CHAPTER XXIV

Upon the terrace, when he was led up the steps, stood a most perfect little elderly lady in a state of agitation much greater than his own or his rescuer's. It was an agitation as perfect in its femininity as she herself was. It expressed its kind tremors in the fashion which belonged to the puce silk dress and fine bits of collar and undersleeve the belated gracefulness of which caused her to present herself to him rather as a figure cut neatly from a book of the styles he had admired in his young manhood. It was of course Miss Alicia, who having, with Tembarom, seen the galloping pony from a window, had followed him when he darted from the room. She came forward, looking pale with charming solicitude.

"I do so hope you are not hurt," she exclaimed. "It really seemed that only divine Providence could prevent a terrible accident."

"I am afraid that it was more grotesque than terrible," he answered a shade breathlessly.

"Let me make you acquainted with the Duke of Stone, Miss Alicia," Tembarom said in the formula of Mrs. Bowse's boarders on state occasions of introduction. "Duke, let me make you acquainted, sir, with my--relation--Miss Alicia Temple Barholm."

The duke's bow had a remote suggestion of almost including a kissed hand in its gallant courtesy. Not, however, that Early Victorian ladies had been accustomed to the kissing of hands; but at the period when he had best known the type he had daily bent over white fingers in Continental capitals.

"A glass of wine," Miss Alicia implored. "Pray let me give you a glass of wine. I am sure you need it very much."

He was taken into the library and made to sit in a most comfortable easy-chair. Miss Alicia fluttered about him with sympathy still delicately tinged with alarm. How long, how long, it had been since he had been fluttered over! Nearly forty years. Ladies did not flutter now, and he remembered that it was no longer the fashion to call them "ladies." Only the lower-middle classes spoke of "ladies." But he found himself mentally using the word again as he watched Miss Alicia.

It had been "ladies" who had fluttered and been anxious about a man in this quite pretty way.

He could scarcely remove his eyes from her as he sipped his wine. She felt his escape "providential," and murmured such devout little phrases concerning it that he was almost consoled for the grotesque inward vision of himself as an aged peer of the realm tumbling out of a baby-carriage and rolled over on the grass at the feet of a man on whom later he had meant to make, in proper state, a formal call. She

put her hand to her side, smiling half apologetically.

"My heart beats quite fast yet," she said. Whereupon a quaintly novel thing took place, at the sight of which the duke barely escaped opening his eyes very wide indeed. The American Temple Barholm put his arm about her in the most casual and informally accustomed way, and led her to a chair, and put her in it, so to speak.

"Say," he announced with affectionate authority, "you sit down right away. It's you that needs a glass of wine, and I'm going to give it to you."

The relations between the two were evidently on a basis not common in England even among people who were attached to one another. There was a spontaneous, every-day air of natural, protective petting about it, as though the fellow was fond of her in his crude fashion, and meant to take care of her. He was fond of her, and the duke perceived it with elation, and also understood. He might be the ordinary bestower of boons, but the protective curve of his arm included other things. In the blank dullness of his unaccustomed splendors he had somehow encountered this fine, delicately preserved little relic of other days, and had seized on her and made her his own.

"I have not seen anything as delightful as Miss Temple Barholm for many a year," the duke said when Miss Alicia was called from the room and left them together.

"Ain't she great?" was Tembarom's reply. "She's just great."

"It's an exquisite survival of type," said the duke. "She belongs to my time, not yours," he added, realizing that "survival of type" might not clearly convey itself.

"Well, she belongs to mine now," answered Tembarom. "I wouldn't lose her for a farm."

"The voice, the phrases, the carriage might survive,- they do in remote neighborhoods, I suppose--but the dress is quite delightfully incredible. It is a work of art," the duke went on. She had seemed too good to be true. Her clothes, however, had certainly not been dug out of a wardrobe of forty years ago.

"When I went to talk to the head woman in the shop in Bond Street I fixed it with 'em hard and fast that she was not to spoil her. They were to keep her like she was. She's like her little cap, you know, and her little mantles and tippets. She's like them," exclaimed Tembarom.

Did he see that? What an odd feature in a man of his sort! And how thoroughly New Yorkish it was that he should march into a fashionable shop and see that he got what he wanted and the worth of his money! There had been no rashness in the hope that the unexplored treasure

might be a rich one. The man's simplicity was an actual complexity. He had a boyish eye and a grin, but there was a business-like line about his mouth which was strong enough to have been hard if it had not been good-natured.

"That was confoundedly clever of you," his grace commented heartily--"confoundedly. I should never have had the wit to think of it myself, or the courage to do it if I had. Shop-women make me shy."

"Oh, well, I just put it up to them," Tembarom answered easily.

"I believe," cautiously translated the duke, "that you mean that you made them feel that they alone were responsible."

"Yes, I do," assented Tembarom, the grin slightly in evidence. "Put it up to them's the short way of saying it."

"Would you mind my writing that down?" said the duke. "I have a fad for dialects and new phrases." He hastily scribbled the words in a tablet that he took from his pocket. "Do you like living in England?" he asked in course of time.

"I should like it if I'd been born here," was the answer.

"I see, I see."

"If it had not been for finding Miss Alicia, and that I made a promise I'd stay for a year, anyhow, I'd have broken loose at the end of the first week and worked my passage back if I hadn't had enough in my clothes to pay for it." He laughed, but it was not real laughter. There was a thing behind it. The situation was more edifying than one could have hoped. "I made a promise, and I'm going to stick it out," he said.

He was going to stick it out because he had promised to endure for a year Temple Barholm and an income of seventy thousand pounds! The duke gazed at him as at a fond dream realized.

"I've nothing to do," Tembarom added.

"Neither have I," replied the Duke of Stone.

"But you're used to it, and I'm not. I'm used to working 'steen hours a day, and dropping into bed as tired as a dog, but ready to sleep like one and get up rested."

"I used to play twenty hours a day once," answered the duke, "but I didn't get up rested. That's probably why I have gout and rheumatism combined. Tell me how you worked, and I will tell you how I played."

It was worth while taking this tone with him. It had been worth while taking it with the chestnut-gathering peasants in the Apennines,

sometimes even with a stone-breaker by an English roadside. And this one was of a type more unique and distinctive than any other--a fellow who, with the blood of Saxon kings and Norman nobles in his veins, had known nothing but the street life of the crudest city in the world, who spoke a sort of argot, who knew no parallels of the things which surrounded him in the ancient home he had inherited and in which he stood apart, a sort of semi-sophisticated savage. The duke applied himself with grace and finished ability to drawing him out. The questions he asked were all seemingly those of a man of the world charmingly interested in the superior knowledge of a foreigner of varied experience. His method was one which engaged the interest of Tembarom himself. He did not know that he was not only questioned, but, so to speak, delicately cross-examined and that before the end of the interview the Duke of Stone knew more of him, his past existence and present sentiments, than even Miss Alicia knew after their long and intimate evening talks. The duke, however, had the advantage of being a man and of cherishing vivid recollections of the days of his youth, which, unlike as it had been to that of Tembarom, furnished a degree of solid foundation upon which go to build conjecture.

"A young man of his age," his grace reflected astutely, "has always just fallen out of love, is falling into it, or desires vaguely to do so. Ten years later there would perhaps be blank spaces, lean years during which he was not in love at all; but at his particular period there must be a young woman somewhere. I wonder if she is employed in one of the department stores he spoke of, and how soon he hopes to

present her to us. His conversation has revealed so far, to use his own rich simile, 'neither hide nor hair' of her."

On his own part, he was as ready to answer questions as to ask them. In fact, he led Tembarom on to asking.

"I will tell you how I played" had been meant. He made a human document of the history he enlarged, he brilliantly diverged, he included, he made pictures, and found Tembarom's point of view or lack of it gave spice and humor to relations he had thought himself tired of. To tell familiar anecdotes of courts and kings to a man who had never quite believed that such things were realities, who almost found them humorous when they were casually spoken of, was edification indeed. The novel charm lay in the fact that his class in his country did not include them as possibilities. Peasants in other countries, plowmen, shopkeepers, laborers in England--all these at least they knew of, and counted them in as factors in the lives of the rich and great; but this dear young man--!

"What's a crown like? I'd like to see one. How much do you guess such a thing would cost--in dollars?"

"Did not Miss Temple Barholm take you to see the regalia in the Tower of London? I am quite shocked," said the duke. He was, in fact, a trifle disappointed. With the puce dress and undersleeves and little fringes she ought certainly to have rushed with her pupil to that seat

of historical instruction on their first morning in London, immediately after breakfasting on toast and bacon and marmalade and eggs.

"She meant me to go, but somehow it was put off. She almost cried on our journey home when she suddenly remembered that we'd forgotten it, after all."

"I am sure she said it was a wasted opportunity," suggested his grace.

"Yes, that was what hit her so hard. She'd never been to London before, and you couldn't make her believe she could ever get there again, and she said it was ungrateful to Providence to waste an opportunity. She's always mighty anxious to be grateful to Providence, bless her!"

