

**THE SENATOR'S WIFE:
BEING A TALE OF
WASHINGTON LIFE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649205639

The Senator's wife: being a tale of Washington life by Melville Philips

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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BY

MELVILLE PHILIPS



F. TENNYSON NEELY

PUBLISHER

LONDON

NEW YORK

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THE SENATOR'S WIFE

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

Yes, salt tears for the bitter truth;
'Tis hard, dear heart, so very hard.
I sought thee in my early youth,
And now I find thee lock'd and barr'd,
—SONG OF THE LAGGARD.

PAXSON knew she would be there. He had come, indeed, at a considerable professional cost, solely to see her; he had thrilled for a week in anticipation.

Now, as their hands met, she seemed to crush with her warm fingers the reviving flame of their romance. So steady and cool and curious, indeed, was the gaze he gave

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her, that she colored under it in pretty confusion.

"After so many years," she murmured.

"Five," said he, computing fleetly. "It seems five ages to me. For you——"

"For me? Yes——" she coaxed.

He smiled. "What nice little thing can I say to you? I've been out of practice so long. . . . In five years, I may say, you seem only to have passed through the fire as a piece of painted porcelain does. I note but a softening of tints. . . . You burn well. It's a trick of yours."

His tone was new to her, and she relished it not. "Don't, please," she said; "that is not like you, at all. If you think I have had no sorrow, you are mistaken; if my face tells you that, it lies. No, don't sneer—I know what you would say. If I am not in mourning——"

"I had no thought of sneering," said Paxson, gently. "I've been bred to mourn, you may remember; don't mention that. One

may go to the graveyard four times and each time drop a quarter of one's heart on the black coffin, and yet one shall not be heartless. You may feel as black as crepe to-day, but to-morrow! Don't you see it's the birds, and the flowers, and the air, and, and—the blood. It's natural that grief should grow grey."

"You talk so wisely," she said, smiling at him, and with lowered eyelids slowly searching his face—the old compelling manner, so potent to him once, so full of enchanting memories now. "But you always did talk wisely."

"I wish I could say I have always acted so."

"In a certain sense you have, and acted well."

"There," he laughed, "we are launched upon an argument which is bound to take us to sea; but——"

He stopped because the shadow of a face fell between them, and as he glanced aside,

she hurriedly said to this shadow: "So you came, my dear?" Then: "Mr. Paxson, you remember Mr. Rogers? You must call upon us."

The shadow said "Yes," almost inaudibly; and then as Paxson looked upon the man before him, the first frost of his own manner melted in the winking of an eyelid. A thin, tired and yellowish face, plain-shaven; a bent back; brilliant grey eyes set far in and blazing out with an expression that was half challenge and half petition; a mere wreck of a once mobile mouth, now aquiver, and askew; long arms and lank hair. So this was Rogers. Looking from the man to his radiant mate, Paxson drew a sharp breath. Verily here was but the shadow of a husband-indeed. And she—

Both men embraced her with their eyes, but her own met Paxson's and his came suddenly back to the face of the husband, and oh! the pity and pathos of the expression he saw there.

"The senator," Rogers said, and then she looked at him with a gleam of interest and held out her hand to Paxson.

"Yes, he's here; we'll find him at once. I'll see you later," she added to Paxson. "If not, come to us soon; come to-morrow." Then she moved away, the most luscious beauty he had ever seen. Her white satin gown, fashioned with severe simplicity, sheathed her tall form like the white leaves of a rose in bud. Her slender arms were bare to the shoulder, and from her breast floated mists of old Mechlin, and about her waist wound a girdle of old silver studded with turquoise, the long ends of which swayed with a soft sound as she moved.

Mrs. Rogers attracted the attention of almost every one in her immediate environment, and almost everybody of consequence in Washington was present or expected at the White House that evening. Congress was on, of course, and its motley membership was sprinkled everywhere, showing bravely,