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Chapter 13 - The First Rain

Ramón and Cipriano were out by the lake. Cipriano also had changed into the white clothes and sandals, and he looked better than when in uniform.

'I had a talk with Montes when he came to Guadalajara,' Cipriano said to Ramón. Montes was the President of the Republic.

'And what did he say?'

'He is careful. But he doesn't like his colleagues. I think he feels lonely. I think he would like to know you better.'

'Why?'

'Perhaps that you could give him your moral support. Perhaps that you might be Secretary, and President when Montes' term is up.'

'I like Montes,' said Ramón. 'He is sincere and passionate. Did you like him?'

'Yes!' said Cipriano. 'More or less. He is suspicious, and jealous for fear anyone else might want to share in his power. He has the cravings of a dictator. He wanted to find out if I would stick to him.'

'You let him know you would?'

'I told him that all I cared for was for you and for Mexico.'

'What did he say?'

'Well, he is no fool. He said: "Don Ramón sees the world with different eyes from mine. Who knows which of us is right? I want to save my country from poverty and unenlightenment, he wants to save its soul. I say, a hungry and ignorant man has no place for a soul. An empty belly grinds upon itself, so does an empty mind, and the soul doesn't exist. Don Ramón says, if a man has no soul, it doesn't matter whether he is hungry or ignorant. Well, he can go his way, and I mine. We shall never hinder one another, I believe. I give you my word I won't have him interfered with. He sweeps the patio and I sweep the street."

'Sensible!' said Ramón. 'And honest in his convictions.'

'Why should you not be Secretary in a few months' time? And follow to the Presidency?' said Cipriano.

'You know I don't want that. I must stand in another world, and act in another world. - Politics must go their own way, and society must do as it will. Leave me alone, Cipriano. I know you want me to be another Porfirio Diaz, or something like that. But for me that would be failure pure and simple.'

Cipriano was watching Ramón with black, guarded eyes, in which was an element of love, and of fear, and of trust, but also incomprehension, and the suspicion that goes with incomprehension.

'I don't understand, myself, WHAT you want,' he muttered.

'Yes, yes, you do. Politics and all this SOCIAL religion that Montes has got is like washing the outside of the egg, to make it look clean. But I, myself, I want to get inside the egg, right to the middle, to start it growing into a new bird. Ay! Cipriano! Mexico is like an old, old egg that the bird of Time laid long ago; and she has been sitting on it for centuries, till it looks foul in the nest of the world. But still, Cipriano, it is a good egg. It is not addled. Only the spark of fire has never gone into the middle of it, to start it. - Montes wants to clean the nest and wash the egg. But meanwhile, the egg will go cold and die. The more you save these people from poverty and ignorance, the quicker they will die: like a dirty egg that you take from under the hen-eagle, to wash it. While you wash the egg, it chills and dies. Poor old Montes, all his ideas are American and European. And the old Dove of Europe will never hatch the egg of dark-skinned America. The United States can't die, because it isn't alive. It is a nestful of china eggs, made of pot. So they can be kept clean. - But here, Cipriano, here, let us hatch the chick before we start cleaning up the nest.'

Cipriano hung his head. He was always testing Ramón, to see if he could change him. When he found he couldn't, then he submitted, and new little fires of joy sprang up in him. But meanwhile, he had to try, and try again.

'It is no good, trying to mix the two things. At this stage of affairs, at least, they won't mix. We have to shut our eyes and sink down, sink away from the surface, away, like shadows, down to the bottom. Like the pearl divers. But you keep bobbing up like a cork.'

Cipriano smiled subtly. He knew well enough.

'We've got to open the oyster of the cosmos, and get our manhood out of it. Till we've got the pearl, we are only gnats on the surface of the ocean,' said Ramón.

'My manhood is like a devil inside me,' said Cipriano.

'It's very true,' said Ramón. 'That's because the old oyster has him shut up, like a black pearl. You must let him walk out.'

'Ramón,' said Cipriano, 'wouldn't it be good to be a serpent, and be big enough to wrap one's folds round the globe of the world, and crush it like that egg?'

Ramón looked at him and laughed.

'I believe we could do that,' said Cipriano, a slow smile curling round his mouth. 'And wouldn't it be good?'

Ramón shook his head, laughing.

'There would be ONE good moment, at least,' he said.

'Who asks for more!' said Cipriano.

