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## [The Plumed Serpent](#)

[D. H. Lawrence](#)

### Chapter 10 - Don Ram 驩 And Do 傅 Carlota

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Kate had been in Sayula ten days before she had any sign from Don Ramón. She had been out in a boat on the lake, and had seen his house, round the bend of the western point. It was a reddish-and- yellow two-storey house with a little stone basin for the boats, and a mango grove between it and the lake. Among the trees, away from the lake, were the black adobe huts, two rows, of the peons.

The hacienda had once been a large one. But it had been irrigated from the hills, and the revolutions had broken all the aqueducts. Only a small supply of water was available. Then Don Ramón had had enemies in the Government. So that a good deal of his land was taken away to be divided among the peons. Now, he had only some three hundred acres. The two hundred acres along the lake-shore were mostly lost to him. He worked a few acres of fruit land round the house, and in a tiny valley just in the hills he raised sugar- cane. On the patches of the mountain slope little patches of maize were to be seen.

But Doña Carlota had money. She was from Torreon and drew still a good income from the mines.

A mozo came with a note from Don Ramón: might he bring his wife to call on Kate?

Doña Carlota was a thin, gentle, wide-eyed woman, with a slightly startled expression, and soft, brownish hair. She was pure European in extraction, of a Spanish father and French mother: very different from the usual stout, over-powdered, ox-like Mexican matron. Her face was pale, faded, and without any make-up at all. Her thin, eager figure had something English about it, but her strange, wide brown eyes were not English. She spoke only Spanish - or French. But her Spanish was so slow and distinct and slightly plaintive, that Kate understood her at once.

The two women understood one another quickly, but were a little nervous of one another. Doña Carlota was delicate and sensitive like a Chihuahua dog, and with the same slightly prominent eyes. Kate felt she had rarely met a woman with such a dog-like finesse of gentleness. And the two women talked. Ramón, large and muted, kept himself in reserve. It was as if the two women rushed together to unite against his silence and his powerful, different significance.

Kate knew at once that Doña Carlota loved him, but with a love that was now nearly all WILL. She had worshipped him, and she had had to leave off worshipping him. She had had to question him. And she would never now cease from questioning.

So he sat apart, a little constrained, his handsome head hanging a little, and his dark, sensitive hands dangling between his thighs.

'I had such a wonderful time!' Kate said suddenly to him. 'I danced a dance round the drum with the Men of Quetzalcoatl.'

'I heard,' he said, with a rather stiff smile.

Doña Carlota understood English, though she would not speak it.

'You danced with the men of Quetzalcoatl!' she said in Spanish, in a pained voice. 'But, Señora, why did you do such a thing? Oh why?'

'I was fascinated,' said Kate.

'No, you must not be fascinated. No! No! It is not good. I tell you. I am so SORRY my husband interests himself in this thing. I am so sorry.'

Juana was bringing a bottle of vermouth: all that Kate had to offer her visitors, in the morning.

'You went to see your boys in the United States?' said Kate to Doña Carlota. 'How were they?'

'Oh, better, thank you. They are well; that is, the younger is very delicate.'

'You didn't bring him home?'

'No! No! I think they are better at school. Here - here - there are so many things to trouble them. No! But they will come home next month, for the vacation.'

'How nice!' said Kate. 'Then I shall see them. They will be here, won't they? - on the lake?'

'Well! - I am not sure. Perhaps for a little while. You see I am so busy in Mexico with my Cuna.'

'What is a Cuna?' said Kate: she only knew it was the Spanish for cradle.

It turned out to be a foundlings' home, run by a few obscure Carmelite sisters. And Doña Carlota was the director. Kate gathered that Don Ramón's wife was an intense, almost exalted Catholic. She exalted herself in the Church, and in her work for the Cuna.

'There are so many children born in Mexico,' said Doña Carlota, 'and so many die. If only we could save them, and equip them for life. We do a little, all we can.'

It seemed the waste, unwanted babies could be delivered in at the door of the Cuna, like parcels. The mother had only to knock, and hand in the little living bundle.

