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Chapter 20 - Marriage By Quetzalcoatl

Kate hid in her own house, numbed. She could not bear to talk to people. She could not bear even Juana's bubbling discourse. The common threads that bound her to humanity seemed to have snapped. The little human things didn't interest her any more. Her eyes seemed to have gone dark, and blind to individuals. They were all just individuals, like leaves in the dark, making a noise. And she was alone under the trees.

The egg-woman wanted six centavos for an egg.

'And I said to her - I said to her - we buy them at five centavos!' Juana went on.

'Yes!' said Kate. She didn't care whether they were bought at five or fifty, or not bought at all.

She didn't care, she didn't care, she didn't care. She didn't even care about life any more. There was no escaping her own complete indifference. She felt indifferent to everything in the whole world, almost she felt indifferent to death.

'Niña! Niña! Here is the man with the sandals! Look! Look how nicely he has made them for you, Niña! Look what Mexican huaraches the Niña is going to wear!'

She tried them on. The man charged her too much. She looked at him with her remote, indifferent eyes. But she knew, in the world one must live, so she paid him less than he asked, though more than he really would have accepted.

She sat down again in her rocking-chair in the shade of the room. Only to be alone! Only that no one should speak to her. Only that no one should come near her! Because in reality her soul and spirit were gone, departed into the middle of some desert, and the effort of reaching across to people to effect an apparent meeting, or contact, was almost more than she could bear.

Never had she been so alone, and so inert, and so utterly without desire; plunged in a wan indifference, like death. Never had she passed her days so blindly, so unknowingly, in stretches of nothingness.

Sometimes, to get away from her household, she sat under a tree by the lake. And there, without knowing it, she let the sun scorch her foot and burn her face inflamed. Juana made a great outcry over her. The foot blistered and swelled, her face was red and painful. But it all seemed to happen merely to her shell. And she was wearily, wanly indifferent.

Only at the very centre of her sometimes a little flame rose, and she knew that what she wanted was for her soul to live. The life of days and facts and happenings was dead on her, and she was like a corpse. But away inside her a little light was burning, the light of her innermost soul. Sometimes it sank and seemed extinct. Then it was there again.

Ramón had lighted it. And once it was lighted the world went hollow and dead, all the world-activities were empty weariness to her. Her soul! Her frail, innermost soul! She wanted to live ITS life, not her own life.

The time would come again when she would see Ramón and Cipriano, and the soul that was guttering would kindle again in her, and feel strong. Meanwhile she only felt weak, weak, weak, weak as the dying. She felt that afternoon of bloodshed had blown all their souls into the twilight of death, for the time. But they would come back. They would come back. Nothing to do but to submit, and wait. Wait, with a soul almost dead, and hands and heart of uttermost inert heaviness, indifference.

Ramón had lost much blood. And she, too, in other ways, had been drained of the blood of the body. She felt bloodless and powerless.

But wait, wait, wait, the new blood would come.

One day Cipriano came. She was rocking in her salon, in a cotton housedress, and her face red and rather swollen. She saw him, in uniform, pass by the window. He stood in the doorway on the terrace, a dark, grave, small, handsome man.

'Do come in,' she said with effort.

Her eyelids felt burnt. He looked at her with his full black eyes, that always had in them so many things she did not understand. She felt she could not look back at him.

'Have you chased all your rebels?' she said.

'For the present,' he replied.

He seemed to be watching, watching for something.

'And you didn't get hurt?'

'No, I didn't get hurt.'

She looked away out of the door, having nothing to say in the world.

'I went to Jamiltepec yesterday evening,' he said.

'How is Don Ramón?'

'Yes, he is better.'

'Quite better?'

'No. Not quite better. But he walks a little.'

'Wonderful how people heal.'

'Yes. We die very easily. But we also come quickly back to life.'

'And you? Did you fight the rebels, or didn't they want to fight?'

'Yes, they wanted to. We fought once or twice; not very much.'

'Men killed?'

'Yes! Some! Not many, no? Perhaps a hundred. We can never tell, no? Maybe two hundred.'

He waved his hand vaguely.

'But you had the worst rebellion at Jamiltepec, no?' he said suddenly, with heavy Indian gravity, gloom suddenly settling down.

'It didn't last long, but it was rather awful while it did.'

'Rather awful, no? - If I had known! I said to Ramón, won't you keep the soldiers? - the guard, no? He said they were not necessary. But here - you never know, no?'

'Niña!' cried Juana, from the terrace. 'Niña! Don Antonio says he is coming to see you.'

'Tell him to come to-morrow.'

'Already he is on the way!' cried Juana, in helplessness. Don Antonio was Kate's fat landlord; and, of course, Juana's permanent master, more important in her eyes, then, even than Kate.

'Here he is!' she cried, and fled.

Kate leaned forward in her chair, to see the stout figure of her landlord on the walk outside the window, taking off his cloth cap and bowing low to her. A cloth cap! - She knew he was a great Fascista, the reactionary Knights of Cortés held him in great esteem.

Kate bowed coldly.

He bowed low again, with the cloth cap.

Kate said not a word.

He stood on one foot, then on the other, and then marched forward up the gravel walk, towards the kitchen quarters, as if he had not seen either Kate or General Viedma. In a few moments he marched back, as if he could not see either Kate or the General, through the open door.

Cipriano looked at the passing stout figure of Don Antonio in a cloth cap as if it were the wind blowing.

'It is my landlord!' said Kate. 'I expect he wants to know if I am taking on the house for another three months.'

'Ramón wanted me to come and see you - to see how you are, no? - and to ask you to come to Jamiltepec. Will you come with me now? The car is here.'

'Must I?' said Kate, uneasily.

'No. Not unless you wish. Ramón said, not unless you wished. He said, perhaps it would be painful to you, no? - to go to Jamiltepec again - so soon after - '

How curious Cipriano was! He stated things as if they were mere bare facts with no emotional content at all. As for its being painful to Kate to go to Jamiltepec, that meant nothing to him.

'Lucky thing you were there that day, no?' he said. 'They might have killed him. Very likely they would! Very likely! Awful, no?'

'They might have killed me too,' she said.

'Yes! Yes! They might!' he acquiesced.

