She had also (since the vote had been forced on her) been a Republican

Committee-woman in 1932, and sent to President Hoover daily a lengthy telegram of advice.

And, though herself unfortunately childless, she was esteemed as a lecturer and writer about Child Culture, and she was the author of a volume of nursery lyrics, including the immortal couplet:

*All of the Roundies are resting in rows,
With roundy-roundies around their toes.*

But always, 1917 or 1936, she was a raging member of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

The D.A.R. (reflected the cynic, Doremus Jessup, that evening) is a somewhat confusing organization—as confusing as Theosophy, Relativity, or the Hindu Vanishing Boy Trick, all three of which it resembles. It is composed of females who spend one half their waking hours boasting of being descended from the seditious American colonists of 1776, and the other and more ardent half in attacking all contemporaries who believe in precisely the principles for which those ancestors struggled.

The D.A.R. (reflected Doremus) has become as sacrosanct, as beyond criticism, as even the Catholic Church or the Salvation Army. And there is this to be said: it has provided hearty and innocent laughter for the judicious, since it has contrived to be just as ridiculous as the unhappily defunct Kuklux Klan, without any need of wearing, like the K.K.K., high dunces' caps and public nightshirts.

So, whether Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch was called in to inspire military morale, or to persuade Lithuanian choral societies to begin their program with "Columbia, the Gem of the Ocean," always she was a D.A.R., and you could tell it as

you listened to her with the Fort Beulah Rotarians on this happy May evening.

She was short, plump, and pert of nose. Her luxuriant gray hair (she was sixty now, just the age of the sarcastic editor, Doremus Jessup) could be seen below her youthful, floppy Leghorn hat; she wore a silk print dress with an enormous string of crystal beads, and pinned above her ripe bosom was an orchid among lilies of the valley. She was full of friendliness toward all the men present: she wriggled at them, she cuddled at them, as in a voice full of flute sounds and chocolate sauce she poured out her oration on "How You Boys Can Help Us Girls."

Women, she pointed out, had done nothing with the vote. If the United States had only listened to her back in 1919 she could have saved them all this trouble. No. Certainly not. No votes. In fact, Woman must resume her place in the Home and: "As that great author and scientist, Mr. Arthur Brisbane, has pointed out, what every woman ought to do is to have six children."

At this second there was a shocking, an appalling interruption.

One Lorinda Pike, widow of a notorious Unitarian preacher, was the manager of a country super-boarding-house that called itself "The Beulah Valley Tavern." She was a deceptively Madonna-like, youngish woman, with calm eyes, smooth chestnut hair parted in the middle, and a soft voice often colored with laughter. But on a public platform her voice became brassy, her eyes filled with embarrassing fury. She was the village scold, the village crank. She was constantly poking into things that were none of her business, and at town meetings she criticized every substantial interest in the whole county: the electric company's rates, the salaries of the schoolteachers, the

Ministerial Association's high-minded censorship of books for the public library. Now, at this moment when everything should have been all Service and Sunshine, Mrs. Lorinda Pike cracked the spell by jeering:

"Three cheers for Brisbane! But what if a poor gal can't hook a man? Have her six kids out of wedlock?"

Then the good old war horse, Gimmitch, veteran of a hundred campaigns against subversive Reds, trained to ridicule out of existence the cant of Socialist hecklers and turn the laugh against them, swung into gallant action:

"My dear good woman, if a gal, as you call it, has any real charm and womanliness, she won't have to 'hook' a man—she'll find 'em lined up ten deep on her doorstep!" (Laughter and applause.)

The lady hoodlum had merely stirred Mrs. Gimmitch into noble passion. She did not cuddle at them now. She tore into it:

"I tell you, my friends, the trouble with this whole country is that so many are *selfish*! Here's a hundred and twenty million people, with ninety-five per cent of 'em only thinking of *self*, instead of turning to and helping the responsible business men to bring back prosperity! All these corrupt and self-seeking labor unions! Money grubbers! Thinking only of how much wages they can extort out of their unfortunate employer, with all the responsibilities he has to bear!

