

This was a small triumph, and re-assured me greatly, so that I was able by Amoret's help to make the circuit of the room and behold with amazed eyes the terrible widow herself. She was standing near the paper-decorated grate, and around her were gathered the best of the Rivermouth beaux, each striving to attract her attention to themselves, and I must say that she was dividing her smiles and pretty speeches and pouts and tosses of the head, and Heaven knows how many more beguiling gestures, fairly among them. Now this kind of behaviour was all very fine, but I thought it neither lady-like nor polite, everyone sat seemingly bored to death, except *the visitors* and most ardent admirers, including my Cousin George; that wretched youth, let me here remark, never withdrew his eyes from her face. Lost! lost to me for ever! I saw that at a glance. This select group laughed and chatted together gaily and heartily, but the rest of the company could only half-hear and take no share in their mirth; yet it was quite loud enough to disconcert them, and quench their feeble attempts to enjoy themselves. The widow had assumed the attitude of one who is mistress of the situation, the queen of the occasion as it were, and I felt my hot country blood rising in my face as I watched her city airs and town snobbishness.

She was as lovely and yet as unlovely a woman as I have ever seen. I do not wish to add to my acquaintances any more specimens of the class. Men, as a rule, think them amiable perfection, let them marry them then and they'll find out their dispositions to a nicety. They have a way, by their oily, studied manner, of making honest-hearted, honest-spoken women seem blunt and bad-tempered, and all quiet and retiring people seem sullen and stupid. The way that she looked at me when I first entered the room is distinctly imprinted on my mind. I could never like her after that, even if I had not disliked her on George's account.

Beyond a doubt, beyond a question she was loveliness itself, yet she owed to dress and manner a part of her charms. She could not wear bright colors, she could not—this recently bereaved one, whose eyes danced with mischief and whose baby lips curved with smiles—leave off her sable garments, could not throw aside her widow's cap, that badge of woe; but as far as such a dress could be modified, the taste of city artistes had lightened and modified it. The cap that rested, no it did not rest, it perched coquettishly and defiantly on her “golden head running over with curls,” flossy