

CHAPTER XXVII

"Mr. Temple Barholm seems in better spirits," Lady Mallowe said to Captain Palliser as they walked on the terrace in the starlight dusk after dinner.

Captain Palliser took his cigar from his mouth and looked at the glowing end of it.

"Has it struck you that he has been in low spirits?" he inquired speculatively. "One does not usually connect him with depression."

"Certainly not with depression. He's an extraordinary creature. One would think he would perish from lack of the air he is used to breathing--New York air."

"He is not perishing. He's too shrewd," returned Palliser. "He mayn't exactly like all this, but he's getting something out of it."

"He is not getting much of what he evidently wants most. I am out of all patience," said Lady Mallowe.

Her acquaintance with Palliser had lasted through a number of years. They argued most matters from the same basis of reasoning. They were at times almost candid with each other. It may be acknowledged,

however, that of the two Lady Mallowe was the more inclined to verge on self-revelation. This was of course because she was the less clever and had more temper. Her temper, she had, now and then, owned bitterly to herself, had played her tricks. Captain Palliser's temper never did this. It was Lady Mallowe's temper which spoke now, but she did not in the least mind his knowing that Joan was exasperating her beyond endurance. He knew the whole situation well enough to be aware of it without speech on her part. He had watched similar situations several times before.

"Her manner toward him is, to resort to New York colloquialisms, `the limit,'" Palliser said quietly. "Is it your idea that his less good spirits have been due to Lady Joan's ingenuities? They are ingenious, you know."

"They are devilish," exclaimed her mother. "She treads him in the mire and sails about professing to be conducting herself flawlessly. She is too clever for me," she added with bitterness.

Palliser laughed softly.

"But very often you have been too clever for her," he suggested. "For my part, I don't quite see how you got her here."

Lady Mallowe became not almost, but entirely, candid.

"Upon the whole, I don't quite know myself. I believe she really came for some mysterious reason of her own."

"That is rather my impression," said Palliser. "She has got something up her sleeve, and so has he."

"He!" Lady Mallowe quite ejaculated the word. "She always has. That's her abominable secretive way. But he! T. Tembarom with something up his sleeve! One can't imagine it."

"Almost everybody has. I found that out long years ago," said Palliser, looking at his cigar end again as if consulting it. "Since I arrived at the conclusion, I always take it for granted, and look out for it. I've become rather clever in following such things up, and I have taken an unusual interest in T. Tembarom from the first."

Lady Mallowe turned her handsome face, much softened by an enwreathing gauze scarf, toward him anxiously.

"Do you think his depression, or whatever it is, means Joan?" she asked.

"If he is depressed by her, you need not be discouraged," smiled Palliser. "The time to lose hope would be when, despite her ingenuities, he became entirely cheerful. But," he added after a moment of pause, "I have an idea there is some other little thing."

"Do you suppose that some young woman he has left behind in New York is demanding her rights?" said Lady Mallowe, with annoyance. "That is exactly the kind of thing Joan would like to hear, and so entirely natural. Some shop-girl or other."

"Quite natural, as you say; but he would scarcely be running up to London and consulting Scotland Yard about her," Palliser answered.

"Scotland Yard!" ejaculated his companion. "How in the world did you find that out?"

Captain Palliser did not explain how he had done it. Presumably his knowledge was due to the adroitness of the system of "following such things up."

"Scotland Yard has also come to him," he went on. "Did you chance to see a red-faced person who spent a morning with him last week?"

"He looked like a butcher, and I thought he might be one of his friends," Lady Mallowe said.

"I recognized the man. He is an extremely clever detective, much respected for his resources in the matter of following clues which are so attenuated as to be scarcely clues at all."

"Clues have no connection with Joan," said Lady Mallowe, still more annoyed. "All London knows her miserable story."

"Have you--" Captain Palliser's tone was thoughtful, "--has any one ever seen Mr. Strangeways?"

"No. Can you imagine anything more absurdly romantic? A creature without a memory, shut up in a remote wing of a palace like this, as if he were the Man with the Iron Mask. Romance is not quite compatible with T. Tembarom."

"It is so incongruous that it has entertained me to think it over a good deal," remarked Palliser. "He leaves everything to one's imagination. All one knows is that he isn't a relative; that he isn't mad, but only too nervous to see or be seen. Queer situation. I've found there is always a reason for things; the queerer they are, the more sure it is that there's a reason. What is the reason Strangeways is kept here, and where would a detective come in? Just on general principles I'm rather going into the situation. There's a reason, and it would be amusing to find it out. Don't you think so?"

He spoke casually, and Lady Mallowe's answer was casual, though she knew from experience that he was not as casual as he chose to seem. He was clever enough always to have certain reasons of his own which formulated themselves into interests large and small. He knew things about people which were useful. Sometimes quite small things were

useful. He was always well behaved, and no one had ever accused him of bringing pressure to bear; but it was often possible for him to sell things or buy things or bring about things in circumstances which would have presented difficulties to other people. Lady Mallowe knew from long experience all about the exigencies of cases when "needs must," and she was not critical. Temple Barholm as the estate of a distant relative and T. Tembarom as its owner were not assets to deal with indifferently. When a man made a respectable living out of people who could be persuaded to let you make investments for them, it was not an unbusinesslike idea to be in the position to advise an individual strongly.

