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# Synopsis



Beatrice Morrow Cannady

## Chicago, 1912:

Alone, Beatrice Morrow considers her future. While she loves opera and the stage, she wonders whether or not there are more tangible ways that she can help African American people to achieve equality.

Beatrice writes letters to Edward Cannady an African American man living in Portland, Oregon. They began corresponding upon the introduction of a mutual friend. Through their letters, Beatrice learns that Edward is a hatcheck man in a fine hotel in Portland. He takes great pride in his job, but he

has also started *The Advocate*, a newspaper that caters to the very small African American community in Oregon. Beatrice is intrigued by his description of his life and the beauty of the area, and determines that she will visit him in Oregon.

## Portland, Oregon at the Train Station

Beatrice has arrived in Oregon after a long and tiring trip. Not immediately seeing anyone come to meet her, she buys and reads a headline that upsets her. Her exclamation draws the attention of a White Woman who stops to read the headline to Beatrice. Beatrice tells the Woman that she can read and explains that headlines like that strain relations between the races. The Woman is receptive, but clearly uncomfortable. They are interrupted by Edward hurrying onto the train platform. The Woman uses the opportunity to take her leave.

Edward and Beatrice are clearly delighted by one another. Edward shares that the other men who founded *The Advocate* with him have all left the paper and he doesn't know how he will keep it going alone. Beatrice sees in this the answer that she has been seeking and decides to stay and help Edward run the paper. After some initial reticence, Edward agrees, and the two leave the station.

## Sometime later at the offices of *The Advocate*

Edward and Beatrice, now husband and wife, enter the offices of *The Advocate*, where Edward shows her around and explains that she will now be the heart and soul of the operation. Beatrice is thrilled and exploring the office, finds her place behind the typewriter. Edward

becomes thoughtful and shares with Beatrice his dream for a Portland in which all people can live in peace and prosperity, no matter their race. Beatrice tells him that that is her dream too.

### Later

Beatrice and Edward are reading *The Oregonian*, and Beatrice is horrified to learn that the racist film, *The Birth of a Nation*, is coming to Portland. She immediately fires off a letter to the Mayor, urging him to ban the film from playing on the grounds that it incites prejudice against Black people. Beatrice also sends letters to other newspapers in Oregon to plead her case. The Mayor makes an announcement that despite their efforts the Governor has denied their request and *The Birth of a Nation* will show.



Beatrice, Edward, and their son.

### Later at the Cannady's home

Beatrice and Edward are disappointed in the results of their protest against *The Birth of a Nation*, but don't have much time to reflect as the guests of one of Beatrice's interracial teas are arriving, among them, the Woman from the train station. The Woman is moved by the warmth of Beatrice's home as well as the other women from all races enjoying each other's company and Beatrice's extensive library. She wonders aloud about what she can do to make change. Beatrice tells the Woman that as a teacher, she has a great opportunity to affect the attitudes and actions of young people. Beatrice and the Woman begin to look on each other as friends.

Beatrice begins a journey of ever more active social justice advocacy. She speaks to high school students; she works with NAACP; she continues her work with the paper; and she continues changing minds and making other advocates one person at a time. Edward, the Woman and the Mayor marvel at her strength and energy, but even as they are celebrating her, she receives news that *The Birth of a Nation* is returning once again to Portland.

### Months later

Beatrice is exhausted and disappointed. Once again, *The Birth of a Nation* will play in Portland. Its influence has caused a rise in racial violence. Beatrice is dejected, but then vows to continue the fight. She decides that she will study the law and go to law school.

## Several years later at the law school graduation

Beatrice has graduated from law school and has just sung at the commencement ceremony. She and Edward are overjoyed by her achievement—the first African American woman in Oregon to graduate from law school—but their happiness is short-lived. The college president hands her diploma in private and asks her to leave. She and Edward are not welcome because of their race.



Beatrice graduating from law school

## At the office of *The Advocate*



An example of Ms. Cannady's work featured in *The Morning Oregonian*.

Beatrice is reading an editorial in *The Southern Oregon Spokesman*, a paper in Grants Pass, Oregon. The editorial by William H. Greene says that Grants Pass should be a “White Man’s Town” with no one else allowed. The Mayor is also reading the same article. He muses on Beatrice’s response, thinking that Beatrice has a voice that she has never hesitated to use. She does so in a scathing answer to Greene’s editorial.

The editorial battle between *The Spokesman* and *The Advocate* gains national attention, encouraging Beatrice to run for office. While she doesn’t win her race, she and her coalition are finally able to ban *The Birth of a Nation* from playing yet again in Portland. Her friends remind her that, despite the disappointment of losing her run for State

Representative, her work has made a difference and she has already won.