

# ***OPERATION CLEAN SWEEP***

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Performance Rights conveyed by: Darleen Bailey Beard

Produced by: Friends of the Umatilla Public Library

December 5, 2006

## **Cast of Characters**

Cornelius Sanwick(Corn) .....12 year old son of Flora and Frank. Carries a Gold Pocket watch with a large mouthed bass.

Otis Gill(Oatmeal).....12 years old . Constantly measuring anything and everything (books/ears/feet) with his *spring-loaded, nickel-plated* tape measure.

Flora Sanwick (Mom)....Confident and outspoken. Very fashionable and is particularly fond of large hats.

Frank Sanwick (Dad).....Currently Mayor, running for a second term.

Kim Lanier....Running for Mayor. Has longstanding grudge against Sanwick.

Birdine Bain.....12 years old. Red Hair and Freckles (Corn has a crush on her.)

Aunt Lola ..... Blue-haired, wrinkled –up old lady who loves to crochet.

Mrs. Augusta Smith.....Suffragist (two children - Melton & Beatrice).

Mrs. Robyn Burris..... Suffragist (Husband Sam runs the Ferry/ son Johnny).

Mrs. Becky Gill.....Suffragist (Otis's Mom)

Miss McKee..... Pretty Librarian

Narrator....Reads passages to set the stage.

## Scene One

Stage Set: Living Room set up for Women's Card Party and Front Porch.

Narrator: The year is 1916 in Umatilla, Oregon. Women are just getting into politics and the United States is just about to enter World War I. The town of Umatilla has about 200 residents and the women are not happy with the way the men are running their city. Umatilla's streetlights are being removed to save money, the council has not funded regular street repair or trash pick-ups, water is not being metered, several graves are in the middle of the street, chickens and dogs run freely about town, there is no Library or City Park and the Fire System is \$1500 in arrears.

Next Tuesday, December 5<sup>th</sup> is Election Day (*exactly 90 years ago today!*). Longtime archenemies, Kim Lanier and Frank Sanwick are running for mayor... Frank is already mayor and hoping for a second term and in a strange kind of way, they seem to enjoy making each other miserable. Sanwick says Lanier is a mudslinging dingbat who doesn't know the first thing about politics. And Lanier says Sanwick is a slimy scalawag, and that he doesn't know the first thing about politics. They have been tearing each others posters down and campaigning with false promises... Secretly the women of Umatilla who won the right to vote in 1912 are also running a campaign....and thus the story unfolds!

## OPEN CURTAIN

*Women enter carrying plates of food and leave their children on the porch with Corn and Otis. Otis walks around measuring the kids/doors/etc.*

Mrs. Gill: *Entering the porch*  
Well, boys, what did you learn in school today?

Corn: Mr. McGrath told us that the soldiers are having to hide in dirty, muddy, rat-infested trenches and that they're covered in lice and ----

Otis: Yeah, and the trenches are so long that they have to put up signs or the soldiers get lost. They're giving the trenches names like 'Death Valley' and 'Hell Hole.'

Mrs. Gill: Otis Leroy Gill! You know better than to use language like that!

Otis: I can't help it if that's what the trenches are called; I'm not the one who came up with the name 'Hell Hole'.

Mrs. Gill: You may not have come up with that name, but you certainly don't have to repeat it!

*Otis and Corn look at each other with mischievous grins.*

Corn: Mothers just don't understand that repeating a curse word someone else has said isn't the same as saying it. That is the only way a boy can use a four letter word and not feel guilty about it!

Mom: *Greets everyone at the door. Mrs. Burris, Aunt Lola and Mrs. Smith*

Hello, sisters!

Miss McKee: *Entering and speaking to Corn and Otis*  
How are my favorite readers today?

Corn and Otis: Fine

Miss McKee: Say, Corn, I have a new dog book that just arrived. I think you will like this one...there's a dog in there that kinda looks like your dog. I will save it for you.

