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Chapter 25 - Teresa

Ramón somewhat surprised Kate by marrying again, a couple of months or so after the death of Doña Carlota. The new bride was a young woman of about twenty-eight, called Teresa. There was a very quiet civil wedding, and Ramón brought his new wife to Jamiltepec.

He had known her since she was a child, for she was the daughter of the famous hacienda of Las Yemas, some twelve miles inland from Jamiltepec. Don Tomás, her father, had been a staunch friend of the Carrascos.

But Don Tomás had died a year ago, leaving the large, flourishing tequila hacienda to his three children, to be administered by Teresa. Teresa was the youngest. Her two brothers had reverted to the usual wasteful, spendthrift, brutal Mexican way. Therefore Don Tomás, in order to save the hacienda from their destructive hands, had especially appointed Teresa administrador, and had got the brothers' consent to this. After all, they were shiftless ne'er-do-wells, and had never shown the slightest desire to help in the rather burdensome business of managing a large tequila hacienda, during their father's lifetime. Teresa had been the one. And during her father's illness the whole charge had devolved on her, while her brothers wasted themselves and their substance in the squashy prostitution-living of Mexicans of their class, away in the cities.

No sooner was the father dead, however, and Teresa in charge, than home came the two brothers, big with their intention to be hacendados. By simple brute force they ousted their sister, gave orders over her head, jeered at her, and in crushing her united for once with each other. They were putting her back into her place as a woman - that is to say, back into a secluded sort of prostitution, to which, in their eyes, women belonged.

But they were bullies, and, as bullies, cowards. And like so many Mexicans of that class, soft and suicidal towards themselves. They made friends with judges and generals. They rode about in resplendent charro dress, and had motor-loads of rather doubtful visitors.

Against their soft, sensuous brutality Teresa could do nothing, and she knew it. They were all soft and sensual, or sensuous, handsome in their way, open-handed, careless, but bullies, with no fear at the middle of them.

'Make yourself desirable, and get a husband for yourself,' they said to her.

In their eyes, her greatest crime was that she did not make herself desirable to men of their sort. That she had never had a man, that she was not married, made her almost repulsive to them. What was woman for, but for loose, soft, prostitutional sex?

'Do you want to wear the trousers?' they jeered at her. 'No, Señorita! Not while there are two men on the place, you are not going to wear the trousers. No, Señorita! The trousers, the men wear them. The women keep under their petticoats that which they are women for.'

Teresa was used to these insults. But they made her soul burn.

'You, do you want to be an American woman?' they said to her. 'Go off to America, then, and bob your hair and wear breeches. Buy a ranch there, and get a husband to take your orders. Go!'

She went to her lawyers, but they held up their hands. And she went to Ramón, whom she had known since she was a child.

It would have meant a hopeless and ruinous law-suit, to get the brothers ejected from the hacienda. It would have meant the rapid ruin of the estate. Ramón instead asked Teresa to marry him, and he carefully arranged her dowry, so that she should always have her own provision.

'It is a country where men despise sex, and live for it,' said Ramón. 'Which is just suicide.'

Ramón came with his wife, to see Kate. Teresa was rather small, pale, with a lot of loose black hair and big, wide black eyes. Yet in her quiet bearing and her well-closed mouth there was an air of independence and authority. She had suffered great humiliation at the hands of her brothers, there was still a certain wanness round her eyes, the remains of tears of anger and helpless indignation, and the bitterness of insulted sex. But now she loved Ramón with a wild, virgin loyalty. That, too, was evident. He had saved her sex from the insult, restored it to her in its pride and its beauty. And in return, she felt an almost fierce reverence for him.

But with Kate she was shy and rather distant: a little afraid of the travelled, experienced, rather assertive white-skinned woman, the woman of the other race. She sat in Kate's salon in her simple white dress with a black gauze reboso, her brown hands motionless in her lap, her dark neck erect, her dark, slender, well-shaped cheek averted. She seemed, Kate thought, rather like a little sempstress.

But Kate was reckoning without that strange quiescent power of authority which Teresa also possessed, in her slight, dark body. And without the black, flashing glances which rested on her from time to time, from Teresa's eyes, full of searching fierceness and fiery misgiving. A fiery soul, in such a demure, slight, dark body. Sometimes a muted word came from her mouth, and a constrained smile moved her lips. But her burning eyes never changed. She did not even look at Ramón.

'How much do you charge per word, Chica?' he asked her, with a sort of soft fondness.

Then her dark eyes flashed at him, and her mouth gave a little smile. It was evident she was hopelessly in love with him, in a sort of trance or muse of love. And she maintained such a cold sort of blankness towards Kate.

'She despises me,' thought Kate, 'because I can't be in love as she is.'

