

CHAPTER VIII

Directly I had shut the door after the doctor I started shouting for Therese. "Come down at once, you wretched hypocrite," I yelled at the foot of the stairs in a sort of frenzy as though I had been a second Ortega. Not even an echo answered me; but all of a sudden a small flame flickered descending from the upper darkness and Therese appeared on the first floor landing carrying a lighted candle in front of a livid, hard face, closed against remorse, compassion, or mercy by the meanness of her righteousness and of her rapacious instincts. She was fully dressed in that abominable brown stuff with motionless folds, and as I watched her coming down step by step she might have been made of wood. I stepped back and pointed my finger at the darkness of the passage leading to the studio. She passed within a foot of me, her pale eyes staring straight ahead, her face still with disappointment and fury. Yet it is only my surmise. She might have been made thus inhuman by the force of an invisible purpose. I waited a moment, then, stealthily, with extreme caution, I opened the door of the so-called Captain Blunt's room.

The glow of embers was all but out. It was cold and dark in there; but before I closed the door behind me the dim light from the hall showed me Doña Rita standing on the very same spot where I had left her, statuesque in her night-dress. Even after I shut the door she loomed up enormous, indistinctly rigid and inanimate. I picked up the candelabra, groped for a candle all over the carpet, found one, and lighted it. All that time Doña Rita didn't stir. When I turned towards her she seemed to be slowly awakening from a trance. She was deathly pale and by contrast the melted, sapphire-blue of her eyes looked black as coal. They moved a little in my direction, incurious, recognizing me slowly. But when they had recognized me completely she raised her hands and hid her face in them. A whole minute or more passed. Then I said in a low tone: "Look at me," and she let them fall slowly as if accepting the inevitable.

"Shall I make up the fire?" . . . I waited. "Do you hear me?" She made no sound and with the tip of my finger I touched her bare shoulder. But for its elasticity it might have been frozen. At once I looked round for the fur coat; it seemed to me that there was not a moment to lose if she was to be saved, as though we had been lost on an Arctic plain. I had to put her arms into the sleeves, myself, one after another. They were cold, lifeless, but flexible. Then I moved in front of her and buttoned the thing close round her throat. To do that I had actually to raise her chin with my finger, and it sank slowly down again. I buttoned all the other buttons right down to the ground. It was a very long and splendid fur. Before rising from my kneeling position I felt her feet. Mere ice. The intimacy of this sort

of attendance helped the growth of my authority. "Lie down," I murmured, "I shall pile on you every blanket I can find here," but she only shook her head.

Not even in the days when she ran "shrill as a cicada and thin as a match" through the chill mists of her native mountains could she ever have felt so cold, so wretched, and so desolate. Her very soul, her grave, indignant, and fantastic soul, seemed to drowse like an exhausted traveller surrendering himself to the sleep of death. But when I asked her again to lie down she managed to answer me, "Not in this room." The dumb spell was broken. She turned her head from side to side, but oh! how cold she was! It seemed to come out of her, numbing me, too; and the very diamonds on the arrow of gold sparkled like hoar frost in the light of the one candle.

"Not in this room; not here," she protested, with that peculiar suavety of tone which made her voice unforgettable, irresistible, no matter what she said. "Not after all this! I couldn't close my eyes in this place. It's full of corruption and ugliness all round, in me, too, everywhere except in your heart, which has nothing to do where I breathe. And here you may leave me. But wherever you go remember that I am not evil, I am not evil."

I said: "I don't intend to leave you here. There is my room upstairs. You have been in it before."

"Oh, you have heard of that," she whispered. The beginning of a wan smile vanished from her lips.

"I also think you can't stay in this room; and, surely, you needn't hesitate . . ."

"No. It doesn't matter now. He has killed me. Rita is dead."

While we exchanged these words I had retrieved the quilted, blue slippers and had put them on her feet. She was very tractable. Then taking her by the arm I led her towards the door.

"He has killed me," she repeated in a sigh. "The little joy that was in me."

"He has tried to kill himself out there in the hall," I said. She put back like a frightened child but she couldn't be dragged on as a child can be.