Curious he was! With a sort of glaze of the ordinary world on top, and underneath a black volcano with hell knows what depths of lava. And talking half-abstractedly from his glazed, top self, the words came out small and quick, and he was always hesitating, and saying: No? It wasn't himself at all talking.

'What would you have done if they had killed Ramón?' she said, tentatively.

'I?' - He looked up at her in a black flare of apprehension. The volcano was rousing. 'If they had killed him?' - 'His eyes took on that fixed glare of ferocity, staring her down.'

'Would you have cared very much?' she said.

'!? Would it?' he repeated, and the black suspicious look came into his Indian eyes.

'Would it have meant VERY much to you?'

He still watched her with a glare of ferocity and suspicion.

'To me!' he said, and he pressed his hand against the buttons of his tunic. 'To me Ramón is MORE than life. MORE than life.' His eyes seemed to glare and go sightless, as he said it, the ferocity melting in a strange blind, confiding glare, that seemed sightless, either looking inward, or out at the whole vast void of the cosmos, where no vision is left.

'More than anything?' she said.

'Yes!' he replied abstractedly, with a blind nod of the head.

Then abruptly he looked at her and said:

'You saved his life.'

By this he meant that THEREFORE - But she could not understand the therefore.

She went to change, and they set off to Jamiltepec. Cipriano made her a little uneasy, sitting beside him. He made her physically aware of him, of his small but strong and assertive body, with its black currents and storms of desire. The range of him was very limited, really. The great part of his nature was just inert and heavy, unresponsive, limited as a snake or a lizard is limited. But within his own heavy, dark range he had a curious power. Almost she could SEE the black fume of power which he emitted, the dark, heavy vibration of his blood, which cast a spell over her.

As they sat side by side in the motor-car, silent, swaying to the broken road, she could feel the curious tingling heat of his blood, and the heavy power of the WILL that lay unemerged in his blood. She could see again the skies go dark, and the phallic mystery rearing itself like a whirling dark cloud, to the zenith, till it pierced the sombre, twilight zenith; the old, supreme phallic mystery. And herself in the everlasting twilight, a sky above where the sun ran smokily, an earth below where the trees and creatures rose up in blackness, and man strode along naked, dark, half-visible, and suddenly whirled in supreme power, towering like a dark whirlwind column, whirling to pierce the very zenith.

The mystery of the primeval world! She could feel it now in all its shadowy, furious magnificence. She knew now what was the black, glinting look in Cipriano's eyes. She could understand marrying him, now. In the shadowy world where men were visionless, and winds of fury rose up from the earth, Cipriano was still a power. Once you entered his mystery the scale of all things changed, and he became a living male power, undefined, and unconfined. The smallness, the limitations ceased to exist. In his black, glinting eyes the power was limitless, and it was as if, from him, from his body of blood could rise up that pillar of cloud which swayed and swung, like a rearing serpent or a rising tree, till it swept the zenith, and all the earth below was dark and prone, and consummated. Those small hands, that little natural tuft of black goats beard hanging light from his chin, the tilt of his brows and the slight slant of his eyes, the domed Indian head with its thick black hair, they were like symbols to her, of another mystery, the mystery of the twilight, primitive world, where shapes that are small suddenly loom up huge, gigantic on the shadow, and a face like Cipriano's is the face at once of a god and a devil, the undying Pan face. The bygone mystery, that has indeed gone by, but has not passed away. Never shall pass away.

As he sat in silence, casting the old, twilight Pan-power over her, she felt herself submitting, succumbing. He was once more the old dominant male, shadowy, intangible, looming suddenly tall, and covering the sky, making a darkness that was himself and nothing but himself, the Pan male. And she was swooned prone beneath, perfect in her proneness.

It was the ancient phallic mystery, the ancient god-devil of the male Pan. Cipriano unyielding forever, in the ancient twilight, keeping the ancient twilight around him. She understood now his power with his soldiers. He had the old gift of demon-power.

He would never woo; she saw this. When the power of his blood rose in him, the dark aura streamed from him like a cloud pregnant with power, like thunder, and rose like a whirlwind that rises suddenly in the twilight and raises a great pliant column, swaying and leaning with power, clear between heaven and earth.

Ah! and what a mystery of prone submission, on her part, this huge erection would imply! Submission absolute, like the earth under the sky. Beneath an over-arching absolute.

Ah! what a marriage! How terrible! and how complete! With the finality of death, and yet more than death. The arms of the twilight Pan. And the awful, half-intelligible voice from the cloud.

She could conceive now her marriage with Cipriano; the supreme passivity, like the earth below the twilight, consummate in living lifelessness, the sheer solid mystery of passivity. Ah, what an abandon, what an abandon, what an abandon! - of so many things she wanted to abandon.

Cipriano put his hand, with its strange soft warmth and weight, upon her knee, and her soul melted like fused metal.

'En poco tiempo, verdad?' he said to her, looking into her eyes with the old, black, glinting look, of power about to consummate itself.

'In a little while, no?'

She looked back at him, wordless. Language had abandoned her, and she leaned silent and helpless in the vast, unspoken twilight of the Pan world. Her self had abandoned her, and all her day was gone. Only she said to herself:

'My demon lover!'

Her world could end in many ways, and this was one of them. Back to the twilight of the ancient Pan world, where the soul of woman was dumb, to be forever unspoken.

The car had stopped, they had come to Jamiltepec. He looked at her again, as reluctantly he opened the door. And as he stepped out, she realized again his uniform, his small figure in uniform. She had lost it entirely. She had only known his face, the face of the supreme god-demon; with the arching brows and slightly slanting eyes, and the loose, light tuft of a goat-beard. The Master. The everlasting Pan.

He was looking back at her again, using all his power to prevent her seeing in him the little General in uniform, in the worldly vision. And she avoided his eyes, and saw nothing.

They found Ramón sitting in his white clothes in a long chair on the terrace. He was creamy-brown in his pallor.

He saw at once the change in Kate. She had the face of one waking from the dead, curiously dipped in death, with a tenderness far more new and vulnerable than a child's. He glanced at Cipriano. Cipriano's face seemed darker than usual, with that secret hauteur and aloofness of the savage. He knew it well.

'Are you better?' Kate asked.

'Very nearly!' he said, looking up at her gently. 'And you?'

'Yes, I am all right.'

'You are?'

'Yes, I think so. - I have felt myself all lost, since that day. Spiritually, I mean. Otherwise I am all right. Are you healing well?'

