

"I want to run up to the village. Miss Alison and her friend might like to join us."

So they rowed down to Connel at his command: and for Lady Forsyth the pleasure of the outing was gone; the peace and beauty of the evening spoilt by fierce resentment against these intrusive strangers who had no authorised position in the scheme of things. And her natural vexation was intensified by concern for Sheila: though whether the girl took Mark's sudden and strange defection seriously it was impossible to tell. She wore that smiling, friendly graciousness of hers like a bright veil, that seemed to baffle attempts at intimacy, while it enhanced her charm. Even with Lady Forsyth, who loved her as a daughter, she had her reserves, notably on matters nearest her heart.

"After all, she knows the real Mark almost as well as I do," Mark's mother reflected by way of consolation. "And she's wiser than I am, in many ways, though she is nearly thirty years younger. I'm probably racing on miles too fast. He's barely known the girl a fortnight. He *couldn't* be so crazy—— All the same, he's no business to—it's distracting!" she concluded, her irritation flaming up again at sight of the two figures that were now approaching the shore, escorted by Mark.

Miss Alison, the taller one, had unquestionably height and grace to recommend her. Mark, who stood six feet in his socks, could barely give her a couple of inches; and the languid deliberation of her movements had, on Lady Forsyth, the same maddening effect as a drawl in speech. Her own brain and body were too quick, in the original sense of the word, not to make her a trifle intolerant towards the "half-alive"; and, rightly or wrongly, Miss Alison was apt to produce that impression even on her admirers, though no doubt they expressed it differently.

Personal prejudice apart, Lady Forsyth preferred