"What this country needs is Discipline! Peace is a great dream, but maybe sometimes it's only a pipe dream! I'm not so sure—now this will shock you, but I want you to listen to one woman who will tell you the unadulterated hard truth instead of a lot of sentimental taffy, and I'm not sure but that we need to be in a real war again, in order to learn Discipline! We don't want all this highbrow intellectuality, all this book-learning. That's good enough in its way, but isn't

it, after all, just a nice toy for grownups? No, what we all of us must have, if this great land is going to go on maintaining its high position among the Congress of Nations, is Discipline—Will Power—Character!"

She turned prettily then toward General Edgeways and laughed:

"You've been telling us about how to secure peace, but come on, now, General—just among us Rotarians and Rotary Anns—'fess up! With your great experience, don't you honest, cross-your-heart, think that perhaps—just maybe—when a country has gone money-mad, like all our labor unions and workmen, with their propaganda to hoist income taxes, so that the thrifty and industrious have to pay for the shiftless ne'er-do-weels, then maybe, to save their lazy souls and get some iron into them, a war might be a good thing? Come on, now, tell your real middle name, Mong General!"

Dramatically she sat down, and the sound of clapping filled the room like a cloud of downy feathers. The crowd bellowed, "Come on, General! Stand up!" and "She's called your bluff—what you got?" or just a tolerant, "Attaboy, Gen!"

The General was short and globular, and his red face was smooth as a baby's bottom and adorned with white-gold-framed spectacles. But he had the military snort and a virile chuckle.

"Well, sir!" he guffawed, on his feet, shaking a chummy forefinger at Mrs. Gimmitch, "since you folks are bound and determined to drag the secrets out of a poor soldier, I better confess that while I do abhor war, yet there are worse things. Ah, my friends, far worse! A state of so-called peace, in which labor organizations are riddled, as by plague germs, with insane notions out of anarchistic Red Russia! A

state in which college professors, newspapermen, and notorious authors are secretly promulgating these same seditious attacks on the grand old Constitution! A state in which, as a result of being fed with these mental drugs, the People are flabby, cowardly, grasping, and lacking in the fierce pride of the warrior! No, such a state is far worse than war at its most monstrous!

"I guess maybe some of the things I said in my former speech were kind of a little bit obvious and what we used to call 'old hat' when my brigade was quartered in England. About the United States only wanting peace, and freedom from all foreign entanglements. No! What I'd really like us to do would be to come out and tell the whole world: 'Now you boys never mind about the moral side of this. We have power, and power is its own excuse!'

"I don't altogether admire everything Germany and Italy have done, but you've got to hand it to 'em, they've been honest enough and realistic enough to say to the other nations, 'Just tend to your own business, will you? We've got strength and will, and for whomever has those divine qualities it's not only a right, it's a *duty*, to use 'em!' Nobody in God's world ever loved a weakling—including that weakling himself!

"And I've got good news for you! This gospel of clean and aggressive strength is spreading everywhere in this country among the finest type of youth. Why today, in 1936, there's less than 7 per cent of collegiate institutions that do not have military-training units under discipline as rigorous as the Nazis, and where once it was forced upon them by the authorities, now it is the strong young men and women who themselves demand the *right* to be trained in warlike virtues and skill—for, mark you, the girls, with their instruction in nursing and the manufacture of gas masks and the like, are

becoming every whit as zealous as their brothers. And all the really *thinking* type of professors are right with 'em!

"Why, here, as recently as three years ago, a sickeningly big percentage of students were blatant pacifists, wanting to knife their own native land in the dark. But now, when the shameless fools and the advocates of Communism try to hold pacifist meetings—why, my friends, in the past five months, since January first, no less than seventy-six such exhibitionistic orgies have been raided by their fellow students, and no less than fifty-nine disloyal Red students have received their just deserts by being beaten up so severely that never again will they raise in this free country the bloodstained banner of anarchism! That, my friends, is NEWS!"

