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## [The Plumed Serpent](#)

[D. H. Lawrence](#)

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### Chapter 27 - Here!

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She and Teresa visited one another along the lake. There was a kinship and a gentleness between them, especially now Kate was going away for a while.

There was a certain autumnal purity and lull on the lake. The moisture still lingered, the bushes on the wild hills were green in puffs. Sunlight lay in a rich gleam on the mountains, and shadows were deep and velvety. The green almost covered the rocks and the pinkish land. Bright green the sugar cane, red the ploughed earth, dark the trees with white specks of villages here and there. And over the wild places, a sprinkle of bushes, then stark grey rock still coming out.

The sky was very high and pure. In the morning came the sound of drums, and on the motionless, crystal air the cry for the pauses of the day. And always the day seemed to be pausing and unfolding again to the greater mystery. The universe seemed to have opened vast and soft and delicate with life.

There was something curiously soothing even in the full, pale, dove-brown water of the lake. A boat was coming over, with its sail hollowed out like a shell, pearly white, and its sharp black canoe-beak slipping past the water. It looked like the boat of Dionysos coming with a message, and the vine sprouting.

Kate could hardly remember now the dry rigid pallor of the heat, when the whole earth seemed to crepitate viciously with dry malevolence: like memory gone dry and sterile, hellish.

Ramón and Teresa came along the lake, and rowed into the basin. It was a morning when the shadows on the mountains were almost cornflower blue.

'Yet you must go away?' Ramón said to her.

'For a little while. You don't think I am Lot's wife, do you?'

'No!' laughed Ramón. 'I think you're Cipriano's.'

'I am really. But I want to go back for a little while.'

'Ah yes! Better go and then come again. Tell them in your Ireland to do as we have done here.'

'But how?'

'Let them find themselves again, and their own universe, and their own gods. Let them substantiate their own mysteries. The Irish have been so wordy about their far-off heroes and green days of the heroic gods. Now tell them to substantiate them, as we have tried to substantiate Quetzalcoatl and Huitzilopochtli.'

'I will tell them,' she said. 'If there is anybody to listen.'

'Yes!' he said.

He watched the white sail blowing nearer.

'But why do you go away?' he asked her, after a silence.

'You don't care, do you?' she said.

There was a dead pause.

'Yes, I care,' he said.

'But why?'

Again it was some time before he answered.

'You are one of us, we need you,' he said.

'Even when I don't do anything? - and when I get a bit bored with living Quetzalcoatl's - and the rest, and wish for a simple Don Ramón?' she replied.

He laughed suddenly.

'What is a simple Don Ramón?' he said. 'A simple Don Ramón has a living Quetzalcoatl inside him. But you help all the same.'

'You go ahead so grandly, one would not think you needed help: especially from a mere woman who - who after all is only the wife of your friend.'

They were sitting on a bench under a red-flowering poinsettia whose huge scarlet petal-leaves spread out like sharp plumes.

'The wife of my friend!' he said. 'What could you be better?'

'Of course,' she said, more than equivocal.

He was leaning his arms on his knees, and looking out to the lake, abstract, and remote. There was a certain worn look on his face, and the vulnerability which always caught at Kate's heart. She realized again the isolation and the deadly strain his effort towards a new way of life put upon him. Yet he had to do it.

This again gave her a feeling of helplessness, a woman's utter helplessness with a man who goes out to the beyond. She had to stifle her resentment, and her dislike of his 'abstract' efforts.

'Do you feel awfully sure of yourself?' she said.

'Sure of myself?' he re-echoed. 'No! Any day I may die and disappear from the face of the earth. I not only know it, I FEEL it. So why should I be sure of MYSELF?'

'Why should you die?' she said.

'Why should anybody ever die? - even Carlota!'

'Ah! - her hour had come!'

'Can you set one's hour as one sets an alarm clock?'

Kate paused.

'And if you're not sure of yourself, what are you sure of?' she challenged.

He looked at her with dark eyes which she could not understand.

'I am sure - sure - ' he voice tailed off into vagueness, his face seemed to go grey and peaked, as a dead man's, only his eyes watched her blackly, like a ghost's. Again she was confronted with the suffering ghost of the man. And she was a woman, powerless before this suffering ghost which was still in the flesh.

'You don't think you are wrong, do you?' she asked, in cold distress.

'No! I am not wrong. Only maybe I can't hold out,' he said.

'And then what?' she said, coldly.

'I shall go my way, alone.' There seemed to be nothing left of him but the black, ghostly eyes that gazed on her. He began to speak Spanish.