'Oh, yes! I always heal quickly.'

'Knives and bullets are horrible things.'

'Yes - in the wrong place.'

Kate felt rather as if she were coming to, from a swoon, as Ramón spoke to her and looked at her. His eyes, his voice seemed kind. Kind? The word suddenly was strange to her, she had to try to get its meaning.

There was no kindness in Cipriano. The god-demon Pan preceded kindness. She wondered if she wanted kindness. She did not know. Everything felt numb.

'I was wondering whether to go to England,' she said.

'Again?' said Ramón, with a slight smile. 'Away from the bullets and the knives, is that it?'

'Yes! - to get away.' And she sighed deeply.

'No!' said Ramón. 'Don't go away. You will find nothing in England.'

'But CAN I go on here?'

'Can you help it?'

'I wish I knew what to do.'

'How can one know? Something happens inside you, and all your decisions are smoke. - Let happen what will happen.'

'I can't QUITE drift as if I had no soul of my own, can I?'

'Sometimes it is best.'

There was a pause. Cipriano stayed outside the conversation altogether, in a dusky world of his own, apart and secretly hostile.

'I have been thinking so much about you,' she said to Ramón, 'and wondering whether it is worth while.'

'What?'

'What you are doing; trying to change the religion of these people. If they have any religion to change. I don't think they are a religious people. They are only superstitious. I have no use for men and women who go crawling down a church aisle on their knees, or holding up their arms for hours. There's something stupid and wrong about it. They never worship a God. Only some little evil power. I have been wondering so much if it is worth while giving yourself to them, and exposing yourself to them. It would be horrible if you were really killed. I have seen you LOOK dead.'

'Now you see me look alive again,' he smiled.

But a heavy silence followed.

'I believe Don Cipriano knows them better than you do. I believe he knows best, if it is any good,' she said.

'And what does he say?' asked Ramón.

'I say I am Ramón's man,' replied Cipriano stubbornly.

Kate looked at him, and mistrusted him. In the long run he was nobody's man. He was that old, masterless Pan-male, that could not even conceive of service; particularly the service of mankind. He saw only glory; the black mystery of glory consummated. And himself like a wind of glory.

'I feel they'll let you down,' said Kate to Ramón.

'Maybe! But I shan't let myself down. I do what I believe in. Possibly I am only the first step round the corner of change. But: ce n'est que le premier pas qui coûte - Why will you not go round the corner with us? At least it is better than sitting still.'

Kate did not answer his question. She sat looking at the mango- trees and the lake, and the thought of that afternoon came over her again.

'How did you men get in; those two bandits on the roof?' she asked wonderingly.

'It was a woman this time; a girl whom Carlota brought here from the Cuna in Mexico City, to be a sewing girl and to teach the peon's wives to sew and do little things. She had a little room at the end of the terrace there - ' Ramón pointed to the terrace projecting towards the lake, opposite the one where his own room was, and the covered balcony. 'She got entangled with one of the peons; a sort of second overseer, called Guillermo. Guillermo had got a wife and four children, but he came to me to say could he change and take Maruca - the sewing girl. I said no, he could stay with his family. And I sent Maruca back to Mexico. But she had had a smattering of education, and thought she was equal to anything. She got messages through to Guillermo, and he ran away and joined her in Mexico, leaving wife and four children here. The wife then went to live with another peon - the blacksmith - whose wife had died and who was supposed to be a good match; a decent fellow.

'One day appeared Guillermo, and said: could he come back? I said not with Maruca. He said he didn't want Maruca, he wanted to come back. His wife was willing to go back to him again with the children. The blacksmith was willing to let her go. I said very well; but he had forfeited his job as sub-overseer, and must be a peon again.

'And he seemed all right - satisfied. But then Maruca came and stayed in Sayula, pretending to make her living as a dressmaker. She was in with the priest; and she got Guillermo again.

'It seems the Knights of Cortés had promised a big reward for the man who would bring in my scalp; secretly, of course. The girl got Guillermo: Guillermo got those two peons, one from San Pablo and one from Ahuajijic; somebody else arranged for the rest.

'The bedroom the girl used to have is that one, on the terrace not far from where the stairs go up to the roof. The bedroom has a lattice window, high up, looking out on to the trees. There's a big laurel de India growing outside. It appears the girl climbed on a table and knocked the iron lattice of the window loose, while she was living here, and that Guillermo, by taking a jump from the bough - a very risky thing, but then he was one of that sort - could land on the window-sill and pull himself into the room.

'Apparently he and the other two men were going to get the scalp and pillage the house before the others could enter. So the first one, the man I killed, climbed the tree, and with a long pole shoved in the lattice of the window, and so got into the room, and up the terrace stairs.

'Martin, my man, who was waiting on the other stairs, ready if they tried to blow out the iron door, heard the smash of the window and rushed round just as the second bandit - the one you shot - was crouching on the window-sill to jump down into the room. The window is quite small, and high up.

'Before Martin could do anything the man had jumped down on top of him and stabbed him twice with his machete. Then he took Martin's knife and came up the stairs, when you shot him in the head.

'Martin was on the floor when he saw the hands of a third man gripping through the window. Then the face of Guillermo. Martin got up and gave the hands a slash with the heavy machete, and Guillermo fell smash back down on to the rocks under the wall.

'When I came down, I found Martin lying outside the door of that room. He told me - They came through there, Patrón. Guillermo was one of them.

'Guillermo broke his thigh on the rocks, and the soldiers found him. He confessed everything, and said he was sorry, and begged my pardon. He's in the prison hospital now.'

'And Maruca?' said Kate.

'They've got her too.'

'There will always be a traitor,' said Kate gloomily.

'Let us hope there will also be a Catarina,' said Ramón.

'But will you go on with it - your Quetzalcoatli?'

'How can I leave off? It's my métier now. Why don't you join us? Why don't you help me?'

'How?'

'You will see. Soon you will hear the drums again. Soon the first day of Quetzalcoatli will come. You will see. Then Cipriano will appear - in the red serape - and Huitzilopochtli will share the Mexican Olympus with Quetzalcoatli. Then I want a goddess.'

'But will Don Cipriano be the god Huitzilopochtli?' she asked, taken aback.

'First Man of Huitzilopochtli, as I am First Man of Quetzalcoatli.'