A spark flashed out of Ramón's eyes too. Then he checked himself, and gathered himself together.

'What would be the good!' he said heavily. 'If the egg was crushed, and we remained, what could we do but go howling down the empty passages of darkness? What's the good, Cipriano?'

Ramón got up and walked away. The sun had set, the night was falling. And in his soul the great, writhing anger was alive again. Carlota provoked it into life: the two women seemed to breathe life into the black monster of his inward rage, till it began to lash again. And Cipriano stirred it up till it howled with desire.

'My manhood is like a demon howling inside me,' said Ramón to himself, in Cipriano's words.

And he admitted the justice of the howling, his manhood being pent up, humiliated, goaded with insult inside him. And rage came over him, against Carlota, against Cipriano, against his own people, against all mankind, till he was filled with rage like the devil.

His people would betray him, he knew that. Cipriano would betray him. Given one little vulnerable chink, they would pierce him. They would leap at the place out of nowhere, like a tarantula, and bite in the poison.

While ever there was one little vulnerable chink. And what man can be invulnerable?

He went upstairs by the outer stairway, through the iron door at the side of the house, under the heavy trees, up to his room, and sat on his bed. The night was hot, heavy, and ominously still.

'The waters are coming,' he heard a servant say. He shut the doors of his room till it was black dark inside. Then he threw aside his clothing, saying: I put off the world with my clothes. And standing nude and invisible in the centre of his room he thrust his clenched fist upwards, with all his might, feeling he would break the walls of his chest. And his left hand hung loose, the fingers softly curving downwards.

And tense like the gush of a soundless fountain, he thrust up and reached down in the invisible dark, convulsed with passion. Till the black waves began to wash over his consciousness, over his mind, waves of darkness broke over his memory over his being, like an incoming tide, till at last it was full tide and he trembled, and fell to rest. Invisible in the darkness, he stood soft and relaxed, staring with wide eyes at the dark, and feeling the dark fecundity of the inner tide washing over his heart, over his belly, his mind dissolved away in the greater, dark mind, which is undisturbed by thoughts.

He covered his face with his hands, and stood still, in pure unconsciousness, neither hearing nor feeling nor knowing, like a dark sea-weed deep in the sea. With no Time and no World, in the deeps that are timeless and worldless.

Then when his heart and his belly were restored, his mind began to flicker again softly, like a soft flame flowing without departing.

So he wiped his face with his hands, and put his serape over his head, and, silent inside an aura of pain, he went out and took the drum, carrying it downstairs.

Martin, the man who loved him, was hovering in the zaguán.

'Ya, Patrón?' he said.

'Yal' said Ramón.

The man ran indoors, where a lamp was burning in the big, dark kitchen, and ran out again with an armful of the woven straw mats.

'Where, Patrón?' he said.

Ramón hesitated in the centre of the courtyard, and looked at the sky.

'Viene el agua?' he said.

'Creo que sí, Patrón.'

They went to the shed where the bananas had been packed and carried away on donkeys. There the man threw down the petates. Ramón arranged them. Guisleno ran with canes. He was going to make lights, the simplest possible. Three pieces of thick cane, tied at the neck with a cord, stood up three-legged, waist high. In the three-pronged fork at the top he laid a piece of flat, slightly hollow lava stone. Then he came running from the house with a bit of burning ocote wood. Three or four bits of ocote, each bit no bigger than a long finger, flickered and rose in quick flames from the stone, and the courtyard danced with shadow.

Ramón took off his serape, folded it, and sat upon it. Guisleno lit another tripod-torch. Ramón sat with his back to the wall, the fire-light dancing on his dark brows, that were sunk in a sort of frown. His breast shone like gold in the flame. He took the drum and sounded the summons, slow, monotonous, rather sad. In a moment two or three men came running. The drummer came, Ramón stood up and handed him the drum. He ran with it to the great outer doorway, and out into the dark lane, and there sounded the summons, quick, sharp.

Ramón put on his serape, whose scarlet fringe touched his knees, and stood motionless, with ruffled hair. Round his shoulders went the woven snake, and his head was through the middle of the blue, woven bird.

