



A Law Unto Herself (Legacies of Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers)

Rebecca Harding Davis

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A scathing critique of the legal status of women and their property rights in nineteenth-century America, Rebecca Harding Davis's 1878 novel *A Law Unto Herself* chronicles the experiences of Jane Swendon, a seemingly naïve and conventional nineteenth-century protagonist struggling to care for her elderly father with limited financial resources. In order to continue care, Jane seeks to secure her rightful inheritance despite the efforts of her cousin and later her husband, a greedy man who has tricked her father into securing her hand in marriage.

Appealing to middle-class literary tastes of the age, *A Law Unto Herself* elucidated for a broad general audience the need for legal reforms regarding divorce, mental illness, inheritance, and reforms to the Married Women's Property Laws. Through three fascinating female characters, the novel also invites readers to consider evolving gender roles during a time of cultural change.



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