Adela E. Orpen

Perfection City

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CHAPTER I.
HOME-COMING OF THE BRIDE.

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“This road isn’t called Perfection Road, is it?” she asked jerkily, as she held tight hold of the edge of the waggon to prevent herself from being pitched head foremost off the seat. She would have laid her head against her companion’s shoulder only that it was square and hard, and she was afraid of getting her temple “stove in,” as the sailors say, by the terrific bumps caused by the wheels going over a big stone or down into a deep rut. She was a bride, and he was bringing her to their new home on the Kansas Prairie.

“My poor little pet,” he said tenderly, “it is very rough here. We are going down into Cotton Wood Creek, and these stones were cast up by the last freshet which pretty well washed the road away.”

They plunged headlong into the muddy waters of the Creek, and the little bride would have felt frightened only that “he” was by her side, for the waggon creaked and groaned with the strain, and the horses snorted uneasily, feeling their way carefully through the rushing torrent. The Creek was safely passed, and they slowly toiled up the long hill out of the bottom-lands, and pulled up when once more on the high prairie.

“There is our home, dearie,” he said, pointing with his whip to some scattered houses a couple of miles away. And being a bridegroom he kissed her.

“So that is Perfection City, is it?” said she, shading her eyes with her hand, for the afternoon sun sent level rays

into her face. “You know, Ezra, it is such a funny name, I always feel inclined to laugh when I say it. And how I shall ever dare to put it at the top of my letters as a real address when I write to the girls at the College at Smyrna, is more than I know.”

“Then don’t write it,” replied Ezra, a trifle sternly. “It will hurt our feelings very much if you laugh at it. You know it means a great deal to all of us.”

“Then I’ll never laugh at it,” said the little bride.

“Which is our house?” she asked a moment later.

“The one half way up the slope.”

“Oh, that is nice. I like looking down across things. I shouldn’t like to live in a valley and always have to look up, you know.”

“The large building is the Academy,” said Ezra. “That is where we hold our meetings and gather together for all the best purposes of our little community-life.”

“Is it there that Madame Morozoff-Smith lives?” asked his wife.

“Her house is the one just opposite.”

“Oh, that big one! It is quite the largest in the village—the City, I mean.”

Ezra did not make any reply to this remark. He had never realised that Madame’s house was indeed the largest in their Community, and now he felt vexed that this fact should have been the first his wife noted.

A small boy with shining black face and shining white teeth, along with a yellow puppy, welcomed them.

“This is Napoleon Pompey,” said Ezra, with much decorum presenting the small darkie who grinned and

bobbed his head. “And this is Diana,” pointing to the puppy that had come up to the bars along with the negro. Diana jumped upon her new mistress and left two black dust marks on her dress. Dust is black in London and on the western prairie, nowhere else.

“Oh, you dirty dog,” said the little bride, who was a very natty body.

“You’ll have to get used to dirt in all degrees out here, Ollie,” said her husband as he led her to the door. She looked like a little girl as she stood beside him, for he was tall and angular and long of leg. A sloping plank with battens nailed across it led to the door, there were no steps. As the pair entered, Napoleon Pompey and Diana took the horses and waggon to the stable and began respectively to unharness and worry them.

“What a dear little house! It is just like a toy! And do look at the saws hanging on the walls beside the covers of the pots! Oh, won’t it be so nice and free living here! I shall feel like an explorer in a far country. And how funny to have nail-kegs for seats, and oh, you dear old darling!”

Olive jumped up and kissed her big husband.

“Things are rough now, dearie,” he said with infinite tenderness, looking at her with loving admiration, “but by and by we shall have everything very nice.”

“But I think it is just as nice as it can be now.”

“This is our room,” said he, opening a door to the right.

“Why, if you haven’t gone and got a rocking-chair!” exclaimed Olive, glancing around the small apartment.

“I made it for you myself in spare time,” answered Ezra, pleased that she had noticed the chair the first thing: he

had often wondered, when working at that rocking-chair, whether she would be pleased with it. “You see,” he continued, “we have to work only five days a week for the Community. All the rest of our time is at our own disposal, and by and by, when we are flourishing, four days for the Community will suffice.”

“Do you like working for other people and not being paid?” asked Olive.

“I do not consider it as working for other people without pay,” replied her husband, with some quickness. “We each work for the general good, and if I happen to plant corn that someone else will eat, then some other member of the Community raises potatoes that I shall eat.”