As the General sat down, amid ecstasies of applause, the village trouble maker, Mrs. Lorinda Pike, leaped up and again interrupted the love feast:

"Look here, Mr. Edgeways, if you think you can get away with this sadistic nonsense without—"

She got no farther. Francis Tasbrough, the quarry owner, the most substantial industrialist in Fort Beulah, stood grandly up, quieted Lorinda with an outstretched arm, and rumbled in his Jerusalem-the-Golden basso, "A moment please, my dear lady! All of us here locally have got used to your political principles. But as chairman, it is my unfortunate duty to remind you that General Edgeways and Mrs. Gimmitch have been invited by the club to address us, whereas you, if you will excuse my saying so, are not even related to any Rotarian but merely here as the guest of the Reverend Falck, than whom there is no one whom we more honor. So, if you will be so good—Ah, I thank you, madame!"

Lorinda Pike had slumped into her chair with her fuse still burning. Mr. Francis Tasbrough (it rhymed with "low") did not slump; he sat like the Archbishop of Canterbury on the archiepiscopal throne.

And Doremus Jessup popped up to soothe them all, being an intimate of Lorinda, and having, since milkiest boyhood, chummed with and detested Francis Tasbrough.

This Doremus Jessup, publisher of the *Daily Informer*, for all that he was a competent business man and a writer of editorials not without wit and good New England earthiness, was yet considered the prime eccentric of Fort Beulah. He was on the school board, the library board, and he introduced people like Oswald Garrison Villard, Norman Thomas, and Admiral Byrd when they came to town lecturing.

Jessup was a littlish man, skinny, smiling, well tanned, with a small gray mustache, a small and well-trimmed gray beard—in a community where to sport a beard was to confess one's self a farmer, a Civil War veteran, or a Seventh Day Adventist. Doremus's detractors said that he maintained the beard just to be "highbrow" and "different," to try to appear "artistic." Possibly they were right. Anyway, he skipped up now and murmured:

"Well, all the birdies in their nest agree. My friend, Mrs. Pike, ought to know that freedom of speech becomes mere license when it goes so far as to criticize the Army, differ with the D.A.R., and advocate the rights of the Mob. So, Lorinda, I think you ought to apologize to the General, to whom we should be grateful for explaining to us what the ruling classes of the country really want. Come on now, my friend—jump up and make your excuses."

He was looking down on Lorinda with sternness, yet Medary Cole, president of Rotary, wondered if Doremus

wasn't "kidding" them. He had been known to. Yes—no—he must be wrong, for Mrs. Lorinda Pike was (without rising) caroling, "Oh yes! I do apologize, General! Thank you for your revelatory speech!"

The General raised his plump hand (with a Masonic ring as well as a West Point ring on the sausage-shaped fingers); he bowed like Galahad or a head-waiter; he shouted with parade-ground maleness: "Not at all, not at all, madame! We old campaigners never mind a healthy scrap. Glad when anybody's enough interested in our fool ideas to go and get sore at us, huh, huh, huh!"

And everybody laughed and sweetness reigned. The program wound up with Louis Rotenstern's singing of a group of patriotic ditties: "Marching through Georgia" and "Tenting on the Old Campground" and "Dixie" and "Old Black Joe" and "I'm Only a Poor Cowboy and I Know I Done Wrong."

Louis Rotenstern was by all of Fort Beulah classed as a "good fellow," a caste just below that of "real, old-fashioned gentleman." Doremus Jessup liked to go fishing with him, and partridge-hunting; and he considered that no Fifth Avenue tailor could do anything tastier in the way of a seersucker outfit. But Louis was a jingo. He explained, and rather often, that it was not he nor his father who had been born in the ghetto in Prussian Poland, but his grandfather (whose name, Doremus suspected, had been something less stylish and Nordic than Rotenstern). Louis's pocket heroes were Calvin Coolidge, Leonard Wood, Dwight L. Moody, and Admiral Dewey (and Dewey was a born Vermonter, rejoiced Louis, who himself had been born in Flatbush, Long Island).