'It hurts me in my soul, as if I were dying,' he said.

'But why?' she cried. 'You are not ill?'

'I feel as if my soul were coming undone.'

'Then don't let it,' she cried, in fear and repulsion.

But he only gazed with those fixed, blank eyes. A sudden deep stillness came over her; a sense of power in herself.

'You should forget for a time,' she said gently, compassionately laying her hand on his. What was the good of trying to understand him or wrestle with him? She was a woman. He was a man, and - and - and therefore not quite real. Not true to life.

He roused himself suddenly from her touch, as if he had come awake, and he looked at her with keen, proud eyes. Her motherly touch had roused him like a sting.

'Yes!' he said. 'It is true!'

'Of course it is!' she replied. 'If you want to be so - so abstract and Quetzalcoatlían, then bury your head sometimes, like an ostrich in the sand, and forget.'

'So!' he said, smiling. 'You are angry again!'

'It's not so simple,' she said. 'There is a conflict in me. And you won't let me go away for a time.'

'We can't even prevent you,' he said.

'Yes, but you are against my going - you don't let me go in peace.'

'Why must you go?' he said.

'I must,' she said. 'I must go back to my children, and my mother.'

'It is a necessity in you?' he said.

'Yes!'

The moment she had admitted the necessity, she realized it was a certain duplicity in herself. It was as if she had two selves: one, a new one, which belonged to Cipriano and to Ramón, and which was her sensitive, desirous self: the other hard and finished, accomplished, belonging to her mother, her children, England, her whole past. This old accomplished self was curiously invulnerable and insentient, curiously hard and 'free.' In it, she was an individual and her own mistress. The other self was vulnerable, and organically connected with Cipriano, even with Ramón and Teresa, and so was not 'free' at all.

She was aware of a duality in herself, and she suffered from it. She could not definitely commit herself, either to the old way of life, or to the new. She reacted from both.

The old was to a prison, and she loathed it. But in the new way she was not her own mistress at all, and her egoistic will recoiled.

'That's just it!' she said. 'It IS a necessity in me, and you want to prevent me.'

'No! No!' said Ramón. 'I hope not.'

'Yes! You put a weight on me, and paralyse me, to prevent me from going,' she said.

'We must not do that,' he said. 'We must leave you, and not come near you for a time, if you feel it is so.'

'Why? Why can't you be friendly? Why can't you be WITH me in my going? Why can't you WANT me to go, since I must go?'

He looked at her with dispassionate eyes.

'I can't do that,' he said. 'I don't believe in your going. It is a turning back: there is something renegade in it. - But we are all complicated. And if you FEEL you must go back for a time, go! It isn't terribly important. You have chosen, really. I am not afraid for you.'

It was a great relief to her to hear this: because she was terribly afraid for herself. She could never be sure, never be WHOLE in her connection with Cipriano and Ramón. Yet she said, mocking slightly:

'Why SHOULD you be afraid for me?'

'Aren't you sometimes afraid for yourself?' he asked.

'Never!' she said. 'I'm absolutely sure about myself.'

They had been sitting in the garden of the Villa Aragon, under the poinsettia tree with the huge scarlet petal-leaves, like soft red quill feathers. The morning was becoming hot. The lake had gone still, with the fallen wind. Everything was still. Save the long scarlet of the poinsettia.

Christmas was coming! The poinsettia reminded Kate of it.

Christmas! Holly-berries! England! Presents! Food! - If she hurried, she could be in England for Christmas. It felt so safe, so familiar, so normal, the thought of Christmas at home, in England, with her mother. And all the exciting things she could tell to the people at home! And all the exciting gossip she could hear! In the distance, it looked very attractive. - She still had a qualm as to what the actual return would be like.

'One can have too much of a good thing,' she said to Ramón.

'What good thing in particular?' he asked her.

'Oh - Quetzalcoat! and all that!' she said. 'One can have too much of it.'

'It may be,' he said, rising and going quietly away; so quietly, he was gone before she knew. And when she realized he had gone like that, she flushed with anger. But she sat on under the poinsettia tree, in the hot, still November sun, looking with anger at the hedge of jasmine, with its pure white flowers, and its sere, withered flowers, and its pinkish buds among the dark leaves. Where had she heard something about jasmine? 'And the jasmine flowers between us!'

Oh! how tired she was of all that!

Teresa came down the garden slope.

'You are still sitting here?' she exclaimed.

'Where else should I be?' Kate answered.

