

"Precisely; but where is Mr. Crewe, miss? Has he spoken with the men? Feeling is very high and bitter against him in the town."

"I'm aware of that. Mr. Crewe is not in the house. Will you send one or two of the men to look for him about the grounds, in the direction of the lake, perhaps?" she added significantly. "No, don't say anything to Mrs. Crewe. She is not really capable just at present of giving her mind properly to anything. She has had a great deal to bear of late."

The inspector nodded comprehendingly, and Tibbie went back to her sister, where she stood out upon the parched grass of the lawn, watching the progress of the fire, which had now got a permanent hold. In vain the powerful hose played upon the flames, merely quenching them at one corner to make them leap forth at another. Very quickly all realised that nothing could save the house. All this time, Tibbie, anxiously watching her sister, was greatly troubled by her looks. Her set, cold stare, the complete absence of any expression of feeling, the absolute indifference, to Tibbie's quick understanding, all told their own tale. Alison had been tried beyond her endurance.

"Now it is all over and it can never be rebuilt again," she said at last, when the great flames had ceased to shoot their tremendous tongues up to the breaking sky. "It's my work, Tibbie; nobody's but mine."

"No, no, my dear; it was a mere accident, through these stupid men, who hardly knew what they were doing, brandishing naked torches. Any baby could have foretold the result. How could it be your fault?"

"It has all been mine. If it had not been for me, the lock-out would have been ended long ago."

"No, no, Alison. Come, we must seek shelter somewhere in the lodge or at the gardener's cottage, until I can get a conveyance to take you over to Guy and Celia."