

Summary- "The Revolt of Mother"

"The Revolt of Mother" is a short story by Mary E. Wilkins Freeman, and was originally published in 1890 in *Harper's Bazaar*. It addresses themes of rebellion, self-assertion, tradition, and the repression of women in a male-dominated society.

The story begins with Sarah Penn asking her husband, Adoniram, why men are digging in a field nearby. Adoniram does not answer her at first, and tries to avoid the question. Eventually, though, he admits that they are digging a cellar for a new barn. They are preparing to build this barn on the same spot where Adoniram had previously promised to build his wife and family a new house.

Sarah looks around her house, which is much smaller than the barn being built. Sarah's son, Sam, admits to having known about this plan for several months, and tells her that Adoniram is building the barn to store more livestock. Sarah begins washing and drying the dishes, and her daughter, Nanny, mentions that it's "too bad" that her father has made this decision about the barn. They so clearly need a new house, as their current home is falling apart. Nanny is engaged, and further complains that her upcoming marriage will have to be held in a small, shabby kitchen. Sarah reminds Nanny that others have it much worse. Nanny, half-joking and half-angry, suggests that she should be allowed to hold her wedding in the newly built barn. This gets Sarah thinking, and she considers the possibility.

Sarah tells Adoniram that their house needs updating, reminding him of past promises he made. She tells him the wallpaper is peeling, and there is no rug in the room. She complains about the bedroom and the pantry, and more. He refuses to discuss anything with her. Sarah believes that the reason he ignores her is because he knows she is right.

Spring arrives, and construction on the barn continues. It takes on the form of a fine looking building, and people from the town even come to look at it on Sundays. Just before the barn is completed, and Adoniram begins moving in livestock, he decides to leave home for several days. He is going to

look around for the right horse to buy. Alone, Sarah seems to be working out a problem in her head. She announces that her husband leaving the house for several days is a beneficent act of God, it is providence.

Men arrive to deliver a load of hay for the new barn. Sarah intercepts them, and tells them to put the hay in the old barn instead. One of the man questions her authority, but eventually they comply with Sarah's instructions. After lunch, Sarah tells her children to pack up all of their things. She herself packs up the items in the kitchen into her own basket. The children and Sarah begin to move everything, the dishes, the bed, all of Nanny's belongings, and everything else from the house, across the field and into the brand new barn, which is still empty. Sarah hangs quilts from the tops of the box stalls to make rooms, and in the harness room she creates the kitchen she had always dreamed of.

The rest of the town quickly hears of Sarah's unusual behavior. They consider her to be either mad or lawless and rebellious. The minister comes to visit Sarah's new farm house, and tries to convince her to undo her actions, but she refuses. With Adoniram due to return home, the gossip throughout the town is so powerful that townspeople gather on the roads to spy on the family. Adoniram goes to the old house first, and then the old shed. He brings his new horse with him, and eventually opens the door to the new barn. His family is living comfortably inside.

Adoniram is shocked, but Sarah quickly takes his arms and explains the reason for her decision. At this moment, Sarah finally stands up to her domineering and dismissive husband. She tells him that the family has just as much a right to live in the big barn as any of the cows and horses, and the little old house was not going to be big enough for them all for much longer. She says she expects him to install some windows and partitions, and to buy some new furniture. Adoniram barely speaks, letting his wife remove his coat while she prepares dinner. Their son leads the new horse back to the old barn.

Throughout dinner, Adoniram stops every once in a while to stare at Sarah. After they have cleaned up, he walks away and Sarah finds him sitting on a step at the door of the barn. He is crying, and promises her that he will carry through all the improvements she has requested. He says he had no idea she was so invested in the idea of a new house.