'I don't know. - Ramón has gone to Sayula, to see the Jefe. He wouldn't wait for us, to come with us in the boat.'

'I suppose he was in a hurry,' said Kate.

'How fine these Noche Buenas are!' said Teresa, looking at the brilliant spread of the red poinsettias.

'They are your Christmas flower, aren't they?' said Kate.

'Yes - the flowers of the Noche Buena - '

'How awful, Christmas with hibiscus and poinsettia! It makes me long to see mistletoe among the oranges, in a fruiterer's shop in Hampstead.'

'Why that?' laughed Teresa.

'Oh!' Kate sighed petulantly. 'To get back to simple life. To see the buses rolling on the mud in Piccadilly, on Christmas Eve, and the wet pavements crowded with people under the brilliant shops.'

'Is that life, to you?' asked Teresa.

'Yes! Without all this abstraction, and WILL. Life is good enough for me if I am allowed to live and be myself.'

'It is time Cipriano should come home,' said Teresa.

But this made Kate rise from her seat, with sudden impatience. She would not have this thing put over her! She would break free, and show them!

She went with Teresa to the village. The air seemed mysteriously alive, with a new Breath. But Kate felt out of it. The two women sat under a tree on the beach at Sayula, talking a little, and watching the full expanse of the dove-pale lake.

A black boat with a red-painted roof and a tall mast was moored to the low breakwater-wall, which rose about a yard high, from the shallow water. On the wall stood loose little groups of white-clad men, looking into the black belly of the ship. And perched immobile in silhouette against the lake, was a black-and-white cow, and a huge monolithic black-and-white bull. The whole silhouette frieze motionless, against the far water that was coloured brown like turtle doves.

It was near, yet seemed strange and remote. Two peons fixed a plank gangway up to the side of the boat. Then they began to shove the cow towards it. She pawed the new broad planks tentatively, then, with that slow Mexican indifference, she lumbered unwillingly on to the gangway. They edged her slowly to the end, where she looked down into the boat. And at last, she dropped neatly into the hold.

Now the group of men broke into motion, for the huge and spangled bull. A tall old Mexican, in fawn, skin-tight trousers and little leather jacket, and a huge felt hat heavily embroidered with silver, gently took the ring in the bull's nose, gently lifted the wedge of the bull's head, so the great soft throat was uplifted. A peon behind put his head down, and with all his might began shoving the mighty, living flanks of the bull. The slim-legged, high-hatted old Mexican pulled evenly at the nose-ring. And with a calm and weighty poise, the bull stepped along the crest of the wall, delicately and impassively, to the plank gangway. There he stopped.

The peons began to re-group. The one behind, with his red sash tied so determinedly over his white hips, ceased to shove, the slim-legged Mexican let go the ring.

Then two peons passed a rope loosely round the haunches of the bull. The high-hatted farmer stepped on to the planks, and took the nose-ring again, very gently. He pulled softly. The bull lifted its head, but held back. It struck the planks with an unwilling foot. Then it stood, spangled with black on its whiteness, like a piece of the sky, immobile.

The farmer pulled once more at the ring. Two men were pulling the rope, pressing in the flanks of the immoveable, passive, spangled monster. Two peons, at the back, with their heads down and their red-sashed, flexible loins thrust out behind, shoved with all their strength in the soft flanks of the mighty creature.

And all was utterly noiseless and changeless; against the fullness of the pale lake, this silent, monumental group of life.

Then the bull stepped slowly, imperturbably, yet against its will, on to the loose planks, and was edged slowly along, to the brink of the boat. There he waited.

He stood huge and silvery, dappled like the sky, with black snake markings down his haunches, looming massive above the red roof of the canoa. How would he ever duck to that roof, and drop under, into the darkness of the ship?

He lowered his head, and looked into the hold. The men behind shoved his living flanks. He took no heed, but lowered his head and looked again. The men pushed with all their might, in the dense Mexican silence.

Slowly, carefully, the bull crouched himself, made himself small, and with a quick, massive little movement dropped his forefeet down into the body of the boat, leaving his huge hind-quarters heaved up behind. There was a shuffle and a little stagger down below, then the soft thud as his hind-feet leaped down. He had gone.

The planks were taken away. A peon ran to unfasten the mooring rope from the stones of the shore. There was a strange thudding of soft feet within the belly of the boat. Men in the water were pushing the ship's black stern, to push her off. But she was heavy. Slowly, casually they pulled the stones from under her flat bottom, and flung them aside. Slowly she edged, swayed, moved a little, and was afloat.

