CHAPTER XIV

He could not persuade them to remain to take lunch with him. The firmness of Hutchinson's declination was not unconnected with a private feeling that "them footmen chaps 'u'd be on the lookout to see the way you handled every bite you put in your mouth." He couldn't have stood it, dang their impudence! Little Ann, on her part, frankly and calmly said, "It wouldn't DO." That was all, and evidently covered everything.

After they had gone, the fog lifted somewhat, but though it withdrew from the windows, it remained floating about in masses, like huge ghosts, among the trees of the park. When Tembarom sat down alone to prolong his lunch with the aid of Burrill and the footmen, he was confronted by these unearthly shapes every time he lifted his eyes to the window he faced from his place at the table. It was an outlook which did not inspire to cheerfulness, and the fact that Ann and her father were going back to Manchester and later to America left him without even the simple consolation of a healthy appetite. Things were bound to get better after a while; they were BOUND to. A fellow would be a fool if he couldn't fix it somehow so that he could enjoy himself, with money to burn. If you made up your mind you couldn't stand the way things were, you didn't have to lie down under them, with a thousand or so "per" coming in. You could fix it so that it would be different. By jinks! there wasn't any law against your giving

it all to the church but just enough to buy a flat in Harlem outright, if you wanted to. But you weren't going to run crazy and do a lot of fool things in a minute, and be sorry the rest of your life. Money was money. And first and foremost there was Ann, with her round cheeks flushed and her voice all sweet and queer, saying, "You wouldn't be T. Tembarom; and it was T. Tembarom that--that was T. Tembarom."

He couldn't help knowing what she had begun to say, and his own face flushed as he thought of it. He was at that time of life when there generally happens to be one center about which the world revolves. The creature who passes through this period of existence without watching it revolve about such a center has missed an extraordinary and singularly developing experience. It is sometimes happy, often disastrous, but always more or less developing. Speaking calmly, detachedly, but not cynically, it is a phase. During its existence it is the blood in the veins, the sight of the eyes, the beat of the pulse, the throb of the heart. It is also the day and the night, the sun, the moon, and the stars, heaven and hell, the entire universe. And it doesn't matter in the least to any one but the creatures living through it. T. Tembarom was in the midst of it. There was Ann. There was this new crazy thing which had happened to him--"this fool thing," as he called it. There was this monstrous, magnificent house,--he knew it was magnificent, though it wasn't his kind,--there was old Palford and his solemn talk about ancestors and the name of Temple Barholm. It always reminded him of how ashamed he had been in Brooklyn of the

"Temple Temple" and how he had told lies to prevent the fellows finding out about it. And there was seventy thousand pounds a year, and there was Ann, who looked as soft as a baby,--Good Lord! how soft she'd feel if you got her in your arms and squeezed her!--and yet was somehow strong enough to keep him just where she wanted him to stay and believed he ought to stay until "he had found out." That was it. She wasn't doing it for any fool little idea of making herself seem more important: she just believed it. She was doing it because she wanted to let him "have his chance," just as if she were his mother instead of the girl he was clean crazy about. His chance! He laughed outright--a short, confident laugh which startled Burrill exceedingly.

When he went back to the library and lighted his pipe he began to stride up and down as he continued to think it over.

"I wish she was as sure as I am," he said. "I wish she was as sure of me as I am of myself--and as I am of her." He laughed the short, confident laugh again. "I wish she was as sure as I am of us both. We're all right. I've got to get through this, and find out what it's best to do, and I've got to show her. When I've had my chance good and plenty, us two for little old New York! Gee! won't it be fine!" he exclaimed imaginatively. "Her going over her bills, looking like a peach of a baby that's trying to knit its brows, and adding up, and thinking she ought to economize. She'd do it if we had ten million." He laughed outright joyfully. "Good Lord! I should kiss her to death!"

The simplest process of ratiocination would lead to a realization of the fact that though he was lonely and uncomfortable, he was not in the least pathetic or sorry for himself. His normal mental and physical structure kept him steady on his feet, and his practical and unsentimental training, combining itself with a touch of iron which centuries ago had expressed itself through some fighting Temple Barholm and a medium of battle-axes, crossbows, and spears, did the rest.

"It'd take more than this to get me where I'd be down and out. I'm feeling fine," he said. "I believe I'll go and 'take a walk,' as Palford says."

