temptuously. She felt sorry to think that Charlie Covington was so genuinely irritated; but it could not be helped. The role of the cut-and-dried newspaper woman was so odious to her that she would continue to steer as far away from it as she possibly could. She had no inclination to be a frump. And she smiled as she thought of Jack Childers' remarks on his army of trained journalistic ladies—poetesses, freckle removers, recipe writers and "society" butterflies. Anything—rather than roles like that. She refused to sink to such a level.

"They say," ran Sallie's thoughts, "that the newspaper woman unsexes herself. What is worth doing at all is worth doing well. If I've got to unsex myself I may as well do it as thoroughly as possible."

In her heart she had no faith in this flippant solution of a tedious problem. Sallie knew that, as a matter of fact, a woman can remain a woman even in a newspaper office, if she cares to do so. The trouble was that nobody cared to do so. Amelia Amberg Hutchinson, Happy Hippy, Lamp-Post Lucy and Anastasia Atwood were not women. They were feeble imitations of men. They had the weaknesses of their own sex and the impudent self-reliance of the other. Sallie did not care for counterfeits.

The next envelope contained Mr. Atkinson Smith's invitation to the newspaper anniversary celebration and the cold collation. Sallie was young enough to feel rather pleasantly excited about this. In fact—and those who have already dubbed her "strong minded" will be grieved to hear it—she forgot all else, and like a vain little popinjay began to wonder if her blue silk evening dress, with the lace, would ... good enough.

"I suppose Jack Childers' aunt and that wonderful cousin of his will be there," she said aloud, "and I'm simply pining to see them. And I must look nice, for he will surely introduce me—and then Charlie Covington will be satisfied, for I shall know a woman or two. That kind of woman I'm willing to know."

She rose and walked up and down, rather surprised to see the sepia features of Rosina in the doorway. The handmaiden, roused by the sound of her mistress' voice, was in hopes that somebody had at last slipped in to relieve the monotony of the girl's evening. But she saw that Sallie was alone, and her face fell.

"If you've got to talk to yourself, honey—I mean Miss Sallie—then we had better call in some neighbors, or somebody. They say that those who talk to themselves talk to the devil."

Miss Sydenham laughed in sheer cheeriness of spirit. "You're very rude, Rosina," she said; "but it doesn't matter, and I can't bother about scolding you. I'm asked out to an evening at the office next week, and heaps of people will be there, and I shall get to know them, and perhaps I'll ask them to dinner, and then there'll be no more solemn, silent evenings. And I shall become so respectable that Mrs. Thingummy downstairs will move away in desperation. Rosina, you must mend my blue silk dress for me, and I'll go to that reception and make the hit of my life."

"And will he be there?" asked Rosina with a very wide smile.

"Who?" sharply.

"The right man."

"Rosina, you're bad—bad to the core," said Sallie, severely. "All my lords and masters will be there, and the entire staff, and a lot of swell outsiders, and actors, and Judges, and high executioners. And Miss Sydenham will wait until they have all arrived, when she will frou-frou in and be introduced coyly and reluctantly. Everybody will say, 'Who is that sweet girl in blue?' And the sweet girl will bestow her favors on all alike. She doesn't get such a chance every day. She has nothing but gloomy old theaters and newspaper columns to contend with."

And Sallie sat down and gayly opened the rest of her letters. There were tickets for a reading by a decollete authoress; two more anonymous notes, warm and vituperative; a managerial request for a curtain-raiser from her pen (in order that she might henceforth deal tenderly with that generous manager's productions); a demand for an interview, and other significant affairs.

Sallie tor them all up, and wrote her answer to Lettie.

CHAPTER VII.

The anniversary celebration in Owldom was very large, multi-colored, obtrusive, and protrusive. The owls blinked in a veritable ecstasy of electric light, and cast a most alluring iridescence over City Hall Park. Poor old Ben Franklin, immovable as ever, glared stonily upon the external "goings-on," and Greeley looked as though he could have said a thing or two on the subject of "this auspicious occasion"—not necessarily for publication, but as a guarantee of good faith. Not a solitary light, human or other, was hidden beneath a bushel. In fact, bushels were distinctly vetoed. Anybody who could say anything, or do anything, or see anything, or wear anything, or think anything, said it, and did it, and saw it, and wore it, and thought it, in the blinding light of Owldom publicity.

The reception was held in a huge and handsomely carpeted room, where ponderous editorial writers hung daily upon the editorial "we" as though it were a verbal trapeze. Opening from this apartment was a sanctum, in which the "cold collation" had been prepared upon a most elaborate scale, and quite regardless of expense. To the reportorial mind this feature of the entertainment represented emphatic festivity; to the editorial mind, wholesome and pardonable relaxation; to the general, non-journalistic mind, happy oblivion and a logical raison d'etre. Perhaps the reportorial mind had the best of it.

Everybody who was anybody had been invited, but many who were nobodies appeared. Still, it could safely be chronicled that there was a "representative gathering" present, because that popular phrase is so delightfully vague, so exquisitely elastic and so amiably misleading. There were a few lawyers, who loved to see their names in print; a judge or two; a highly jocular coroner, whose inquests were witty, rollicking things; two police justices, famed for their trenchant, entertaining dealings with the "drunk and disorderly" class; two gentlemen and three ladies on the outside edge of society, who had "got there" by astute journalism, and who were grateful for a sort of first aid to the ambitious; a whole galaxy of unread authors with unreadable wares on the market, and prospects of more; and a senator famous for his after-dinner speeches and a picturesque remarriage, and eminently popular in Owldom, inasmuch as he was invariably willing to rise from his downy couch at the dead of night to tell any reporter anything—either true or false; false preferred.

