

Karlene Kubat
Copyright 2000

The Green Bird Sings Desire

by Karlene Kubat

I

Kamille Penine paused on a terminal walkway above Aurora Airport's circular pit of confusion. Guatemala at last. Beyond the large windows framed by broad banana leaves, the volcanoes off to her left jutted into the sky, stark and threatening in the hot afternoon sun. She squinted to see if the purple cones were smoldering, and detected a small vapor cloud. Could they be priming for a fatal exhibition like that of Mount St. Helens in her home state of Washington? Awakening St. Helens had leveled its perfectly symmetrical top and removed from her recent life yet one more thing: the pristine and snowy peak that had

floated above a blissful childhood. The clear recollection of that fiery transition summoned other sharp memories of the drastic changes in her life, some random acts beyond her control, some precipitated by her own bad judgment.

Her eyes clouded and she shivered in the sultry heat, for a moment imagining herself held in Charlie's arms while erupting St. Helens sent curling black clouds into the sky at his back. The two of them had been watching from his hotel room in Portland where she had gone to meet him in one of his hurried global touchdowns. Enigmatic Charlie was forever arriving and departing, often dropping out of some tropical, white-suited zone into her raincoated world. Still, she could not imagine him troubling to follow her all the way to Guatemala. She could hardly believe that she herself had taken this radical step. It was the inheritance coupled with a large amount of personal dissatisfaction that had prompted her abrupt decision to come; her great aunt's Guatemalan bequest, the death of her parents, and Charlie.

Her thoughts of Charlie were now those of a shady life increasingly suspect, but once so very promising. She had allowed herself to remain incredibly naïve about him almost to the end, her usually insightful judgment skewed by a relentless passion. Could she have been mistaken? What if the conspiring eastern lawyer she had almost married were not really an underworld figure, as she had come at last to believe? But of course he was. It was undeniable. More

than once she had stumbled onto his threatening telephone conversations and slipped away without his knowing. He was surly and tight-lipped about the mysterious conglomerate for which he worked. With her jolting discovery that he carried a .38 pistol in his briefcase, her paranoia grew and colored the smallest details of his existence. The patronizing and paternal way he evaded her questions had become so very annoying, even though he could be nearly irresistible in the process. Would he try to find her? Not difficult, but why? With a healthy dose of caution, she considered herself free; he did, after all, have other women to distract him.

Their paths should never have crossed in the first place. A freakish accident had brought them together. His car ran over her purse when the strap came unbuckled as she was rushing across the street in front of the American Museum of Natural History in New York. She turned around and cried out, "No! Oh, no!" The purse held her gold watch with a recently broken clasp, a cherished gift her deceased grandmother had given her years ago for her high school graduation. Everything was smashed, and she gathered up her belongings with tears in her eyes and dashed to the curb. He later told her he had liked what he saw in his rearview mirror and that was why he stopped his car and ran back to her. Thus began the tempestuous coast-to-coast affair -- she, held down to her college teaching position, was not at liberty to come and go as freely as Charlie -- which soon

escalated into a proposal of marriage. The happy moments would fade; as long as she was free, unreachable, without the continual flame of passion burning away clear reason. The memory of her unchecked ardor and bad judgment could still, as now, inflame her pale skin. Then the sudden thought of her dead parents intervened, ice on hot coals.

She reached out to the iron railing, grasping it and looking down, whispering, "A new life. A new life."

A jangle of Spanish voices rose up from the lower level as she listened more intently, searching for a familiar word. Strangeness thrust itself upon her in the thick, muggy atmosphere. People moved dreamlike: a scolding woman in a red skirt, pulling at an angry, weeping child who had removed his sandals; two perspiring nuns in khaki, dragging their supply boxes over the yellow stone floor; a ragged beggar being shoved through the doors by a shouting guard; confused bodies turning, crossing, meeting and parting.

She felt disconnected from reality, realizing for the first time how closely her identity was linked to places: her parents' big rambling house on a Seattle hill; her uncle's shady orchards and horse-cropped meadows in eastern Washington -- those glorious country summers going back to earliest childhood; cherished memories that securely rooted her in familiar places and times, coloring her adult vision with a deep sense of family attachment. Now the Seattle house was sold. There could be no turning back to the once

secure warmth of family, or ever again the unsurpassed joy in working and laughing with her parents and her mother's younger brother on the farm. It was always those early experiences she harked back to for strength, not the more recent ones containing so much unhappiness: her parents' fatal car crash, her misplaced devotion to a faithless and disreputable lover, the unvarying and thankless routine of teaching English to distracted college students.

When he hugged her good-bye at SeaTac Airport, Uncle Jasper had said: "You're like a tight string ready to snap, my girl. Go busy yourself with your windfall; it's a chance not many get. You've got a fine mind and a good heart worthy of the task." That warm praise and bolstering assurance was very much needed as she rushed off into the unknown. Now, as she repeated those comforting words to herself, she straightened her shoulders with determination.

These people...their desires can't be so different from my own. I'll find out what little differences there are and somehow...somehow overcome them. I will make this work.

For a moment, she felt the weakness of fatigue sweep over her and was distressed, almost angry, at how easily she could succumb. She bent to smooth the wrinkles in her damp skirt with forceful hands, raising her head just as a small, wiry man rushed up to her and removed his hat.

"Señorita Penine?" he said, extending his hand.

"Yes...si. And you must be Señor Tomás Nervo. How do

you do?" She spoke while shaking his welcome hand.

"*Si si, encantado, señorita...* But forgive me, *Señora Catalina* Bartel told me that you do not speak Spanish.

"No, and I am sorry, but I'll learn. The language I studied most -- a little French -- is not so different from yours."

"A matter of opinion, *Señorita* Penine. Perhaps it is so for you, a teacher: *la maestra*. How is that for your first Spanish lesson?"

"Perfect. Teacher: *la maestra*. Your English is very good. I hope sometimes you'll be *my* teacher, *Señor* Nervo."

The congenial and diminutive man who had been her great aunt's executor in the recent probate of her will, and also her very good friend, waved his hand with a modest grin -- from a face, to her relief, resonating with kindness.

"It will please me to help you in any way that I can. But you must call me *Don* Tomás as your great aunt did. It pleases me. I miss her...but of that later. Now we must begin. The drive is long and the day is hot for you. Not even hungry dogs go out at this hour...only tourists," he added with a twinkle in his jet eyes.

He looked very Indian, *indígena*, as they said here, yet he must be called *ladino* because of his mixed blood and Western dress. There were still many pure Indians in Guatemala, but few pure Spanish.

They climbed into an old Mercedes sedan and were driven

with haste into the countryside by a practiced but aloof *ladino*. He juggled them with expert but careless abandon over all the known shortcuts. The large, green car was immaculate and comfortable with its soft, buff leather seats, so relaxing for a tired traveler to sink down upon. Its exterior shone beneath the rapidly accumulating dust like a proud grande dame with a sumptuous past.

"This couldn't have been Aunt Cathline's car," Kamille said, positive of her assertion although she had no real evidence for making it.

"No, no, *señorita*. It is from the *finca* of *Señor* Andar Steinlöwe. He hears that you are coming and sends his big car in respect for *Doña Catalina* who was his friend, and sometimes," *Don* Tomás gave a curious laugh, "he was also her enemy."

"Kind of him," Kamille said, thinking again, and with slight impatience, how many mysteries there were that would have to be slowly unraveled. A question sprang to her lips that had to do with her sketchy knowledge of Guatemala: this *finca* owner, Steinlöwe...weren't the plantations of many wealthy Germans taken away for collaborating with the Nazis, and weren't they thrown out of Guatemala during World War II? She was, however, too tired to speak, instead leaning back and staring out the window, letting small factories, shanties, and finally waving banana leaves and bright crimson splotches of *bougainvillea* slide by in silence.

Friends had warned her about coming to Guatemala. Her parents would probably have been against it, although they might have come themselves if there had not been the fatal accident on a California freeway. Her pained heart gave a sickening lurch, but she opened her eyes wide and stretched her head back to relax the muscles in her neck. Their nearly unbearable deaths had ultimately left her with a careless boldness, an almost reckless daring. If the end could come so abruptly on a simple vacation, why should she fear even the dark political strife of this country? The inheritance held forth such promise, although it was disturbing to think of her great aunt's death as her own salvation. Still, this chance for escape was a timely gift. If she was running, there was a time to run, even toward the unknown.

Kamille was sure there would be no great mysteries in her great aunt's life style. She expected nothing frivolous beyond the gates of her deceased aunt's estate. A premature widow and childless, Aunt Cathline had brought her modest fortune to Guatemala from England as an idealistic young socialist. Very quickly her high-minded ideology was cast aside by the earthy needs of the Indians. Her letters insisted that the Indians had taught her "the truth of life," a harmony with nature that was long forgotten in places of the world thought more civilized.

This amazing woman had come into Kamille's world only

once, in Seattle, when she had detached herself from her Indians long enough to sweep through North America begging medical and school supplies. Kamille had been little more than a baby, but she remembered the high, refined voice and the clear, direct gaze of the palest blue eyes. She could also recall watching her aunt's long, graceful fingers slide expertly over the keys of her mother's prized rosewood piano. She had been in awe and more than a little afraid of this tall, forceful woman wearing unusual, brightly colored Indian textiles and thin silver jewelry. Now she was sure that her aunt must have been a unique free spirit, one who possessed the strong will to give up all the comforts of the familiar and plunge into the unknown. She had taken great risks and made herself useful in a world where so many drifted in selfishness, sharing little with the world's deprived multitudes. Could she, the grandniece, emulate this dauntless relative, dare to follow in her footsteps?

#

During most of the trip, *Don Tomás* had said little, kindly allowing Kamille to dream out the window as they climbed over the shadowed mountains of pine and fir, or to doze off, now and then awakened by a sharp curve or rough jolt. Later, I'll get to know all of this countryside, she thought. Now I'm almost too tired to be curious, although I can sense the enveloping beauty and promise. Still, it's

all a blur flying by, a great mystery.

Once again she fell asleep, this time more soundly, and only opened her eyes when the slowing Mercedes was purring down a long drive lined with tall royal palms perhaps eighty feet high. The straight, slender trunks with blackened, feathery tops were silhouetted against a pink-edged horizon, short-lingering dusk.

A large black dog, just discernible in the shadows, gave one long, howling bark as they pulled into the circular driveway, past the high walls of a sprawling hacienda. In the heat of the day, it would present an imposing, white Spanish edifice with a burning, red tile roof, but now it loomed before her in a soft dusky rose, and the broad, dark leaves at its grilled windows fluttered a friendlier welcome than might have been offered in blazing noon light. A great chandelier sparkled through the salon glass to the right of the towering, carved mahogany entrance doors.

"Oh, lovely," she muttered, still in the throes of sleep. "But where am I?"

"*Perdóneme, señorita*, for not telling sooner. Your destination is too tiring over such mountains to do without rest. This is *Casa d'el Tigre*. We are at the *finca, La Guarida d'el Tigre*, which means *The Lair of the Tiger*. The owner, *Señor Andar Steinlöwe*, in whose car you ride, has offered to keep us for the night. I will leave early in the morning in the car of my son, who is here conducting

business. You may sleep later. After the *desayuno*, that is, the breakfast, the *finquero* and his friend will accompany you on his way to another of his properties. It is near your hacienda. Now there will be a late supper. They have asked for you to join them. It is customary to dine at ten o'clock here. Do you feel agreeable to this?"

"You mean, am I up to it?" Kamille tried to smile in her groggy state. "All I really care about is sleep...but I suppose this would be very impolite. So, I'll do my best."

"*Bueno, señorita,*" Don Tomás said with a pleased expression.

They followed the driver who carried one of her pieces of luggage, a single piece she assumed would get her through this night and the following day.

Upon reaching the door, the luggage was immediately taken in tow by a feisty, bowlegged Indian woman named Maria, who grinned and waved while leading her charge down a long corridor. At its end, they stepped around the large perimeter of an indistinct garden full of sweet and sharp, musky aromas. A little further along the loggia, Maria flung open a door and turned on the lights of a spacious room that smelled of fresh, resinous wax. Small orange lights like soft candle flames sprang on in their carved wall sconces, illuminating a shadowy white room with a smooth floor of wide-planked teak, a raised, flower-tiled hearth, and a capacious mahogany bed with a patterned beige

coverlet. Beside the bed was a deerskin rug and a high-backed chair over which was thrown a thick woolen blanket woven in black and white animal scenes. These appointments Kamille found charming, their simple natural elegance a very uplifting comfort to her fatigue-dulled spirits.

She opened the closet door and was greeted by the wonderfully pungent aroma of cedar. As she was inhaling deeply, Maria rushed forward to insist upon hanging up her clothes. The little servant was holding one hand over her mouth, from which a tooth was missing, and waving the other in the air. Next, Maria hurried across the room and cried "*Baño*" as she opened the bathroom door and pointed to the inviting, spa-sized, blue-tiled tub.

"*Gracias*," Kamille said, thankful for this one beautiful word: bath. She dove through the door, tugging at her clothes and grabbing up the musky-sweet, brown bar of Spanish soap. Humming soft, random notes, she turned on the spigot.

The warm water so relaxed her tired muscles that she almost fell asleep. Certain she had stayed in the bath too long, she still rubbed herself slowly, dreamily, with a white towel nearly as large as a bed sheet. She stood under a lighted wall sconce, examining herself before a handsome old cheval glass placed in the corner of the room.

Her body looked golden-orange in the light, a slim waist, even a few ribs showing -- she had recently been too

nervous to eat very much -- but firm, round breasts with sharp, crimson nipples. Her fine, wavy blond hair was still dripping a bit, and she flung it back, studying her shining-clean, oval face. For a moment it was as though she were looking at a stranger. She made a mocking face, pursing a generous, blood-infused mouth that rarely required lipstick, the result of biting at her lips when nervous. Perhaps because of her fair complexion, people were always surprised to find that her almond-shaped eyes were not blue but amber. Her cheekbones were high, her nose, much to her annoyance, slightly upturned. She sighed with tiredness and patted her cheeks. "Wake up," she said in a low voice. Wake up, sleepyhead, she continued in silence. This is another time, another place, but you aren't dreaming. Try to stay awake long enough to eat and say *gracias*.

I wonder how formal the dining is here, Kamille thought as she squinted into the aromatic cedar closet in the dim light. Her unyielding wardrobe simply hung there offering little. The rest, such as it was, remained in the car. Let's see, a German...*finquero*, Don Tomás called him; probably stiff-necked and authoritarian, very proper. Many Germans love titles...all that rigmarole. Unfortunately, I never thought of fashion at all.

She had finally donned a white toile dress with a flaring skirt. The dress appeared to have red polka dots, but if one looked closely the dots became little red

cherries with tiny black stems. The three-quarter sleeves clung softly to the shoulders and billowed out at a gathered base, and the neck plunged a little. This, with dark red pumps, was the best she could do. Still, remembering the earthy costume of Aunt Cathline so long ago, she felt overdressed. She needn't have.

The *finquero*, *Señor* Andar Steinlöwe, and his friend, the widow *Frau* Ursula Bilder, were elegant specimens: he, tall, tan, and blond in a dark plum, velour jacket over a grayed-violet shirt and, incredible as it seemed, a shaded alizarin tie that worked rather well; and she, full-figured and vivacious in a moss-green chiffon gown, a classic German beauty and well aware of her elegance.

What can I say to these people whose world until this moment has been so very far from mine? she thought. But the *finquero*, whose accented voice was not harsh and grating, as she had expected, but low-pitched and mellow, was in a good humor in the presence of his charming German friend, and he easily directed the conversation.

"You have large shoes to fill over in the mountain valley of *Doña Catalina's*, Miss Penine."

"I'll have to wear my own shoes, however small they are," Kamille answered with a tired smile. But the tone of her voice had been faintly arrogant, and she wished she could recall it. The two studied her in a growing silence.

Steinlöwe was one of the first in Guatemala to show her

kindness. Why was she responding in such a defensive way? Was it this strange mix of starkness and Old World opulence that overwhelmed her, or was it merely disorienting fatigue? Perhaps it was both. Already she had sensed an earthy primitiveness in this wild country that was far from the sophisticated Spain she had experienced in her travels. Now this splendor. The ornate silver gleamed and the carved crystal sparkled as she reached for a glass of pale citrine wine and drank a rather large amount, a welcome diversion.