The fog-wreaths in the park were floating away, and he went out grinning and whistling, giving Burrill and the footman a nod as he passed them with a springing young stride. He got the door open so quickly that he left them behind him frustrated and staring at each other.

"It wasn't our fault," said Burrill, gloomily. "He's never had a door opened for him in his life. This won't do for me."

He was away for about an hour, and came back in the best of spirits. He had found out that there was something in "taking a walk" if a fellow had nothing else to do. The park was "fine," and he had never seen anything like it. When there were leaves on the trees and the

grass and things were green, it would be better than Central Park itself. You could have base-ball matches in it. What a cinch it would be if you charged gate-money! But he supposed you couldn't if it belonged to you and you had three hundred and fifty thousand a year. You had to get used to that. But it did seem a fool business to have all that land and not make a cent out of it. If it was just outside New York and you cut it up into lots, you'd just pile it up. He was quite innocent--calamitously innocent and commercial and awful in his views. Thoughts such as these had been crammed into his brain by life ever since he had gone down the staircase of the Brooklyn tenement with his twenty-five cents in his ten-year-old hand.

The stillness of the house seemed to have accentuated itself when he returned to it. His sense of it let him down a little as he entered. The library was like a tomb--a comfortable luxurious tomb with a bright fire in it. A new Punch and the morning papers had been laid upon a table earlier in the day, and he sat down to look at them.

"I guess about fifty-seven or eight of the hundred and thirty- six hours have gone by," he said. "But, gee! ain't it lonesome!"

He sat so still trying to interest himself in "London Day by Day" in the morning paper that the combination of his exercise in the fresh air and the warmth of the fire made him drowsy. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes without being aware that he did so. He was on the verge of a doze.

He remained upon the verge for a few minutes, and then a soft, rustling sound made him open his eyes.

An elderly little lady had timidly entered the room. She was neatly dressed in an old-fashioned and far-from-new black silk dress, with a darned lace collar and miniature brooch at her neck. She had also thin, gray side-ringlets dangling against her cheeks from beneath a small, black lace cap with pale-purple ribbons on it. She had most evidently not expected to find any one in the room, and, having seen Tembarom, gave a half-frightened cough.

"I--I beg your pardon," she faltered. "I really did not mean to intrude--really."

Tembarom jumped up, awkward, but good-natured. Was she a kind of servant who was a lady?

"Oh, that's all right," he said.

But she evidently did not feel that it was all right. She looked as though she felt that she had been caught doing something wrong, and must properly propitiate by apology.

"I'm so sorry. I thought you had gone out--Mr. Temple Barholm."

"I did go out--to take a walk; but I came in."

Having been discovered in her overt act, she evidently felt that duty demanded some further ceremony from her. She approached him very timidly, but with an exquisite, little elderly early-Victorian manner. She was of the most astonishingly perfect type, though Tembarom was not aware of the fact. The manner, a century earlier, would have expressed itself in a curtsy.

"It is Mr. Temple Barholm, isn't it? " she inquired.

"Yes; it has been for the last few weeks," he answered, wondering why she seemed so in awe of him and wishing she didn't.

"I ought to apologize for being here," she began.

"Say, don't, please!" he interrupted. "What I feel is, that it ought to be up to me to apologize for being here."

She was really quite flurried and distressed.

"Oh, please, Mr. Temple Barholm!" she fluttered, proceeding to explain hurriedly, as though he without doubt understood the situation. "I should of course have gone away at once after the late Mr. Temple Barholm died, but--but I really had nowhere to go--and was kindly allowed to remain until about two months ago, when I went to make a

visit. I fully intended to remove my little belongings before you arrived, but I was detained by illness and could not return until this morning to pack up. I understood you were in the park, and I remembered I had left my knitting-bag here." She glanced nervously about the room, and seemed to catch sight of something on a remote corner table. "Oh, there it is. May I take it?" she said, looking at him appealingly. "It was a kind present from a dear lost friend, and--and--" She paused, seeing his puzzled and totally non-comprehending air. It was plainly the first moment it had dawned upon her that he did not know what she was talking about. She took a small, alarmed step toward him.

