has links and invisible wires; it connects the most dissociated ideas.

"Or Amelia," she cried quickly and feverishly. "Yes, Amelia. Oh, I know what I shall find. He has grown freckles; he is threatened with pimples; his complexion has been lured to its ruin, and he has been consulting the Amberg-Hutchinson. And during the process of eradication or amelioration—I might say Amelia-ration, but punning is so low and so obsolete—she has fallen in love with him. Think how dramatic it would be to find her at his feet, swearing that unless he would be hers he should go, with all his freckles, to perdition. Wouldn't it be lovely? Yet it might be so, mightn't it?"

She rattled on, and they both laughed, as they always did when she let herself loose—no matter how idiotic were her sallies. She felt thankful to see that Charlie Covington was amused. She was frightened of Charlie Covington; he was so serious and so sinister. She could always cope with Jack Childers, whose first want—whose only want—perhaps—was entertainment.

"Perhaps he has 'liaisoned' with Lamp-Post Lucy," she continued recklessly, almost vaulting over her words. "He has become aware that she might look well in tights, as leader of the Amazon march at the Folie, and he has been trying to persuade her. Think of him kneeling to Lamp-Post Lucy! He would just reach up to the top of her Wellington boots. Such a womanly woman! I'd give a week's salary—though I need it for my rent—if it were Lamp-Post Lucy. Wouldn't you, Charlie? Charlie, you are so proper, so pitifully, so abjectly proper, that if Lucy wore tights and I had to criticize her you would say: 'Sallie, you are a woman. Dismiss the ribald subject in a few words.'"

It was hard work to go the pace, but Sallie felt that she was achieving her usual success. Jack Childers was convulsed with laughter; and though it was a blow to her amour propre, she realized that the stuff she talked was quite silly, and wondered how any man could appreciate it. Still, Charlie Covington was also laughing. As a rule, Sallie enjoyed her own witticisms, and honestly thought that she was at times quite brilliant. To-night, however, her own humor palled upon her as veriest twaddle. She was not in the mood.

She must give them some more. "Stay!" she went on, in mock tragedy. "We are forgetting Happy Hippy, and—when I come to think of it—the probability that she is the heavily veiled lady is very strong. Happy Hippy couldn't be veiled too heavily to suit me. I could stand her with a face draped in cachemire. It would be an improvement. Happy Hippy is very fond of actors—also of journalists, and lawyers, and doctors, and ministers, and business men, and commercial travelers. She has a loving heart. She could put up with anything, and she has a very persuasive and fascinating way with her. She knows how to flatter men, and actors love to be flattered. (N. B.—That is why I don't flatter 'em.) It might be Happy Hippy. Stranger things have happened."

She stopped suddenly. She might be frivoling in a good cause, but she was doing a detestable thing in her effort to be funny. She had felt nausea and disgust just a few hours earlier, when she heard Miss Eisenstein debiting Mr. Green with a list of candidates for the position of delinquent. Yet she herself—even though she were not doing it seriously—came within an ace of emulating Miss Eisenstein's despised example. Decency uttered a quick protest.

"Go on," cried Jack Childers, like a spoiled child asking for a story to be finished.

"There is no more," she said. After all, he had started it by suggesting Anastasia Atwood; but it was an ugly game, a frolic with mud, and it had gone quite far enough for all purposes. The train was pulling up into the Twenty-third street station and she said good-night to Jack Childers. Charlie Covington joined her, and they left the train together. She saw Mr. Childers, left alone, take the inevitable newspaper from his pocket and immerse himself in its contents, even before the train had started again. She wondered at the singular lack of premonition and presentiment in this world. Why were ninety-nine out of a hundred lacking in the psychic sense? What a very sad lack it was! How strange it was that those who were endowed with the possibility of seeing what was happening beneath their own noses should be regarded as uncanny and supernormal. Could it be normal to know nothing, to be quite ignorant until something came along and fell upon you, to crush the life out of you? Sallie wondered, though there was nothing of the mystic about her, and she was not accustomed to dwell upon thoughts of presentiments. She followed Charlie Covington down the stairs of the Elevated station.

"Let's have a Welsh rabbit, Sallie," he said, "and hang our ancestors!"

She was still so occupied with her thoughts that a rabbit of any nationality whatsoever would have been equally convincing. He took her arm, and they entered one of the ever open restaurants that lie in the vicinity of Sixth avenue and Twenty-third street. It was not a particularly appetizing resort, and certainly Charlie would not be likely to meet there any of the swagger acquaintances who were wont to regard him as the immaculate young clubman. Apparently, on this occasion, his fastidious sentiments were shelved. To Sallie one restaurant was quite as good as another, and—when she was hungry—better. Just now nothing mattered very much.

"I wish you were not in for that very unpleasant piece of work, Sallie," said Charlie, when the meal was served.

"Have you brought me here to lecture me?" she asked, with a rather dangerous gleam in her eye, for she had not appointed this tete-a-tete and was not anxious for its duration.

"No," he said slowly; "but I can't help thinking that you must have some reason for wishing to undertake this work. It isn't like you to grovel in vulgar reporting. You've told me so often how you loathed the idea of it, and how sorry you felt for the men who were forced to it."

Sallie was desperate. She felt as the hunted antelope must feel on the verge of being brought to bay. "Well, suppose I have a reason?" she asked. "What of it? Let us admit that I have a reason. And then?"

"And then?" he repeated gently. The sympathy in his soul had so often gone forth to meet that which lurked in hers, even though she had scarcely realized it. "And then? There is no 'and then.' Merely if you have a reason—may I not, as an old friend, know it?"

Sallie was furious. The delicacy of his appeal was lost upon her. She was tangled up in the intricacies of a problem that was going to prove odiously ungrateful, and there was no rest for her in the usual haven of "an old friend."

"No," she retorted sharply. "I did not say that I had any reason. You said it, and I will admit it, if only to let the matter drop. Do stop being an old friend, Charlie. The only excuse for old friends is, it seems to me, their inquisitiveness. They feel that they must know everything; that they have a perfect right to know everything. It is a nuisance. I hate being catechized and cross-examined for no other reason than because an old friend wants to know. It is most exasperating. Be anything—but not an old friend."

Sallie was sorry the instant her graceless words were spoken; she was sorry because she disliked the idea of personally inflicting pain upon anybody. If to be "an old friend" a man must be disinterested, unselfish, consistently devoted, perpetually watchful, Charlie Covington had earned the right to be called one. But Sallie did not stop to realize this. The treasures at hand are not always the treasures that appeal. The halo looks best at a distance.

