

That was a task neither beyond Janet's capability nor will. From the moment when it had been laid, a small, red, unpromising bundle in her arms, the starved heart of her had melted into all the tenderness of motherhood, and she had straightway sworn fealty and service to the third Patrick Fleming, till death should close her eyes. Janet was now bound by cords nothing else could break to the manse of Rochallan.

After Christmas Anne and Stephen returned to Milan to complete their winter's work. Madge went back to Cambridge, and Alison slipped into her old place in Rochallan Manse. It was astonishing how easy was the transition, how the gulf lessened and quickly disappeared.

The bairn undoubtedly was the saving of the situation, as well as lord of them all. Where the child is, there is Jesus in the midst!

Tibbie, after various consultations with herself, decided to accompany Anne and Stephen abroad again. She was still pursued by a strange restlessness, which only her work seemed to be able to quiet.

"Nobody needs me, Ailie, you least of all, and Pat's bairn doesn't want to be brought up by two aunts, let alone the fact that Janet Aiken doesn't think I'm fit to handle him even for five minutes in the day."

"But you'll not stop long away, Tib. We can't afford to be parted for long now. Life is all different, don't you think?"

"I'll tell you what I think, Ailie," said Tibbie, in a great outburst. "You are far too good for this world, and what I would like to see beyond everything would be one of the old tussles between you and Janet about the cleaning time. Oh, couldn't you arrange one for my benefit just to make me sure we are not all too near kingdom come."

Alison smiled.

"When I look back, Tib, I see myself nothing but a bairn—a big, tiresome, rather tyrannical bairn——"