

## CHAPTER XXII

In a certain sense she had been dragged to the place by her mother. Lady Mallowe had many resources, and above all she knew how to weary her into resistlessness which was almost indifference. There had been several shameless little scenes in the locked boudoir. But though she had been dragged, she had come with an intention. She knew what she would find herself being forced to submit to if the intruder were not disposed of at the outset, and if the manoeuvring began which would bring him to London. He would appear at her elbow here and there and at every corner, probably unaware that he was being made an offensive puppet by the astute cleverness against which she could not defend herself, unless she made actual scenes in drawing-rooms, at dinner-tables, in the very streets themselves. Gifted as Lady Mallowe was in fine and light-handed dealing of her cards in any game, her stakes at this special juncture were seriously high. Joan knew what they were, and that she was in a mood touched with desperation. The defenselessly new and ignorant Temple Barholm was to her mind a direct intervention of Providence, and it was only Joan herself who could rob her of the benefits and reliefs he could provide. With regard to Lady Joan, though Palliser's quoted New Yorkism, "wipe up the earth," was unknown to her, the process she had in mind when she left London for Lancashire would have been well covered by it. As in feudal days she might have ordered the right hand of a creature such as this to be struck off, forgetting that he was a man, so was she capable to-day of

inflicting upon him any hurt which might sweep him out of her way. She had not been a tender-hearted girl, and in these years she was absolutely callous. The fellow being what he was, she had not the resources she might have called upon if he had been a gentleman. He would not understand the chills and slights of good manners. In the country he would be easier to manage than in town, especially if attacked in his first timidity before his new grandeurs. His big house no doubt frightened him, his servants, the people who were of a class of which he knew nothing. When Palliser told his story she saw new openings. He would stand in servile awe of her and of others like her. He would be afraid of her, to begin with, and she could make him more so.

But though she had come to alarm him so that he would be put to absolute flight, she had also come for another reason. She had never seen Temple Barholm, and she had discovered before they had known each other a week that it was Jem's secret passion. He had loved it with a slighted and lonely child's romantic longing; he had dreamed of it as boy and man, knowing that it must some time be his own, his home, and yet prevented by his uncle's attitude toward him from daring to act as though he remembered the fact. Old Mr. Temple Barholm's special humor had been that of a man guarding against presumption.

Jem had not intended to presume, but he had been snubbed with relentless cruelty even for boyish expressions of admiration. And he had hid his feeling in his heart until he poured it out to Joan. To-day it would have been his. Together, together, they would have lived

in it and loved every stone of it, every leaf on every great tree, every wild daffodil nodding in the green grass. Most people, God be thanked! can forget. The wise ones train themselves beyond all else to forgetting.

Joan had been a luckless, ill-brought-up, passionate child and girl. In her Mayfair nursery she had been as little trained as a young savage. Since her black hour she had forgotten nothing, allowed herself no palliating moments. Her brief dream of young joy had been the one real thing in her life. She absolutely had lain awake at night and reconstructed the horror of Jem's death, had lived it over again, writhing in agony on her bed, and madly feeling that by so doing she was holding her love close to her life.

And the man who stood in the place Jem had longed for, the man who sat at the head of his table, was this "thing!" That was what she felt him to be, and every hurt she could do him, every humiliation which should write large before him his presumption and grotesque unfitness, would be a blow struck for Jem, who could never strike a blow for himself again. It was all senseless, but she had not want to reason. Fate had not reasoned in her behalf. She watched Tembarom under her lids at the dinner-table.

He had not wriggled or shuffled when she spoke to him in the gallery; he did neither now, and made no obvious efforts to seem unembarrassed. He used his knife and fork in odd ways, and he was plainly not used to

being waited upon. More than once she saw the servants restrain smiles. She addressed no remarks to him herself, and answered with chill indifference such things as he said to her. If conversation had flagged between him and Mr. Palford because the solicitor did not know how to talk to him, it did not even reach the point of flagging with her, because she would not talk and did not allow it to begin. Lady Mallowe, sick with annoyance, was quite brilliant. She drew out Miss Alicia by detailed reminiscences of a visit paid to Rowlton Hall years before. The vicar had dined at the hall while she had been there. She remembered perfectly his charm of manner and powerful originality of mind, she said sweetly. He had spoken with such affection of his "little Alicia," who was such a help to him in his parish work.