"Your land...your home...this room," she said, lifting her hand and turning it palm up, "are beautiful...all so very...beautiful." Her own voice sounded strange to her.

Steinlöwe laid down his fork and leaned back, his head angled over his left shoulder, looking at her with a steady concentration. "I am glad you think so.

"To our new neighbor," he toasted, lifting his glass, and Kamille drank another long draft, again thankful for the wine.

"I'm very grateful for your kindness," she said, but only half hopeful. Moreover, she was disturbed by a growing feeling of insignificance and by the scrutiny directed at her from the end of the table where Steinlöwe sat. I'm like a passing curiosity, she thought, only an outsider, a foreigner. He doesn't expect to treat me as a neighbor. But why do you care? she asked herself. Eat with as much civility as you can muster and very soon this night will

end.

The fatigue sat heavily upon her as she struggled with a large, bone-handled cutting knife. How impatient she was to get away from the table. She had expected to see Spanish food; instead she was eating roast duckling in cherry sauce, and at such a late hour that she was sure to have unpleasant dreams. The day had been far too long, enervating. The knife slipped and clattered on her plate. The handsome *Frau Bilder* held her napkin to her lips and coughed lightly, her head moving so that the candlelight flickered over the straw-blond hair swept atop her head in a flawless coil.

Kamille saw that Andar Steinlöwe was frowning at her. For all his consideration and kindness, she still found herself growing angry that she had to sit there in her festive white cherry dress and smile, while her head felt as if it weighed a thousand pounds. She was equally annoyed with herself for not having a better mastery of her fatigue.

"This was inconsiderate of us. You are really tired. Please let me cut your duckling and then you must go at once to bed," Steinlöwe said, preparing to rise from his chair.

Kamille, for some time now fully a woman, suddenly found herself reduced to a peevish child. She tried to wave away her offending host. Well aware that it was mostly the fatigue setting her off at his patronizing manner, her irritation was still difficult to suppress, especially with Ursula Bilder looking at her as if she were a pitiful waif.

"No please, I'll handle this, thank you. I'm almost at my limit." She drew herself up with cool dignity. "I'm afraid I'm unused to eating dinner at this time of...this late hour...but if it's the custom...I'll learn to do so.

"I thought *Señor Nervo* would dine with us," she went on, changing the subject and halfheartedly attacking the duckling, which smashed uncut under the weight of her knife.

"*Don Tomás* begs forgiveness. He has gone with his son to the village of his sister who is taken ill with fever. He will meet you at *Esperanza* tomorrow."

How could she expect him to come tomorrow when his sister was seriously ill? She decided the best response was none, hoping that no further conversation would prolong her misery at being propped against the table, half dead.

As they ate in silence, accompanied for the moment only by the clinking of silver and china, a serious-faced steward brought in more wine. Steinlöwe stood up, nodding at his servant and reaching for the bottle. He came toward her with a purposeful stride, fingering back a wave of unruly hair as he approached.

"Gewürztraminer...a little more and you will sleep."

If Kamille had not been half asleep already, she would have laughed. The elegant dining room spun around her. She had already drunk two generous goblets of wine. Lifting her head, she looked up at the tall, rather menacing figure who leaned over her chair, filling her glass. His eyes were so

pale a gray they easily captured the gold fire of the candles burning in the huge silver candelabrum before her.

"Go ahead, drink it," his wry voice encouraged.

A languid Kamille stared into the molten eyes and was held for a second in an emotionless state somewhere between blurred dream and reality. Then very quickly she felt the heat in her face, the heat of the candles, of the room, of Steinlöwe. Her confused eyes fell at once upon his lithe hands. Although the nails were clean and neatly trimmed, the large, finely-shaped hands were well used and tan, not the skin of a dilettante, but of a man who had worked his hands without favor, rendering them obedient and supple.

She lifted the sparkling glass and drank, letting the candle-infused, amber wine drain into her veins. Now she was freed by the sheer idiocy of drunkenness from hunting through a formal garden of words for something to pick and present. Her head swam as everything began a slow spin, the plates, the candles, the room, the immense beauty of Ursula Bilder who seemed to grow larger and hover above the table. She looked up from her blurred, unfinished plate, loosely aware of her foolish condition, as Steinlöwe refilled her glass.

"Very nice Ge...traminwürtz...Gewürtztrammel..." she stammered, lifting the glass yet again and drinking.

Steinlöwe was laughing, a deep, thoroughly self-indulgent laugh, but she no longer cared. She was far from

home, a home that was gone forever, far from everything, and tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow would be an endless struggle with mysteries. What did it matter if tonight she drank herself to sleep almost before removing her travel-weary body from the formal dining hall of a formal German *finca*? This lofty, so-called *finquero* could laugh himself into oblivion, even if at her rising expense.

However rude it might appear, she had just enough reasoning power left to know that she had to escape before she made a complete fool of herself. Murmuring an apology, she leaned forward and gripped the table, rising from her seat at the same moment that Steinlöwe quickly eased back the chair and took her slack body by the shoulders. He drew her against him, supporting her with an arm around her back. Even in her exhausted state of inebriation, she thought she saw him wink at the immaculate German *frau*. Yes, he had definitely winked, rude, but now she found herself yawning.

"Wait for me in the *sala*, Ursula. I am just going to show Miss Penine to her room."

"Not necessary...thank you...think I remember the way. I'll just--"

"Oh, I think not," Steinlöwe assured her, again with an outpouring of laughter. "You really need a little sleep."

Swaying, she nodded in the direction of *Frau Bilder* as he adjusted his grip on her shoulder. Her feelings were so raw that his touch burned in waves that traveled down her

spine. It was necessary to go along without further words, docile, for she knew that whatever she said would come out wrong. She felt his eyes upon her as they went down the long hall and through the garden. There her senses were again assaulted by coolness and a sweet, musky aroma of some exotic vine, in her imagination growing wild and swift, engulfing her body in a lush, heady tangle. An inescapable shiver crept over her, not from any coldness but from a rushing sensuousness. Her step faltered. His arm tightened around her shoulders. The long, woeful cry of a peacock flowed over them, piercing the darkness like the scream of a woman in hideous pain. Kamille cringed, feeling as if she had made the cry herself, as if she were letting out a sorrowful wail for all the times she had held it in. Drunken, maudlin tears sprang into her eyes. She pulled away and hung onto the railing, brushing against a bench in the darkness and then easing herself down upon it.

"Wait a minute...I really...really drank too much, *Herr* Steinlöwe. I think you...you didn't help."

"The meal was a mistake. Please forgive me. I should have sent something light to your room and let you sleep. It was my selfish curiosity. But the wine...that was not a mistake. Tired as you are, you would not sleep without a great deal of it...because you are in a strange place. I well know that feeling. I am sorry...and even sorrier I have laughed at you."

With the tears still wet on her cheeks, Kamille put her head back and laughed herself. "No, I must be pretty amusing. I'm dizzy. What a day! What a long...a strange day. You've been...I appreciate your kindness. Everything is swimming. I think I'll just...just sit here a minute and--"

"No. You will go to bed quickly while your head is still winding into sleep. This is no time for reflection."

"Yes...right," Kamille agreed, standing up on shaky legs and allowing herself to be dragged along.

He opened her door and switched on the orange wall sconces. "Do you need anything? Shall I call Maria?"

"Nothing...nothing...dear little woman...legs so short. Nothing...so tired. You speak with no con...contractions."

He chuckled a little, then hesitated while Kamille's clumsy grasp tugged at her back zipper. It slipped out of her fingers which seemed swollen to grossness. Remembering that Steinlöwe was still in the room, she flung herself onto the bed fully clothed.

"Wait. You will spoil your dress. Let me..."

He raised her up and held onto her shoulder while he unzipped the dress.

"Can you do the rest?"

"Yes," she said and began to giggle, pulling the dress off over her head in one sweeping motion and throwing herself down in her satin slip. Everything was spinning.

He pulled off her shoes. She felt her body being lifted and smelled a cologne that was like bay rum as her head rolled against his shoulder. She nuzzled there a moment, murmuring softly, then caught herself up, laughing against his jacket. Her inhibitions had drifted away and she was responding to his charismatic manliness with a fleeting pulse of desire. She wanted to sleep. Throwing herself back on the pillows, she felt those deft long fingers cradling her head and pulling the combs from her hair. Then she heard, felt, saw nothing at all.

#

Kamille's *desayuno* was served to her in bed. Steinlöwe and *Frau Bilder* waited for her with an unobtrusive patience that was not at all German but certainly Spanish. When she was at last fully awake, she tried to hurry. While doing this, she tried to remember if she had done anything really shameful the night before. Never had she wanted sleep so badly, and the gentle wine did indeed bring unconsciousness without her usual soul searching. She had only the faintest headache from its effects, but that would soon be driven off by caffeine from the two cups of delicious, very rich black coffee she had drunk. Alas, her actions of the previous night descended upon her as she was repacking her dinner dress. Steinlöwe had helped her to her room, assisted her in a most familiar way, and, even more disturbing to her, at

the edge of the shadowy garden he had seen her fast-changing emotions fluctuate from one gushing extreme to another. How incredibly naïve she must have appeared. Probably they were laughing at her over breakfast. Still, it was Steinlöwe who kept pouring the wine. She gave a helpless little shrug of laughter and took one last sip of the most wonderful coffee she had ever tasted. Was this not a coffee plantation? She tried to summon less personal thoughts as she finished doing her hair. A few fragments of more recent history surfaced.

Why had Steinlöwe's people not been expelled from the country like the other Germans? She remembered reading about it. During the Second World War, President Ubico's concession to the Allies was to throw out the Nazi-lovers of Guatemala and to confiscate their beautiful and lucrative *fincas*. Yet Steinlöwe's prosperity seemed undiminished.

Her speculation was halted by yet another twinge of remorse: should she apologize for lacking the robust skill of her host in drinking wine...or say nothing? Last night, pitiful as it was, would probably be her last fling for a very long time. She bit into a thick, round slice of cake that turned out to be incredible banana bread, fresh and scrumptious with large crystals of sugar on its crust.

Steinlöwe was pacing beside the Mercedes when Kamille arrived ready for departure. *Frau Bilder*, wearing a slim, gold sundress with a cream jacket, was ensconced on a pillowed stone bench in the breakfast courtyard. She was

drinking something red from a tall, frosty glass and looked completely at ease and ready for nothing but pleasantries.

Kamille had put on her simplest beige wrap skirt, a white blouse, and sandals, and had braided her hair into one thick plait suitable for accommodating a hat. She was carrying a plain straw hat and wearing no makeup. Her cheeks were flushed with a slight embarrassment at being so tardy. She smiled a sheepish smile and said good morning to everyone present, including Maria and the driver, Palo, then offered to ride with Palo in the front in order to give Steinlöwe and *Frau Bilder* more room.

"I will ride with Palo," Steinlöwe informed her with a polite smile as he opened her door.

She slid over near the far window and opened it, calling out: "Good-bye, Maria. I loved your coffee and banana bread...delicious."

"She does not understand, my dear," *Frau Bilder* said with an ingratiating smile. She called Maria over to her side of the car and explained in a carefully enunciated voice: "*Le gustó a la señorita le desayuno.*"

Walking around the car, Maria presented a wide grin, displaying the empty space of her missing tooth. She waved her hand in a manner that seemed to beckon Kamille. Then the car pulled away, and Kamille leaned back, still smiling.

The big Mercedes was soon climbing out of the high valley into blue peaks. The light changed; more intense.

Everything in her vision was crisp and clear, as the earth fell away into the valley in startling green precipices. They passed men alone or with burros, and the backs of the men and the beasts were equally laden with cornstalks. Sometimes only two thin bowed legs stuck out from beneath a great mountain of cornstalks, moving along the roadside like a curious walking haystack.

Steinlöwe spoke on occasion to Palo and sometimes turned his head to the left toward *Frau Bilder* to comment on something, but had not yet looked at her since she entered the car. He wore trim, khaki slacks and a white shirt with the sleeves rolled neatly to the elbows, and one tan, blond-haired arm thrown in a casual manner over the back of the seat. His hair glinted like the ticked fur of a tawny animal, curling at the nape with a natural trim of unmussed appeal. It was not as brutally short as her college German professor *Herr Haltmann's* had been -- why had she thought of *him*? Perhaps because he had been interested in her. He was methodical and meticulous, as she had come to think of so many Germans, and she wondered if Steinlöwe were the same. She had not mentioned to anyone that she knew a little German, because the knowledge had fallen into such disuse.

Before college Kamille had worked for a time in a law office, and thus she was one of Haltmann's older, more serious students. She had admired him, and he had more than admired her. He asked her to coffee and then to dinner, and

finally, to her embarrassment, to sleep with him. He was a dynamic teacher and interesting to be with, but she was not attracted to him and unable to continue the relationship.

Charlie's face flashed before her. She dropped her head and stared at her hand where the ring had been, then raised her gaze to the beckoning green slopes. She had come so close to marrying him, even knowing that he would never be faithful. He was darkly handsome, urbane, and quick-witted, and the mysterious things about him must at first have been an exciting attraction. She later realized she would never really know his true nature, had been afraid to guess what he might become? She had said good-bye to him in a note because she was in too much pain for a confrontation. He had lied to her with confidence because he believed she could not do without him -- his mistake, that self-assured center of a world not hers. He had given her a huge diamond ring, six carats, which, he said with great amusement, he had won in a poker game. She had accepted it with amazement and disbelief. What a relief to drop it into the envelope with the note and leave it, with trembling hands, in his large and Spartan, chrome-filled apartment.

When her parents died, she was catapulted into the realm of clear reason. Her position teaching English at a private college suddenly stifled her. The horror and finality of death awakened her from a monotonous sleep that had gone on for years. Now, for the first time in so long,

she felt alive and eager for discovery. This morning, looking in her mirror, she felt different, filled with an excited anticipation. The very earth here, all around her outside the windows, was a marvelous, haunting, primitive place of rough beauty and fresh promise.

"What are those mountains over there?" she asked, unable to remain silent a second longer.

"*Los Altos Cuchumatanes*, not the highest mountains, but the highest range in Guatemala. They run north northeast. Over 3,000 meters high, or as you would say--"

"About 10,000 feet," Kamille finished for Steinlöwe. Happiness spread through her as she stared out the window at the fierce horizon. *Cuchumatanes* -- what a lyrical word. The mountains were singing their name to her. She glanced down at a little wisp of fog still drifting in the valley like a gauzy white curtain fluttering over a jewel case.

Steinlöwe turned around to his right for the first time, so that he was facing only Kamille and not looking past Frau Bilder.

"You will be living in one of the high, green valleys of the *Cuchumatanes*...a very beautiful valley but often sharply cold...quite remote."

"Good!" Kamille exclaimed with happy anticipation. "I'm familiar with cold, cold mountains...very beautiful ones...but none of mine had a steamy jungle at its foot."

He studied her a moment, the gray of his eyes charged

with her enthusiasm. "We are coming into *Huehuetenango*. This is Thursday, a very good market day. Would you like to stop?"

"Oh, I'd love to...if it won't affect your plans." She answered with such exuberance that *Frau Bilder* drew in her breath and muttered something in German which Kamille thought meant *such a girl*, but the mild aspersion could in no way assail her high-spirited mood.

"Ursula, you will like it, too," Steinlöwe said. "A surprising amount of traffic comes through here, although there are only about twelve or thirteen thousand inhabitants in the immediate town. The Mexican border is only eighty kilometers away. That is--"

"About fifty miles," Kamille interrupted with another of her amused smiles. I'm not as dense as you imagine, she thought, but her real enthusiasm banished any feeling of offense or resentment at his repeated condescension.

He had put on a light tweed jacket, and they were walking through the square when Steinlöwe stopped and, for the first time, offered Kamille a broad grin.

"Please excuse me," he said with his perfectly enunciated, but nevertheless accented, English. "I forget that you are *la maestra*, as *Don Tomás* already calls you. Some North Americans who come here have no...no idea of the simplest things...but you, whom I would expect...and yet, you are such a...a *Kind*."