Cipriano came from the house. He was wearing a serape all scarlet and dark brown, a great scarlet sun at the centre, deep scarlet zigzags at the borders, and dark brown fringe at his knees. He came and stood at Ramón's side, glancing up into Ramón's face. But the other man's brows were low, his eyes were fixed in the darkness of the sheds.

away across the courtyard. He was looking into the heart of the world; because the faces of men, and the hearts of men are helpless quicksands. Only in the heart of the cosmos man can look for strength. And if he can keep his soul in touch with the heart of the world, then from the heart of the world new blood will beat in strength and stillness into him, fulfilling his manhood.

Cipriano turned his black eyes to the courtyard. His soldiers had drawn near, in a little group. Three or four men were standing in dark serapes, round the fire. Cipriano stood brilliant like a cardinal bird, next to Ramón. Even his sandals were bright, sealing-wax red, and his loose linen trousers were bound at the ankles with red and black bands. His face looked very dark and ruddy in the firelight, his little black tuft of a beard hung odd and devilish, his eyes were glittering sardonically. But he caught Ramón's hand in his small hand, and stood holding it.

The peons were coming through the entrance-way, balancing their big hats. Women were hurrying barefoot, swishing their full skirts, carrying babies inside the dark wrap of their rebozos, children running after. They all clustered towards the flame-light, like wild animals gazing in at the circle of men in dark serapes, Ramón, magnificent in his white and blue and shadow, poising his beautiful head, Cipriano at his side like a glittering cardinal bird.

Carlota and Kate emerged from the inner doorway of the house. But there Carlota remained, wrapped in a black silk shawl, seated on a wooden bench where the soldiers usually sat, looking across at the ruddy flare of light, the circle of dark men, the tall beauty of her husband, the poppy-petal glitter of red, of Cipriano, the group of little, dust-coloured soldiers, and the solid throng of peons and women and children, standing gazing like animals. While through the gate men still came hurrying, and from outside, the drum sounded, and a high voice sang again and again:

Someone will enter between the gates,
Now, at this moment, Ay!
See the light on the man that waits.
Shall you? Shall I?

Someone will come to the place of fire,
Now, at this moment, Ay!
And hark to the words of their heart's desire.
Shall you? Shall I?

Someone will knock when the door is shut,
Ay! in a moment, Ay!
Hear a voice saying: I know you not!
Shall you? Shall I?

There was a queer, wild yell each time on the Ay! and like a bugle refrain: Shall you? Shall I? It made Carlota shiver.

Kate, wrapping her yellow shawl round her, walked slowly towards the group.

The drum outside gave a rapid shudder, and was finished. The drummer came in, the great doors were shut and barred, the drummer took his place in the ring of standing men. A dead silence supervened.

Ramón continued to gaze from under lowered brows, into space. Then in a quiet, inward voice, he said:

'As I take off this cover, I put away the day that is gone from upon me.'

He took off his serape, and stood with it over his arm. All the men in the circle did the same, till they stood with naked breasts and shoulders, Cipriano very dark and strong-looking, in his smallness, beside Ramón.

'I put away the day that is gone,' Ramón continued, in the same still, inward voice, 'and stand with my heart uncovered in the night of the gods.'

Then he looked down at the ground.

'Serpent of the earth,' he said; 'snake that lies in the fire at the heart of the world, come! Come! Snake of the fire of the heart of the world, coil like gold round my ankles, and rise like life around my knee, and lay your head against my thigh. Come, put your head in my hand, cradle your head in my fingers, snake of the deeps. Kiss my feet and my ankles with your mouth of gold, kiss my knees and my inner thigh, snake branded with flame and shadow, come! and rest your head in my finger-basket! So!'

The voice was soft and hypnotic. It died upon a stillness. And it seemed as if really a mysterious presence had entered unseen from the underworld. It seemed to the peons as if really they saw a snake of brilliant gold and living blackness softly coiled around Ramón's ankle and knee, and resting its head in his fingers, licking his palm with forked tongue.

He looked out at the big, dilated, glittering eyes of his people, and his own eyes were wide and uncanny.

'I tell you,' he said, 'and I tell you truly. At the heart of this earth sleeps a great serpent, in the midst of fire. Those that go down in mines feel the heat and the sweat of him, they feel him move. It is the living fire of the earth, for the earth is alive. The snake of the world is huge, and the rocks are his scales, trees grow between them. I tell you the earth you dig is alive as a snake that sleeps. So vast a serpent you walk on, this lake lies between his folds as a drop of rain in the folds of a sleeping rattlesnake. Yet he none the less lives. The earth is alive.'