And for one second Kate envied Teresa. The next second, she despised her. 'The harem type - '

Well, it was Ramón's nature to be a sort of Sultan. He looked very handsome in his white clothes, very serene and pasha-like in his assurance, yet at the same time, soft, pleasant, something boyish also in his physical well-being. In his soft yet rather pasha-like way, he was mixing a cocktail of gin and vermouth and lime. Teresa watched him from the corner of her eye. And at the same time, she watched Kate, the potential enemy, the woman who talked with men on their own plane.

Kate rose to get spoons. At the same moment, he stepped back from the low table where he was squeezing a lime, so that he came into slight collision with her. And Kate noticed again how quick and subtle was his physical evasion of her, the soft, almost liquid, hot quickness of sliding out of contact with her. His natural voluptuousness avoided her as a flame leans away from a draught.

She flushed slightly. And Teresa saw the quick flush under the fair, warm-white skin, the leap of yellow light, almost like anger, into Kate's grey-hazel eyes. The moment of evasion of two different blood-streams.

And Teresa rose and went to Ramón's side, bending over and looking in the tumblers, asking, with that curious affected childishness of dark women:

'What do you put in?'

'Look!' said Ramón. And with the same curious male childishness of dark men, he was explaining the cocktail to her, giving her a little gin in a spoon, to taste.

'It is an impure tequila,' she said naïvely.

'At eight pesos a bottle?' he laughed.

'So much! It is much!'

She looked into his eyes for a second, and saw all his face go darker, warmer, as if his flesh were fusing soft towards her. Her small head poised the prouder. She had got him back.

'Harem tricks!' said Kate to herself. And she was somewhat impatient, seeing the big, portentous Ramón enveloped in the toils of this little dark thing. She resented being made so conscious of his physical presence, his full, male body inside his thin white clothes, the strong, yet soft shoulders, the full, rich male thighs. It was as if she herself, also, being in the presence of this Sultan, should succumb as part of the harem.

What a curious will the little dark woman had! What a subtle female power inside her rather skinny body! She had the power to make him into a big, golden full glory of a man. Whilst she herself became almost inconspicuous, save for her big black eyes lit with a tigerish power.

Kate watched in wonder. She herself had known men who made her feel a queen, who made her feel as if the sky rested on her bosom and her head was among the stars. She knew what it was to rise grander and grander, till she filled the universe with her womanhood.

Now she saw the opposite taking place. This little bit of a black-eyed woman had an almost uncanny power to make Ramón great and gorgeous in the flesh, whilst she herself became inconspicuous, almost INVISIBLE, save for her great black eyes. Like a sultan, he was, like a full golden fruit in the sun, with a strange and magnificent presence, glamour. And then, by some mysterious power in her dark little body, the skinny Teresa held him most completely.

And this was what Ramón wanted. And it made Kate angry, angry. The big, fluid male, gleaming, was somewhat repulsive to her. And the tense little female with her pale-dark face, wan under her great, intense, black eyes, having all her female being tense in an effort to exalt this big glistening man, this enraged Kate. She could not bear the glistening smile in Ramón's dark eyes, a sort of pasha satisfaction. And she could not bear the erect, tense little figure of the dark woman, using her power in this way.

This hidden, secretive power of the dark female! Kate called it harem, and self-prostitution. But was it? Yes, surely it was the SLAVE approach. Surely she wanted nothing but sex from him, like a prostitute! The ancient mystery of the female power, which consists in glorifying the blood-male.

Was it right? Kate asked herself. Wasn't it degrading for a woman? And didn't it make the man either soft and sensuous, or else hatefully autocratic?

Yet Kate herself had convinced herself of one thing, finally: that the clue to all living and to all moving-on into new living lay in the vivid blood-relation between man and woman. A man and a woman in this togetherness were the clue to all present living and future possibility. Out of this clue of togetherness between a man and a woman, the whole of the new life arose. It was the quick of the whole.

And the togetherness needed a balance. Surely it needed a balance! And did not this Teresa throw herself entirely into the male balance, so that all the weight was on the man's side?

Ramón had not wanted Kate. Ramón had got what he wanted - this black little creature, who was so servile to him and so haughty in her own power. Ramón had never wanted Kate: except as a friend, a clever friend. As a woman, no! - He wanted this little viper of a Teresa.

Cipriano wanted Kate. The little general, the strutting little soldier, he wanted Kate: just for moments. He did not really want to marry her. He wanted the moments, no more. She was to give him his moments, and then he was off again, to his army, to his men. It was what he wanted.

It was what she wanted too. Her life was her own! It was not her métier to be fanning the blood in a man, to make him almighty and blood-glamorous. Her life was her own!

