

of the Arab go-between, and at once Ethne had said "Exactly," as though the explanation gave her a cue. But to what?

Mrs. Adair moved in her chair. "Wait," he cried, putting out a hand to arrest her. A clue to what—if not to Feversham's presence in Wadi Halfa and his mysterious disappearance to the south? He leaned suddenly back in his chair.

"Was Harry Feversham to be himself the go-between?" he exclaimed. "Was that his object, then? To rescue Trench?"

"I don't know," said Mrs. Adair.

But Durrance did not heed the words, he seemed unconscious of her presence.

"That was what Ethne thought," he went on. "Without a doubt. She jumped to it at once, it seemed natural. There was then some obligation upon Feversham to rescue Trench, or to attempt his rescue."

That seemed clear. Ethne was glad that Major Castleton was dead. Did she mean that Castleton could stand in no such need?

"Then there was the same obligation with regard to Castleton," he said. Mrs. Adair had no inkling of his meaning. She only saw that she was forgotten, that Durrance was absorbed in some conjecture, and was following it to its issues with a rising excitement.

"Captain Willoughby's news caused Ethne's good spirits?" he went on. "You are sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

"Then, suppose he owed something to Willoughby as well and had discharged that debt? And suppose Willoughby had come back to say the slate was clean? Make the debt serious enough—a disgraceful debt!" And he rose up suddenly from his chair. "It was a disgraceful thing which Harry did, eh?" he asked with a sudden change of tone to quietude. "Let him discharge the debt, and suppose that Ethne at her heart, in spite of her will, in spite of her pride, in spite of these five years, still cares for Fev-

ersham! Would not that explain her quick recapture of her youth?"

"I don't understand," said Mrs. Adair.

"Don't say that," said Durrance eagerly, and it was not to her that he spoke, but to her objection. "It's not so difficult if you will follow me. There's a white feather. Ethne treasures it, you say. What's a white feather? Just a white feather, yes, but a symbol, too."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Adair. "A symbol of cowardice."

"Precisely."

"Then why should Ethne treasure it?" she asked with something of his eagerness.

"Why? Don't you see?" he asked, with an incredulous laugh at her obtuseness. "Suppose—it's all supposition of course, but it's plausible, admit that—suppose the cowardice is atoned or partly atoned. Let us say a third part of it's atoned. Why then the feather becomes a symbol of the atonement, and one would treasure it."

Mrs. Adair thought over that view of the matter, looking out across the lawn.

"I wonder," she said.

"I must make sure," said Durrance, and he turned briskly to her. "Will you make an excuse for me to-morrow? Will you say that I am called away? That I must go to town?"

"The oculist?"

"No," he said quickly. "That excuse will no longer serve, and he stopped abruptly.

He had become aware that he was speaking not to a mere vague somebody upon whom he tested his suppositions, like the impersonal character who answers the questions in a Socratic dialogue, but to Mrs. Adair, who was Ethne's friend, or who at all events said she was Ethne's friend.

"Why have you told me all this to-night?" he asked quietly.

He heard the rustle of her dress, the sound of her breathing, and in a low voice she answered:

"I thought you ought to know."

"But Ethne wished the secret to be kept, and you are Ethne's friend."