He was not only 100 per cent American; he exacted 40 per cent of chauvinistic interest on top of the principal. He was on every occasion heard to say, "We ought to keep all

these foreigners out of the country, and what I mean, the Kikes just as much as the Wops and Hunkies and Chinks." Louis was altogether convinced that if the ignorant politicians would keep their dirty hands off banking and the stock exchange and hours of labor for salesmen in department stores, then everyone in the country would profit, as beneficiaries of increased business, and all of them (including the retail clerks) be rich as Aga Khan.

So Louis put into his melodies not only his burning voice of a Bydgoszcz cantor but all his nationalistic fervor, so that every one joined in the choruses, particularly Mrs. Adelaide Tarr Gimmitch, with her celebrated train-caller's contralto.

The dinner broke up in cataract-like sounds of happy adieux, and Doremus Jessup muttered to his goodwife Emma, a solid, kindly, worried soul, who liked knitting, solitaire, and the novels of Kathleen Norris: "Was I terrible, butting in that way?"

"Oh, no, Dormouse, you did just right. I *am* fond of Lorinda Pike, but why *does* she have to show off and parade all her silly Socialist ideas?"

"You old Tory!" said Doremus. "Don't you want to invite the Siamese elephant, the Gimmitch, to drop in and have a drink?"

"I do not!" said Emma Jessup.

And in the end, as the Rotarians shuffled and dealt themselves and their innumerable motorcars, it was Frank Tasbrough who invited the choicer males, including Doremus, home for an after-party.

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As he took his wife home and drove up Pleasant Hill to Tasbrough's, Doremus Jessup meditated upon the epidemic patriotism of General Edgeways. But he broke it off to let himself be absorbed in the hills, as it had been his habit for the fifty-three years, out of his sixty years of life, that he had spent in Fort Beulah, Vermont.

Legally a city, Fort Beulah was a comfortable village of old red brick, old granite workshops, and houses of white clapboards or gray shingles, with a few smug little modern bungalows, yellow or seal brown. There was but little manufacturing: a small woolen mill, a sash-and-door factory, a pump works. The granite which was its chief produce came from quarries four miles away; in Fort Beulah itself were only the offices . . . all the money . . . the meager shacks of most of the quarry workers. It was a town of perhaps ten thousand souls, inhabiting about twenty thousand bodies—the proportion of soul-possession may be too high.

There was but one (comparative) skyscraper in town: the six-story Tasbrough Building, with the offices of the Tasbrough & Scarlett Granite Quarries; the offices of Doremus's son-in-law, Fowler Greenhill, M.D., and his partner, old Dr. Olmsted, of Lawyer Mungo Kitterick, of Harry Kindermann, agent for maple syrup and dairying supplies, and of thirty or forty other village samurai.

It was a downy town, a drowsy town, a town of security and tradition, which still believed in Thanksgiving, Fourth of

July, Memorial Day, and to which May Day was not an occasion for labor parades but for distributing small baskets of flowers.

It was a May night—late in May of 1936—with a three-quarter moon. Doremus's house was a mile from the business-center of Fort Beulah, on Pleasant Hill, which was a spur thrust like a reaching hand out from the dark rearing mass of Mount Terror. Upland meadows, moon-glistening, he could see, among the wildernesses of spruce and maple and poplar on the ridges far above him; and below, as his car climbed, was Ethan Creek flowing through the meadows. Deep woods—rearing mountain bulwarks—the air like spring-water—serene clapboarded houses that remembered the War of 1812 and the boyhoods of those errant Vermonters, Stephen A. Douglas, the "Little Giant," and Hiram Powers and Thaddeus Stevens and Brigham Young and President Chester Alan Arthur.

"No—Powers and Arthur—they were weak sisters," pondered Doremus. "But Douglas and Thad Stevens and Brigham, the old stallion—I wonder if we're breeding up any paladins like those stout, grouchy old devils?—if we're producing 'em anywhere in New England?—anywhere in America?—anywhere in the world? They had guts. Independence. Did what they wanted to and thought what they liked, and everybody could go to hell. The youngsters today—Oh, the aviators have plenty of nerve. The physicists, these twenty-five-year-old Ph. D.'s that violate the inviolable atom, they're pioneers. But most of the wishy-washy young people today—Going seventy miles an hour but not going anywhere—not enough imagination to *want* to go anywhere! Getting their music by turning a dial. Getting their phrases from the comic strips instead of from Shakespeare and the Bible and Veblen and Old Bill Sumner.