“There, there, don’t be cross,” said the little wife, noting the flush that had risen to his brow as he spoke. “I am sure it is nice, and I shall like it when I understand it all. At any rate we shall be very happy whatever happens, and I like my dear little house, and please, I am very thirsty, can I have a drink?”

He brought her some water in a tin dipper with a long handle, and she did not make a face, but drank the water gratefully. She determined in her own mind, however, to have a glass tumbler the very next day, but she was new to the prairie, and she did not get the tumbler the next day, nor the next week, nor for many, many long months.

“What time are we to have breakfast?” she asked, when taking over the household from Napoleon Pompey and Diana, who had run the establishment while her husband had been to fetch her from Ohio.

“Yo’ kin eat when yo’ like,” said Napoleon Pompey, desiring to be all that was polite to his new mistress.

“But I want to know what time you have breakfast?” repeated Olive with persistence.

“We uns got ter be hout on der lan’ ploughin’ afore sun-up,” said Napoleon Pompey concisely.

“Dear me! Why, that is before six o’clock!” exclaimed Olive.

“I calkerlate,” said Napoleon Pompey affably.

Ezra did not want Olive to think she was bound to get up and prepare the working-man’s breakfast.

“You are not used to that sort of hard work, dearie. We can do very well with cold corn-bread.”

“Of all things the most stoggy and hopelessly uninviting,” interrupted his wife. “No, Ezra, I won’t have any of the people out here think I am a little fool that can’t do any useful work. I have my pride as well as other folks. I shall cook your breakfast to-morrow and every day afterwards, and I shall cook it well, see if I don’t.”

“I am sure of that,” said her husband with the confidence of a bridegroom.

The house of which the young bride had just taken possession was by no means an ordinary prairie house. Far from it. It had pretensions to comfort which the true prairie house should never possess, and it lacked the few elements of picturesqueness with which the genuine article is sometimes endowed. The plan on which it was built was of the simplest—the same that children adopt in building their doll’s houses—four sides and a sloping roof, all of wood from top to bottom. It was not a log-house, which has a few

broken lines to rest the eye of the beholder and present possibilities to the artist, it was a frame house, that is, the straightest, stiffest, squarest, most hopelessly unpicturesque object that it is possible to imagine, and to make matters worse it was painted a glaring white from eave to foundation. There was not a broken line or a broken tint anywhere to refresh the eye, and it stood on the high prairie, as if hurled into a glaring world by a Titan’s hand.

The prairie is fertile, and in the eye of a farmer may possess the beauty of usefulness, but otherwise it is hideous. The long rolling billows of grass present no character, while the trees are confined to the river valleys where they find refuge from prairie fires, and can therefore lead a sufficiently undisturbed existence to reach quite a respectable height. A couple of small locust trees, not three feet high, were all that did duty as shade-giving plants near Olive’s house, which accordingly faced the world and its storms entirely on its own individual merits. Judged by prairie standard the house was “tip-top.” It possessed no less than four rooms, while the regular settler’s cabin was wont to indulge in only a single comprehensive apartment, which was kitchen, parlour and bedroom all in one. The two lower rooms were the kitchen, which was fairly large, and a smaller one off it, reserved for the private use of the young wife. The kitchen looked like a ship’s cabin, only that it had more light than usually penetrates into a ship’s cabin. In fact it was very light, for there were two large windows, one to the north and one to the south, geometrically opposite each other. These two windows, so exactly facing each other, were fairly typical of the house itself, which was the

embodiment of mathematical accuracy. The building was placed exactly east and west, as if it had been a carefully oriented church. There was a door on the south side, exactly in the middle, and a window on either side of the door, placed accurately in the centre of the space left between the side of the door and the end of the house. Over these two windows were two others exactly one half their size, giving light to the loft, and exactly in the centre of the roof-ridge was a black stove-pipe.

The average prairie man is a genius in the way of doing without things. He can live in a house of the smallest dimensions, containing the minimum of utensils. In fact, his idea of a house is that it should be a miner's tent solidified into substantiality. The miner in a newly-prospected gold-field is a person who spends his days in a hole, and has no belongings but the clothes on his back and the shovel in his hand. He lives on his expectations. The regular prairie settler, would arrive in the spring, camp in his waggon, stick grains of corn under the sod, and think himself lucky if he could raise both the corn and a loghut, fourteen by twelve feet, before the cold weather set in. Those who have passed through such a severe school prune down their requirements. Therefore the house to which Ezra Weston brought his little bride was rightly considered to be a model of luxury, or in prairie phraseology to be "powerful full o' truck."

