"I know something of Lady Joan and I know something of you," he said, "but I don't exactly foresee what will happen. I will not say that I should not like to be present."

"There'll be nobody present but just me and her," Tembarom answered.

CHAPTER XXX

The visits of Lady Mallowe and Captain Palliser had had their features. Neither of the pair had come to one of the most imposing "places" in Lancashire to live a life of hermit-like seclusion and dullness. They had arrived with the intention of availing themselves of all such opportunities for entertainment as could be guided in their direction by the deftness of experience. As a result, there had been hospitalities at Temple Barholm such as it had not beheld during the last generation at least. T. Tembarom had looked on, an interested spectator, as these festivities had been adroitly arranged and managed for him. He had not, however, in the least resented acting as a sort of figurehead in the position of sponsor and host.

"They think I don't know I'm not doing it all myself," was his easy mental summing-up. "They've got the idea that I'm pleased because I believe I'm It. But that's all to the merry. It's what I've set my mind on having going on here, and I couldn't have started it as well

myself. I shouldn't have known how. They're teaching me. All I hope is that Ann's grandmother is keeping tab."

"Do you and Rose know old Mrs. Hutchinson?" he had inquired of Pearson the night before the talk with the duke.

"Well, not to say exactly know her, sir, but everybody knows of her. She is a most remarkable old person, sir." Then, after watching his face for a moment or so, he added tentatively, "Would you perhaps wish us to make her acquaintance for-- for any reason?"

Tembarom thought the matter over speculatively. He had learned that his first liking for Pearson had been founded upon a rock. He was always to be trusted to understand, and also to apply a quite unusual intelligence to such matters as he became aware of without having been told about them.

"What I'd like would be for her to hear that there's plenty doing at Temple Barholm; that people are coming and going all the time; and that there's ladies to burn--and most of them lookers, at that," was his answer.

How Pearson had discovered the exotic subtleties of his master's situation and mental attitude toward it, only those of his class and gifted with his occult powers could explain in detail. The fact exists that Pearson did know an immense number of things his employer had not

mentioned to him, and held them locked in his bosom in honored security, like a little gentleman. He made his reply with a polite conviction which carried weight.

"It would not be necessary for either Rose or me to make old Mrs. Hutchinson's acquaintance with a view to informing her of anything which occurs on the estate or in the village, sir," he remarked. "Mrs. Hutchinson knows more of things than any one ever tells her. She sits in her cottage there, and she just knows things and sees through people in a way that'd be almost unearthly, if she wasn't a good old person, and so respectable that there's those that touches their hats to her as if she belonged to the gentry. She's got a blue eye, sir--"

"Has she?" exclaimed Tembarom.

"Yes, sir. As blue as a baby's, sir, and as clear, though she's past eighty. And they tell me there's a quiet, steady look in it that ill-doers downright quail before. It's as if she was a kind of judge that sentenced them without speaking. They can't stand it. Oh, sir! you can depend upon old Mrs. Hutchinson as to who's been here, and even what they've thought about it. The village just flocks to her to tell her the news and get advice about things. She'd know."

It was as a result of this that on his return from Stone Hover he dismissed the carriage at the gates and walked through them to make a visit in the village. Old Mrs. Hutchinson, sitting knitting in her

chair behind the abnormally flourishing fuchsias, geraniums, and campanula carpaticas in her cottage-window, looked between the banked-up flower-pots to see that Mr. Temple Barholm had opened her wicket-gate and was walking up the clean bricked path to her front door. When he knocked she called out in the broad Lancashire she had always spoken, "Coom in!" When he entered he took off his hat and looked at her, friendly but hesitant, and with the expression of a young man who has not quite made up his mind as to what he is about to encounter.

"I'm Temple Temple Barholm, Mrs. Hutchinson," he announced.

"I know that," she answered. "Not that tha looks loike th' Temple Barholms, but I've been watchin' thee walk an' drive past here ever since tha coom to th' place."

She watched him steadily with an astonishingly limpid pair of old eyes. They were old and young at the same time; old because they held deeps of wisdom, young because they were so alive and full of question.

"I don't know whether I ought to have come to see you or not," he said.

