

There was the slightest contraction of Mr. Blunt's facial muscles. Very slight; but I, staring at the narrator after the manner of all simple souls, noticed it; the twitch of a pain which surely must have been mental. There was also a suggestion of effort before he went on: "I suppose you know how he got hold of her?" in a tone of ease which was astonishingly ill-assumed for such a worldly, self-controlled, drawing-room person.

Mills changed his attitude to look at him fixedly for a moment. Then he leaned back in his chair and with interest—I don't mean curiosity, I mean interest: "Does anybody know besides the two parties concerned?" he asked, with something as it were renewed (or was it refreshed?) in his unmoved quietness. "I ask because one has never heard any tales. I remember one evening in a restaurant seeing a man come in with a lady—a beautiful lady—very particularly beautiful, as though she had been stolen out of Mahomet's paradise. With Doña Rita it can't be anything as definite as that. But speaking of her in the same strain, I've always felt that she looked as though Allègre had caught her in the precincts of some temple . . . in the mountains."

I was delighted. I had never heard before a woman spoken about in that way, a real live woman that is, not a woman in a book. For this was no poetry and yet it seemed to put her in the category of visions. And I would have lost myself in it if Mr. Blunt had not, most unexpectedly, addressed himself to me.

"I told you that man was as fine as a needle." . . . And then to Mills: "Out of a temple? We know what that means." His dark eyes flashed: "And must it be really in the mountains?" he added.

"Or in a desert," conceded Mills, "if you prefer that. There have been temples in deserts, you know."