The kitchen certainly was full. The stove, black and business-like, stood near the partition wall, and on it rested a couple of huge iron pots with covers. Chairs there were none, as Olive had remarked, but boxes and nail-kegs did as

well and were useful in holding things. There was a large wooden table, very strongly made, on one side, and a set of shelves in one corner. The walls and ceiling, which were of wood closely jointed, added to the ship-like appearance of the room, but the presence of two large saws and a horse-collar which hung above them made a considerable deduction from the nautical character of the apartment.

This model dwelling stood in the midst of a large tract of fenced-in land. Part of this was already under cultivation and showed a dark purple surface to the heavens, betokening newly turned up prairie sod full of the natural plant foods stored there for thousands of ages. These were now about to be recklessly used up by the ordinary system of prairie farming, which consisted of taking everything out of the land and of putting nothing back into it. A sort of road, that is to say a beaten track with deep channels on either side, led from the house to the bars, which did duty as gate to the premises. These bars were precisely what the name implies, bars of wood lying on supports made for them between posts, and they were simply let down whenever horses or other animals had to pass in or out, and were climbed over by active children too lazy to let them down or rather, perhaps, too lazy to put them up again.

On one side of the bars stretching out at an angle was an orchard just planted with trees that probably would be worth having twenty years hence, and further away was another field consisting simply of fenced-in prairie grass. The fields, and indeed everything else, were square, and every fence that did not run north and south, ran east and west. The whole place seemed under a despotism of compass and

measuring chain. Indeed, the prairie itself was under the same iron rule: and by the authorities had been plotted out into squares of a mile each way called “sections,” of which persons could buy of the Government quarter sections or multiples of a quarter section at a low rate. Fortunately for humanity this conspiracy to turn the world into a surveyor’s map was to some extent defeated by the rivers and streams, which ran as Heaven and the water-sheds decreed, and not as the officials at Washington desired. This fact, and this alone, has in some measure saved the prairie from the awful fate of mathematical damnation.

CHAPTER II.
UNCLE DAVID.

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Mrs. Weston was tired and sat down in her rocking-chair to rest. Her day's work was fairly over. The breakfast had been ready punctually at half past five, and it was well-cooked, as she had boasted it would be—corn-bread smoking hot, fried chicken, potatoes, flap-jacks and molasses—a meal for a king, to say nothing of a working-man and his negro help. Ezra and Napoleon Pompey had partaken heartily, especially the latter, for he had been living on underdone hoe-cake and cold pork. Then they had gone off to the ploughing, while Olive had bustled around and got forward with her house-work. At eleven o'clock she had run up the towel against the shady side of the house, a signal easily seen from the distant field, and signifying that dinner was ready. They had come home, men and horses thoroughly hungry and ready for food and rest. Ezra lay on the kitchen floor and talked to her while she washed up the dishes. And now it was three o'clock, and all the work was done. She thought she would read a little. She had several books with her that she had been looking forward to reading. So she took up one of them and seated herself comfortably in the rocking-chair. The door was open and a warm air came in from the south along with the gleaming sunshine. Diana lay across the door-way, but kept one eye open, so as to see when the black hen came near enough to have a spring at her with any chance of grabbing a mouthful of tail-feathers. Olive's eyes rested very little on the book,

but much on the view outside. It looked pleasant enough in the bright May sunshine. The long brown patch of the garden showed a few methodical green lines that spoke of vegetables beginning to sprout. The meadow of blue grass just beyond was likewise by its hue showing the on-coming of the warm spring weather, and yet again further off, on the other side of the meadow, lay the vast field which her husband was ploughing. Once in every half hour she could see him turn at the head-land, and noted how seldom he seemed to stop and rest. Napoleon Pompey was riding the off leader, and from that distance they seemed little insects gently crawling backwards and forwards across the land. Pleasant it looked too and by no means hard work. Olive determined to go out to the field one day soon and watch the process from a nearer point of view; she might indeed herself hold the plough-handles, it looked easy, she would ask Ezra to let her, she would like to learn to do all sorts of work so as to be very useful, she would—confused images swept slowly over her mind, she leaned back her pretty little head and slept in her chair.