She rose and went to her bedroom to look for a book she had promised Ramón. She could not bear the sight of him in love with Teresa any longer. The heavy, mindless smile on his face, the curious glisten of his eyes, and the strange, heavy, lordly APLOMB of his body affected her like a madness. She wanted to run.

This was what they were, these people! Savages, with the impossible fluid flesh of savages, and that savage way of dissolving into an awful black mass of desire. Emerging with the male conceit and haughtiness swelling his blood and making him feel endless. While his eyes glistened with a haughty blackness.

The trouble was, that the power of the world, which she had known until now only in the eyes of blue-eyed men, who made queens of their women - even if they hated them for it in the end - was now fading in the blue eyes, and dawning in the black. In Ramón's eyes at this moment was a steady, alien gleam of pride, and daring, and power, which she knew was masterly. The same was in Cipriano's quick looks. The power of the world was dying in the blond men, their bravery and their supremacy was leaving them, going into the eyes of the dark men, who were rousing at last.

Joachim, the eager, clever, fierce, sensitive genius, who could look into her soul, and laugh into her soul, with his blue eyes: he had died under her eyes. And her children were not even his children.

If she could have fanned his blood as Teresa now fanned the blood of Ramón, he would never have died.

But it was impossible. Every dog has his day. - And every race.

Teresa came tapping timidly.

'May I come?'

'Do!' said Kate, rising from her knees and leaving little piles of books all round the book-trunk.

It was a fairly large room, with doors opening on to the patio and the sun-hard garden, smooth mango-trees rising like elephant's trunks out of the ground, green grass after the rains, chickens beneath the ragged banana leaves. A red bird splashed in the basin of water, opening and shutting brown wings above his pure scarlet, vivid.

But Teresa looked at the room, not out of doors. She smelt the smell of cigarettes and saw the many cigarette stumps in the agate tray by the bed. She saw the littered books, the scattered jewellery, the brilliant New-Mexican rugs on the floor, the Persian curtain hung behind the bed, the handsome, coloured bedcover, the dresses of dark silk and bright velvet flung over a trunk, the folded shawls with their long fringe, the scattered shoes, white, grey, pale-brown, dark-brown, black, on the floor, the tall Chinese candlesticks. The room of a woman who lived her own life, for her own self.

Teresa was repelled, uneasy, and fascinated.

'How nice this is!' she said, touching the glowing bedcover.

'A friend made it for me, in England.'

Teresa looked with wonder at everything, especially at the tangle of jewellery on the dressing-table.

'Don't you like those red stones!' said Kate, kneeling again to put the books back, and looking at the brown neck bent absorbedly over the jewels. Thin shoulders, with a soft, dark skin, in a bit of a white dress! And loosely folded masses of black hair held by tortoise-shell pins. - An insignificant little thing, humble, Kate thought to herself.

But she knew really that Teresa was neither insignificant nor humble. Under that soft brown skin, and in that stooping female spine was a strange old power to call up the blood in a man, and glorify it, and, in some way, keep it for herself.

On the sewing-table was a length of fine Indian muslin which Kate had bought in India, and did not know what to do with. It was a sort of yellow-peach colour, beautiful, but it did not suit Kate. Teresa was fingering the gold-thread selvedge.

'It is not organdie?' she said.

'No, muslin. Hand-made muslin from India. - Why don't you take it? It doesn't suit me. It would be perfect for you.'

She rose and held the fabric against Teresa's dark neck, pointing to the mirror. Teresa saw the warm-yellow muslin upon herself, and her eyes flashed.

'No!' she said. 'I couldn't take it.'

'Why not? It doesn't suit me. I've had it lying about for a year now, and was wondering whether to cut it up for curtains. Do have it.'

Kate could be imperious, almost cruel in her giving.

'I can't take it from you!'

'Of course you can!'

Ramón appeared in the doorway, glancing round the room, and at the two women.

'Look!' said Teresa, rather confused. 'The Señora wants to give me this Indian muslin.' - She turned to him shyly, with the fabric held to her throat.

'You look very well in it,' he said, his eyes resting on her.

'The Señora ought not to give it to me.'

'The Señora would not give it you unless she wished to.'

'Then!' said Teresa to Kate. 'Many thanks! But many thanks!'

'It is nothing,' said Kate.

'But Ramón says it suits me.'

'Yes, doesn't it suit her!' cried Kate to him. 'It was made in India for someone as dark as she is. It DOES suit her.'

'Very pretty!' said Ramón.

He had glanced round the room, at the different attractive things from different parts of the world, and at the cigarette ends in the agate bowl: the rather weary luxury and disorder, and the touch of barrenness, of a woman living her own life.