'And if he died, we should all perish. Only his living keeps the soil sweet, that grows you maize. From the roots of his scales we dig silver and gold, and the trees have root in him, as the hair of my face has root in my lips.'

'The earth is alive. But he is very big and we are very small, smaller than dust. But he is very big in his life, and sometimes he is angry. These people, smaller than dust, he says, they stamp on me and say I am dead. Even to their asses they speak, and shout Harreh! Burro! But to me they speak no word. Therefore I will turn against them, like a woman who lies angry with her man in bed, and eats away his spirit with her anger, turning her back to him.'

'That is what the earth says to us. He sends sorrow into our feet, and depression into our loins.'

'Because as an angry woman in the house can make a man heavy, taking his life from him, so the earth can make us heavy, make our souls cold, and our life dreary in our feet.'

'Speak then to the snake of the heart of the world, put oil on your fingers and lower your fingers for him to taste the oil of the earth, and let him send life into your feet and ankles and knees, like sap in the young maize pressing against the joint and making the milk of the maize bud among its hair.'

'From the heart of the earth man feels his manhood rise up in him, like the maize that is proud, turning its green leaves outwards. Be proud like the maize, and let your roots go deep, deep, for the rains are here, and it is time for us to be growing in Mexico.'

Ramón ceased speaking, the drum softly pulsed. All the men of the ring were looking down at the earth and softly letting their left hands hang.

Carlota, who had not been able to hear, drifted up to Kate's side, spellbound by her husband. Kate unconsciously glanced down at the earth, and secretly let her fingers hang softly against her dress. But then she was afraid of what might happen to her, and she caught her hand up into her shawl.

Suddenly the drum began to give a very strong note, followed by a weak: a strange, exciting thud.

Everybody looked up. Ramón had flung his right arm tense into the air, and was looking up at the black dark sky. The men of the ring did the same, and the naked arms were thrust aloft like so many rockets.

'Up! up! up!' said a wild voice.

'Up! up!' cried the men of the ring, in a wild chorus.

And involuntarily the men in the crowd twitched, then shot their arms upwards, turning their faces to the dark heavens. Even some of the women boldly thrust up their naked arms, and relief entered their hearts as they did so.

But Kate would not lift her arm.

There was dead silence, even the drum was silent. Then the voice of Ramón was heard, speaking upwards to the black sky:

'Your big wings are dark, Bird, you are flying low to-night. You are flying low over Mexico, we shall soon feel the fan of your wings on our face.

'Ay, Bird! You fly about where you will. You fly past the stars, and you perch on the sun. You fly out of sight, and are gone beyond the white river of the sky. But you come back like the ducks of the north, looking for water and winter.

'You sit in the middle of the sun, and preen your feathers. You crouch in the rivers of stars, and make the star-dust rise around you. You fly away into the deepest hollow place of the sky, whence there seems no return.

'You come back to us, and hover overhead, and we feel your wings fanning our faces - '

Even as he spoke the wind rose, in sudden gusts, and a door could be heard slamming in the house, with a shivering of glass, and the trees gave off a tearing sound.

'Come then, Bird of the great sky!' Ramón called wildly. 'Come! Oh Bird, settle a moment on my wrist, over my head, and give me power of the sky, and wisdom. Oh Bird! Bird of all the wide heavens, even if you drum your feathers in thunder, and drop the white snake of fire from your beak back to the earth again, where he can run in, deep down the rocks again, home: even if you come as the Thunderer, come! Settle on my wrist a moment, with the clutch of the power of thunder, and arch your wings over my head, like a shadow of clouds; and bend your breast to my brow, and bless me with the sun. Bird, roaming Bird of the Beyond, with thunder in your pinions and the snake of lightning in your beak, with the blue heaven in the socket of your wings and cloud in the arch of your neck, with sun in the burnt feathers of your breast and power in your feet, with terrible wisdom in your flight, swoop to me a moment, swoop!'

Sudden gusts of wind tore at the little fires of flame, till they could be heard to rustle, and the lake began to speak in a vast hollow noise, beyond the tearing of trees. Distant lightning was beating far off, over the black hills.

Ramón dropped his arm, which had been bent over his head. The drum began to beat. Then he said:

'Sit down a moment, before the Bird shakes water out of his wings. It will come soon. Sit down.'