She awoke with a start. A large square figure stood in the door-way, blocking out the sunshine, and Diana, with the insane friendliness of a puppy, was trying to clamber up one of his legs.

“Well, little gal, I reckon you’re ’most tired out, ain’t you?” said the big man, coming straight into the room.

Mrs. Weston rose to her utmost height of five feet two inches, and tried to be dignified.

“Do you wish to see my husband?” she inquired stiffly.

“No, I don’t want to see Ezry. I come to talk to you a spell, and see you.”

“You are very kind I’m sure,” returned the little lady icily, but the stranger did not seem one whit abashed. He took a nail-keg and sat down on it and looked about him. “Wal, now,” he remarked, nodding his head, “Ezry is real downright handy. He’s gone and got your house fine and fixed up, ain’t he now?”

“It is extremely comfortable, Mr.—ah—I don’t think you mentioned your name,” said Mrs. Weston, with a snap of her black eyes. She didn’t at all relish the free and easy way in which this man spoke of her husband.

“Do tell!” exclaimed the stranger with vast cordiality. “An’ you didn’t know who I was. Why, I’m Uncle David. I guessed everybody ’ud know me. There ain’t nobody else so big and awkward looking ’bout here on this prairie as me. Why, there was a man over to Perfection City yesterday, he come from beyond Cotton Wood Creek, and he said he calculated I’d be powerful useful on washing days, ’cause if they tied the clothes-line to me I’d do instead of a pole, an’ timber is mighty scarce anyhow.”

Uncle David gave a long loud laugh that set Diana into an ecstasy of delight, and was of itself so joyous that, after a moment, Olive also joined in with a merry titter. She had often heard her husband speak of Uncle David, as being one of the kindest and most simple-hearted of men. Her frigid manner melted rapidly and completely.

“Wal, now,” began Uncle David again, after his merriment had subsided, “how do you like our name?”

“Your name,” repeated Olive considerably puzzled.

“No, our name, the name of the Community, Perfection City. Do you like it?”

“I don’t think I do,” replied she.

“Jes’ so,” broke in Uncle David, apparently much pleased with this answer. “I knew you wouldn’t. Nobody does.”

“Why did you call it such a name—such a horrid name—and if nobody likes it, what is the use?”

“There now, that’s what they all say, until I talk to ’em,” said Uncle David. “You see I gave the name to the place.”

“Oh, it was your choice!” said Olive.

“When we came here, Niece and I, there wasn’t no town nor nothing, it was just open prairie. Ezry he come along too with us, and the Carpenters, and Mrs. Ruby, and the Wrights.”

“You leave out Madame Morozoff-Smith,” interrupted Olive.

“I thought you knew. Why, Madame, she’s Niece. She ain’t my real niece, she wasn’t born in my family, but she’s niece by adoption, and I hold she’s more to me than half the nieces I ever seen. I ain’t cute like most of the folks here, an’ there wasn’t no use in having me at Perfection City. I can’t do nothing. I can’t compose papers like Brother Wright. So I was studyin’ to see some way for me to come with ’em. It would ha’ broke my heart to be left behind. Madame, she come to me, an’ says she: ‘You’ll be my uncle. I want an uncle very much, and I’ll love you dearly.’ An’ so I was. I call it the greatest honour of my life when Madame made me her uncle, and added my name to hers.” Uncle David stooped and patted Diana’s head thoughtfully.

“When did you think of the name?” said Olive with a view to bringing him back to the point.

“Yes, jes’ so, that’s ’xactly what I was comin’ to. You see, when Ezry fust come here with us he wasn’t quite clear in his mind ’bout joinin’ in with us, leastways not to be one of the Community for his whole mortal life. It’s a serious step to take, and he was a-doubtin’ in his mind, leastways till Madame she talked to him for a spell. He wasn’t sure fust if he’d got a call to community-life. He knowed it was the best, of course, and the true life: he knowed all that right enough, but he didn’t feel sure of himself as bein’ fit to found a city. It is a most responsible thing to be a founder. ’Taint everybody as is fit for it. Then Madame made it clear how she was a founder, an’ she is the most wonderful woman ever lived in this world, an’ she showed Ezry how it was his duty to help in this great work, an’ when he saw that clear he was dreadful sot on it too. We was a-gettin’ our houses up as spry as ever we could, and ole Wright he was a-buildin’ th’ Academy, then Ezry says: ‘What’s goin’ to be our name?’ It was jes’ called Weddell’s Gully, ’cause we bought from a man o’ that name. So Ezry said: ‘Let’s call it something to signify our principles,’ and one person said one name and one said another, then Wright said ‘Let’s call it Teleiopolis.’”

