

The Governor's Lady

A Novelization of Alice Bradley's Play

By Gertrude Siebenson

Illustrations From Photographs of the Stage Production

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(Continued from last week.) CHAPTER II.

As Slade turned from the frightened, insignificant figure of his fleeing wife, he saw a woman of perfect poise and queenly carriage, a woman a trifle haughty and insolent in her youth and beauty and assured command of all the intricacies of social grace and charm. Her wide, full eyes met his with an engaging, frank curiosity to see this new factor in the political world. Her gown was a triumph of soft, shimmering silk and alluring chiffon—a gown that emphasized the charm of her proud, statuesque figure. She was the sort of woman that makes a man glow with pride to present as his wife or daughter. She was all that Mary Slade was not.

Slade stood looking at her, fascinated, forgetting for the moment the man she was with, remembering nothing but the magnetic personality of the woman whose reputation for doing big things—a big way was already known to him—a woman whose eyes meeting his gave back flash for flash and understanding for understanding.

Almost mechanically Slade found himself acknowledging Senator Strickland's formal presentation of his daughter. Hesitatingly he offered his hand, which the girl, perfectly at ease, grasped with a cordial, sympathetic pressure. Her eyes were looking critically into his, much as if she were trying to read him through and through and take his measure for future use.

Her easy, graceful acceptance of the situation, her thoughtful inquiry for Mrs. Slade's health, prompted by well-bred sympathy rather than any curious interest, and the cultured modulation of her splendid voice, charmed him as no woman had ever done before.

There was nothing of the shy, retiring ingenue in Katherine Strickland's makeup. She was a woman of splendid physique and wonderful mental development. Her appeal to a man was that of a dominant intellect as much as of a lovely woman. She immediately impressed Slade as being keen-witted, strong-minded and clever. His admiration displayed itself in his shining eyes and his unusually affable, attentive manner.

Suddenly he found himself comparing his own little old-fashioned wife with this handsome, self-possessed woman before him. What a wife Katherine Strickland would be for the governor of a state! What a picture she would make presiding at the head of a millionaire's dinner tables! How wonderfully such a woman would adorn the richly furnished rooms of the work-worn fingers of his wife, continuously fumbling with darned threads, he saw, in a mental vision, this woman's lovely hands constantly engaged in unwinding the threads of problematic political tangles. Here was a woman who would be a man's wife and comrade—the very antithesis of the household drudge, his own wife was content to be, with no interest outside of the four walls of her home and no desire for anything bigger in life than the daily routine of breakfast, dinner and supper, washing on Monday, ironing on Tuesday, and so on to the end of the week—week after week in the same deadly rut. Here was a woman who would "go along with a man"—possibly a step ahead, blazing the way for new and greater glories and recognizing no limit.

Slade brought his reflections to a sudden halt as he remembered the girl's father.

"Why, what has happened to you, senator? Your face looks different than it did this afternoon."

"Her fault," replied the senator, with a smile of tolerant affection, indicating his daughter. "She made me cut my beard this way. It's French."

Katherine laughed a delightful, throaty little laugh.

"Nonsense, father," she protested. "Of course, I like the West, but I don't believe in being absolutely typical. I was horrified when I got back and found you so blatantly the typical, much-cartooned Westerner."

"Mr. Slade," resumed Strickland, "a few influential men from different parts of our state are having a meeting in town tomorrow, and I want you to meet them. I'm arranging a little impromptu dinner, and thought Katherine might be able to persuade Mrs. Slade and yourself to join us."

"Oh, father, tell the truth," Katherine interrupted. "These gentlemen want to meet you, Mr. Slade. I hear we're to expect great things of you. You see, I've been mixed up in politics all my life, and I do love to have a hand in them."

"She'd run for president if they'd let her," teased her father.

"Indeed I would," the girl admitted, brazenly. "I've got politics in my blood, and home doesn't seem like home unless politics are being brewed in our dining-room. So you'll both come, won't you—you and Mrs. Slade."

Slade was stammering his acceptance when Strickland interrupted abruptly.

"How'd you like to be governor, Slade?"

Slade threw back his head with a laugh that was intended to denote complete unconcern.

"Oh—that talk! Did the evening papers put that into your head or— and he paused significantly, "did you put it into the evening papers?"

Strickland's laugh was a practical admission.

"It would mean a hard fight, Slade. The water-front crowd's against you, and you can't get on without their influence."

"Not in this town, at least," amended Katherine.

"You've got to have Wesley Merritt, his paper, his highfalutin editorials and his speechmaking—and his wife," Strickland explained. "He and his crowd run the town."

"Oh, you mean my neighbors?" asked Slade. "They'll come around," he finished, meaningly.

"But, man alive! Only today Merritt's attack on you was scurrilous. I remonstrated with him myself. He's your out-and-out enemy. I've tried to get him—to come over and shake hands, but he swears he'll never cross your threshold—"

"I guess they'll come when I want 'em to come," Slade interrupted, with an assurance his auditors could not understand. "In fact, I'm looking for 'em any minute now," and he consulted his watch.

"You're looking for them—here—tonight?" gasped Strickland, showing plainly he thought Slade was making a joke of the matter.

"Yes, tonight," replied the would-be governor, quietly, and turned to Katherine.

Strickland subsided, a question growing in his mind as to whether he had fully measured the man he expected to use for his own political and financial ends. There was in Slade's method of fighting a direct and open quality that would make him hard to handle in the crooked and indirect ways of political life.