"Forgive me, Charlie," she said, as she saw his hand tremble. "But you do worry a fellow so! Don't you, now? I didn't mean what I said about 'an old friend.' At least, it doesn't apply to you. I'm fractious to-night and out of sorts. And I don't want to be questioned. Let us talk of something more cheerful."

He was anxious to humor her—she could not guess just then how anxious. In some things, as she knew, he was almost clairvoyant; in others he was lamentably obtuse. This annoyed her, as the combination was unusual, and often unpleasant.

"Before you came into Jack's office to-night," he said lightly, "he had just been confiding in me. Good old Jack! I don't know any man with so many lovable characteristics. He told me that everything at last had been definitely settled."

Sallie looked at him in odd bewilderment. As she had asked him to change the conversation to some cheerful topic, this was probably a cheerful topic. But what was it? And just for one moment—she remembered this afterward—she did not want to know.

"Yes," Charlie went on amiably—at the adjoining table they were drinking champagne, and Sallie heard shrieks of laughter—"you know it has been a sort of tacitly understood thing for a long time. The aunt has always desired it, but it seemed to hang fire, you know. Jack is such an indolent boy, and so dreadfully matter of fact. But the other night, as he tells me, things came to a head, and it is now an event that may be discussed."

"What is?" Sallie could hardly hear her own voice in the babel of noise that proceeded from the rowdy table near her. There were two "ladies" in the party. One wore a very bright red blouse. Sallie observed all this, and seemed to be absorbing it all, as though her question "What is?" did not genuinely concern her.

"Why, the engagement," replied Mr. Covington. "Ivy and Jack. Kind friends have given them to each other for years, but, positively, I think that Jack was absolutely too lazy to pop the question and settle matters. As for Ivy—well, I've always considered her a pretty little icicle. But now we have changed all that. I suppose that he will tell you later. Jack is abominably diffident, and I think he has a kind of horror of the news getting out in the office. He told me that the one thing in the world he has always dreaded was a silver tea set from the staff, or a loving cup with a sentiment on it."

The woman in the red blouse was growing so obstreperous that the proprietor of the restaurant, who was, as a rule, warranted not to see anything until it knocked against him, came up and made a few pungent remarks. Sallie's eyes were riveted upon the table. Charlie's words sounded like the murmur of a phonograph. She felt she must wait until he ran down, and then—she would wind him up again.

"Aren't you listening, Sallie?" he asked. "Did you know this?"

There was a draught blowing in from an open window. Sallie shivered. She looked pinched with cold. Her hand shook as she lifted a glass to her lips. She sent him away to have the window closed, but he came back. Windows were closed so quickly nowadays. There was no use sending any one off to close a window, in the hope that the process would be laborious, and would keep him employed for hours—for days. Sallie drew herself together with an effort.

"How quick you were," she said, and she smiled. "Thank you. Let me see, you were saying—oh, yes, about Mr. Childers. No, he did not tell me; but perhaps, as you say, he felt diffident. He thought of the silver tea set to which I might contribute, or the loving cup with 'God Bless Our Home' on it."

She laughed noisily, and the sound reminded her of the cachinnation she had heard from the woman with the red blouse. "But one must give something, you know. I think I'll collect my criticisms and have them bound in ivory, chased with orange blossoms. Is—is—is Ivy a very nice girl, Charlie? But she must be. Do you know her?"

Charlie Covington looked surprised at Sallie's quick change from shiver to fever, for he could see that she was burning. Perhaps she was ill, but——

"I have met her," he replied. "I imagine that she is a very charming girl—very guileless and ingenuous—the sort of girl before whom one would be afraid to say 'Boo!' Mrs. Hampton has brought her up very carefully, and she is most exclusive. She knows nobody except a few girl friends. I was quite surprised at the reception downtown last month to see her talking with Stuyvesant. By the by, I shall always think of him now as your great reportorial subject——"

"Don't," she said recklessly; and he thought, for the first time, that she looked old and care streaked. Perhaps she was on the verge of a fever or of something dangerous. She looked changed.

"I was joking, Sallie," he declared tenderly. "I should hate to think of Stuyvesant as anybody's subject. Why was I alluding to him? Oh, I was saying that Ivy Hampton is so exclusive that I was surprised to see her talking with Stuyvesant."

"The matinee girl knows no barriers," she said, with a dim smile. "The most exclusive maiden thaws for a moment in the sun of a favorite actor. Is Ivy—is Miss Hampton good?"

He laughed. "Good as they are made," he asserted. "A perfect little Puritan. Jack himself has often told me that he was positively afraid of her. Why—forgive me, Sallie, but it's the 'old friend' again—he wouldn't even dare to let her read your criticisms. Isn't it funny? And Jack's so different."

Sallie sat there wondering. What a relief it would be if she should discover later on that everything she had heard to-day was—something else! If she could but be drugged into some such certainty! What an escape it would be from a tortuously horrible nightmare! And again her intuition came from its lair, luminous as a shaft of light. It was useless to buoy herself up with false hopes. She knew——

Charlie Covington was half way through the speech that followed this before she heard him.

"Sallie," he said, "I've been thinking it over for a long time, but I never spoke to you before, because—well, because it seems to me that you have some sort of a career ahead of you, and I thought it would be rather brutal for me to interfere with it. But—but—all this talk about Jack and Ivy is contagious. It makes its own appeal. And, as you are launching forth into a kind of work that will lead to nothing but chagrin, disgust and disappointment—ah, I know it so well, Sallie—I can't help thinking that I need be silent no longer. We have known each other a long time, haven't we? You have liked me—don't you think you have, Sallie? You do like me? Would you—would you—follow in the footsteps of Jack Childers and Ivy Hampton? I love you, and I can't flatter myself that I have concealed it. I've tried to put the feeling aside and to believe that you, Sallie, had other aims in life than marriage. But you haven't, have you? Won't you come and redeem my lonely bachelor life—for I'm getting on, my dear, and am growing horribly bachelory. Won't you help me out and leave this work, and this newspaper turmoil, and this association with horrors, and all this fag of night work forever? Will you, Sallie? Do say yes."

For a moment she felt inclined to say, "Won't you please let me hear it all over again?" She had really absorbed so little of it; but of course she had heard quite enough. Besides, it would be quite heartless to make him repeat a speech that was deliciously improvised, and—well, she was probably quite heartless; still, she would not descend to such cruelty.

She was surprised to find that she was perfectly unruffled and quite as composed as she had been while watching the woman with the red blouse. That perfect lady was quite quiet now.