There was a stir. Men put their serapes over their faces, women clutched their rebozos tighter, and all sat down on the ground. Only Kate and Carlota remained standing, on the outer edge. Gusts of wind tore at the flames, the men put their hats on the ground in front of them.

'The earth is alive, and the sky is alive,' said Ramón in his natural voice, 'and between them, we live. Earth has kissed my knees, and put strength in my belly. Sky has perched on my wrist, and sent power into my breast.

'But as in the morning the Morning-star stands between earth and sky, a star can rise in us, and stand between the heart and the loins.

'That is the manhood of man, and for woman, her womanhood.

'You are not yet men. And women, you are not yet women.

'You run about and toss about and die, and still you have not found the star of your manhood rise within you, the stars of your womanhood shine out serene between your breasts, women.

'I tell you, for him that wishes it, the star of his manhood shall rise within him, and he shall be proud, and perfect even as the Morning-star is perfect.

'And the star of a woman's womanhood can rise at last, from between the heavy rim of the earth and the lost grey void of the sky.

'But how? How shall we do it? How shall it be?

'How shall we men become Men of the Morning Star? And the women the Dawn-Star Women?

'Lower your fingers to the caress of the Snake of the earth.

'Lift your wrist for a perch to the far-lying Bird.

'Have the courage of both, the courage of lightning and the earthquake.

'And wisdom of both, the wisdom of the snake and the eagle.

'And the peace of both, the peace of the serpent and the sun.

'And the power of both, the power of the innermost earth and the outermost heaven.

'But on your brow, Men! the undimmed Morning Star, that neither day nor night, nor earth nor sky can swallow and put out.

'And between your breasts, Women! the Dawn-Star, that cannot be dimmed.

'And your home at last is the Morning Star. Neither heaven nor earth shall swallow you up at the last, but you shall pass the place beyond both, into the bright star that is lonely yet feels itself never alone.

'The Morning Star is sending you a messenger, a god who died in Mexico. But he slept his sleep, and the invisible Ones washed his body with water of resurrection. So he has risen, and pushed the stone from the mouth of the tomb, and has stretched himself. And now he is striding across the horizons even quicker than the great stone from the tomb is tumbling back to the earth, to crush those that rolled it up.

'The Son of the Star is coming back to the Sons of Men, with big, bright strides.

'Prepare to receive him. And wash yourselves, and put oil on your hands and your feet, on your mouth and eyes and ears and nostrils, on your breast and navel and on the secret places of your body, that nothing of the dead days, no dust of skeletons and evil things may pass into you and make you unclean.

'Do not look with the eyes of yesterday, nor like yesterday listen, nor breathe, nor smell, nor taste, nor swallow food and drink. Do not kiss with the mouths of yesterday, nor touch with the hands, nor walk with yesterday's feet. And let your navel know nothing of yesterday, and go into your women with a new body, enter the new body in her.

'For yesterday's body is dead, and carrion, the Xopilote is hovering above it.

'Put yesterday's body from off you, and have a new body. Even as your God who is coming. Quetzalcoatl is coming with a new body, like a star, from the shadows of death.

'Yes, even as you sit upon the earth this moment, with the round of your body touching the round of the earth, say: Earth! Earth! you are alive as the globes of my body are alive. Breathe the kiss of the inner earth upon me, even as I sit upon you.

'And so, it is said. The earth is stirring beneath you, the sky is rushing its wings above. Go home to your homes, in front of the waters that will fall and cut you off forever from your yesterdays.

'Go home, and hope to be Men of the Morning Star, Women of the Star of Dawn.

'You are not yet men and women - '

He rose up and waved to the people to be gone. And in a moment they were on their feet, scurrying and hastening with the quiet Mexican hurry, that seems to run low down upon the surface of the earth.

The black wind was all loose in the sky, tearing with the thin shriek of torn fabrics, in the mango-trees. Men held their big hats on their heads and ran with bent knees, their serapes blowing. Women clutched their rebozos tighter and ran barefoot to the zaguán.

The big doors were open, a soldier stood with a gun across his back, holding a hurricane lamp. And the people fled like ghosts through the doors, and away up the black lane like bits of paper veering away into nothingness, blown out of their line of flight. In a moment, they had all silently gone.

Martin barred the great doors. The soldier put down his lamp on the wooden bench, and he and his comrades sat huddled in their dark shawls, in a little bunch like toadstools in the dark cavern of the zaguán. Already one had curled himself up on the wooden bench, wrapped like a snail in his blanket, head disappeared.