"Well, tha'st coom," she replied, going on with her knitting. "Sit thee doun and have a bit of a chat."

"Say!" he broke out. "Ain't you going to shake hands with me?" He held his hand out impetuously. He knew he was all right if she'd shake hands.

"Theer's nowt agen that surely," she answered, with a shrewd bit of a smile. She gave him her hand. "If I was na stiff in my legs, it's my place to get up an' mak' thee a curtsey, but th' rheumatics has no respect even for th' lord o' th' manor."

"If you got up and made me a curtsey," Tembarom said, "I should throw a fit. Say, Mrs. Hutchinson, I bet you know that as well as I do."

The shrewd bit of a smile lighted her eyes as well as twinkled about her mouth.

"Sit thee doun," she said again.

So he sat down and looked at her as straight as she looked at him.

"Tha 'd give a good bit," she said presently, over her flashing needles, "to know how much Little Ann's tow'd me about thee."

"I'd give a lot to know how much it'd be square to ask you to tell me about her," he gave back to her, hesitating yet eager.

"What does tha mean by square?" she demanded.

"I mean `fair.' Can I talk to you about her at all? I promised I'd stick it out here and do as she said. She told me she wasn't going to write to me or let her father write. I've promised, and I'm not going to fall down when I've said a thing."

"So tha coom to see her grandmother?"

He reddened, but held his head up.

"I'm not going to ask her grandmother a thing she doesn't want me to be told. But I've been up against it pretty hard lately. I read some things in the New York papers about her father and his invention, and about her traveling round with him and helping him with his business."

"In Germany they wur," she put in, forgetting herself. "They're havin' big doin's over th' invention. What Joe 'u'd do wi'out th' lass I canna tell. She's doin' every bit o' th' managin' an' contrivin' wi' them furriners--but he'll never know it. She's got a chap to travel wi' him as can talk aw th' languages under th' sun."

Her face flushed and she stopped herself sharply.

"I'm talkin' about her to thee!" she said. "I would na ha' believed o' mysen'."

He got up from his chair.

"I guess I oughtn't to have come," he said, restlessly. "But you haven't told me more than I got here and there in the papers. That was what started me. It was like watching her. I could hear her talking and see the way she was doing things till it drove me half crazy. All of a sudden, I just got wild and made up my mind I'd come here. I've wanted to do it many a time, but I've kept away."

"Tha showed sense i' doin' that," remarked Mrs. Hutchinson. "She'd not ha' thowt well o' thee if tha'd coom runnin' to her grandmother every day or so. What she likes about thee is as she thinks tha's got a strong backbone o' thy own."

She looked up at him over her knitting, looked straight into his eyes, and there was that in her own which made him redden and feel his pulse quicken. It was actually something which even remotely suggested that she was not--in the deeps of her strong old mind--as wholly unswerving as her words might imply. It was something more subtle than words. She was not keeping him wholly in the dark when she said "What she likes about thee." If Ann said things like that to her, he was pretty well off.

"Happen a look at a lass's grandmother--when tha conna get at th' lass hersen--is a bit o' comfort," she added. "But don't tha go walkin' by here to look in at th' window too often. She would na think well o'

that either."

"Say! There's one thing I'm going to get off my chest before I go," he announced, "just one thing. She can go where she likes and do what she likes, but I'm going to marry her when she's done it--unless something knocks me on the head and finishes me. I'm going to marry her."

"Tha art, art tha?" laconically; but her eyes were still on his, and the something in their depths by no means diminished.

"I'm keeping up my end here, and it's no slouch of a job, but I'm not forgetting what she promised for one minute! And I'm not forgetting what her promise means," he said obstinately.

"Tha'd like me to tell her that?" she said.

"If she doesn't know it, you telling her wouldn't cut any ice," was his reply. "I'm saying it because I want you to know it, and because it does me good to say it out loud. I'm going to marry her."

"That's for her and thee to settle," she commented, impersonally.

"It is settled," he answered. "There 's no way out of it. Will you shake hands with me again before I go?"

"Aye," she consented, "I will."

When she took his hand she held it a minute. Her own was warm, and there was no limpness about it. The secret which had seemed to conceal itself behind her eyes had some difficulty in keeping itself wholly in the background.