The staff wore its bib and tucker, and was quite irresistible. Jack Childers, looking rather red and embarrassed—as though this sort of thing had not been stipulated in his contract—stood in a corner with Mrs. Hampton, his aunt, and his charming cousin, Miss Ivy Hampton, pale, ingenuous, tall, with shining silver-gold hair, and a quaint retrousse nose. Mrs. Hampton surveyed the gathering through a pair of insolent lorgnettes—very much as though it were a cattle show. She held herself supremely aloof, and clung to Ivy's hand as though she feared the girl's contamination.

Several of the ladies made ineffectual efforts to pounce upon Charlie Covington; but Mr. Covington was not to be had for the asking. Moreover, the bevy of authors with wares in the market were up and at him, leaving him very little leisure, and thanking him for things that he had never written, but that they hoped he would write. The struggling author and the book reviewer rarely meet. Harsh fate does not cast them together, as it does the luckless dramatic critic and the thankless actor. So Mr. Covington found that he was immensely popular, and was rather pleased. His reviews were always so colorless and generally facile, that even a Marie Corelli would have patted him on the back and called him a dear little flunky.

It was quite late when Sallie Sydenham fluttered in, and if she had been anxious to make a sensation she must have been perfectly satisfied. The old blue dress had been manipulated by the artistic yet sepia handmaiden, whose long visible stitches had been rather crudely hidden by home-made ruching. And in connection with woman's dress the phrase "home made," that, applied to pies, and cakes and fancy work, is so charming, becomes a curse. Sallie's war paint had not been forgotten. Her eyes were very dark, her lips very red, her cheeks very crimson and her hair very yellow. Moreover, her bodice was cut low—it was the only thing of its kind in the room—and she wore a pair of high-heeled shoes that clicked as she walked.

Charlie Covington bit his lip and colored as he saw her. She was irrepressible—wickedly irrepressible. Either she was anxious to shock people, or was too ignorant to adapt herself to circumstances. She looked like a third rate soubrette in a company addicted to what are known as "one-night stands," and as she flounced in the attention of the entire room was riveted upon her. But if all the room saw Sallie, Sallie saw all the room and was very thorough about it. Her keen little eyes had discovered men, frumps and hangers-on, even before the men frumps and hangers-on had discovered her.

The newspaper ladies tittered and seemed highly amused. A few frowns appeared later when Miss Sydenham's identity was announced, and the frowns grew positively ominous when Sallie was, in an instant, the center of a little circle that seemed to be playing kiss-in-the-ring.

While Sallie talked, and laughed and said outrageously flippant things her eyes rested upon Jack Childers, his aunt and his cousin. She could scarcely repress her admiration for Ivy, as the young woman stood, tall and impressive, like a Gibson girl, surprised in her stateliness. As she watched her standing by Childers she wondered how he could ever escape her fascination. Perhaps he couldn't, and didn't. He seemed to look upon her with a quiet glance of ownership, and Sallie, intent upon the picture, found it difficult to keep up her flippancies.

Presently Jack Childers left his aunt and cousin and bore slowly down upon Sallie. She saw his departure the instant it occurred, and she also noticed that Miss Hampton was immediately approached by Arthur Stuyvesant, the favorite matinee actor, who instantly engaged her in conversation. Sallie was so surprised at this—Miss Hampton looked supremely the wrong sort for a man like Stuyvesant to attempt—that she was unaware that Mr. Childers at last stood by her side.

She left the circle and walked slowly with him down the room.

"Solomon in all his glory—" began Mr. Childers, looking with amusement at her attire. It was so like what he could have imagined that Sallie would wear.

"Good old glory," retorted Sally. "Glory that has seen better days. But"— her eyes dancing—"it doesn't matter. I wanted to come so badly that I'm thankful I own this old blue relic."

"Did you really want to come? Why?"

"Oh," she said, "it is a change. I never get any opportunity to see people or to laugh—outside of the theater, which is only a metier. This is really charming to me. I'm afraid, Mr. Childers, that if I were rich I should revel in parties and dances, and all that sort of thing. It would be so exciting."

"I didn't think this sort of thing would have appealed to you," he said.

"Why not?" asked Sallie, gayly. She looked at him in his bland evening dress and was intensely satisfied. "It takes me out of myself, at any rate. It is new and it is real. I've come to the conclusion, Mr. Childers, that I like real things. I gorge myself with the counterfeit all the time, and I think I must suffer from indigestion."

"Couldn't you write this up gorgeously?" he queried, with a smile.

"I don't intend to talk shop to-night," she declared. "You needn't try to lure me to the subject. I want to forget that I'm an owl for this occasion only. How very lovely your cousin is, Mr. Childers."

Ivy had moved away from the place she had last occupied. So had Arthur Stuyvesant. Mrs. Hampton was talking to the Senator, who had at last broken loose from Mrs. Amelia Amberg Hutchinson, and was looking at him through the insolent lorgnette.

"Yes, Ivy's a pretty girl," Jack Childers replied, "and a very nice, good girl."