'The water is coming!' cried the servants excitedly, as Kate went upstairs with Doña Carlota.

The lake was quite black, like a great pit. The wind suddenly blew with violence, with a strange ripping sound in the mango-trees, as if some membrane in the air were being ripped. The white-flowered oleanders in the garden below leaned over quite flat, their white flowers ghostly, going right down to the earth, in the pale beam of the lamp - like a street lamp - that shone on the wall at the front entrance. A young palm-tree bent and spread its leaves on the ground. Some invisible juggernaut car rolling in the dark over the outside world.

Away across the lake, south-west, lightning blazed and ran down the sky like some portentous writing. And soft, velvety thunder broke inwardly, strangely.

'It frightens me!' cried Doña Carlota, putting her hand over her eyes and hastening into a far corner of the bare salon.

Cipriano and Kate stood on the terrace, watching the coloured flowers in the pots shake and fly to bits, disappearing up into the void of darkness. Kate clutched her shawl. But the wind suddenly got under Cipriano's blanket, and lifted it straight up into the air, then dropped it in a scarlet flare over his head. Kate watched his deep, strong Indian chest lift as his arms quickly fought to free his head. How dark he was, and how primitively physical, beautiful, and deep-breasted, with soft, full flesh! But all, as it were, for himself. Nothing that came forth from him to meet with one outside. All oblivious of the outside, all for himself.

'Ah! the water!' he cried, holding down his serape.

The first great drops were flying darkly at the flowers, like arrows. Kate stood back into the doorway of the salon. A pure blaze of lightning slipped three-fold above the black hills, seemed to stand a moment, then slip back into the dark.

Down came the rain with a smash, as if some great vessel had broken. With it, came a waft of icy air. And all the time, first in one part of the sky, then in another, in quick succession the blue lightning, very blue, broke out of heaven and lit up the air for a blue, breathless moment, looming trees and ghost of a garden, then was gone, while thunder dropped and exploded continually.

Kate watched the dropping masses of water in wonder. Already, in the blue moments of lightning, she saw the garden below a pond, the walks were rushing rivers. It was cold. She turned indoors.

A servant was going round the rooms with a lantern, to look if scorpions were coming out. He found one scuttling across the floor of Kate's room, and one fallen from the ceiling beams on to Carlota's bed.

They sat in the salon in rocking-chairs, Carlota and Kate, and rocked, smelling the good wetness, breathing the good, chilled air. Kate had already forgotten what really chill air was like. She wrapped her shawl tighter round her.

'Ah, yes, you feel cold! You must take care in the nights now. Sometimes in the rainy season the nights are very cold. You must be ready with an extra blanket. And the servants, poor things, they just lie and shudder, and they get up in the morning like corpses. - But the sun soon warms them again, and they seem to think they must bear what comes. So they complain sometimes, but still they don't provide.'

The wind had gone, suddenly. Kate was uneasy, uneasy, with the smell of water, almost of ice, in her nostrils, and her blood still hot and dark. She got up and went again to the terrace. Cipriano was still standing there, motionless and inscrutable, like a monument, in his red and dark serape.

The rain was abating. Down below in the garden two barefooted women-servants were running through the water, in the faint light of the zaguán lamp, running across the garden and putting ollas and square gasoline cans under the arching spouts of water that seethed down from the roof, then darting away while they filled, then struggling in with the frothy vessel. It would save making trips to the lake, for water.

'What do you think of us?' Cipriano said to her.

'It is strange to me,' she replied, wondering and a little awed by the night.

'Good, no?' he said, in an exultant tone.

'A little scaring,' she replied, with a slight laugh.

'When you are used to it,' he said, 'it seems natural, no? It seems natural so - as it is. And when you go to a country like England, where all is so safe and ready-made, then you miss it. You keep saying to yourself: "What am I missing? What is it that is not here?"'

He seemed to be gloating in his native darkness. It was curious, that though he spoke such good English, it seemed always foreign to her, more foreign than Doña Carlota's Spanish.

'I can't understand that people want to have everything, all life, no? - so safe and ready-made as in England and America. It is good to be AWAKE. On the qui vive, no?'

'Perhaps,' she said.