Pap-fed flabs! Like this smug pup Malcolm Tasbrough, hanging around Sissy! Aah!

"Wouldn't it be hell if that stuffed shirt, Edgeways, and that political Mae West, Gimmitch, were right, and we need all these military monkeyshines and maybe a fool war (to conquer some sticky-hot country we don't want on a bet!) to put some starch and git into these marionettes we call our children? Aah!

"But rats—These hills! Castle walls. And this air. They can keep their Cotswolds and Harz Mountains and Rockies! D. Jessup—topographical patriot. And I *am* a—"

"Dormouse, would you mind driving on the right-hand side of the road—on curves, anyway?" said his wife peaceably.

An upland hollow and mist beneath the moon—a veil of mist over apple blossoms and the heavy bloom of an ancient lilac bush beside the ruin of a farmhouse burned these sixty years and more.

Mr. Francis Tasbrough was the president, general manager, and chief owner of the Tasbrough & Scarlett Granite Quarries, at West Beulah, four miles from "the Fort." He was rich, persuasive, and he had constant labor troubles. He lived in a new Georgian brick house on Pleasant Hill, a little beyond Doremus Jessup's, and in that house he maintained a private barroom luxurious as that of a motor company's advertising manager at Grosse Point. It was no more the traditional New England than was the Catholic part of Boston; and Frank himself boasted that, though his family had for six generations lived in New England, he was no tight Yankee but in his Efficiency, his Salesmanship, the complete Pan-American Business Executive.

He was a tall man, Tasbrough, with a yellow mustache and a monotonously emphatic voice. He was fifty-four, six years younger than Doremus Jessup, and when he had been four, Doremus had protected him from the results of his singularly unpopular habit of hitting the other small boys over the head with things—all kinds of things—sticks and toy wagons and lunch boxes and dry cow flops.

Assembled in his private barroom tonight, after the Rotarian Dinner, were Frank himself, Doremus Jessup, Medary Cole, the miller, Superintendent of Schools Emil Staubmeyer, R. C. Crowley—Roscoe Conkling Crowley, the weightiest banker in Fort Beulah—and, rather surprisingly, Tasbrough's pastor, the Episcopal minister, the Rev. Mr. Falck, his old hands as delicate as porcelain, his wilderness of hair silk-soft and white, his unfleshy face betokening the Good Life. Mr. Falck came from a solid Knickerbocker family, and he had studied in Edinburgh and Oxford along with the General Theological Seminary of New York; and in all of the Beulah Valley there was, aside from Doremus, no one who more contentedly hid away in the shelter of the hills.

The barroom had been professionally interior-decorated by a young New York gentleman with the habit of standing with the back of his right hand against his hip. It had a stainless-steel bar, framed illustrations from *La Vie Parisienne*, silvered metal tables, and chromium-plated aluminum chairs with scarlet leather cushions.

All of them except Tasbrough, Medary Cole (a social climber to whom the favors of Frank Tasbrough were as honey and fresh ripened figs), and "Professor" Emil Staubmeyer were uncomfortable in this parrot-cage elegance, but none of them, including Mr. Falck, seemed to dislike Frank's soda and excellent Scotch or the sardine sandwiches.

"And I wonder if Thad Stevens would of liked this, either?" considered Doremus. "He'd of snarled. Old cornered catamount. But probably not at the whisky!"

"Doremus," demanded Tasbrough, "why don't you take a tumble to yourself? All these years you've had a lot of fun criticizing—always being agin the government—kidding everybody—posing as such a Liberal that you'll stand for all these subversive elements. Time for you to quit playing tag with crazy ideas and come in and join the family. These are serious times—maybe twenty-eight million on relief, and beginning to get ugly—thinking they've got a vested right now to be supported.

