

"It must have been," said Errol, quietly, and a sob broke from Marion's lips, and she reached out her hand and clasped Airlie's firm and close in token of her sympathy and love. It was well, perhaps, for Airlie Keith that these two were the first to meet and greet her; they were certainly the warmest hearts in Errol Lodge. Airlie seemed to feel the jolting of the cab, for she breathed a sigh of relief when it turned into Palmerston Road and swept up the smooth gravelled approach to her new home.

"They told me on the way that there was snow on the ground, but it was so dark I could discern nothing," said Airlie. "I have never seen snow. Ah! there it is! How beautiful, how unlike anything I have ever seen before."

"You will see plenty of it here, I promise you, Airlie," said Errol, grimly. "In the meantime, let me take you into the house. Shall I carry you?"

"Oh no, in case Aunt Marion should be frightened out of her wits," said Airlie, merrily, but she leaned heavily enough on the strong arm offered to her; and so they entered the house, Marion following behind. As they stepped into the hall the dining-room door opened, and Mrs. Keith, with her wraps about her head and shoulders, came out, followed by Janet.

"Aunt Marion!" exclaimed Airlie, in a quick, eager whisper, and her eyes flashed one wistful, seeking glance upon her aunt's pale face.

"How are you, Airlie? You are welcome to Edinburgh," said Mrs. Keith, and taking the girl in her arms, she kissed her kindly enough, but Airlie felt that there was something lacking. Then Janet—stately, beautiful, and calm—offered her a welcoming hand; and presently Jack came bounding downstairs, two steps at a time, and gave her hand a hearty, boyish squeeze; and so the greetings were all over.

In one swift, keen, comprehensive glance, Janet Keith had taken in her cousin's whole appearance, and had passed her mental verdict, which was not flattering to the stranger.

"The girls will take you up to your room, my dear," said Mrs. Keith. "I am a sad invalid, laid up with every breath of cold. I hope you will find everything nice. Tea is waiting, whenever you are ready."

"Very well, Aunt Marion," said Airlie, quietly, and then she turned to Errol once more, as if seeking his sympathy and help.

"Come, Cousin Airlie, and I will take you to your room," said Janet, stepping forward.

"Will you excuse me if I ask Errol to help me?" said Airlie, with her swift, pathetic smile. "I am a poor, useless thing, Cousin Janet. My back has failed me, and I cannot climb upstairs alone."

So Airlie ascended the long stair, slowly and heavily, leaning on her cousin's arm, and when she reached the landing her face was quite flushed, but they did not know that it was with pain.

"Thank you, Errol. Now, Cousin Janet, I am ready," she said, and they entered the room together. It was a cheerful, cosy corner, with a bright fire burning in the grate. Airlie looked round her with a sigh of content.

"I shall be at home here, I think," she said brightly. "I will just sit down one moment, Janet, to get my breath. Oh, dear, how weak and weary I am!"

She sank into a low chair, and leaning back, closed her eyes. The colour receded quickly enough from her face, and left it so ashen hued that Janet Keith feared to look upon it.

"Cousin Airlie, I am afraid you are very ill."

"I have been. I am on furlough on that account," said Airlie, and again that sweet, bright smile sent