She did not know what he was thinking. But to herself she thought: This is the man I defended on that roof. This is the man who lay with a hole in his back, naked and unconscious under the lamp. He didn't look like a Sultan then.

Teresa must have divined something of her thought, for she said, looking at Ramón:

'Señora! But for you Ramón would have been killed. Always I think of it.'

'Don't think of it,' said Kate. 'Something else would have happened. Anyhow it wasn't I, it was destiny.'

'Ah, but you were the destiny!' said Teresa.

'Now there is a hostess, won't you come and stay some time at Jamiltepec?' said Ramón.

'Oh, do! Do come!' cried Teresa.

'But do you really want me?' said Kate, incredulous.

'Yes! Yes!' cried Teresa.

'She needs a woman-friend,' said Ramón gently.

'Yes, I do!' she cried. 'I have never had a true, TRUE woman- friend: only when I was at school, and we were girls.'

Kate doubted very much her own capacity for being a TRUE, true woman-friend to Teresa. She wondered what the two of them saw in her. As what did they see her?

'Yes, I should like to come for a few days,' she replied.

'Oh, yes!' cried Teresa. 'When will you come?'

The day was agreed.

'And we will write the Song of Malintzi,' said Ramón.

'Don't do that!' cried Kate quickly.

He looked at her, in his slow, wondering way. He could make her feel, at moments, as if she were a sort of child and as if he were a ghost.

Kate went to Jamiltepec, and before the two women knew it, almost, they were making dresses for Teresa, cutting up the pineapple- coloured muslin. Poor Teresa, for a bride she had a scanty wardrobe: nothing but her rather pathetic black dresses that somehow made her look poor, and a few old white dresses. She had lived for her father - who had a good library of Mexicana and was all his life writing a history of the State of Jalisco - and for the hacienda. And it was her proud boast that Las Yemas was the only hacienda, within a hundred miles range, which had not been smashed at all during the revolutions that followed the flight of Porfirio Díaz.

Teresa had a good deal of the nun in her. But that was because she was deeply passionate, and deep passion tends to hide within itself, rather than expose itself to vulgar contact.

So Kate pinned the muslin over the brown shoulders, wondering again at the strange, uncanny softness of the dark skin, the heaviness of the black hair. Teresa's family, the Romeros, had been in Mexico since the early days of the Conquest.

Teresa wanted long sleeves.

'My arms are so thin!' she murmured, hiding her slender brown arms with a sort of shame. 'They are not beautiful like yours.'

Kate was a strong, full-developed woman of forty, with round, strong white arms.

'No!' she said to Teresa. 'Your arms are not thin: they are exactly right for your figure, and pretty and young and brown.'

'But make the sleeves long, to the wrist,' pleaded Teresa.

And Kate did so, realizing it became the other woman's nature better.

'The men here don't like little thin women,' said Teresa, wistfully.

'One doesn't care what THE MEN like,' said Kate. 'Do you think Don Ramón wishes you were a plump partridge?'

Teresa looked at her with a smile in her dark, big bright eyes, that were so quick, and in many ways so unseeing.

'Who knows!' she said. And in her quick, mischievous smile it was evident she would like also, sometimes, to be a plump partridge.

Kate now saw more of the hacienda life than she had done before. When Ramón was at home, he consulted his overseer, or administrator, every morning. But already Teresa was taking this work off his hands. She would see to the estate.

Ramón was a good deal absent, either in Mexico City or in Guadalajara, or even away in Sonora. He was already famous and notorious throughout the country, his name was a name to conjure with. But underneath the rather ready hero-worship of the Mexicans, Kate somehow felt their latent grudging. Perhaps they took more satisfaction in ultimately destroying their heroes, than in temporarily raising them high. The real perfect moment was when the hero was downed.

And to Kate, sceptic as she was, it seemed much more likely that they were sharpening the machete to stick in Ramón's heart, when he got a bit too big for them, than anything else. Though, to be sure, there was Cipriano to reckon with. And Cipriano was a little devil whom they quite rightly feared. And Cipriano, for once, was faithful. He was, to himself, Huitzilopochtli, and to this he would maintain a demonish faith. He was Huitzilopochtli, Ramón was Quetzalcoatl. To Cipriano this was a plain and living fact. And he kept his army keen as a knife. Even the President would not care to run counter to Cipriano. And the President was a brave man too.

'One day,' he said, 'we will put Quetzalcoatl in Puebla Cathedral, and Huitzilopochtli in Mexico Cathedral and Malintzi in Guadalupe. The day will come, Ramón.'

'We will see that it comes,' Ramón replied.

But Ramón and Montes suffered alike from the deep, devilish animosity the country sent out in silence against them. It was the same, whoever was in power, the Mexicans seemed to steam with invisible, grudging hate, the hate of demons foiled in their own souls, whose only motive is to foil everything, everybody, in the everlasting hell of cramped frustration.