"It is good of you, Charlie," she said affably, "to throw yourself at me, poor spinster. I wish I could say yes. It would really be so nice. But I can't, old chap. I'm not the marrying sort. You know that. I suppose I'm incorrigible, and that I really like—though I pretend I don't—all the excitement and worry of Newspaper Row. I should be a hideous thing in wives, and quite mercenary. I told Mr. Childers the other day that if I ever captured anybody willing to pay my rent I would never show myself again in the vicinity of Newspaper Row. I also said that the woman who invented earning her own living ought to be compelled to do it through eternity. I said some very weary, discontented things, I remember. Perhaps I thought them at that moment. I think I did, for we were talking about Anastasia Atwood, who was sitting alone at Mouquin's, while she owned a real husband. At this moment, Charlie, those are not my sentiments. Thank you, old man. Did you really mean it?"

He did not answer her, but called the waiter for the bill, added it with elaborate and conscientious care, and lighted a cigarette. Then he helped her on with her jacket, waited while she buttoned it, and walked with her to the street.

Her temporary jauntiness had left her, and she felt as if to scream would be the acme of joy. But she did not scream. His silence jarred her, and they walked through the deserted streets until they reached her house without uttering a word. Then he asked her if she had the key, and she waved it in front of him. She wished that he would say something, and would gladly have done so herself. But she could think of nothing that would fit the situation, which was embarrassing. His voice was suave as usual as he said good-night, and she ran up the steps and left him.

CHAPTER XII.

"In my young days," said Mrs. Hampton, harking amiably back to former times, with the archaeological diffidence so popular with mature ladies possessing moral minds—"in my young days girls were less apathetic than they seem to be to-day. It was never considered bad form to show a little enthusiasm, some slight symptom of excitement, a certain degree of pardonable pride, when an eminently satisfactory engagement was made public. But you, my dear Ivy—well, it seems scarcely possible to realize that anything has occurred. And yet—it was what we all wanted, what we all expected. It is extremely gratifying, even though it may not be startling or wonderful."

Ivy Hampton stood looking out of the window of the apartments in Central Park West and beating a monotonous tattoo on the window pane. Her pose was careless and unstudied, and the girlish outline of her figure appealed picturesquely to Mrs. Hampton. The last of a bevy of "girl friends" to whom she had been serving afternoon tea had just disappeared, and Miss Hampton felt slightly fatigued. Every detail of her engagement to Jack Childers had been thoroughly threshed out, and she was rather tired of the subject. How they had all gossiped, and chattered, and frivoled, and what a wealth of congratulation they had showered upon her! They were easy, innocent, amiable little girls, and the idea that this little gray Puritan, with the shining silver-gold hair, was really about to settle into austere matronhood, interested them. It was an event that has never yet failed to say things—and to whisper others—to the youthful feminine heart. Ivy was such a delightfully prim and quaint young person. They were afraid to say too much to her, for she wore her maidenhood so persistently and with so much pictorial display. Her "reluctant feet" seemed to be unbudging. They could not imagine those feet trotting nimbly into the eternal circle of marriage. Ivy was so absolutely unemotional, such an unyielding little iceberg, that they hesitated at lavishing upon her their sly, girl-simple, winking innuendos.

She had poured out tea for them, and sat, idly diffident, listening to their coy suggestions. Mrs. Hampton rose to the occasion, and frankly admitted her pleasure. It was a relief to her to know that Ivy's future was arranged with such admirable precision and certainty, and although the girl's apathy surprised her, she was not entirely displeased at it; for was it not the result of perfect education, distinct good breeding, and an excellent bringing up? Everything that Ivy did had the unmistakable cachet of the gentlewoman. This lack of enthusiasm was not poetic, or romantic, or inspiring, but it was quite irreproachable. Fireworks were for Sarah Jane, and untrammeled joy on the subject of marriage was if not positively indecent, at least an indication of a family herald mind.

"I don't know if you hear me, Ivy." Mrs. Hampton went on somewhat impatiently. "I was saying that in my young days, even a gentlewoman was quite justified in betraying a note or two of legitimate satisfaction when her engagement was made public."

Ivy turned from the window, and walked with her slow, listless grace into the room.

"There is nothing to be wildly excited about," she said drawlingly. "Jack is not a gay cavalier who has ridden in to the field to win at the sword's point. We've known each other all our lives. Our intercourse has been flavored by the certain knowledge that one of these days we should surely marry. You've known it; I've known it; he has known it. It is very pleasant, of course, because I know him so well. There is little to learn. Even frequent uncertainties, such as whether he likes his meat cooked rare or brown, his eggs soft or hard, his potatoes fried or boiled, are out of the question. It is all very happy, but not at all stirring, is it? You see, I know him so well."

Perhaps Mrs. Hampton felt that the apathy of the gentlewoman went a few inches too far, but she did not say so. She continued:

"But the cap, my dear Ivy, fits both ways. You know Jack so well and so completely that you cannot possibly go wrong. And he can lay claim to the same legitimately acquired knowledge. He also knows you."

Ivy looked far across the park, where some children were scampering away their juvenile energies. She could not, however, repress a simile as she heard Mrs. Hampton's words.

"Do you think I am complex?" she asked. Like most people with mental or physical warp she loved discussing herself, and listening to the best or to the worst—it did not much matter which. Miss Hampton belonged to the enormous class of self-epicures who haunt the rooms of palmists and mind-readers and card manipulators, direly anxious to hear what they may of themselves from the lips of others.

"No, my dear," replied Mrs. Hampton, with fat unction. "You are as legible as a book—more legible than a good many, I think. I fancy I know every thought that passes through your mind. I believe—although I am not sure—that while you do not love Jack as fervently as cook seems to love that annoying policeman (by the bye, Ivy, the joint of beef we had for dinner last has dwindled down to a mere bone), yet—yet you are sincerely attached to him in your own little Puritan way."

"Jack is a good fellow," said Ivy, with a sigh. She would have said the same thing of the annoying policeman. Good fellows were enviable institutions in a world that occasionally wagged laboriously. But they did not stir the pulses, or quicken the emotions, or cast rosy lights upon the monotony of the landscape. They were comfortable pieces of furniture, with no rough edges, and as a general thing they could be folded up and put aside.

"He will be an ideal husband," resumed Mrs. Hampton complacently. "He is so easy-going, so courteous, so good-natured. I can't think of any man with so many really lovable characteristics. Everybody says that. There is a marvelous unanimity of opinion. You are a lucky girl, Ivy, and I foresee a wedded life without a ripple or murmur of discontent. After all, a calm and equable man is a great boon. It is something to know that, in the matter of pursuits, you can go your way and he can go his."

There was a quick gleam in Ivy's eye which Mrs. Hampton did not see. "You can go your way and he can go his." It sounded very facile and pleasing. If it could only be!