Katherine Strickland's eyes narrowed as she met Slade's gaze. Her quick, calculating mind saw in this man the possibility of realizing her highest hopes and ambitions. With such a man a woman could scale any heights—reach any goal. He was hard—yes! But a man needs to be hard in these days and times if he is ever to accomplish anything. In her fertile brain smoldered ambitions as great as his ambitions that she now realized would never be attained unless she made some great, radical change in her life.

She had pushed her father as far as the man would—could go. She had outdistanced every girl in her circle. She had reached high, but she had triumphed. Now she was at the end of her tether. It was a matter of making some one huge stroke or sinking back into stupid obscurity, a situation all the more bitter because of her previous successes. The thought of settling down into the everyday life of the western city where she was born made her very soul squirm. Surely there was something more in life for her. Surely there were bigger goals to be gained.

She had never realized how empty

own mind that no puddle would be so big that she couldn't become a frog of considerable size in it.

Now, as her restless brain and soul clamored for higher goals and a wider field, the thought of Slade's millions, Slade's dominating, forceful personality, Slade's reputation for sweeping everything before him, Slade's probable governorship, flashed through her mind like a burning streak of electric fire. With him, with his weapons, what a career lay before a woman!

Just as suddenly she found herself wondering what sort of a woman had been a mate to this man for so many years. She was conscious of a poignant pang of envy—jealousy almost—against this woman who had the opportunity which was denied her.

"Well, what do you think of your own country, now you're back?" she heard Slade's voice saying. "Seem big to you?"

"Oh, I like Washington," she said, bringing herself back to the conversation with difficulty.

Her father, noticing her abstraction, remarked indulgently: "She likes Washington, Slade. She likes the East, but she doesn't tell it to everybody on account of father's votes. Now, Slade and I love our western city, eh, Slade?"

"Well," with some reluctance, "it's a good starting point," Slade admitted.

"Ah!" Katherine exclaimed, now thoroughly herself again. "There's a man for you! He's not going to let a town stand in his way. Mr. Slade, this is father's Waterloo. He's been a great disappointment to me. That's the worst of parents. We children never know how they're going to turn out. If father had only listened to me it would have been Washington for him—Washington for me. But he wouldn't cross the Delaware. He wouldn't leave the West. If there'd only been a drop of Napoleon in father," she concluded with a sudden burst of vehemence.

"Napoleon!" repeated the senator.

"Yes, Napoleon. He got what he wanted, and nothing ever stood in his path. I just love the way he rode over poor old Josephine's heart, don't you?"—and she turned to Slade.

"But he was right!" she continued, earnestly, as if she were making a plea for something that lay very close to her own heart. "Why should we let anyone hold us back? I wouldn't. But mother didn't want to leave the West, so father stuck to his town and his friends and his state. Now he stands in the background and boosts other men politically."

"He wants to boost you," she added, suddenly.

"Letting out secrets," her father accused, playfully.

But Katherine was never more serious. "You're his dark horse," she persisted.

"You're a lucky man, senator," Slade broke in, as he watched Katherine admiringly. "You're a lucky man to have a charming young woman behind you in the race."

"That's all we women are for," answered Katherine, bitterly, "standing behind some man and watching him do things."

"Why, child alive, you do things yourself," the senator remonstrated. "She makes busts, Slade—heads. Done some big guns in Europe."

Katherine sighed and leaned back wearily in her chair. "Oh, in my feminine way, I model," she admitted.

"But if there'd been one drop of Napoleon in father I shouldn't have had to fall back on molding clay. I should have been molding," she hesitated, and then finished daringly, "opinions and people."

CHAPTER III.

Just how much more freely Katherine might have revealed her aims and inspirations, Slade could not know, for at that moment the butler appeared and engaged his attention.

As the man withdrew, Slade spread wide his arms and announced grandiloquently:

"The gentleman of the water-front crowd, if you please. Mr. Wesley Merritt, the gentleman who wasn't going to darken my door, is here!"

He broke off with a loud, mirthless laugh. As well as any man who ever lived, he liked to feel the grip of his own power. He had come to the point where it was genuine satisfaction to humble men and conquer things.

"Wesley Merritt!" the senator was almost too surprised for speech.

"After his abuse of you in the paper today—? And Hunt! How did you do it?"

"This is the sort of thing I like," broke in Katherine, eagerly. "Oh, it's so exciting," she declared, her eyes glowing with eagerness and animation.

"Oh, Mr. Slade, how did you make them kowtow?"

Slade's reply was prevented by the brusque, excited entrance of Merritt and Hunt. The pair, angry and belligerent, strode into the room without a word. Merritt, small, wiry, energetic, was in the lead, followed closely by his shadow and echo, Hunt.

"Is it true?" he demanded angrily, before he realized that Slade was not alone. "How do you do, senator—Miss Strickland!" he exclaimed, in surprise. "Lovely home you have, Mr. Slade," he added, trying to adjust himself to the scene he had not expected.

"An astonishing rumor has reached us, Mr. Slade," he finally declared, getting down to the business of his invasion. "It concerns you, senator. It concerns every public-spirited man in the city. Is it true, Slade, that you have bought up our entire water front on which our residences—our old homes—the mansions of the city face, and that you intend building factories there?"

"Why, yes," Slade admitted, with maddening calmness.

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She Was All That Mary Slade Was Not.

the old home life was until now, when she suddenly found herself a part of it again after the brilliant European season and the stimulating, exciting life in diplomatic circles at the capital. The thought of remaining in the West, a big frog in a little puddle, had grown positively hateful to her. Big or little herself, she wanted a big puddle. She was quite satisfied in her