"Oh, I BEG your pardon," she exclaimed in delicate anguish. "I'm afraid you don't know who I am. Perhaps Mr. Palford forgot to mention me. Indeed, why should he mention me? There were so many more important things. I am a sort of distant--VERY distant relation of yours. My name is Alicia Temple Barholm."

Tembarom was relieved. But she actually hadn't made a move toward the knitting-bag. She seemed afraid to do it until he gave her permission. He walked over to the corner table and brought it to her, smiling broadly.

"Here it is," he said. "I'm glad you left it. I'm very happy to be acquainted with you, Miss Alicia."

He was glad just to see her looking up at him with her timid, refined, intensely feminine appeal. Why she vaguely brought back something that reminded him of Ann he could not have told. He knew nothing whatever of types early-Victorian or late.

He took her hand, evidently to her greatest possible amazement, and shook it heartily. She knew nothing whatever of the New York street type, and it made her gasp for breath, but naturally with an allayed terror.

"Gee!" he exclaimed whole-heartedly, "I'm glad to find out I've got a relation. I thought I hadn't one in the world. Won't you sit down?" He was drawing her toward his own easy-chair. But he really didn't know, she was agitatedly thinking. She really must tell him. He seemed so good tempered and--and DIFFERENT. She herself was not aware of the enormous significance which lay in that word "different." There must be no risk of her seeming to presume upon his lack of knowledge.

"It is MOST kind of you," she said with grateful emphasis, "but I mustn't sit down and detain you. I can explain in a few words--if I may."

He positively still held her hand in the oddest, natural, boyish way, and before she knew what she was doing he had made her take the chair--quite MADE her.

"Well, just sit down and explain," he said. "I wish to thunder you would detain me. Take all the time you like. I want to hear all about it--honest Injun."

There was a cushion in the chair, and as he talked, he pulled it out and began to arrange it behind her, still in the most natural and matter-of-fact way--so natural and matter-of-fact, indeed, that its very natural matter-of-factedness took her breath away.

"Is that fixed all right?" he asked.

Being a little lady, she could only accept his extraordinary friendliness with grateful appreciation, though she could not help fluttering a little in her bewilderment.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Mr. Temple Barholm," she said.

He sat down on the square ottoman facing her, and leaned forward with an air of making a frank confession.

"Guess what I was thinking to myself two minutes before you came in? I was thinking, `Lord, I'm lonesome--just sick lonesome!' And then I opened my eyes and looked-- and there was a relation! Hully gee! I call that luck!"

"Dear me!" she said, shyly delighted. "DO you, Mr. Temple Barholm--

REALLY?"

Her formal little way of saying his name was like Ann's.

"Do I? I'm tickled to death. My mother died when I was ten, and I've never had any women kin-folks."

"Poor bo--" She had nearly said "Poor boy!" and only checked the familiarity just in time--" Poor Mr. Temple Barholm!"

"Say, what are we two to each other, anyhow?" He put it to her with great interest.

"It is a very distant relationship, if it is one at all," she answered. "You see, I was only a second cousin to the late Mr. Temple Barholm, and I had not really the SLIGHTEST claim upon him." She placed pathetic emphasis on the fact. "It was most generous of him to be so kind to me. When my poor father died and I was left quite penniless, he gave me a--a sort of home here."

"A sort of home?" Tembarom repeated.

"My father was a clergyman in VERY straitened circumstances. We had barely enough to live upon--barely. He could leave me nothing. It actually seemed as if I should have to starve --it did, indeed." There was a delicate quiver in her voice. "And though the late Mr. Temple

Barholm had a great antipathy to ladies, he was so--so noble as to send word to me that there were a hundred and fifty rooms in his house, and that if I would keep out of his way I might live in one of them."

"That was noble," commented her distant relative.

"Oh, yes, indeed, especially when one considers how he disliked the opposite sex and what a recluse he was. He could not endure ladies. I scarcely ever saw him. My room was in quite a remote wing of the house, and I never went out if I knew he was in the park. I was most careful. And when he died of course I knew I must go away."

Tembarom was watching her almost tenderly.

"Where did you go?"

"To a kind clergyman in Shropshire who thought he might help me."

"How was he going to do it?"

She answered with an effort to steady a somewhat lowered and hesitating voice.

"There was near his parish a very nice--charity,"--her breath caught itself pathetically,--"some most comfortable almshouses for decayed

gentlewomen. He thought he might be able to use his influence to get me into one." She paused and smiled, but her small, wrinkled hands held each other closely.