I assured her that the man was no longer there but she only repeated, "I can't get through the hall. I can't walk. I can't . . ."

"Well," I said, flinging the door open and seizing her suddenly in my arms, "if you

can't walk then you shall be carried," and I lifted her from the ground so abruptly that she could not help catching me round the neck as any child almost will do instinctively when you pick it up.

I ought really to have put those blue slippers in my pocket. One dropped off at the bottom of the stairs as I was stepping over an unpleasant-looking mess on the marble pavement, and the other was lost a little way up the flight when, for some reason (perhaps from a sense of insecurity), she began to struggle. Though I had an odd sense of being engaged in a sort of nursery adventure she was no child to carry. I could just do it. But not if she chose to struggle. I set her down hastily and only supported her round the waist for the rest of the way. My room, of course, was perfectly dark but I led her straight to the sofa at once and let her fall on it. Then as if I had in sober truth rescued her from an Alpine height or an Arctic floe, I busied myself with nothing but lighting the gas and starting the fire. I didn't even pause to lock my door. All the time I was aware of her presence behind me, nay, of something deeper and more my own—of her existence itself—of a small blue flame, blue like her eyes, flickering and clear within her frozen body. When I turned to her she was sitting very stiff and upright, with her feet posed hieratically on the carpet and her head emerging out of the ample fur collar, such as a gem-like flower above the rim of a dark vase. I tore the blankets and the pillows off my bed and piled them up in readiness in a great heap on the floor near the couch. My reason for this was that the room was large, too large for the fireplace, and the couch was nearest to the fire. She gave no sign but one of her wistful attempts at a smile. In a most business-like way I took the arrow out of her hair and laid it on the centre table. The tawny mass fell loose at once about her shoulders and made her look even more desolate than before. But there was an invincible need of gaiety in her heart. She said funnily, looking at the arrow sparkling in the gas light:

"Ah! That poor philistinish ornament!"

An echo of our early days, not more innocent but so much more youthful, was in her tone; and we both, as if touched with poignant regret, looked at each other with enlightened eyes.

"Yes," I said, "how far away all this is. And you wouldn't leave even that object behind when you came last in here. Perhaps it is for that reason it haunted me—mostly at night. I dreamed of you sometimes as a huntress nymph gleaming white through the foliage and throwing this arrow like a dart straight at my heart. But it never reached it. It always fell at my feet as I woke up. The huntress never meant to strike down that particular quarry."

"The huntress was wild but she was not evil. And she was no nymph, but only a

goatherd girl. Dream of her no more, my dear.”

I had the strength of mind to make a sign of assent and busied myself arranging a couple of pillows at one end of the sofa. “Upon my soul, goatherd, you are not responsible,” I said. “You are not! Lay down that uneasy head,” I continued, forcing a half-playful note into my immense sadness, “that has even dreamed of a crown—but not for itself.”

She lay down quietly. I covered her up, looked once into her eyes and felt the restlessness of fatigue over-power me so that I wanted to stagger out, walk straight before me, stagger on and on till I dropped. In the end I lost myself in thought. I woke with a start to her voice saying positively:

“No. Not even in this room. I can’t close my eyes. Impossible. I have a horror of myself. That voice in my ears. All true. All true.”

She was sitting up, two masses of tawny hair fell on each side of her tense face. I threw away the pillows from which she had risen and sat down behind her on the couch. “Perhaps like this,” I suggested, drawing her head gently on my breast. She didn’t resist, she didn’t even sigh, she didn’t look at me or attempt to settle herself in any way. It was I who settled her after taking up a position which I thought I should be able to keep for hours—for ages. After a time I grew composed enough to become aware of the ticking of the clock, even to take pleasure in it. The beat recorded the moments of her rest, while I sat, keeping as still as if my life depended upon it with my eyes fixed idly on the arrow of gold gleaming and glittering dimly on the table under the lowered gas-jet. And presently my breathing fell into the quiet rhythm of the sleep which descended on her at last. My thought was that now nothing mattered in the world because I had the world safe resting in my arms—or was it in my heart?