'It saves so many mothers from neglecting their babies, and letting them die,' said Doña Carlota. 'Then we do what we can. If the mother doesn't leave a name, I name the child. Very often I do. The mothers just hand over a little naked thing, sometimes without a name or a rag to cover it. And we never ask.'

The children were not all kept in the Home. Only a small number. Of the others, some decent Indian woman was paid a small sum to take the child into her home. Every month she must come with the little one to the Cuna, to receive her wage. The Indians are so very rarely unkind to children. Careless, yes. But rarely, rarely unkind.

In former days, Doña Carlota said, nearly every well-born lady in Mexico would receive one or more of these foundlings into her home, and have it brought up with the family. It was the loose, patriarchal generosity innate in the bosoms of the Spanish- Mexicans. But now, few children were adopted. Instead, they were taught as far as possible to be carpenters or gardeners, or house- servants, or, among the girls, dressmakers, even school-teachers.

Kate listened with uneasy interest. She felt there was so much real human feeling in this Mexican charity: she was almost rebuked. Perhaps what Doña Carlota was doing was the best that could be done, in this half-wild, helpless country. At the same time, it was such a forlorn hope, it made one's heart sink.

And Doña Carlota, confident as she was in her good works, still had just a bit the look of a victim; a gentle, sensitive, slightly startled victim. As if some secret enemy drained her blood.

Don Ramón sat there impassive, listening without heeding: solid and unmoving AGAINST the charitable quiver of his wife's emotion. He let her do as she would. But against her work and against her flow he was in silent, heavy, unchanging opposition. She knew this, and trembled in her nervous eagerness, as she talked to Kate about the Cuna, and won Kate's sympathy. Till it seemed to her that there was something cruel in Don Ramón's passive, masked poise. An impassive male cruelty, changeless as a stone idol.

'Now won't you come and spend the day with me while I am here with Don Ramón?' said Doña Carlota. 'The house is very poor and rough. It is no longer what it used to be. But it is your house if you will come.'

Kate accepted, and said she would prefer to walk out. It was only four miles, and surely she would be safe, with Juana.

'I will send a man to come with you,' said Don Ramón. 'It might not be quite safe.'

'Where is General Viedma?' asked Kate.

'We shall try to get him out when you come,' replied Doña Carlota. 'I am so very fond of Don Cipriano, I have known him for many years, and he is the godfather of my younger son. But now he is in command of the Guadalajara division, he is not very often able to come out.'

'I wonder why he is a General?' said Kate. 'He seems to me too human.'

'Oh, but he is very human too. But he is a general; yes, yes, he wants to be in command of the soldiers. And I tell you, he is very strong. He has great power with his regiments. They believe in him, oh, they believe in him. He has that power, you know, that some of the higher types of Indians have, to make many others want to follow them and fight for them. You know? Don Cipriano is like that. You can never change him. But I think a woman might be wonderful for him. He has lived so without any woman in his life. He won't care about them.'

'What does he care about?' asked Kate.

'Ah!' Doña Carlota started as if stung. Then she glanced quickly, involuntarily at her husband, as she added: 'I don't know. Really, I don't know.'

'The Men of Quetzalcoatl,' said Don Ramón heavily, with a little smile.

But Doña Carlota seemed to be able to take all the ease and the banter out of him. He seemed stiff and a bit stupid.

'Ah, there! There! There you have it! The Men of Quetzalcoatl - that is a nice thing for him to care about! A nice thing, I say,' fluttered Doña Carlota, in her gentle, fragile, scolding way. And it was evident to Kate that she adored both the men, and trembled in opposition to their wrongness, and would never give in to them.

To Ramón it was a terrible burden, his wife's quivering, absolute, blind opposition, taken in conjunction with her helpless adoration.

A man-servant appeared at nine o'clock one morning, to accompany Kate to the hacienda, which was called Jamiltepec. He had a basket, and had been shopping in the market. An elderly man, with grey in his moustache, he had bright young eyes and seemed full of energy. His bare feet in the huaraches were almost black with exposure, but his clothes were brilliantly white.