"I thought he was speaking of a little girl at first," she said smilingly, "but it soon revealed itself that 'little Alicia' was only his caressing diminutive."

A certain widening of Miss Alicia's fascinated eye, which could not remove itself from her face, caused her to quail slightly.

"He was of course a man of great force of character and-- and expression," she added. "I remember thinking at the time that his eloquent frankness of phrase might perhaps seem even severe to frivolous creatures like myself. A really remarkable personality."

"His sermons," faltered Miss Alicia, as a refuge, "were indeed

remarkable. I am sure he must greatly have enjoyed his conversations with you. I am afraid there were very few clever women in the neighborhood of Rowlton."

Casting a bitter side glance on her silent daughter, Lady Mallowe lightly seized upon New York as a subject. She knew so much of it from delightful New Yorkers. London was full of delightful New Yorkers. She would like beyond everything to spend a winter in New York. She understood that the season there was in the winter and that it was most brilliant. Mr. Temple Barholm must tell them about it.

"Yes," said Lady Joan, looking at him through narrowed lids, "Mr. Temple Barholm ought to tell us about it."

She wanted to hear what he would say, to see how he would try to get out of the difficulty or flounder staggeringly through it. Her mother knew in an instant that her own speech had been a stupid blunder. She had put the man into exactly the position Joan would enjoy seeing him in. But he wasn't in a position, it appeared.

"What is the season, anyhow?" he said. "You've got one on me when you talk about seasons."

"In London," Miss Alicia explained courageously, "it is the time when her Majesty is at Buckingham Palace, and when the drawing-rooms are held, and Parliament sits, and people come up to town and give balls."

She wished that Lady Mallowe had not made her remark just at this time. She knew that the quietly moving servants were listening, and that their civilly averted eyes had seen Captain Palliser smile and Lady Joan's curious look, and that the whole incident would form entertainment for their supper- table.

"I guess they have it in the winter in New York, then, if that's it," he said. "There's no Buckingham Palace there, and no drawing-rooms, and Congress sits in Washington. But New York takes it out in suppers at Sherry's and Delmonico's and theaters and receptions. Miss Alicia knows how I used to go to them when I was a little fellow, don't you, Miss Alicia?" he added, smiling at her across the table.

"You have told me," she answered. She noticed that Burrill and the footmen stood at attention in their places.

"I used to stand outside in the snow and look in through the windows at the people having a good time," he said. "Us kids that were selling newspapers used to try to fill ourselves up with choosing whose plate we'd take if we could get at it. Beefsteak and French fried potatoes were the favorites, and hot oyster stews. We were so all-fired hungry!"

"How pathetic!" exclaimed Lady Mallowe. "And how interesting, now that it is all over!"

She knew that her manner was gushing, and Joan's slight side glance of subtle appreciation of the fact exasperated her almost beyond endurance. What could one do, what could one talk about, without involving oneself in difficulties out of which one's hasty retreat could be effected only by gushing? Taking into consideration the awkwardness of the whole situation and seeing Joan's temper and attitude, if there had not been so much at stake she would have received a summoning telegram from London the next day and taken flight. But she had been forced to hold her ground before in places she detested or where she was not wanted, and she must hold it again until she had found out the worst or the best. And, great heaven! how Joan was conducting herself, with that slow, quiet insultingness of tone and look, the wicked, silent insolence of bearing which no man was able to stand, however admiringly he began! The Duke of Merthshire had turned his back upon it even after all the world had known his intentions, even after the newspapers had prematurely announced the engagement and she herself had been convinced that he could not possibly retreat. She had worked desperately that season, she had fawned on and petted newspaper people, and stooped to little things no one but herself could have invented and which no one but herself knew of. And never had Joan been so superb; her beauty had seemed at its most brilliant height. The match would have been magnificent; but he could not stand her, and would not. Why, indeed, should any man? She glanced at her across the table. A beauty, of course; but she was thinner, and her eyes had a hungry fierceness in them, and the two

delicate, straight lines between her black brows were deepening.