Sallie waited for him to say, "I want you to meet her," but Mr. Childers did not say it. She wondered when the introduction would take place, for she anticipated it eagerly, and the idea of knowing Jack Childers' feminine attributes was very precious to her.

"I suppose she was delighted to come to-night?" Sallie said presently.

The managing editor laughed outright. "I had the hardest work to persuade either of them to come," he replied. "My cousin goes out so much that she didn't think this quite the thing. And Mrs. Hampton failed to see why she should have to visit my 'shop.' But I insisted, as it would have looked bad if they had not shown themselves. The chief would have been displeased."

Sallie was amazed. She could not understand how any well regulated young girl could fail to feel interested in the spectacle of Jack Childers among his associates.

"Your cousin—seems quite young," she ventured again, harping insistently on the subject.

"Yes, she is young," he assented. "But she is—er—she is—very good form, and rather looks down upon the newspaper world."

"How strange," murmured Sallie. She was working herself up to a sort of frenzy of desire to know this girl.

"Yes," he said, "Ivy's a nice, good girl and very amiable. But she isn't a good fellow like you are, and—she isn't amusing."

"I suppose she doesn't—she doesn't read my articles?"

Mr. Childers could not restrain his merriment. "Oh, horror!" he cried. "Never! My aunt takes good care of that. Aunt would have a fit if she thought Ivy indulged in that sort of literature."

"Then your aunt must think I'm horrid?" Her voice had sunk, and there was something rather pathetic in the anxiety with which she waited for his reply.

"Well—of course, she doesn't know you," he replied evasively. "But we don't cater to old ladies, do we? We endeavor to amuse serious people. There's a good deal in it, Sallie. Only short-sighted people condemn it as frivolity. This isn't a very comic world, and the man or woman who can amuse, if even for a moment, has earned gratitude somewhere."

He had called her "Sallie" for the first time. As the name passed his lips she looked up and flushed. Perhaps the "cold collation," in private view, was responsible. But the familiarity gave her a delightfully comfortable sensation. She wondered if he would ever call her Miss Sydenham again, and hoped not.

"I shall have to drink your health to-night," he said, as the crowd began to move toward the refreshment inclosure. "We must clink glasses."

"That will be jolly," she cried, feverishly. "But I hope you don't feel it your duty to clink with the entire staff, otherwise you will be a martyr."

He smiled. "I think I see myself clinking with Amelia and Anastasia," he said. "For goodness' sake, look at that woman!" he added, as a vision of Lamp-Post Lucy drinking a bumper of champagne came through the open door. "We had better hurry or we shall get none."

They passed into the room, which had grown wildly convivial. Sallie looked carefully among the crowd to find Ivy Hampton, but her quest was unsuccessful. Mrs. Hampton was there with the Senator, to whom she was talking in pompous deliberation, punctuated by the inevitable lorgnette in its gold-rimmed impertinence. Sallie almost brushed against her as Jack Childers tried to burrow a path through the crowd to the table, and the girl was conscious that she involuntarily paused while in Mrs. Hampton's vicinity, waiting for a possible introduction. But Jack Childers pushed her quietly along, and Mrs. Hampton was soon left in the background. Frayed edges of her conversation with the Senator reached Sallie. The fragmentary murmurings sounded like the incoherent mutterings of a dream. It died away gradually, and Sallie found herself by the table with Jack Childers at her side. A feeling of disappointment and gloom oppressed her, and the table, with its glittering glass, its huge vases of flowers and its subdued lights—Sallie saw a little tunnel of leaves through which a glow of rosy electricity was felicitously diffused—gave her something of a shock. Mrs. Hampton had not even glanced in her direction, although the lorgnette focused so very much that was going on. And yet she had even felt the silk of the lady's dress as she brushed by her, and the subtle perfume of her hair had rested for a moment in her nostrils. Sallie's sensation of disappointment was soon replaced by a restless discomfort. But she looked at Jack Childers as he stood smiling by her side, and she took from his hand the glass of champagne that he had poured out for her.

"Here's to you, Sallie," he said—it was still "Sallie," she noticed—and they clinked. Sallie felt the "clink," as it traveled to her elbow. She smiled and sipped the wine, while Mr. Childers drank unstintingly, and seemed vexed that the glass did not hold more.

"Don't be abstemious," he said, looking at Sallie's almost untouched glass. "This is not a W. C. T. U. meeting, and the cause of temperance is eschewed by the paper on this occasion. We shall have a beautiful editorial on temperance to-morrow—one of the best that McPherson has ever written—but to-night we will give the other side a chance to be heard. Please drink to my health."

He filled his own glass again and drained it. Sallie, with growing resklessness, looked at him, said "A votre sante," and with an effort swallowed the champagne. Jack Childers patted her approvingly. The room tinkled with uncorked eloquence and journalistic decorum evaporated slowly but surely.

Sallie felt that the wine was going to her head. She was flushed and dizzy. The room moved slightly, and in the little tunnel of leaves the red electric lights peered at her like eyes. She saw old Tomlinson trying to clink with himself—he stood in a corner and held a glass in each hand—and she felt that little Robinson was looking at her. She liked this good natured little boy, and beckoned to him to come to her. When he stood by her side, she asked Jack Childers to give him some champagne, held up her own glass and suggested a toast. But little Robinson looked at her quietly and began to talk to Mr. Childers. The toast was not drunk, and Sallie wondered why. Little Robinson offered her his arm, and as Jack Childers showed no desire to move away he led her quietly into the adjoining room, now comparatively empty.