'Will you?' said Kate to Cipriano. 'That horrible Huitzilopochtli?'

'Yes, Señora!' said Cipriano, with a subtle smile of hauteur, the secret savage coming into his own.

'Not the old Huitzilopochtli - but the new,' said Ramón. 'And then there must come a goddess; wife or virgin, there must come a goddess. Why not you, as the First Woman of - say Itz'papatli, just for the sound of the name?'

'I?' said Kate. 'Never! I should die of shame.'

'Shame?' laughed Ramón. 'Ah, Señora Caterina, why shame? This is a thing that MUST be done. There must be manifestations. We MUST change back to the vision of the living cosmos; we MUST. The oldest Pan is in us, and he will not be denied. In cold blood and in hot blood both, we must make the change. That is how man is made. I accept the MUST from the oldest Pan in my soul, and from the newest ME. Once a man gathers his whole soul together and arrives at a conclusion, the time of alternatives has gone. I AM the MUST. No more than that. I AM the First Man of Quetzalcoatli. I am Quetzalcoatli himself, if you like. A manifestation, as well as a man. I accept myself entire, and proceed to make destiny. Why, what else can I do?'

Kate was silent. His loss of blood seemed to have washed him curiously fresh again, and he was carried again out of the range of human emotion. A strange sort of categorical imperative! She saw now his power over Cipriano. It lay in this imperative which he acknowledged in his own soul, and which really was like a messenger from the beyond.

She looked on like a child looking through a railing; rather wistful, and rather frightened.

Ah, the soul! The soul was always flashing and darkening into new shapes, each one strange to the other. She had thought Ramón and she had looked into each other's souls. And now, he was this pale, distant man, with a curious gleam, like a messenger from the beyond, in his soul. And he was remote, remote from any woman.

Whereas Cipriano had suddenly opened a new world to her, a world of twilight, with the dark, half-visible face of the god-demon Pan, who can never perish, but ever returns upon mankind from the shadows. The world of shadows and dark prostration, with the phallic wind rushing through the dark.

Cipriano had to go to the town at the end of the lake, near the State of Colima; to Jaramay. He was going in a motor-boat with a couple of soldiers. Would Kate go with him? He waited, in heavy silence, for her answer.

She said she would. She was desperate. She did not want to be sent back to her own empty, dead house.

It was one of those little periods when the rain seems strangled, the air thick with thunder, silent, ponderous thunder latent in the air from day to day, among the thick, heavy sunshine. Kate, in these days in Mexico, felt that between the volcanic violence under the earth, and the electric violence of the air above, men walked dark and incalculable, like demons from another planet.

The wind on the lake seemed fresh, from the west, but it was a running mass of electricity, that burned her face and her eyes and the roots of her hair. When she had wakened in the night and pushed the sheets, heavy sparks fell from her fingertips. She felt she could not live.

The lake was like some frail milk of thunder; the dark soldiers curled under the awning of the boat, motionless. They seemed dark as lava and sulphur, and full of a dormant, diabolic electricity. Like salamanders. The boatman in the stern, steering, was handsome, almost like the man she had killed. But this one had pale greyish eyes, phosphorescent with flecks of silver.

Cipriano sat in silence in front of her. He had removed his tunic, and his neck rose almost black from his white shirt. She could see how different his blood was from hers, dark, blackish, like the blood of lizards among hot black rocks. She could feel its changeless surge, holding up his light, bluey-black head as on a fountain. And she would feel her own pride dissolving, going.

She felt he wanted his blood-stream to envelop hers. As if it could possibly be. He was so still, so unnoticing, and the darkness of the nape of his neck was so like invisibility. Yet he was always waiting, waiting, waiting, invisibly and ponderously waiting.

She lay under the awning in the heat and light without looking out. The wind made the canvas crackle.

Whether the time was long or short, she knew not. But they were coming to the silent lake-end, where the beach curved round in front of them. It seemed sheer lonely sunlight.

But beyond the shingle there were willow-trees, and a low ranch-house. Three anchored canoes rode with their black, stiff lines. There were flat lands, with maize half grown and blowing its green flags sideways. But all was as if invisible, in the intense hot light.

The warm, thin water ran shallower and shallower, to the reach of shingle beyond. Black water-fowl bobbed like corks. The motor stopped. The boat ebbed on. Under the thin water were round stones, with thin green hair of weed. They would not reach the shore - not by twenty yards.

The soldiers took off their huaraches, rolled their cotton trousers up their black legs, and got into the water. The tall boatman did the same, pulling forward the boat. She would go no farther. He anchored her with a big stone. Then with his uncanny pale eyes, under the black lashes, he asked Kate in a low tone if he could carry her ashore, offering her his shoulder.

'No, no!' she said. 'I'll paddle.'

And hastily she took off her shoes and stockings and stepped into the shallow water, holding up her thin skirt of striped silk. The man laughed; so did the soldiers.

The water was almost hot. She went blindly forward, her head dropped. Cipriano watched her with the silent, heavy, changeless patience of his race, then when she reached the shingle he came ashore on the boatman's shoulders.

They crossed the hot shingle to the willow-trees by the maize-fields, and sat upon boulders. The lake stretched pale and unreal, far, far away into the invisible, with dimmed mountains rising on either side, bare and abstract. The canoes were black and stiff, their masts motionless. The white motor-boat rode near. Black birds were bobbing like corks, at this place of the water's end and the world's end.

A lonely woman went up the shingle with a water-jar on her shoulder. Hearing a sound, Kate looked, and saw a group of fishermen holding a conclave in a dug-out hollow by a tree. They saluted, looking at her with black, black eyes. They saluted humbly, and yet in their black eyes was that ancient remote hardness and hauteur.

Cipriano had sent the soldiers for horses. It was too hot to walk.

They sat silent in the invisibility of this end of the lake, the great light taking sight away.

'Why am I not the living Huitzilopochtli?' said Cipriano quietly, looking full at her with his black eyes.

'Do you feel you are?' she said, startled.

'Yes,' he replied, in the same low, secret voice. 'It is what I feel.'

The black eyes looked at her with a rather awful challenge. And the small, dark voice seemed to take all her will away. They sat in silence, and she felt she was fainting, losing her consciousness for ever.

