

CHAPTER XI

For a few moments the two young men looked at each other, Pearson's gaze being one of respectfulness which hoped to propitiate, if propitiation was necessary, though Pearson greatly trusted it was not. Tembarom's was the gaze of hasty investigation and inquiry. He suddenly thought that it would have been "all to the merry" if somebody had "put him on to" a sort of idea of what was done to a fellow when he was "valeted." A valet, he had of course gathered, waited on one somehow and looked after one's clothes. But were there by chance other things he expected to do,--manicure one's nails or cut one's hair,--and how often did he do it, and was this the day? He was evidently there to do something, or he wouldn't have been waiting behind the door to pounce out the minute he appeared, and when the other two went away, Burrill wouldn't have closed the door as solemnly as though he shut the pair of them in together to get through some sort of performance.

"Here's where T. T. begins to feel like a fool," he thought. "And here's where there's no way out of looking like one. I don't know a thing."

But personal vanity was not so strong in him as healthy and normal good temper. Despite the fact that the neat correctness of Pearson's style and the finished expression of his neat face suggested that he

was of a class which knew with the most finished exactness all that custom and propriety demanded on any occasion on which "valeting" in its most occult branches might be done, he was only "another fellow," after all, and must be human. So Tembarom smiled at him.

"Hello, Pearson," he said. "How are you?"

Pearson slightly started. It was the tiniest possible start, quite involuntary, from which he recovered instantly, to reply in a tone of respectful gratefulness:

"Thank you, sir, very well; thank you, sir."

"That's all right," answered Tembarom, a sense of relief because he'd "got started" increasing the friendliness of his smile. "I see you got my trunk open," he said, glancing at some articles of clothing neatly arranged upon the bed.

Pearson was slightly alarmed. It occurred to him suddenly that perhaps it was not the custom in America to open a gentleman's box and lay out his clothes for him. For special reasons he was desperately anxious to keep his place, and above all things he felt he must avoid giving offense by doing things which, by being too English, might seem to cast shades of doubt on the entire correctness of the customs of America. He had known ill feeling to arise between "gentlemen's gentlemen" in the servants' hall in the case of slight differences in

customs, contested with a bitterness of feeling which had made them almost an international question. There had naturally been a great deal of talk about the new Mr. Temple Barholm and what might be expected of him. When a gentleman was not a gentleman,--this was the form of expression in "the hall,"--the Lord only knew what would happen. And this one, who had, for all one knew, been born in a workhouse, and had been a boot-black kicked about in American streets,--they did not know Tembarom,--and nearly starved to death, and found at last in a low lodging-house, what could he know about decent living? And ten to one he'd be American enough to swagger and bluster and pretend he knew everything better than any one else, and lose his temper frightfully when he made mistakes, and try to make other people seem to blame. Set a beggar on horseback, and who didn't know what he was? There were chances enough and to spare that not one of them would be able to stand it, and that in a month's time they would all be looking for new places.

So while Tembarom was rather afraid of Pearson and moved about in an awful state of uncertainty, Pearson was horribly afraid of Tembarom, and was, in fact, in such a condition of nervous anxiety that he was obliged more than once furtively to apply to his damp, pale young forehead his exceedingly fresh and spotless pocket-handkerchief.

In the first place, there was the wardrobe. What COULD he do? How could he approach the subject with sufficient delicacy? Mr. Temple Barholm had brought with him only a steamer trunk and a Gladstone bag,

the latter evidently bought in London, to be stuffed with hastily purchased handkerchiefs and shirts, worn as they came out of the shop, and as evidently bought without the slightest idea of the kind of linen a gentleman should own. What most terrified Pearson, who was of a timid and most delicate-minded nature, was that having the workhouse and the boot-blackening as a background, the new Mr. Temple Barholm COULDN'T know, as all this had come upon him so suddenly. And was it to be Pearson's calamitous duty to explain to him that he had NOTHING, that he apparently KNEW nothing, and that as he had no friends who knew, a mere common servant must educate him, if he did not wish to see him derided and looked down upon and actually "cut" by gentlemen that WERE gentlemen? All this to say nothing of Pearson's own well-earned reputation for knowledge of custom, intelligence, and deftness in turning out the objects of his care in such form as to be a reference in themselves when a new place was wanted. Of course sometimes there were even real gentlemen who were most careless and indifferent to appearance, and who, if left to themselves, would buy garments which made the blood run cold when one realized that his own character and hopes for the future often depended upon his latest employer's outward aspect. But the ulster in which Mr. Temple Barholm had presented himself was of a cut and material such as Pearson's most discouraged moments had never forced him to contemplate. The limited wardrobe in the steamer trunk was all new and all equally bad. There was no evening dress, no proper linen,--not what Pearson called "proper,"-- no proper toilet appurtenances. What was Pearson called upon by duty to do? If he had only had the initiative to anticipate

