
THE SENATOR'S WIDOW: A LEGACY OF GRACE AND POWER

A polished and accomplished woman, was the widow of a distinguished senator from one of the western states, of which, also, her husband had twice filled the office of governor. Her daughter having completed her education at the best boarding-school in Philadelphia, and her son being about to graduate at Princeton, the mother had planned with her children a tour to Niagara and the lakes, returning by way of Boston. On leaving Philadelphia, and the delighted Caroline stopped at Princeton to be present at the annual commencement, and had the happiness of seeing their beloved Edward receive his diploma as bachelor of arts; after hearing him deliver, with great applause, an oration on the beauties of the American character.

College youths are very prone to treat on subjects that imply great experience of the world. But Edward Morland was full of kind feeling for everything and everybody; and his views of life had hitherto been tinted with a perpetual rose-color. Not depending altogether upon the celebrity of her late husband, and wishing that her children should see specimens of the best society in the northern cities, had left home with numerous letters of introduction. But when they arrived at New York, she found to her great regret, that having unpacked and taken out her small traveling desk, during her short stay in Philadelphia, she had strangely left it behind in the closet of her room at the hotel. In this desk were deposited all her letters, except two which had been offered to her by friends in Philadelphia.

The young people, impatient to see the wonders of Niagara, had entreated her to stay but a day or two in the city of New York, and thought these two letters would be quite sufficient for the present. In the meantime she wrote back to the hotel, requesting that the missing desk should be forwarded to New York as soon as possible. On the morning after their arrival at the great commercial metropolis of America, the Morland family took a carriage to ride round through the principal parts of the city, and to deliver their two letters at the houses to which they were addressed, and which were both situated in the region that lies between the upper part of Broadway and the North River. In one of the most fashionable streets they found the elegant mansion of; but on stopping at the door, were informed that its mistress was not at home.

They then left the introductory letter (which they had prepared for this mischance, by enclosing it in an envelope with a card), and proceeding to another street considerably farther up, they arrived at the dwelling of the Watkinson family, to the mistress of which the other Philadelphia letter was directed. It was one of a large block of houses all exactly alike, and all shut up from top to bottom, according to a custom more prevalent in New York than in any other city. Here they were also unsuccessful; the servant who came to the door telling them that the ladies were particularly engaged and could see no company.

So they left their second letter and card and drove off, continuing their ride till they reached the Croton water works, which they quitted the carriage to see and admire. On returning to the hotel, with the intention after an hour or two of rest to go out again, and walk till near dinner-time, they found waiting them a note from expressing her regret that she had not been able to see them when they called; and explaining that her family duties always obliged her to deny herself the pleasure of receiving morning visitors, and that her servants had general orders to that effect. But she requested their company for that evening (naming o'clock as the hour), and particularly desired an immediate answer.

"I suppose," said, "she intends asking some of her friends to meet us, in case we accept the invitation; and therefore is naturally desirous of a reply as soon as possible. Of course we will not keep her in suspense. Who volunteered the letter, assured me that was one of the most estimable women in New York, and a pattern to the circle in which she moved. It seems that and are connected in business. Shall we go?" The young people assented, saying they had no doubt of passing a pleasant evening.

The billet of acceptance having been written, it was sent off immediately, entrusted to one of the errand-goers belonging to the hotel, that it might be received in advance of the next hour for the dispatch-post—and Edward Morland desired the man to get into an omnibus with the note that no time might be lost in delivering it. "It is but right"—said he to his mother—"that we should give an ample opportunity of making her preparations, and sending round to invite her friends."

"How considerate you are, dear Edward"—said Caroline—"always so thoughtful of every one's convenience. Your college friends must have idolized you." "No"—said Edward—"they called me a prig." Just then a remarkably handsome carriage drove up to the private door of the hotel. From it alighted a very elegant woman, who in a few moments was ushered into the drawing-room by the head waiter, and on his designating family, she advanced and gracefully announced herself as. This was the lady at whose house they had left the first letter of introduction. She expressed regret at not having been at home when they called; but said that on finding their letter, she had immediately come down to see them, and to engage them for the evening.

"Tonight"—said —"I expect as many friends as I can collect for a summer party. The occasion is the recent marriage of my niece, who with her husband has just returned from their bridal excursion, and they will be soon on their way to their residence in Baltimore. I think I can promise you an agreeable evening, as I expect some very delightful people, with whom I shall be most happy to make you acquainted." Edward and Caroline exchanged glances, and could not refrain from looking wistfully at their mother, on whose countenance a shade of regret was very apparent. After a short pause she replied to—"I am truly sorry to say that we have just answered in the affirmative a previous invitation for this very evening."