"And the Jew Communists and Jew financiers plotting together to control the country. I can understand how, as a younger fellow, you could pump up a little sympathy for the unions and even for the Jews—though, as you know, I'll never get over being sore at you for taking the side of the strikers when those thugs were trying to ruin my whole business—burn down my polishing and cutting shops—why, you were even friendly with that alien murderer Karl Pascal, who started the whole strike—maybe I didn't enjoy firing *him* when it was all over!

"But anyway, these labor racketeers are getting together now, with Communist leaders, and determined to run the country—to tell men like *me* how to run our business!—and just like General Edgeways said, they'll refuse to serve their country if we should happen to get dragged into some war. Yessir, a mighty serious hour, and it's time for you to cut the cackle and join the really responsible citizens."

Said Doremus, "Hm. Yes, I agree it's a serious time. With all the discontent there is in the country to wash him into office, Senator Windrip has got an excellent chance to be

elected President, next November, and if he is, probably his gang of buzzards will get us into some war, just to grease their insane vanity and show the world that we're the huskiest nation going. And then I, the Liberal, and you, the Plutocrat, the bogus Tory, will be led out and shot at 3 A.M. Serious? Huh!"

"Rats! You're exaggerating!" said R. C. Crowley.

Doremus went on: "If Bishop Prang, our Savonarola in a Cadillac 16, swings his radio audience and his League of Forgotten Men to Buzz Windrip, Buzz will win. People will think they're electing him to create more economic security. Then watch the Terror! God knows there's been enough indication that we *can* have tyranny in America—the fix of the Southern share-croppers, the working conditions of the miners and garment-makers, and our keeping Mooney in prison so many years. But wait till Windrip shows us how to say it with machine guns! Democracy—here and in Britain and France, it hasn't been so universal a sniveling slavery as Naziism in Germany, such an imagination-hating, pharisaic materialism as Russia—even if it has produced industrialists like you, Frank, and bankers like you, R. C., and given you altogether too much power and money. On the whole, with scandalous exceptions, Democracy's given the ordinary worker more dignity than he ever had. That may be menaced now by Windrip—all the Windrips. All right! Maybe we'll have to fight paternal dictatorship with a little sound patricide—fight machine guns with machine guns. Wait till Buzz takes charge of us. A real Fascist dictatorship!"

"Nonsense! Nonsense!" snorted Tasbrough. "That couldn't happen here in America, not possibly! We're a country of freemen."

"The answer to that," suggested Doremus Jessup, "if Mr. Falck will forgive me, is 'the hell it can't!' Why, there's no

country in the world that can get more hysterical—yes, or more obsequious!—than America. Look how Huey Long became absolute monarch over Louisiana, and how the Right Honorable Mr. Senator Berzelius Windrip owns *his* State. Listen to Bishop Prang and Father Coughlin on the radio—divine oracles, to millions. Remember how casually most Americans have accepted Tammany grafting and Chicago gangs and the crookedness of so many of President Harding's appointees? Could Hitler's bunch, or Windrip's, be worse? Remember the Kuklux Klan? Remember our war hysteria, when we called sauerkraut 'Liberty cabbage' and somebody actually proposed calling German measles 'Liberty measles'? And wartime censorship of honest papers? Bad as Russia! Remember our kissing the—well, the feet of Billy Sunday, the million-dollar evangelist, and of Aimée McPherson, who swam from the Pacific Ocean clear into the Arizona desert and got away with it? Remember Voliva and Mother Eddy? . . . Remember our Red scares and our Catholic scares, when all well-informed people knew that the O.G.P.U. were hiding out in Oskaloosa, and the Republicans campaigning against Al Smith told the Carolina mountaineers that if Al won the Pope would illegitimatize their children? Remember Tom Heflin and Tom Dixon? Remember when the hick legislators in certain states, in obedience to William Jennings Bryan, who learned his biology from his pious old grandma, set up shop as scientific experts and made the whole world laugh itself sick by forbidding the teaching of evolution? . . . Remember the Kentucky night-riders? Remember how trainloads of people have gone to enjoy lynchings? Not happen here? Prohibition—shooting down people just because they *might* be transporting liquor—no, that couldn't happen in *America!* Why, where in all history has there ever been a people so

ripe for a dictatorship as ours! We're ready to start on a Children's Crusade—only of adults—right now, and the Right Reverend Abbots Windrip and Prang are all ready to lead it!"