Suddenly my heart seemed torn in two within my breast and half of my breath knocked out of me. It was a tumultuous awakening. The day had come. Doña Rita had opened her eyes, found herself in my arms, and instantly had flung herself out of them with one sudden effort. I saw her already standing in the filtered sunshine of the closed shutters, with all the childlike horror and shame of that night vibrating afresh in the awakened body of the woman.

“Daylight,” she whispered in an appalled voice. “Don’t look at me, George. I can’t face daylight. No—not with you. Before we set eyes on each other all that past was like nothing. I had crushed it all in my new pride. Nothing could touch the Rita whose hand was kissed by you. But now! Never in daylight.”

I sat there stupid with surprise and grief. This was no longer the adventure of

venturesome children in a nursery-book. A grown man's bitterness, informed, suspicious, resembling hatred, welled out of my heart.

"All this means that you are going to desert me again?" I said with contempt. "All right. I won't throw stones after you . . . Are you going, then?"

She lowered her head slowly with a backward gesture of her arm as if to keep me off, for I had sprung to my feet all at once as if mad.

"Then go quickly," I said. "You are afraid of living flesh and blood. What are you running after? Honesty, as you say, or some distinguished carcass to feed your vanity on? I know how cold you can be—and yet live. What have I done to you? You go to sleep in my arms, wake up and go away. Is it to impress me? Charlatanism of character, my dear."

She stepped forward on her bare feet as firm on that floor which seemed to heave up and down before my eyes as she had ever been—goatherd child leaping on the rocks of her native hills which she was never to see again. I snatched the arrow of gold from the table and threw it after her.

"Don't forget this thing," I cried, "you would never forgive yourself for leaving it behind."

It struck the back of the fur coat and fell on the floor behind her. She never looked round. She walked to the door, opened it without haste, and on the landing in the diffused light from the ground-glass skylight there appeared, rigid, like an implacable and obscure fate, the awful Therese—waiting for her sister. The heavy ends of a big black shawl thrown over her head hung massively in biblical folds. With a faint cry of dismay Doña Rita stopped just within my room.

The two women faced each other for a few moments silently. Therese spoke first. There was no austerity in her tone. Her voice was as usual, pertinacious, unfeeling, with a slight plaint in it; terrible in its unchanged purpose.

"I have been standing here before this door all night," she said. "I don't know how I lived through it. I thought I would die a hundred times for shame. So that's how you are spending your time? You are worse than shameless. But God may still forgive you. You have a soul. You are my sister. I will never abandon you—till you die."

"What is it?" Doña Rita was heard wistfully, "my soul or this house that you won't abandon."

“Come out and bow your head in humiliation. I am your sister and I shall help you to pray to God and all the Saints. Come away from that poor young gentleman who like all the others can have nothing but contempt and disgust for you in his heart. Come and hide your head where no one will reproach you—but I, your sister. Come out and beat your breast: come, poor Sinner, and let me kiss you, for you are my sister!”

While Therese was speaking Doña Rita stepped back a pace and as the other moved forward still extending the hand of sisterly love, she slammed the door in Therese’s face. “You abominable girl!” she cried fiercely. Then she turned about and walked towards me who had not moved. I felt hardly alive but for the cruel pain that possessed my whole being. On the way she stooped to pick up the arrow of gold and then moved on quicker, holding it out to me in her open palm.

“You thought I wouldn’t give it to you. Amigo, I wanted nothing so much as to give it to you. And now, perhaps—you will take it.”

“Not without the woman,” I said sombrely.

“Take it,” she said. “I haven’t the courage to deliver myself up to Therese. No. Not even for your sake. Don’t you think I have been miserable enough yet?”

I snatched the arrow out of her hand then and ridiculously pressed it to my breast; but as I opened my lips she who knew what was struggling for utterance in my heart cried in a ringing tone:

“Speak no words of love, George! Not yet. Not in this house of ill-luck and falsehood. Not within a hundred miles of this house, where they came clinging to me all profaned from the mouth of that man. Haven’t you heard them—the horrible things? And what can words have to do between you and me?”

Her hands were stretched out imploringly, I said, childishly disconcerted:

“But, Rita, how can I help using words of love to you? They come of themselves on my lips!”

“They come! Ah! But I shall seal your lips with the thing itself,” she said. “Like this. . . .”