This was the dragon of Mexico, that Ramón had to fight. Montes, the President, had it to fight the same. And it shattered his health. Cipriano also had it up against him. But he succeeded best. With his drums, with his dances round the fire, with his soldiers kept keen as knives he drew real support from his men. He grew stronger and more brilliant.

Ramón also, at home in his own district, felt the power flow into him from his people. He was their chief, and by his effort and his power he had almost overcome their ancient, fathomless resistance. Almost he had AWED them back into the soft mystery of living, awed them until the tension of their resistant, malevolent wills relaxed. At home, he would feel his strength upon him.

But away from home, and particularly in the city of Mexico, he felt himself bled, bled by the subtle, hidden malevolence of the Mexicans, and the ugly negation of the greedy, mechanical foreigners, birds of prey forever alighting in the cosmopolitan capital.

While Ramón was away, Kate stayed with Teresa. The two women had this in common, that they felt it was better to stand faithfully behind a really brave man, than to push forward into the ranks of cheap and obtrusive women. And this united them. A certain deep, ultimate faithfulness in each woman, to her own man who needed her fidelity, kept Kate and Teresa kindred to one another.

The rainy season had almost passed, though throughout September and even in October occasional heavy downpours fell. But the wonderful Mexican autumn, like a strange, inverted spring, was upon the land. The waste places bloomed with pink and white cosmos, the strange wild trees flowered in a ghostly way, forests of small sunflowers shone in the sun, the sky was a pure, pure blue, the floods of sunshine lay tempered on the land, that in part was flooded with water, from the heavy rains.

The lake was very full, strange and uneasy, and it had washed up a bank of the wicked water-hyacinths along all its shores. The wild-fowl were coming from the north, clouds of wild ducks like dust in the high air, sprinkling the water like weeds. Many, many wild fowl, grebe, cranes, and white gulls of the inland seas, so that the northern mystery seemed to have blown so far south. There was a smell of water in the land, and a sense of soothing. For Kate firmly believed that part of the horror of the Mexican people came from the unsoothed dryness of the land and the untempered crudity of the flat-edged sunshine. If only there could be a softening of water in the air, and a haze above trees, the unspoken and unspeakable malevolence would die out of the human hearts.

Kate rode out often with Teresa to see the fields. The sugarcane in the inner valley was vivid green, and rising tall, tall. The peons were beginning to cut it with their sword-like machetes, filling the bullock-wagons, to haul the cane to the factory in Sayula. On the dry hill-slopes the spikey tequila plant - a sort of maguey - flourished in its iron wickedness. Low wild cactuses put forth rose-like blossoms, wonderful and beautiful for such sinister plants. The beans were gathered from the bean-fields, some gourds and squashes still sprawled their uncanny weight across the land. Red chiles hung on withering plants, red tomatoes sank to the earth. Some maize still reared its flags, there was still young corn to eat on the cob. The banana crop was small, the children came in with the little wild yellow tejocote apples, for making preserves. Teresa was making preserves, even with the late figs and peaches. On the trees, the ponderous mango-trees, some fruit was again orange-yellow and ripe, but the most still hung in strings, heavy and greenish and dropping like the testes of bulls.

It was autumn in Mexico, with wild duck on the waters, and hunters with guns, and small wild doves in the trees. Autumn in Mexico, and the coming of the dry season, with the sky going higher and higher, pure pale blue, the sunset arriving with a strange flare of crystal yellow light. With the coffee berries turning red on the struggling bushes under the trees, and bougainvillea in the strong light glowing with a glow of magenta colour so deep you could plunge your arms deep in it. With a few humming-birds in the sunshine, and the fish in the waters gone wild, and the flies, that steamed black in the first rains, now passing away again.

Teresa attended to everything, and Kate helped. Whether it was a sick peon in one of the little houses, or the hosts of bees from the hives under the mangoes, or the yellow, yellow beeswax to be made into little bowlfuls, or the preserves, or the garden, or the calves, or the bit of butter and the little fresh cheeses made of strands of curd, or the turkeys to be overlooked: she saw to it along with Teresa. And she wondered at the steady, urgent, efficient WILL which had to be exerted all the time. Everything was kept going by a heavy exertion of will. If once the will of the master broke, everything would break, and ruin would overtake the place almost at once. No real relaxation, ever. Always the sombre, insistent will.

Ramón arrived home one evening in November, from a long journey to Sonora. He had come overland from Tepic, and twice had been stopped by floods. The rains, so late, were very unusual. He was tired and remote-seeming. Kate's heart stood still a moment as she thought: He goes so remote, as if he might go away altogether into death.