Mrs. Hampton was perplexed, in spite of the bravery of her words. Inherited sentiment still had a vague place in her heart, although she tried so hard—and sometimes, alas! so unsuccessfully—to ape the conditions of the "modern" neurasthenic "society" that she so ardently admired. She knew that many things came after marriage—generally children, for progeny was still a post-matrimonial affair, even in the most exclusive circles—but she could not quite place love in the same category. She had been brought up to look upon love as the cause, and not the effect, and it was hard to rearrange these little details. Yet Ivy was extremely good form. There was no doubt about that. There was no need to worry about the fossilized notions of mere tradition.

"I may not be back to dinner, Ivy," she said presently, after a fatiguing bout of silence that had tried her nerves very severely. Nobody that she had ever met could remain so provokingly silent as Ivy. "I promised to see Mrs. Ogden, who is ill. If she asks me to stay, I shall do so. You will not be unduly desolate, for I imagine that you do not care to talk."

Ivy yawned. "No," she said, stretching herself. "I really exhausted the engagement topic this afternoon. And I know, dear, that you could discuss nothing else. Go and see Mrs. Ogden. I may take a stroll, just to remove the cobwebs. An afternoon tea is so dreadfully exhausting, isn't it? One says so much and so little."

She watched Mrs. Hampton's departure with a nonchalance that seemed a trifle exaggerated. She could have rampaged around the immaculate apartment in a fever of impatience. Outwardly, however, she was indifferent, apathetic, tired. She even took up a book labeled "Golden Thoughts'" and pretended to read it. She held it upside down—which was quite thoughtless—but Mrs. Hampton, fussily preparing for her outing, did not notice the proceeding. How slow she was! First the bonnet—then the jacket—then its hooks—then her handkerchief—and the keys, had she forgotten them? Oh, and be sure and tell the dressmaker when she called that Monday would do, and keep the chain on the door, and Susan could go out after she had prepared Ivy's dinner. Would it ever end? Ivy fumed, and fretted, and bit her lip, and felt that she would like to eat "Golden Thoughts," to chew it viciously.

The front door closed, and Ivy waited for the inevitable return to say unimportant things that had been forgotten. Mrs. Hampton generally discovered five minutes after departure that she had forgotten something—usually the keys that she never by any chance needed. Ivy went to the window and watched the respectable black velvet bonnet fading into the distance. She was free at last.

Her hands trembled so, that she could scarcely don her hat and coat. The "reluctancy" of her demeanor vanished quickly, for there was nobody there to admire it. Her face sharpened; even the discretion of her respiration seemed to be discarded for something more febrile.

"I shan't be long, Susan," she called out nervously. "You can go out. I shall not need dinner; if I do I can find what I want."

In the pocket of her jacket was a black gauze veil. She felt eagerly to see if it were there. Then she sauntered forth—quite leisurely. She seemed to be out for the purpose of "getting the air," and she even stood for a few moments, as though to decide upon the direction that her aimless promenade should take. After which, she apparently made up her mind. She cut across Central Park, quickening her footsteps, as the West Side was speedily left in the background.

Once she met one of Mrs. Hampton's annoyingly loquacious friends, and was obliged to stop and talk to her. As she did so, she noticed a girl on the other side of the street, who stopped at the same time. The girl was heavily muffled up and plainly dressed; in fact, there was nothing in her appearance that would attract a moment's attention. Ivy looked at her simply because she needed something to look at while she was waiting for the ultra-eloquent old crony to finish her apparently interminable cackle. She had forgotten the girl when she was able to move on again. At Third avenue, she entered a small shop and bought some hairpins, using them to fasten on the gauze veil. When she emerged from the shop she saw the same girl staring stupidly in at the window, evidently lost in admiration of a "marked down" display of corsets.

Ivy felt that such vulgar details were rather beyond the situation just at present. She was nearing her destination, and, crossing Third avenue, reached a placid little bourgeois apartment house, marked "Five rooms and bath. Elegantly appointed." She opened the door with a key and entered, just as the somber girl whom she had previously noticed came up and eagerly scanned the names on the door-bells—McNally, Silverman, Compton, Rivington, Lambwell.

Ivy went upstairs, and with another key opened the door of the apartment. It was one of the small, pitiful makeshifts in which New Yorkers immure themselves and occasionally call "home." There was a "parlor," a dining-room, two bedrooms (so-called), a kitchen and a bathroom. All were dark but the parlor and the kitchen. But as Ivy entered and surveyed it an expression of keen exultation spread over her face. It was hers. This was her temple, and what did its material accessories matter? The parlor was sparsely furnished, but it was pretty and it was highly decorated. It was a resting-place for the sole of her foot. She removed her hat and coat, and threw them aside.

She rocked herself in the one armchair, and sat there thinking and smiling, her Puritanism cast aside, the "reluctant maiden" ousted, and in their place the woman who doesn't care, and who defies the conventions. The "afternoon tea" girls who had chirped to her of her engagement a couple of hours ago would scarcely have recognized her now, so completely was the expression of her features changed by the tide of different ideas that swept across them. In this apartment house lived people who were "really good," as Mrs. Hampton would say, and Ivy smiled as she wondered over the situation. "Goodness" came to them naturally, and was quite easy. As she sat there rocking, she hoped that when her time came to be "good" the surroundings would be more alluring. Suppose that Jack Childers should bring her to a place like this! The supposition led her very much farther east, to where the river was deep and tranquil.

A key clicked in the lock, the door was thrown open and Arthur Stuyvesant, his collar turned up and his hat turned down, entered.

"At last!" she cried. "I thought you would never come. I imagined that I, too, should never get here. I had a tiresome tea—a henfight, as you would call it—and they stayed eternally. Arthur!"

He held her in his arms, and kissed the silver-gold hair that was knotted at the back of her head. She helped him to remove his overcoat and hung it up in the hall.

"Ivy," he said presently, "I am afraid that this game is up. My wife has discovered something. Somebody saw us together, or, at any rate, saw me, for you were saved by your veil. We had a most exasperating scene, and what the upshot will be, goodness knows."

He walked up and down the room in genuinely serious dismay. The tongue of gossip that had wagged vaguely for so long now had definite food. He saw his Waterloo.

Ivy turned a shade paler, not at thoughts of possible publicity, but at the grim suggestion that this drama of her life was in danger.

"Are you afraid?" she asked defiantly.

"Yes," he said. "This kind of thing would ruin me. I have never yet figured in any tangible sort of scandal, and you know the public. It likes to believe indefinitely that an actor is a gay Lothario, but anything definite . . . and good-by. My wife, who has very fixed ideas, would not hesitate to drag me into the divorce court. In fact, she spoke of it. My only hope lies in the fact that she really does—did—love me. And there is the boy . . . Poor thing! . . . I can't help feeling sorry."