As soon as Sallie had left Charlie Covington suddenly appeared, and, plowing his way through the crowd, joined Mr. Childers and shook hands with him.

"Everything is going along admirably, Jack," said Mr. Covington. "This is festive, and no mistake. Say, old man, have you introduced Miss Sydenham to Mrs. and Miss Hampton? I think they would rather enjoy knowing her. Don't you think so?"

His hand was rather unsteady as he placed it upon Jack Childers' shoulder. The managing editor had been somewhat aimlessly watching Sallie's exit with little Robinson.

"Introduce Miss Sydenham to Mrs. and Miss Hampton?" he repeated thickly. "What on earth for? Sallie would hate them, and—well, Charlie, old man, you know how strait laced they are."

Charlie Covington with the tip of his first finger drew a round on the tablecloth, and then—went over it again—and again—and again.

Then he said slowly: "I think you're wrong, old chap. Sallie wouldn't hate them at all. You don't know her. She'd like to know them. I don't think that she has spoken to a woman to-night. And I'm sure Mrs. Hampton and your cousin would be glad to meet anybody with whom you are friendly."

Jack Childers coughed. The expression on his face was a strange combination of embarrassment and champagne.

"See here," he said—and he had the discretion to sink his voice to a whisper—"—I really couldn't introduce Sallie to-night. She is so atrociously overdressed, and—and—well, while you and I don't mind—frankly, Charlie, I prefer the unconventional—still, Aunt Sarah and Ivy would be furious. I should never hear the last of it. You know, they both hated to come, and it was with the greatest difficulty that I prevailed upon them to do so. So, you see, if I took Miss Sydenham up to them just now—decked out as she is—I should be—er—rather putting my foot in it, don't you think?"

A brick-red flush colored Mr. Covington's face; but he made an effort to suppress the anger that was rising. He knew that there was a good deal of truth in his friend's words, but it was selfish and rather humiliating truth, the expression of which was not quite necessary.

With a successful injection of calmness into his voice, he said: "Your aunt, I am sure, is a kind and a courteous woman, while your cousin, who is at present talking to Arthur Stuyvesant on the balcony, can have no excuse for refusing. Sallie may be a reckless young person, but Mr. Stuyvesant—well—er—you know what he is."

Mr. Childers poured out another glass of champagne and drank it. "What a serious fellow you are, Charlie," he said good naturedly. "What pains you take to embroider logic upon your themes. You're right, and I know you're right, and I'm glad you're right. I'm always glad when anybody's right. I didn't know Ivy had ever met Stuyvesant; but she is one of those inveterate matinee girls who plaster their mantel-pieces with photographs of those strutting fools. I dare say somebody has introduced her to this beauty to-night. Why not? But I'm glad I was not the somebody. Why, if I had suggested it I believe she would have withered me with a glance. But I'm glad to see that she is human enough to want the introduction, for sometimes, Charlie, her touch-me-not manner gets on my nerves. But I can't go up to her, tear her away from Stuyvesant, and say: 'I've seen you talking to that reprobate, so you've got to know Miss Sydenham.' Can I, Charlie?"

Mr. Covington flushed again. "It is not necessary even to think of them as in the same category," he remarked, with another effort at repression. "Take a tip from me, Jack. Go and find Sallie and introduce her to your aunt and cousin. You like her, and it would please her."

"It would not please her," Mr. Childers retorted. "I know Sallie, and she dislikes staid, matter-of-fact, conventional people. Besides, I can't do it. It isn't necessary. I am not obliged to introduce the staff to my own relatives. Please drop the subject. It is silly."

"But you like Sallie Sydenham?" Mr. Covington was conscious of a dull, dogged persistence that infected his tones.

"I do. I like her immensely. She is a jolly good fellow, and we have just clinked glasses. I'm not going to worry her to-night by inflicting my relatives upon her. You seem determined to festoon Sallie with women, and she doesn't want them."

Charlie Covington did not trust himself to discuss the matter further. Jack Childers was perfectly honest; indeed, there was no breach of loyalty in his treatment of Sallie. According to the managing editor's inexorable logic, there was really no reason why the girl should be foisted unwillingly upon a couple of women who were not at all anxious for the honor. Moreover, there was nothing to show that Jack Childers had the slightest interest in Miss Sydenham apart from the exigencies of the office, and the fraternal intercourse that this association rendered necessary, and at the same time—perhaps—pleasant. It was useless dwelling upon the subject further, as far as Mr. Childers was concerned.

