

THE ARROW OF GOLD

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"Her sister here!" I exclaimed. "Her sister!" Blunt turned to me politely, but only for a long mute gaze. His eyes were in deep shadow and it struck me for the first time then that there was something fatal in that man's aspect as soon as he fell silent. I think the effect was purely physical, but in consequence whatever he said seemed inadequate and as if produced by a commonplace, if uneasy, soul.

"Doña Rita brought her down from her mountains on purpose. She is asleep somewhere in this house, in one of the vacant rooms. She lets them, you know, at extortionate prices, that is, if people will pay them, for she is easily intimidated. You see, she has never seen such an enormous town before in her life, nor yet so many strange people. She has been keeping house for the uncle-priest in some mountain gorge for years and years. It's extraordinary he should have let her go. There is something mysterious there, some reason or other. It's either theology or Family. The saintly uncle in his wild parish would know nothing of any other reasons. She wears a rosary at her waist. Directly she had seen some real money she developed a love of it. If you stay with me long enough, and I hope you will (I really can't sleep), you will see her going to mass at half-past six; but there is nothing remarkable in her; just a peasant woman of thirty-four or so. A rustic nun. . . ."

I may as well say at once that we didn't stay as long as that. It was not that morning that I saw for the first time Therese of the whispering lips and downcast eyes slipping out to an early mass from the house of iniquity into the early winter murk of the city of perdition, in a world steeped in sin. No. It was not on that morning that I saw Doña Rita's incredible sister with her brown, my face, her gliding motion, and her really nun-like dress, with a black handkerchief enfolding her head