Kate was glad to be walking. The one depressing thing about life in the villages was that one could not walk out into the country. There was always the liability to be held up or attacked. And she had walked already, as far as possible, in every direction, in the neighbourhood of the village, accompanied usually by Ezequiel. Now she was beginning to feel a prisoner.

She was glad, then, to be setting off. The morning was clear and hot, the pale brown lake quite still, like a phantom. People were moving on the beach, in the distance tiny, like dots of white: white dots of men following the faint dust of donkeys. She wondered often why humanity was like specks in the Mexican landscape; just specks of life.

They passed from the lake shore to the rough, dusty road going west, between the steep slope of the hills and the bit of flat by the lake. For almost a mile there were villas, most of them shut up fast, some of them smashed, with broken walls and smashed windows. Only flowers bloomed in masses above the rubble.

In the empty places were flimsy straw huts of the natives, haphazard, as if blown there. By the road under the hill were black-grey adobe huts, like boxes, and fowls running about, and brown pigs or grey pigs spotted with black careered and grunted, and half-naked children, dark orange-brown, trotted or lay flat on their faces in the road, their little naked posteriors hunched up, fast asleep. Already asleep again.

The houses were many of them being re-thatched, or the tiled roofs were being patched by men who assumed a great air of importance at having undertaken such a task. They were pretending to hurry, too, because the real rains might begin any day. And in the little stony levels by the lake, the land was being scratch-ploughed by a pair of oxen and a lump of pointed wood.

But this part of the road Kate knew. She knew the fine villa on the knoll, with its tufts of palms, and the laid-out avenues that were laid out, indeed, as the dead are, to crumble back again. She was glad to be past the villas, where the road came down to the lake again, under big shady trees that had twisted, wriggly beans. On the left was the water, the colour of turtledoves, lapping the pale fawn stones. At a water-hole of a stream in the beach, a cluster of women were busily washing clothes. In the shallows of the lake itself two women sat bathing, their black hair hanging dense and wet. A little farther along a man was wading slowly, stopping to throw his round net skilfully upon the water, then slowly stooping and gathering it in, picking out the tiny, glittery fish called charales. Strangely silent and remote everything, in the gleaming morning, as if it were some distant period of time.

A little breeze was coming from the lake, but the deep dust underfoot was hot. On the right the hill rose precipitous, baked and yellowish, giving back the sun and the intense dryness, and exhaling the faint, desiccated, peculiar smell of Mexico, that smells as if the earth had sweated itself dry.

All the time strings of donkeys trotted laden through the dust, their drivers stalking erect and rapid behind, watching with eyes like black holes, but always answering Kate's salute with a respectful *Adiós!* And Juana echoed her laconic *Adiós!* She was limping, and she thought it horrible of Kate to walk four miles, when they might have struggled out in an old hired motor-car, or gone in a boat, or even ridden donkey-back.

But to go on foot! Kate could hear all her criada's feelings in the drawled, sardonic *Adiós!* But the man behind strode bravely and called cheerfully. His pistol was prominent in his belt.

A bluff of yellow rock came jutting at the road. The road wound round it, and into a piece of flat open country. There were fields of dry stone, and hedges of dusty thorn and cactus. To the left the bright green of the willows by the lake-shore. To the right the hills swerved inland, to meet the sheer, fluted sides of dry mountains. Away ahead, the hills curved back at the shore, and a queer little crack or niche showed. This crack in the hills led from Don Ramón's shore-property to the little valley where he grew the sugar-cane. And where the hills approached the lake again there was a dark clustering of mango-trees, and the red upper storey of the hacienda house.

'There it is!' cried the man behind. 'Jamiltepec, Señorita. 'La hacienda de Don Ramón!'

And his eyes shone as he said the name. He was a proud peon, and he really seemed happy.

'Look! How far!' cried Juana.

'Another time,' said Kate, 'I shall come alone, or with Ezequiel.'

'No, Niña! Don't say so. Only my foot hurts this morning.'

'Yes. Better not to bring you.'

'No, Niña! I like to come, very much!'