this, he might have asked permission to consult in darkest secrecy with Mr. Palford. But he had never dreamed of such a situation, and apparently he would be obliged to send his new charge down to his first dinner in the majestically decorous dining-room, "before all the servants," in a sort of speckled tweed cutaway, with a brown necktie.

Tembarom, realizing without delay that Pearson did not expect to be talked to and being cheered by the sight of the fire, sat down before it in an easy-chair the like of which for luxurious comfort he had never known. He was, in fact, waiting for developments. Pearson would say or do something shortly which would give him a chance to "catch on," or perhaps he'd go out of the room and leave him to himself, which would be a thing to thank God for. Then he could wash his face and hands, brush his hair, and wait till the dinner-bell rang. They'd be likely to have one. They'd have to in a place like this.

But Pearson did not go out of the room. He moved about behind him for a short time with footfall so almost entirely soundless that Tembarom became aware that, if it went on long, he should be nervous; in fact, he was nervous already. He wanted to know what he was doing. He could scarcely resist the temptation to turn his head and look; but he did not want to give himself away more entirely than was unavoidable, and, besides, instinct told him that he might frighten Pearson, who looked frightened enough, in a neat and well-mannered way, already. Hully gee! how he wished he would go out of the room!

But he did not. There were gently gliding footsteps of Pearson behind him, quiet movements which would have seemed stealthy if they had been a burglar's, soft removals of articles from one part of the room to another, delicate brushings, and almost noiseless foldings. Now Pearson was near the bed, now he had opened a wardrobe, now he was looking into the steamer trunk, now he had stopped somewhere behind him, within a few yards of his chair. Why had he ceased moving? What was he looking at? What kept him quiet?

Tembarom expected him to begin stirring mysteriously again; but he did not. Why did he not? There reigned in the room entire silence; no soft footfalls, no brushing, no folding. Was he doing nothing? Had he got hold of something which had given him a fit? There had been no sound of a fall; but perhaps even if an English valet had a fit, he'd have it so quietly and respectfully that one wouldn't hear it. Tembarom felt that he must be looking at the back of his head, and he wondered what was the matter with it. Was his hair cut in a way so un-English that it had paralyzed him? The back of his head began to creep under an investigation so prolonged. No sound at all, no movement. Tembarom stealthily took out his watch--good old Waterbury he wasn't going to part with --and began to watch the minute-hand. If nothing happened in three minutes he was going to turn round. One--two-- three--and the silence made it seem fifteen. He returned his Waterbury to his pocket and turned round.

Pearson was not dead. He was standing quite still and resigned,

waiting. It was his business to wait, not to intrude or disturb, and having put everything in order and done all he could do, he was waiting for further commands--in some suspense, it must be admitted.

"Hello!" exclaimed Tembarom, involuntarily.

"Shall I get your bath ready, sir?" inquired Pearson. "Do you like it hot or cold, sir?"

Tembarom drew a relieved breath. He hadn't dropped dead and he hadn't had a fit, and here was one of the things a man did when he valeted you--he got your bath ready. A hasty recollection of the much-used, paint-smearred tin bath on the fourth floor of Mrs. Bowse's boarding-house sprang up before him. Everybody had to use it in turn, and you waited hours for the chance to make a dash into it. No one stood still and waited fifteen minutes until you got good and ready to tell him he could go and turn on the water. Gee whizz!

Being relieved himself, he relieved Pearson by telling him he might "fix it" for him, and that he would have hot water.

"Very good, sir. Thank you, sir," said Pearson, and silently left the room.

Then Tembarom got up from his chair and began to walk about rather restlessly. A new alarm seized him. Did Pearson expect to WASH him or

to stand round and hand him soap and towels and things while he washed himself?

If it was supposed that you hadn't the strength to turn the faucets yourself, it might be supposed you didn't have the energy to use a flesh-brush and towels. Did valeting include a kind of shampoo all over?