Mr. Covington glanced into the room where Sallie had gone. He could see her laughing and talking with little Robinson. Her face was flushed with a tint redder than the rouge that besmeared it, and there was an unusual nervousness in her manner. Occasionally she looked back into the refreshment inclosure that she had left, and her eyes had rested upon him while he talked with Mr. Childers. He had noticed that, even in the midst of the discussion. An immense pity for this girl swept into his heart, and a fervid desire to help her, in spite of herself, took possession of him. He had an ardent belief in the innate femininity of her nature, incrusted though it might be with the rude, unpretty devices of rather rampant Bohemianism. He noted the aloofness of the women as they passed her, and analyzed the various looks—a compound of jealousy and contempt—that were cast upon her by the ladies present. Her sister-workers, he particularly observed, made a point of staring stonily at her, and of perking up their heads as they went by. They made comments upon her to their companions, and it irritated him to think that Sallie had been impolitic enough to persistently antagonize them. A woman, opposed by her own co-workers, cut a sorry figure in the eyes of those who do not appreciate the niceties of the situation. It would have been a satisfaction to see Sallie in conversation with Mrs. Amelia Amberg Hutchinson or Lamp-Post Lucy. Still, he could scarcely expect them to bob up as chaperons when Miss Sydenham made merry at their expense on all occasions. He saw her very soon surrounded again by a circle of actors, authors and cheap politicians, all anxious to chat with her and sample for themselves the airy moods that read so well in print. But he knew that Sallie's salvation was imperiled by just these careless, flippant attentions. He realized that sensuality, selfishness and curiosity were the forces that drew these men into that encircling fringe around the girl.

Mr. Covington knew Mrs. Hampton slightly. He had met her once or twice, and he had admired her as very "good form." They had talked books together, and as Charlie was a perfectly colorless journalist, who had never expressed an opinion in print, he was received in any "set." Mr. Covington was swayed by a sudden impulse, and he did not allow himself to reason about it. He marched straight up to Mrs. Hampton, who had just dismissed her Senator, saluted her gracefully, and took the plunge.

"May I introduce Miss Sydenham to you?" he asked, rushing at his subject. "You know of her, of course. She is an awfully bright girl, Mrs. Hampton, and I think you would enjoy knowing her. May I go and find her?"

The gold-rimmed lorgnettes that had been hanging limply at the lady's side were at once called into service. Mrs. Hampton's eyes, from which a kindly courteousness had shone, were suddenly seen through the awe-inspiring glasses—gray and cold.

"Really, Mr. Covington," she said, "I—I do not understand you."

"I want to introduce you to Miss Sydenham"—very staccato.

"To that vulgar girl who writes disreputable things about plays? To that woman in the make-up and the horrible dress? Really, Mr. Covington, do you mean it?"

"Assuredly I do," replied the young man. "Please, Mrs. Hampton."

"Not for the world," said the lady, decidedly. "I flatter myself I have done my duty. I very much dislike this kind of thing. I have already had enough of it—and Ivy and I must be going home? Where is Ivy? I could not be seen talking to this atrocious looking young woman, Mr. Covington. She may be a clever journalist—as clever journalism goes today. And I may add that in my day she would have been too outre for the Police Gazette. But I really have not the force to cope with these modern innovations. Where is Ivy, I wonder? I must find her. These crowds are very trying. Don't you think so, Mr. Covington? Jack quite put himself out when I tried to cry off. So I made a martyr of myself. One can be a martyr for a few hours, can't one? And I'm very fond of Jack. He is a dear boy, and so kind to Ivy. I wonder where Ivy is? Ah, Mr. Underbrush, how do you do? I read the book you sent me. Thanks, immensely. Good-night, Mr. Covington."

She moved away voluminously stately, the gold-rimmed lorgnettes still framing her eyes. Charlie Covington bit his lip, and tasted blood. He had played rather a bold game that might have succeeded, for there are certain women to whom sheer audacity is not displeasing. But the game had failed. He looked into the next room. Sallie was still there. He saw her look up as Mrs. Hampton entered, towed by the proud author of "Theodore the Thug." He watched her move slowly forward, as though to compel Mrs. Hampton's attention. Then he heard her prattling lightly to little Robinson, the reporter.

CHAPTER VIII.

Out on the balcony, her temples fanned by a small, reluctant breeze that erred vagrantly through City Hall Park, stood Ivy Hampton, wisps of her silver-gold hair dancing lightly from the release of a jeweled comb as she leaned upon the granite supports of owldom's majestic retreat. The tinkle of a herd of street cars reaching destination and starting again on their long, thin journey to Manhattan end smote her ears, as did the grinding certainty of the adjacent elevated roads.

Her attitude no longer suggested the ingenuous, for as she turned toward the dark haired, thick set, aggressively virile young man by her side the glints in her gray eyes shone like the fires in an opal. The conventions—dozens of them, in assorted sizes and grades—lurked in the rooms behind her, from which convivial sounds issued, and in which, as frequently happened, when she turned her small and neatly poised head, she could see the forms of owldom's visitors flitting in all directions in ghostly noiselessness.

The rather pensive maidenhood, in its cool, thin suggestions, that had appealed to Sallie Sydenham when she saw Miss Hampton standing in lissome indifference by her mother's side, had vanished. A furtive warmth had replaced it. The girl's bosom rose and fell in quicker rhythm than that which is usually inspired by mere virginal apathy, and the concentration of her eyes upon the street below was somewhat unduly tense. For the street below was cold, and gray, and empty, and listless, as it stretched before her, striped with its gleaming car tracks into the shadows and nocturnal restlessness of the Bowery.

Miss Hampton's attitude might have been mistaken for one of fatigue by those who could not see the fitful, opal lights in her still, pool-like drab eyes. She wore a thin gray dress, and as her elbows rested on the parapet her cloak fell from her figure in shadowy undulations, and the perfection of that figure was revealed. The waist was slight and charming and the fullness of the bust symmetrical. Earlier in the evening, when Miss Hampton had stood erect and on guard by the flank of her chaperone, that figure had seemed replete with the vague immaturity of transparent girlhood. But now it spoke of a certain womanhood, palpitant and ripe, eager and unmistakable.

