

CHAPTER XXVI.

IN THE DARK NIGHT.

TIBBIE sprang up and ran to the open window in her nightdress. Leaning as far over as she dared, she beheld what appeared to be a great gathering of people on the terrace before the house. Some of them carried lighted torches, which they swung to and fro in their hands, instruments of menace in the hot dry air, with the wind coming up out of the west. She was fascinated by the weird light thrown upon the sea of faces—gaunt, hungry faces, upon which starvation had already set its mark. They were strangely silent, an occasional whisper, a colloquy carried on in hurried, low tones, was all that could be heard, but there was a curious impression of concerted purpose.

Wondering whether the rest of the household had become aware of this strange ambuscade in the night, Tibbie, consciously excited, threw on her dressing-gown and opened her door. She fancied even then the smell of burning to be in the air, but there was no smoke indoors, nor any indication of wakefulness on the part of other sleepers. Remembering by a kind of instinct where Alison's rooms were situated, she crossed the wide landing and ran along the little corridor which partly shut them off. It was a large suite in the new wing which did not overlook the front terrace.

She knocked hurriedly, but received no answer. Then, after knocking again, she opened the door. It was the dressing-room door, and a night-light