SECOND NOTE

The narrative of our man goes on for some six months more, from this, the last night of the Carnival season up to and beyond the season of roses.

The tone of it is much less of exultation than might have been expected. Love as is well known having nothing to do with reason, being insensible to forebodings and even blind to evidence, the surrender of those two beings to a precarious bliss has nothing very astonishing in itself; and its portrayal, as he attempts it, lacks dramatic interest. The sentimental interest could only have a fascination for readers themselves actually in love. The response of a reader depends on the mood of the moment, so much so that a book may seem extremely interesting when read late at night, but might appear merely a lot of vapid verbiage in the morning. My conviction is that the mood in which the continuation of his story would appear sympathetic is very rare. This consideration has induced me to suppress it—all but the actual facts which round up the previous events and satisfy such curiosity as might have been aroused by the foregoing narrative.

It is to be remarked that this period is characterized more by a deep and joyous tenderness than by sheer passion. All fierceness of spirit seems to have burnt itself out in their preliminary hesitations and struggles against each other and themselves. Whether love in its entirety has, speaking generally, the same elementary meaning for women as for men, is very doubtful. Civilization has been at work there. But the fact is that those two display, in every phase of discovery and response, an exact accord. Both show themselves amazingly ingenuous in the practice of sentiment. I believe that those who know women won't be surprised to hear me say that she was as new to love as he was. During their retreat in the region of the Maritime Alps, in a small house built of dry stones and embowered with roses, they appear all through to be less like released lovers than as companions who had found out each other's fitness in a specially intense way. Upon the whole, I think that there must be some truth in his insistence of there having always been something childlike in their relation. In the unreserved and instant sharing of all thoughts, all impressions, all sensations, we see the naïveness of a children's foolhardy adventure. This unreserved expressed for him the whole truth of the situation. With her it may have been different. It might have been assumed; yet nobody is altogether a comedian; and even comedians themselves have got to believe in the part they play. Of the two she appears much the more assured and confident. But if in this she was a comedienne then it was but a great achievement of her ineradicable honesty. Having once renounced her honourable scruples she took good care that he should taste no flavour of misgivings in the cup. Being older it was she who imparted its character to the situation. As to the man if he had any superiority of his own it was simply the superiority of him who loves with the greater self-surrender.

This is what appears from the pages I have discreetly suppressed—partly out of regard for the pages themselves. In every, even terrestrial, mystery there is as it were a sacred core. A sustained commentary on love is not fit for every eye. A universal experience is exactly the sort of thing which is most difficult to appraise justly in a particular instance.

How this particular instance affected Rose, who was the only companion of the two hermits in their rose-embowered hut of stones, I regret not to be able to report; but I will venture to say that for reasons on which I need not enlarge, the girl could not have been very reassured by what she saw. It seems to me that her devotion could never be appeased; for the conviction must have been growing on her that, no matter what happened, Madame could never have any friends. It may be that Doña Rita had given her a glimpse of the unavoidable end, and that the girl's tarnished eyes masked a certain amount of apprehensive, helpless desolation.

What meantime was becoming of the fortune of Henry Allègre is another curious question. We have been told that it was too big to be tied up in a sack and thrown into the sea. That part of it represented by the fabulous collections was still being protected by the police. But for the rest, it may be assumed that its power and significance were lost to an interested world for something like six months. What is certain is that the late Henry Allègre's man of affairs found himself comparatively idle. The holiday must have done much good to his harassed brain. He had received a note from Doña Rita saying that she had gone into retreat and that she did not mean to send him her address, not being in the humour to be worried with letters on any subject whatever. "It's enough for you"—she wrote—"to know that I am alive." Later, at irregular intervals, he received scraps of paper bearing the stamps of various post offices and containing the simple statement: "I am still alive," signed with an enormous, flourished exuberant R. I imagine Rose had to travel some distances by rail to post those messages. A thick veil of secrecy had been lowered between the world and the lovers; yet even this veil turned out not altogether impenetrable.