"Your wife—your wife—always, always, always!" cried Ivy, ferociously. "You din her into my ears. You talk of her as though she were the inevitable. You cannot forget her—you will not forget her. I have told you that I hate to hear her mentioned, but you cannot refrain. Perhaps you are remorseful, or penitent, or ashamed. Why? Can't a man have the courage of his convictions? Do I care? Would I balk even at a scandal? Am I frightened or disturbed? I have no patience with you, Arthur. You do not love me."

She flung herself into his arms, and burst into petulant tears. The tie that bound him was always flaunted before her and she could not respect it, nor could she understand why it played such a leading role in his life. Her morality was as light as her hair, but not as picturesque.

"Do I worry you with trivialities?" she asked at last, as she saw that her tears had not been quite ineffective. "If I did, I could tell you that my engagement to Jack Childers has just been sanctioned in the most respectable and legitimate way. I do not like it, but I do not come here and tease you about such matters. I submit to it all, and I submit to it more for your sake than for my own."

He looked at her and for a moment was bewildered. He knew that women would do anything, brave anything for love, in its variations and aberrations. But this tigerish attachment surely went beyond limits prescribed or non-prescribed. It amazed him. Though what she told him was not unexpected, still—as she told it—it was astonishing. Even to his corrupted mind it seemed rather horrible. But he could not tell her so. A man cannot tell a woman who does outre things for his sake that it is horrible. Nor can he read her a lesson. He had a detestation of illicit love that ended in preachiness, as it so often did.

"Ivy," he said, "you are a" (he was going to say "noble," but the idea was too paradoxical) "brave girl. What would you advise me to do?"

She looked at him and he knew that there was contempt in her eyes. "I cannot advise you," she declared. "I do not know your—your wife. Ah, you force me to say it—you force me to say it! Those words, 'your wife,' burn me, scorch my lips. You force me to utter them. You are so weak, so cowardly! What do I advise you to do—I, I, I? Would you like me to see her and beg her to be lenient? Shall I tell her how I love you? Ah, you wouldn't mind. If you thought that it would settle things, you would let me go to her. I advise you what to do? I—I can't. I love you. I don't know why. I can't think up all these things. They have not occurred to me. You have had to deal with other kinds of women who knew these situations by heart. I don't."

He was shocked. This was a tigress, unreasoning, illogical—and not a girl. There was something primitive and savage in such untrammeled emotion. It was also quite new, but—it appealed to him. She was right. The women he had met were the furtive, clandestine things without the courage of conviction and probably without conviction. He had come to the pied-a-terre to-day with the determination to relinquish it and flout the gossipers. He had no ideas for the future—and though it annoyed him to end everything he was quite prepared to do it. He knew that her devotion to him was something quite out of the ordinary, but—ah, how little he, with his vast knowledge of women, knew her!—he had believed that the mere idea of discovery would affright her. It meant so much to her, or, at least, he supposed so. Arthur Stuyvesant was puzzled. His nature was a vacillating one; but, just the same, he had no intention of allowing this entanglement to foreshadow his ruin. Something must be done. Vague thoughts flitted through his mind. His wife must be appeased. At any rate, any further appeal to Miss Hampton was out of the question.

"Come here, Ivy," he said gently; and as she came to him he took her hand. "I won't discuss this matter with you any more. I'll think, if I can, what we had better do. You see, I am considering you just as much as—myself."

"You need not," she said; but she was mollified, "because I really don't care. What you call the worst does not frighten me. It would not kill me to say good-by to Mrs. Hampton—a stepmother is not an irreparable loss—and as to breaking with Jack, I should get over it nicely. Say that you will come here just the same, if only occasionally. We can be careful; I always am. It is you—you who are careless. Say you will come here. Say it, Arthur—say it."

She rose and stood before him, looking down into his eyes. In the very shadow of clouds that might fatally obscure his brightest prospects he gave her the requisite promise. He would be careful. He had a dim recollection of having "talked" the other night when he was not quite himself. He had given the situation away; but she need not know that. He would come out of this tangle as he had come out of others. He would avoid that mysterious process known as "borrowing trouble." In spite of which promised restraint, trouble loomed up before him.

In the meantime the girl downstairs, confronted with the puzzle of the names in the door, had carefully examined them all. She had seen both Ivy Hampton and Arthur Stuyvesant enter, but they had let themselves in with a key, and she could not tell whether they were McNally, Silverman, Compton, Rivington or Lambwell. She rather inclined to McNally, as there seemed to be safety in the multitude of McNallys. She felt feverish and oppressed, for she was muffled to the ears. She had never been in this neighborhood before and was therefore not afraid of recognition; so she gave herself the necessary ventilation and emerged, not as Sallie Sydenham, critic, but as Sallie Sydenham, detective.

That day and other days she had devoted to the almost hopeless task of tracking Ivy Hampton to her reported lair. She wondered what Mr. Green would think of her reportorial acumen, for she had worked without the ghost of a clew—waiting till she was blue in the face; till her feet were cramped and numb; till she ached for movement and activity—waiting for a girl to emerge from a house to go—anywhere or nowhere.

It had been a galling and a most humiliating job. She wondered if this were the kind of thing that reporters did for money, and what they would consider adequate payment for this atrophy of self-respect, for this odious, groveling, loathsome work.

She could scarcely imagine mere pecuniary recompense in such a case. It seemed to her to be outside the pale of human possibility. No wonder that Mr. Green had tried to wet-blanket her aspirations. But, of course, he thought it was a consideration allied unto "treasury day." She paused for a moment before taking the next step, and uttered a sigh of relief. She had discovered, beyond the peradventure of a doubt, that old Witherby's story was true. She had unearthed the rendezvous, and the mysterious lady who had been no mystery to her, was identified in a legitimately evidential manner. There was no doubt any longer, and her evidence would be satisfactory anywhere. She felt like a ghoul as she thought of these things. Horrible as they were they were preferable to the picture of Jack Childers—her amiable, chivalrous, charming associate (she was entitled to call him "associate"), chained downtown by his duties, while this girl, whom he loved, and who looked so young and pretty and ingenuous, was—. No, she could not dwell upon it. It was too harrowing.

She descended a flight of clammy, grimy steps into the janitorial department, and a thin, fair-haired woman came to her with a baby in her arms, another at her skirts, and—three—four—five—behind her, in the squalor of a room that reeked with the smell of onions. She talked in an evil German dialect that was ugly enough to hear, and too unprofitable to reproduce.

"The house is full," she said. "The last apartment was rented last week."

Sallie tried to look vexed, and was not quite sure how to proceed. Janitors and janitresses are generally suspicious, as it is the sole relaxation of their pulseless lives. She did not want to seem unduly inquisitive.