"She knows aw tha' does," she said coolly, as if she were not suddenly revealing immensities. "She knows who cooms an' who goes, an' what they think o' thee, an' how tha gets on wi' 'em. Now get thee gone, lad, an' dunnot tha coom back till her or me sends for thee."

Within an hour of this time the afternoon post brought to Lady Mallowe a letter which she read with an expression in which her daughter recognized relief. It was in fact a letter for which she had waited with anxiety, and the invitation it contained was a tribute to her social skill at its highest watermark. In her less heroic moments, she had felt doubts of receiving it, which had caused shudders to run the entire length of her spine.

"I'm going to Broome Haughton," she announced to Joan.

"When?" Joan inquired.

"At the end of the week. I am invited for a fortnight."

"Am I going?" Joan asked.

"No. You will go to London to meet some friends who are coming over from Paris."

Joan knew that comment was unnecessary. Both she and her mother were on intimate terms with these hypothetical friends who so frequently turned up from Paris or elsewhere when it was necessary that she should suddenly go back to London and live in squalid seclusion in the unopened house, with a charwoman to provide her with underdone or burnt chops, and eggs at eighteen a shilling, while the shutters of the front rooms were closed, and dusty desolation reigned. She knew every detail of the melancholy squalor of it, the dragging hours, the nights of lying awake listening to the occasional passing of belated cabs, or the squeaks and nibbling of mice in the old walls.

"If you had conducted yourself sensibly you need not have gone," continued her mother. "I could have made an excuse and left you here. You would at least have been sure of good food and decent comforts."

"After your visit, are we to return here?" was Lady Joan's sole reply.

"Don't look at me like that," said Lady Mallowe. "I thought the country would freshen your color at least; but you are going off more every day. You look like the Witch of Endor sometimes."

Joan smiled faintly. This was the brandishing of an old weapon, and she understood all its significance. It meant that the time for opportunities was slipping past her like the waters of a rapid river.

"I do not know what will happen when I leave Broome Haughton," her mother added, a note of rasped uncertainty in her voice. "We may be obliged to come here for a short time, or we may go abroad."

"If I refuse to come, would you let me starve to death in Piers Street?" Joan inquired.

Lady Mallowe looked her over, feeling a sort of frenzy at the sight of her. In truth, the future was a hideous thing to contemplate if no rescue at all was in sight. It would be worse for her than for Joan, because Joan did not care what happened or did not happen, and she cared desperately. She had indeed arrived at a maddening moment.

"Yes," she snapped, fiercely.

And when Joan faintly smiled again she understood why women of the lower orders beat one another until policemen interfere. She knew perfectly well that the girl had somehow found out that Sir Moses Monaldini was to be at Broome Haughton, and that when he left there he was going abroad. She knew also that she had not been able to conceal that his indifference had of late given her some ghastly hours, and

that her play for this lagging invitation had been a frantically bold one. That the most ingenious efforts and devices had ended in success only after such delay made it all the more necessary that no straw must remain unseized on.

"I can wear some of your things, with a little alteration," she said. "Rose will do it for me. Hats and gloves and ornaments do not require altering. I shall need things you will not need in London. Where are your keys?"

Lady Joan rose and got them for her. She even flushed slightly. They were often obliged to borrow each other's possessions, but for a moment she felt herself moved by a sort of hard pity.

"We are like rats in a trap," she remarked. "I hope you will get out."

"If I do, you will be left inside. Get out yourself! Get out yourself!" said Lady Mallowe in a fierce whisper.

Her regrets at the necessity of their leaving Temple Barholm were expressed with fluent touchingness at the dinner-table. The visit had been so delightful. Mr. Temple Barholm and Miss Alicia had been so kind. The loveliness of the whole dear place had so embraced them that they felt as if they were leaving a home instead of ending a delightful visit. It was extraordinary what an effect the house had on one. It was as if one had lived in it always--and always would. So few