Even though he had just called her a child, perhaps even a baby, in German, nothing of the sort could unsettle her on a day rare as this one, and she would prove herself.

"Yes, a child's curiosity is endless, and so is mine at all this... Go on explaining. I want to know everything."

"And in time you will. I am sure of it," he said with his head angled down to her and his eyes laughing.

"What is that curious stepped tower over there?" *Frau Bilder* asked in a high, sweet trill. She held her shading hand above her lavender eyes, smiling up at *Steinlöwe*.

"*Huehuetenango* is also the name of this department, and that unusual edifice is the department's government building. *Huehuetenango* in the Mam language means 'town of the old people.' The Mam Indians have been here a very long time."

"It's fascinating to contemplate just how long...and all that's gone on," Kamille said.

Frau Bilder hurried off to see if she might be permitted to climb the tower, while Kamille stood looking around her with pounding heart.

"It can't be just the altitude that's affecting me," she said. "What is it, the air?...the light? I can't see enough...take in enough of everything. It's all just...just so marvelous. I love being here."

"You have the same high spirit as *Doña Catalina*...after you have had a little rest. Did the wine help?"

The previous night was surfacing at last. Kamille blushed. "Yes, thank you. It was somewhat of a good idea. I think you're a bit of a psychologist, *Señor...Herr Steinlöwe* -- I don't know which to call you."

"If you were German you would say '*Herr*,' if Spanish, *Señor*.' But you are a *norte...a norteamericana* whom I put to bed last night in my own casa. Surely that entitles me to *Andar*." He laughed at her startled face.

"Oh," she said, with a small grimace at the unsettling memory. She put her hand up to a flushed cheek, dropping her head to stare at the cobbles beneath her shoes.

"*Andar*, please," he insisted.

"In Washington it would be so easy to say your given name, but here somehow it...it seems--"

"Say it."

"*Andar*," she said with cautious voice, staring straight into the suasive gray eyes and then watching his mouth curve into a smile no longer aloof.

"There. You see...just as easy here."

"I'm sorry. I guess I...I feel the convention here more strongly than...than I could've ever imagined."

"Only because you are uncertain. Perhaps it makes you uncomfortable. Then say it when we are alone."

"That would be even more difficult." She was blushing, a frequent chemistry neither her life nor will would ever change.

He turned to the tower, trying to determine if his friend had made it to the top. "Then think it," he said over his shoulder. "Whenever you say Steinlöwe think Andar, just until you know me better."

"Steinlöwe -- stone lion," Kamille mused to herself.

"You know German."

"Not really...well some. I haven't used it much. Now I'll have to concentrate on Spanish."

"You had better learn a little Mam while you are at it. But must I call you Miss Penine?"

"I...hmm...I suppose...yes," she said, watching *Frau Bilder* approach and wishing she would hurry.

"We will see," he said, reaching out to take *Frau Bilder's* arm.

"One doesn't get inside the tower. They guard that building as if it contained the Ring of the Nibelungen," *Frau Bilder* said with perturbed voice.

"You did not say the right words, Ursula. There is always a way."

"Well, my Spanish is not as good as yours."

"It is good enough. Let us acquaint Miss Penine with the marketplace. May I call you Kamille? After all, we are practically neighbors, and it is such an elegant name to be left in silence." One gray eye flashed a triumphant wink.

His expression made her think of Charlie's when he had just beat her soundly at a game of gin rummy. She stared

hard at him, until she saw *Frau Bilder's* look of interest.

"Please do, then," she said with a standoffish air, which by now it was hard to affect, for she was beginning to feel a strange humor coming from deep inside.

Everything touched on the hilarious: Steinlöwe and his ravishing German *frau*, the cherubic golden sun, even a plump lizard falling at her feet out of a rosebush. How strange: a lizard in a rosebush. It must be an omen. Omens were obviously rampant in this land where one was forced to think so often of the contrasts of nature. She was growing very lightheaded and nearly stumbled, thankful that no one had noticed, until she felt Steinlöwe's tight grip on her arm.

"Do you realize you are dizzy? Do not laugh too much," he cautioned, but with enjoyment in his eyes. "Really, you will hyperventilate...even in this thin air."

"Oh please, no, don't tell me not to laugh. It's the one thing I've been wanting to do." She spoke with such candor that she had to look away as his pleased eyes traveled over her face.

In the marketplace she wanted to know what everything was, all of the curious baskets and blankets filled with nuts and pods and fruits and roots, and why he didn't eat these things every single day. They were all so beautiful.

Frau Bilder agreed that the entire milieu was quite wonderful, a subject for a rich painting. She then set off to bargain for a pair of leather sandals. Soon, she was

deeply engrossed in the mysterious process of gradually shifting prices that was always expected in the marketplace.

Kamille looked up at Steinlöwe whose discerning eyes were far away, searching for something in particular. He has a fine, mellow sense of humor when he chooses, she thought, but there is an unapproachable quality about him. She understood very well how one kept to one's self in order to avoid entanglement or pain, and had already decided that it was what Steinlöwe did. Still, she could also feel the warmth smoldering beneath that very trenchant surface. He stood with his hands in his pockets, calm and smiling a little, but she was so aware of him that it startled her. His unusual face invited study, striking, long and lean but not overly thin, an El Greco face that only a very tall person such as he could carry well; the arresting shape drew attention to the intelligent, limpid gray eyes, and to a faintly cleft chin. Her focus lingered on the provocative fawn coloration sculpting the sensual fullness of his mouth. Her eyes often returned to that expressive mouth, or, in following him, to the short curl of tawny hair at his neck, so clean and natural that it made her want to... Her head drew back with shock, for his eyes had found her out, demanding to know if she approved of what she had been studying. Turning away with heated face, she let her gaze travel over the marketplace.

"Don't you ever...ever eat any of this wonderful

potpourri?" She spread her arms around her. "You don't just eat duckling in cherry sauce in the middle of the night always...do you?"

He broke into a delighted riff of laughter at this obvious retaliation. "I will never hear the end of that, I suppose. I could have done worse, fed you plenty of *comida típica*, native food, and you would be sick today, *Mädchen*. Try a little at a time," he warned, still quite amused.

It had been so long since she felt free to laugh like this. Just now, just in this one moment, all her worries and sorrows were laid aside. Even the air tasted delicious, the high, thin air that made her spin as she laughed. His hand gripped her arm, and she started to explain that she wasn't dizzy, or if she was it didn't matter; she needed the laughter. Her sentence was never completed. For seconds their discovery of the affect each had on the other bound them together. Shut away in a private world of startling emotion, they couldn't look anywhere but at each other.

"My God, how good you make me feel!" he exclaimed above the returning hum of voices.

He drew her behind a stall of hand-woven textiles and kissed her mouth so hard and deeply that if he hadn't caught her she would have fallen backwards into a stack of crude pottery water jugs. She hung onto his jacket, touching the cloth with sparks shooting through her fingers, then saw that he was as stunned as she. He kissed her again, longer,

softer, so thoroughly that the marketplace vanished from her senses. A low sound of pleasure was uttered against her mouth, and she murmured back like a small violin. This was madness. Her lips stung, her knees buckled, and her heart was crashing against her ribs. Pushing herself away, she stumbled and felt his firm arm steadying her. Again she could think only of laughing. She put her hand against her throbbing mouth and turned away, staring at nothing. She was dazed, walking along beside him, touching things, finally gesturing and laughing with the Indians who so loved to barter. Everything turned over in her mind like the piecing together of a dream, sharp fragments but almost out of reach. What was happening to her? Slowed time was again gathering speed, the blazing ball of fire bouncing across the heavens too quickly. She would never forget this day, the playful black eyes of the proud Indians, the intense blue of the sky, the white clouds drifting over the dark mountain peaks. Was *Huehuetenango* at the very top of the world? She saw an Indian shout and wave his wild arms.

"What's wrong with him?"

"*Aguardiente*, distilled from sugar cane. Makes them crazy and leaves a pretty bad hangover. *Doña Catalina* tried very hard to teach the Indians moderation, but it is their *costumbre*, their custom, and a part of their celebrations."

The sun poured over Kamille, and now she really did feel a powerful dizziness, almost as if she herself had

drunk too much of the potent *aguardiente*.

"Put on your hat or you will get freckles...possibly sunstroke," Steinlöwe ordered with gentle voice as he watched her for signs of what, she wondered, lunacy? "The sun will boil your brain up here."

"What about you? Where's your hat?" she demanded.

"It is already too late for me, but for you there is still hope." He grinned.

His eyes and his hair glittered bronze in the sun, like the stone and the lion of his name, eyes that looked too deeply in one instant and in the next held no clue of any virtue but sharp humor. She understood that something irreversible had happened to her, and her joyous laughter diminished by the smallest part as she felt a little tremor of fear.

He had found what he was seeking, and she followed him and watched with fascination as he bartered in Mam with an Indian woman at a textile booth. The words he spoke were oddly sibilant; he used his hands turned palms up when he was finished. Both seller and buyer seemed pleased with the transaction. Kamille found that the purchase was to be a gift for her. Unwinding a small, blue and white, woven tapestry, she saw that it displayed a man, woman, child, and small pig beside a simple hut and cornfield. All stood beneath a sun spreading its astral rays of life, and a little cloud giving forth rain.

"If you study this you will understand everything dear to the Indian. There is hardly a thing more important to him than is depicted here...and you, *Liebling*, are smart enough to appreciate the truth of it."

He removed his jacket, threw it over his shoulder, and walked over to *Frau Bilder*. She was proudly wrapped in a new green shawl, like a radiant yellow bloom unfolding from its calyx. So startling was she that Kamille could only stand and smile in appreciation.

She looked down, pondering the homely tapestry in her hand -- her first and most important Guatemalan treasure -- then at Steinlöwe's receding back, all formidable, work-honed muscle beneath the taut, white shirt. The quick knowledge of what had happened sent small arrows of grief shooting through her wrists. A small pain because there was yet no time for reflection, and the laughter still wanted to well up in her throat. Tonight she would lie alone in a strange bed somewhere out there in a high, cold valley. The sun must have done its damage after all, for she wanted to go there at once, to lie alone and think of nothing but this day. It was the most perfectly etched day of her life, and had already given her more than she had ever dreamed of possessing. She could ask for nothing more, except a place that welcomed her.

Kamille's first view of *Esperanza* nearly took her breath away. The road twisted up among wind-whipped, barren volcanic crags, passed through a gap and dropped down into a sloping emerald valley, a high, sweet-aired valley that hung in the clouds. It contained a patchwork of green apple and pear orchards -- she had never imagined that she would find apples and pears in Guatemala -- and fields dotted here and there with Indian ranchos, the smoke of their fires rising almost straight up.

"There is the hacienda," Steinlöwe said, pointing to a square white building with a red tile roof, surrounded by a grove which he said contained pine, spruce, and cypress.

Kamille could just make out what appeared to be a courtyard of walks and gardens inside the square and, off to the south of the main building, another long white structure with a bright tile roof.

"*La escuela*," Steinlöwe said, "but of course *Esperanza* is much more than just a schoolhouse, as you know. The estate narrows at the north end of the valley and funnels down into a lower valley, thus it has varied climates. It is a fully working *finca* which can produce many crops, but, as you also know, mainly coffee."

"*Esperanza* is a coffee *finca*?" Kamille said.

Steinlöwe's face registered complete incredulity. He glanced at *Frau_Bilder* who returned a knowing look.

Kamille flushed. "But I thought..." she said, and then

fell silent, feeling utterly confused. Her head was burning with astonishment, and with questions, but she knew that her companions were already amazed at her ignorance. There could be no plausible excuse for being so poorly informed and ill-prepared. In her distress she had failed to do the research that was so typical of her usually inquiring mind.

Steinlöwe pondered awhile in silence, staring out the window, so that Kamille was able to glimpse his solemn profile. Then he went on in a low, steady voice with a few more pieces of information.

"*El Tigre Pequeño*, our hacienda of The Little Tiger, was once owned entirely by my family, as is *La Guarida d'el Tigre*. I now share Little Tiger, after a fashion, with the government. It runs alongside lower *Esperanza* for a number of kilometers, so you see we are neighbors, even though I must spend more time at *La Guarida d'el Tigre*."

Kamille stared far below at the long, white schoolhouse whose resourceful teacher she had lately imagined herself becoming -- this duty she had felt herself quite capable of mastering, even with her temporary lack of Spanish. But a coffee *finca*! For the first time she was really afraid. Was she expected to run it? Deeply frustrated, she wished *Frau Bilder* were not present. Perhaps then she could reveal a little more of her growing anxiety and learn if it was justified. "Herr...Steinlöwe," she heard herself almost stammering, "Who is the administrator of *Finca Esperanza*?"

"You are," he answered. "Of course, *Don Tomás* and his son will help you. Over many difficult years *Doña Catalina* herself learned everything she needed to know to turn *Esperanza* into a profitable resource for her school. She ran the place entirely by her own wits, except, of course, for her laborers. Later, *Don Tomás* and then his son came along. She trained excellent ladino teachers, sending them away to be schooled. The school is well-staffed. All *Esperanza* really needs is a capable administrator...one who can run it with the genius of the grand old *Doña*."

Kamille's stomach was churning. She thought the last remark terribly unfair. He was frank to the point of cruelty. Did he think she was so lacking in sense as not to have realized the gravity of her situation? What on earth had gone wrong? Many of Aunt Cathline's letters were missing, she knew, a discovery she'd made in searching through her parents' papers when she had actually made a feeble effort to learn something about *Esperanza* before departing. Now she struggled to remember what her parents had told her. Little snatches of information from casual conversations began to drift out of fragmented memories.

The rest of the drive to the trim, white hacienda was spent in heavy silence. Kamille knew as the car came to a stop that her face reflected her apprehension, her ignorance of the kinds of tasks that lay before her. She, therefore, managed a rather transparent show of enthusiasm.

The charming Spanish house with its handsome white arcade and long veranda seemed, despite its carefully tended appearance, to leer at her. The school was much larger than she had imagined, a bona fide place of serious learning. And the grounds! Immaculate, perfectly manicured and lush. Every trim bush and flower bed cried out to her for a constant and well-informed monitoring, beginning this very moment lest something get out of hand.

Inside, the house was cool, smelling of cedar and a trace of the sweet copal incense she had inhaled along the road. It was furnished with the unique crafts of the Indians: carved woods, textiles woven with the common back-strap hip loom that existed in every village, clay bowls and delicately engraved gourds, handsome sisal floor mats resting on shining plank and red tile floors, and the fireplaces trimmed with blue tiles as rich and deep as an evening sky. The ceiling fans were turning at a slow speed. Everything was in a state of perfection. A red-eyed Indian woman named Ixil stood at the door with her hands folded, smiling and weeping.

Palo brought her luggage to the spacious master bedroom where she found a note on her dresser, which had been brought over earlier by the son of *Don Tomás*. The feverish sister was dying, and with deepest apologies he excused himself for a few days. She frowned at this ominous news, with a rush of pity for the kindly *Don Tomás*, and for the

harrowing experience of loss.

The house would take some getting used to. She walked through it like a hushed visitor at a museum. How could she take command of this place and all the fields that lay beyond before they took command of her?

Steinlöwe and *Frau* Bilder were served cold guava juice, brought by Ixil to the veranda. Kamille wished they would go so that she could flee to her room and sulk. But at the same time she wished that Steinlöwe would stay a little longer and say something comforting to her, some revelation that would clarify everything, or at least provide assurance enough to face the awful truth of her position.

Finally, they were leaving, but only after *Frau* Bilder's curiosity was satisfied by a tour of the house. Steinlöwe had offered Kamille nothing but uncommitting pleasantries, and her heart was sinking. She sat in the cool salon, staring into space. To what remote place had her little hut in the clouds, her dream of a simple school, vanished? Surely this place was remote enough, but it was large and demanding and complicated. Presently, she heard a sound and looked up to see Steinlöwe standing before her with a small piece of her luggage, which he had purposely lost among *Frau* Bilder's packages during the unloading.