"I'm sorry," Sallie remarked. "I like the look of the place. I've been hunting for an apartment in which I can be quiet. Children make so much noise, don't they?"

It was scarcely a diplomatic remark. The janitress, surrounded on all sides by her poor little cubs, could hardly be expected to agree with "the lady."

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "We can't kill 'em off. In some flats, I know, they won't have children. Those landlords ought to be flogged. What are people to do?"

"Are there many children in—in—in this apartment?"

The janitress looked triumphant. "Yes, there are," she said loudly. "So, if you are looking for a place without 'em, it's just as well we are all filled up. They all have children here—the McNallys seven, and one on the way; the Silvermans four; the Rivingtons six, and the Lambwells five. Oh, I'm forgetting the Comptons. But they don't count. They're a queer couple. They hardly live here. He's a drummer, I believe, and she's a dressmaker, and lives at her store. Kind of people who haven't time to have children. Don't deserve 'em, I dare say."

"The Comptons!" laughed Sallie. "Ah, yes, the Comptons!"

"Ah, yes, the Comptons!" mimicked the janitress, who felt that she had been stung in the maternal affections. The blue-white child in her arms set up a puny howl; the baby at her skirts tugged and pulled. She could hear the others, in the room at her back, improving the shining hour. Yet she was wasting time on a woman who wanted to live where there were no children . . . the hussy!

Sallie had heard enough, and to "ease" things generally gave a quarter to the little boy at the janitress' skirts. If she could have brought herself to kiss the pathetic little blue-white face on the mother's breast she would have done it. Still, that would have been overelaboration, and neither mother nor child would have been grateful. The Comptons! That was it, and she wondered why she had picked out McNally.

The Comptons! The girl with the silver-gold hair, the Puritan face, the unsophisticated manner and the high-bred, gentlewomanly attributes was Mrs. Compton. Sallie ground her teeth furiously. She could have strangled Miss Hampton.

CHAPTER XIII.

The feminine owls were deeply impressed and graphically interested when the news of Jack Childers' engagement reached them. Exactly how it "leaked out," as the saying is, Mr. Childers would probably never know. But the receptive owls heard of it in exceedingly due course, and proceeded to make the urbane life of their amiable managing editor distinctly uncomfortable. They felt it their duty, for they had once been women, and they still wore skirts, to make the most of the situation, which, for various reasons, was singularly grateful to them. Most women believe that man, unmarried, is a rake at heart, and even in Owldom a vestige of that ancient sentiment may yet lurk.

At another time the humor of the situation might have appealed to Mr. Childers, who was not lacking in that sixth perception, known as the sense of the ridiculous. But on this occasion he was rubbed into irritability, and he could see nothing funny in the procession of feminine owls, each with a pretext, that came to his office and withered him with congratulations.

Mr. Childers felt completely unsettled, and he sat frowning and making no attempt to struggle with a mass of editorial correspondence that lay threateningly before him. He was on edge. He had hitherto successfully battled against those women and rigorously denied himself to them on all occasions. And now they besieged him and he was powerless. He could have coped with a delegation of irate trade unionists far more effectively than with these feminine parodies. His hatred of them was quite unreasonable, and he knew it; but on that precise account it was all the more irresistible, for when cold applications of logic become useless then a case is generally hopeless.

It was late that evening when Sallie Sydenham appeared. She had shirked her theater and had devoted her time to mapping out a line of action. What it was she hardly knew as yet, but she had been thinking things out and was prepared to work unwaveringly. Her night had been sleepless. And her cup of unhappiness had been filled to overflowing by the recollection of Charlie Covington's last words. She had hoped that if the case became desperate she could have called upon him in the splendid devotion of his platonic friendship. That was all over. Charlie could never be the same again, under any circumstances. The memory of what he had said made her feel petulant and irritable, for it was so manifestly absurd. She had regarded him safely, almost as a woman-friend, and he had turned. He was a man * * * the man she didn't want. Everything seemed to be against her.

She had come to the office to hear Jack Childers talk, to learn from his own lips that he loved this girl, who was known under an alias in the squalor and dankness of an East Side apartment House * * * this pale girl, with the silver-gold hair, who had one relationship with him as cousin and proposed to undertake another * * *.

It was late in the evening, but too early for the uptown ride after the day's labor. She had not the heart to consider that uptown ride. Bohemian though she was in all her impulses, her Bohemianism balked at this guileless contact with Ivy Hampton's cousin and fiance. She felt, moreover, like an executioner as she came into the office and saw him sitting there, in his easy nonchalance and good temper. Whatever happened, she would have to deal him a crushing blow, for half measures were impossible, and she would feel bound to prevent his marriage with Ivy, whether he loved her or whether he didn't, whether the scandal burst or whether it evaporated. She would take very good care that it evaporated, and then. * * * She did not dare to think of her future course. She had never dwelt very fixedly upon marital problems. But she knew one thing, and it was that she could never permit the man she loved * * * yes, she loved him with all her heart, and she had always loved him * * * to enter into a life contract, his eyes closed, with a girl whom she had proved to be hopelessly tainted. She could not think it out. The immediate question was how to avert a horrible newspaper scandal.

"I've had such a terrible day of it, Sallie," he said, smiling, as she came up to his desk. "They have all been congratulating me. Miss Poplets will tell you all about it, if you want to know. But per-congratulate me."

"No," she said shortly. "You didn't think it worth while to tell me the news. Mr. Covington was my informant. It is true, of course."

He put up his hands with a comic gesture, as though to ward off a blow. "Yes," he said. "It is quite true, but don't congratulate me. I hate it. Honestly, if somebody came in and pitied me, and cried over me, it would be a most welcome event—such a change."

She smiled, but not very exuberantly. He did not seem to be violently delighted, but of course he had known it for so long. It was new to her, but not to him. He had grown quite used to contemplating the situation.

"I won't congratulate you," she said, with an affection of indulgence, "as you don't wish it. It is not always necessary to speak congratulations, is it? When—when—shall you be—be—when shall you be married?"

"Not for a long time," he cried. "Not for ages. Miss Hampton is in no hurry. She is a very sensible girl, quite practical and logical. * * *"

"Oh!" Sallie could not repress the exclamation. This information gave her a vast feeling of relief. She could breathe again. He was not a fervid Lothario, at any rate. He was quite cool and unruffled, it seemed to her. A certain mental tension was removed; clouds that had almost touched her, floated upwards into the haze; she began to feel more like her usual self.

"You are not impassioned," she said in her frivolous tones, "not a bit like the heroes in my plays. I thought I should find you kissing locks of hair and pressing violets."