It was cloudy again, with lightning beating about on the horizons. But all was very still. She said good-night early, and wandered down her own side of the terrace, to the look-out at the end, which looked on to the lake. Everything was dark, save for the intermittent pallor of lightning.

And she was startled to see, in a gleam of lightning, Teresa sitting with her back to the wall of the open terrace, Ramón lying with his head in her lap, while she slowly pushed her fingers through his thick black hair. They were as silent as the night.

Kate gave a startled murmur and said:

'I'm so sorry! I didn't know you were here.'

'I wanted to be under the sky!' said Ramón, heaving himself to rise.

'Oh, DON'T move!' said Kate. 'It was stupid of me to come here. You are tired.'

'Yes,' he said, sinking again. 'I am tired. These people make me feel I have a hole in the middle of me. So I have come back to Teresa.'

'Yes!' said Kate. 'One isn't the Living Quetzalcoatl for nothing. Of course they eat holes in you. - Really, is it worth it? - To give yourself to be eaten away by them.'

'It must be so,' he said. 'The change has to be made. And some man has to make it. I sometimes wish it wasn't I.'

'So do I wish it. So does Teresa. One wonders if it isn't better to be just a man,' said Kate.

But Teresa said nothing.

'One does what one must. And after all, one is always just a man,' he said. 'And if one has wounds - à la guerre comme à la guerre!'

His voice came out of the darkness like a ghost.

'Ah!' sighed Kate. 'It makes one wonder what a man is, that he must needs expose himself to the horrors of all the other people.'

There was silence for a moment.

'Man is a column of blood, with a voice in it,' he said. 'And when the voice is still, and he is only a column of blood, he is better.'

She went away to her room sadly, hearing the sound of infinite exhaustion in his voice. As if he had a hole, a wound in the middle of him. She could almost feel it, in her own bowels.

And if, with his efforts, he killed himself? - Then, she said, Cipriano would come apart, and it would be all finished.

Ah, why should a man have to make these efforts on behalf of a beastly, malevolent people who weren't worth it! Better let the world come to an end, if that was what it wanted.

She thought of Teresa soothing him, soothing him and saying nothing. And him like a great helpless, wounded thing! It was rather horrible, really. Herself, she would have to expostulate, she would have to try to prevent him. Why should men damage themselves with this useless struggling and fighting, and then come home to their women to be restored!

To Kate, the fight simply wasn't worth one wound. Let the beastly world of man come to an end, if that was its destiny, as soon as possible. Without lifting a finger to prevent it. - Live one's own precious life, that was given but once, and let the rest go its own hellish way.

She would have HAD to try to prevent Ramón from giving himself to destruction this way. She was willing for him to be ten Living Quetzalcoatl's. But not to expose himself to the devilish malevolence of people.

Yet he would do it. Even as Joachim had done. And Teresa, with her silence and her infinitely soft administering, she would heal him far better than Kate, with her expostulation and her opposition.

'Ah!' said Kate to herself. 'I'm glad Cipriano is a soldier, and doesn't get wounds in his SOUL.'

At the same time, she knew that without Ramón, Cipriano was just an instrument, and not ultimately interesting to her.

In the morning, Teresa appeared alone to breakfast. She seemed very calm, hiding her emotions in her odd, brown, proud little way.

'How is Ramón?' said Kate.

'He is sleeping,' said Teresa.

'Good! He seemed to me almost done up, last night.'

'Yes.' - The black eyes looked at Kate, wide with unshed tears and courage, and a beautiful deep, remote light.

'I DON'T believe in a man's sacrificing himself in this way,' said Kate. 'And I DON'T.'

Teresa still looked her full in the eyes.

'Ah!' she said. 'He doesn't sacrifice himself. He feels he must do as he does. And if he must, I must help him.'

'But then you are sacrificing yourself to HIM, and I don't believe in that either,' said Kate.

'Oh, no!' replied Teresa quickly, and a little flush burned in her cheek, and her dark eyes flashed. 'I am not sacrificing myself to Ramón. If I can give him - sleep - when he needs it - that is not sacrifice. It is - ' She did not finish, but her eyes flashed, and the flush burned darker.

'It is love, I know,' said Kate. 'But it exhausts you too.'

'It is not simply love,' flashed Teresa proudly. 'I might have loved more than one man: many men are lovable. But Ramón! - My soul is with Ramón.' - The tears rose to her eyes. 'I do not want to talk about it,' she said, rising. 'But you must not touch me there, and judge me.'

She hurried out of the room, leaving Kate somewhat dismayed. Kate sighed, thinking of going home.

But in an hour Teresa appeared again, putting her cool, soft, snake-like little hand on Kate's arm.

'I am sorry if I was rude,' she said.

