blushing and feeling rather as though she had been proposed to, and yet, spinster though she was, somehow quite understanding about the nest and Ann.

CHAPTER XXI

Lady Mallowe and her daughter did not pay their visit to Asshawe Holt, the absolute, though not openly referred to, fact being that they had not been invited. The visit in question had merely floated in the air as a delicate suggestion made by her ladyship in her letter to Mrs. Asshe Shaw, to the effect that she and Joan were going to stay at Temple Barholm, the visit to Asshawe they had partly arranged some time ago might now be fitted in.

The partial arrangement itself, Mrs. Asshe Shaw remarked to her eldest daughter when she received the suggesting note, was so partial as to require slight consideration, since it had been made "by the woman herself, who would push herself and her daughter into any house in England if a back door were left open." In the civilly phrased letter she received in answer to her own, Lady Mallowe read between the lines the point of view taken, and writhed secretly, as she had been made to writhe scores of times in the course of her career. It had happened so often, indeed, that it might have been imagined that she had become used to it; but the woman who acted as maid to herself and Joan always

knew when "she had tried to get in somewhere" and failed.

The note of explanation sent immediately to Miss Alicia was at once adroit and amiable. They had unfortunately been detained in London a day or two past the date fixed for their visit to Asshawe, and Lady Mallowe would not allow Mrs. Asshe Shawe, who had so many guests, to be inconvenienced by their arriving late and perhaps disarranging her plans. So if it was quite convenient, they would come to Temple Barholm a week earlier; but not, of course, if that would be the least upsetting.

When they arrived, Tembarom himself was in London. He had suddenly found he was obliged to go. The business which called him was something which could not be put off. He expected to return at once. It was made very easy for him when he made his excuses to Palliser, who suggested that he might even find himself returning by the same train with his guests, which would give him opportunities. If he was detained, Miss Alicia could take charge of the situation. They would quite understand when she explained. Captain Palliser foresaw for himself some quiet entertainment in his own meeting with the visitors. Lady Mallowe always provided a certain order of amusement for him, and no man alive objected to finding interest and even a certain excitement in the society of Lady Joan. It was her chief characteristic that she inspired in a man a vague, even if slightly irritated, desire to please her in some degree. To lead her on to talk in her sometimes brilliant, always heartlessly unsparing, fashion,

perhaps to smile her shade of a bitter smile, gave a man something to do, especially if he was bored. Palliser anticipated a possible chance of repeating the dialogue of "the ladies," not, however, going into the Jem Temple Barholm part of it. When one finds a man whose idle life has generated in him the curiosity which is usually called feminine, it frequently occupies him more actively than he is aware or will admit.

A fashionable male gossip is a curious development. Palliser was, upon the whole, not aware that he had an intense interest in finding out the exact reason why Lady Mallowe had not failed utterly in any attempt to drag her daughter to this particular place, to be flung headlong, so to speak, at this special man. Lady Mallowe one could run and read, but Lady Joan was in this instance unexplainable. And as she never deigned the slightest concealment, the story of the dialogue would no doubt cause her to show her hand. She must have a hand, and it must be one worth seeing.

It was not he, however, who could either guess or understand. The following would have been his summing up of her: "Flaringly handsome girl, brought up by her mother to one end. Bad temper to begin with. Girl who might, if she lost her head, get into some frightful mess. Meets a fascinating devil in the first season. A regular Romeo and Juliet passion blazes up--all for love and the world well lost. All London looking on. Lady Mallowe frantic and furious. Suddenly the fascinating devil ruined for life, done for. Bolts, gets killed. Lady

Mallowe triumphant. Girl dragged about afterward like a beautiful young demon in chains. Refuses all sorts of things. Behaves infernally. Nobody knows anything else."

Nobody did know; Lady Mallowe herself did not. From the first year in which Joan had looked at her with child consciousness she had felt that there was antagonism in the deeps of her eyes. No mother likes to recognize such a thing, and Lady Mallowe was a particularly vain woman. The child was going to be an undeniable beauty, and she ought to adore the mother who was to arrange her future. Instead of which, she plainly disliked her. By the time she was three years old, the antagonism had become defiance and rebellion. Lady Mallowe could not even indulge herself in the satisfaction of showing her embryo beauty off, and thus preparing a reputation for her. She was not cross or tearful, but she had the temper of a little devil. She would not be shown off. She hated it, and her bearing dangerously suggested that she hated her handsome young mother. No effects could be produced with her.

