

484 Patience Sparhawk and Her Times

look when they have dressed without a mirror. But there was no curve of amusement on the young men's faces, and they were shuffling their feet uneasily. Her hair hung in a long braid. She looked very young.

She dropped the head-keeper's arm and walked deliberately to the chair; but he caught her hand and held her back.

"Wait a minute," he said, with affected gruffness. He went to the chair and examined it in detail. He asked a number of questions, which were answered by the electrician with haughty surprise. In a moment the reporters were staring, and like a lightning flash one brain informed another that "something was in the wind."

When the head-keeper had lingered about the chair as long as he dared he returned to Patience, who was standing rigidly where he had left her, and drawing a short breath said, —

"If you have any last words, ma'am, you are at liberty to speak."

"I have nothing to say," replied Patience, wondering if her mouth or brain were speaking.

"Yes, yes, speak," exclaimed several of the reporters. They had out their pads in an instant; but, for once, it was not the news instinct that was alert. The most quick-witted men in the world, they realised that the head-keeper was endeavouring to gain time. Their stiff felt hats dropped to the floor and bounced about. Their hands shook a little. For perhaps the first time in their history they were more men than journalists.

"I don't wish to speak," said Patience, and again she walked toward the chair. The newspaper men sprang forward with an uncontrollable movement, but the guards waved them back.