

"Listen, Tib; if I'm to live at all, I mustn't be pitied. I've got this battle to fight, and I must be left to fight it my own way without any help. God has forgotten me, and it will be better perhaps if you forget me too."

These words, so unlike the steadfast faith that had once inspired Alison's tongue, sounded in Tibbie's ears almost like the crack of doom.

She was silent, stirring mechanically at her coffee till it had become quite cold. But she could not leave the subject.

"Of course there were rumours about him in Birtley long ago," she said after a while; "but somehow we hoped that you were going to change him completely. We thought you had, Alison; he was so altogether different after you came back from your honeymoon trip. It looks as if something had set him back."

Alison made no answer, but rose to set her coffee cup on a side table. Well did she know what had set her husband back; but of that episode, of that unforgettable day in Rochallan Woods, she would not speak even to the sister of her soul.

"It is true what I said, Tib. I've failed, and failed utterly, with Edmund Crewe, and the less said about it the better," she said clearly. "Let us talk about you now. You won't stop here, of course; indeed it's no place for anybody who is not obliged to stay in it. When will you go down to see them at Rochallan? Pat is very anxious about Edie. She's not at all strong. Latterly she has hardly been able to be up at all."

"When is the event expected?"

"I believe in November."

"But Janet is there to take care of her, and it seems to me that you need me more," said Tibbie, greatly daring.

Alison shook her head.

"Ailie, I never will believe you have failed. I've never known you to fail; something will happen,