

The GOVERNOR'S LADY

A Novelization of Alice Bradley's Play

By GERTRUDE STEVENSON
ILLUSTRATIONS FROM PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE STAGE PRODUCTION

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The story is a direct narrative of a fancied incompatibility between a self-made, iron-willed man and the humble, home-loving wife of his early struggles.

CHAPTER I.

Daniel Slade sat reading the evening newspaper in the handsomely appointed library of his spacious home. To all intents he was a man at peace with the world. He had money and power. He had advanced from a penniless miner to a millionaire figure in the business world. At fifty his were the fruits of a well-spent, energetic life. Handsome and immaculate in his perfectly tailored evening clothes, he fitted into the beautiful room with its rich tapestries and oriental rugs with all the ease and naturalness of a man born to culture and wealth.

Every now and then his eyes wandered from his newspaper to the figure of his wife sitting at the other side of the richly carved table. The tiny, unimposing little woman in her badly cut, dun-colored gown was the one incongruous detail in the room. She was like a shabby little prairie flower suddenly transplanted to a conservatory where brilliant orchids and lovely roses bloomed all about her, her faint little fragrance overpowered by their heavy sweetness—her delicate loveliness completely submerged by very contrast with the radiant beauty of her surroundings.

To Slade's critical eyes, the dowdy little figure, with the work basket in her lap and her head bent over the stocking she was contentedly darning, was an actual eyesore. He had fitted up a magnificent home that would have made a perfect setting for a princess, and his wife's appearance had not changed a particle from the days when they lived in a tumble-down cottage and he worked in the mines in his shirtsleeves. With the getting of vast amounts of money he had acquired a veneer of manners and tastes that at times failed to conceal the rough and brutal instincts of the real man. His social horizon was enlarging, but within it his wife seemed to find no place. He wanted, beyond this and everything, to climb the political tree and pick the fruits thereof. His wife seemed not to know that there was such a thing as a political tree to climb. With herself, her husband and her work she was contented and happy.

The wives of other men of his position were social queens noted for their beautiful gowns, their entertaining and their clever wit. He alone was shackled to a woman he would have been ashamed to introduce to his friends. Only he was tied to a wife he could not force either by pleading or argument to enter into the life which meant so much to him. Tonight as he rehearsed in his mind his many unsuccessful efforts to make Mary advance and take an interest in his life as it was now, rebellion surged in his heart. He had struggled year after year to attain his present standing, his present position in the world, and Mary, the one loved thing of his life, insisted on hanging like a millstone around his neck.

Why, oh, why, couldn't the woman progress? Why hadn't she developed as he had done? Why was she complacently sitting there satisfied to remain just as she had been twenty years ago, hopelessly behind the times?

And if she wouldn't advance—why should he consent to be held back by her? If she wouldn't go on with him—he would leave her behind. The thought and the resultant decision had their birth suddenly but positively in the man's mind. He would make one more argument, one last appeal. If Mary wouldn't meet him half way, Mary could stay behind with her everlasting darning and her eternal knitting. She could wash and cook and sew, if she liked, but she couldn't do it in his mansion.

But Daniel Slade was no more uncomfortable at having her there than Mary Slade was at being obliged to live in this great, elegant house, with its crowds of servants and its routine, absolutely foreign and well-nigh hateful to her. She knew she didn't fit into her surroundings. She realized her own inharmoniousness. Her attempts to look natural and feel comfortable were pathetic. She felt lost without the task of overseeing the Monday's washing. She was heart-broken because she couldn't personally superintend the making of Dan's coffee. Her life was incomplete because a hired cook made the bread that was served on the table and because Dan never seemed to miss the evenly brown loaves that had been her especial pride in the old days.

Mary Slade was as commonplace as a cup of boiled tea. She was a plain, ordinary, everyday woman, who loved

a simple, unpretentious life, with the neighbors dropping in for a word or two, exchanging recipes for muffins and debating the proper way to season a stew.

There was neither charm nor comfort for her in the vista of rooms opening out from the spacious library. The brocade chairs were straight and didn't rock. They were high-posted and stilted compared to her own low-set little rocker in the cottage. When she sat back in them, stiffly and awkwardly, her feet didn't even reach the floor, but dangled restlessly above the priceless rug that was one of her husband's newest purchases.

All big crises in life are the results of trifles. It took the merest incident to crystallize Slade's thought into action. Mary had picked up a portion of the paper after it had dropped from her husband's hands. She started to read the printed page with all the serious importance of a little child trying to do something very big and grown-up.

Suddenly her eyes lighted with pleasure and a tender smile of pride and delight illuminated her features. In turning the pages she had suddenly discovered a picture of her husband, under which she read a simple but significant line:

"Daniel S. Slade, a Possible Governor."

"Oh, Dan," she cried, happily. "Isn't this a fine picture of you. I could almost imagine it was going to speak to me."

Then she paused a little wistfully and doubtfully before she asked:

"But do you really want to be governor?"

"Want to be?"

Slade caught his breath as he repeated her question.

Want to be—when every aim and ambition the last few years had been made in the one direction, toward the one longed-for goal—political power! Want to be—when years before he had turned his eyes on the governor's chair and had been battling grimly, silently, persistently toward that end ever since! Want to be—when that was his one ambition, the one thing he had yet to achieve!

He sighed wearily to himself. That Mary could ask that question was the best proof of how irrevocably they had drifted apart. Living in the same house with him, eating at the same table, day after day at his side, the little woman knew no more of his real self or his ambitions than the merest stranger.