The men climbed in. The two peons on the ship's rims were poling her out, pressing their poles and walking heavily till they reached the stern, then lifting their poles and running to the high prow. She slid slowly out, on to the lake.

Then quickly they hoisted the wide white sail. The sail thrust up her horn and curved in a whorl to the wind. The ship was going across the waters, with her massive, sky-spangled cargo of life invisible.

All so still and soft and remote.

'And will Ramón want you to sit beside him in the church as the bride of Quetzalcoatl - with some strange name?' Kate asked of Teresa.

'I don't know,' said Teresa. 'Later, he says, when the time comes for them to have a goddess.'

'And will you mind?'

'For myself, I am afraid of it. But I understand that Ramón wants it. He says it is accepting the greater responsibility of one's existence. And I think that is true. If there is God in me, and God as woman, then I must accept this part of myself also, and put on the green dress, and be for the time the God-woman, since it is true of me also. I think it is true. Ramón says we must make it manifest. When I think of my brothers, I know we must. So I shall think of the God that beats invisible, like the heart of all the world. So when I have to wear the green dress, and sit before all the people in the church, I shall look away to the heart of all the world, and try to be my sacred self, because it is necessary, and the right thing to do. It is right. I would not do it if I thought it was not right.'

'But I thought the green dress was for the Bride of Huitzilopochtli!' said Kate.

'Ah yes!' Teresa caught herself up. 'Mine is the black dress with the white edges, and the red clouds.'

'Would you rather have the green?' Kate asked. 'Have it if you would. I am going away.'

Teresa glanced up at her quickly.

'The green is for the wife of Huitzilopochtli,' she said, as if numbed.

'I can't see that it matters,' said Kate.

Teresa looked at her with quick, dark eyes.

'Different men must have different wives,' she said. 'Cipriano would never want a wife like me.'

'And different women must have different husbands,' said Kate. 'Ramón would always be too abstract and overbearing for me.'

Teresa flushed slowly, looking down at the ground.

'Ramón needs far too much submission from a woman, to please me,' Kate added. 'He takes too much upon himself.'

Teresa looked up quickly, and raised her head proudly, showing her brownish throat like a rearing, crested snake.

'How do you know that Ramón needs submission from a woman?' she said. 'How do you know? He has not asked any submission from you. - And you are wrong. He does not ask submission from me. He wants me to give myself gently to him. And then he gives himself back to me far more gently than I give myself to him. Because a man like that is more gentle than a woman. He is not like Cipriano. Cipriano is a soldier. But Ramón is gentle. You are mistaken in what you say.'

Kate laughed a little.

'And you are a soldier among women, fighting all the time,' Teresa continued. 'I am not such. But some women must be soldiers in their spirit, and they need soldier husbands. That is why you are Malintzi, and your dress is green. You would always fight. You would fight with yourself, if you were alone in the world.'

It was very still by the lake. They were waiting for Ramón.

A man was stripping palm-stalks, squatting in silence under a tree, in his white clothes, his black head bent forward. Then he went to wet his long strips in the lake, returning with them dangling.

Then he sat down again, and deftly, silently, with the dark, childlike absorption of the people, took up his work. He was mending a chair bottom. When Kate watched him, he glanced up with a flash of black eyes, saluting her. And she felt a strange power surge in her limbs, from the flash of living recognition and deference in his eyes. As if his deference were a sort of flame of life, rich in him when he saw her.

A roan horse speckled with white was racing prancing along the shore, neighing frantically. His mane flowed in the wind, his feet struck the pebbles as he ran, and again he opened his long nose and neighed anxiously. Away up the shore he ran. What had he lost?

A peon had driven a high-wheeled wagon, drawn by four mules, deep into the lake, till the water was above the high axles of the wheels, almost touching the bed of the cart. It looked like a dark square boat drawn by four soft, dark seahorses which slowly waved their long dark ears like leaves, while the peon, in white with his big hat proudly balanced, stood erect. The mules deep in the water stepped gently, curving to the shore.

It was winter, but like spring by the lake. White and yellow calves, new and silky, were skipping, butting up their rear ends, lifting their tails, trotting side by side down to the water, to sniff at it suspiciously.

In the shadow of a great tree a mother-ass was tethered, and her foal lay in the shadow, a little thing black as ink, curled up, with fluffy head erect and great black ears spreading up, like some jet-black hare full of witchcraft.

'How many days?' called Kate to the peon, who had come out of the straw hut.

He gave her the flash of his dark eyes, in a sort of joy of deference. And she felt her breast surge with living pride.