The tall windmill fan for drawing up water from the lake was spinning gaily. A little valley came down from the niche in the hills, and at the bottom a little water running. Towards the lake, where this valley flattened out, was a grove of banana-plants, screened a little from the lake breeze by a vivid row of willow-trees. And on the top of the slope, where the road ran into the shade of mango-trees, were the two rows of adobe huts, like a village, set a little back from the road.

Women were coming up between the trees, on the patch from the lake, with jars of water on their shoulders; children were playing around the doors, squatting with little naked posteriors in deep dust; and here and there a goat was tethered. Men in soiled white clothes were lounging, with folded arms and one leg crossed in front of the other, against the corner of a house, or crouching under the walls. Not by any means *dolce far niente*. They seemed to be waiting, eternally waiting for something.

'That way, Señorita!' called the man with the basket, running to her side and indicating the smoother road sloping down between some big trees, towards the white gate of the hacienda. 'We are here!'

Always he spoke with pleased delight, as if the place were a wonder-place to him.

The big doors of the *zaguán*, the entrance, stood open, and in the shade of the entrance-way a couple of little soldiers were seated. Across the cleared, straw-littered space in front of the gates two peons were trotting, each with a big bunch of bananas on his head. The soldiers said something, and the two peons halted in their trotting, and slowly turned under their yellow-green load, to look back at Kate and Juana and the man Martin, approaching down the road. Then they turned again and trotted into the courtyard, barefoot.

The soldiers stood up. Martin, trotting at Kate's side again, ushered her into the arched entrance, where the ox-wagons rumbling through had worn deep ruts. Juana came behind, making a humble noise.

Kate found herself in a big, barren yard, that seemed empty. There were high walls on the three sides, with sheds and stables. The fourth side, facing, was the house, with heavily-barred windows looking on to the courtyard, but with no door. Instead, there was another *zaguán*, or passage with closed doors piercing the house.

Martin trotted ahead to knock on the closed doors. Kate stood looking round at the big yard. In a shed in one corner, four half-naked men were packing bunches of bananas. A man in the shade was sawing poles, and two men in the sun were unloading tiles from a donkey. In a corner was a bullock-wagon, and a pair of big black- and-white oxen standing with heads pressed down, waiting.

The big doors opened, and Kate entered the second *zaguán*. It was a wide entrance way, with stairs going up on one side, and Kate lingered to look through the open iron gates in front of her, down a formal garden hemmed in with huge mango-trees, to the lake, with its little artificial harbour where two boats were moored. The lake seemed to give off a great light, between the dark walls of mango.

At the back of the new-comers the servant woman closed the big doors on to the yard, then waved Kate to the stairs.

'Pass this way, Señorita.'

A bell tinkled above. Kate climbed the stone stairs. And there above her was Doña Carlota, in white muslin and with white shoes and stockings, her face looking curiously yellow and faded by contrast. Her soft brown hair was low over her ears, and she held out her thin brownish arms with queer effusiveness.

'So you have come! And you have walked, walked all the way? Oh, imagine walking in so much sun and dust! Come, come in and rest.'

She took Kate's hands and led her across the open terrace at the top of the stairs.

'It is beautiful here,' said Kate.

She stood on the terrace, looking out past the mango-trees at the lake. A distant sailing-canoe was going down the breeze, on the pallid, unreal water. Away across rose the bluish, grooved mountains, with the white speck of a village: far away in the morning it seemed, in another world, in another life, in another mode of time.

'What is that village?' Kate asked.

'That one? That one there? It is San Ildefonso,' said Doña Carlota, in her fluttering eagerness.

'But it is beautiful here!' Kate repeated.

'Hermoso - sí! Sí, bonito!' quavered the other woman uneasily, always answering in Spanish.

The house, reddish and yellow in colour, had two short wings towards the lake. The terrace, with green plants on the terrace wall, went round the three sides, the roof above supported by big square pillars that rose from the ground. Down below, the pillars made a sort of cloisters around the three sides, and in the little stone court was a pool of water. Beyond, the rather neglected formal garden with strong sun and deep mango-shade.