Before she was four the antagonism was mutual, and it increased with years. The child was of a passionate nature, and had been born intensely all her mother was not, and intensely not all her mother was. A throw-back to some high-spirited and fiercely honest ancestor created in her a fury at the sight of mean falsities and dishonors. Before she was old enough to know the exact cause of her rage she was shaken by it. She thought she had a bad temper, and was bad enough to

hate her own mother without being able to help it. As she grew older she found out that she was not really so bad as she had thought, though she was obliged to concede that nothing palliative could be said about the temper. It had been violent from the first, and she had lived in an atmosphere which infuriated it. She did not suppose such a thing could be controlled. It sometimes frightened her. Had not the old Marquis of Norborough been celebrated through his entire life for his furies? Was there not a hushed-up rumor that he had once thrown a decanter at his wife, and so nearly killed her that people had been asking one another in whispers if a peer of the realm could be hanged. He had been born that way, so had she. Her school-room days had been a horror to her, and also a terror, because she had often almost flung ink-bottles and heavy rulers at her silly, lying governesses, and once had dug a pair of scissors into one sneaking old maid fool's arm when she had made her "see red" by her ignoble trickeries. Perhaps she would be hanged some day herself. She once prayed for a week that she might be made better tempered, --not that she believed in prayer,--and of course nothing came of it.

Every year she lived she raged more furiously at the tricks she saw played by her mother and every one who surrounded her; the very servants were greater liars and pilferers than any other servants. Her mother was always trying to get things from people which they did not want to give her. She would carry off slights and snubs as though they were actual tributes, if she could gain her end. The girl knew what the meaning of her own future would be. Since she definitely disliked

her daughter, Lady Mallowe did not mince matters when they were alone. She had no money, she was extremely good looking, she had a certain number of years in which to fight for her own hand among the new debutantes who were presented every season. Her first season over, the next season other girls would be fresher than she was, and newer to the men who were worth marrying. Men like novelty. After her second season the debutantes would seem fresher still by contrast. Then people would begin to say, "She was presented four or five years ago." After that it would be all struggle,--every season it would be worse. It would become awful. Unmarried women over thirty-five would speak of her as though they had been in the nursery together. Married girls with a child or so would treat her as though she were a maiden aunt. She knew what was before her. Beggary stared them both in the face if she did not make the most of her looks and waste no time. And Joan knew it was all true, and that worse, far worse things were true also. She would be obliged to spend a long life with her mother in cheap lodgings, a faded, penniless, unmarried woman, railed at, taunted, sneered at, forced to be part of humiliating tricks played to enable them to get into debt and then to avoid paying what they owed. Had she not seen one horrible old woman of their own rank who was an example of what poverty might bring one to, an old harpy who tried to queen it over her landlady in an actual back street, and was by turns fawned upon and disgustingly "your ladyshiped" or outrageously insulted by her landlady?

Then that first season! Dear, dear God! that first season when she met

Jem! She was not nineteen, and the facile world pretended to be at her feet, and the sun shone as though London were in Italy, and the park was marvelous with flowers, and there were such dances and such laughter!

And it was all so young--and she met Jem! It was at a garden-party at a lovely old house on the river, a place with celebrated gardens which would always come back to her memory as a riot of roses. The frocks of the people on the lawn looked as though they were made of the petals of flowers, and a mad little haunting waltz was being played by the band, and there under a great copper birch on the green velvet turf near her stood Jem, looking at her with dark, liquid, slanting eyes! They were only a few feet from each other,--and he looked, and she looked, and the haunting, mad little waltz played on, and it was as though they had been standing there since the world began, and nothing else was true.

Afterward nothing mattered to either of them. Lady Mallowe herself ceased to count. Now and then the world stops for two people in this unearthly fashion. At such times, as far as such a pair are concerned, causes and effects cease. Her bad temper fled, and she knew she would never feel its furious lash again.

With Jem looking at her with his glowing, drooping eyes, there would be no reason for rage and shame. She confessed the temper to him and told of her terror of it; he confessed to her his fondness for high

play, and they held each other's hands, not with sentimental youthful lightness, but with the strong clasp of sworn comrades, and promised on honor that they would stand by each other every hour of their lives against their worst selves.