"An excuse to have a word with you alone," he offered, and the warmth of his smile made her heart leap. "I thought Don Tomás would be here to explain things. Poor fellow. I

will come tonight after Ursula has settled into one of her novels. I am not far off. If you climb the hill above your buildings, you can just make out my hacienda. I will not have eaten. Will you have a light supper with me?"

"Won't Frau Bilder object?"

"She does not concern herself with everything I do."

"My house, my food are yours, but I can't promise to dine with you. I haven't much appetite at the moment."

She arose from her chair, folded her arms, and looked out across the veranda through the large, arched window.

He touched her shoulder. "But you *will* eat with me. I will bring some wine. Ixil will know what to fix. She is an old treasure, but still mourning the Doña."

"As I am. More than ever," Kamille answered.

"I cannot understand how you could know so little about Esperanza. It is not at all like the Doña to leave you in such ignorance."

"The fault is mine."

"You can fill me in later. I must go. Take a siesta ...so that you can stay awake for supper," he teased, trying to make her smile. "And do not worry. Don Tomás and I will not let you finish this place."

"How encouraging," her bitter voice hurled at his back.

He returned with hurried steps, putting his fingers under her chin to lift her bent head. "I am sorry, *Kind*."

The apology fed her misery. She trembled on the verge

of tears as a hollow feeling of aloneness swept over her.

"I am as surprised as you are," he said with softened words, his finger tracing the length of her flipped nose.

"But I should not have been surprised," she answered, lingering in self-ridicule.

"No, no, I am speaking of us...you and I."

She tried not to look at him, to verify anything.

He bent over her and again lifted her crestfallen face.

"Now you will have to kiss me good-bye...please."

Bereft and in need, she acted without thinking, standing on her toes and bringing her lips up to his inclined face. A little dazed, she found his warm mouth encouraging, the tightening of his arms reassuring. Then, almost immediately, the effect was as startling as the earlier kisses, leaving her limp with excitement.

He put his fingers in her hair, rubbing the back of her neck. "Ah...and this is why I tried to leave so hastily. I must go. *Adiós* until tonight."

As soon as his commanding frame had passed out of her newly acquired hacienda, the house resumed its indifferent, museum personality. Kamille decided to take a bath and soak away the trembling. But first she got out her Spanish dictionary and said a few words to Ixil on the subject of supper, giving her shoulder a reassuring pat.

The tub, in a large bathroom just off her bedroom, was actually a wide-ledged, rectangular well of orange tiles

with delicate flowers. She lay with her head back and propped against a rolled towel, watching the steam rise and breathing in the unusual scent of Spanish soap; it was becoming a favorite aroma. High above her, the ledge of a fan-shaped window held a potted vine which cascaded down the white wall, flourishing in the warm steam. All at once, she had an odd sense of *déjà vu*, that she had been in this exact spot before, that, at least reclining in this restful tile basin, she was home. How many of her aunt's dreams and schemes had been hatched in the steam and froth of this private sanctum? It would be easy to fall asleep like this. A siesta, Kamille decided, was an excellent idea. Why, when disturbing times came, did she always desire endless sleep? It must be a very natural animal release, restorative. The high, mahogany bed had a mattress stacked with soft featherbeds; slipping between them, a drowsy Kamille felt herself falling through clouds, layers of them, thick and billowy.

Something touched her arm. She started and sat up, confused by her surroundings. The room had grown dark. Ixil stood over her with a small, flickering candle, having obviously feared to frighten her by switching on the light. The old woman's lined face, slightly grotesque in half shadow but still benevolent, broke into a welcome smile. Somehow her crooked teeth made her all the more endearing.

"Señor Steinlöwe here," she said with labored voice.

"Ixil, do you speak English?" Kamille asked, surprised

and thankful, at the moment welcoming any familiar words.

"Oh, *si*, some English Doña teaches me, but she say old dog is hard for new tricks."

Kamille laughed. "How nice...oh, how nice that you can speak English. Soon I hope to speak Spanish. You can help.

"Lord, how could I have slept so long? Señor Steinlöwe will think I'm really a very lazy woman."

She dressed with haste, putting on a pale blue wool skirt and matching cowl-necked sweater, for she felt the evening chill. Wanting to appear as mature and capable as she had appeared to her classrooms of students, she drew up her long wavy hair -- perhaps the pigtail had made Steinlöwe call her a *Kind* -- and coiled it atop her head, but it was not as obedient as Frau Bilder's stunning coiffure. Little strands floated down around her eyes.

"Oh, darn! It won't stay."

"I fix," Ixil said, giggling for the first time.

Her fingers were deft and comforting. Probably she had often done Aunt Cathline's hair. She seemed very familiar with the task and an expert with two simple combs.

Stepping into the dark-beamed *comedor*, Kamille was surprised at its simple elegance. A fire sparkled on the tile hearth. The large dining table was pulled against the wall out of the way, and a smaller, more intimate table was set before the fire. It contained heavy crystal wine goblets on a blue cloth, and there were terra cotta plates

and an opalescent glass vase of miniature pink rosebuds.

Steinlöwe was smoking a pipe as he relaxed in a leather-backed side chair. He stood up, his eyes filled with a pleasure so obvious it gave her a heady satisfaction.

"The fire was in here, so I did not wait in the salon."

"I'm sorry...you must be hungry," Kamille apologized in a somewhat shy voice. "You know, I bathed and went to sleep almost immediately after you left and I just woke up...and that thanks to Ixil. I think it's pure escape."

"It was certainly good for you. You are what is called a knockout, *nicht wahr?*...very lovely for such a *Kind*."

Kamille frowned.

"You do not like it when I call you that."

"I suppose I don't mind so much. It's just that now I want more than anything to think like a wise old woman."

"Only experience will grant such a wish. Do not look so worried. Let us have supper before we say anything serious. I brought an inoffensive Spanish table wine, *vino tinto*, to go with Ixil's warm bread, salad, and *sopa*...a very good garlic and sausage soup...easy to eat."

"You seem to know the menu here very well."

"Yes. I have come much further than *Tigre Pequeño* to have Ixil's cooking and the Doña's conversation."

"Mine won't be so interesting."

"Please do not demean yourself. It is not in keeping with the laughing *Mädchen* I found in Huehuetenango."

"I was almost giddy there. Maybe it was the altitude."

"But you are higher up here. It could not have been me?" he asked with a half teasing disappointment.

Kamille blushed and asked, "How is Frau Bilder?"

"Quite content. She took her supper in bed, along with an engrossing book. I am fine, too, thank you. I spent a tedious amount of time conducting business on the telephone while you were dreaming of my appearance." His low resonant voice carried with its levity a touch of sarcasm.

"I know all Germans aren't like this."

"How many others have you known?"

He uncorked the wine, poured, then sloshed it around in the goblet and tasted. "Of course, it could have decanted awhile, but nothing bad ever happens to Spanish table wine." He grinned, and Kamille assumed that the previous question could go unanswered.

"The other Germans?" he prodded.

"I knew a German professor in college. That's really all," she said, lifting up her glass to be filled.

"And naturally he was in love with you. You had a long, irresistible pigtail and the same sensuous mouth you are smiling with now, and he could hardly teach for thinking of you...as I have thought of you...all afternoon."

She recoiled from her excitement with a brash response. "I am not going to fall in love with you, Herr Steinlöwe."

"My God, call me Andar if you are going to be so

forward. There is no other living thing present larger than a mouse. You could lead me on a little just to exploit my brain. I might be useful."

"I could never do that."

"No. You could not. You are a *Kind*, a straight, honest woman-child from the state of Washington...where apples remain apples and peaches remain peaches."

"Woman-child! You can't get away with that!" Kamille exclaimed. The laughter was rising in her throat. How did he manage it, so effortlessly causing her carefully upheld persona to melt away? Subtle changes similar to those in the marketplace were affecting her vision. The fire burned liquid bright, and the uncoiling pink rosebuds in the milky glass vase were striking, so beautiful she had to touch them with her fingertips. There was an inescapable moistness forming in her eyes, laughing eyes that saw Steinlöwe's mood augmented by her own. He pulled out her chair and lingered a moment behind her, so that her neck twitched. She had to busy her nervous hands by unfurling her napkin and smoothing it over her lap.

He sat down and lifted his glass, offering a toast.

"Salud y amor y tiempo para gozarlos."

"Which means?"

"Health and love and time in which to enjoy them."

She clinked her glass against his waiting goblet and set upon a supper of very different flavors. Delicious food

that was accompanied by humorous thrust and parry all the way through, interspersed with bits of local information.

Finally, Steinlöwe pushed back his chair and said, "Now that I have you where I want you, how is your backbone? Can you take a little bad with the good?"

"I guess I'll have to," she replied, feeling an anxious pang very close to where her heart must be.

"Let's go into the *sala* with our precious *esencia* that you know as coffee. I asked your *mozo*, Miguel, to light a fire in there."

The *sala* at Esperanza was much less formal than its counterpart, the grand living room at *La Guarida d'el Tigre*, but it was, nevertheless, quite pleasant. Beneath the dark-beamed, white ceiling the bright tile floor shone around the edges of thick rugs woven of fine merino wool. There was an assortment of comfortable chairs and couches covered with spongy, tanned hides, and a great rug of stitched deerskins thrown before the open fire.

Steinlöwe knelt, set his cup on the hearth, and motioned for Kamille to sit beside him on the soft furs.

"This does not look like a business conference," she said, her voice ringing with exasperation. "Did you really come here to tell me anything helpful? Is there anyone here whom I can trust?"

He remained unperturbed as he removed his suede jacket and deftly unbuttoned and turned up the cuffs of his white

linen shirt. Still silent, he pulled off his elegant boots and sat gazing into the fire with long legs drawn up and arms clasping his knees.

"You do not know who I am yet, but you can trust me."

"Because you are a prosperous German who runs large *fincas*? A remarkable feat according to my sketchy knowledge of Guatemalan history," Kamille said with a new boldness.

"That is for another time."

She saw that his face had hardened with an emotion approaching anger, and said, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to...to be so personal."

"Mean to be! I am down on your hearth with my boots off, Kamille."

"I like so many of the things you say," she offered, spontaneous, but with a strong need to be ameliorating. The swiftness of her own remark did surprise her a little, but not the desperate need to make peace, to have a friend.

"That is personal enough for the moment," he said, giving a brisk laugh and rubbing the heat from his arms. Then his voice grew serious and demanding.

"Kamille, how did the Doña ever choose a woman of your profession for a job where such a different kind of experience is required?"

"I've been thinking about that. You see, Aunt Cathline wrote many letters over the years...and after..." She took a deep breath. "Last year my parents were killed in an

automobile accident -- I really have trouble saying that."

"I am sorry. Yes, those words make everything return. I am very sorry, Kamille. And after that?"

"I think my parents were..." Kamille sighed and moved back from the heat. "I must sound so naive. Well, I may be a bit green...but...but my mind works just fine. You can see that I...I wasn't born yesterday."

"But you are hardly Methuselah. I have no quarrel with your intelligence...only your experience in this matter."

"When I rather hastily decided to come here, I tried to learn more by reading my aunt's letters. Too late, I discovered that many of them were missing. Today, I felt so foolish to be told things I should have known. Later, I tried to recall conversations I had with my mother about my aunt. She was my maternal grandmother's sister. My mother often chatted about her, but I...I didn't always listen carefully. Still, I now believe that Aunt Cathline wanted my parents to retire early and come here. I do recall something like that, but I never thought my parents took the offer very seriously. I could be wrong, of course. They were to have a sort of life estate of the property, and I was to have the remaining interest...which I now have. I suppose Aunt Cathline expected me to come here eventually and carry on with things. My parents must have intended to sit down and discuss it with me at some future date. They probably also thought I was paying more attention to their

comments. In the little free time I had, I...I was often away...quite involved in...in other things. Half the time I...well, anyway, I just didn't give it my full attention."

She lowered her head and stroked her hair, an old habit that surfaced when she was nervous or distressed.

"I really am a *Kind*, after all...aren't I?...in the most ignorant sense."

"No. It is my expression for your honest, childlike enthusiasm...wonderful. Most adults lose it."

His gray eyes shone with approval as he reached out to lift her chin and, by his look, soothe away her long face.

"Kamille, if you will forgive me, I wonder how much better your parents would have been at running this place. It is not exactly a retirement hobby."

"They were both college instructors, as I am, and I think that Aunt Cathline wrote them volumes of information which they may have kept in their offices. They certainly could have run the school. Dad spoke pretty fair Spanish."

"And so, I am sure, can you run the school. You appear very capable in that area...but the school's life blood is that shrewd old woman's expertly working *finca*."

"I know that now. I have to do it somehow. I can't go back. I sold the family home. My life...there's nothing--"

"*Liebchen*, do not look so sad. Even my callous heart cannot bear it. God, I want to...let me..." He took her by the shoulders. "Please look at me."

This time she refused to lift her head, knowing that her eyes would be like windows upon her stirring thoughts.

"Won't Frau Bilder be wondering where you are?"

"Why do you bring up Ursula every time I get near you? She is not my wife."

"She's certainly something to you...your guest...your friend...and deserves consideration."

"Of which she gets plenty. Yes, she is a visiting guest and we are friends. Please look at me."

"I can't."

"Do you not know that refusing to look at me makes your feelings known anyway?"

"I...I suppose so. I can't just...do this. Can't you tell me some of the things I need to know? Oh lord, I--"

"Kamille...I think...I would rather hold you in my arms than say anything else now."

"No, tell me everything, please. You...you know things that you don't want to talk about."

"What a psychic little nose you have."

"Tell me...if you care at all."

"Ah, you want to use my caring but not partake of it."

There was a long silence during which the only sound was the crackling fire. Then he spoke again, and Kamille was surprised at the hardness in his voice.

"There is someone else who should have been here to greet you today, but I am not surprised at his absence."

Now Kamille's eyes met his with surprise.

"At last I have your attention. Your eyes are topaz. That surprised me when I first looked into them. I thought they should be blue...but, no...they are so warm."

The hardness had vanished from his voice. She was held fast just as she had feared, swimming in the softness of his smile and the liquid fire of eyes that kept so much back from her. She tried to look away without realizing that her hands were pressing against his chest. It shocked her, the need to touch him, the excuse of pushing him away to do so.

"Well, *Kind*," he said, laughing with a quick understanding. "Never have I seen...no, never have I seen topaz faceted with such a warm invitation."

Deeply embarrassed, she pulled her hands away. "Please don't laugh at me. Don't you realize... I'm just so...so vulnerable right now. Tell me what you came to tell me."

"What I really came to tell you? I have never seen anyone so alive...so open...so eager for life. I am quite fascinated. I want to know you. I think our feelings are the same. Ever since the market...no, for me, ever since you walked into my *comedor* and drank so much of my wine--"

"Please! You don't understand anything about me. I've got so much to do. I'm changing a whole way of life, and I'm afraid of...of... Oh God, I'm--"

"Kamille, listen to me. Listen! I *do* understand. I will help you. I intend nothing less."

"Then don't take advantage of me. I need a friend...a friend! Stop this other thing...this other--"

"No! You stop. Be as honest about this as you are about everything else...our feelings." He took her by the shoulders and held her at arm's length. "Despite all your *Aufregung*...your...your excitement, that sad loneliness is in your eyes. I love to make it go away. I can. I have already. See how you are with me...how we are together. So alive and happy. All in an instant, we have found something very good, *Liebchen*. I want it to come first."

Kamille looked at him, a steady gaze now, yet shivering with frustration at her weakness and desire. "You are keeping something from me...something important."

"All right...all right, yes...yes, I am. I am sorry, but first I want to...God, I want..."

He had pulled her against him and was sliding his mouth over hers until she was shaking beyond control. All through the afternoon she had fought the notion of such a thing happening again, yet now she was filled with an emotion so consuming that there was not room enough left for even the faintest scruple or protest. It was like falling, falling from the top of a dizzying mountain. His hands gripped her shoulders, his mouth burning wherever it touched, lips, eyes, throat all afire so that she could think of nothing but the heat, the inescapable and relentless heat drawing her into him deeper and deeper. Finally, there was little

strength, thought, breath left in her. Gasping for air, she had to pull away, and in that moment she tried to protest.

"Please, no. Andar, please!"

