

"To know him personally one had to be either very distinguished or very lucky. Mr. Mills here . . ."

"Yes, I have been lucky," Mills struck in. "It was my cousin who was distinguished. That's how I managed to enter his house in Paris—it was called the Pavilion—twice."

"And saw Doña Rita twice, too?" asked Blunt with an indefinite smile and a marked emphasis. Mills was also emphatic in his reply but with a serious face.

"I am not an easy enthusiast where women are concerned, but she was without doubt the most admirable find of his amongst all the priceless items he had accumulated in that house—the most admirable. . . ."

"Ah! But, you see, of all the objects there she was the only one that was alive," pointed out Blunt with the slightest possible flavour of sarcasm.

"Immensely so," affirmed Mills. "Not because she was restless, indeed she hardly ever moved from that couch between the windows—you know."

"No. I don't know. I've never been in there," announced Blunt with that flash of white teeth so strangely without any character of its own that it was merely disturbing.

"But she radiated life," continued Mills. "She had plenty of it, and it had a quality. My cousin and Henry Allègre had a lot to say to each other and so I was free to talk to her. At the second visit we were like old friends, which was absurd considering that all the chances were that we would never meet again in this world or in the next. I am not meddling with theology but it seems to me that in the Elysian fields she'll have her place in a very special company."

All this in a sympathetic voice and in his unmoved manner. Blunt produced another disturbing white flash and muttered: