

SPELLBINDERS

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Spellbinders by Margaret Culkin Banning

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MARGARET CULKIN BANNING

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BY

MARGARET CULKIN BANNING

AUTHOR OF "HALF LOAVES," "THIS MARRYING," ETC.



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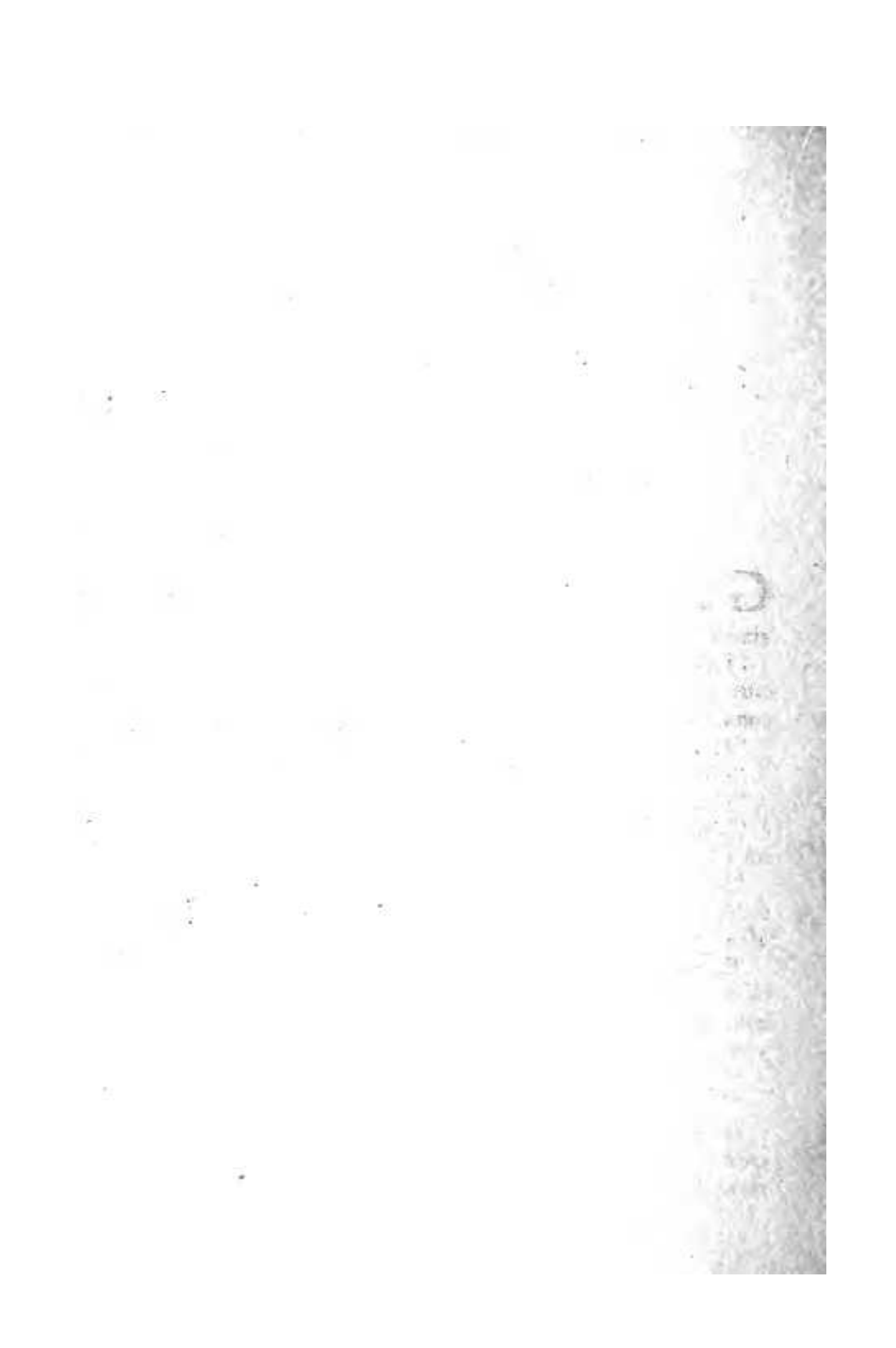
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TO MY FATHER
WILLIAM E. CULKIN
WHO HAS TAUGHT ME OF POLITICS
AND PHILOSOPHY

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SPELLBINDERS

CHAPTER I

AT THE BROWNLEYS'

I

GAGE FLANDON put his wife's fur cloak around her and stood back, watching her as she took a final glance into the long mirror in the hall.

"I'm quite excited," she said. "Margaret always excites me and I do want you to meet her. She really must come to stay with us, Gage."

"If you like. I'm not so keen."

"Afraid of strong-minded women?"

"It's not their strong minds I'm afraid of, Helen."

"Their alluring personalities?" She slipped an arm into his and led him to the door.

"Not even that. Their horrible consciousness—self-consciousness. Their nervousness. Their aggressiveness. Most of all, I hate the idea of their effect on you."

"You sound as if whole cohorts of strong-minded rapacious women were storming the city instead of one old college friend of mine come to bolster up the fortunes of your own political party."

Flandon helped her into the automobile.

"You know what I mean," he said briefly.

He stayed silent and Helen Flandon left him to it. But even in the darkness of the car he could feel her excitement and his own irritation at it bothered him. There

was no reason, he told himself, to have conceived this prejudice against this friend of Helen's, this Margaret Duffield. Except that he had heard so much about her. Except that she was always being quoted to him, always writing clever letters to his wife, producing exactly that same nervous excitement which characterized her mood to-night. An unhealthy mood. He hated fake women, he told himself angrily, and was angry at himself for his prejudice.

"It's too bad to drag you out to meet her. But I couldn't go to the Brownleys', of all places, alone, could I?"

"Of course not. I don't mind coming. I want to see Brownley anyway. I don't mind meeting your friend, Helen. Probably I'll like her. But I don't like to see you excited and disturbed as she always makes you. Even in letters."

"Nonsense."

"No—quite true. You're not real. You begin by wondering whether you've kept up to the college standard of women again. You wonder if you've gone to seed and begin worrying about it. You get different. Even to me."

"How foolish, Gage."

Her voice was very sweet and she slipped along the seat of the car until she was pressed close beside him. He turned her face up to his.

"I don't care what the rest of the fool women do, Helen. But I do so love you when you're real—tangible—sweet."

"I'm always real, about five pounds too tangible and invariably sweet."

"You're utterly unreliable, anyway. You promised me you'd keep clear of this political stuff at least for a while. You quite agreed with me that you were not the kind