He—it would be convenient to call him Monsieur George to the end—shared with Doña Rita her perfect detachment from all mundane affairs; but he had to make two short visits to Marseilles. The first was prompted by his loyal affection for Dominic. He wanted to discover what had happened or was happening to Dominic and to find out whether he could do something for that man. But Dominic was not the sort of person for whom one can do much. Monsieur George did not even see him. It looked uncommonly as if Dominic's heart were broken. Monsieur George remained concealed for twenty-four hours in the very house in which Madame Léonore had her café. He spent most of that time in conversing with Madame Léonore about Dominic. She was distressed, but her mind was

made up. That bright-eyed, nonchalant, and passionate woman was making arrangements to dispose of her café before departing to join Dominic. She would not say where. Having ascertained that his assistance was not required Monsieur George, in his own words, “managed to sneak out of the town without being seen by a single soul that mattered.”

The second occasion was very prosaic and shockingly incongruous with the super-mundane colouring of these days. He had neither the fortune of Henry Allègre nor a man of affairs of his own. But some rent had to be paid to somebody for the stone hut and Rose could not go marketing in the tiny hamlet at the foot of the hill without a little money. There came a time when Monsieur George had to descend from the heights of his love in order, in his own words, “to get a supply of cash.” As he had disappeared very suddenly and completely for a time from the eyes of mankind it was necessary that he should show himself and sign some papers. That business was transacted in the office of the banker mentioned in the story. Monsieur George wished to avoid seeing the man himself but in this he did not succeed. The interview was short. The banker naturally asked no questions, made no allusions to persons and events, and didn’t even mention the great Legitimist Principle which presented to him now no interest whatever. But for the moment all the world was talking of the Carlist enterprise. It had collapsed utterly, leaving behind, as usual, a large crop of recriminations, charges of incompetency and treachery, and a certain amount of scandalous gossip. The banker (his wife’s salon had been very Carlist indeed) declared that he had never believed in the success of the cause. “You are well out of it,” he remarked with a chilly smile to Monsieur George. The latter merely observed that he had been very little “in it” as a matter of fact, and that he was quite indifferent to the whole affair.

“You left a few of your feathers in it, nevertheless,” the banker concluded with a wooden face and with the curtness of a man who knows.

Monsieur George ought to have taken the very next train out of the town but he yielded to the temptation to discover what had happened to the house in the street of the Consuls after he and Doña Rita had stolen out of it like two scared yet jubilant children. All he discovered was a strange, fat woman, a sort of virago, who had, apparently, been put in as a caretaker by the man of affairs. She made some difficulties to admit that she had been in charge for the last four months; ever since the person who was there before had eloped with some Spaniard who had been lying in the house ill with fever for more than six weeks. No, she never saw the person. Neither had she seen the Spaniard. She had only heard the talk of the street. Of course she didn’t know where these people had gone. She manifested some impatience to get rid of Monsieur George and even attempted to push him towards the door. It was, he says, a very funny experience. He noticed

the feeble flame of the gas-jet in the hall still waiting for extinction in the general collapse of the world.

Then he decided to have a bit of dinner at the Restaurant de la Gare where he felt pretty certain he would not meet any of his friends. He could not have asked Madame Léonore for hospitality because Madame Léonore had gone away already. His acquaintances were not the sort of people likely to happen casually into a restaurant of that kind and moreover he took the precaution to seat himself at a small table so as to face the wall. Yet before long he felt a hand laid gently on his shoulder, and, looking up, saw one of his acquaintances, a member of the Royalist club, a young man of a very cheerful disposition but whose face looked down at him with a grave and anxious expression.

Monsieur George was far from delighted. His surprise was extreme when in the course of the first phrases exchanged with him he learned that this acquaintance had come to the station with the hope of finding him there.

“You haven’t been seen for some time,” he said. “You were perhaps somewhere where the news from the world couldn’t reach you? There have been many changes amongst our friends and amongst people one used to hear of so much. There is Madame de Lastaola for instance, who seems to have vanished from the world which was so much interested in her. You have no idea where she may be now?”

Monsieur George remarked grumpily that he couldn’t say.