Tembarom looked away. He spoke as though to himself, and without knowing that he was thinking aloud.

"Almshouses!" he said. "Wouldn't that jolt you!" He turned on her again with a change to cheerful concern. "Say, that cushion of yours ain't comfortable. I 'm going to get you another one." He jumped up and, taking one from a sofa, began to arrange it behind her dexterously.

"But I mustn't trouble you any longer. I must go, really," she said, half rising nervously. He put a hand on her shoulder and made her sit again.

"Go where?" he said. "Just lean back on that cushion, Miss Alicia. For the next few minutes this is going to be MY funeral."

She was at once startled and uncomprehending. What an extraordinary expression! What COULD it mean?

"F--funeral?" she stammered.

Suddenly he seemed somehow to have changed. He looked as serious as

though he was beginning to think out something all at once. What was he going to say?

"That's New York slang," he answered. "It means that I want to explain myself to you and ask a few questions."

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. Temple Barholm."

He leaned his back against the mantel, and went into the matter practically.

"First off, haven't you ANY folks?" Then, answering her puzzled look, added, "I mean relations."

Miss Alicia gently shook her head.

"No sisters or brothers or uncles or aunts or cousins?"

She shook her head again.

He hesitated a moment, putting his hands in his pockets and taking them out again awkwardly as he looked down at her.

"Now here's where I'm up against it," he went on. "I don't want to be too fresh or to butt in, but--didn't old Temple Barholm leave you ANY money?"

"Oh, no!" she exclaimed. "Dear me! no! I couldn't possibly EXPECT such a thing."

He gazed at her as though considering the situation. "Couldn't you?" he said.

There was an odd reflection in his eyes, and he seemed to consider her and the situation again.

"Well," he began after his pause, "what I want to know is what you expect ME to do."

There was no unkindness in his manner, in fact, quite the contrary, even when he uttered what seemed to Miss Alicia these awful, unwarranted words. As though she had forced herself into his presence to make demands upon his charity! They made her tremble and turn pale as she got up quickly, shocked and alarmed.

"Oh, nothing! nothing! nothing WHATEVER, Mr. Temple Barholm!" she exclaimed, her agitation doing its best to hide itself behind a fine little dignity. He saw in an instant that his style of putting it had been "'way off," that his ignorance had betrayed him, that she had misunderstood him altogether. He almost jumped at her.

"Oh, say, I didn't mean THAT!" he cried out. "For the Lord's sake!

don't think I'm such a Tenderloin tough as to make a break like that! Not on your life!"

Never since her birth had a male creature looked at Miss Alicia with the appeal which showed itself in his eyes as he actually put his arm half around her shoulders, like a boy begging a favor from his mother or his aunt.

"What I meant was--" He broke off and began again quite anxiously, "say, just as a favor, will you sit down again and let me tell you what I did mean?"

It was that natural, warm, boyish way which overcame her utterly. It reminded her of the only boy she had ever really known, the one male creature who had allowed her to be fond of him. There was moisture in her eyes as she let him put her back into her chair. When he had done it, he sat down on the ottoman again and poured himself forth.

"You know what kind of a chap I am. No, you don't, either. You mayn't know a thing about me; and I want to tell you. I'm so different from everything you've ever known that I scare you. And no wonder. It's the way I've lived. If you knew, you'd understand what I was thinking of when I spoke just now. I've been cold, I've been hungry, I've walked the wet streets on my uppers. I know all about GOING WITHOUT. And do you expect that I am going to let a--a little thing like you--go away from here without friends and without money on the chance of getting

into an almshouse that isn't vacant? Do you expect that of me? Not on your life! That was what I meant."

Miss Alicia quivered; the pale-purple ribbons on her little lace cap quivered.

"I haven't," she said, and the fine little dignity was piteous, "a SHADOW of a claim upon you." It was necessary for her to produce a pocket- handkerchief. He took it from her, and touched her eyes as softly as though she were a baby.