“Oh, that sounds very pretty,” exclaimed Olive. “Why didn’t you?”

“Wal, now, I said that’s very pretty, jes’ the same as you did. What does it mean, do you know?”

“No, I don’t know. I suppose it is Greek for something.”

“’Zactly so. It is Greek for something, and that something is Perfection City.”

“It sounds nicer.”

“Maybe so, but you look here. Are we Greeks?”

“No, of course not.”

“Then why talk in Greek?”

“I don’t know, except it is prettier.”

“Do you suppose them old Greeks, when they went an’ founded cities, they called ’em names out o’ some other language they didn’t understand, or did they called ’em good solid Greek names as any little boy ’ud know what they meant?” asked Uncle David with rising energy.

“I believe they called their cities by Greek names, in fact I know they did,” said Olive, hastily reviewing her stock of history.

“An’ why?” asked Uncle David.

“I don’t know.”

“Because they wasn’t ’shamed o’ their mother tongue like we are. That’s why,” said Uncle David, clapping his big hand on his knee.

“Oh indeed,” said Olive.

“An’ that’s what I said, says I, ‘We are ’Mericans, we are founding a new city that’s goin’ to be great things one day. We have our principles. Let’s live up to them. We hain’t shamed o’ nothin’. Leastways not to my knowledge. We are goin’ to be an example to these folks roun’ here. We are goin’ to show ’em how to live a better life nor they ever did before. An’ how in thunder can we do that if we start by being ’shamed of our own mother tongue? We hain’t

Greeks, we don’t talk in Greek. This hain’t Teleiopolis, this is Perfection City.’ That is what I said to ’em.”

“What did they say to that?” asked Olive, much interested in the rugged honesty of Uncle David.

“Wal, I don’t know as they said anything much, on’y Ezry, he said he guessed he’d had his fust lesson, an’ he come and shook hands an’ said it certainly should be Perfection City, an’ so it was.”

“I shall think better of the name now,” said Olive. “Only at first I was afraid of people laughing, people who didn’t understand it, you see.”

“Oh, people’ll laugh,” said Uncle David. “People does a heap o’ laughing in this world without makin’ it one mite merrier for anybody. I like laughing myself. It’s awful good an’ satisfyin’ to have a real square laugh, but t’aint that sort. Mos’ folks’ laugh hain’t got no more fun in it than the laugh of a hoot-owl. I’d a heap sight rather have none at all. You ain’t agoin’ to mind that sort, I hope?” Uncle David spoke with a shade of anxiety in his manner.

“Oh no, I’m not thin-skinned,” said Olive with a superior smile.

“Some folks is made that way. When they have found a tender spot in anybody they can’t rest no how till they’ve stuck some sort o’ pin into it.”

“Tell me, does everything belong to everybody generally out here? It is so puzzling. This house, for instance, is it ours or yours or everybody’s?” asked Olive.

“The land an’ the horses an’ the cattle an’ waggons was mostly bought with community-money, that is Madame, she gave the money, she’s rich you know, an’ she’s generous

and always givin’ to the Community, her whole heart is in it. But Ezry worked a heap on this house, he mostly built it all, an’ it’s his, an’ t’other folks’ houses are theirs. That’s Brother Wright’s over yonder, an’ that’s our house beside the ’Cademy, most everybody worked to get it up and fix it comfortable for Madame. Old Mrs. Ruby, she lives to herself in the log cabin we bought from Weddell, we had it moved there a purpose over from the Gully, ’cause she liked to live beside the spring so as to get her water handy. She had a little mite of money which we used in buyin’ stock.”

“So you do have some things as private property, just like ordinary people,” observed Olive.

“Of course. It would not be any sort o’ use to have everything in common, ’cause folks’ notions don’t always ’xactly suit. An’ what we want is to have everybody free, so they can be perfectly happy here. We don’t want to have no strife, an’ no jealousy, an’ no ill feeling one towards another. But there can’t be community in all things. What sort o’ use would it be for you an’ me to have community o’ boots an’ shoes?” said Uncle David with a great laugh, sticking out his enormous foot towards where Olive’s dainty little slipper peeped from beneath her dress.

