

## *The New Suffragette*

She had holes in her fingers from the unconscious biting. Mariam had volunteered with so many different organizations across town but the prospect of getting acquainted with *The New Suffragettes* had her blood boiling from the anxiety. She'd long considered herself a proponent of the values the activist group espoused but, still, she felt faint walking up to the large, wooden sliding door. She grip the cast-iron door handle and slid the door open.

Inside (she didn't know what she expected) it looked like any bar. Stools spread out leading towards a spot where you can order food. Above her, to her left, was a list of the beer & wine options. Two women carried two beers & glass of red wine to the back corner, where a convention of tables gathered behind one long table. The long table was manned by two others — clipboards in their hands, checking in yet another duo of women.

Her fingers tasted bland as usual, though she continued to feast on her right pinky with the fastidiousness typical of a mutt chomping on a leftover pork chop. Duke Ellington spun on the turntable and suddenly Mariam felt herself transported to the nineteen teens. It all felt like a dirty little secret: Private meetings, the desire for change that sometimes felt like empathy for terrorism. One of the women at the table called out. Mariam meandered over to her.

"Here with the NSP?"

She looked Mariam up & down, before concluding.

"Yes, of course you are. Here."

She grabbed the clipboard from the woman's hands, then the pen as well.

"What's your name?"

"Mariam."

"It's a pleasure to meet you Mariam. Welcome to our ranks."

*Our Ranks*. There it was again. That deep well of empathy that tasted dangerous.

"Thank you."

She finished jotting down her phone number & email address.

“Go ahead and take a seat anywhere. We’ll start shortly.”

It felt like an ocean of tables and chairs though, truthfully, it was only seven or eight small tables with about three chairs apiece. No one could be faulted for calling The New Suffragettes a party without infrastructure, a cause without the numbers. In truth, even Mariam had a hard time rationalizing her presence there.

She took her seat at a table with another solitary woman. Older. Probably in her mid-thirties. Long blonde hair with strands of orange igniting at her neck. She texted rapidly on her phone.

The lights went down.

She’d felt like a pot of water finally coming to a boil. For weeks she had put up with her boyfriend’s musings of the “nonstarter” of the New Suffragettes. “Feminism doesn’t need radicals like it used to,” he’d say. “We’ve made tremendous strides since the 1920s, why waste the hard work our forebears put forth?”

He was sweet and, in many ways, he wasn’t wrong. Though, for Mariam, the feminism he referred to felt more like a tortoise participating in a race the hare had already won. Equal Pay for Equal Work might not be a radical idea, but unless we treat it with the urgency as though it was, the people of the 21st century would never see it.

Perhaps it wasn’t as difficult for her to rationalize her being here as she feared.