"Do you want more? Do not lie. You are hungry."

"What I want is... I can't do this...I don't--"

"Please be honest. This morning, even before the heat of the sun, I felt the warmth of you drifting all through my *casa*. Last night when you walked into my *comedor* the room caught fire. Ah, what a damned romantic you have made me!" He threw back his head and laughed. "I am amazed. What a problem that it should be you. You do not know...you cannot understand... If only you had come from somewhere else."

"What are you talking about?"

"Nothing...nothing...only it is said... No, nothing. If I want you -- Oh, yes -- we can...? May I have you?"

"No," she said, pulling herself free. This refusal only caused a repetition of his ardor, holding her, kissing her until her unwilling hands slid over his arched back as she struggled to hide quick gasps of breath.

"Your words are not honest, *Liebling*...but your touch is. You have your arms around me. Do you want me?"

"Yes...yes...yes, I do. Oh, this is--"

"Then forget all the rest...first, let us have this understanding. Come, let me lie with you."

"I can't. I don't know what I'm doing. I can't just go through life...letting emotion take hold of...doing

whatever... Oh, I didn't expect this...anything like this, not you...not you here...anywhere. But you--"

She was startled to find herself hurled up against his damp shirt, the faint aroma of citron, of Spanish soap, and the sweat of arousal filling her nostrils with an utterly provocative commingling of inescapable scents.

"Andar...please put me down."

She heard a low groan. His hands loosened their grasp and he stepped back, leaning against the wall with his arms folded against his chest. His face was in shadow. She stood trembling a moment then moved closer and saw that he was suffering with need, trying to get control. "Just you. Just you," he muttered. How could it end like this when her own desire was as great as his? A soft, commiserating cry issued from her as she moved, almost fell, into his arms, letting him carry her away to her high, feathered bed.

"Take off your clothes...or I will," he said as he stripped off his shirt and slacks.

Lying motionless on the bed, she watched his broad shoulders appear in the soft light of the night lamp -- bronzed shoulders and back, fair buttocks, long, sinewy thighs. He turned toward her, his total maleness making her racing breath stand still. His hands were already lifting the sweater over her head, then came the skirt, sandals, satin, until all was peeled away and he knelt running his hand down the length of her body, watching her tremble

beneath the touch of his hands. Fingers searched through her hair, pulling out combs, twining it first in a rough grasp, then with tenderness around his fist, letting it fall over her breasts. His arms slid under her back, pulling her up against his startling flesh, rolling over with her across the bed until he could see into her eyes under the lamp.

"You never intended to tell me--" she tried one more time, hearing the foolishness of her voice as he stopped her words with his hungry mouth. He lifted his head and uttered with impatient ferocity, "To hell with that now! *Schöne, schöne* Kamille, this is pain, is it not?...for both of us. I want you. You want me?"

"Yes."

"Say it then, the way you laughed with me in Huehue -- so beautiful under the sun. Say it...say Andar."

"Andar, I want you...I do want you...but I--"

"And what you feel."

"At the beginning I thought you would...would cut me up like duckling in cherry sauce...then...couldn't think. I've never known anything so...I wanted...oh, what am I saying? I--" Her voice broke against his mouth.

He continued to lead her, draw her out of her safe zone of caution, demanding responses between kisses like hot sparks searing her throat, neck, breasts, exploding over her uncertain mouth.

"Kamille, *amada mía*, do you know what it means, this

feeling...feeling so much?"

"I can't believe...but I...yes."

"After only two days...is it possible?"

"I thought so after only two minutes," she heard her own frank admission and knew at that moment it was true.

"Do you realize...*realize* what we have found?"

"Yes, I think...yes."

He held her neck and slid his thumbs over her pulsing throat. "*Kind*, you will need to...to let our words stay in your head tomorrow and the next day and the next."

She was shaking, and then he nipped at her lips with increasing demand, her quaking body melting against him in a sumptuous, racking need. Her own voice was a distant throb in her ears. "*Andar*, please, oh please, oh please."

"*Si, mi nueva vida. Comprende?* My new life."

He drove himself down on her with a soft, guttural sound like the low cry of an animal in a distant forest, until the groan became almost a chant. "*Liebling, Liebling, Liebling*. My God, little manslayer!"

#

The shadowy forest was all around her and yet there was barren ground. Something was coming, gigantic, dark, and ominous. It took the shape of a massive human? a bear? an ape? something that had no features, only density, filling the whole dark sky, the entire universe. She had been running for so long and was tired. Kneeling in dead grass,

she listened to a voice beside her -- someone she knew but couldn't identify -- telling her the dark beast wouldn't hurt her if it could only have something unnamed from her. Subtle distinctions concerning its intentions were obscure. Terror gripped her until she was consumed by the threatening violence of the dark powerful beast. It was impossible to run any more. She lay down, pressing herself flat against the earth, sweating and listening to the trees break like dry weed stalks as the dark giant pounded toward her. She tried to scream but her breath was smothered away. Now she was in the thing's vice-like grip. Clumsy, garbled screams were forced from her closing throat.

"No! No! Help me! Oh, help me! Help me!"

"*Liebling, Liebling*, wake up. Shh, shh, I am here. Andar...here. Get your eyes open, *Kind*. You are fine."

"Oh! Where am I? Charlie? Who are you?"

Still paralyzed in half-dream, half-wakefulness, she struggled to free herself, and found everything strange.

"Kamille?" he said, shaking her gently and running his fingers through her damp and tangled hair. "You have had a bad dream; that is all. *Liebchen*, do you not remember us? Have you forgotten Andar?"

He reached over and turned on the lamp while she cringed in embarrassment and uncertainty. Then he leaned on an elbow and stroked her face.

"Poor *Kind*. I think Charlie was a mistake. For a long

time you have needed Andar...we have needed each other."

"I'm sorry," she said. "Oh, it's impossible to relate the horror of that dream. But there was...was nothing in it very distinct...only the fear...a dark stalking figure."

"Anxiety. You have been so alone. Everything is new and strange to you. Let me hold you."

Kamille shrank back. "I feel so...so cut off from anything familiar. You're startling...startling to me."

"I frighten you?"

"No, only...I don't know..."

"Are you still in love with him...Charlie?"

"No. I don't want to talk about him...not now."

"I wanted you so much I could not let you...I thought if we... I am sorry. You were not ready for this."

"Yes...No! Oh, it seems I've known you forever...and yet, I can't believe that I'm here with you...this strange place...you...strange man...*finghero*. Oh, so strange. Just hold me." She dropped her head against his warm chest and closed her eyes. "Please don't let go," she whispered.

"No...I will not," he answered against her cheek as he held her, stroking her back with slow, soothing fingers.

"Kamille...Kamille, I wonder why someone like you...why you are not married."

She lifted her head. "You mean because I'm so...well, so old?"

He laughed. "God, no. I am thirty-six. I mean

because you are so much."

She smiled. "No one ever described me quite like that. I was almost married...and I..."

After a moment of silence, a wave of astonishment swept over her. "Oh, I almost made such a terrible mistake," she blurted out, and immediately regretted her remark.

"The man you are running away from?"

"Please forgive me. I hardly know what I'm saying, or...or doing. You'll never believe how much I...how I love reason. Reason...I always insisted my students use it."

Her hands were nervous again, tracing over his shoulders, along his neck and across his lips. He kissed her fingers. "Do not apologize for anything, Kamille."

"Did you ever do anything you thought was very...well very...wrong?" she asked.

"Many things...when I was young and foolish."

"Did you ever want to save the world?"

"I suppose so, when I was really foolish. Is this going to be a long inquisition into my moral character? You are a cautious creature...but I am not Charlie."

"I don't think that's what I was doing."

"I think it was."

Leaning over him and smiling with a half-hidden eagerness, she kissed him a long, steadily warming kiss.

"I have no defense against that...fortunately," he said when his mouth was free.

"Don't leave me," she whispered.

"Not...going...anywhere," he said between kisses.

"Make love to me."

"What is this?" He laughed. "I am, *Kind*."

#

Kamille was awakened by an indistinct rustling sound. She stretched, feeling languorous and lazy until the spent feeling of her body suddenly reminded her of the previous illusory night. A sensuous smile of pleasure overtook her, then, as the full realization struck her, she sat up in shock. She had spent the first night in her new home in bed with a German *finquero* of barely two days acquaintance. What would Aunt Cathline have thought of this? And what had Aunt Cathline thought of Andar Steinlöwe? She threw back the covers and started to slip down from the very high fourposter. Then in the dim, early light she saw him sitting in her chair pulling on his boots.

"Good morning, *Kind*," he said, eyeing her with distinct pleasure.

He was grinning with what she thought for a moment might be described as the Latin American male satisfaction. But how lovely was his grin, and he had not acted in the way a chauvinist does when he expects his extreme politeness to a woman to end in submission, whether desired or not. She suspected that he was courteous to everyone as a matter of concern as well as breeding, had already seen evidence of it

in his dealings with others. It was a rather nice quality, refreshing, especially since she knew that men inured in the Latin American tradition were often hopelessly chauvinistic.

"My boots were standing inside your door when I got up, and I left them in the sala along with my jacket -- I found that, along with the rest of my clothes, in your closet. Old Ixil is a curious and tidy little shadow. How she must have enjoyed our lovers' sleep, but not as much as I enjoyed finding you there when I awoke."

Kamille pulled the covers back over her and sank down beneath her pillows. *Oh, mortification!* Was she destined to have a mockery made of everything she did?

Steinlöwe got up and leaned over her with laughter.

"Come out, Kamille. It is no use. I have spent the night memorizing your body...and you seemed rather fond of mine, too."

"Turn your back," she said with a wretched shyness.

"Ridiculous!" He laughed and grabbed the covers, flinging them back. His eyes traveled over her with obvious delight. "Perhaps you had better put something on after all...or I had better take something off."

Kamille sprang from the bed and dove into the closet, yanking a fluffy robe from a hanger and fumbling until she managed to get herself into it. She was about to fly to the other side of the room, simply out of wild embarrassment, when Steinlöwe caught her and sat in the lone chair, pulling

her down onto his lap.

"Will you please light a moment. I have something to say. You must get more chairs in here if you do not like this arrangement...it is fine with me."

Kamille sat stiffly, but he drew her back until her head was on his shoulder.

"Your heart is pounding like a hummingbird's wings. Close your eyes, take a deep breath and listen to me."

Placing her head on her hand against his chest, she uttered a long sigh and gave in to the real delight she had finally allowed. "I'm listening."

"Kamille, you are going to hear unpleasant things about me from Stewart Bartel, and I want to prepare you for them."

"Stewart Bartel?" she said with surprise.

"You are not going to tell me you do not know who he is?" His expression was somewhat incredulous.

"He's... Isn't he a relative of Aunt Cathline's late husband? He used to come here to...to paint, didn't he? Isn't he an artist?"

"I suppose you could say that some of his work is art. I begrudge him praise for his painting of Doña Catalina."

"You don't like him?"

"To put it mildly. Five years ago Catalina allowed him to come and live here permanently, the poorest judgment she ever exercised. But she felt an obligation to her husband's family. It was none of my affair...except as a concerned

friend. He gave her a great deal of trouble, and he is likely to give you some. I thought he might be here yesterday, but I am not surprised at his absence. He is most likely in Guatemala City bar hopping."

"He drinks?"

Steinlöwe gave a sarcastic laugh. "At the slightest thirst. He goes on periodic binges when his work is not showing or selling or the wind is not blowing in the right direction...or when he has a fight with poor, smitten little Mata, whom he pretends he does not know intimately. You will find her mooning about. All this is not my greatest concern."

"What is, then?" she asked, leaning away from him and studying his face.

"That you have been given what he wanted: Esperanza. He thought it should have come to him, and he has been broadcasting this openly while crying in his liquor. Do not mistake me. Bartel is neurotic but quite cunning. In the beginning, he was clever enough to charm your aunt -- no mean feat. You will have to watch him. Call me if you ever need help. Don Tomás will be invaluable to you, and his son, Rodolfo. Please do not fall in love with Rodolfo. He is a very capable young man...well-educated, well-mannered, and...handsome. I will be here only a week more and then I must go back to *Guerida d'el Tigre*, but I will try to see you as often as I can. I want to know you...you to know me.

I want that very much."

"But you haven't told me what Bartel has against you. Why?" Kamille asked. She saw that his open and attentive face was closing with an expression sullen, almost aloof.

"Kamille...I cannot bring myself to wallow in Bartel's mudslinging. I was going to say more, but now there is no time. I stayed too long. I could not leave you, *Liebchen*. How could I steal away in the night when you were crying in your sleep? I want to tell you in my own time. It is a long story...heavy... Something not good for you at present.

"I love the way your nose turns up, *Kind*."

He took her face in his hands and kissed her on the tip of her nose.

"But there is one other thing I should say now. Guatemala frowns on foreigners, any foreigner for any reason, coming in and taking possession of the land. You are used to the ways of your country. They are not the ways of this country. Doña Catalina was a great resource to Guatemala. She was very just to her *mozos*...all her workers...and monetarily as fair as she could be without arousing hostility in other quarters. This is how we must deal with things here. And as for schools: Guatemala is making some progress with schools, but it has not enough of them; for this reason, the Doña was tolerated from the beginning. Do not let these admonitions frighten you,

Kamille, but...in a manner of speaking, you will really have to show that you intend to do more for this country than for yourself."

Kamille stood up. She was calmer now, serious and resolute.

"It has always been my intention, however naïve, to...to make myself useful here...not rich. You will find I'm not the least avaricious...nor am I just a...a stupid little *gringo*, Herr Steinlöwe."

First an amused smile then delighted laughter spread over his face. "Ah, so it is Herr Steinlöwe when the *gringa* feels abused, is it? You must learn to put a feminine ending on that word, for you are very much a woman."

Kamille blushed with embarrassment, but her heart was pounding at his irresistible smile. This easy betrayal of her fickle heart pushed her toward anger, but when he took her nervous hand and kissed it she was lost once again.

"I might be thought a *gringo*, too, although I was born here as were my father and grandfather."

"Why do you have such a *German German* accent?" Kamille asked, encouraged by his offering of personal history. "And how do you come to speak such perfect English along with your Spanish?"

"I grew up hearing German from Germans, of course -- the extended family was a close-knit group. I was educated at Heidelberg University. As for my English, I later

studied at Princeton -- where I could never get the hang of contractions. Do you know the east coast of North America?"

"Some...not well. I suppose I'm simply a hide-bound northwesterner...one who certainly never dreamed of coming here. I wonder now if I'll be able to stay."

He stood up and pulled on his jacket.

"You will stay. I will see to it."

He reached for her and she drew back, hardly realizing what she had done, or the offensiveness of her act.

"Why did you do that?" he asked with hurt in his eyes.

"I don't know...exactly." She put her hands to her cheeks which were beginning to burn. "Everything has happened so fast, and I...I'm afraid that if I get too close to you I won't be able to think clearly. I really have a logical mind when I'm not--"

"Emotionally involved," he finished with a satisfied smile.

Her hand was lifted and the palm kissed. Then, holding her wrist, he drew her against his mouth so that once again her knees were buckling and her heart straining to leap out of her chest.

"*Liebchen*," he whispered against her cheek. His release of her was abrupt, but with noticeable resignation. "I will be back," he said quickly over his shoulder as his brisk boots glided over the shining teak planks. He turned as he went out the door. "I will phone you, *la maestra*. I

am sorry that things did not proceed exactly according to proper etiquette, but I cannot apologize for taking advantage of the moment. That is something a good deal of living finally teaches one. And anyway...I was helpless. Enjoy the Doña's casa, *Kindi*; now it is yours."

Kamille slipped out of her robe and crawled back into her soft bed. She was really exhausted, but she could not return to sleep, and lay propped up on her pillows dreaming with her eyes open. Each time the swiftly moving film in her mind flickered over a moment spent with Steinlöwe her heart leapt and she smiled. He reminded her of someone; perhaps in an old film -- yes, a sort of early Gary Cooper but tanned, a bit weathered, and with a German accent. Only in the movies, a small voice whispered. What has happened to me? I can't stop smiling, she thought. I am hopeless, without even sense enough to be afraid. When a person gets this bad terrible things are bound to happen, and yet...