'Come, you will need to rest!' said Doña Carlota.

'I would like to change my shoes,' said Kate.

She was shown into a high, simple, rather bare bedroom with red-tiled floor. There she changed into the shoes and stockings Juana had carried, and rested a little.

As she lay resting, she heard the dulled thud-thud of the tom-tom drum, but, save the crowing of a cock in the distance, no other sound on the bright, yet curiously hollow Mexican morning. And the drum, thudding with its dulled, black insistence, made her uneasy. It sounded like something coming over the horizon.

She rose, and went into the long, high salon where Doña Carlota was sitting talking to a man in black. The salon, with its three window-doors open on to the terrace, its worn, red floor tiled with old square bricks, its high walls colour-washed a faint green, and the many-beamed ceiling whitewashed; and with its bareness of furniture; seemed like part of the out-of-doors, like some garden-arbour put for shade. The sense, which houses have in hot climates, of being just three walls wherein one lingers for a moment, then goes away again.

As Kate entered the room, the man in black rose and shook hands with Doña Carlota, bowing very low and deferential. Then with a deferential sideways sort of bow to Kate, he vanished out of doors.

'Come!' said Doña Carlota to Kate. 'Are you sure now you are rested?' And she pulled forward one of the cane rocking-chairs that had poised itself in the room, en route to nowhere.

'Perfectly!' said Kate. 'How still it seems here! Except for the drum. Perhaps it is the drum that makes it seem so still. Though I always think the lake MAKES a sort of silence.'

'Ah, the drum!' cried Doña Carlota, lifting her hand with a gesture of nervous, spent exasperation. 'I cannot hear it. No, I cannot, I cannot bear to hear it.'

And she rocked herself in a sudden access of agitation.

'It does hit one rather below the belt,' said Kate. 'What is it?'

'Ah, do not ask me! It is my husband.'

She made a gesture of despair, and rocked herself almost into unconsciousness.

'Is Don Ramón drumming?'

'Drumming?' Doña Carlota seemed to start. 'No! Oh no! He is not drumming, himself. He brought down two Indians from the north to do that.'

'Did he!' said Kate, non-committal.

But Doña Carlota was rocking in a sort of semi-consciousness. Then she seemed to pull herself together.

'I MUST TALK to somebody, I must!' she said, suddenly straightening herself in her chair, her face creamy and creased, her soft brown hair sagging over her ears, her brown eyes oddly desperate. 'May I talk to you?'

'Do!' said Kate, rather uneasy.

'You know what Ramón is doing?' she said, looking at Kate almost furtively, suspiciously.

'Does he want to bring back the old gods?' said Kate vaguely.

'Ah!' cried Doña Carlota, again with that desperate, flying jerk of her hand. 'As if it were POSSIBLE! As if it were possible! The old gods! Imagine it, Señora! The old gods! Why, what are they? Nothing but dead illusions. And ugly, repulsive illusions! Ah! I always thought my husband such a clever man, so superior to me! Ah, it is terrible to have to change one's idea! This is such NONSENSE. How dare he! How dare he take such nonsense seriously! How does he dare!'

'Does he believe in it himself?' asked Kate.

'Himself? But, Señora - ' and Doña Carlota gave a pitiful, pitying smile of contempt. 'How could he! As if it were possible. After all, he is an educated man! How could he believe in such nonsense!'

'Then why does he do it?'

'Why? Why?' There was a tone of unspeakable weariness in Doña Carlota's voice. 'I wish I knew. I think he has gone insane, as Mexicans do. Insane like Francisco Villa, the bandit.'

Kate thought of the pug-faced notorious Pancho Villa in wonder, unable to connect him with Don Ramón.

'All the Mexicans, as soon as they rise above themselves, go that way,' said Doña Carlota. 'Their pride gets the better of them. And then they understand nothing, nothing'

but their own foolish will their will to be very, very important. It is just against this danger that Christ came, to teach men a proper humility? To teach them the sin of pride. But that is why they hate Christ so much, and His teaching. First and last, they want their own vanity.'