The soldiers came, with a black Arab horse for him; a delicate thing; and for her a donkey, on which she could sit sideways. He lifted her into the saddle, where she sat only half-conscious. A soldier led the donkey, and they set off, past the long, frail, hanging fishing-nets, that made long filmy festoons, into the lane.

Then out into the sun and the grey-black dust, towards the grey-black, low huts of Jaramay, that lined the wide, desert road.

Jaramay was down as a lava oven. Black low hut-houses with tiled roofs lined the broken, long, dilapidated street. Broken houses. Blazing sun. A brick pavement all smashed and sun-worn. A dog leading a blind man along the little black walls, on the broken pavement. A few goats. And unspeakable lifelessness, emptiness.

They came to the broken plaza, with sun-decayed church and ragged palm trees. Emptiness, sun, sun-decay, sun-dilapidation. One man on a dainty Arab horse trotting lightly over the stones, gun behind, big hat making a dark face. For the rest, the waste space of the centre of life. Curious how dainty the horse looked, and the horseman sitting erect, amid the sun-roasted ruin.

They came to a big building. A few soldiers were drawn up at the entrance. They saluted Cipriano as if they were transfixed, rolling their dark eyes.

Cipriano was down from his horse in a moment. Emitting the dark rays of dangerous power, he found the Jefe all obsequious; a fat man in dirty white clothes. They put their wills entirely in his power.

He asked for a room where his esposa could rest. Kate was pale and all her will had left her. He was carrying her on his will.

He accepted a large room with a brick-tiled floor and a large, new brass bed with a coloured cotton cover thrown over it, and with two chairs. The strange, dry, stark emptiness, that looked almost cold in the heat.

'The sun makes you pale. Lie down and rest. I will close the windows,' he said.

He closed the shutters till only a darkness remained.

Then in the darkness, suddenly, softly he touched her, stroking her hip.

'I said you were my wife,' he said, in his small, soft Indian voice. 'It is true, isn't it?'

She trembled, and her limbs seemed to fuse like metal melting down. She fused into a molten unconsciousness, her will, her very self gone, leaving her lying in molten life, like a lake of still fire, unconscious of everything save the eternity of the fire in which she was gone. Gone in the fadeless fire, which has no death. Only the fire can leave US, and we can die.

And Cipriano the master of fire. The Living Huitzilopochtli, he had called himself. The living firemaster. The god in the flame; the salamander.

One cannot have one's own way, and the way of the gods. It has to be one or the other.

When she went out into the next room, he was sitting alone, waiting for her. He rose quickly, looking at her with black, flashing eyes from which dark flashes of light seemed to play upon her. And he took her hand, to touch her again.

'Will you come to eat at the little restaurant?' he said.

In the uncanny flashing of his eyes she saw a gladness that frightened her a little. His touch on her hand was uncannily soft and inward. His words said nothing; would never say anything. But she turned aside her face, a little afraid of that flashing, primitive gladness, which was so impersonal and beyond her.

Wrapping a big yellow-silk shawl around her, Spanish fashion, against the heat, and taking her white sunshade lined with green, she stepped out with him past the bowing Jefe and the lieutenant, and the saluting soldiers. She shook hands with the Jefe and the lieutenant. They were men of flesh and blood, they understood her presence, and bowed low, looking up at her with flashing eyes. And she knew what it was to be a goddess in the old style, saluted by the real fire in men's eyes, not by their lips.

In her big, soft velour hat of jade green, her breast wrapped round with the yellow brocade shawl, she stepped across the sun-eaten plaza, a sort of desert made by man, softly, softly beside her Cipriano, soft as a cat, hiding her face under her green hat and her sunshade, keeping her body secret and elusive. And the soldiers and the officers and clerks of the Jefatura, watching her with fixed black eyes, saw, not the physical woman herself, but the inaccessible, voluptuous mystery of man's physical consummation.

They ate in the dusky little cavern of a fonda kept by a queer old woman with Spanish blood in her veins. Cipriano was very sharp and imperious in his orders, the old woman scuffled and ran in a sort of terror. But she was thrilled to her soul.

Kate was bewildered by the new mystery of her own elusiveness. She was elusive even to herself. Cipriano hardly talked to her at all; which was quite right. She did not want to be talked to, and words addressed straight at her, without the curious soft veiling which these people knew how to put into their voices, speaking only to the unconcerned, third person in her, came at her like blows. Ah, the ugly blows of direct, brutal speech! She had suffered so much from them. Now she wanted this veiled elusiveness in herself, she wanted to be addressed in the third person.

After the lunch they went to look at the serapes which were being spun for Ramón. Their two soldiers escorted them a few yards up a broken, sun-wasted wide street of little, low black houses, then knocked at big doors.

Kate entered the grateful shade of the zaguán. In the dark shade of the inner court, or patio, where sun blazed on bananas beyond, was a whole weaver's establishment. A fat, one-eyed man sent a little boy to fetch chairs. But Kate wandered, fascinated.

In the zaguán was a great heap of silky white wool, very fine, and in the dark corridor of the patio all the people at work. Two boys with flat square boards bristling with many little wire bristles were carding the white wool into thin films, which they took off the boards in fine rolls like mist, and laid beside the two girls at the end of the shed.

These girls stood by their wheels, spinning, standing beside the running wheel, which they set going with one hand, while with the other hand they kept a long, miraculous thread of white wool-yarn dancing at the very tip of the rapidly-spinning spool-needle, the filmy rolls of the carded wool just touching the point of the spool, and at once running out into a long, pure thread of white, which wound itself on to the spool, and another piece of carded wool was attached. One of the girls, a beautiful oval-faced one, who smiled shyly at Kate, was very clever. It was almost miraculous the way she touched the spool and drew out the thread of wool almost as fine as sewing cotton.

At the other end of the corridor, under the black shed, were two looms, and two men weaving. They treadled at the wooden tread- looms, first with one foot and then the other, absorbed and silent, in the shadow of the black mud walls. One man was weaving a brilliant scarlet serape, very fine, and of the beautiful cochineal red. It was difficult work. From the pure scarlet centre zigzags of black and white were running in a sort of whorl, away to the edge, that was pure black. Wonderful to see the man, with small bobbins of fine red and white yarn, and black, weaving a bit of the ground, weaving the zigzag of black up to it, and, up to that, the zigzag of white, with deft, dark fingers, quickly adjusting his setting needle, quick as lightning threading his pattern, then bringing down the beam heavily to press it tight. The serape was woven on a

black warp, long fine threads of black, like a harp. But beautiful beyond words the perfect, delicate scarlet weaving in.