The other tried to appear at ease. Tongues were wagging about it in Paris. There was a sort of international financier, a fellow with an Italian name, a shady personality, who had been looking for her all over Europe and talked in clubs—astonishing how such fellows get into the best clubs—oh! Azzolati was his name. But perhaps what a fellow like that said did not matter. The funniest thing was that there was no man of any position in the world who had disappeared at the same time. A friend in Paris wrote to him that a certain well-known journalist had rushed South to investigate the mystery but had returned no wiser than he went.

Monsieur George remarked more unamiably than before that he really could not help all that.

“No,” said the other with extreme gentleness, “only of all the people more or less connected with the Carlist affair you are the only one that had also disappeared before the final collapse.”

“What!” cried Monsieur George.

“Just so,” said the other meaningly. “You know that all my people like you very much, though they hold various opinions as to your discretion. Only the other day Jane, you know my married sister, and I were talking about you. She was extremely distressed. I assured her that you must be very far away or very deeply buried somewhere not to have given a sign of life under this provocation.”

Naturally Monsieur George wanted to know what it was all about; and the other appeared greatly relieved.

“I was sure you couldn’t have heard. I don’t want to be indiscreet, I don’t want to ask you where you were. It came to my ears that you had been seen at the bank to-day and I made a special effort to lay hold of you before you vanished again; for, after all, we have been always good friends and all our lot here liked you very much. Listen. You know a certain Captain Blunt, don’t you?”

Monsieur George owned to knowing Captain Blunt but only very slightly. His friend then informed him that this Captain Blunt was apparently well acquainted with Madame de Lastaola, or, at any rate, pretended to be. He was an honourable man, a member of a good club, he was very Parisian in a way, and all this, he continued, made all the worse that of which he was under the painful necessity of warning Monsieur George. This Blunt on three distinct occasions when the name of Madame de Lastaola came up in conversation in a mixed company of men had expressed his regret that she should have become the prey of a young adventurer who was exploiting her shamelessly. He talked like a man certain of his facts and as he mentioned names . . .

“In fact,” the young man burst out excitedly, “it is your name that he mentions. And in order to fix the exact personality he always takes care to add that you are that young fellow who was known as Monsieur George all over the South amongst the initiated Carlists.”

How Blunt had got enough information to base that atrocious calumny upon, Monsieur George couldn’t imagine. But there it was. He kept silent in his indignation till his friend murmured, “I expect you will want him to know that you are here.”

“Yes,” said Monsieur George, “and I hope you will consent to act for me altogether. First of all, pray, let him know by wire that I am waiting for him. This will be enough to fetch him down here, I can assure you. You may ask him also to bring two friends with him. I don’t intend this to be an affair for Parisian journalists to write paragraphs about.”

“Yes. That sort of thing must be stopped at once,” the other admitted. He assented to Monsieur George’s request that the meeting should be arranged for at his elder brother’s country place where the family stayed very seldom. There was a most convenient walled garden there. And then Monsieur George caught his train promising to be back on the fourth day and leaving all further arrangements to his friend. He prided himself on his impenetrability before Doña Rita; on the happiness without a shadow of those four days. However, Doña Rita must have had the intuition of there being something in the wind, because on the evening of the very same day on which he left her again on some pretence or other, she was already ensconced in the house in the street of the Consuls, with the trustworthy Rose scouting all over the town to gain information.

Of the proceedings in the walled garden there is no need to speak in detail. They were conventionally correct, but an earnestness of purpose which could be felt in the very air lifted the business above the common run of affairs of honour. One bit of byplay unnoticed by the seconds, very busy for the moment with their arrangements, must be mentioned. Disregarding the severe rules of conduct in such cases Monsieur George approached his adversary and addressed him directly.

“Captain Blunt,” he said, “the result of this meeting may go against me. In that case you will recognize publicly that you were wrong. For you are wrong and you know it. May I trust your honour?”