"I am indeed disappointed"—said, who had been looking approvingly at the prepossessing appearance of the two young people. "Is there no way in which you can revoke your compliance with this unfortunate first invitation—at least, I am sure, it is unfortunate for me. What a vexatious contretemps that I should have chanced to be out when you called; thus missing the pleasure of seeing you at once, and securing that of your society for this evening? The truth is, I was disappointed in some of the preparations that had been sent home this morning, and I had to go myself and have the things rectified, and was detained away longer than I expected. May I ask to whom you are engaged this evening? Perhaps I know the lady—if so, I should be very much tempted to go and beg you from her."

"The lady is "—replied—"most probably she will invite some of her friends to meet us." "That of course"—answered—"I am really very sorry—and I regret to say that I do not know her at all." "We shall have to abide by our first decision,". "By mentioning in her note the hour of nine, it is to be presumed she intends asking some other company. I cannot possibly disappoint her. I can speak feelingly as to the annoyance (for I have known it by my own experience) when after inviting a number of my friends to meet some strangers, the strangers have sent an excuse almost at the eleventh hour. I think no inducements, however strong, could tempt me to do so myself."

"I confess that you are perfectly right," said. "I see you must go to. But can you not divide the evening, by passing a part of it with her and then finishing with me?" At this suggestion the eyes of the young people sparkled, for they had become delighted with, and imagined that a party at her house must be every way charming. Also, parties were novelties to both of them. "If possible we will do so," answered, "and with what pleasure I need not assure you. We leave New York to-morrow, but we shall return this way in September, and will then be exceedingly happy to see more of." After a little more conversation took her leave, repeating her hope of still seeing her new friends at her house that night; and enjoining them to let her know as soon as they returned to New York on their way home.

anded her to her carriage, and then joined his mother and sister in their commendations of, with whose exceeding beauty were united a countenance beaming with intelligence, and a manner that put every one at their ease immediately. "She is an evidence," said Edward, "how superior our women of fashion a those of Europe." "Wait, my dear son," said "till you have been in Europe, and had an opportunity of forming an opinion on that point (as on many others) from actual observation. For my part, I believe that in all civilized countries the upper classes of people are very much alike, at least in their leading characteristics." "Ah! here comes the man that was sent to," said ."I hope he could not find the house and has brought the note back with him.

We shall then be able to go at first to and pass the whole evening there." The man reported that he had found the house, and had delivered the note into own hands, as she chanced to be crossing the entry when the door was opened; and that she read it immediately, and said "Very well." "Are you certain that you made no mistake in the house," said, "and that you really did give it to ?"And it's quite sure I am, sir," replied the man, "when I first came over from the ould country I lived with them awhile, and though when she saw me to-day, she did not let on that she remembered my doing that same, she could not help calling me James.

Yes, the rale words she said when I handed her the billy-dux was, 'Very well, James.'" "Come, come," said Edward, when they found themselves alone, "let us look on the bright side. If we do not find a large party at, we may in all probability meet some very agreeable people there, and enjoy the feast of reason and the flow of soul. We may find the Watkinson house so pleasant as to leave it with regret even for." "I do not believe is in fashionable society," said Caroline, "or would have known her. I heard some of the ladies here talking last evening of, and I found from what they said that she is among the élite of the lite." "Even if she is," observed, "are polish of manners and cultivation of mind confined exclusively to persons of that class?"

"Certainly not," said Edward, "the most talented and refined youth at our college, and he in whose society I found the greatest pleasure, was the son of a bricklayer." In the ladies' drawing-room, after dinner, the Morlands heard a conversation between several of the female guests, who all seemed to know very well by reputation, and they talked of her party that was to "come off" on this evening. "I hear," said one lady, "that is to have an unusual number of lions." She then proceeded to name a gallant general, with his elegant wife and accomplished daughter; a celebrated commander in the navy; two highly distinguished members of Congress, and even an ex-president. Also several of the most eminent among the American literati, and two first-rate artists. Felt as if he could say, "Had I three ears I'd hear thee."

"Such a woman as can always command the best lions that are to be found," observed another lady. "And then," said a third, "I have been told that she has such exquisite taste in lighting and embellishing her always elegant rooms. And her supper table, whether for summer or winter parties, is so beautifully arranged; all the viands are so delicious, and the attendance of the servants so perfect—and does the honors with so much ease and tact." "Some friends of mine that visit her," said a fourth lady, "describe her parties as absolute perfection. She always manages to bring together those persons that are best fitted to enjoy each other's conversation.