'Last night, Patrona!' he smiled in answer.

'So new! So new! He doesn't get up, can't he?'

The peon went round, put his arm under the foal and lifted it to its feet. There it straddled on high, in amaze, upon its black legs like bent hair-pins.

'How nice it is!' cried Kate in delight, and the peon laughed at her with a soft, grateful flame, touched with reverence.

The ink-black ass-foal did not understand standing up. It rocked on its four loose legs, and wondered. Then it hobbled a few steps, to smell at some green, growing maize. It smelled and smelled and smelled, as if all the dark aeons were stirring awake in its nostrils.

Then it turned, and looked with its bushy-velvet face straight at Kate, and put out a pink tongue at her. She laughed aloud. It stood wondering, dazed. Then it put out its tongue again. She laughed at it. It gave an awkward little skip, which surprised its own self very much. Then it ventured forward again, and all unexpectedly even to itself, exploded into another little skip.

'Already it dances!' cried Kate. 'And it came into the world only last night.'

'Yes, already it dances!' reiterated the peon.

After bethinking itself for a time, the ass-foal walked uncertainly towards the mother. She was a well-liking grey-and-brown she-ass, rather glossy and self-assured. The ass-foal straight found the udder, and was drinking.

Glancing up, Kate met again the peon's eyes, with their black, full flame of life heavy with knowledge and with a curious reassurance. The black foal, the mother, the drinking, the new life, the mystery of the shadowy battlefield of creation; and the adoration of the full-breasted, glorious woman beyond him: all this seemed in the primitive black eyes of the man.

'Adiós!' said Kate to him, lingeringly.

'Adiós, Patrona!' he replied, suddenly lifting his hand high, in the Quetzalcoatl salute.

She walked across the beach to the jetty, feeling the life surging vivid and resistant within her. 'It is sex,' she said to herself. 'How wonderful sex can be, when men keep it powerful and sacred, and it fills the world! Like sunshine through and through one! - But I'm not going to submit, even there. Why should one give in, to anything!'

Ramón was coming down towards the boat, the blue symbol of Quetzalcoatl in his hat. And at that moment the drums began to sound for mid-day, and there came the mid-day call, clear and distinct, from the tower. All the men on the shore stood erect, and shot up their right hands to the sky. The women spread both palms to the light.

Everything was motionless, save the moving animals.

Then Ramón went on to the boat, the men saluting him with the Quetzalcoatl salute as he came near.

'It is wonderful, really,' said Kate, as they rowed over the water, 'how - how splendid one can feel in this country! As if one were still genuinely of the nobility.'

'Aren't you?' he said.

'Yes, I am. But everywhere else it is denied. Only here one feels the full force of one's nobility. The natives still worship it.'

'At moments,' said Ramón. 'Later, they will murder you and violate you, for having worshipped you.'

'Is it inevitable?' she said flippantly.

'I think so,' he replied. 'If you lived here alone in Sayula, and queened it for a time, you would get yourself murdered - or worse - by the people who had worshipped you.'

'I don't think so,' she said.

'I know,' he replied.

'Why?' she said, obstinate.

'Unless one gets one's nobility from the gods and turns to the middle of the sky for one's power, one will be murdered at last.'

'I do get my nobility that way,' she said.

But she did not quite believe it. And she made up her mind still more definitely, to go away.

She wrote to Mexico City, and engaged a berth from Vera Cruz to Southampton: she would sail on the last day of November. Cipriano came home on the seventeenth, and she told him what she had done. He looked at her with his head a little on one side, with a queer boyish judiciousness, but she could not tell at all what he felt.

'You are going already?' he said in Spanish.

And then she knew, at last, that he was offended. When he was offended he never spoke English at all, but spoke Spanish just as if he were addressing another Mexican.

'Yes,' she said. 'On the thirtieth.'

'And when do you come back?' he asked.

'Quién sabe! - Who knows!' she retorted.

He let his black eyes rest on her face for some minutes, watching her, unchanging and incomprehensible. He was thinking, superficially, that if he liked, he could use the law and have her prevented from leaving the country - or even from leaving Sayula - since she was legally married to him. There was the old fixity of Indian anger, glinting fixed and relentless in the depths of his eyes. And then the almost invisible change in his face, as the hidden emotion sank down and the stoic indifference, the emotionlessness of centuries, and the stoic kind of tolerance came over him. She could almost feel the waves of successive shadow and coldness go through his blood, his mind hardly aware at all. And again a fear of losing his contact melted her heart.

