

could hardly bear the strain of intimate talk, when her husband's dependence on her struck her with a full sense of pain.

He seemed to be pondering a good deal about his affairs, and in the afternoon, when she thought he was sleeping quietly, and when she had even contemplated taking a run down to the manse to see Edie, he suddenly looked up and spoke out clearly.

"There ought to be a letter from Birtley by one of these posts, Alison. I'll be glad when the whole business is put through, then I can really set my house in order."

The words, though she supposed them to be casually used, merely in reference to the final transfer of his business to a syndicate, struck her with a sort of chill.

"You are in a great hurry, surely, Edmund. Can it matter much about the details now everything has been satisfactorily arranged?"

"It matters only that until I know it is absolutely a settled thing I can't rest. What's that you're making?"

A little smile played about the corners of Alison's sweet mouth, as she held up a small square of fine flannel, upon which she was working something in white silk.

"It's a head flannel for the third Patrick Fleming, if you're any the wiser. I wish he would hurry up and get here to wear it."

"Well, put it down, and come here, and sit on the front of the bed like you do in the morning and at night, and talk to me with your whole heart and voice and eyes. The third Patrick Fleming will do well if he gets his Aunt Alison's attention when he has actually arrived on the scene."

Alison laughed, folded up the dainty piece of work, and came over to his side. It was very quiet in the house, and in the wide and pleasant room there was a cheery glow from the little wood fire which burned and crackled in the grate.