"I couldn't stand for that," he said. "I'd have to tell him there'd been no Turkish baths in mine, and I'm not trained up to them. When I've got on to this kind of thing a bit more, I'll make him understand what I'm NOT in for; but I don't want to scare the life out of him right off. He looks like a good little fellow."

But Pearson's duties as valet did not apparently include giving him his bath by sheer physical force. He was deft, calm, amenable. He led Tembarom down the corridor to the bath-room, revealed to him stores of sumptuous bath-ropes and towels, hot- and cold-water faucets, sprays, and tonic essences. He forgot nothing and, having prepared all, mutely vanished, and returned to the bedroom to wait--and gaze in troubled wonder at the speckled tweed cutaway. There was an appalling possibility--he was aware that he was entirely ignorant of American customs--that tweed was the fashionable home evening wear in the States. Tembarom, returning from his bath much refreshed after a warm plunge and a cold shower, evidently felt that as a costume it was all that could be desired.

"Will you wear--these, sir,--this evening?" Pearson suggested.

It was suggestive of more than actual inquiry. If he had dared to hope that his manner might suggest a number of things! For instance, that in England gentlemen really didn't wear tweed in the evening even in private. That through some unforeseen circumstances his employer's evening-dress suit had been delayed, but would of course arrive tomorrow!

But Tembarom, physically stimulated by hot and cold water, and relief at being left alone, was beginning to recover his natural buoyancy.

"Yes, I'll wear 'em," he answered, snatching at his hairbrush and beginning to brush his damp hair. It was a wooden-backed brush that Pearson had found in his Gladstone bag and shudderingly laid in readiness on the dressing-table. "I guess they're all right, ain't they?"

"Oh, quite right, sir, quite," Pearson ventured--"for morning wear."

"Morning?" said Tembarom, brushing vigorously. "Not night?"

"Black, sir," most delicately hinted Pearson, "is--more usual--in the evening--in England." After which he added, "So to speak," with a vague hope that the mollifying phrase might counteract the effect of

any apparently implied aspersion on colors preferred in America.

Tembarom ceased brushing his hair, and looked at him in good-natured desire for information.

"Frock-coats or claw-hammer?" he asked. Despite his natural anxiety, and in the midst of it, Pearson could not but admit that he had an uncondemnatory voice and a sort of young way with him which gave one courage. But he was not quite sure of "claw-hammer."

"Frock-coats for morning dress and afternoon wear, sir," he ventured.

"The evening cut, as you know, is--"

"Claw-hammer. Swallow-tail, I guess you say here," Tembarom ended for him, quite without hint of rancor, he was rejoiced to see.

"Yes, sir," said Pearson.

The ceremony of dressing proved a fearsome thing as it went on. Pearson moved about deftly and essayed to do things for the new Mr. Temple Barholm which the new Mr. Temple Barholm had never heard of a man not doing for himself. He reached for things Pearson was about to hand to him or hold for him. He unceremoniously achieved services for himself which it was part of Pearson's manifest duty to perform. They got into each other's way; there was even danger sometimes of their seeming to snatch things from each other, to Pearson's unbounded

horror. Mr. Temple Barholm did not express any irritation whatsoever misunderstandings took place, but he held his mouth rather close-shut, and Pearson, not aware that he did this as a precaution against open grinning or shouts of laughter as he found himself unable to adjust himself to his attendant's movements, thought it possible that he was secretly annoyed and regarded the whole matter with disfavor. But when the dressing was at an end and he stood ready to go down in all his innocent ignoring of speckled tweed and brown necktie, he looked neither flurried nor out of humor, and he asked a question in a voice which was actually friendly. It was a question dealing with an incident which had aroused much interest in the servants' hall as suggesting a touch of mystery.

"Mr. Strangeways came yesterday all right, didn't he?" he inquired.

"Yes, sir," Pearson answered. "Mr. Hutchinson and his daughter came with him. They call her `Little Ann Hutchinson.' She's a sensible little thing, sir, and she seemed to know exactly what you'd want done to make him comfortable. Mrs. Butterworth put him in the west room, sir, and I valeted him. He was not very well when he came, but he seems better to-day, sir, only he's very anxious to see you."

"That's all right," said Tembarom. "You show me his room. I'll go and see him now."

And being led by Pearson, he went without delay.