"Well, what if they are?" protested R. C. Crowley. "It might not be so bad. I don't like all these irresponsible attacks on us bankers all the time. Of course, Senator Windrip has to pretend publicly to bawl the banks out, but once he gets into power he'll give the banks their proper influence in the administration and take our expert financial advice. Yes. Why are you so afraid of the word 'Fascism,' Doremus? Just a word—just a word! And might not be so bad, with all the lazy bums we got panhandling relief nowadays, and living on my income tax and yours—not so worse to have a real Strong Man, like Hitler or Mussolini—like Napoleon or Bismarck in the good old days—and have 'em really *run* the country and make it efficient and prosperous again. 'Nother words, have a doctor who won't take any back-chat, but really boss the patient and make him get well whether he likes it or not!"

"Yes!" said Emil Staubmeyer. "Didn't Hitler save Germany from the Red Plague of Marxism? I got cousins there. I *know!*"

"Hm," said Doremus, as often Doremus did say it. "Cure the evils of Democracy by the evils of Fascism! Funny therapeutics. I've heard of their curing syphilis by giving the patient malaria, but I've never heard of their curing malaria by giving the patient syphilis!"

"Think that's nice language to use in the presence of the Reverend Falck?" raged Tasbrough.

Mr. Falck piped up, "I think it's quite nice language, and an interesting suggestion, Brother Jessup!"

"Besides," said Tasbrough, "this chewing the rag is all nonsense, anyway. As Crowley says, might be a good thing

to have a strong man in the saddle, but—it just can't happen here in America."

And it seemed to Doremus that the softly moving lips of the Reverend Mr. Falck were framing, "The hell it can't!"

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Doremus Jessup, editor and proprietor of the *Daily Informer*, the Bible of the conservative Vermont farmers up and down the Beulah Valley, was born in Fort Beulah in 1876, only son of an impecunious Universalist pastor, the Reverend Loren Jessup. His mother was no less than a Bass, of Massachusetts. The Reverend Loren, a bookish man and fond of flowers, merry but not noticeably witty, used to chant "Alas, alas, that a Bass of Mass should marry a minister prone to gas," and he would insist that she was all wrong ichthyologically—she should have been a cod, not a bass. There was in the parsonage little meat but plenty of books, not all theological by any means, so that before he was twelve Doremus knew the profane writings of Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, Jane Austen, Tennyson, Byron, Keats, Shelley, Tolstoy, Balzac. He graduated from Isaiah College—once a bold Unitarian venture but by 1894 an inter-denominational outfit with nebulous trinitarian yearnings, a small and rustic stable of learning, in North Beulah, thirteen miles from "the Fort."

But Isaiah College has come up in the world today—excepting educationally—for in 1931 it held the Dartmouth football team down to 64 to 6.

During college, Doremus wrote a great deal of bad poetry and became an incurable book addict, but he was a fair track athlete. Naturally, he corresponded for papers in Boston and Springfield, and after graduation he was a reporter in Rutland and Worcester, with one glorious year in

Boston, whose grimy beauty and shards of the past were to him what London would be to a young Yorkshireman. He was excited by concerts, art galleries, and bookshops; thrice a week he had a twenty-five-cent seat in the upper balcony of some theater; and for two months he roomed with a fellow reporter who had actually had a short story in *The Century* and who could talk about authors and technique like the very dickens. But Doremus was not particularly beefy or enduring, and the noise, the traffic, the bustle of assignments, exhausted him, and in 1901, three years after his graduation from college, when his widowed father died and left him \$2980.00 and his library, Doremus went home to Fort Beulah and bought a quarter interest in the *Informer*, then a weekly.

By 1936 it was a daily, and he owned all of it . . . with a perceptible mortgage.