"It's a nice story about yer, Dan," Mary went on, all unconscious of the struggle going on just a few feet away from her—the struggle between the heart of a man that calls out to the companion of his youth, the sharer of his joys and struggles and the brain



She Was a Shabby Little Prairie Flower Transplanted to a Conservatory.

of a man that demands the glory of power and the fulfillment of ambition.

"But, Dan," questioned Mary's gentle little voice, "who's The Governor's Lady?"

"His wife, of course," snapped Slade.

"What does it say about you?"

He reached over and took the paper from her hands, leaned forward eagerly toward the light and frowned as he read:

"Should Daniel S. Slade, the examiner, ex-town marshal, ex-sheriff, ex-United States marshal, ex-land boomer and multimillionaire, arrive. It will be

interesting to see the governor's lady dusting the gubernatorial chair—probably the only occupation congenial to this kind-hearted and plain little woman."

"Dusting the gubernatorial chair," Slade repeated mockingly, cut to the quick by this public allusion to his wife's plainness and lack of social graces.

That simple little phrase, stinging as it was, was as a match flame to dry timber. It was all that was necessary to bring the hot rage surging through him to the boiling point. The sweetness of the little woman's expression, the tenderness of her eyes whenever they rested upon him, the plaintive softness of her voice meant nothing to him then. Through angry eyes he saw only the lack of smartness in her somber brown dress, only the note of absurdity she struck amid the exquisite surroundings of the room he had furnished for her. He thought of nothing but the sorry spectacle she would make at a brilliant dinner or smart function where beautiful women in fashionable chiffons chatted freely and easily of men and things in the progress of the nation.

"This is some of Wesley Merritt's, tin-horn tooting writing," growled Slade. "D—n his dirty work!"

As her husband muttered to himself, Mary had calmly resumed her endless mending of socks, long years of thrift and saving making it impossible for her to throw away even a well-worn pair in spite of the fact that the need for repairing had long since passed.

Slade found himself looking at the little woman who had been his wife for twenty years, through lean years and hard years, as faithful and patient then as later, when success first began to come his way, very much as he might have scrutinized an entire stranger. For a moment the tragedy of their present state caught at his soul, and he felt the infinite pathos of the woman's predicament. A softer note came into his voice as he asked slowly:

"Say, haven't you got any clothes, Mary? Haven't you any of the things other women wear at night—silk or lace or ruffles or—whatever they are?"

"Yes, I've got 'em," Mary replied, indifferently, "but it's too cold to wear 'em, and those silk stockings you told me to buy—I can't wear them, either—they tickle my toes. Satin slippers made me uncomfortable, and—" she finished with a bubbling little laugh, "I guess I wasn't made for those things, Dan, dear. I'm too much of a home body."

Her very self-satisfied complacency nettled her questioner. The very sight of the darning needle in her fingers maddened him.

"Good God, Mary," he exclaimed, "can't you ever stop this endless mending? Haven't I begged you, day and night, not to mend my socks. I won't wear socks all over darns—they're uncomfortable."

Just a suggestion of a smile played around Mary Slade's sweet mouth as she answered:

"They're yours, Dan. It's the only thing left that I can do for you—now. I can't bear to see strangers touch your things—" and her voice trailed off in a wistful sigh, a sigh which might on any other occasion have made its appeal to the earnest-faced man now gazing at her so grimly.

The lightness of her tone showed how little she realized the seriousness of the situation—how little she understood how inadequately she was filling her position as his wife. She loved her husband with the devotion of a slave and the reverence of a worshiper at a shrine, but, like many another good woman, she wanted to show her affection in her own way and not in his. Because she wanted to do for him with her hands, she turned a deaf ear to his pleas that she use her head. She wanted her husband to be happy and comfortable, but she wanted to make him happy and comfortable according to her own ideas of what ought to make a man satisfied. She had seen him rise gradually at first and then by leaps and bounds. Now that he had become wealthy and successful she wanted to decide for him that he ought to let well enough alone. To her it seemed foolish to bother about being governor, absurd for him to fret about the way she dressed and did things.

So, for awhile they sat in silence and the fire dying down left the room chilly, so chilly that Mary started up to get a shawl. Halfway to the door, she was peremptorily called back by her husband, who, ringing for a maid, dispatched her for the wrap, while Mary, humiliated and with something of the air of a martyr, went sighing back to the big, uncomfortable chair to resume the mending that was such an irritation to her husband.

"Why can't you learn to be waited on, Mary?" her husband asked, not unkindly. "Other women do."

"I'm slow—slow and old-fashioned," the woman answered, quietly, but with an air which plainly showed that she was perfectly satisfied with herself and that she thought he ought to be.

"I've never been with women who know how to do these things. You didn't know any such people until lately. I don't want to know them," she concluded with an engagingly confiding smile.

"But I can't go everywhere always alone," Slade expostulated. "A man's wife ought to go with him and meet the right kind of people—otherwise he's an outsider. What do you think I built this house for? I don't work in the mines any longer with my hands. I've got to use my head. I don't drink. I don't smoke. I don't disipate—keep yachts and horses—or women. A man's got to do something. I'm going into public life, and I want

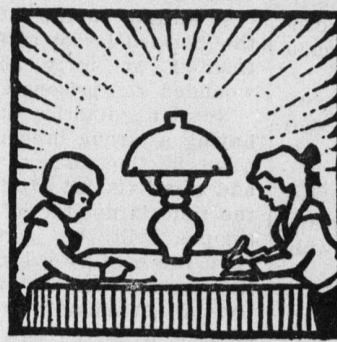
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