

hospitality, so far as material things were concerned, and Alison was completely mistress of every detail of her household, and was, furthermore, adored by the servants, adored and pitied by turns. Only in the biggest thing of all apparently she had failed; undoubtedly Mr. Crewe had deteriorated since his marriage. The tragedy of it so nearly overwhelmed Tibbie that she could hardly eat, and the delightful winsome gaiety which had cast such a spell over Archie Mackerrow in London and sent him off in a very curious mood had totally disappeared. By the end of the meal she had relapsed into silence which Alison made no attempt to break. When they retired to the small drawing-room for coffee, they found themselves alone. Madge, a considerate person, waylaid Ricketts with the tray in the hall, and carried hers off to her den in the higher regions of the house. She knew that the sisters must have much to say to one another. But it was a long time before the ominous silence was broken.

At last Tibbie was forced to speak.

"Ailie, can't anything be done?" she asked desperately.

"No," answered Ailie, in a quiet, level voice.

"Nothing whatever can be done except endure and wait for the end."

Tibbie beat her hands on the air.

"For God's sake, don't speak like that; it's—it's horrible! Can't you take him away, get someone to look after him, shut him up?"

"No, for the simple reason that none of these things can be done without the consent of the principal person concerned. You may believe that I've tried everything, and that I've failed. Let us talk about something else."

"But there is nothing else," said Tibbie dismally.

"Oh, my dear, my dear!"

At that wailing sound, Alison went a little white and turned her eyes with some passion on her sister's face.