Ixil came in later with warm banana bread and rich black coffee, both as delicious as Maria's.

"Is good," Ixil said with a little crooked grin as she patted the bed. "Babies in this house."

"*Uno momento!*" Kamille exclaimed, dropping the sandal into which she was trying to get her foot. "I have only just arrived myself!"

#

Kamille was eager to see the school, but it was Friday, her Spanish was almost non-existent, and Don Tomás was not there to guide her. Perhaps it would be better to wait until Monday when the teachers and children were fresh and Don Tomás might be available. She decided to wander around by herself after meeting the house and field workers, or *mozos*, as they were called. A dutiful Ixil went with her for the introductions, and when she had made the rounds and undergone the polite naming of everyone who could be found, she decided to take a walk.

The hill behind the outbuildings of Esperanza was steeper than it looked and she puffed along, laughing at herself and promising to strengthen her lungs with daily walks. When she reached the knoll she looked back at her green valley and was struck by its delicate beauty. It was the middle of October and still apples clung to the trees in the orchards below like Christmas ornaments. The apple trees made her feel more at home. The sharp, geometrical boundaries of the orchards with their tidy rows of mature trees reminded her of her uncle's well-tended orchards flourishing in the crisp air of eastern Washington. What was Uncle Jasper doing now? Sorting through filled apple crates in his cool cellars, perhaps, or laying in more firewood for the big stone fireplace that warmed the living room in the light autumn snow. And here she was far away in a high mountain valley of Guatemala. Her body felt strange,

tingling as though Steinlöwe were still making love to her, and the places tender with lovemaking consumed her with a joyous pain. All at once, her stomach felt weak. She threw herself down on the hard earth and lay looking up at clouds. Never had she seen such massive ones, ballooning tropical thunderheads bumping into the mountains. It was the dry season, however, and they would soon drift away, evaporate. Now they were brushing over her forehead like cool, clammy fingertips, and the laughing wind whispered to her, a curling voice with hushed airy jokes. Always present in her thoughts was the special place where she had not yet looked. She rolled over at last and looked across the knoll and far down the descending valley. There, glinting in the sun, was Steinlöwe's red-roofed casa, unmistakable because there was nothing else like it in the vicinity, the Hacienda of the Little Tiger, a modest casa by his standards alone. The wind caught in her throat and her wild heart raced. She closed her eyes, remembering the words they had spoken in the previous illusory night. He had made a point of asking her to remember their words. Why such concern that she not forget? It was almost as if he expected something sinister to intervene. She smiled at her overwrought sense of the mysterious and stretched out her arms, continuing to stare in languor at the red-tiled roof of his casa. A frown crept over her face as she thought of Frau Bilder. At the same moment, a dark shadow fell over her and she sat up, giving a

startled cry.

"Oh...sorry. I didn't mean to alarm you," a very British voice said.

Kamille looked up at a thin, sandy-haired man of medium height with sharp, somewhat ravaged features, an intense, rather hostile mouth that twisted in a sensual way as he spoke, and piercing blue eyes. The eyes were already alternating between coolness and outright rancor.

"I am Stewart Bartel, and you, I'm sure, are Kamille Penine. I apologize for my absence at your arrival, but I had unavoidable business in the city."

Yes, Kamille reminded herself, unavoidable bouts of inebriation. Careful, my girl, you must not appear to know too much. Go slowly. Somehow you must become this man's friend...or at least not his enemy.

"I'm glad to meet you at last," she said, extending her hand which was given a brief and weak grasp. "I was just admiring the view from up here. I can't get over how beautiful everything is...and the air...the light. It must mean a great deal to you as an artist."

"Yes," Bartel said, lifting one eyebrow and glancing down at Steinlöwe's hacienda. "Look, do you mind if we sit here a moment and talk over some things...or were you coming back down to the casa?"

"In awhile...oh, but this is fine. I'd love to talk. I know this will sound a little provincial, but it's

wonderful to hear such lovely English." She hesitated and went on. "Spanish, too, is a beautiful language."

Bartel narrowed his eyes, studying her with careful scrutiny, then his face relaxed in a private conclusion.

"I hope I'll see some of your work soon," Kamille went on with as much enthusiasm as she could muster.

He gave a terse laugh. "It's hanging all over the casa."

"Oh...well, I'm still getting acquainted with the house. Now there's something more to...to look forward to."

Bartel kicked an angular stone across the knoll with his thick-soled boot, watched it fly off into space, and then threw himself down on a low bed of grass that had been closely cropped by some wandering animal. He turned to Kamille, his attention riveted on her, cold and steady.

"Miss Penine, excuse my bluntness, but Esperanza is temporarily lying idle, stayed by Cathline's order that only your people run it. It must get back into production immediately for the next harvest. I do wonder, do you a...*know* very much about *fincas*...or coffee...or even about schools, for that matter?"

Her skin flushed red. How dare this idle, alcoholic paint dauber question her capabilities! There was to be no pretense of courtesy, no attempt at fairness. Knowing what she knew would make it all too easy to retaliate, to stand her ground in belligerence, letting her anger boil up and

scald her potential enemy. It would be a mistake. Bitter recriminations were irreversible. Yet, if she were too eager and soft, too forgiving, he, who thought he knew her now as an incompetent naïf, would run right over her, try to take her over completely. She saw with whom she was dealing and responded in accordance.

"About schools I know something, yes." She laughed almost with good nature. "As an instructor at a small private college, I was often also involved in administrative work. I think it's safe to say I know a fair amount. As to coffee, you have me there. My experience is limited to brewing a fairly decent cup. That's all. And as to *fincas*, well, I did spend a good part of my life on a farm in Washington and saw how things got done. I realize that's a far cry from a large working *finca*, but I'm really a fast learner...and I intend to learn very fast. I'll have to. I've recently met Herr Steinlöwe, and...and, while he doesn't know it yet, I intend to make full use of his expert knowledge of coffee *fincas*. Since he...well, he appears to be quite successful, he ought to be a good teacher."

Bartel's relaxed face had tightened with irritation as he listened, and at the mention of Steinlöwe his cheeks went livid, his eyes narrowed and resentful.

"Yes, I understood that Steinlöwe was here, and I wish you wouldn't invite him on the property so freely. We must talk about this Nazi, and I believe you'll come to see what

I mean."

"Of course he'll come again," Kamille said, "and I really don't want to hear anything derogatory about him."

"What? Are you prepared to be an ostrich, with your head in the sand?"

"I think it would be unfair of me to listen, and really unkind of you to make up things behind his back."

"Make up things?" Bartel laughed, incredulous. "I need hardly *make up* anything with his voluminous history of evil. It is common knowledge that the man killed his own father and that he will do anything for land. That Nazi bastard wants this property. He pestered poor Cathline to sell it for the last ten years of her steadily weakening life, and now I presume he is after you to the same end."

Speechless, Kamille stared into the unyielding, frozen blue eyes, unable to look away lest her face crumble in shock, and yet unable to go on looking for fear Bartel would read everything as clearly and quickly as it swept across her mind. She swallowed and dropped her gaze. The ground wavered and the valley far below rose up to meet her swaying body. Oh God, she thought, I'm going to be sick.

"Good lord, what is it?" Bartel asked. He face held genuine surprise, even alarm.

"I think..." she stammered, "the food...it's...I...I've eaten something...disagreeable. I'm not used to...to the food. Oh, God...awful!"

Bartel grabbed her and pushed her down on her knees near a rocky precipice that dipped away from the knoll.

"Keep your head down. Vomit if you can."

She looked out a moment in agony, and her rippling vision caught the red roof of *El Tigre Pequeño*, the sight of which only a few moments ago had brought her such pleasure. The top of her head turned to ice. Her body convulsed as tears and vomit streamed from her face. Leaning forward, she thought of floating away. How good it would be to fall free, fly over the valley away from this black bubble of pain swelling in her heart. Only in this moment did she realize how deeply she had been moved by recent events, and how deeply she was wounded. A reckless, half-conscious notion of blotting out that terrible agony prevailed. Letting her body sway further over the edge, she plunged into fear and vertigo. It was a dangerous and short-lived release. Bartel's arms closed around her and drew her back.

"Here, let me...it's all right. I'll help you." He pulled out his handkerchief and dabbed at her face.

"Certainly it's the food and the altitude and travel fatigue. You really should have stayed in bed today. Take my arm now. You must go to bed as soon as we're down."

III

Kamille lay in bed all day Saturday without eating, refusing food even when the frightened Ixil sat by her bed

that night, balancing on her knee a tray holding a bowl of chicken broth. The distraught woman was convinced that she would lose her new mistress as she had lost her beloved Doña, and that a curse had fallen upon the house. Holding up a spoonful of the hot broth, she tried her best to entice Kamille into having just one swallow.

"Very good *sopa*."

"No thank you, Ixil," Kamille said, turning her head away, with a convulsing stomach.

"I do some bad thing?" the guilty-faced Ixil asked.

"No, no, Ixil," Kamille insisted. "You are very good to me. It's not your fault. I'll try...I will...to eat later. I promise. I just want to sleep. No visitors, no calls, please...just sleep."

"Steinlöwe, he calls two time already this day," Ixil said, giving Kamille a very penetrating look.

Kamille winced. "Have you said anything to Bartel about...about us?" she asked with quavering voice.

"No," Ixil answered. "Not his business. First I talk to Señor Steinlöwe, then Señor Bartel talk. He say you very sick, not to come here."

Ixil looked out of the corner of a questioning eye.

"Oh," Kamille said. She clenched her jaws tight to stem a flood of tears. "Yes, that was right. That's all right. Please Ixil, I want to sleep."

Thursday will always be a perfect day, Kamille thought

when she was left alone. Yes, perfect, just for itself, just as it was, and as I felt...so happy. I can't throw that away. How could I have known? Now I see...why else would the lofty, land baron, Steinlöwe, have been so zealous, so ardent, especially with his flawless Ursula nearby? I suppose I was a foolish dupe...yes, of course I was, but I regret nothing. I so needed that day...for a little while everything was perfect. I've no idea what Bartel meant about Steinlöwe's father...can't think about it...don't want to know. He'll be gone soon anyway...back to his grand *estancia*. Last Thursday I'll keep separate from everything else; in my ignorance it was bliss. I should laugh...laugh at myself...oh, but it hurts too much.

The sleeping pills Bartel had left for her were beginning to slow her racing thoughts. At first she had refused them, so disliking the idea of chemicals taking over her body, but Bartel left them anyway. In the end, she succumbed to their release, when she could no longer stand the memories, the guilt and remorse that went coursing through her mind over and over again -- for all this she blamed herself even more than she blamed Steinlöwe. The sudden and constant changes of emotion had exhausted her without bringing unconsciousness. Worst of all was the self-pity, the persistent, devilish voice that kept saying, "Poor Kamille, you fool...you fool!" Finally, her mind let go of the voices, the remorse, and her body drifted into

sleep.

On Sunday, Kamille awakened from her chemically induced sleep to the faint but sensuous smell of Steinlöwe on her pillow and the memory of his warning: "It will be necessary to let our words stay in your head tomorrow and the next day and the next." Her body longed for him. Then, with a jolt of horror, she remembered everything. No. It had to stop, the pain of it. How could it have come to this, the severity of it? She tried to think how she had been before any of it happened and swore that she would be that way again, free and unencumbered. But the sorrow, the cruelty. "*Liebling, Liebling, Liebling...*" his voice taunted. Such a very short time ago she had felt nothing, and she would feel that way again. The linens tainted with her fleeting love were removed, and her tormented brain groped for peace.

#

On Monday, Don Tomás arrived with his son, Rodolfo. The father was tired and sad at the ordeal of his sister's untimely death, and Kamille, in her own low spirits, questioned whether he should have come so soon.

"No, it is better that I go on with my affairs. The living must go on," he replied with a stoicism that, quite unknown to him, helped to console Kamille.

She was relieved to meet the schoolteachers, four polite and enthusiastic young women, and to visit their

classes filled with earnest, dark-eyed children. A few of the smallest children were playing with curious seeds that moved, and she wanted to know what these were. Don Tomás explained that they were *crincadores*, jumping beans from the wolfsbane plant. A simple gray moth stings the bean, and as its larvae become lively they cause the beans to dance. The children watched as she knelt down to observe the strange spasms of the beans. Their lovely brown eyes crinkled and their smooth little faces contorted with bashful giggles of mischievous delight at her surprise. Her heart warmed as she laughed along with them, surrounded by their innocent joy, lifted up by their life-affirming enthusiasm. Some wore their native dress, the little girls with bright red ribbons plaited into their shining black braids.

With the help of Don Tomás, she went over the curriculum with the teachers. Finally, she settled down to watch the shy but eager children recite, read, and play. She began, in her own eagerness, to be drawn into their proudly tended academic sphere. The thought came to her that as a sort of principal she could be very useful here, making decisions and solving problems which might otherwise keep the teachers from the important work of teaching. But wasn't that just what Aunt Cathline had done?

There was one troubling incident which had disturbed her. She had seen a young boy, perhaps ten years of age, who was carried to school on the back of another child. His

legs were twisted at the knees, so that he could not walk or stand. She found that his name was Tzuli, and spoke to him with gentle concern. His bitter smile and taciturn manner stabbed at her heart, for she knew that with some delicate surgery he would be able to walk. She had seen a similar infirmity, had worked with a child nearly the same age in Washington, and saw how the orthopedic surgeon was able to turn the girl's legs and give her mobility. Don Tomás listened with interest to her enthusiastic story of a surgical remedy, and promised to do what he could.

"Yes, Don Tomás, I'd be so grateful for your help. I want to talk to the boy's parents. There, you can help me. We have to convince them that something can be done. And then comes the hard part," she said. "I know of a surgeon, but we'll have to find a way to pay for the surgery."

"Si," Don Tomás agreed, "That is the most difficult. But I believe that somehow you will find a way, Señorita Penine. In matter of fact, I am certain of it."

The day had passed quickly, and Kamille returned to the soothing quiet of her study in the spacious Casa Esperanza, carrying with her books and papers for her own form of homework. Her appetite was somewhat improved, although that night brought further reason for sleeplessness.

She had invited the Nervos to take supper with her, and sat down to dine at a later hour than she would have liked so as not to disrupt their custom. Stewart Bartel had once

again disappeared, much to her relief.

Rodolfo was indeed a handsome man with profuse black hair and a trim mustache, very dark but warm brown eyes, smooth olive skin, and thickish lips that often curved away from exquisite white teeth in the most brilliant and heart-melting smile. He was of medium height and appeared strong as an ox. When he shook her hand the grip was firm and sincere, and he looked straight into her eyes with an earnestness that was compelling.

Kamille wondered if Don Tomás might be bent upon replacing his old relationship with her Aunt Cathline with a new one of his son and herself. If that is what he wants, so be it, she thought. He misses his Doña, the mutual rewards of their confidences, their successful routine.

In recent years, Rodolfo had taken on more and more responsibilities for Aunt Cathline, helping with bank liaisons, accounting problems, and general overseeing, which had become increasingly difficult for her, although final decisions were always her own. Don Tomás, it seemed, was more a friend and advisor than a paid assistant, but his son received a salary from Esperanza.

They finished the late meal and went to the sala for coffee. A little pain started up in Kamille's heart as she walked into the room and saw the fire flickering on the hearth and the empty chair where Steinlöwe had sat smoking his pipe. They talked a while longer, switching to more

mundane matters, generally getting to know one another, and with Kamille requesting as much Spanish as the communication could tolerate. Then as they were preparing to separate for the evening, Don Tomás drew her aside in a most clandestine way, so that she knew he had received exactly this careful instruction, and extended to her a sealed envelope from Steinlöwe. She took the envelope into her grasp with as much ease as she could, but her hand had already begun to tremble as she walked the Nervos to the door.

Once in her room, she undressed quickly, set out her pills and water on the night table where the envelope, boldly printed with her name, had been placed still unopened, and got into bed.

The stationery was of a fine cream vellum with a small red, black, and gold coat of arms at the top -- a lion with its paws grasping a large globe -- and Andar V. Steinlöwe printed in gold script beneath. His sweeping letters were made in an elegant, cursive style with a rather thick-nibbed pen. The bold black ink seemed to resonate with impatience and passionate offense.

