

postman at the door. Immediately he had gone she rang the bell and asked that her letters might be brought up.

There were a goodly number, but from them she singled out the only two which in the meantime mattered. They were from Italy, and had been written by Stephen and Anne. The contents were satisfactory, and after a casual glance to see whether there was anything else demanding attention, she put them inside the flap of the bureau in the corner, and left the room.

Next to her, in a large light room, her husband spent his invalid days. He had never recovered that blow struck in the dark in the grounds of Birtley Old Hall, and which had never been brought home. At first surgeons had advised an operation, though they were more than doubtful of the result. Alison had declined it, and had trusted to nature's healing method. Her trust had been so far justified, because now at the end of three months, Mr. Crewe, though still an invalid, was able to take a sensible interest once more in outside affairs. Nay more, he had been able since coming to Rochallan to reorganise a part of his business, so that work had once more been resumed at Birtley. Nothing had been done towards the restoration of the Hall, its blackened walls still stood roofless and desolate to the heavens, proclaiming the folly and the evil passions of men. But the worst was over, and these last days were better to Alison Crewe than any of the former ones had been since she had taken the most momentous step in her life.

One nurse for night duty was still retained, Alison herself attending to his needs in the daytime. As she entered the room, the nurse, bidding her a pleasant good morning, immediately glided from the room. She was one of the best of her kind, she needed no hint or warning when to disappear, and had established the friendliest and most grateful relations with the whole household. Alison smiled as she approached