

or simply in the world, could see on the big sofa during the gatherings in Allègre's exclusive Pavilion: the Doña Rita of their respectful addresses, manifest and mysterious, like an object of art from some unknown period; the Doña Rita of the initiated Paris. Doña Rita and nothing more—unique and indefinable." He stopped with a disagreeable smile.

"And of peasant stock?" I exclaimed in the strange, conscious silence that fell between Mills and Blunt.

"Oh! All these Basques have been ennobled by Doña Sanche II," said Captain Blunt moodily. "You see coats of arms carved over the doorways of the most miserable *caseros*. As far as that goes she's Doña Rita right enough whatever else she is or is not in herself or in the eyes of others. In your eyes, for instance, Mills. Eh?"

For a time Mills preserved that conscious silence.

"Why think about it at all?" he murmured coldly at last. "A strange bird is hatched sometimes in a nest in an unaccountable way and then the fate of such a bird is bound to be ill-defined, uncertain, questionable. And so that is how Henry Allègre saw her first? And what happened next?"

"What happened next?" repeated Mr. Blunt, with an affected surprise in his tone. "Is it necessary to ask that question? If you had asked *how* the next happened. . . . But as you may imagine she hasn't told me anything about that. She didn't," he continued with polite sarcasm, "enlarge upon the facts. That confounded Allègre, with his impudent assumption of princely airs, must have (I shouldn't wonder) made the fact of his notice appear as a sort of favour dropped from Olympus. I really can't tell how the minds and the imaginations of such aunts and uncles are affected by such rare visitations. Mythology may give us a hint. There is the story of Danaë, for instance."