"She regards you as Providence," remarked the duke, enraptured. With a touch here and there, the touch of a master, he had gathered the whole little story of Miss Alicia, and had found it of a whimsical exquisiteness and humor.

"She's a lot too good to me," answered Tembarom. "I guess women as nice as her are always a lot too good to men. She's a kind of little old angel. What makes me mad is to think of the fellows that didn't get busy and marry her thirty-five years ago."

"Were there--er--many of 'em?" the duke inquired.

"Thousands of 'em, though most of 'em never saw her. I suppose you never saw her then. If you had, you might have done it."

The duke, sitting with an elbow on each arm of his chair, put the tips of his fine, gouty fingers together and smiled with a far-reaching inclusion of possibilities.

"So I might," he said; "so I might. My loss entirely-- my abominable loss."

They had reached this point of the argument when the carriage from Stone Hover arrived. It was a stately barouche the coachman and footman of which equally with its big horses seemed to have hastened to an extent which suggested almost panting breathlessness. It contained Lady Edith and Lady Celia, both pale, and greatly agitated by the news which had brought them horrified from Stone Hover without a moment's delay.

They both ascended in haste and swept in such alarmed anxiety up the terrace steps and through the hall to their father's side that they had barely a polite gasp for Miss Alicia and scarcely saw Tembarom at all.

"Dear Papa!" they cried when he revealed himself in his chair in the

library intact and smiling. "How wicked of you, dear! How you have frightened us!"

"I begged you to be good, dearest," said Lady Edith, almost in tears. "Where was George? You must dismiss him at once. Really--really--"

"He was half a mile away, obeying my orders, "said the duke. "A groom cannot be dismissed for obeying orders. It is the pony who must be dismissed, to my great regret; or else we must overfeed him until he is even fatter than he is and cannot run away."

Were his arms and legs and his ribs and collar-bones and head quite right? Was he sure that he had not received any internal injury when he fell out of the pony-carriage? They could scarcely be convinced, and as they hung over and stroked and patted him, Tembarom stood aside and watched them with interest. They were the girls he had to please Ann by "getting next to," giving himself a chance to fall in love with them, so that she'd know whether they were his kind or not. They were nice-looking, and had a way of speaking that sounded rather swell, but they weren't ace high to a little slim, redheaded thing that looked at you like a baby and pulled your heart up into your throat.

"Don't poke me any more, dear children. I am quite, quite sound," he heard the duke say. "In Mr. Temple Barholm you behold the preserver of your parent. Filial piety is making you behave with shocking ingratitude."

They turned to Tembarom at once with a pretty outburst of apologies and thanks. Lady Celia wasn't, it is true, "a looker," with her narrow shoulders and rather long nose, but she had an air of breeding, and the charming color of which Palliser had spoken, returning to Lady Edith's cheeks, illuminated her greatly.

They both were very polite and made many agreeably grateful speeches, but in the eyes of both there lurked a shade of anxiety which they hoped to be able to conceal. Their father watched them with a wicked pleasure. He realized clearly their well-behaved desire to do and say exactly the right thing and bear themselves in exactly the right manner, and also their awful uncertainty before an entirely unknown quantity. Almost any other kind of young man suddenly uplifted by strange fortune they might have known some parallel for, but a newsboy of New York! All the New Yorkers they had met or heard of had been so rich and grand as to make them feel themselves, by contrast, mere country paupers, quite shivering with poverty and huddling for protection in their barely clean rags, so what was there to go on? But how dreadful not to be quite right, precisely right, in one's approach--quite familiar enough, and yet not a shade too familiar, which of course would appear condescending! And be it said the delicacy of the situation was added to by the fact that they had heard something of Captain Palliser's extraordinary little story about his determination to know "ladies." Really, if Willocks the butcher's boy had inherited Temple Barholm, it would have been easier to know where

one stood in the matter of being civil and agreeable to him. First Lady Edith, made perhaps bold by the suggestion of physical advantage bestowed by the color, talked to him to the very best of her ability; and when she felt herself fearfully flagging, Lady Celia took him up and did her very well-conducted best. Neither she nor her sister were brilliant talkers at any time, and limited by the absence of any common familiar topic, effort was necessary. The neighborhood he did not know; London he was barely aware of; social functions it would be an impertinence to bring in; games he did not play; sport he had scarcely heard of. You were confined to America, and if you knew next to nothing of American life, there you were.