“Your shoes, my dear, wouldn’t go on my two fingers, an’ mine ’ud be big enough to make a tol’eble boat for you. There couldn’t be community in shoes, so there ain’t none. But with the lan’ it’s different. We all work that for the benefit of everybody, there ain’t no strugglin’ to be fust an’ get ahead o’ one another. We are all brothers at Perfection City.”

Olive was full of excitement when Ezra came back at sun-down.

“Just fancy, I’ve had my first visitor,” she said as she stood beside her husband while he was watering the horses.

“Who was it? Mrs. Ruby?”

“No, it was Uncle David,” and she gave a merry little laugh.

“Well, and how did you like him?”

“I think he is just charming. He is just like a piece of granite or oak or something of that sort, not smooth or shiny on the outside, but solid and sound to the very core. Oh! I shall love Uncle David.”

“That’s right. He is a good man,” said Ezra.

“And you know? he has made me understand about Perfection City. I shan’t want to laugh at it any more, and I don’t care if anybody else does. It was real brave of you showing your colours plain and sticking to them,” said Olive with a skip and a clap of her little hands.

CHAPTER III.
SISTER MARY WINKLE.

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The very next morning just as she was washing her potatoes for dinner, another visitor called upon Olive, a visitor of whose sex she was for a moment or two in doubt. The visitor wore a large sunbonnet, a check blouse, and a pair of Zouave trowsers fastened in at the ankle.

“How do you do, Olive Weston?” said this person, in a deep serious voice. Olive, who had not seen her, started in surprise and dropped her potato into the basin.

“I am Mary Winkle. That’s my house over yonder.”

“Oh, the Wrights’! Yes, to be sure. Come in and sit down,” said Olive hospitably, although she felt considerable surprise at her visitor’s appearance.

“You don’t wear the reformed dress yet, I see,” said Mary Winkle.

“No, I don’t,” acquiesced Olive.

“Shall you?”

“I don’t know. I have not thought about it. I suppose there is no regulation about what one wears on the prairie. There is no fashion here I suppose,” said Olive politely.

“No, only the fashion of common sense.”

“Do all the ladies dress that way, Miss Winkle?” inquired Olive.

“Only my daughter and myself.”

“I beg your pardon, I should have said Mrs. Winkle,” said Olive, in some confusion.

“No, you shouldn’t,” replied her visitor. “I am not Mrs. Winkle.”

“I am afraid I am very stupid. Would you tell me then how I should address you. I don’t understand.”

“Address me as Mary Winkle, and my husband as John Wright.”

Olive stared at her.

“Are you not Mrs. Wright then?”

“No, certainly not. I scorn the title. It is a symbol of subjection. I did not lose my identity when I chose to marry. I am the same Mary Winkle that I was before, and as such I desire to retain the name that I always possessed. Why should I take a new name simply because I am married?”

“It is usual,” stammered Olive. “I shouldn’t like not to be called Mrs. Weston. It is so confusing, you see.”

“Mere custom and prejudice. Why should not your husband take your name, instead of its always being the wife who is absorbed?”

“I don’t know, but I never heard of it before.”

“Ah, that is one of the first changes that must be made when women get their rights,” observed Mary Winkle.

“But I don’t want the change one bit. I much prefer the old way.”

“I dare say. Slaves often feel no want of freedom.”

“I’m not a slave,” said Olive, flushing angrily. “You cannot be in the least acquainted with my husband.”

“Oh, I know your husband very well, an excellent man in many respects, but narrow in others; however, I referred to general slavery, to custom, not to any individual slavery in your case.”

“I don’t think there is any good in destroying customs, unless there is something better to be got in a new custom.”

“Ah yes, no doubt it seems so to you; but there is inestimable gain in the mere protest against tyranny. Why, that’s what we are all here for, to protest against everything and live a life of freedom.”

“And freedom may as well begin here and now, and in its name I will wear long dresses and be called Mrs. Weston, because I prefer the older customs,” said Olive with some archness.

“Yes, you may do as you like, but you will get heartily sick of those skirts, I can tell you.”

Olive remembering sundry pretty dresses she had in her trunk, was privately convinced she would not get sick of them.

“I haven’t seen Madame yet,” she said, “and I feel the greatest curiosity about her. She must be a remarkable woman by all accounts. Does she wear the same sort of dress as you do?”