*All women have entered and are filling their plates with food or sitting at the card table while conversing.*

*Corn moves toward the door*

Corn: You watch the kids while I go get us some chow.

*Corn just about to open the door stops cold in his tracks and listens intently at the door.*

Mom: Sisters? If we're going to carry this off, we can't tell any man in town. Not our husbands, our brothers, our fathers, not even our sons!...Our next meeting will be tomorrow night, nine o'clock, at the library.

Miss McKee: Remember the password?

Ladies in unison: ***"OPERATION CLEAN SWEEP!"***

Mom: Tomorrow night we'll make our nominations.

Mrs. Gill: I know who I'll be nominating....Flora, you're just the person we need for mayor.

Mom: It would be my honor and pleasure.

Mrs. Burris: Just think, Flora. Your name will go down in history books. People will be reading about you hundreds of years from now – Mayor Flora Sanwick, right here in Umatilla, Oregon. Your name will be up there with all the great suffrage leaders like Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony.

*Corn puts his fingers in his ears...wiggles them as if to be sure his hearing is okay.*

Mom: Sister Suffragists, I think we stand a very good chance of getting elected; you know... there are more women than men in this town. If we spread the word among ourselves, and persuade enough women to vote for us, I think we can give the men of this town a run for their money.

If ... I'm elected, the first thing I'm going to do is pay the town's back electric bill and reinstall the streetlights... Next, I'll make a law against chickens running rampant around town, and then I'll move Elmer's grave!

Mrs. Burris: What if the men find out and try to stop us?

Mrs. Smith: We have to get the word out to let each woman in Umatilla know she has a choice. She can vote for women who will work for our future, or she can drag her hem through chicken droppings on dark streets for the rest of her life.

*The ladies clink their teacups and cheer!*

Otis: What's going on in there?

Corn: Can't say right now...meet me at Ol' Elmers.....

**CLOSE CURTAINS**

## Skit I

Narrator: Poor ol' Elmer Diffenbottom. His grave is in the middle of Main Street. It used to be in the cemetery, but then Main Street was planned to go right through the part where Elmer had been laid to rest. The men who made the street said they'd move his grave, but they never did. The women of Umatilla were always complaining about it. Mayor Sanwick says ol' Elmer gives Main Street lots of character. All the boys agree, they think Elmer's tombstone makes a dandy place to sit and think about things and tell ghost stories after dark. Rumor has it that rubbing it right before important events, such as test taking and fish catching and girl kissing always brings good luck.

*Roll out Elmer's Tombstone... Corn and Otis, legs dangling... sit down in front of curtains while stage is being reset.*

Otis: *Measures his foot, the tombstone, etc.*  
"So what were they saying that was so interesting?"

Corn: You wouldn't believe it... I don't even believe it.

Otis: Try me.

Corn: Well, I'm not exactly sure, but it sounds like all the ladies are planning to run for office in our upcoming election and my mom's going to run for mayor!

Otis: Very funny Corncob, you're a real joker. Now tell me the truth.

Corn: I just did, Oatmeal.

Otis: I'm supposed to believe that? ... Women don't run for political office, especially for mayor! Come on, Corn. I'm smarter than that!

Corn: See?.... I knew you wouldn't believe me.

Otis: A woman can't be mayor! ... Why, that's-that's a man's job!

Corn: I know, they're plumb crazy!

Otis: They're loony birds! How do they expect a man to vote for a woman?

Corn: Beats me. They were talking about a password and a secret meeting tomorrow night at the library.

Otis: Secret meeting? What's the password?

Corn: **“OPERATION CLEAN SWEEP.”**

Otis: What the heck is that supposed to mean?

Corn: I think it means Umatilla is going to get a clean sweep ... but not by a broom.

Otis: Then by what?

Corn: The women!

