The Vote

by Sybil Downing



About the Book

In the early summer of 1918 when American men are fighting in Europe Kate Brennan is in a cab on the way to Washington's Union station. A sheltered, upper-class college graduate, she is going home to resume a life she dreads. As the cab passes the White House, she sees a line of suffragists holding banners. The surly crowd gathered nearby suddenly surges forward and Kate dashes across the street to help. Police arrive. She and the suffragists are arrested. And without benefit of a lawyer or a trial, they are sentenced to fourteen days in the Occoquan Workhouse, a "model" prison in the Virginia countryside.

Galvanized by the experience, Kate becomes a passionate supporter of the National Woman's Party. Its leaders, Lucy Burns and Alice Paul teach her how to operate in the precarious and often dangerous world of hardball politics. She falls in love with a man who may or may not sympathize with her cause. As the vote nears, she is sent to Colorado to defeat one of her family's closest friends in his reelection bid for the Senate. She joins forces with Mary Daly, an intrepid union leader, and they put their lives on the line.

The Vote is the riveting story of women who face prison, ridicule, and the destruction of their private lives in the final (and almost-forgotten) battle for women's right to vote. Seen through the eyes of three remarkable women, **The Vote** is about courage and love and the value of personal integrity --- as timely as today's headlines.

Discussion Guide

1. Why did Kate Brenner's experience in the Occoquan Workhouse make her decide to work with the National Woman's Party?

2. Why do you think some women in 1918 actually were indifferent and even opposed to women voting?

3. When Lucy Burns first decided to work for the women's vote, did she anticipate the consequences?

4. How would you describe the relationship between Alice Paul and Lucy Burns?

5. Given Mary Daly's experiences working for Kate's "kind of people," what made Mary decide to help her defeat Senator Shafroth for reelection?

6. Over the summer, as Kate comes to learn more about the inner workings of the NWP, when she discovers a different side to Lucy, did it influence Kate's own attitude toward her job?

7. Kate buries her early attraction for Charlie when she suspects he might be a tool of the government. What made her ultimately change her mind?

8. Did Mary Daly suspect she might find someone other than her friend, Rosa, in the house on Goat Hill? If she did, why didn't she ask Kate and Charlie to go with her?

9. How would you describe the reaction of Kate's parents to her decision to dedicate herself to the woman's vote?

10. At the novel's end, Kate and Charlie know they want to live their lives together, even as they also know she will be playing a major part in the upcoming ratification process. How does her situation compare to that of today's women trying to balance their private and public life?

Author Bio

Sybil Downing is the award-winning author of numerous books, including**Fire in the Hole, Ladies of the Goldfield Stock Exchange,** and **The Binding Oath.** A fourth generation Coloradoan with deep political roots who grew up in New York City, she returned to Colorado where she has held state and local office. She and her husband live in Boulder, Colorado.

Critical Praise

"Sybil Downing brings the imaginative powers of a gifted novelist to an important period in American history, when a handful of women struggle for women's rights as citizens. The vote is a gripping story that brings history to life in a way that reminds us why history is important. I was left with the feeling that, for a brief time, I had stepped into the past and shared the fear, danger and courage of the characters, as well as the exultation at their hard-won victory."

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