And there were no dukes on the horizon. Merthshire had married almost at once, and all the others were too young or had wives already. If this man would take her, she might feel herself lucky. Temple Barholm and seventy thousand a year were not to be trifled with by a girl who had made herself unpopular and who was twenty-six. And for her own luck the moment had come just before it was too late--a second marriage, wealth, the end of the hideous struggle. Joan was the obstacle in her path, and she must be forced out of it. She glanced quickly at Tembarom. He was trying to talk to Joan now. He was trying to please her. She evidently had a fascination for him. He looked at her in a curious way when she was not looking at him. It was a way different from that of other men whom she had watched as they furtively stared. It had struck her that he could not take his eyes away. That was because he had never before been on speaking terms with a woman of beauty and rank.

Joan herself knew that he was trying to please her, and she was asking herself how long he would have the courage and presumption to keep it up. He could scarcely be enjoying it.

He was not enjoying it, but he kept it up. He wanted to be friends with her for more reasons than one. No one had ever remained long at enmity with him. He had "got over" a good many people in the course of his career, as he had "got over" Joseph Hutchinson. This had always

been accomplished because he presented no surface at which arrows could be thrown. She was the hardest proposition he had ever come up against, he was thinking; but if he didn't let himself be fool enough to break loose and get mad, she'd not hate him so much after a while. She would begin to understand that it wasn't his fault; then perhaps he could get her to make friends. In fact, if she had been able to read his thoughts, there is no certainty as to how far her temper might have carried her. But she could see him only as a sharp-faced, common American of the shop-boy class, sitting at the head of Jem Temple Barholm's table, in his chair.

As they passed through the hall to go to the drawing-room after the meal was over, she saw a neat, pale young man speaking to Burrill and heard a few of his rather anxiously uttered words.

"The orders were that he was always to be told when Mr. Strangeways was like this, under all circumstances. I can't quiet him, Mr. Burrill. He says he must see him at once."

Burrill walked back stiffly to the dining-room.

"It won't trouble HIM much to be disturbed at his wine," he muttered before going. "He doesn't know hock from port."

When the message was delivered to him, Tembarom excused himself with simple lack of ceremony.

"I 'll be back directly," he said to Palliser. "Those are good cigars." And he left the room without going into the matter further.

Palliser took one of the good cigars, and in taking it exchanged a glance with Burrill which distantly conveyed the suggestion that perhaps he had better remain for a moment or so. Captain Palliser's knowledge of interesting detail was obtained "by chance here and there," he sometimes explained, but it was always obtained with a light and casual air.

"I am not sure," he remarked as he took the light Burrill held for him and touched the end of his cigar--"I am not quite sure that I know exactly who Mr. Strangeways is."

"He's the gentleman, sir, that Mr. Temple Barholm brought over from New York," replied Burrill with a stolidity clearly expressive of distaste.

"Indeed, from New York! Why doesn't one see him?"

"He's not in a condition to see people, sir," said Burrill, and Palliser's slightly lifted eyebrow seeming to express a good deal, he added a sentence, "He's not all there, sir."

"From New York, and not all there. What seems to be the matter?"

Palliser asked quietly. "Odd idea to bring a lunatic all the way from America. There must be asylums there."

"Us servants have orders to keep out of the way," Burrill said with sterner stolidity. "He's so nervous that the sight of strangers does him harm. I may say that questions are not encouraged."

"Then I must not ask any more," said Captain Palliser. "I did not know I was edging on to a mystery."

"I wasn't aware that I was myself, sir," Burrill remarked, "until I asked something quite ordinary of Pearson, who is Mr. Temple Barholm's valet, and it was not what he said, but what he didn't, that showed me where I stood."

"A mystery is an interesting thing to have in a house," said Captain Palliser without enthusiasm. He smoked his cigar as though he was enjoying its aroma, and even from his first remark he had managed not to seem to be really quite addressing himself to Burrill. He was certainly not talking to him in the ordinary way; his air was rather that of a gentleman overhearing casual remarks in which he was only vaguely interested. Before Burrill left the room, however, and he left it under the impression that he had said no more than civility demanded, Captain Palliser had reached the point of being able to deduce a number of things from what he, like Pearson, had not said.