'No,' said Kate. 'Apparently it is I who am wrong.'

'Yes, I think you are,' said Teresa. 'You think there is only love. Love is only such a little bit.'

'And what is the rest?'

'How can I tell you if you do not know? - But do you think Ramón is no more to me than a lover?'

'A husband!' said Kate.

'Ah!' Teresa put her head aside with an odd impatience. 'Those little words! Those little words! Nor either a husband. - He is my life.'

'Surely it is better for one to live one's own life!'

'No! It is like seed. It is no good till it is given. I know. I kept my own life for a long time. As you keep it longer, it dies. And I tried to give it to God. But I couldn't, quite. Then they told me, if I married Ramón and had any part in the Quetzalcoatl heresy, my soul would be damned. - But something made me know it was not true. I even knew he needed my soul. - Ah, Señora - ' a subtle smile came on Teresa's pale face - 'I have lost my soul to Ramón. - What more can I say!'

'And what about his soul?'

'It comes home to me - HERE!' She put her hand over her womb.

Kate was silent for a time.

'And if he betrays you?' she said.

'Ah, Señora!' said Teresa. 'Ramón is not just a lover. He is a brave man, and he doesn't betray his own blood. And it is his soul that comes home to me. - And I would struggle to my last breath to give him sleep, when he came home to me with his soul, and needed it,' she flashed. Then she added, murmuring to herself: 'No, thank God! I have not got a life of my own! I have been able to give it to a man who is more than a man, as they say in their Quetzalcoatl language. And now it needn't die inside me, like a bird in a cage. - Oh, yes, Señora! If he goes to Sinaloa and the west coast, my soul goes with him and takes part in it all. It does not let him go alone. And he does not forget that he has my soul with him. I know it. - No, Señora! You must not criticise me or pity me.'

'Still!' said Kate. 'It still seems to me it would be better for each one to keep her own soul, and be responsible for it.'

'If it were possible!' said Teresa. 'But you can no more keep your own soul inside you for yourself, without its dying, than you can keep the seed of your womb. Until a man gives you his seed, the seed of your womb is nothing. And the man's seed is nothing to him. - And until you give your soul to a man, and he takes it, your soul is nothing to you. - And when a man has taken your whole soul. - Ah, do not talk to me about betraying. A man only betrays because he has been given A PART, and not the whole. And a woman only betrays because only the part has been taken from her, and not the whole. That is all about betrayal. I know. - But when the whole is given, and taken, betrayal can't exist. What I am to Ramón, I am. And what he is to me, he is. I do not care what he does. If he is away from me, he does as he wishes. So long as he will always keep safe what I am to him.'

Kate did not like having to learn lessons from this little waif of a Teresa. Kate was a woman of the world, handsome and experienced. She was accustomed to homage. Other women usually had a slight fear of her, for she was powerful and ruthless in her own way.

Teresa also feared her a little, as a woman of the world. But as an intrinsic woman, not at all. Trenched inside her own fierce and proud little soul, Teresa looked on Kate as on one of those women of the outside world, who make a very splendid show, but who are not so sure of the real secret of womanhood, and the innermost power. All Kate's handsome, ruthless female power was second-rate to Teresa, compared with her own quiet, deep passion of connection with Ramón.

Yes, Kate was accustomed to looking on other women as inferiors. But the tables were suddenly turned. Even as, in her soul, she knew Ramón to be a greater man than Cipriano, suddenly she had to question herself, whether Teresa was not a greater woman than she.

Teresa! A greater woman than Kate? What a blow! Surely it was impossible!

Yet there it was. Ramón had wanted to marry Teresa, not Kate. And the flame of his marriage with Teresa she saw both in his eyes and in Teresa's. A flame that was not in Kate's eyes.

Kate's marriage with Cipriano was curious and momentary. When Cipriano was away, Kate was her old individual self. Only when Cipriano was present, and then only sometimes, did the connection overwhelm her.

When Teresa turned and looked at her with this certain flame, touched with indignation, Kate quailed. Perhaps for the first time in her life she quailed and felt abashed: repentant.

Kate even knew that Teresa felt a little repugnance for her: for the foreign white woman who talked as cleverly as a man and who never gave her soul: who did not believe in giving her soul. All these well-dressed, beautiful women from America or England, Europe, they all kept their souls for themselves, in a sort of purse, as it were.

Teresa was determined that Kate should leave off treating her, very, very indefinably, as an inferior. It was how all the foreign women treated the Mexican women. Because the foreign women were their own mistresses! They even tried to be condescending to Ramón.

But Ramón! He could look at them and make them feel small, feel really nothing, in spite of all their money and their experience and their air of belonging to the ruling races. The ruling races! Wait! Ramón was a challenge to all that. Let those rule who can.

