

It happened, about two years ago now, that the placid atmosphere of Iron Springs was disturbed by the coming of a new proprietor to the general store, which stood at the head of the one short street. Owen Fisher had lost no time in remodeling the premises, painting the outside a shade of flame with black trimming, which Alex Morrison, the postmaster across the street, said would increase the fire insurance rate. The next week Mr. Fisher put in a gasoline pump and started a service station. At the end of three months the Fisher restaurant had been opened, too, and Mrs. Fowler, who had made her living by giving meals to farmers and others on the long oilcloth-covered table in her big room, looked with dismay at her empty chairs.

When the Fisher invasion had been going on for perhaps six months, and Mrs. Fisher was now the President of the Institute, and had been to the school twice to complain of Miss Morrison's treatment of her son Reggie, it happened that she was getting some sewing done by Miss Coulter, and on the first afternoon she conceived the kind idea of giving a cup of tea to the small, pale dressmaker. Dressmakers going from house to house must know many things. So, carrying a tin tray with a cup tea-stained and cracked and a plate of store biscuits, she set it before Miss Coulter and invited her to eat and drink. Miss Coulter stopped her work of pinning a pattern on the goods, removed several pins from her mouth, and prepared to do so.

Ellen Coulter knew all the gossip about the Fishers, and so the friendly overture of a cup of tea came as a surprise; but when she saw the bare tray she was convinced that there was no kind-