'For whom is that?' said Kate to Cipriano. 'For you?'

'Yes,' he said. 'For me!'

The other weaver was weaving a plain white serape with blue and natural-black ends, throwing the spool of yarn from side to side, between the white harp-strings, pressing down each thread of his woof heavily, with the wooden bar, then treddling to change the long, fine threads of the warp.

In the shadow of the mud shed, the pure colours of the lustrous wool looked mystical, the cardinal scarlet, the pure, silky white, the lovely blue, and the black, gleaming in the shadow of the blackish walls.

The fat man with the one eye brought serapes, and two boys opened them one by one. There was a new one, white, with close flowers of blue on black stalks, and with green leaves, forming the borders, and at the boca, the mouth, where the head went through, a whole lot of little, rainbow-coloured flowers, in a coiling blue circle.

'I love that!' said Kate. 'What is that for?'

'It is one of Ramón's; they are Quetzalcoatl's colours, the blue and white and natural black. But this one is for the day of the opening of the flowers, when he brings in the goddess who will come,' said Cipriano.

Kate was silent with fear.

There were two scarlet serapes with a diamond at the centre, all black, and a border-pattern of black diamonds.

'Are these yours?'

'Well, they are for the messengers of Huitzilopochtli. Those are my colours: scarlet and black. But I myself have white as well, just as Ramón has a fringe of my scarlet.'

'Doesn't it make you afraid?' she said to him, looking at him rather blanched.

'How make me afraid?'

'To do this. To be the living Huitzilopochtli,' she said.

'I AM the living Huitzilopochtli,' he said. 'When Ramón dares to be the living Quetzalcoatl, I dare to be the living Huitzilopochtli. I AM he. - Am I not?'

Kate looked at him, at his dark face with the little hanging tuft of beard, the arched brows, the slightly slanting black eyes. In the round, fierce gaze of his eyes there was a certain silence, like tenderness, for her. But beyond that, an inhuman assurance, which looked far, far beyond her, in the darkness.

And she hid her face from him, murmuring:

'I know you are.'

'And on the day of flowers,' he said, 'you, too, shall come, in a green dress they shall weave you, with blue flowers at the seam, and on your head the new moon of flowers.'

She hid her face, afraid.

'Come and look at the wools,' he said, leading her across the patio to the shade where, on a line, the yarn hung in dripping tresses of colour, scarlet and blue and yellow and green and brown.

'See!' he said. 'You shall have a dress of green, that leaves the arms bare, and a white under-dress with blue flowers.'

The green was a strong apple-green colour.

Two women under the shed were crouching over big earthenware vessels, which sat over a fire which burned slowly in a hole dug in the ground. They were watching the steaming water. One took dried, yellow-brown flowers, and flung them in her water as if she were a witch brewing decoctions. She watched as the flowers rose, watched as they turned softly in the boiling water. Then she threw in a little white powder.

'And on the day of flowers you, too, will come. Ah! If Ramón is the centre of a new world, a world of new flowers shall spring up round him, and push the old world back. I call you the First Flower.'

They left the courtyard. The soldiers had brought the black Arab stallion for Cipriano, and for her the donkey, on which she could perch sideways, like a peasant woman. So they went through the hot, deserted silence of the mud-brick town, down the lane of deep, dark-grey dust, under vivid green trees that were bursting into flower, again to the silent shore of the lake-end, where the delicate fishing-nets were hung in long lines and blowing in the wind, loop after loop striding above the shingle and blowing delicately in the wind, as away on the low places the green maize was blowing, and the fleecy willows shook like soft green feathers hanging down.

The lake stretched pale and unreal into nowhere; the motor-boat rode near in, the black canoas stood motionless a little farther out. Two women, tiny as birds, were kneeling on the water's edge, washing.

Kate jumped from her donkey on to the shingle.

'Why not ride through the water to the boat?' said Cipriano.

She looked at the boat, and thought of the donkey stumbling and splashing.

'No,' she said. 'I will wade again.'

He rode his black Arab to the water. It sniffed, and entered with delicate feet into the warm shallows. Then, a little way in, it stood and suddenly started pawing the

water, as a horse paws the ground, in the oddest manner possible, very rapidly striking the water with its fore-foot, so that little waves splashed up over its black legs and belly.

But this splashed Cipriano too. He lifted the reins and touched the creature with his spurs. It jumped, and went half-stumbling, half-dancing through the water, prettily, with a splashing noise. Cipriano quieted it, and it waded gingerly on through the shallows of the vast lake, bending its black head down to look, to look in a sort of fascination at the stony bottom, swaying its black tail as it moved its glossy, raven haunches gingerly.

Then again it stood still, and suddenly, with a rapid beating of its fore-paw, sent the water hollowly splashing up, till its black belly glistened wet like a black serpent, and its legs were shiny wet pillars. And again Cipriano lifted its head and touched it with the spurs, so the delicate creature danced in a churn of water.

'Oh, it looks so pretty! It looks so pretty when it paws the water!' cried Kate from the shore. 'Why does it do it?'

Cipriano turned in the saddle and looked back at her with the sudden, gay Indian laugh.

'It likes to be wet - who knows?' he said.

A soldier hurried wading through the water and took the horse's bridle. Cipriano dismounted neatly from the stirrup, with a little backward leap into the boat, a real savage horseman. The barefoot soldier leaped into the saddle, and turned the horse to shore. But the black horse, male and wilful, insisted on stopping to paw the waters and splash himself, with a naïve, wilful sort of delight.

'Look! Look!' cried Kate. 'It's so pretty.'

But the soldier was perching in the saddle, drawing up his legs like a monkey, and shouting at the horse. It would wet its fine harness.

He rode the Arab slanting through the water, to where an old woman, sitting in her own silence and almost invisible before, was squatted in the water with brown bare shoulders emerging, ladling water from a half gourd-shell over her matted grey head. The horse splashed and danced, the old woman rose with her rag of chemise clinging to her, scolding in a quiet voice and bending forward with her calabash cup; the soldier laughed, the black horse joyfully and excitedly pawed the water and made it splash high up, the soldier shouted again. - But the soldier knew he could make Cipriano responsible for the splashings.