In answer to that appeal Captain Blunt, always correct, didn’t open his lips but only made a little bow. For the rest he was perfectly ruthless. If he was utterly incapable of being carried away by love there was nothing equivocal about his jealousy. Such psychology is not very rare and really from the point of view of the combat itself one cannot very well blame him. What happened was this. Monsieur George fired on the word and, whether luck or skill, managed to hit Captain Blunt in the upper part of the arm which was holding the pistol. That gentleman’s arm dropped powerless by his side. But he did not drop his weapon. There was nothing equivocal about his determination. With the greatest deliberation he reached with his left hand for his pistol and taking careful aim shot Monsieur George through the left side of his breast. One may imagine the consternation of the four seconds and the activity of the two surgeons in the confined, drowsy heat of that walled garden. It was within an easy drive of the town and as Monsieur George was being conveyed there at a walking pace a little brougham coming from the opposite direction pulled up at the side of the road. A thickly veiled woman’s head looked out of the window, took in the state of affairs at a glance, and called out in a firm voice: “Follow my carriage.” The brougham turning round took the lead. Long before this convoy reached the town another

carriage containing four gentlemen (of whom one was leaning back languidly with his arm in a sling) whisked past and vanished ahead in a cloud of white, Provençal dust. And this is the last appearance of Captain Blunt in Monsieur George's narrative. Of course he was only told of it later. At the time he was not in a condition to notice things. Its interest in his surroundings remained of a hazy and nightmarish kind for many days together. From time to time he had the impression that he was in a room strangely familiar to him, that he had unsatisfactory visions of Doña Rita, to whom he tried to speak as if nothing had happened, but that she always put her hand on his mouth to prevent him and then spoke to him herself in a very strange voice which sometimes resembled the voice of Rose. The face, too, sometimes resembled the face of Rose. There were also one or two men's faces which he seemed to know well enough though he didn't recall their names. He could have done so with a slight effort, but it would have been too much trouble. Then came a time when the hallucinations of Doña Rita and the faithful Rose left him altogether. Next came a period, perhaps a year, or perhaps an hour, during which he seemed to dream all through his past life. He felt no apprehension, he didn't try to speculate as to the future. He felt that all possible conclusions were out of his power, and therefore he was indifferent to everything. He was like that dream's disinterested spectator who doesn't know what is going to happen next. Suddenly for the first time in his life he had the soul-satisfying consciousness of floating off into deep slumber.

When he woke up after an hour, or a day, or a month, there was dusk in the room; but he recognized it perfectly. It was his apartment in Doña Rita's house; those were the familiar surroundings in which he had so often told himself that he must either die or go mad. But now he felt perfectly clear-headed and the full sensation of being alive came all over him, languidly delicious. The greatest beauty of it was that there was no need to move. This gave him a sort of moral satisfaction. Then the first thought independent of personal sensations came into his head. He wondered when Therese would come in and begin talking. He saw vaguely a human figure in the room but that was a man. He was speaking in a deadened voice which had yet a preternatural distinctness.

"This is the second case I have had in this house, and I am sure that directly or indirectly it was connected with that woman. She will go on like this leaving a track behind her and then some day there will be really a corpse. This young fellow might have been it."

"In this case, Doctor," said another voice, "one can't blame the woman very much. I assure you she made a very determined fight."

"What do you mean? That she didn't want to. . ."

“Yes. A very good fight. I heard all about it. It is easy to blame her, but, as she asked me despairingly, could she go through life veiled from head to foot or go out of it altogether into a convent? No, she isn’t guilty. She is simply—what she is.”

“And what’s that?”

“Very much of a woman. Perhaps a little more at the mercy of contradictory impulses than other women. But that’s not her fault. I really think she has been very honest.”

The voices sank suddenly to a still lower murmur and presently the shape of the man went out of the room. Monsieur George heard distinctly the door open and shut. Then he spoke for the first time, discovering, with a particular pleasure, that it was quite easy to speak. He was even under the impression that he had shouted:

“Who is here?”

From the shadow of the room (he recognized at once the characteristic outlines of the bulky shape) Mills advanced to the side of the bed. Doña Rita had telegraphed to him on the day of the duel and the man of books, leaving his retreat, had come as fast as boats and trains could carry him South. For, as he said later to Monsieur George, he had become fully awake to his part of responsibility. And he added: “It was not of you alone that I was thinking.” But the very first question that Monsieur George put to him was:

“How long is it since I saw you last?”

“Something like ten months,” answered Mills’ kindly voice.

“Ah! Is Therese outside the door? She stood there all night, you know.”