places gave one the same feeling. They should both look forward--greedy as it seemed--to being allowed some time to come again. She had decided from the first that it was not necessary to go to any extreme of caution or subtlety with her host and Miss Alicia. Her method of paving the way for future visits was perhaps more than a shade too elaborate. She felt, however, that it sufficed. For the most part, Lady Joan sat with lids dropped over her burning eyes. She tried to force herself not to listen. This was the kind of thing which made her sick with humiliation. Howsoever rudimentary these people were, they could not fail to comprehend that a foothold in the house was being bid for. They should at least see that she did not join in the bidding. Her own visit had been filled with feelings at war with one another. There had been hours too many in which she would have been glad--even with the dingy horrors of the closed town house before her--to have flown from the hundred things which called out to her on every side. In the long-past three months of happiness, Jem had described them all to her--the rooms, gardens, pleached walks, pictures, the very furniture itself. She could enter no room, walk in no spot she did not seem to know, and passionately love in spite of herself. She loved them so much that there were times when she yearned to stay in the place at any cost, and others when she could not endure the misery it woke in her-- the pure misery. Now it was over for the time being, and she was facing something new. There were endless varieties of wretchedness. She had been watching her mother for some months, and had understood her varying moods of temporary elation or prolonged anxiety. Each one had meant some phase of the episode of Sir

Moses Monaldini. The people who lived at Broome Haughton were enormously rich Hebrews, who were related to him. They had taken the beautiful old country-seat and were filling it with huge parties of their friends. The party which Lady Mallowe was to join would no doubt offer opportunities of the most desirable kind. Among this special class of people she was a great success. Her amazingly achieved toilettes, her ripe good looks, her air of belonging to the great world, impressed themselves immensely.

T. Tembarom thought he never had seen Lady Joan look as handsome as she looked to-night. The color on her cheek burned, her eyes had a driven loneliness in them. She had a wonderfully beautiful mouth, and its curve drooped in a new way. He wished Ann could get her in a corner and sit down and talk sense to her. He remembered what he had said to the duke. Perhaps this was the time. If she was going away, and her mother meant to drag her back again when she was ready, it would make it easier for her to leave the place knowing she need not hate to come back. But the duke wasn't making any miss hit when he said it wouldn't be easy. She was not like Ann, who would feel some pity for the biggest fool on earth if she had to throw him down hard. Lady Joan would feel neither compunctions nor relentings. He knew the way she could look at a fellow. If he couldn't make her understand what he was aiming at, they would both be worse off than they would be if he left things as they were. But--the hard line showed itself about his mouth--he wasn't going to leave things as they were.

As they passed through the hall after dinner, Lady Mallowe glanced at a side-table on which lay some letters arrived by the late post. An imposing envelope was on the top of the rest. Joan saw her face light as she took it up.

"I think this is from Broome Haughton," she said. "If you will excuse me, I will go into the library and read it. It may require answering at once."

She turned hot and cold, poor woman, and went away, so that she might be free from the disaster of an audience if anything had gone wrong. It would be better to be alone even if things had gone right. The letter was from Sir Moses Monaldini. Grotesque and ignoble as it naturally strikes the uninitiated as seeming, the situation had its touch of hideous pathos. She had fought for her own hand for years; she could not dig, and to beg she was not ashamed; but a time had come when even the most adroit begging began to bore people. They saw through it, and then there resulted strained relations, slight stiffness of manner, even in the most useful and amiable persons, lack of desire to be hospitable, or even condescendingly generous. Cold shoulders were turned, there were ominous threatenings of icy backs presenting themselves. The very tradesmen had found this out, and could not be persuaded that the advertisement furnished by the fact that two beautiful women of fashion ate, drank, and wore the articles which formed the items in their unpaid bills, was sufficient return for the outlay of capital required. Even Mrs. Mellish, when graciously

approached by the "relative of Miss Temple Barholm, whose perfect wardrobe you supplied," had listened to all seductions with a civil eye fixed unmovedly and had referred to the "rules of the establishment." Nearer and nearer the edge of the abyss the years had pushed them, and now if something did not happen--something--something--even the increasingly shabby small house in town would become a thing of the past. And what then? Could any one wonder she said to herself that she could have beaten Joan furiously. It would not matter to any one else if they dropped out of the world into squalid oblivion--oh, she knew that--she knew that with bitter certainty!--but oh, how it would matter to them!--at least to herself. It was all very well for Mudie's to pour forth streams of sentimental novels preaching the horrors of girls marrying for money, but what were you to do--what in heaven's name were you to do? So, feeling terrified enough actually to offer up a prayer, she took the imposingly addressed letter into the library.