Please, dear Kamille,

Remember us and read this. Are you well, Liebling? You cannot be if you are too full of anger, too misled to allow me to vindicate myself of whatever Bartel has accused me. Wasn't this the very

possibility for which I tried to prepare you? If you are too ill to leave the house, I will come there. I have no fear of Bartel whatever. It is only out of deference to you that I have stayed away, but I have heard nothing from you, and I must leave soon. If you are well and do not wish to see me, I will come anyway and cause whatever spectacle is necessary to make myself heard. If you want to avoid this, simply take a horse from your stable and ride down the valley by the northeastern path to the pond in the pine grove where our properties meet. I will be there at eleven in the morning.

Andar

Kamille's hand was shaking so badly that the letter slipped from her grasp, landing on the floor where it remained until morning. She had taken only one pill, afraid that she would not awaken in time to carry out Steinlöwe's request. She had known that she would have to face him sometime, and it might as well be now and away from curious eyes. Still, the fear of seeing him was almost unbearable, and the fear of her own uncertain conduct.

In the morning the *mozo*, Carlos, was at the stable and saddled her a gentle white mare named Cuca. Kamille had a

little laugh over his assumption that she would not be able to stay a high-spirited mount. She was quite a good rider, having grown up on her Uncle's powerful quarter horses. Nevertheless, she was even more skittish than the most unstrung thoroughbred this morning, unable to touch reality, unable to decide in what frame of mind, in what shade of emotion she would finally reach Steinlöwe. She rode along dispirited, looking now and then at her watch. Having no idea how long the ride would take, she had started early, and being completely without appetite had not even bothered to carry along as much as a single slice of banana bread. This emptiness and her recent malaise caused her to feel lightheaded, and she decided that the mare had been a good choice after all. Trick riding would not be needed today. The little mare proved quite trustworthy, keeping her hooves on the trail once pointed in the right direction. Kamille had little to do but ride forward looking at the sweeping land, a pastime which would have been much more enjoyable had her destination not been so ominous. Her good chestnut riding boots gleamed in the morning sun. She had worn only tan jodhpurs and a blue cotton shirt, and soon began to long for a warm jacket in the crisp morning air. A wind played about her shivering frame, tugging strands of hair loose and whipping them over her eyes. Tossing the dark gold braid over her freezing back, she looked behind her and thought of returning for a coat, but she was afraid of arriving late.

The ride became a chilling tour de force.

Down, down the long valley the obliging Cuca trotted, past the tree-shaded, aromatic coffee plants and through the cool, slanting shadows of the pale morning sun. At last, Kamille saw a little oblong pond rimmed with dark pines off to her right, and she rode on until she came beneath the trees. There was no one in sight. She dismounted, huddling under a humming pine, listening with chattering teeth to the wild cacophony of birds that had been awake for hours.

Finally, at nearly eleven she heard hoof beats coming from the north. There rode Steinlöwe in a warm sheepskin jacket, his long legs expertly bent against the gleaming belly of a big sorrel stallion. The blood drained from her already cold face as she folded her shaking arms around her chest and leaned against the shuddering pine for support.

He jumped from his horse and came toward her in quick, long strides.

"So you have been ill. Where the devil is your coat?"

When she didn't answer, he approached more closely with a frowning scrutiny. "My God, you are freezing!" he swore, yanking off his jacket and wrapping her in it. "Ahh, *Kind*," he muttered, gripping the collar and shaking her with it. He hurried back to the saddlebag on his horse and pulled out a faded but clean, heavy denim jacket for himself. Next he unrolled a blanket and put it on the sunny ground away from the trees.

"Sit," he ordered. "What a *Kind* you are, *Liebling*."

At the repeat of that endearment Kamille's head dropped and huge tears splashed down her cheeks.

"No, *Liebchen*," he said, reaching for her.

She put up her hand. "Don't touch me, please. I came to get this over with so there would be no...no further misunderstanding." Having glanced once at his face, she turned away as she spoke. Both the sun and the emotion in his eyes had turned the gray to bronze. She felt as if she were falling backward over a precipice.

"Look at me...please, Kamille."

"No."

"Are you so afraid of what you feel?"

"I feel...I feel ashamed."

She heard his breath catch and then looked to see the anger in his face replaced by disappointment.

"So...Bartel told you that I killed my father and that I am after your land."

"How could you know so precisely?"

His laugh was bitter. "I have heard it before. Those are the two worst things he says about me."

"There were three," she said with cutting voice.

"Oh," he answered, a single word of disgust. "What was the other?"

"Never mind. I didn't come here to inflict pain. I've had enough of that myself. I just want this to end."

"Has my loving caused you pain, *Mädchen*?"

"Please," she said, with imploring eyes.

"All right, then tell me the rest of Bartel's filth. You want to. That is why you are here."

"It doesn't matter...doesn't matter," she answered, certain that she would soon be hysterical.

"Then say it...come on for God's sake!"

"He called you a Nazi bastard."

Steinlöwe laughed. "I have heard that before, too. My father and grandfather would have been surprised to hear it, though."

"You don't owe me any explanations," Kamille said.

"But of course I do."

"I just want you to know that Esperanza is not for sale, with or without me."

There was a heavy silence during which she was unable to look at him to discover what effect this statement had produced. It was all that needed to be said.

"Ah, Kamille...you remembered nothing I told you."

"You told me nothing!" she cried.

"I what! My God, even your heart has frozen. I have told you with every part of me what you have so quickly become to me. I was expecting this. It is why I told you to remember our words the night we made love."

"So quickly and conveniently."

He shook his head. "It happens that way sometimes. Do

not twist what I say. Before I met you, I was actually considering what life might be like with...with another -- not all that I wanted but...all right...tolerable. After you it was out of the question."

"I wasn't that awful to contemplate along with Esperanza."

"Oh, to hell with Esperanza! I want to shake you. You have forgotten what you said your feelings were for me. Can they be all gone? Tell me!" He took ahold of her, ignoring her protests. "Or did you never have them? Are you such a remarkable actress?" He let go of her rigid body and leaned back, his eyes flashing steely glints of anger.

"Feelings! Feelings! Oh God, feelings!...how I hate them!" she cried with her hands against her cheeks. "I want them to be all gone, so I can eat and sleep and dream again without the pain of you. Oh, why did I come? I'm going."

"Wait a minute! It seems we have unwittingly done something to each other...but what? Can so much hurt be the result of mere greed and carelessness?"

She lifted her head and was surprised at the show of grief in his eyes. Her desire to move forward into his arms was so overpowering that she fought to hold herself still.

"Do not look at me with fear...do not! Can you believe I am a murderer...that I could...that I have killed my own father?" He stopped and looked away, off toward the frosty peaks of the *Cuchumatanes*. "It is difficult to... His own

mozos, witnesses to his death, denied the accusation. Is that not enough for you? Then you may see the records. I have them in my library."

Confused, her heart aching, she cried out, "Please stop this! It's so personal...painful. I can't stand to hurt you. This has all been so...so awful...so hurtful."

He looked at her with sadness. "Part of what love is, *Kind*. It is vulnerable. Sometimes daring to love leaves you with your insides exposed...as I find myself now."

The jacket had slipped from her shoulders, and she was weeping openly. "How...how can anything that started out so well end in...in such mistrust?"

He leaned forward to retrieve the jacket for her, and his words stung her heart. "I was wrong to come at you as I did, but...there was no mistrust on my part, *Kind*."

Her impulsive lips brushed over the cool hand holding the jacket on her shoulder. Lifting her face, she felt herself slipping into his eyes with a welter of longing and pain; not difficult for him to read when her feelings so easily overflowed.

He started to move toward her, stopped himself, and then kissed her, a controlled kiss. Her heart did freeze.

"I have to go...and you, too, I'm sure...back to...to our respective lives. Thank you very much," she said with a wan smile, feeling inept and torn apart.

"For what?" he asked with puzzled eyes.

"For giving me so much...so much laughter...pleasure, in a thimbleful of time. Perhaps you'll forgive my...my failures and one day...one day..." She had tried to say they might be friends, but it seemed so unlikely that her lips quivered and she shrugged, slipping off his heavy jacket and handing it to him.

"No, wear it back. You can send it later."

"I like to feel the cold," she said, throwing it down and running for the mare.

She jumped on and slapped Cuca, but the little mare was already eager to get home, horse and rider flying across the field. She gave only one discreet glance over her shoulder. He was still sitting there staring after her.

As soon as she was out of his sight, she reined in Cuca and plodded along, dismal. It was over and done with now. The offended look in his eyes and the coolness of the kiss she had shamelessly forced from him floated all too clearly before her. The sun, however, was still shining and the earth turning, a few white stars of the coffee blossoms still opening wide, while her heart was closing, closing tight. Deep within her there lingered an inescapable longing to believe everything Steinlöwe had told her. If she were wrong what cruelty she had inflicted. Had Bartel intentionally done this evil thing? It no longer mattered after what she had said to Steinlöwe. There must be a semblance of truth in it; he had let her go with such

indifference. Esperanza was not worth that much trouble after all. Or perhaps he saw at last how foolish she was and was glad to be rid of her. And she was foolish. Who but a foolish person would declare desire and mistrust in the same tearful breath? Despite her self-abasement, she still possessed a stubborn determination to get over the approaching hurdles. She would strive for Aunt Cathline's skill and wisdom if it took her last ounce of strength; it would surely take the rest of her life.

Upon arriving home, she called Rodolfo and asked him to arrange for her to be taken through a coffee finca at a similar altitude. Any one of them but Steinlöwe's -- he was, she advised, too busy with his guest. She wanted a finca that would show her every phase of the business so that she would feel confident enough to get Esperanza back into production. Rodolfo immediately secured her a visit in two weeks time at a finca only an hour's drive away.

The following morning Kamille was feeling anxious. She was unable to settle down in her office and decided to cure herself with some brisk riding, choosing the lively bay gelding, Fuego, a horse which Carlos said needed a good workout.

"Is he fast?" she asked. "I want a really fast horse today, Carlos." One as anxious as I am, she thought.

"*Si muy rápido, fast,*" Carlos assured her.

"Take off the checkrein, please. Sorry, but I guess we

need to have a little talk about tack, Carlos. If my horses can't have their heads, I consider them poorly trained. No bearing reins, please."

"*Si, señorita,*" Carlos said, shaking his head.

"Now we're almost ready, I think." She walked around Fuego, checking the stirrup strap length, which she could readily determine without getting into the saddle, and then stopped and pressed her palm flat under his nose with a sugar cube left over from morning coffee.

"Are you a good boy? Are you a fast little old boy?" she whispered in his ear.

Fuego bucked a little when she got on, and she leaned way down and ran her fingers under the girth to see if he was playing any tricks.

"That's just fine, Fuego. I'm glad you're in such a hell-bent-for-leather mood, because so am I." She patted the gelding as he paddled and side-stepped around the courtyard. He snorted and reared up, and Kamille laughed. "So off we go," she said, dipping her backward reaching heels in and snapping the tips of the reins behind her as Fuego burst forward with exhilarating power.

Kamille had decided to try dispelling her anxiety by taking the same path down to the pine grove and then riding along the property line to an interesting meadow she had seen. It was ringed with eucalyptus trees, and she loved their aroma. This time she was wearing a fleece-lined cloth

jacket that had been Aunt Cathline's, and she had tied a red scarf at her neck for extra warmth.

Fuego was heading into the slipstream of his horizontal nose, but still she encouraged him to stretch out, giving him full head and the pressure of her heels. We're flying now, she thought, and indeed the pine grove was visible in no time. Her heart ached as she stared at the bent little pine where she had leaned the day before, but she clicked her tongue and urged Fuego around the grove. Yes, it was a good idea, she thought. It was a good idea to do this. I think I'm learning how to rise above old miseries at last.

The path she had seen earlier, and imagined taking one day to the eucalyptus-ringed meadow, wound between some narrow thorny places, and she slowed Fuego to a canter. They made it through and were soon galloping again, picking up speed. She heard a loud call. Someone yelling at her? She glanced up to her left, shocked to find the obtruding Steinlöwe riding through a sloping, young coffee field.

She urged Fuego forward, thinking she had enough distance to beat even that huge, high-powered stallion and get clean away and on to her own business. Steinlöwe was still yelling at her as she raced along the boundary line to the meadow. Startled to see his horse jump the coffee rows and tear down the slope after her, she slapped Fuego with her reins and yelled, "Get me out of here, boy!" Still, he was coming at her like a madman, and catching up. "Damn it,

Fuego!" she cried. "Move, horse!"

He was nearly alongside and then he was alongside, reaching down and spreading his fingers around her horse's reins right below the bit. Incredible! She was livid with anger, as he yanked the reins back and brought them both to a fairly rapid standstill. Seeing the wild fear in his eyes and the ashen color of his face, she was astonished.

"What on earth!"

"So, you have proven you are a very good rider," he said. "Let me show you something."

Still in possession of her reins, he led her forward along the path she had been so swiftly traversing, until they came to the area opening into the meadow. Just ahead, she saw some weathered boards lying flat across the trail. She turned to her captor with an irritated shrug.

"Dismount, please," he said, dropping to the ground and standing beside Fuego.

"Why?" She glanced at his jeans and rough work boots.

"Please get down off your horse, Kamille."

She swung herself off and followed him as he walked up to the flattened and half missing scaffolding. He kicked hard at an end of broken board, and it fell away into the dark area beneath the pile as he stood listening. Finally, they heard it hit the bottom with a splash.

"It is an old well shaft. Catalina always thought she would use it again and left it this way. You were headed

straight for it."

Kamille looked at him for a moment and then at the well shaft, and said softly, "Oh, lord."

"Damn it! I should have told you, but I had no idea you were going to race over here. You are always full of surprises, Kamille. Was it necessary to move your horse that fast?"

"I...I thought it was," Kamille answered.

"To get away from me."

"Thank you...thank you for--"

"Well, now you know where it is. One thing I will not have to worry about. Lucky I was here." He looked back the way they had come and up the slope. "I think I left my hat up there somewhere."

"I'm sorry...sorry," she said and felt tears she could not allow -- they were not for this but for so much else. Oh, I'm clever, she thought, really clever at dispelling all my problems.

She mounted Fuego, once again feeling inept and foolish and wondering what else there was to say.

"If I were you, I would either cover it securely or fence it and use it," he advised in a very business-like manner.

"Thank you. I'll look into the matter," she replied.

"Back to work," he said, swinging into his saddle.

"That is enough excitement for me today."

Kamille walked Fuego on into the meadow, thinking the aroma of her eucalyptus trees had been well paid for and she was going to sit there and inhale their fragrance. She glanced back at Steinlöwe as his powerful horse bounded up the hill. "You are a good rider! I will run you a fair race some day!" he called over his shoulder.

"Some day!" she called back and whispered, "When hell has penguins."

One early morning after two weeks of nonstop busyness, Kamille bathed quickly, putting on fresh, tan jodhpurs, a cool, white silk shirt, and her riding boots, for she was expecting to visit the fields of the finca Copía. Donning a lovely old Panama straw hat of Aunt Cathline's, she glanced in her mirror. The hat looked functional, lent a serious intent to her slight form, and suited her perfectly. "On with tradition," she instructed the country-girl face in the mirror with a hopeful smile.

Rodolfo greeted her in dark slacks and white shirt, himself carrying a black-banded, blond Panama straw hat. His boots were carefully shined and his beautiful white smile very much in evidence.

Miguel drove, gingerly handling Aunt Cathline's sturdy old Land Rover while Rodolfo sat in the back with Kamille and tried to initiate her into the world of coffee production.

"The region of coffee planted on a finca is known as a *cafetal*," Rodolfo began. "We will not talk about the nursery and shoot beds; these you will see. Let us say that you begin with a *caballería* of *cafetal* or one hundred eleven acres the first year. Each year you plant another *caballería*. During the third or fourth year, some of the older coffee trees will begin to flower...very beautiful and fragrant as you have seen."

"Yes, lovely white blossoms," she eagerly agreed.