“Yes, I heard of it. She is hundreds of miles away now.”

“Well, then, ask Rita to come in.”

“I can’t do that, my dear boy,” said Mills with affectionate gentleness. He hesitated a moment. “Doña Rita went away yesterday,” he said softly.

“Went away? Why?” asked Monsieur George.

“Because, I am thankful to say, your life is no longer in danger. And I have told you that she is gone because, strange as it may seem, I believe you can stand this

news better now than later when you get stronger.”

It must be believed that Mills was right. Monsieur George fell asleep before he could feel any pang at that intelligence. A sort of confused surprise was in his mind but nothing else, and then his eyes closed. The awakening was another matter. But that, too, Mills had foreseen. For days he attended the bedside patiently letting the man in the bed talk to him of Doña Rita but saying little himself; till one day he was asked pointedly whether she had ever talked to him openly. And then he said that she had, on more than one occasion. “She told me amongst other things,” Mills said, “if this is any satisfaction to you to know, that till she met you she knew nothing of love. That you were to her in more senses than one a complete revelation.”

“And then she went away. Ran away from the revelation,” said the man in the bed bitterly.

“What’s the good of being angry?” remonstrated Mills, gently. “You know that this world is not a world for lovers, not even for such lovers as you two who have nothing to do with the world as it is. No, a world of lovers would be impossible. It would be a mere ruin of lives which seem to be meant for something else. What this something is, I don’t know; and I am certain,” he said with playful compassion, “that she and you will never find out.”

A few days later they were again talking of Doña Rita Mills said:

“Before she left the house she gave me that arrow she used to wear in her hair to hand over to you as a keepsake and also to prevent you, she said, from dreaming of her. This message sounds rather cryptic.”

“Oh, I understand perfectly,” said Monsieur George. “Don’t give me the thing now. Leave it somewhere where I can find it some day when I am alone. But when you write to her you may tell her that now at last—surer than Mr. Blunt’s bullet—the arrow has found its mark. There will be no more dreaming. Tell her. She will understand.”

“I don’t even know where she is,” murmured Mills.

“No, but her man of affairs knows. . . . Tell me, Mills, what will become of her?”

“She will be wasted,” said Mills sadly. “She is a most unfortunate creature. Not even poverty could save her now. She cannot go back to her goats. Yet who can tell? She may find something in life. She may! It won’t be love. She has sacrificed that chance to the integrity of your life—heroically. Do you remember

telling her once that you meant to live your life integrally—oh, you lawless young pedant! Well, she is gone; but you may be sure that whatever she finds now in life it will not be peace. You understand me? Not even in a convent.”

“She was supremely lovable,” said the wounded man, speaking of her as if she were lying dead already on his oppressed heart.

“And elusive,” struck in Mills in a low voice. “Some of them are like that. She will never change. Amid all the shames and shadows of that life there will always lie the ray of her perfect honesty. I don’t know about your honesty, but yours will be the easier lot. You will always have your . . . other love—you pig-headed enthusiast of the sea.”

“Then let me go to it,” cried the enthusiast. “Let me go to it.”

He went to it as soon as he had strength enough to feel the crushing weight of his loss (or his gain) fully, and discovered that he could bear it without flinching. After this discovery he was fit to face anything. He tells his correspondent that if he had been more romantic he would never have looked at any other woman. But on the contrary. No face worthy of attention escaped him. He looked at them all; and each reminded him of Doña Rita, either by some profound resemblance or by the startling force of contrast.

The faithful austerity of the sea protected him from the rumours that fly on the tongues of men. He never heard of her. Even the echoes of the sale of the great Allègre collection failed to reach him. And that event must have made noise enough in the world. But he never heard. He does not know. Then, years later, he was deprived even of the arrow. It was lost to him in a stormy catastrophe; and he confesses that next day he stood on a rocky, wind-assaulted shore, looking at the seas raging over the very spot of his loss and thought that it was well. It was not a thing that one could leave behind one for strange hands—for the cold eyes of ignorance. Like the old King of Thule with the gold goblet of his mistress he would have had to cast it into the sea, before he died. He says he smiled at the romantic notion. But what else could he have done with it?