Arthur Stuyvesant, following the direction of her eyes, saw the chill, dim park, with its feathery trees and its dark, weird shapes, and—following them still—saw also the cold, empty, gray and listless street, striped with tracks, on its quick iron way to the Bowery. He preferred the quiet, nearly motionless figure beside him. It was neither cold nor gray, nor listless, nor empty.

"Ivy," he murmured softly, and he touched her elbow upon the cool granite balcony.

"You see I came," she said, not looking at him, but at a red Bowery car that thumped toward the postoffice. "I had to come. This was an occasion from which I might and should have stayed away. I tried, but I couldn't. I came."

Mr. Stuyvesant watched her face, averted from his own, and noticed the young, admirable angles of her features—the slight facial angularity of immaturity, of which, as a connoisseur, he never tired.

"It was good of you to come," he said, quickly. "I could not have seen you for days, as I go to Washington to-morrow for one long, tiresome, unending week. So I wanted you here to-night. Why not? What risk can there be? On these occasions one may talk to anybody. A cat might talk to a king if it had the gift of language."

"I suppose I am the cat," retorted the girl. "Well, I feel like one—just a furtive, stealthy, velvety thing, always purring until—until it gets out to the balcony, when it can display its claws—and live."

He was silent—not from the psychological fitness of silence at that moment, but because he was not quite sure what particular style of remark would be harmonious. Then quickly, with a woman's craving to hear a man say the banal thing she loves, she asked: "Are you really glad I came?"

He tipped the banal answer from his lips, and it cheered her. "You know I am, Ivy. How can you even ask it? Don't you know——"

She interrupted him, but raised her pool-like gray eyes, now all disturbed and moving with the opal glints, to his face. "Yes—I know, I know," she said, impatiently. "But it is all so horribly difficult. You are an actor, and you act during certain hours only; and it is your work, for which you are paid. But I am an actress—acting all the time—all the time except when I am with you; and it is not my work, and I am not paid—except in my discomfort and distress. I must play the pensive, guileless maiden through the dull and dreary day. I am a dear little unsophisticated thing to my easily deluded stepmother. I am a pretty little bit of marble to my cousin Jack. It is acting—all acting. For when I am with you I live, and I am not——"

"Not marble." Arthur Stuyvesant smiled, with a sense of his own irresistible powers, which he loved to attribute to a hypnotic faculty. He was one of those who prefer to call sensuality by that much abused and cleverly misinterpreted possibility. He moved toward her and put his arm around the slim waist, from which the cloak fell in its shadowy undulations. "Not precisely, Ivy. Not precisely marble. I think I have discovered the real Ivy, eh? Do you forget it? Tell me, dearest?"

"Regret?" she exclaimed contemptuously. "Never! I suppose I'm a thoroughbred—with the wrong sort of thoroughness. But I'm jealous, hatefully jealous, of you. I hate to think of your wife. It makes me sick to remember her. When I do so I feel that I am not quite so thorough, for I see the spots on my own soul. I suppose"—with a laugh—"that awful looking girl, Sallie Sydenham, who guyed you so fearfully that, if I had dared, I would have requested Jack to discharge her, and who writes as recklessly as any French novelist—I suppose that she is an angel compared with me. She barks, and I bite. She is on the surface, and I am deep down. Nobody would care to know her, yet they all swarm around me. Isn't it odd? But I'm thankful it is so. I am getting gradually used to it all, you know; but when I am out of sorts I am unpleasant. I should like to sail smoothly, not because it would be right, but merely easier."

She paused, breathless. The breeze came gustily across the dormant park, and the wisps of her silver-gold hair fluttered. The noise of heavy wagons jolting over the uneven pavements came to them in muffled roar. They were alone, but the world was somnolently alive below them. It made her think of the world in owldom's rooms, which was nearer.

"You are morbid," he whispered, glancing in at the windows, through which shapes still flitted.

"One of these days," she said, also in low tones, "the worst will happen, and I shall have to marry Jack. I know it. Mrs. Hampton is always hinting at such a possibility; and sometimes I think that Mr. Childers looks upon it as tacitly settled. The idea makes me ill, though I am schooling myself admirably, and there are times when I can contemplate anything. Of course, I like Jack as a cousin, but in any other role——" She closed her eyes, and a perpendicular furrow traveled quickly between her yellow eyebrows. "It would be the last straw, wouldn't it, Arthur—you with a wife, I with a husband."

Mr. Stuyvesant stifled a smile. The situation was one in which he had frequently appeared on the stage. It was a favorite situation in the "drawing-room" comedies that trickle into cesspools, and are sometimes guided by the master-hand of a Pinero.

"We won't look so far into the future," he said. "The present is not so awfully bad, and we may as well make the most of it. My wife——"

"Your wife!" repeated Ivy, her eyes wide.

"My wife is a good soul, and—and" (he was going to say, "She has forgiven me fifty times before," but checked himself in time, and said) "she thinks I am perfection. There is no need to worry about anything. Take life easily, Ivy. Don't let us cross our bridges until we get to them."