"Oh, Sallie, Sallie," he exclaimed deprecatingly. "You are like all girls, after all—except Miss Hampton. Marriage is, after all, the supreme event in the world, in your opinion, eh? I am not, as you say, impassioned. Why should I be? There are no risks, no dangers. We are fond of each other, and it is a case of the course of true love running quite smoothly."

"And if there were dangers and risks," she asked.

"I think I should like them," he answered, with a laugh. "They would be so exciting. As it is, nothing is likely to happen. It is all so placid and certain."

She looked at him, anxious and distressed. Perhaps he didn't know how much he loved Ivy Hampton, and the only thing necessary was the spice of danger, the leaven of risk. In that case it would be very sad, indeed, and the denouement would prove ghastly.

"Suppose," she said, with an assumption of lightness, "that at the very last moment Miss Hampton told you that she 'could never be yours,' and said, 'Stand aside,' and 'Let me pass,' as they do in melodrama. What then?"

He grew rather thoughtful. Her question was a somewhat leading one, but * * * * well, she was Sallie Sydenham, and Sallie had the privileges of a court-jester. He had once said that she wore a cap and bells for the benefit of the office.

"What then?" he repeated. "Well, Sallie, I'm afraid I'm prosaic. I'm awfully sorry, but I don't think that it would kill me. I wish I could tell you that I should pine away, in a beautiful green and yellow melancholy. Alas! I fear I shouldn't. The twentieth century doesn't lend itself to that sort of thing, does it? Of course, I should be horribly put out, and I think I should make it very warm for Miss Hampton."

Sallie blessed those words, as he spoke them. They set her at comparative ease, and seemed to soothe her. No, it was not a selfish satisfaction in the belief that he was not violently enamored, that she experienced. There was absolutely no selfishness in any nook or cranny of the situation. If he had loved Ivy passionately, and the position had been clear and desirable, she would have been light-hearted and joyous—or she thought she would—for his sake. She loved him, and there was no taint in her love. She would always love him; but she could have watched his happy marriage to the one sublime woman of his choice, with exquisite altruism. This she firmly believed. She would have envied that sublime woman * * * * That was all.

"Don't you sometimes tire of the dreadful rubbish I talk?" she asked, with a laugh, for she felt that she could enjoy repose—for a moment or two, at any rate.

"Not a bit," he responded promptly. "You're a tonic, Sallie. I've often told you so. I might object to the analytic suggestion in your recent question, if I thought you were serious. But you never are, you little lady-wag."

"I never am," she declared, with an inaudible sigh, "and I hope I shall always be able to live up to my reputation—or down to it, or around it, or in some cardinal association with it."

"By the bye," he asked, "how's the case getting on—poor old Stuyvesant and his siren?"

It was too ghastly, and for one instant—one quick, horrid instant—she thought of telling him the whole hateful truth, and closing the situation with a snap there and then. It was such a fearful impulse that it made her feel unsafe and irresponsible.

She summoned up all her powers of repression, and conquered. "Nicely," she said carelessly. "I'm hard at work."

"Have you any inkling, inkling, inkling?" he asked, and he stopped to whistle the song from "Florodora."

"Perhaps; but don't be inquisitive. Sherlock Holmes never gave himself away, and I'm Sherlock just at present. I'm off now, as I've loads of things to do. Good-night."

"Won't you wait and ride uptown?"

"I can't, to-night."

"Oh," he said, with a quizzical smile. "You are going to look upon me as engaged now, and to leave me alone. Sallie, if you do that I shall be furious. The way in which men who are engaged, or married are abandoned by everything feminine that they like, is distressing and cruel. It always reminds me of rats leaving a sinking ship. Don't be a rat, Sallie, and please don't regard me as a sinking ship. Go on being a good fellow, Sallie. You are a good fellow, and you can't help it."

A flush spread over her face, and she felt rather shaky. This appeal to her * * * * well, it was unnecessary; it was heartless.

"I shall never be a rat," she said unsteadily, "and you will never be a sinking ship. But I must abandon you to-night, whatever you are. Duty, Mr. Childers, calls me, and I reply, 'I come—I come.'"

CHAPTER XIV.

Sallie possessed a very few of those quiet, serene, reasoning faculties that mow down the crop of mushroom impulses as they sprout. Nor could she follow the inevitable progress of events from their source, to the turbulent everyday sea into which they finally empty themselves. With her it was always intuition. She decided that the next thing to do was to see Arthur Stuyvesant's wife, for upon Mrs. Stuyvesant the burden of results rested. If the wife had no intention of seeking redress, if she believed in a plaintive acquiescence, a Spartan endurance * * * * then there was considerably less to fear. The case would be easier to handle, for her duty would be narrowed down to some unimagined "business" with Jack Childers. If she could but discover that Stuyvesant's wife suffered inertly, unvindictively, then she could take her own time * * * * there would be no need to hurry * * * * She could placidly await her cue, and pave the way for a denouement that should not prove disastrous.

Unconsciously, her mind grew less perturbed * * * * the danger signal was somewhat blurred * * * * she was, in spite of herself, lulled by the fact that nothing happened. To Mr. Green she had made one report, with a great affectation of sensational mystery * * * * the sort of mystery that appealed to his not aggressively fantastic mind. She told him that she had made some discoveries, and that in a few days she would know for certain if there really were a "story," or if the whole thing could be dismissed as mere gossip. This, she imagined—poor little Sallie, pitted against the huge, relentless, multi-clogged wheel of newspaperdom—was a very diplomatic move on her part. She knew little of the wheels within wheels of journalism, and she was rather proud of a course that she thought would pave the way for that final moment, when she saw herself approach Mr. Green, with the words "Nothing in it * * * absolutely untrue * * * case dismissed." And she would say this, she told herself, with a fine simulation of annoyance, as though she were deeply chagrined at finding that her labors had led her to a dead wall. In fact, she would give an artistic imitation of the disappointed and hungry reporter. She had watched many reporters robbed of their prey. She had seen their despondent faces when "stories" upon which they had expended their most highly sharpened energies had resulted in * * * in a clean bill of nothing whatsoever. She had often wondered to herself if, in their heart of hearts, they had not felt some instinctive sense of relief at the knowledge that they had speared innocence instead of guilt, and had found the world fair, when they had gone forth to paint it dark. But they had always seemed to be grievously depressed.

She looked upon her quest of Mrs. Stuyvesant as distressing, but necessary. But when, with the address of the presumably aggrieved wife on a scrap of paper in her pocket, she set out upon her self-imposed mission, her heart sank and her spirit quailed. It was a nauseating piece of work, but it was the sort of work at which nine out of ten reporters would smile as "easy," and they had far slighter inducements than she possessed. They did this sort of thing for a dollar or two—for fifty cents an hour or eight dollars a column. Her work meant * * * oh, it meant everything. In it were involved Jack Childers, Ivy Hampton, Arthur Stuyvesant * * * herself.