Still no one is overlooked or neglected. Then everything at her reunions is so well proportioned—she has just enough of music, and just enough of whatever amusement may add to the pleasure of her guests; and still there is no appearance of design or management on her part." "And better than all," said the lady who had spoken firsts " is one of the kindest, most generous, and most benevolent of women—she does good in every possible way." "I can listen no longer," said Caroline to Edward, rising to change her seat. "If I hear any more I shall absolutely hate the Watkinsons. How provoking that they should have sent us the first invitation.

If we had only thought of waiting till we could hear from !" "For shame, Caroline," said her brother, "how can you talk so of persons you have never seen, and to whom you ought to feel grateful for the kindness of their invitation; even if it has interfered with another party, that I must confess seems to offer unusual attractions. Now I have a presentiment that we shall find the Watkinson part of the evening very enjoyable."

As soon as tea was over, and her daughter repaired to their toilettes. Fortunately, fashion as well as good taste, has decided that, at a summer party, the costume of the ladies should never go beyond an elegant simplicity. Therefore our two ladies in preparing for their intended appearance at, were enabled to attire themselves in a manner that would not seem out of place in the smaller company they expected to meet at the. Over an under-dress of lawn, Caroline Morland put on a white organdy trimmed with lace, and decorated with bows of pink ribbon.

At the back of her head was a wreath of fresh and beautiful pink flowers, tied with a similar ribbon. wore a black grenadine over a satin, and a lace cap trimmed with white. It was but a quarter past nine o'clock when their carriage stopped at the Watkinson door. The front of the house looked very dark. Not a ray gleamed through the Venetian shutters, and the glimmer beyond the fan-light over the door was almost imperceptible. After the coachman had rung several times, an Irish girl opened the door, cautiously (as Irish girls always do), and admitted them into the entry, where one light only was burning in a branch lamp. "Shall we go upstairs?" said.

"And what for would ye go upstairs?" said the girl in a pert tone. "It's all dark there, and there's no preparations. Ye can lave your things here a-hanging on the rack. It is a party ye're expecting? Blessed are them what expects nothing." The sanguine Edward Morland looked rather blank at this intelligence, and his sister whispered to him, "We'll get off to as soon as we possibly can. When did you tell the coachman to come for us?" "At half past ten," was the brother's reply. "Oh! Edward, Edward!" she exclaimed, "And I dare say he will not be punctual. He may keep us here till eleven." "Courage, mes enfants," said their mother, "et parlez plus doucement."

The girl then ushered them into the back parlor, saying, "Here's the company." The room was large and gloomy. A checquered mat covered the floor, and all the furniture was encased in striped calico covers, and the lamps, mirrors, etc. concealed under green gauze. The front parlor was entirely dark, and in the back apartment was no other light than a shaded lamp on a large centre table, round which was assembled a circle of children of all sizes and ages. On a backless, cushionless sofa sat, and a young lady, whom she introduced as her daughter Jane.

And in return presented Edward and Caroline. "Will you take the rocking-chair, ma'am?" inquired. declining the offer, the hostess took it herself, and see-sawed on it nearly the whole time. It was a very awkward, high-legged, crouch-backed rocking-chair, and shamefully unprovided with anything in the form of a footstool. "My husband is away, at Boston, on business," said. "I thought at first, ma'am, I should not be able to ask you here this evening, for it is not our way to have company in his absence.

But my daughter Jane overpersuaded me to send for you." "What a pity," thought Caroline. "You must take us as you find us, ma'am," continued. "We use no ceremony with anybody; and our rule is never to put ourselves out of the way. We do not give parties [looking at the dresses of the ladies]. Our first duty is to our children, and we cannot waste our substance on fashion and folly.

They'll have cause to thank us for it when we die." Something like a sob was heard from the centre table, at which the children were sitting, and a boy was seen to hold his handkerchief to his face. "Joseph, my child," said his mother, "do not cry. You have no idea, ma'am, what an extraordinary boy that is. You see how the bare mention of such a thing as our deaths has overcome him."

There was another sob behind the handkerchief, and the Morlands thought it now sounded very much like a smothered laugh. "As I was saying, ma'am," continued, "we never give parties. We leave all sinful things to the vain and foolish. My daughter Jane has been telling me, that she heard this morning of a party that is going on tonight at the widow. It is only fifteen years since her husband died. He was carried off with a three days' illness, but two months after they were married. I have had a domestic that lived with them at the time, so I know all about it.