"You'll always care for me?" she cried, impulsively. Again she felt the odd, feminine need of a banal question that must give birth to a banal answer. And again she felt cheered when that answer immediately came. Like a child to whom the best known story is the story best loved, she waited for an inevitable response, and was comforted by it.

The shapes in the brilliantly lighted rooms, silhouetted on the amber blinds, seemed to flit closer to them. She left his side, pushed aside the tawny shade, and stepped into the clamorous apartment, wrapped once again in the gray veil of her Puritanism. Silently and with slowly measured steps she gained the crowd, smiling colorlessly at an acquaintance or two. The opal light had gone from her eyes, and they were the mere gray pools in which were mirrored an ingenuous soul. The wisps of her hair, unstirred now by any breeze, arranged themselves in neat precision along the nape of her neck, as though they, too, had a role to play. So might Priscilla have stood, no more unruffled or nervously alert.

Sallie Sydenham, chatting aimlessly with the faithful little Robinson, saw her enter, and waited—waited for the other. Into her keenly perceptive little soul had crept the wraith of a doubt. She saw Miss Hampton's two entities at once—they were flashed upon her almost simultaneously—so that she had no more faith in the one than in the other. She was watching them both in their unconscious differentiation. So she waited for Miss Hampton's companion. But there was apparently no companion, and Sallie saw the tall, lithe, indolent form of the girl passing down the room. Miss Sydenham was perplexed, but not uncomfortably so. In her solitude—for her tete-a-tete with little Robinson was scarcely more than solitude—she had discovered the duet on the balcony. And while she sat anxiously expectant of the coveted introduction that had not been given her, she had found herself wondering what this pensive, high-bred girl could have in common with an actor whose repute was that usually ascribed to Arthur Stuyvesant.

She rose, and leaving little Robinson in the midst of a glowing panegyric on the magnificent after-dinner eloquence of the popular Senator—who had once risen from his bed at 3 in the morning to give Mr. Robinson an impassioned description of a dinner dress that the Senatorial wife had worn that evening—Sallie proceeded to the window. She would have been almost justified in imagining that she must have been mistaken. It would have been easy to have ascribed the tete-a-tete to a mere brain fantasy. Miss Hampton might have been taking a little air on her own solitary account. A strange impulse—something, perhaps, that leaked into the future—told her to try and believe this. But Sallie was too practically engrossed with the present. She pushed the blind aside and stepped out. Her dazzled eyes, greeted with the swift darkness that hung, pall-like, around, could at first distinguish nothing. But they persevered and Arthur Stuyvesant was discovered just about to return to the multitude—by another window.

"Good evening, Mr. Stuyvesant," said Sallie, as he stopped, in the apparent belief that Miss Hampton had returned. "I'm not here to criticize to-night; but—won't you take cold? You have been out a long time, and—you've no hat."

Mr. Stuyvesant was not disconcerted for long. He was not at all fond of Miss Sydenham, who had so frequently held him up to ridicule. But his policy was invariably to use his own personality for all that it was worth, when in contact with either friend or foe; and, although Sallie scarcely belonged to either category, she was probably as susceptible as the rest—when she was off guard, and off duty. Moreover, even a flippant little penny-a-liner (to the actor's mind all journalists are penny-a-liners) must be impressed by Stuyvesant's personal charms.

"It's a lovely evening, Miss Sydenham," he said, "and I've been enjoying the air. I hate a crowd and a stifling room, don't you?"

"I wasn't aware that you knew Miss Hampton," she remarked, ignoring side issues and lunging at her subject.

"One of my matinee girls," he declared, laughing. "I know 'em all, Miss Sydenham, more or less, although—in print—you always wonder what they see in me. Sometimes I wonder, too, don't you know? Particularly when I'm in a modest mood. Still, they are my stock in trade, and if they fancy they like me I must humor them. I really must, you know. Let me see, didn't you say last week that I had a face like a pie—or was it a pudding? I really can't quite remember which, but I know it was something that came after meat. Well, you know, I feel it my duty to prove to you that others don't think so, or that, if they do, they like pie and pudding."

"But you do know Miss Hampton?" she asked quietly.

"Know her? Oh, I won't go so far as that. I have met her once or twice. Very nice girl—rather quiet and sedate, and unsophisticated, and all that sort of thing. But I rather like that style, as it is so unusual nowadays. Where have you been all evening, Miss Sydenham? I haven't seen you before."

Sallie walked to the parapet and leaned her elbows upon it, just as Ivy Hampton had done. Arthur Stuyvesant saw the attitude and recognized it; but he also saw that Sallie's waist was not a symmetrical quality, and that no cloak fell from her shoulders in shadowy undulations. This, however, would not have disturbed him in the least, for Sallie was a woman, and to Mr. Stuyvesant the sex—any of it under forty—was the sex. There was, however, something in her manner that pushed such ideas away from him.

"See here, Mr. Stuyvesant," she said deliberately, "you are a very bad actor. I tell you that to your face, although I have merely hinted at it playfully in print, for I thought you were too bad to take seriously. But if you don't play square, if you try and foist your precious theatrical personality upon a girl like Miss Hampton—she is the cousin of my managing editor, Mr. Jack Childers, if you please—I'll roast you until you are the laughing stock of the town. I'll ridicule you, pull you to pieces, show you up, dissect you until you will wish that you had never been born. I can do it, you know. I'm not malicious—in print—but I shall take particular delight in doing something in that direction for your own especial benefit. Go it—if you like—with your matinee girls, but leave Miss Hampton out of it."