*The boys give the tombstone a “good luck” rub and exit*

## OPEN CURTAINS

### Scene Two: Library Meeting

*Women are making posters and banners/have brooms handy.*

Narrator: Cornelius has more problems than he knows what to do with. Lying in bed, that night, tossing and turning he can quit thinking: “How can Mom run for Mayor? Women don’t run for mayor. Especially a woman whose husband is already mayor... Women are supposed to be mothers and stay at home. They’re supposed to cook and clean and make sure us kids do our homework and don’t go around repeating four-letter words without feeling guilty. There is no way she can do Dad’s job. She’s too busy doing her own job here at the house. There’s no way Mom can pull this off. She and her friends are crazier than bedbugs. Should he tell his father that his mother and her sister suffragists are planning to give the town a clean sweep? Or should he keep his mouth shut and let history take its course?”

*Corn peeks in window while Otis holds ladder.*

Otis: Do you see anything?

Corn: They’re taking their seats...my mom is standing at the podium, holding a broom in the air...She’s saying, ‘Sisters, this town needs a clean sweep!’

Otis: What else?

Corn: They’re taking nominations and your mom just nominated my mom for mayor...Oh no! You’re not going to like this.

Otis: What? What?

Corn: Your mom just got nominated for treasurer.

Otis: *Otis lets go of the ladder and Corn Jumps down to avoid falling.*

Oh brother! How can she do this to me? Let me see!

*Otis climbs the ladder while Corn holds the base ... long pause while Otis takes it all in.*

Corn: Well? What’s going on?

*Birdine walks by the window and runs back to her mother pointing toward the window.*

Otis: Birdine just walked by and looked out the window.

Corn: Birdine? What's she doing in there? Did she see you?

*Birdine whispers to her mother and points at the window.*

Otis: Oh no, she's talking to her mother and pointing at the window. Let's get out of here!

*Boys run off without the ladder...dash back and grab the ladder.*

Birdine: I know you're out here! *Looking around...* And you better not repeat anything you heard! ... *Birdine goes back inside.*

Corn: Gee, that was close.

Otis: I'll say. You think she knew it was us?

Corn: Maybe.

Otis: So what are we going to do if she says something about it?

Corn: The only decent respectable thing boys like us can do.

Otis: What's that?

Corn: Lie like a dog and deny it.

**CLOSE CURTAINS / RESET STAGE**

## Skit II

*Father and Corn come out with fishing poles, legs dangling over stage... sign saying "China Man's Hole".*

Corn: How's the election coming?

Dad: Good, I think I've got that ol' mudslinger beat, but I won't know for sure until tomorrow.

Corn: So, are you glad that women can vote now?

Dad: Sure. They've fought long and hard. I think women in every state should be allowed to vote.

Corn: Um, do you think that women should be able to run for office, too?

Dad: Now, that's a different story. You see, if women ran for office, I don't think very many men would vote for them.

Corn: Why do you think men wouldn't vote for women?

Dad: Most men feel that women belong in the home and not in politics. It's the way it's always been.

Corn: But just because it's always been that way doesn't make it right, does it?

Dad: I suppose not.

Corn: What about you, Dad? *Corn pretends to scratch and itch.* Do you think a woman could for example, become Mayor of Umatilla?

Dad: Umatilla? I doubt it. Most folks in this town are old fashioned. Yup, I'd say "**cows will fly**" before a woman becomes mayor of Umatilla.

Corn and Dad: "Birdie, birdie in the sky  
Why'd you do that in my eye?  
I'm a good boy, I won't cry  
I'm just glad that cows don't fly!"

Exit Stage

**Scene Three: Election Day Parade**

*Corn blows the bugle and the Parade begins...*

Umatilla Police Dept (Flags)

Mayor Sanwick: SANWICK FOR MAYOR- THE WISE CHOICE (hands out candy)

Kim Lanier- Political Sign / handouts (buttons/poster/etc)

Umatilla Fire Dept/ Cub Scouts/Little League/**Invite all local groups**

EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN (Banner held by Miss McKee and Birdine) ... Women marching with their brooms..."Clean Sweep! Clean Sweep! This town needs a clean sweep!"

Little Miss Walleye Princess waving from back of a wagon.

