

st in November, and I didn't answer; then all the dreadful things happened, and I had to write and tell him that you were free. I had to do that Ailie, because," said Tibbie—and her voice became very low and tense—"because you see to me it was everything, as it is to women. It is only a bit of a man's life, even the best of them, but I—I couldn't afford to make any mistake."

"And now to-day what does he say?" repeated Alison, and her voice sounded very cold.

"He wants me to come, and he says, Ailie, that if I refuse he will go unmarried to his grave, and never set foot in Scotland again."

"Well, and what do you say to that?"

Tibbie turned round suddenly and her eyes were aglow.

"Oh, I want to go, Ailie. I want to go very much! I want it more than anything in the world!"

"But your career! The thing you have been so proud of, and in which you wanted to succeed."

"Oh that—that is what a woman fills up with when there's nothing else," she made answer in tones of profound and unassailable content. "It's only one of the make-believes, the other is the real thing. I want to be necessary to some man, Ailie, and I'm not ashamed to confess it, I want to bear his children, and make him a home, and if—and if—" here her vibrant voice broke—"if you'll let me, I'll go away to Archie Mackerrow to-morrow, and account myself a blessed woman."

A little shuddering sigh fluttered like a breath between Alison's parted lips.

"Oh, my Tib, my wee sister!" she said, and clasped her close, and nothing more was needed on either side.

She did not know when or how she was left alone, nor even noticed that the fire was fluttering low in the grate. She only knew that there in the red silence she had made the last stand, had given up all that was