"What do you know of Miss Hampton?" he asked sullenly, a flush on his face, as he realized that he was now dealing with a woman to whom his generally efficacious personality made no appeal.

"Nothing," she replied; and a tinge of sadness crept into her voice as she realized how absolutely true that statement was, and how events pointed to the probability that it would remain true. "I have never met her; but she is Jack Childers' cousin, and she is a lady—not a matinee girl," she added, with emphasis.

Mr. Stuyvesant bit his lip, for a grim smile that it was hard to check suggested itself.

"You fancy that you are an excellent judge of women?" he asked, repressing an intonation that he felt would sound sardonic.

Sallie smiled. "Not necessarily," she said. "I have told you that I do not know Miss Hampton. I am, therefore, considering general principles only. I trust, Mr. Stuyvesant, that—er—your wife is well?"

The actor fought against a flush of chagrin, the dawn of which he felt beneath his skin. This was a dangerous young woman, who meant business, and who apparently was not quite so flippant as her surface measure indicated. He had schooled himself carefully, however, in the suppression of all sorts of emotion off the stage. He was quite prepared for Miss Sydenham by the time he spoke again.

"She is well, I thank you," he said. "She would have accompanied me here to-night, but—well, Mrs. Stuyvesant is a domesticated little woman, who loves her home, and hates to leave it. She takes her pleasure in sewing and cooking. Not your style, eh, Miss Sydenham?"

"Not precisely," Sallie replied; but she was conscious at that moment that it was extremely irritating to be irreparably "classed," at sight, by good men and by bad men, by friends and by foes. She appealed to them all in the same way. She tried to do so—but it would have been agreeable to slip from the eternal pose at times. She began to wish, as this fat actor stood before her, that she could cook and sew. There were worse occupations to be found, she supposed. Were the foolish creatures in owldom at that moment—unsexed women, barren matrons, petticoats aping the bifurcation of trousers—any more essential to the general scheme of things than little Mrs. Stuyvesant, surrounded by her household gods, and living a deluded wifehood to the best of her ability?

They left the balcony and entered owldom together. The large room was slowly emptying itself, and conviviality was slackening its pace. Mrs. Hampton had just captured Ivy and was preparing to beat a retreat. Jack Childers stood with his aunt and cousin, talking rather nonchalantly. Sallie heard him say to Ivy: "Fancy you thawing. I hear that you were positively talking with Stuyvesant, the actor. How did you unbend sufficiently to submit to an introduction?"

He turned, and at that moment Arthur Stuyvesant and Sallie Sydenham passed them. A faint surprise was reflected in Ivy Hampton's eyes as she, too, noticed the promenade; but the surprise vanished quickly.

In her cold, prim, unemotional tones, she said: "My dear Jack, you made me come here, and I have been introduced to various people. I'm sorry that Mr. Stuyvesant was among them, now that I see him with that terrible looking person in the old blue dress. It is Miss Sydenham, is it not, Jack? Don't you think that, as managing editor, you could prevail upon her to cover up her shoulders and to use a little less rouge? Really, she looks positively rowdy and rakish, doesn't she, mamma?"

"Yes," Mrs. Hampton answered, with the ready lorgnette raised on duty. "By the by, Jack, I must tell you what happened. Your friend, Mr. Covington, rather a nice young man—quite a respectable person for journalism—wanted to insist upon introducing me to that girl—Miss Sydenham. I thought it most inopportune, and impertinent, and disrespectful."

"So you refused?" asked Jack Childers, with a smile. "I thought you would. Covington spoke to me about it, and I knew your sentiments. I had no idea that he was so determined as to tackle you himself. But I'm quite sure that Miss Sydenham herself knew nothing of this," with a laugh. "You wouldn't be her style at all."

"Probably not," assented Ivy, with her Priscilla mien. "Let us hope not. Are you coming, mamma? Jack, just put us into a hansom and we won't bother you any more. You will naturally wish to stay to the bitter end."

Sallie left Arthur Stuyvesant to his own devices after entering the room. She had no desire to parade in his vicinity, for, as she did not belong to the class of sensual women known as "matinee girls," he was rather disgusting to her. Sallie understood the average "matinee girl," and mentally placed her side by side with the vacuous youths to whom the playhouse means anatomical display. Perhaps Ivy Hampton had known the ignominy of matinee girl moments. But she did not look the character at all. Was it possible that beneath the gray pictorial innocence there were "dark blue depths"?

The girl felt inclined to wish that she had remained away from this "celebration." Her head ached, and a horrible sense of loneliness—a painful feeling of solitude in a crowd—oppressed her. She saw the departure of Ivy and Mrs. Hampton, with Jack in tow, and she knew that her cherished desire would not be realized. Mr. Childers evidently did not want her to meet his people, and she wondered why. Was it because she was so badly dressed? Was this perpetual struggle for the unusual—in her writing, in her manner, in her attire—to be the undoing of all her plans for simple, genuine pleasure?

She looked at the feminine owls, bunched together at the end of the room, apparently watching her intently, yet as soon as she looked in their direction disregarding her glances quickly. Well, she was glad of it. "Cats!" she said to herself. "I don't want them. I couldn't stand them for five minutes, singly or collectively. I must be a trifle upset even to think of such a hateful possibility."

Continued Next Week.