The men had come into the drawing-room when she returned. As she entered, Joan did not glance up from the book she was reading, but at the first sound of her voice she knew what had occurred.

"I was obliged to dash off a note to Broome Haughton so that it would be ready for the early post," Lady Mallowe said. She was at her best. Palliser saw that some years had slipped from her shoulders. The moment which relieves or even promises to relieve fears does astonishing things. Tembarom wondered whether she had had good news,

and Miss Alicia thought that her evening dress was more becoming than any she had ever seen her wear before. Her brilliant air of social ease returned to her, and she began to talk fluently of what was being done in London, and to touch lightly upon the possibility of taking part in great functions. For some time she had rather evaded talk of the future. Palliser had known that the future had seemed to be closing in upon her, and leaving her staring at a high blank wall. Persons whose fortunate names had ceased to fall easily from her lips appeared again upon the horizon. Miss Alicia was impressed anew with the feeling that she had known every brilliant or important personage in the big world of social London; that she had taken part in every dazzling event. Tembarom somehow realized that she had been afraid of something or other, and was for some reason not afraid any more. Such a change, whatsoever the reason for it, ought to have had some effect on her daughter. Surely she would share her luck, if luck had come to her.

But Lady Joan sat apart and kept her eyes upon her book. This was one of the things she often chose to do, in spite of her mother's indignant protest.

"I came here because you brought me," she would answer. "I did not come to be entertaining or polite."

She was reading this evening. She heard every word of Lady Mallowe's agreeable and slightly excited conversation. She did not know exactly

what had happened; but she knew that it was something which had buoyed her up with a hopefulness which exhilarated her almost too much--as an extra glass of wine might have done. Once or twice she even lost her head a little and was a trifle swaggering. T. Tembarom would not recognize the slip, but Joan saw Palliser's faint smile without looking up from her book. He observed shades in taste and bearing. Before her own future Joan saw the blank wall of stone building itself higher and higher. If Sir Moses had capitulated, she would be counted out. With what degree of boldness could a mother cast her penniless daughter on the world? What unendurable provision make for her? Dare they offer a pound a week and send her to live in the slums until she chose to marry some Hebrew friend of her step-father's? That she knew would be the final alternative. A cruel little smile touched her lips, as she reviewed the number of things she could not do to earn her living. She could not take in sewing or washing, and there was nothing she could teach. Starvation or marriage. The wall built itself higher and yet higher. What a hideous thing it was for a penniless girl to be brought up merely to be a beauty, and in consequence supposably a great lady. And yet if she was born to a certain rank and had height and figure, a lovely mouth, a delicate nose, unusual eyes and lashes, to train her to be a dressmaker or a housemaid would be a stupid investment of capital. If nothing tragic interfered and the right man wanted such a girl, she had been trained to please him. But tragic things had happened, and before her grew the wall while she pretended to read her book.

T. Tembarom was coming toward her. She had heard Palliser suggest a game of billiards.

"Will you come and play billiards with us?" Tembarom asked. "Palliser says you play splendidly."

"She plays brilliantly," put in Lady Mallowe. "Come, Joan."

"No, thank you," she answered. "Let me stay here and read."

Lady Mallowe protested. She tried an air of playful maternal reproach because she was in good spirits. Joan saw Palliser smiling quietly, and there was that in his smile which suggested to her that he was thinking her an obstinate fool.

"You had better show Temple Barholm what you can do," he remarked. "This will be your last chance, as you leave so soon. You ought never let a last chance slip by. I never do."

Tembarom stood still and looked down at her from his good height. He did not know what Palliser's speech meant, but an instinct made him feel that it somehow held an ugly, quiet taunt.

"What I would like to do," was the unspoken crudity which passed through his mind, "would be to swat him on the mouth. He's getting at her just when she ought to be let alone."

"Would you like it better to stay here and read?" he inquired.

"Much better, if you please," was her reply.

"Then that goes," he answered, and left her.

He swept the others out of the room with a good-natured promptness which put an end to argument. When he said of anything "Then that goes," it usually did so.