Vendors are strolling around. *"Hot dogs! Get your hot dogs!...only a nickel"*  
*"Peanuts! Fresh-roasted peanuts!...two cents a bag!"*

Sam the Ferryman – Sign with Switzler's Ferry Photo

Sticky Fingers Fred

Band playing **"Yankee Doodle Dandy"**

City Council/Chamber of Commerce/Museum (etc)

All others **(dressed in costumes holding signs or banners)**

## OPEN CURTAINS

### Scene Four: Election

Stage Set: The Castle (voting booth inside) Bench off to side for Corn and Otis.

Narrator: Election Day is finally here, Tuesday December 5, 1916 and folks are making their way to the “Castle” to vote. Umatilla’s fate is being decided, would it be: Frank Sanwick...Kim Lanier or.....Flora Sanwick? Otis and Corn are watching as men and women take their turns voting but can’t decide if there are more men or women casting their ballots. Corn’s stomach feels like he has swallowed a whole batch of Indian sinkers.

Otis: I guess you didn’t tell your dad? *Throws a peanut shell at Corn.*

Corn: Nope. *Throwing a shell back.*

Otis: You think we did the right thing by not telling?

Corn: Yup.

Otis: You think our moms will go down in history books?

Corn: We’ll find out pretty soon.

Mom: *Exiting from voting...Comes over and gives Corn a big hug.*

Its okay, Corn, whatever will be ... will be.

*Walks over to other suffragists wringing her hands and looking at her watch.*

### SELECTED MEMBERS OF THE AUDIENCE CAST THEIR BALLOTS

Dad and Mr. Lanier: *Exit Castle: Hair disheveled, eyes glazed, mumbling  
Set up the Elections Results on Easel*

Corn: Dad? Dad? Are you okay?

Dad: **“Cows, Corn. Cows are flying!”**

## THE END

#### About the Author:

Darleen Bailey Beard writes children's books based on historical fact. While researching information on Women in History for another book she was writing, she stumbled across Umatilla's "Petticoat Coup". She sent a copy of the article with a side note to her editor: "Wouldn't this be a cute story of a 12 year old boy overhearing the women's plan?" They sent her a contract! Darleen visited Umatilla in December 2002 for research. During that visit she met with many of our pioneer citizens and spent a day at McNary Heights Elementary. She returned for "Landing Days" when the book was published in 2004. Darleen very generously gave permission to Canda Rattray to write this play in support of the Friends of the Umatilla Public Library.

#### Historical Fact:

On December 5, 1916, after approximately forty Umatilla citizens stepped out of the voting booths, Mrs. Laura Stockton Starcher had proudly defeated her husband, incumbent Mayor E.E. Starcher, receiving twenty-six votes to her husband's eight. Other women elected that day were Gladys Spinning; Anna Means; Florence Brownell; and Stella Paulu;( who was elected mayor in 1918) to the council. Bertha Cherry as City Recorder; (who later became Umatilla's public librarian and was the Mayor in 1933-1934) and Lola Merrick won as treasurer. Many of the nation's leading newspapers covered the incident as though it were a joke and referred to it as a "Petticoat Coup", but the seven women took their positions seriously.

Their first order of business was to replace Umatilla's streetlights and pay the back electric bills. Then uneven streets were graded and covered with new cinders. Sidewalks were repaired. Several graves were exhumed from the streets and moved to the cemetery.

Citywide "Cleanup Weeks" were enforced, and a team of men was hired to haul trash. Public fountains were erected. A campground was built. Trees were planted on all city lots. The Columbia River Highway was routed through the city after the women convinced the highway committee that Umatilla held the flattest land that followed the river. Monthly garbage service began. A library board was appointed and a library fund was added to the city's budget. Regulations were made regarding the parking of automobiles, and numerous other laws were enacted. This was all accomplished with annual budgets of no more than \$3800.00.

Certainly the accomplishments of these remarkable women helped pave the way for August 27, 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution was passed, granting all women the right to vote.