“No, she doesn’t, and it’s a great pity, for her influence would be very great with the other women. I suppose you’ll see her to-morrow evening. You’ll come to the Academy, won’t you?”

“Yes, certainly, if Ezra is going. I should like to go ever so much and see all my neighbours, but perhaps he will be too tired. He does work dreadfully hard, it seems to me.”

“He ought to do a little brain-work. Wright says nothing rests one like brain-work. He’s been doing a spell of that lately. He’s been writing an essay on ‘The Ultimate

Perfection of Being.’ He’ll most likely read some of it to-morrow at the Academy.”

“I shouldn’t think essays would be much use in planting corn,” said Olive rather tartly, remembering at what hour her husband had come from the harrowing.

“Wright and I, we don’t believe in making a god of work. We have a much higher ideal of life than that. We don’t want anything sordid in our lives, Wright and I. We haven’t any sympathy with this restless striving to get on. One of the great advantages of Perfection City is that we all have time for the cultivation of our higher natures.”

“Just now,” said Olive, “my husband seems to have no thought in his mind but the cultivation of that field over there. He is at work early and late. No person could possibly work harder for himself or his individual advantage than he does for the Community.”

“There’s just a case in point,” remarked Mary Winkle complacently. “I always thought your husband very narrow in his views. He slaves away at this corn planting as if that were the chief end and object of his existence. It is all very well to work at times, but working in order to store up food for the body is the lowest possible form that human activity can take.”

“It is the most indispensable form,” remarked Olive.

“By no means,” replied Mary Winkle with precision. “That observation would seem to indicate that you are more narrow even than your husband. The body is merely the servant of the mind: the mind needs to be fed, and it is the food for the mind which your husband appears so careless about providing. Fortunately for Perfection City, Wright has

taken thought on that subject. Wright has a very high standard of what is necessary for the mind."

"It appears to me," said Olive with a snap of her black eyes and an ominous red spot on her cheeks, "that if we all lived up to your standard, it might very well happen that by next winter our minds might be uncomfortably full and our stomachs correspondingly empty. If Ezra did not plough and get his land ready for planting as fast as mortal man can, how is the land to be got ready? It doesn't plough itself, does it, even at Perfection City?"

"I see you will have to get rid of many prejudices," observed Mary Winkle. "Of course community-life only comes easy to people who are adapted to it. Wright and I are adapted. We like it. We shall stay here. We shall succeed therefore. You and Brother Ezra will have to go through a season of training first. You both need it. I dare say you may hear something that you will find useful to you to-morrow from Wright. I will just mention to him where your particular blindness seems to lie. Wright is a very profound thinker. He has given great thought to the subject of the Ultimate Perfection of People. He can explain every step in the training of a perfect communist, and show clearly just where everybody has hitherto gone wrong in their attempts to realize their ideal, and exactly what mistakes they have made. I am glad you have come in time to hear his paper; it will be of lasting good to you. You will be able to profit by it, because you are in great need of proper training. I dare say you need it more even than Ezra. For, after all, he must have learned something from us in the year he has been with us."

CHAPTER IV.
MADAME MOROZOFF-SMITH.

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The Academy at Perfection City was not a pretentious building in anything but in name. It was a plain wooden house, almost square, having a window on three sides and a door on the fourth, facing south. Inside there were several rough benches, two tables, an iron stove, and a large easy chair, with a small desk beside it, upon which stood a pair of candles. There were no curtains and no carpets, absolutely no attempts at beautifying the place. But the board-floor was clean.

Olive dressed herself in a flutter of expectation for her first visit to this abode of wisdom.

“I expect everybody will be there, because they’ll all want to see you, little woman,” said her husband, who, tired as he was after his day’s work, changed his earth-stained clothes for a fresh suit. Olive wore a white dress with lavender ribbons, and looked as fresh as a daisy as she tripped along daintily holding up her skirts. She wore the nattiest of boots over the neatest of feet, altogether a bright and unexpected sight upon the glum-looking prairie. It was a quarter of a mile to the Academy, down a road hardly more than a cart-track, and across a dry gully where there were no stepping stones.

As Ezra had predicted, everybody had turned out to welcome the new bride. Uncle David met her at the door.

“Wal, little girl,” he said, “we’re all a-looking out for you. Here’s Sister Mary Winkle, you’ve seen her, and this is her