He was an equable and sympathetic boss; an imaginative news detective; he was, even in this ironbound Republican state, independent in politics; and in his editorials against graft and injustice, though they were not fanatically chronic, he could slash like a dog whip.

He was a third cousin of Calvin Coolidge, who had considered him sound domestically but loose politically. Doremus considered himself just the opposite.

He had married his wife, Emma, out of Fort Beulah. She was the daughter of a wagon manufacturer, a placid, prettyish, broad-shouldered girl with whom he had gone to high school.

Now, in 1936, of their three children, Philip (Dartmouth, and Harvard Law School) was married and ambitiously practicing law in Worcester; Mary was the wife of Fowler Greenhill, M.D., of Fort Beulah, a gay and hustling medico, a choleric and red-headed young man, who was a wonder-

worker in typhoid, acute appendicitis, obstetrics, compound fractures, and diets for anemic children. Fowler and Mary had one son, Doremus's only grandchild, the bonny David, who at eight was a timid, inventive, affectionate child with such mourning hound-dog eyes and such red-gold hair that his picture might well have been hung at a National Academy show or even been reproduced on the cover of a Women's Magazine with 2,500,000 circulation. The Greenhills' neighbors inevitably said of the boy, "My, Davy's got such an imagination, hasn't he! I guess he'll be a Writer, just like his Grampa!"

Third of Doremus's children was the gay, the pert, the dancing Cecilia, known as "Sissy," aged eighteen, where her brother Philip was thirty-two and Mary, Mrs. Greenhill, turned thirty. She rejoiced the heart of Doremus by consenting to stay home while she was finishing high school, though she talked vigorously of going off to study architecture and "simply make *millions*, my dear," by planning and erecting miraculous small homes.

Mrs. Jessup was lavishly (and quite erroneously) certain that her Philip was the spit and image of the Prince of Wales; Philip's wife, Merilla (the fair daughter of Worcester, Massachusetts), curiously like the Princess Marina; that Mary would by any stranger be taken for Katharine Hepburn; that Sissy was a dryad and David a medieval page; and that Doremus (though she knew him better than she did those changelings, her children) amazingly resembled that naval hero, Winfield Scott Schley, as he looked in 1898.

She was a loyal woman, Emma Jessup, warmly generous, a cordon bleu at making lemon-meringue pie, a parochial Tory, an orthodox Episcopalian, and completely innocent of any humor. Doremus was perpetually tickled by her kind solemnity, and it was to be chalked down to him as a

singular act of grace that he refrained from pretending that he had become a working Communist and was thinking of leaving for Moscow immediately.

Doremus looked depressed, looked old, when he lifted himself, as from an invalid's chair, out of the Chrysler, in his hideous garage of cement and galvanized iron. (But it was a proud two-car garage; besides the four-year-old Chrysler, they had a new Ford convertible coupe, which Doremus hoped to drive some day when Sissy wasn't using it.)

He cursed competently as, on the cement walk from the garage to the kitchen, he barked his shins on the lawnmower, left there by his hired man, one Oscar Ledue, known always as "Shad," a large and red-faced, a sulky and surly Irish-Canuck peasant. Shad always did things like leaving lawnmowers about to snap at the shins of decent people. He was entirely incompetent and vicious. He never edged-up the flower beds, he kept his stinking old cap on his head when he brought in logs for the fireplace, he did not scythe the dandelions in the meadow till they had gone to seed, he delighted in failing to tell cook that the peas were now ripe, and he was given to shooting cats, stray dogs, chipmunks, and honey-voiced blackbirds. At least twice a day, Doremus resolved to fire him, but—Perhaps he was telling himself the truth when he insisted that it was amusing to try to civilize this prize bull.

Doremus trotted into the kitchen, decided that he did not want some cold chicken and a glass of milk from the ice-box, nor even a wedge of the celebrated cocoanut layer cake made by their cook-general, Mrs. Candy, and mounted to his "study," on the third, the attic floor.

His house was an ample, white, clapboarded structure of the vintage of 1880, a square bulk with a mansard roof and,