'So I like it,' he said, 'when Ramón tells the people the earth is alive, and the sky has a big bird in it, that you don't see. I think it is true. Certainly! And it is good to know it, because then one is on the qui vive, no?'

'But it's tiring to be always on the qui vive,' she said.

'Why? Why tiring? No, I think, on the contrary, it is refreshing. - Ah, you should marry, and live in Mexico. At last, I am sure, you would like it. You would keep waking up more and more to it.'

'Or else going more and more deadened,' she said. 'That is how most foreigners go, it seems to me.'

'Why deadened?' he said to her. 'I don't understand. Why deadened? Here you have a country where night is night, and rain comes down and you know it. And you have a people with whom you must be on the qui vive all the time, all the time. And that is very good, no? You don't go sleepy. Like a pear! Don't you say a pear goes sleepy, no? - cuando se echa a perder?'

'Yes!' she said.

'And here you have also Ramón. How does Ramón seem to you?'

'I don't know. I don't want to say anything. But I do think he is almost too much: too far. - And I DON'T think he is Mexican.'

'Why not? Why not Mexican? He is Mexican.'

'Not as you are.'

'How not as I am? He is Mexican.'

'He seems to me to belong to the old, old Europe,' she said.

'And he seems to me to belong to the old, old Mexico - and also to the new,' he added quickly.

'But you don't believe in him.'

'How?'

'You - yourself. You don't believe in him. You think it is like everything else, a sort of game. Everything is a sort of game, a put-up job, to you Mexicans. You don't REALLY believe, in anything.'

'How not believe? I not believe in Ramón? - Well, perhaps not, in that way of kneeling before him and spreading out my arms and shedding tears on his feet. But I - I believe in him, too. Not in your way, but in mine. I tell you why. Because he has the power to compel me. If he hadn't the power to COMPEL me, how should I believe?'

'It is a queer sort of belief that is compelled,' she said.

'How else should one believe, except by being compelled? I like Ramón for that, that he can compel me. When I grew up, and my godfather could not compel me to believe, I was very unhappy. It made me very unhappy. - But Ramón COMPELS me, and that is very good. It makes me very happy, when I know I can't escape. It would make you happy too.'

'To know I could not escape from Don Ramón?' she said ironically.

'Yes, that also. And to know you could not escape from Mexico. And even from such a man as me.'

She paused in the dark before she answered, sardonically:

'I don't think it would make me happy to feel I couldn't escape from Mexico. No, I feel, unless I was sure I could get out any day, I couldn't bear to be here.'

In her mind she thought: And perhaps Ramón is the only one I couldn't quite escape from, because he really touches me somewhere inside. But from you, you little Cipriano, I should have no need even to escape, because I could not be caught by you.

'Ah!' he said quickly. 'You think so. But then you don't know. You can only think with American thoughts, it is natural. From your education, you have only American thoughts, U.S.A. thoughts, to think with. Nearly all women are like that: even Mexican women of the Spanish-Mexican class. They are all thinking nothing but U.S.A. thoughts, because those are the ones that go with the way they dress their hair. And so it is with you. You think like a modern woman, because you belong to the Anglo-Saxon or Teutonic world, and dress your hair in a certain way, and have money, and are altogether free. - But you only think like this because you have had these thoughts put in your head, just as in Mexico you spend centavos and pesos, because that is the Mexican money you have put in your pocket. It's what they give you at the bank. - So when you say you are free, you are NOT free. You are compelled all the time to be thinking U.S.A. thoughts - COMPELLED, I must say. You have not as much choice as a slave. As the peons must eat tortillas, tortillas, tortillas, because there is nothing else, you must think these U.S.A. thoughts, about being a woman and being free. Every day you must eat those tortillas, tortillas. - Till you don't know how you would like something else.'

'What else should I like?' she said, with a grimace at the darkness.

'Other thoughts, other feelings. - You are afraid of such a man as me, because you think I should not treat you à l'américaine. You are quite right. I should not treat you as an American woman must be treated. Why should I? I don't wish to. It doesn't seem good to me.'

'You would treat a woman like a real old Mexican, would you? Keep her ignorant, and shut her up?' said Kate sarcastically.

'I could not keep her ignorant if she did not start ignorant. But what more I had to teach her wouldn't be in the American style of teaching.'

'What then?'

'Quién sabe! Ça reste à voir.'

'Et continuera à y rester,' said Kate, laughing.