'You did not sleep?' Teresa said to Kate.

'Not very well,' said Kate.

'No, you look as if you had not slept very well. - Under your eyes.'

Kate smoothed the skin under her eyes, querulously.

'One gets that look in Mexico,' she said. 'It's not an easy country to keep your youth in. - You are looking well.'

'Yes, I am very well.'

Teresa had a new, soft bloom on her dark skin, something frail and tender, which she did not want to have to defend against another woman.

'I think I will go home now Ramón has come,' said Kate.

'Oh, why? Do you wish to?'

'I think I'd better.'

'Then I will go with you to Sayula. In the boat, no?'

Kate put her few things together. She had slept badly. The night had been black, black, with something of horror in it. As when the bandits had attacked Ramón. She could see the scar in his back, in the night. And the drumming crash of falling water, menacing and horrible, seemed to keep up for hours.

In her soul, Kate felt Teresa's contempt for her way of wifehood.

'I have been married too,' Kate had said. 'To a very exceptional man, whom I LOVED.'

'Ah, yes!' said Teresa. 'And he died.'

'He wanted to die.'

'Ah, yes! He wanted to die.'

'I did my level best to prevent him from wearing himself out.'

'Ah, yes, to prevent him.'

'What else could I have done?' flashed Kate in anger.

'If you could have given him your life, he would not even have wanted to die.'

'I DID give him my life. I loved him - oh, you will never know. - But he didn't WANT my soul. He believed I should keep a soul of my own.'

'Ah, yes, men are like that, when they are merely men. When a man is WARM and brave - then he wants the woman to give him her soul, and he keeps it in HIS womb, so he is more than a mere man, a single man. I know it. I know where my soul is. It is in Ramón's womb, the womb of a man, just as his seed is in my womb, the womb of a woman. He is a man, and a column of blood. I am a woman, and a valley of blood. I shall not contradict him. How can I? My soul is inside him, and I am far from contradicting him when he is trying with all his might to do something that HE knows about. He won't die, and they won't kill him. No! The stream flows into him from the heart of the world: and from me. - I tell you, because you saved his life, and therefore we belong to the same thing, you and I and he - and Cipriano. But you should not misjudge me. That's another way of women, where a woman keeps her own soul - ah, what is it but weariness!'

'And the men?'

'Ah! If there are men whose souls are warm and brave, how they comfort one's womb, Caterina!'

Kate hung her head, stubborn and angry at being put down from her eminence. - The slave morale! she said to herself. The miserable old trick of a woman living just for the sake of a man. Only living to send her soul with him, inside his precious body. And to carry his precious seed in her womb! Herself, apart from this, nothing.

Kate wanted to make her indignation thorough, but she did not quite succeed. Somewhere, secretly and angrily, she envied Teresa her dark eyes with the flame in them and their savage assurance. She envied her her serpent-delicate fingers. And above all, she envied her, with repining, the comfort of a living man permanent in her womb. And the secret, savage indomitable pride in her own womanhood, that rose from this.

In the warm morning after the rain, the frogs were whirring frantically. Across the lake, the mountains were blue black, and little pieces of white, fluffy vapour wandered low across the trees. Clouds were along the mountain-tops, making a level sky- line of whitish softness the whole length of the range. On the lonely, fawn-coloured water, one sail was blowing.

'It is like Europe - like the Tyrol to-day,' said Kate wistfully.

'Do you love Europe very much?' asked Teresa.

'Yes, I think I love it.'

'And must you go back to it?'

'I think so. Soon! To my mother and my children.'

'Do they want you very much?'

'Yes!' said Kate, rather hesitant. Then she added: 'Not VERY much, really. But I want them.'

'What for? - I mean,' Teresa added, 'do you long for them?'

'Sometimes,' said Kate, the tears coming to her eyes.

The boat rowed on in silence.

'And Cipriano?' Teresa asked timidly.

'Ah!' said Kate shortly. 'He is such a stranger to me.'

Teresa was silent for some moments.

'I think a man is always a stranger to a woman,' said Teresa. 'Why should it not be so?'

'But you,' said Kate, 'haven't any children.'

'Ramón has. - And he says: "I cast my bread upon the waters. It is my children too. And if they return to me after many days, I shall be glad." - Is it not the same for you?'

'Not quite!' said Kate. 'I am a woman, I am not a man.'

'I, if I have children,' said Teresa, 'I shall try to cast my bread upon the waters, so my children come to me that way. I hope I shall. I hope I shall not try to fish them out of life for myself, with a net. I have a very great fear of love. It is so personal. Let each bird fly with its own wings, and each fish swim its own course. - Morning brings more than love. And I want to be true to the morning.'

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