Kate had often thought so herself. Her own final conclusion about men was that THEY were the vanity of vanities, nothing but vanity. They must be flattered and made to feel great: Nothing else.

'And now, my husband wants to go to the other extreme of Jesus. He wants to exalt pride and vanity higher than God. Ah, it is terrible, terrible! And foolish like a little boy! Ah, what is a man but a little boy who needs a nurse and a mother! Ah, Señora, I can't bear it.'

Doña Carlota covered her face with her hand, as if swooning.

'But there is something wonderful, too, about Don Ramón,' said Kate coaxingly: though at the moment she hated him.

'Wonderful! Ah yes, he has gifts. He has great gifts! But what are gifts to a man who perverts them!'

'Tell me what you think he really wants,' said Kate.

'Power! Just power! Just foolish, wicked power. As if there had not been enough horrible, wicked power let loose in this country. But he - he - wants to be beyond them all. He - he - he wants to be worshipped. To be worshipped! To be worshipped! A God! He, whom I've held, I've held in my arms! He is a child, as all men are children. And now he wants - to be worshipped - !' She went off into a shrill, wild laughter, covering her face with her hands, and laughing shrilly, her laughter punctuated by hollow, ghastly sobs.

Kate sat in absolute dismay, waiting for the other woman to recover herself. She felt cold against these hysterics, and exerted all her heavy female will to stop them.

'After all,' she said, when Doña Carlota became quiet, her face in her hands, 'it isn't your fault. We can't be responsible, even for our husbands. I know THAT, since my husband died, and I couldn't prevent him dying. And then - then I learned that no matter how you love another person, you can't really do anything, you are helpless when it comes to the last things. You have to leave them to themselves, when they want to die: or when they want to do things that seem foolish, so, so foolish, to a woman.'

Doña Carlota looked up at the other woman.

'You loved your husband very much - and he died?' she said softly.

'I DID love him. And I shall never, never love another man. I couldn't. I've lost the power.'

'And why did he die?'

'Ah, even that was really his own fault. He broke his own soul and spirit, in those Irish politics. I knew it was wrong. What does Ireland matter, what does nationalism and all that rubbish matter, really! And revolutions! They are so, so stupid and vieux jeu. Ah! It would have been SO much better if Joachim had been content to live his life in peace, with me. It could be so jolly, so lovely. And I tried and tried and tried with him. But it was no good. He WANTED to kill himself with that beastly Irish business, and I tried in vain to prevent him.'

Doña Carlota stared slowly at Kate.

'As a woman MUST try to prevent a man, when he is going wrong,' she said. 'As I try to prevent Ramón. As he will get himself killed, as surely as they all do, down to Francisco Villa. And when they are dead, what good is it all?'

'When they ARE dead,' said Kate, 'then you KNOW it's no good.'

'You do! Oh, Señora, if you think you can help me with Ramón, DO help me, DO! For it means the death either of me or him. And I shall die, though he is wrong. Unless he gets killed.'

'Tell me what he wants to do,' said Kate. 'What does he THINK he wants to do, anyhow? - Like my husband thought he wanted to make a free Ireland and a great Irish people. But I knew all the time, the Irish aren't a great people any more, and you CAN'T make them free. They are only good at destroying - just mere stupid destroying. How can you make a people free, if they AREN'T free? If something inside them compels them to go on destroying!'

'I know! I know! And that is Ramón. He wants to destroy even Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, for this people. Imagine it! To destroy Jesus and the Blessed Virgin! the last thing they've got!'

'But what does he say himself, that he wants to do?'

'He says he wants to make a new connection between the people and God. He says himself, God is always God. But man loses his connection with God. And then he can never recover it again, unless some new Saviour comes to give him his new connection. And every new connection is different from the last, though God is always God. And now, Ramón says, the people have lost God. And the Saviour cannot lead them to Him any more. There must be a new Saviour with a new vision. But ah, Señora, that is not true for me. God is love, and if Ramón would only submit to love, he would know that he had found God. But he is perverse. Ah, if we could be together, quietly loving, and enjoying the beautiful world, and WAITING IN THE LOVE OF GOD! Ah, Señora, WHY, why, why can't he see it? Oh, why can't he see it! Instead of doing all these - '

The tears came to Doña Carlota's eyes, and spilled over her cheeks. Kate also was in tears, mopping her face.