It was somehow, to her, beautiful, to feel shadows, and cold gleams, and a hardness like stone, then the strange heavy inertia of the tropical mid-day, the stupor of the sun, moving upon him while he stood motionless, watching her. In the end it was that weird, sultry, tropical stupor of the hot hours, a heat-swoon of sheer indifference.

'Como quieres tu!' he said. 'As you wish.'

And she knew he had already released her, in the dark, sultry stupor of his blood. He would make no further effort after her. This also was the doom of his race.

He took a boat and went down to Jamiltepec, to Ramón: as she knew he would.

She was alone, as usual. It occurred to her, that she herself willed this aloneness. She could not relax and be with these people. She could not relax and be with anybody. She always had to recoil upon her own individuality, as a cat does.

Sex, sexual correspondence, did it matter so very much to her? It might have mattered more, if she had not had it. But she had had it - and very finally and consummately, with Cipriano. So she knew all about it. It was as if she had conquered another territory, another field of life. The conqueress! And now she would retire to the lair of her own individuality, with the prey.

Suddenly, she saw herself as men often saw her: the great cat, with its spasms of voluptuousness and its lifelong lustful enjoyment of its own isolated, isolated individuality. Voluptuously to enjoy a contact. Then with a lustful feline gratification, to break the contact, and roam alone in a sense of power. Each time, to seize a sort of power, purring upon her own isolated individuality.

She knew so many women like that. They played with love and intimacy as a cat with a mouse. In the end, they quickly ate up the love mouse, then trotted off with a full belly and a voluptuous sense of power.

Only sometimes the love-mouse refused to be digested, and there was life-long dyspepsia. Or, like Cipriano, turned into a sort of serpent, that reared and looked at her with glittering eyes, then slid away into the void, leaving her blank, the sense of power gone out of her.

Another thing, she had observed, with a touch of horror. One after the other, her women 'friends', the powerful love-women, at the age of forty, forty-five, fifty, they lost all their charm and allure, and turned into real grimalkins, greyish, avid, and horrifying, prowling around looking for prey that became scarcer and scarcer. As human beings they went to pieces. And they remained these grey-ribbed grimalkins, dressed in elegant clothes, the grimalkin howl even passing into their smart chatter.

Kate was a wise woman, wise enough to take a lesson.

It is all very well for a woman to cultivate her ego, her individuality. It is all very well for her to despise love, or to love love as a cat loves a mouse, that it plays with as long as possible, before devouring it to vivify her own individuality and voluptuously fill the belly of her own ego.

'Woman has suffered far more from the suppression of her ego than from sex suppression,' says a woman writer, and it may well be true. But look, only look at the modern women of fifty and fifty-five, those who have cultivated their ego to the top of their bent! Usually, they are grimalkins to fill one with pity or with repulsion.

Kate knew all this. And as she sat alone in her villa, she remembered it again. She had had her fling, even here in Mexico. And these men would let her go again. She was no prisoner. She could carry off any spoil she had captured.

And then what! To sit in a London drawing-room, and add another to all the grimalkins? To let the peculiar grimalkin-grimace come on her face, the most weird grimalkin-twang come into her voice? Horror! Of all the horrors, perhaps the grimalkin women, her contemporaries, were the most repellent to her. Even the horrid old tom-cat men of the civilized roof gutters, did not fill her with such sickly dread.

'No!' she said to herself. 'My ego and my individuality are not worth THAT ghastly price. I'd better abandon some of my ego, and sink some of my individuality, rather than go like that.'

After all, when Cipriano touched her caressively, all her body flowered. That was the greater sex, that could fill all the world with lustre, and which she dared not think about, its power was so much greater than her own will. But on the other hand when she spread the wings of her own ego, and sent forth her own spirit, the world could look very wonderful to her, when she was alone. But after a while, the wonder faded, and a sort of jealous emptiness set in.

'I must have both,' she said to herself. 'I must not recoil against Cipriano and Ramón, they make my blood blossom in my body. I say they are limited. But then one must be limited. If one tries to be unlimited, one becomes horrible. Without Cipriano to touch me and limit me and submerge my will, I shall become a horrible, elderly female. I ought to WANT to be limited. I ought to be GLAD if a man will limit me with a strong will and a warm touch. Because what I call my greatness, and the vastness of the Lord behind me, lets me fall through a hollow floor of nothingness, once there is no man's hand there, to hold me warm and limited. Ah yes! Rather than become elderly and a bit grisly, I will make my submission; as far as I need, and no further.'