They would have kept the pact. Neither was a slight or dishonest creature. The phase of life through which they passed is not a new one, but it is not often so nearly an omnipotent power as was their three-months' dream.

It lasted only that length of time. Then came the end of the world. Joan did not look fresh in her second season, and before it was over men were rather afraid of her. Because she was so young the freshness returned to her cheek, but it never came back to her eyes.

What exactly had happened, or what she thought, it was impossible to know. She had delicate, black brows, and between them appeared two delicate, fierce lines. Her eyes were of a purplish-gray, "the color of thunder," a snubbed admirer had once said. Between their black lashes they were more deeply thunder-colored. Her life with her mother was a thing not to be spoken of. To the desperate girl's agony of rebellion against the horror of fate Lady Mallowe's taunts and beratings were devilish. There was a certain boudoir in the house in Hill Street which was to Joan like the question chamber of the Inquisition. Shut up in it together, the two went through scenes which in their cruelty would have done credit to the Middle Ages. Lady

Mallowe always locked the door to prevent the unexpected entrance of a servant, but servants managed to hover about it, because her ladyship frequently forgot caution so far as to raise her voice at times, as ladies are not supposed to do.

"We fight," Joan said with a short, horrible laugh one morning--"we fight like cats and dogs. No, like two cats. A cat-and-dog fight is more quickly over. Some day we shall scratch each other's eyes out."

"Have you no shame?" her mother cried.

"I am burning with it. I am like St. Lawrence on his gridiron. 'Turn me over on the other side,'" she quoted.

This was when she had behaved so abominably to the Duke of Merthshire that he had actually withdrawn his more than half-finished proposal. That which she hated more than all else was the God she had prayed to when she asked she might be helped to control her temper.

She had not believed in Him at the time, but because she was frightened after she had stuck the scissors into Fraulein she had tried the appeal as an experiment. The night after she met Jem, when she went to her room in Hill Street for the night, she knelt down and prayed because she suddenly did believe. Since there was Jem in the world, there must be the other somewhere.

As day followed day, her faith grew with her love. She told Jem about it, and they agreed to say a prayer together at the same hour every night. The big young man thought her piety beautiful, and, his voice was unsteady as they talked. But she told him that she was not pious, but impious.

"I want to be made good," she said. "I have been bad all my life. I was a bad child, I have been a bad girl; but now I must be good."

On the night after the tragic card-party she went to her room and kneeled down in a new spirit. She knelt, but not to cover her face, she knelt with throat strained and her fierce young face thrown back and upward.

Her hands were clenched to fists and flung out and shaken at the ceiling. She said things so awful that her own blood shuddered as she uttered them. But she could not--in her mad helplessness--make them awful enough. She flung herself on the carpet at last, her arms outstretched like a creature crucified face downward on the cross.

"I believed in You!" she gasped. "The first moment you gave me a reason I believed. I did! I did! We both said our prayer to You every night, like children. And you've done this--this--this!" And she beat with her fists upon the floor.

Several years had passed since that night, and no living being knew

what she carried in her soul. If she had a soul, she said to herself, it was black--black. But she had none. Neither had Jem had one; when the earth and stones had fallen upon him it had been the end, as it would have been if he had been a beetle.

This was the guest who was coming to the house where Miles Hugo smiled from his frame in the picture-gallery--the house which would to-day have been Jem's if T. Tembarom had not inherited it.

Tembarom returned some twenty-four hours after Miss Alicia had received his visitors for him. He had been "going into" absorbing things in London. His thoughts during his northward journey were puzzled and discouraged ones. He sat in the corner of the railway carriage and stared out of the window without seeing the springtime changes in the flying landscape.

The price he would have given for a talk with Ann would not have been easy to compute. Her head, her level little head, and her way of seeing into things and picking out facts without being rattled by what didn't really count, would have been worth anything. The day itself was a discouraging one, with heavy threatenings of rain which did not fall.

The low clouds were piles of dark-purple gray, and when the sun tried to send lances of ominous yellow light through them, strange and lurid effects were produced, and the heavy purple-gray masses rolled

together again. He wondered why he did not hear low rumblings of thunder.

He went to his room at once when he reached home. He was late, and Pearson told him that the ladies were dressing for dinner. Pearson was in waiting with everything in readiness for the rapid performance of his duties. Tembarom had learned to allow himself to be waited upon. He had, in fact, done this for the satisfying of Pearson, whose respectful unhappiness would otherwise have been manifest despite his efforts to conceal it. He dressed quickly and asked some questions about Strangeways. Otherwise Pearson thought he seemed preoccupied. He only made one slight joke.