Tembarom saw it all,--he was sharp enough for that,--and his habit of being jocular and wholly unashamed saved him from the misery of awkwardness that Willocks would have been sure to have writhed under. His casual frankness, however, for a moment embarrassed Lady Edith to the bitterest extremity. When you are trying your utmost to make a queer person oblivious to the fact that his world is one unknown to you, it is difficult to know where do you stand when he says

"It's mighty hard to talk to a man who doesn't know a thing that belongs to the kind of world you've spent your life in, ain't it? But don't you mind me a minute. I'm glad to be talked to anyhow by people like you. When I don't catch on, I'll just ask. No man was ever electrocuted for not knowing, and that's just where I am. I don't know, and I'm glad to be told. Now, there's one thing. Burrill said

'Your Ladyship' to you, I heard him. Ought I to say it, er oughtn't I?"

"Oh, no," she answered, but somehow without distaste in the momentary stare he had startled her into; "Burrill is--"

"He's a servant," he aided encouragingly. "Well, I've never been a butler, but I've been somebody's servant all my life, and mighty glad of the chance. This is the first time I've been out of a job."

What nice teeth he had! What a queer, candid, unresentful creature! What a good sort of smile! And how odd that it was he who was putting her more at her ease by the mere way in which he was saying this almost alarming thing! By the time he had ended, it was not alarming at all, and she had caught her breath again.

She was actually sorry when the door opened and Lady Joan Fayre came in, followed almost immediately by Lady Mallowe and Captain Palliser, who appeared to have just returned from a walk and heard the news.

Lady Mallowe was most sympathetic. Why not, indeed? The Duke of Stone was a delightful, cynical creature, and Stone Hover was, despite its ducal poverty, a desirable place to be invited to, if you could manage it. Her ladyship's method of fluttering was not like Miss Alicia's, its character being wholly modern; but she fluttered, nevertheless. The duke, who knew all about her, received her amiabilities with appreciative smiles, but it was the splendidly handsome, hungry-eyed

young woman with the line between her black brows who engaged his attention. On the alert, as he always was, for a situation, he detected one at once when he saw his American address her. She did not address him, and scarcely deigned a reply when he spoke to her. When he spoke to others, she conducted herself as though he were not in the room, so obviously did she choose to ignore his existence. Such a bearing toward one's host had indeed the charm of being an interesting novelty. And what a beauty she was, with her lovely, ferocious eyes and the small, black head poised on the exquisite long throat, which was on the verge of becoming a trifle too thin! Then as in a flash he recalled between one breath and another the quite fiendish episode of poor Jem Temple Barholm--and she was the girl!

Then he became almost excited in his interest. He saw it all. As he had himself argued must be the case, this poor fellow was in love. But it was not with a lady in the New York department stores; it was with a young woman who would evidently disdain to wipe her feet upon him. How thrilling! As Lady Mallowe and Palliser and the others chattered, he watched him, observing his manner. He stood the handsome creature's steadily persistent rudeness very well; he made no effort to push into the talk when she coolly held him out of it. He waited without external uneasiness or spasmodic smiles. If he could do that despite the inevitable fact that he must feel his position uncomfortable, he was possessed of fiber. That alone would make him worth cultivating. And if there were persons who were to be made uncomfortable, why not cut in and circumvent the beauty somewhat and give her a trifle of

unease? It was with the light and adroit touch of accustomedness to all orders of little situations that his grace took the matter in hand, with a shade, also, of amiable malice. He drew Tembarom adroitly into the center of things; he knew how to lead him to make easily the odd, frank remarks which were sufficiently novel to suggest that he was actually entertaining. He beautifully edged Lady Joan out of her position. She could not behave ill to him, he was far too old, he said to himself, leaving out the fact that a Duke of Stone is a too respectable personage to be quite waved aside.

Tembarom began to enjoy himself a little more. Lady Celia and Lady Edith began to enjoy themselves a little more also. Lady Mallowe was filled with admiring delight. Captain Palliser took in the situation, and asked himself questions about it. On her part, Miss Alicia was restored to the happiness any lack of appreciation of her "dear boy" touchingly disturbed. In circumstances such as these he appeared to the advantage which in a brief period would surely reveal his wonderful qualities. She clung so to his "wonderful qualities" because in all the three-volumed novels of her youth the hero, debarred from early advantages and raised by the turn of fortune's wheel to splendor, was transformed at once into a being of the highest accomplishments and the most polished breeding, and ended in the third volume a creature before whom emperors paled. And how more than charmingly cordial his grace's manner was when he left them!

"To-morrow," he said, "if my daughters do not discover that I have

injured some more than vital organ, I shall call to proffer my thanks with the most immense formality. I shall get out of the carriage in the manner customary in respectable neighborhoods, not roll out at your feet. Afterward you will, I hope, come and dine with us. I am devoured by a desire to become more familiar with The Earth."