"Claim nothing!" he said. "I've got a claim on YOU. I'm going to stake one out right now." He got up and gesticulated, taking in the big room and its big furniture. "Look at all this! It fell on me like a thunderbolt. It's nearly knocked the life out of me. I'm like a lost cat on Broadway. You can't go away and leave me, Miss Alicia; it's your duty to stay. You've just GOT to stay to take care of me." He came over to her with a wheedling smile. "I never was taken care of in my life. Just be as noble to me as old Temple Barholm was to you: give me a sort of home."

If a little gentlewoman could stare, it might be said that Miss Alicia stared at him. She trembled with amazed emotion.

"Do you mean--" Despite all he had said, she scarcely dared to utter the words lest, after all, she might be taking for granted more than

it was credible could be true. "Can you mean that if I stayed here with you it would make Temple Barholm seem more like HOME? Is it possible you--you mean THAT?"

"I mean just that very thing."

It was too much for her. Finely restrained little elderly gentlewoman as she was, she openly broke down under it.

"It can't be true!" she ejaculated shakily. "It isn't possible. It is too--too beautiful and kind. Do forgive me! I c-a-n't help it." She burst into tears.

She knew it was most stupidly wrong. She knew gentlemen did not like tears. Her father had told her that men never really forgave women who cried at them. And here, when her fate hung in the balance, she was not able to behave herself with feminine decorum.

Yet the new Mr. Temple Barholm took it in as matter-of- fact a manner as he seemed to take everything. He stood by her chair and soothed her in his dear New York voice.

"That's all right, Miss Alicia," he commented. "You cry as much as you want to, just so that you don't say no. You've been worried and you're tired. I'll tell you there's been two or three times lately when I should like to have cried myself if I'd known how. Say," he added with

a sudden outburst of imagination, "I bet anything it's about time you had tea."

The suggestion was so entirely within the normal order of things that it made her feel steadier, and she was able to glance at the clock.

"A cup of tea would be refreshing," she said. "They will bring it in very soon, but before the servants come I must try to express--"

But before she could express anything further the tea appeared. Burrill and a footman brought it on splendid salvers, in massive urn and tea-pot, with chaste, sacrificial flame flickering, and wonderful, hot buttered and toasted things and wafers of bread and butter attendant. As they crossed the threshold, the sight of Miss Alicia's small form enthroned in their employer's chair was one so obviously unanticipated that Burrill made a step backward and the footman almost lost the firmness of his hold on the smaller tray. Each recovered himself in time, however, and not until the tea was arranged upon the table near the fire was any outward recognition of Miss Alicia's presence made. Then Burrill, pausing, made an announcement entirely without prejudice:

"I beg pardon, sir, but Higgins's cart has come for Miss Temple Barholm's box; he is asking when she wants the trap."

"She doesn't want it at all," answered Tembarom. "Carry her trunk up-

stairs again. She's not going away."

The lack of proper knowledge contained in the suggestion that Burrill should carry trunks upstairs caused Miss Alicia to quail in secret, but she spoke with outward calm.

"No, Burrill," she said. "I am not going away."

"Very good, Miss," Burrill replied, and with impressive civility he prepared to leave the room. Tembarom glanced at the tea-things.

"There's only one cup here," he said. "Bring one for me."

Burrill's expression might perhaps have been said to start slightly.

"Very good, sir," he said, and made his exit. Miss Alicia was fluttering again.

"That cup was really for you, Mr. Temple Barholm," she ventured.

"Well, now it's for you, and I've let him know it," replied Tembarom.

"Oh, PLEASE," she said in an outburst of feeling--"PLEASE let me tell you how GRATEFUL--how grateful I am!"

But he would not let her.

"If you do," he said, "I'll tell you how grateful I am, and that'll be worse. No, that's all fixed up between us. It goes. We won't say any more about it."

He took the whole situation in that way, as though he was assuming no responsibility which was not the simple, inevitable result of their drifting across each other--as though it was only what any man would have done, even as though she was a sort of delightful, unexpected happening. He turned to the tray.

"Say, that looks all right, doesn't it?" he said. "Now you are here, I like the way it looks. I didn't yesterday."

Burrill himself brought the extra cup and saucer and plate. He wished to make sure that his senses had not deceived him. But there she sat who through years had existed discreetly in the most unconsidered rooms in an uninhabited wing, knowing better than to presume upon her privileges--there she sat with an awed and rapt face gazing up at this new outbreak into Temple Barholm's and "him joking and grinning as though he was as pleased as Punch."