She slipped through a quiet thoroughfare in the west Side Nineties and found the house of the one woman who was legitimately entitled to the corporeal beauties of Mr. Stuyvesant. She saw his name in large red letters upon several bill-posters. He was to appear in a new problem play, and the event had been largely advertised. Of the real problem that she herself must solve, the advertisements were silent. If only she could gag the situation * * *

She rang an electric bell and walked up three flights of stairs. There was an elevator, but she had no desire to be rushed up. She would arrive soon enough; she would have been quite satisfied to walk up ten flights of stairs. As she reached Mrs. Stuyvesant's apartment the door was opened and a man issued forth. She saw him stand by the elevator shaft, ring the bell and wait until the boy answered his summons. He was a well-dressed yet unobtrusive man, but she could see the dim outlines of his face only. He did not look at her, and she shrank back, in case he should attempt to do so. She waited until he had disappeared and then rang Mrs. Stuyvesant's bell.

It was Mrs. Stuyvesant herself who opened the door, Sallie felt sure. She held a lighted lamp in her hand, and started as she saw Miss Sydenham.

"Oh!" she said, "excuse me. I had just closed the door to a gentleman. * * * I thought he had returned. How stupid of me! Well"—with a smile—"I can't say I'm out now, can I? Did you wish to see me?"

"Please."

She led the way into a little drawing-room and Sallie followed. It was a tiny, closely furnished apartment, with pictures of Arthur Stuyvesant everywhere—on easels, on desks, on what-nots, on the mantelpiece, on the bookcase. The actor, in all styles, met her eye in poses of declamatory aspect and Roman toga, and in photographs of the smug, smiling drawing-room demeanor of to-day. It was a sort of indigestion of Arthur Stuyvesant. Mrs. Stuyvesant was a faded little woman who must once have been exceedingly pretty. Sallie could picture her with rosy cheeks and a well-rounded figure. Suggestions of this remained, but the cheeks were hollowing, and the figure, in a tawdry silken peignoir, with ribbons awry and laces gone wrong, looked limp and uncared for. In spite of the lightness of her first words, Sallie could see that she was uneasy and feverish. She placed the lamp upon a small table. It was the only light in the room, but it was luminous enough to give salience to the detestable smiling pictures of Arthur Stuyvesant.

"You wish to see me?" asked Mrs. Stuyvesant. "You are an actress, of course?"

She glanced significantly at the rouge on Miss Sydenham's cheeks—tints that she put on as regularly as she donned her clothes. She often said—to Rosina—that she felt cold without it. * * *

"No," Sallie replied, "I will introduce myself. You may have heard of me. I am Sallie Sydenham, the dramatic critic."

Mrs. Stuyvesant stared at her visitor in surprise. There was a time when she would have risen, in all her might and main, to flout this daring young critic who had made merry so frequently at the expense of her aspiring husband * * * who had penned caustic witticisms and assailed the immorality of plays, with a pen that was abnormally trenchant and vindictive. That time had passed. Still, through force of habit, she looked for a moment at the various pictures of the actor that filled the room.

"Yes, I know you," she said. "We have often hated you together * * * when you attacked him; and laughed at and applauded you * * * when you attacked others. You have always appeared to be honest, but honesty is unpleasant. Once I thought that if I ever met you, I should take great pleasure in strangling you. It was when you said that he appealed only to the unripe judgment and the forbidden sentiments of the matinee girl. I treasured that up against you. But now, Miss Sydenham, I do not mind. We * * * we change."

"Yes," said Sallie, in a low voice, "I know, Mrs. Stuyvesant, I know. My visit to-night has nothing whatsoever to do with dramatic criticism."

Mrs. Stuyvesant looked once more at her collection of photographs, and Sallie wondered at her own temerity. It was ghastly to apply the probe, as she knew that she must do, if her mission were to be successfully accomplished.

"I came," said Sallie slowly—it seemed cruel to look at the poor little faded woman, and yet she preferred to do it rather than stare at the gallery of dramatic Stuyvesants—"I came, Mrs. Stuyvesant, to tell you that the paper has heard—has heard this sad story—and to ask you—to ask you—"

She stumbled and was silent, literally unable to proceed. She wondered if the "out-and-out" reporter began in this way * * * or if he beat about the bush more artistically * * * or if he were even more brutal in his frankness. What an agreeable calling! And yet men could be reporters, while there were bricks to be "laid," subways to be dug, tunnels to be excavated.

"It is quite true—whatever you may have heard," said Mrs. Stuyvesant, quietly. "Yes, I know. You are referring to the—trouble between Mr. Stuyvesant and myself. You need not hesitate. It is a subject that I have schooled myself to meet. I am quite willing to talk."

Sallie experienced a sense of dismay so keen that she felt the sharpening of her features, the tightening of the skin upon her face. Old Witherby's insinuations were even more far-reaching than he had supposed. Mrs. Stuyvesant knew all, had made her plans, and was prepared. For a moment Sallie was utterly taken aback. She had intended to probe and to ferret. Instead, the actor's wife threw the truth at her, and it was a large and a formidable truth.

"Is it true," she began hesitantly—"is it true that you will take steps to—to secure a divorce—to ventilate the matter?"

Mrs. Stuyvesant showed no emotion. This was not the picture of the distressed and weeping wife that Sallie had expected to see. Cool resolution was impressed upon the bedraggled features of the pale little woman. It was by no means a question of hysterics.

"See here, Miss Sydenham," she said, "you are a woman—at least I suppose you are—or have been, at some time. It is like this: Arthur and I have been married for several years, and I have suffered a good deal during those years. I was an actress, but I left the stage to please him. I withdrew from the struggle, and at the time was glad to do so. I—I worshiped him. There could be no matinee girl that ever looked upon him as I did. He deceived me, not once or twice, but many times, and I bore it all in silence, and still loved him. I have humiliated myself more than I should care to say, until I felt that I was no longer a woman but a shadow, hovering around him, and thankful for the privilege of being allowed to hover. His plea was always the same thing; publicity meant ruin. My ruin, which was achieved long ago, did not appeal to him at all. Of late I was never able to discover anything tangible, but we have lived in an atmosphere of indifference and apathy that was appalling. As soon as I learned the truth—that he has a mistress and an apartment—I resolved to end it all. Kind friends threw out hints, and although I have no idea of the name of the woman or of the locality of her apartment, I am now prepared to take the final step. I will not prostitute myself by wearing his name, and I will show every woman who had admired him as an actor, what he is as