Kate waded slowly to the boat, and stepped in. The water was warm, but the wind was blowing with strong, electric heaviness. Kate quickly dried her feet and legs on her handkerchief, and pulled on her biscuit-coloured silk stockings and brown shoes.

She sat looking back, at the lake-end, the desert of shingle, the blowing, gauzy nets, and, beyond them, the black land with green maize standing, a further fleecy green of trees, and the broken lane leading deep into the rows of old trees, where the soldiers from Jaramay were now riding away on the black horse and the donkey. On the right there was a ranch, too; a long, low black building and a cluster of black huts with tiled roofs, empty gardens with reed fences, clumps of banana and willow-trees. All in the changeless, heavy light of the afternoon, the long lake reaching into invisibility, between its unreal mountains.

'It is beautiful here!' said Kate. 'One could almost live here.'

'Ramón says he will make the lake the centre of a new world,' said Cipriano. 'We will be the gods of the lake.'

'I'm afraid I am just a woman,' said Kate.

His black eyes came round at her swiftly.

'What does it mean, just a woman?' he said, quickly, sternly.

She hung her head. What did it mean? What indeed did it mean? Just a woman! She let her soul sink again into the lovely elusiveness where everything is possible, even that oneself is elusive among the gods.

The motor-boat, with waves slapping behind, was running quickly along the brownish pale water. The soldiers, who were in the front, for balance, crouched on the floor with the glazed, stupefied mask-faces of the people when they are sleepy. And soon they were a heap in the bottom of the boat, two little heaps lying in contact.

Cipriano sat behind her, his tunic removed, spreading his white-sleeved arms on the back of his seat. The cartridge-belt was heavy on his hips. His face was completely expressionless, staring ahead. The wind blew his black hair on his forehead, and blew his little beard. He met her eyes with a far-off, remote smile, far, far down his black eyes. But it was a wonderful recognition of her.

The boatman in the stern sat tall and straight, watching with pale eyes of shallow, superficial consciousness. The great hat made his face dark, the chin-ribbon fell black against his cheek. Feeling her look at him, he glanced at her as if she were not there.

Turning, she pushed her cushion on to the floor and slid down. Cipriano got up, in the running, heaving boat, and pulled her another seat-cushion. She lay, covering her face with her shawl, while the motor chugged rapidly, the awning rattled with sudden wind, the hurrying waves rose behind, giving the boat a slap and throwing her forward, sending spray sometimes, in the heat and silence of the lake.

Kate lost her consciousness, under her yellow shawl, in the silence of men.

She woke to the sudden stopping of the engine, and sat up. They were near shore; the white towers of San Pablo among near trees. The boatman, wide-eyed, was bending over the engine, abandoning the tiller. The waves pushed the boat slowly round.

'What is it?' said Cipriano.

'More gasoline, Excellency!' said the boatman.

The soldiers woke and sat up.

The breeze had died.

'The water is coming,' said Cipriano.

'The rain?' said Kate.

'Yes - ' and he pointed with his fine black finger, which was pale on the inside, to where black clouds were rushing up behind the mountains, and in another place farther off, great heavy banks were rising with strange suddenness. The air seemed to be knitting together overhead. Lightning flashed in various places, muffled thunder spoke far away.

Still the boat drifted. There was a smell of gasoline. The man potted with the engine. The motor started again, only to stop again in a moment.

The man rolled up his trousers, and, to Kate's amazement, stepped into the lake, though they were a mile from the shore. The water was not up to his knees. They were on a bank. He slowly pushed the boat before him, wading in the silence.

'How deep is the lake farther in?' asked Kate.

'There, Señorita, where the birds with the white breasts are swimming, it is eight and a half metres,' he said, pointing as he waded.

'We must make haste,' said Cipriano.

'Yes, Excellency!'

The man stepped in again, with his long, handsome brown legs. The motor spluttered. They were under way, running fast. A new chill wind was springing up.

But they rounded a bend, and saw ahead the flat promontory with the dark mango-trees, and the pale yellow upper story of the hacienda house of Jamiltepec rising above the trees. Palm-trees stood motionless, the bougainvillea hung in heavy sheets of magenta colour. Kate could see huts of peons among the trees, and women washing, kneeling on stones at the lake side where the stream ran in, and a big plantation of bananas just above.

A cool wind was spinning round in the heavens. Black clouds were filling up. Ramón came walking slowly down to the little harbour as they landed.

'The water is coming,' he said in Spanish.

'We are in time,' said Cipriano.

Ramón looked them both in the face, and knew. Kate, in her new elusiveness, laughed softly.

'There is another flower opened in the garden of Quetzalcoatl,' said Cipriano in Spanish.

'Under the red cannas of Huitzilopochtli,' said Ramón.

'Yes, there, Señor,' said Cipriano. 'Pero una florecita tan zarca! Y abrió en mi sombra, amigo.'

'Seis hombre de la alta fortuna.'

'Verdad!'

It was about five in the afternoon. The wind hissed in the leaves, and suddenly the rain was streaming down in a white smoke of power. The ground was a solid white smoke of water, the lake was gone.

'You will have to stay here to-night,' said Cipriano to Kate in Spanish, in the soft, lapping Indian voice.

'But the rain will leave off,' she said.

'You will have to stay here,' he repeated, in the same Spanish phrase, in a curious voice like a breath of wind.

Kate looked at Ramón, blushing. He looked back at her, she thought, very remote, as if looking at her from far, far away.

'The bride of Huitzilopochtli,' he said, with a faint smile.

'Thou, Quetzalcoatl, thou wilt have to marry us,' said Cipriano.

'Do you wish it?' said Ramón.

'Yes!' she said. 'I want you to marry us, only you.'

'When the sun goes down,' said Ramón.

And he went away to his room. Cipriano showed Kate to her room, then left her and went to Ramón.

The cool water continued to come down, rushing with a smoke of speed down from heaven.

As the twilight came through the unceasing rain, a woman-servant brought Kate a sleeveless dress or chemise of white linen, scalloped at the bottom and embroidered with stiff blue flowers upside-down on the black stalks, with two stiff green leaves. In the centre of the flowers was the tiny Bird of Quetzalcoatl.

'The Patrón asks that you put this on!' said the woman, bringing also a lamp and a little note.