And there she is now, living in an elegant house, and riding in her carriage, and dressing and dashing, and giving parties, and enjoying life, as she calls it. Poor creature, how I pity her! Thank heaven, nobody that I know goes to her parties. If they did I would never wish to see them again in my house. It is an encouragement to folly and nonsense—and folly and nonsense are sinful. Do not you think so, ma'am?"

"If carried too far they may certainly become so," replied. "We have heard," said Edward, "that Mrs. St. Leonard, though one of the ornaments of the gay world, has a kind heart, a beneficent spirit and a liberal hand." "I know very little about her," replied, drawing up her head, "and I have not the least desire to know any more. It is well she has no children; they'd be lost sheep if brought up in her fold.

For my part, ma'am," she continued, turning to ,"I am quite satisfied with the quiet joys of a happy home. And no mother has the least business with any other pleasures. My innocent babes know nothing about plays, and balls, and parties; and they never shall. Do they look as if they had been accustomed to a life of pleasure?" They certainly did not! for when the took a glance at them, they thought they had never seen youthful faces that were less gay, and indeed less prepossessing. There was not a good feature or a pleasant expression among them all.

Recollected his having often read "that childhood is always lovely." But he saw that the juvenile Watkinsons were an exception to the rule. "The first duty of a mother is to her children," repeated. "Till nine o'clock, my daughter Jane and myself are occupied every evening in hearing the lessons that they have learned for to-morrow's school. Before that hour we can receive no visitors, and we never have company to tea, as that would interfere too much with our duties. We had just finished hearing these lessons when you arrived. Afterwards the children are permitted to indulge themselves in rational play, for I permit no amusement that is not also instructive.

My children are so well trained, that even when alone their sports are always serious." Two of the boys glanced slyly at each other, with what Edward Morland comprehended as an expression of pitch-penny and marbles. "They are now engaged at their game of astronomy," continued. "They have also a sort of geography cards, and a set of mathematical cards. It is a blessed discovery, the invention of these educationary games; so that even the play-time of children can be turned to account. And you have no idea, ma'am, how they enjoy them."

Just then the boy rose from the table, and stalking up to, said to her, "Mamma, please to whip me." At this unusual request the visitors looked much amazed, and replied to him, "Whip you, my best Joseph—for what cause? I have not seen you do anything wrong this evening, and you know my anxiety induces me to watch my children all the time." "You could not see me," answered, "for I have not done anything very wrong. But I have had a bad thought, and you know says that a fault imagined is just as wicked as a fault committed."

"You see, ma'am, what a good memory he has," said aside to. "But my best Joseph, you make your mother tremble. What fault have you imagined? What was your bad thought?" "Ay," said another boy, "what's your thought like?" "My thought," said, "was 'Confound all astronomy, and I could see the man hanged that made this game.'" "Oh! my child," exclaimed the mother, stopping her ears, "I am indeed shocked. I am glad you repented so immediately." "Yes," returned, "but I am afraid my repentance won't last. If I am not whipped, I may have these bad thoughts whenever I play at astronomy, and worse still at the geography game.

Whip me, ma, and punish me as I deserve. There's the rattan in the corner: I'll bring it to you myself." "Excellent boy!" said his mother. "You know I always pardon my children when they are so candid as to confess their faults." "So you do," said, "but a whipping will cure me better." "I cannot resolve to punish so conscientious a child," said. "Shall I take the trouble off your hands?" inquired Edward, losing all patience in his disgust at the sanctimonious hypocrisy of this young Blifil. "It is such a rarity for a boy to request a whipping, that so remarkable a desire ought by all means to be gratified."

Turned round and made a face at him. "Give me the rattan," said, half laughing, and offering to take it out of his hand. "I'll use it to your full satisfaction." The boy thought it most prudent to stride off and return to the table, and ensconce himself among his brothers and sisters; some of whom were staring with stupid surprise; others were whispering and giggling in the hope of seeing get a real flogging.

having bestowed a bitter look on Edward, hastened to turn the attention of his mother to something else. Said she, "allow me to introduce you to my youngest hope." She pointed to a sleepy boy about five years old, who with head thrown back and mouth wide open, was slumbering in his chair. Children were of that uncomfortable species who never go to bed; at least never without all manner of resistance. All her boasted authority was inadequate to compel them; they never would confess themselves sleepy; always wanted to "sit up," and there was a nightly scene of scolding, coaxing, threatening and manoeuvring to get them off