

beautiful as ever, the great trees sending forth their gracious shade upon the arid heat, and in the distance the gleam of the lake in the soft radiance of a rising moon. But over all, some hush of apprehension, almost of fear, seemed to brood. Tibbie was conscious that it deepened as they neared the house. The butler was there to greet her, but no Alison.

"Oh, she'll be about," said Madge encouragingly. "Dinner's put forward half an hour for you, I believe. A quarter-past eight didn't Mrs. Crewe say, Ricketts?"

"Yes, miss, a quarter-past eight."

"And what room for Miss Fleming? Perhaps you know yourself, Tibbie," said Madge inquiringly. "I'd better come up with you and exploit; oh, there she is——"

On the half landing Alison appeared, and Madge with her usual good feeling which never obtruded itself, turned away immediately to hang up her things in the cloak-room. Tibbie ran up the stairs, dropping her wraps *en route*.

"Oh, Ailie, I have wanted to see you; how are you, my dear?"

She was almost breathless, and her voice shook with tenderness. Alison smiled the old kind, motherly smile, a little wrung. She was much changed. Tibbie could have cried out at the havoc these months of separation had wrought in the dear comely sister of her love. The fine contour of her figure, then inclining to matronliness, was destroyed; she was thinner than Tibbie had ever seen her, and her colour was gone too. The cheeks, from which the rounded contour had fled, were quite pale. But it was the expression which grieved Tibbie most of all. It was not one expression, but a mingling of many, not one of which could be welcome on a face one loves. Sadness, pathos, anxiety, and an odd expression of fear in the eyes seemed to be accentuated rather than banished by the brave smile with which she sought to welcome her sister.