

Ethne's reason for the act; she misunderstood it altogether, so far as she thought of it at all. But the act in itself, the swift change in the room from light to dark with its suggestion of secrecy, the appealing music floating out from darkness, and the low, hushed talk which followed, struck upon some chord of imagination in her, and kindled her jealousy to a devouring flame. She had noticed Ethne's buoyancy of spirit that day, and the signs of tears and the old timidity of manner which had returned to her that night; and of her observation Mrs. Adair meant to make full use. But it was the mere turning out of the lamp which prompted her to use them.

Durrance held out his hand to Mrs. Adair the moment after Ethne had gone in.

"I must go," he said. "It is getting late."

"Not so very late," she answered. "I shall not go to bed for a few minutes," and she just moved the basket chair which stood empty at her side. Durrance, however, did not accept the hinted invitation.

"Good night, Mrs. Adair," he said, and she replied with a sudden sharpness,

"I think that you avoid me."

"I do?" Durrance exclaimed, and as he made the exclamation he wondered whether after all she was not right. Perhaps he had rather avoided her, not deliberately, but from some instinct of which he had not considered the cause.

"Yes," Mrs. Adair continued, and she used a more gentle voice. "I am sorry because I have few opportunities of speaking to you alone, and I wish very much to say something to you now."

Durrance sat down patiently upon the chair and waited. Mrs. Adair leaned forward with her eyes bent intently upon her companion's face.

"I want to speak to you about Ethne," she said with a low and sympathetic accent. "I have no right to, perhaps. But, after all, she is my

friend. Have you noticed nothing yourself?"

Durrance's patience was at once changed into alarm. The cunning voice of sympathy had produced its effect.

"She is ill?" he asked. "Ah, there I miss my eyes. You know her. She would go on, whatever pain she felt, holding up her end. Only one's eyes could tell that anything was wrong. She is ill? Yes. I have no doubt she is wearying for Donegal." And as he hit upon that explanation his cheerfulness returned.

"Well," he said, "she will not weary much longer after to-night," and he laughed. For to-night that difficulty with many others had been smoothed away, and he could put into execution that long cherished project of rebuilding Lennon House. But Mrs. Adair did not share his cheerfulness. She sat quite silent long enough for her silence to disconcert him. Then she said quietly:

"I am afraid."

"The trouble lies deeper, then?"

"Yes. Have you not noticed her hesitation, the air of constraint she has been wearing, the strain under which she has been suffering?"

"Until to-night," Durrance replied, and again his alarm ceased to plague him. "Yes, I have noticed it, and I know the reason. I always have known the reason. But everything's different to-night. The constraint, the weariness have gone. Surely you saw that. To-night, Mrs. Adair, Ethne is what she was five years ago."

"And why?" asked Mrs. Adair.

Durrance drew in a breath and laughed again.

"Something has happened," he said with a certain awkwardness of modesty. "Something for which I hardly dared to hope," and suddenly he leaned forward towards her. "You accused me of a wish to avoid you just now. Well, I did wish it. You were right, you were right, and I will confess why I wished it. I wanted to be alone so that I might thoroughly and clearly realize just what has happened