"It's quite natural that you should feel an interest," she answered.

"But the romantic stranger is too romantic, though I will own Scotland Yard is a little odd."

"Yes, that is exactly what I thought," said Palliser.

He had in fact thought a good deal and followed the thing up in a quiet, amateur way, though with annoyingly little result. Occasionally he had felt rather a fool for his pains, because he had been led to so few facts of importance and had found himself so often confronted by T. Tembarom's entirely frank grin. His own mental attitude was not a complex one. Lady Mallowe's summing up had been correct enough on the whole. Temple Barholm ought to be a substantial asset, regarded in its connection with its present owner. Little dealings in stocks--

sometimes rather large ones when luck was with him-- had brought desirable returns to Captain Palliser throughout a number of years. Just now he was taking an interest in a somewhat imposing scheme, or what might prove an imposing one if it were managed properly and presented to the right persons. If T. Tembarom had been sufficiently lured by the spirit of speculation to plunge into old Hutchinson's affair, as he evidently had done, he was plainly of the temperament attracted by the game of chance. There had been no reason but that of temperament which could have led him to invest. He had found himself suddenly a moneyed man and had liked the game. Never having so much as heard of Little Ann Hutchinson, Captain Palliser not unnaturally argued after this wise. There seemed no valid reason why, if a vague invention had allured, a less vague scheme, managed in a more businesslike manner, should not. This Mexican silver and copper mine was a dazzling thing to talk about. He could go into details. He had, in fact, allowed a good deal of detail to trail through his conversation at times. It had not been difficult to accomplish this in his talks with Lady Mallowe in his host's presence. Lady Mallowe was always ready to talk of mines, gold, silver, or copper. It happened at times that one could manage to secure a few shares without the actual payment of money. There were little hospitalities or social amiabilities now and then which might be regarded as value received. So she had made it easy for Captain Palliser to talk, and T. Tembarom had heard much which would have been of interest to the kind of young man he appeared to be. Sometimes he had listened absorbedly, and on a few occasions he had asked a few questions which laid him curiously

bare in his role of speculator. If he had no practical knowledge of the ways and means of great mining companies, he at least professed none. At all events, if there was any little matter he preferred to keep to himself, there was no harm in making oneself familiar with its aspect and significance. A man's arguments, so far as he himself is concerned, assume the character with which his own choice of adjectives and adverbs labels them. That is, if he labels them. The most astute do not. Captain Palliser did not. He dealt merely with reasoning processes which were applicable to the subject in hand, whatsoever its nature. He was a practical man of the world--a gentleman, of course. It was necessary to adjust matters without romantic hair-splitting. It was all by the way.

T. Tembarom had at the outset seemed to present, so to speak, no surface. Palliser had soon ceased to be at all sure that his social ambitions were to be relied on as a lever. Besides which, when the old Duke of Stone took delighted possession of him, dined with him, drove with him, sat and gossiped with him by the hour, there was not much one could offer him. Strangeways had at first meant only eccentricity. A little later he had occasionally faintly stirred curiosity, and perhaps the fact that Burrill enjoyed him as a grievance and a mystery had stimulated the stirring. The veriest chance had led him to find himself regarding the opening up of possible vistas.

From a certain window in a certain wing of the house a much-praised view was to be seen. Nothing was more natural than that on the

occasion of a curious sunset Palliser should, in coming from his room, decide to take a look at it. As he passed through a corridor Pearson came out of a room near him.

"How is Mr. Strangeways to-day?" Palliser asked.

"Not quite so well, I am afraid, sir," was the answer.

"Sorry to hear it," replied Palliser, and passed on.

On his return he walked somewhat slowly down the corridor. As he turned into it he thought he heard the murmur of voices. One was that of T. Tembarom, and he was evidently using argument. It sounded as if he were persuading some one to agree with him, and the persuasion was earnest. He was not arguing with Pearson or a housemaid. Why was he arguing with his pensioner? His voice was as low as it was eager, and the other man's replies were not to be heard. Only just after Palliser had passed the door there broke out an appeal which was a sort of cry.

"No! My God, no! Don't send me away? Don't send me away!"

One could not, even if so inclined, stand and listen near a door while servants might chance to be wandering about. Palliser went on his way with a sense of having been slightly startled.

"He wants to get rid of him, and the fellow is giving him trouble," he

said to himself. "That voice is not American. Not in the least." It set him thinking and observing. When Tembarom wore the look which was not a look of depression, but of something more puzzling, he thought that he could guess at its reason. By the time he talked with Lady Mallowe he had gone much further than he chose to let her know.