

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.