She called a man-servant, and set off down the lake in a row-boat. It was a very lovely November morning, the world had not yet gone dry again. In the sharp folds of the steep mountain slopes to the north-east, the shadows were pure corn-flower blue. Below was the lingering delicacy of green, already drying. The lake was full still, but subsided, and the water-hyacinths had drifted away. Birds flew low in the stillness. It was very full and still, in the strong, hot light. Some maize-fields showed sere stubble, but the palo-blanco flowers were out, and the mesquite bushes were frail green, and there were wafts of perfume from the little yellow flower-balls, like cassia.

'Why should I go away!' said Kate. 'Why should I see the buses on the mud of Piccadilly, on Christmas Eve, and the crowds of people on the wet pavements, under the big shops like great caves of light? I may as well stay here, where my soul is less dreary. I shall have to tell Ramón I am sorry for the things I said. I won't carp at them. After all, there is another kind of vastness here, with the sound of drums, and the cry of Quetzalcoatl.'

Already she could see the yellow and reddish, tower-like upper story of Jamiltepec, and the rich, deep fall of magenta bougainvillea, from the high wall, with the pale spraying of plumbago flowers, and many loose creamy-coloured roses.

'Están tocando!' said her boatman quietly, looking up at her with dark, pregnant eyes.

He had heard already the sound of the light drum at Jamiltepec. The boat rowed softly: and there came a sound of a man's voice singing in the morning.

Her boatman lifted an oar, as a signal to the house. And as the boat rounded the curve into the basin, a man-servant in white clothes came running down to the little jetty. In the changeless sunshine was a scent, perhaps of datura and of roses, and an eternal Mexican silence, which the noise of the drum, and the voice of singing, did not disturb.

'Is Don Cipriano here?' asked Kate.

'Está!' murmured the man, with a slight motion towards Ramón's balcony, whence the singing came. 'Shall I say you have come?'

He did not lift his voice above the murmur.

'No!' said Kate. 'I shall sit here in the garden a while, before I come up.'

'Then I will leave open the door,' said the man, 'and you can come up when you will.'

Kate sat on a seat under a big tree. A creeping plant, with great snake-like cords, and big sulphur-and-brown trumpet flowers, hung above. She listened to the singing. It was Ramón teaching one of the singers.

Ramón had not a very good voice. He sang quietly, as if to the inner air, with very beautiful, simple expression. But Kate could not catch the words.

'Ya?' said Ramón, when he had finished.

'Ya, Patrón!' said the man, the singer.

And he began, in his strong, pure voice that caught at the very bowels, to sing another of the Hymns.

'My way is not thy way, and thine is not mine.  
But come, before we part  
Let us separately go to the Morning Star,  
And meet there.

I do not point you to my road, nor yet  
Call: 'Oh come!  
But the Star is the same for both of us,  
Winsome.

The good ghost of me goes down the distance  
To the Holy Ghost.

Oh you, in the tent of the cloven flame  
Meet me, you I like most.

Each man his own way forever, but towards  
The hoverer between:  
Who opens his flame like a tent-flap,  
As we slip in unseen.

A man cannot tread like a woman,  
Nor a woman step out like a man.  
The ghost of each through the leaves of shadow  
Moves as it can.

But the Morning Star and the Evening Star  
Pitch tents of flame  
Where we foregather like gypsies, none knowing  
How the other came.

I ask for nothing except to slip  
In the tent of the Holy Ghost  
And be there in the house of the cloven flame,  
Guest of the Host.

Be with me there, my woman,  
Be bodily there.  
Then let the flame wrap round us  
Like a snare.

Be there along with me, O men!  
Reach across the hearth,  
And laugh with me while the woman rests  
For all we are worth.'

The man had sung this hymn over several times, halting and forgetting, his pure, burning voice faltering out; then the low, rather husky voice of Ramón, with a subtlety of intensity, coming in, as if heard from the centre of a shell; then again the sudden ripping sound of the true singer's tenor, going like a flame through the blood.

Her mozo, a man-servant, had followed her into the garden, and sat at a distance on his heels, under a tree, with his back to the trunk, like a crouching shadow clothed in white. His toes spread dark and hard, in his open huaraches, and the black braid of his hat-string hung against his dark cheek. For the rest he was pure white, the white cotton tight on his thighs.

When the singing had finished above, and the drum was silent, and even the voices speaking in low tones were silent, her mozo looked up at Kate, with his black hat-string dangling at his chin, his black eyes shining, and a timid sort of smile on his face.