"You'd be a first-rate dresser for a quick-change artist, Pearson," he remarked.

On his way to the drawing-room he deflected from the direct path, turning aside for a moment to the picture-gallery because for a reason of his own he wanted to take a look at Miles Hugo. He took a look at Miles Hugo oftener than Miss Alicia knew.

The gallery was dim and gloomy enough, now closing in in the purple-gray twilight. He walked through it without glancing at the pictures until he came to the tall boy in the satin and lace of Charles II period. He paused there only for a short time, but he stood quite near the portrait, and looked hard at the handsome face.

"Gee!" he exclaimed under his breath, "it's queer, gee!"

Then he turned suddenly round toward one of the big windows. He turned because he had been startled by a sound, a movement. Some one was standing before the window. For a second's space the figure seemed as though it was almost one with the purple-gray clouds that were its background. It was a tall young woman, and her dress was of a thin material of exactly their color--dark-gray and purple at once. The wearer held her head high and haughtily. She had a beautiful, stormy face, and the slender, black brows were drawn together by a frown. Tembarom had never seen a girl as handsome and disdainful. He had, indeed, never been looked at as she looked at him when she moved slightly forward.

He knew who it was. It was the Lady Joan girl, and the sudden sight of her momentarily "rattled" him.

"You quite gave me a jolt," he said awkwardly, and knowing that he said it like a "mutt." "I didn't know any one was in the gallery."

"What are you doing here?" she asked. She spoke to him as though she were addressing an intruding servant. There was emphasis on the word "you."

Her intention was so evident that it increased his feeling of being

"rattled." To find himself confronting deliberate ill nature of a superior and finished kind was like being spoken to in a foreign language.

"I--I'm T. Tembarom." he answered, not able to keep himself from staring because she was such a "winner" as to looks.

"T. Tembarom?" she repeated slowly, and her tone made him at once see what a fool he had been to say it.

"I forgot," he half laughed. "I ought to have said I'm Temple Barholm."

"Oh!" was her sole comment. She actually stood still and looked him up and down.

She knew perfectly well who he was, and she knew perfectly well that no palliative view could possibly be taken by any well-bred person of her bearing toward him. He was her host. She had come, a guest, to his house to eat his bread and salt, and the commonest decency demanded that she should conduct herself with civility. But she cared nothing for the commonest, or the most uncommon, decency. She was thinking of other things. As she had stood before the window she had felt that her soul had never been so black as it was when she turned away from Miles Hugo's portrait--never, never. She wanted to hurt people. Perhaps Nero had felt as she did and was not so hideous as he seemed.

The man's tailor had put him into proper clothes, and his features were respectable enough, but nothing on earth could make him anything but what he so palpably was. She had seen that much across the gallery as she had watched him staring at Miles Hugo.

"I should think," she said, dropping the words slowly again, "that you would often forget that you are Temple Barholm."

"You're right there," he answered. "I can't nail myself down to it. It seems like a sort of joke."

She looked him over again.

"It is a joke," she said.

It was as though she had slapped him in the face, though she said it so quietly. He knew he had received the slap, and that, as it was a woman, he could not slap back. It was a sort of surprise to her that he did not giggle nervously and turn red and shuffle his feet in impotent misery. He kept quite still a moment or so and looked at her, though not as she had looked at him. She wondered if he was so thick-skinned that he did not feel anything at all.

"That's so," he admitted. "That's so." Then he actually smiled at her. "I don't know how to behave myself, you see," he said. "You're Lady

Joan Fayre, ain't you? I'm mighty glad to see you. Happy to make your acquaintance, Lady Joan."

He took her hand and shook it with friendly vigor before she knew what he was going to do.

"I'll bet a dollar dinner's ready," he added, "and Burrill's waiting. It scares me to death to keep Burrill waiting. He's got no use for me, anyhow. Let's go and pacify him."

He did not lead the way or drag her by the arm, as it seemed to her quite probable that he might, as costermongers do on Hampstead Heath. He knew enough to let her pass first through the door; and when Lady Mallowe looked up to see her enter the drawing-room, he was behind her. To her ladyship's amazement and relief, they came in, so to speak, together. She had been spared the trying moment of assisting at the ceremony of their presentation to each other.