'It's no good!' she said, sobbing. 'I know it's no good, no matter what we do. They don't WANT to be happy and peaceful. They WANT this strife and these other false, horrible connections. It's no good whatever we do! That's what's so bitter, so bitter!'

The two women sat in their bent-wood rocking-chairs and just sobbed. And as they sobbed, they heard a step coming along the terrace, the faint swish of the sandals of the people.

It was Don Ramón, drawn unconsciously by the emotional disturbance of the two women.

Doña Carlota hastily dabbed her eyes, and her sniffing nose. Kate blew her nose like a trumpet, and Don Ramón stood in the doorway.

He was dressed in white, dazzling, in the costume of the peons, the white blouse jacket and the white, wide pantaloons trousers. But the white was linen, slightly starched, and brilliant, almost unnatural in its whiteness. From under his blouse, in front, hung the ends of a narrow woollen sash, white, with blue and black bars, and a fringe of scarlet. And on his naked feet were the plaited huaraches, of blue and black strips of leather, with thick, red-dyed soles. His loose trousers were bound round the ankles with blue, red, and black woollen braids.

Kate glanced at him as he stood in the sun, so dazzlingly white, that his black hair and dark face looked like a hole in the atmosphere. He came forward, the ends of his sash swinging against his thighs, his sandals slightly swishing.

'I am pleased to see you,' he said, shaking hands with Kate. 'How did you come?'

He dropped into a chair, and sat quite still. The two women hung their heads, hiding their faces. The presence of the man seemed to put their emotion out of joint. He ignored all the signs of their discomfort, overlooking it with a powerful will. There was a certain strength in his presence. They all cheered up a bit.

'You didn't know my husband had become one of the people - a real peon - a Señor Peon, like Count Tolstoy became a Señor Moujik?' said Doña Carlota, with an attempt at raillery.

'Anyway it suits him,' said Kate.

'There!' said Don Ramón. 'Give the devil his dues.'

But there was something unyielding, unbending about him. He laughed and spoke to the women only from a surface self. Underneath, powerful and inscrutable, he made no connection with them.

So it was at lunch. There was a flitting conversation, with intervals of silence. It was evident that Ramón was thinking in another world, in the silence. And the ponderous stillness of his will, working in another sphere, made the women feel overshadowed.

'The Señora is like me, Ramón,' said Doña Carlota. 'She cannot bear the sound of that drum. Must it play any more this afternoon?'

There was a moment's pause, before he answered:

'After four o'clock only.'

'MUST we have that noise to-day?' Carlota persisted.

'Why not to-day like other days!' he said. But a certain darkness was on his brow, and it was evident he wanted to leave the presence of the two women.

'Because the Señora is here: and I am here: and we neither of us like it. And to-morrow the Señora will not be here, and I shall be gone back to Mexico. So why not spare us to-day! Surely you can show us this consideration.'

Ramón looked at her, and then at Kate. There was anger in his eyes. And Kate could almost feel, in his powerful chest, the big heart swelling with a suffocation of anger. Both women kept mum. But it pleased them, anyhow, that they could make him angry.

'Why not row with Mrs Leslie on the lake!' he said, with quiet control.

But under his dark brows was a level, indignant anger.

'We may not want to,' said Carlota.

Then he did what Kate had not known anyone to do before. He withdrew his consciousness away from them as they all three sat at table, leaving the two women, as it were, seated outside a closed door, with nothing more happening. Kate felt for the time startled and forlorn, then a slow anger burned in her warm ivory cheek.

'Oh, yes,' she said. 'I can start home before then.'

'No! No!' said Doña Carlota, with a Spanish wail. 'Don't leave me. Stay with me till evening, and help me to amuse Don Cipriano. He is coming to supper.'