

486 Patience Sparhawk and Her Times

tending her arms in position. Once more her brain relaxed its grasp on every thought but the determination not to scream nor quiver. She closed her eyes and set her teeth.

The guards began to fasten the straps, but slowly, under the significant eyes of the head-keeper. The warden stamped up and down. The electrician came forward. The surgeon went into an adjoining room and cast his eyes over his instruments, laid out on a long table.

The brain works eccentrically in such moments. Patience's suddenly flung upon her consciousness a picture of Carmel tower. She speculated upon the fate of her owl. She recalled that the Mission had been restored, and wondered if Solomon, that proud and elderly hermit, had turned his haughty back upon civilisation to dwell alone in the black arbours of the remote pine tops of the forest. She saw the spray toss itself into scattering wraiths, as when she had knelt there — a thousand years ago — a little lonely girl in copper-toed boots, dreaming dreams that were pricked with no premonition of life's tragic horrors.

She frowned suddenly, recalling her long-lived determination to take life as a spectacular drama. Life had got the best of her! Assuredly there was nothing impersonal about this ignominious and possibly excruciating death. The thought banished Carmel tower. Her mind was a sudden blaze of light — white light she thought with a stifled shrink — in which every detail of the room was sharply accentuated. She opened her eyes, but only a trifle, lest these men see the horror in them. Her blood was curdling, but she knew that she was making no sign.