The note was from Ramón, saying in Spanish: 'Take the dress of the bride of Huitzilopochtli, and put it on, and take off everything but this. Leave no thread nor thing that can touch you from the past. The past is finished. It is the new twilight.'

Kate did not quite know how to put on the slip, for it had no sleeves nor arm-holes, but was just a straight slip with a running string. Then she remembered the old Indian

way, and tied the string over her left shoulder; rather, slipped the tied string over her left shoulder, leaving her arms and part of her right breast bare, the slip gathered full over her breasts. And she sighed. For it was but a shirt with flowers upturned at the bottom.

Ramón, barefoot, in his white clothes, came for her and took her in silence downstairs into the garden. The zaguán was dark, the rain fell steadily in the twilight, but was abating. All was dark twilight.

Ramón took off his blouse and threw it on the stairs. Then with naked breast he led her into the garden, into the massive rain. Cipriano came forward, barefoot, with naked breast, bareheaded, in the floppy white pantaloons.

They stood barefoot on the earth, that still threw back a white smoke of waters. The rain drenched them in a moment.

'Barefoot on the living earth, with faces to the living rain,' said Ramón in Spanish, quietly; 'at twilight, between the night and the day; man, and woman, in presence of the unfading star, meet to be perfect in one another. Lift your face, Caterina, and say: This man is my rain from heaven.'

Kate lifted her face and shut her eyes in the downpour.

'This man is my rain from heaven,' she said.

'This woman is the earth to me - say that, Cipriano,' said Ramón, kneeling on one knee and laying his hand flat on the earth.

Cipriano kneeled and laid his hand on the earth.

'This woman is the earth to me,' he said.

'I, woman, kiss the feet and the heels of this man, for I will be strength to him, throughout the long twilight of the Morning Star.'

Kate kneeled and kissed the feet and heels of Cipriano, and said her say.

'I, man, kiss the brow and the breast of this woman, for I will be her peace and her increase, through the long twilight of the Morning Star.'

Cipriano kissed her, and said his say.

Then Ramón put Cipriano's hand over the rain-wet eyes of Kate, and Kate's hand over the rain-wet eyes of Cipriano.

'I, a woman, beneath the darkness of this covering hand, pray to this man to meet me in the heart of the night, and never deny me,' said Kate. 'But let it be an abiding place between us, for ever.'

'I, a man, beneath the darkness of this covering hand, pray to this woman to receive me in the heart of the night, in the abiding place that is between us for ever.'

'Man shall betray a woman, and woman shall betray a man,' said Ramón, 'and it shall be forgiven them, each of them. But if they have met as earth and rain, between day and night, in the hour of the Star; if the man has met the woman with his body and the star of his hope, and the woman has met the man with her body and the star of her yearning, so that a meeting has come to pass, and an abiding place for the two where they are as one star, then shall neither of them betray the abiding place where the meeting lives like an unsetting star. For if either betray the abiding place of the two, it shall not be forgiven, neither by day nor by night nor in the twilight of the star.'

The rain was leaving off, the night was dark.

'Go and bathe in the warm water, which is peace between us all. And put oil on your bodies, which is the stillness of the Morning Star. Anoint even the soles of your feet, and the roots of your hair.'

Kate went up to her room and found a big earthenware bath with steaming water, and big towels. Also, in a beautiful little bowl, oil, and a soft bit of white wool.

She bathed her rain-wet body in the warm water, dried and anointed herself with the clear oil, that was clear as water. It was soft, and had a faint perfume, and was grateful to the skin. She rubbed all her body, even among her hair and under her feet, till she glowed softly.

Then she put on another of the slips with the inverted blue flowers that had been laid on the bed for her, and over that a dress of green, hand-woven wool, made of two pieces joined openly together down the sides, showing a bit of the white, full under-dress, and fastened on the left shoulder. There was a stiff flower, blue, on a black stem, with two black leaves, embroidered at the bottom, at each side. And her white slip showed a bit at the breast, and hung below the green skirt, showing the blue flowers.

It was strange and primitive, but beautiful. She pushed her feet into the plaited green huaraches. But she wanted a belt. She tied a piece of ribbon round her waist.

A mozo tapped to say supper was ready.

Laughing rather shyly, she went along to the salon.

Ramón and Cipriano were both waiting, in silence, in their white clothes. Cipriano had his red serape loosely thrown over his shoulders.

'Sol!' said Cipriano, coming forward. 'The bride of Huitzilopochtli, like a green morning. But Huitzilopochtli will put on your sash, and you will put on his shoes, so that he shall never leave you, and you shall be always in his spell.'

Cipriano tied round her waist a narrow woollen sash of white wool, with white, terraced towers upon a red and black ground. And she stooped and put on his small, dark feet the huaraches of woven red strips of leather, with a black cross on the toes.

'One more little gift,' said Ramón.

He made Kate put over Cipriano's head a blue cord bearing a little symbol of Quetzalcoatl, the snake in silver and the bird in blue turquoise. Cipriano put over her head the same symbol, but in gold, with a bird in black dull jet, and hanging on a red cord.

'There!' said Ramón. 'That is the symbol of Quetzalcoatl, the Morning Star. Remember the marriage is the meeting-ground, and the meeting-ground is the star. If there be no star, no meeting-ground, no true coming together of man with the woman, into a wholeness, there is no marriage. And if there is no marriage, there is nothing but an agitation. If there is no honourable meeting of man with woman and woman with man, there is no good thing come to pass. But if the meeting come to pass, then whosoever betrays the abiding place, which is the meeting-ground, which is that which lives like a star between day and night, between the dark of woman and the dawn of man, between man's night and woman's morning, shall never be forgiven, neither here nor in the hereafter. For man is frail and woman is frail, and none can draw the line down which another shall walk. But the star that is between two people and is their meeting-ground shall not be betrayed.

'And the star that is between three people, and is their meeting-ground, shall not be betrayed.

'And the star that is between all men and all women, and between all the children of men, shall not be betrayed.

'Whosoever betrays another man, betrays a man like himself, a fragment. For if there is no star between a man and a man, or even a man and a wife, there is nothing. But whosoever betrays the star that is between him and another man, betrays all, and all is lost to the traitor.

'Where there is no star and no abiding place, nothing is, so nothing can be lost.'