'Está muy bien, Patrona?' he said shyly. 'It is good, isn't it, Mistress?'

'It is very good,' she replied, with the infallible echo. But there were conflicting feelings in her breast, and the man knew it.

He looked so young, when he smiled that gay, shy, excited little smile. Something of the eternal child in him. But a child that could harden in an instant into a savage man, revengeful and brutal. And a man always fully sex-alive, for the moment innocent in the fullness of sex, not in the absence. And Kate thought to herself, as she had thought before, that there were more ways than one of 'becoming again as a little child.'

But the man had a sharp, watchful look in the corner of his eye: to see if she were feeling some covert hostility. He wanted her to acquiesce in the hymn, in the drum, in the whole mood. Like a child he wanted her to acquiesce. But if she were going to be hostile, he would be quick to be first in the hostility. Her hostile judgment would make a pure enemy of him.

Ah, all men were alike!

At that moment the man stood up, with soft suddenness, and she heard Cipriano's voice from the balcony above:

'What is it, Lupe?'

'Está la Patrona,' answered the servant.

Kate rose to her feet and looked up. She saw the head and the naked shoulders of Cipriano above the parapet of the balcony.

'I will come up,' she said.

And slowly she went through the great iron gates into the passage-way. Lupe, following, bolted the doors behind her.

On the terrace above she found Ramón and Cipriano both with their upper bodies naked, waiting for her in silence. She was embarrassed.

'I waited to hear the new hymn,' she said.

'And how does it seem to you?' said Ramón, in Spanish.

'I like it,' she said.

'Let us sit down,' said Ramón, still in Spanish. He and she sat in the cane rocking-chairs: Cipriano stood by the wall of the terrace.

She had come to make a sort of submission: to say she didn't want to go away. But finding them both in the thick of their Quetzalcoatl mood, with their manly breasts uncovered, she was not very eager to begin. They made her feel like an intruder. She did not pause to realize that she WAS one.

'We don't meet in your Morning Star, apparently, do we?' she said, mocking, but with a slight quaver.



A deeper silence seemed suddenly to hold the two men.

'And I suppose a woman is really de trop, even there, when two men are together.'

But she faltered a bit in the saying. Cipriano, she knew, was baffled and stung when she taunted him.

Ramón answered her, with the gentleness that could come straight out of his heart: but still in Spanish:

'Why, Cousin, what is it?'

Her lip quivered, as she suddenly said:

'I don't really want to go away from you.'

Ramón looked swiftly at Cipriano, then said:

'I know you don't.'

But the gentle protective tone of his voice only made Kate rebel again. She brimmed over with sudden tears, crying:

'You don't really want me.'

'Yes, I want you! - Verdad! Verdad!' exclaimed Cipriano, in his low, secret, almost muttering voice.

And even amid her tears, Kate was thinking to herself: What a fraud I am! I know all the time it is I who don't altogether want them. I want myself to myself. But I can fool them so that they shan't find out.

For she heard the hot, phallic passion in Cipriano's voice.

Then came the voice of Ramón, like a chill:

'It is you who don't want,' he said, in English this time. 'You needn't commit yourself to US. Listen to your own best desire.'

'And if it tells me to go away?' she flashed, defiant through the end of her tears.

'Then go! Oh certainly go!'

Suddenly her tears came afresh.

'I knew you didn't really want me,' she wept.

Then Cipriano's voice said, with a hot, furtive softness of persuasion:

'You are not his! He would not tell you!'

'That is very true,' said Ramón. 'Don't listen to me!'

He spoke in Spanish. And Kate glanced up sharply through her tears, to see him going quietly, but swiftly, away.

She wiped her face, suddenly calm. Then she looked with wet eyes at Cipriano. He was standing erect and alert, like a little fighting male, and his eyes glowed black and uncannily as he met her wet, limpid glance.

Yes, she was a bit afraid of him too, with his inhuman black eyes.

'You don't want me to go, do you?' she pleaded.

A slow, almost foolish smile came over his face, and his body was slightly convulsed. Then came his soft-tongued Indian speech, as if all his mouth were soft, saying in Spanish, but with the 'r' sound almost lost:

'Yo! Yo!' - his eyebrows lifted with queer mock surprise, and a little convulsion went through his body again. 'Te quiero mucho! Mucho te quiero! Mucho! Mucho! I like you very much! Very much!'

It sounded so soft, so soft-tongued, of the soft, wet, hot blood, that she shivered a little.

'You won't let me go!' she said to him.