"And later in the season these become the red berries called *cereza*. At the end of five or six years the trees are at their full bearing peak, but always the plants must be shaded so that they do not burn in the sun, shaded at first with corn, then perhaps with plantains, a plant which resembles the banana, or with taller trees which you have saved when clearing the land for the planting. There are several crops, and a crop can be gathered as soon as the rains stop. But there are interferences to be dealt with, the *grillos*, for instance, a plague of crickets which eat the berries. The best coffee grows between one thousand five hundred feet and three thousand five hundred feet -- as you would say -- best production at two thousand five hundred feet, with finer coffee in smaller amounts at higher altitudes such as the lower part of Esperanza produces. You will find when we come to finca Copía exactly what a *quintal* or one hundred pounds of coffee is worth on the market,

mucho dinero, as we say, but the *finquero* has costs and damages. Doña Catalina's pickers are always careful for her. They do not break the branches to make the picking easier."

Rodolfo explained that the Doña had always taken good care of her workers, given them land called *milpas* on which to grow their own corn, and paid them as fairly as she could without incurring the resentment of other *finqueros*.

"But after the berry is picked what then...what happens?" she asked with curiosity and growing enthusiasm.

"They are put into a water tank and the debris that is with them floats to the top while the good berries are siphoned from the bottom. These go to a hulling tank, then a fermenting tank, and finally they are spread on cement patios to dry in the sun, or sometimes machine dried. The fermenting stage causes a tough husk that is like parchment to crack in the sun. Then the beans are called *café en pergamino*, coffee in parchment. Some *finqueros* ship the beans to a mill at this stage; a few have their own mills. There the beans might be kiln-dried again. At last they are put into a machine which strips off the parchment. Then they are carefully sorted and ready for market.

"How much there is to learn," Kamille said. "I had no idea coffee went through so many stages before it reached my cup."

#

The finca Copía was spread beneath distant purple-shadowed mountains that sparkled with thinning waterfalls, these swelling to thundering white splendor in the rainy season. Much of the land was cleared and under cultivation. Blue and gold flower beds studded fresh-mown lawns which rolled toward the graceful, white hacienda. There were groves of fruit trees just beyond the row of palms which lined the south side of the broad avenue leading to the *finquero's* home. The elongated casa's wide roofs were slung low and tropical in design, with a fine portico and an airy loggia flanked on the north by a tennis court and pool.

The *administrador* came out to take them around as the owner had sent apologetic word that he was indisposed. They followed along to the *beneficiadero*, where the damp coffee was dried on cement and stored. There, Rodolfo introduced Kamille, his expressive hands adding supportive flourishes to his words. The administrador was a small, rosy-cheeked ladino who treated Kamille with great politeness, and who apparently knew Rodolfo well. He led them into the *cafetals* on horseback, taking Kamille, with careful explanation and Rodolfo's help, through the stages of coffee mentioned in her brief indoctrination on the ride to Copía. Her head was filled with new words, facts, and figures. She was pleased to feel the fatigue of useful accomplishment; it had come with much criss-crossing activity and a number of questions

that required laborious answers while standing often in the sun. Then the owner sent word that she and Rodolfo were invited to join him for refreshments, along with another visiting planter who marketed coffee with Copía.

They walked toward the sprawling casa where the others were talking on the wide veranda above. There, a generous assortment of cool refreshments and canapés was laid out on a long, white-clothed table.

Kamille was relieved to step between the columns of the portico and into the cool shade. But as she gazed from beneath her hat brim she saw a dark blond figure resting in a white wicker chair. The long, booted legs extended in a casual posture made her breath catch in her throat. It was Steinlöwe. At the end of the veranda was Ursula Bilder, laughing and talking with the owner's wife, a woman as small and dark as her husband was large and leonine. Steinlöwe had not yet discovered her presence, and she stopped behind a large column, taking a deep breath. There was no possible way that she could leave without making herself known, impolite, and possibly ridiculous. In the next moment, Rodolfo found her and led her forward, introducing her to the owner in a very polite and deferential manner. She removed her hat and held it delicately in front of her while she brushed back a few strands of hair. Then she held out her hand and offered a generous smile to Señor Juan Moreno, a big, silver-haired Spaniard.

"Well," he said, with warm laughter, "if I had known how agreeable my visitor was I would have done the squiring myself."

From the corner of her eye Kamille saw Steinlöwe straighten in his chair, and still she prolonged the inevitable, pretending that she had not seen him and continuing to smile and exchange amenities with Rodolfo and Señor Moreno.

"Come this way and meet my wife and Señora Bilder," Moreno said.

"Oh, but I've met Frau Bilder," Kamille informed him with a light, affable voice as he led her out to the end of the veranda.

When the introductions and polite small talk had finished, Rodolfo and Juan Moreno began speaking in Spanish while Frau Bilder was taking from her hostess a plant cutting "for Don Andar's garden," she said in her cheerful German accent, and with a conjugal smile for Steinlöwe.

Tiredness swept over Kamille, accompanied by a sudden rush of undesired pathos directed at herself. Glancing his way, she saw that Steinlöwe was draining his glass while eyeing her over the top of it. She smiled and nodded hello, carefully skirting his chair and walking to the far end near the portico, with her glass of icy guava juice and her hat gripped in nervous fingers. Placing her hat and juice on a round wicker table, she leaned against a column and stared

across the pool at the violet-shadowed mountains. Sprays of crimson bougainvillea framed her view, trailing down off the eaves. She touched a vivid cluster with her fingertips. The blooms swayed in a puff of breeze, giving off a hurting brilliance.

Without turning around, she knew precisely when it was that Steinlöwe approached and sat in a nearby chair. She gave one quick glance. He was quiet, sipping a fresh gin and tonic and watching her. She could feel a growing force, a tension charging the air. Nothing presented itself in the way of conversation. Putting her head back against a column, she took a few deep breaths until she was able to slow her racing pulse. The mountains floating beyond the lush grounds beckoned with a soothing purple mist, and the late afternoon breezes carried the heady scent of garden flowers. Her shoulders were angled away from Steinlöwe and, despite all her attempts at peace, she began to feel as if something were hammering at her back. Twisting around suddenly, she stared straight into his unwavering eyes. They reflected the Spanish gold setting sun, eyes fixed and calculating as a jaguar waiting in the bush. His earlier surprise had been recast in an amused intimacy.

"*Kind.*" The German word spoken so softly it must have been meant only for himself. She almost didn't hear it, or heard it several seconds after it was uttered, but the familiar implications of the echoing word scalded her brain.

"So now you have mastered coffee," he said in that astonishing, ironic voice of perfect but accented English.

"Fascinating," she offered with a shy intonation she hardly recognized. "I'll never again drink coffee in the same way."

"And when it is no longer fascinating what will you do?"

"Everywhere I look...every day I see thousands of things I want to know about...to do...I..." She stopped herself, feverish, realizing that she was feeding upon the bright flame of his presence. If he were to go, she would again feel only tired and drained. This clear realization disappointed and saddened her. More than anything she wanted the strength to fire her own dreams. But it was too soon. Her short encounter with him had somehow made him closer to her than any man had ever been, an intuitive intimacy that had given them a certain possession of each other. She felt a great longing to draw near him, to know him, to know everything -- an unending endeavor, but it was accompanied by the inescapable fear of becoming a victim. She picked up her hat from the table near his chair.

"Have you decided what to do about the well?" he asked.

"I'm going to fence it and use it."

"Good."

"You'll be going home soon," she remarked.

"Tomorrow."

"Then I probably won't see you or Frau Bilder again for some time. I hope..." She struggled briefly for something impersonal, conventional to say. "that you'll have a pleasant Christmas."

"Christmas?" He laughed, standing up and draining his glass. "In Guatemala we celebrate it two months from now."

"Yes." She laughed at herself. "Merry Christmas," she said and started to move away. But the uninhibited words of his persevering voice paralyzed her body.

"A while ago, as I was watching you, I was thinking not of the way we made love together -- I can hardly stand to think of that -- but of that first night when I put you to bed in my casa so tired and drunk."

Kamille looked around, startled, trying to see if anyone had heard. He didn't seem to care at all, and her feet were frozen to the tiles as he went on.

"I was thinking of the way you nuzzled against my jacket with such trust and spoke rather childishly to me, as if you had known me a long time. It took all of my strength then to leave you. My God, if you were still like that--"

"Please!" Kamille begged. "Don't...don't. Oh, I wish... If only none of it had happened."

She turned away, attempting a hurried retreat, but he was across the floor in two strides and blocking her exit.

"You do not mean that...Kamille?"

"Let me by. How can you...with Ursula here?"

She tried to move away, but he reached out and took her arm, and she immediately felt her divided emotions in a wild tug of war. The wretched ambivalence was unbearable, tearing asunder a heart beating with fearful anger and desire.

"For heaven's sake! They'll hear you...see you," she cried in a harsh whisper.

"No, they have gone inside. Listen to me, Kamille, if you do not...don't want to draw attention to us. You have known about Ursula from the beginning, and yet you let me make love to you...let me--"

"Yes!...yes. I know it. I know. I didn't realize... I thought..." Thought that he had really cared for her and not the land, not Esperanza, she wanted to say but couldn't bring herself to say it yet one more time.

"Maybe I should be accusing you of something less than honest, instead of the other way around. Why...why did you tell me how much you wanted me?"

"I...I couldn't help myself," she heard her oddly unfamiliar voice concede.

"And neither could I...neither *can* I."

"But you only...and Ursula--"

"Listen please. We are going to keep running into each other and we need to get this settled. What happened to us was unforeseen."

"Was it?"

"Yes! Unforeseen!" He snatched away her hat and

tossed it back on the table, then held her arms and looked into her eyes with an intense determination. "Unforeseen. But a rare thing and so...so unbelievably good...and now so bad for us because we are in love...*in love*, my little *Nárrin*...little fool...and yet you will not...you won't let me absolve myself. Of course, it is not Ursula who drives you from me at all, is it? Is it?"

"No...no. Please, we shouldn't," she implored, her eyes searching for onlookers who had not yet appeared. "Not here, please."

"Then where? Nowhere! Because I am under suspicion."

He let her go, and, to her dismay, she instantly felt a sinking rejection. Only his pained eyes and the mouth she had so quickly come to love held onto her. Her knees were weak, her body too unsteady to turn away, even though she knew that he would read the disappointment, the indecision on her face, for this close she could hide nothing.

He studied her only a second longer, then grasped her hand, pulling her into a narrow and shady alcove that hid them from view.

Stumbling a little, she found herself tangled in the large-flowered branches of a potted hibiscus. He half lifted, half dragged her from the sprays of florid blooms and held her against him. A startled cry escaped her open mouth, not a word but more the yelp of a cornered animal.

"Kiss me. You want to."

"It changes nothing," she said in as level a voice as she could force from her dry throat.

"Do it anyway...because we both want it so badly."

"I have to leave!" she cried with her hands against his chest and her heart crashing.

"For God's sake, let go! Let go of the lies you try so hard to believe, Kamille."

He held her face in his hands and kissed her forehead then her mouth, hard. Her eyes were closed.

"Do not destroy this thing we will never find again... Neither of us...ever again. Look at me! I ask you to look at me."

She opened her eyes, tilted her face back and looked, knowing what he would see, knowing what she would do, standing on her toes, far too eager, wanting to believe, letting go of everything but what she felt now in this isolated moment.

"Poor *Kind*. You say one thing and feel another."

He lowered his head, his mouth taunting, familiar and yet unfamiliar, so promising of reward but leaving the full response to her, making her confess the truth in that treacherous way. And she did fully respond, her small cry of pleasure the only confession he would need. Hers were the arms that first reached out, her touch the one that first grew insistent, holding herself to him with a punishing hunger, lost in the strength, the scent, the sheer

physical presence of his body. She felt his anger go.

His restless hands moved up her back, finding and tugging at her adored braid. "*Liebling...I have missed you so...missed you. Schöne Kamille, my sweet...sweet Kind.*" Her starved senses fed on his words, digesting them as fact.

At last, Ursula's distant laugh entered her stolen consciousness, her ears until that invasive moment tuned only to his caressing voice. But Ursula's commanding laughter broke through with a secure, complacent ripple of sound, announcing her purity of intent, her unfettered claim to Steinlöwe; it was an open declaration far removed from the secretive, wild passion of Kamille's vacillating heart.

Forcing herself away from him with an aching wrench of contrary feeling, she returned to earth, pressing her unstable body against the alcove wall.

"Like thieves," she whispered with tears in her eyes. The words she had spoken earlier repeated in her head: *I couldn't help myself. I couldn't help myself.* It was no excuse whatever, merely the truth.

Her indulged lips were throbbing. With one hand over her mouth, she sprang away and heard the immediate protest of his voice, hard cries that rang with finality.

"No, wait! *Kind!* Please! Let me--"

She reached for her hat and ran, then tried to slow her rushing feet, heading off the veranda where Rodolfo had come looking for her. He caught sight of her and started toward

her with attentive solicitude. They walked over to the Morenos just as Ursula was leaving them to find Steinlöwe. Kamille thanked them for their kindness with earnest handclasps and said good-bye, trying not to sound too eager to be off.

As they departed Kamille thought she heard the loud, jovial voice of Señor Moreno saying something about her and Rodolfo in Spanish to his guests. She looked at Rodolfo to see if he had heard, but he merely flashed his melting white smile as he opened the door of the Land Rover and stood waiting for her.

IV

Rodolfo had been delegated more authority to run the business of Esperanza than Aunt Cathline had ever given him, but Kamille had no compunction in doing this. She wanted the finca running, and running smoothly, and was not fool enough to think she could do it alone. Rodolfo, who took pride in his excellent English, was repeatedly asked to speak to her in Spanish, and her knowledge of the language was progressing with increasing competence. Don Tomás and his son were regularly invited to supper where Kamille struggled to converse with them in the mellifluous language of Guatemala, a language which, she observed, still held the manners and some of the grandeur of the Spanish crown.

In the mornings, after a brisk walk to the top of the

hill and back or an occasional horseback ride, Kamille could be found at her mahogany desk in Aunt Cathline's rather modest but pleasant, cedar-fragrant office in the school. There she sorted through the mail, looked at textbooks, and talked and drank coffee with the teachers and occasionally the parents. They would come to sit and smoke in silence, searching her face with an open curiosity that amused her.

Many of the Indians came from a nearby area around the town of *Todos Santos Cuchumatán*; it was high at the rising end of this enchanted valley so pristine and well hidden in the palm of the Cuchumatanes Mountains. Long isolated, these Mam Indians had kept their old ways, their idols, their prayer rituals, and the traditional two hundred and sixty-day religious calendar. The people of Todos Santos still clung with pride to their native dress, the colors and clever patterns so pleasurable to Kamille that she looked forward to seeing them in her office every day. She worried about the children losing sight of their unique culture, just as her Aunt Cathline had. Their customs were therefore revered in lively classroom discussions and brief plays, which Kamille labored over in Spanish; these were performed on special days when some of the parents could attend.

She had learned that the little invalid boy, Tzuli, had only a grandmother, but the old woman did speak limited English, for she wove textiles on her hip loom to sell in the marketplace, on occasion to English speaking tourists.

Kamille went to the market in Huehuetenango to speak with her, and found her sitting on a burlap sack spinning threads beside her pile of textiles. Don Tomás had come along and explained in Spanish what Kamille proposed; essentially that if they could find the money Tzuli's legs could be repaired well enough to make him self-sufficient on his feet.

"Tell her I have written to the doctor; now all we need is the money, and I have begun searching for that, too."

Where would they ever find such money, the old woman wanted to know. Tipping back her black felt bowler and squinting into the sun, she waved her hand in despair, certain that such a feat would never be accomplished.

"You must have faith...hope...esperanza," Kamille said. "We will do this thing somehow."

The grandmother wiped her gnarled hands over her weathered face and dropped them into the folds of her skirt, looking at Kamille with intense, dark eyes. "Tzuli is bueno," she said, "*Muy inteligente*."

"I know that he is very intelligent," Kamille readily agreed, for she had found that the boy learned very fast.

"I...hope," the grandmother said, "Esperanza."

Kamille smiled and patted the old woman's shoulder. She now felt the weight of this hope as a force that would compel her to strive until she had seen Tzuli walk. After this visit to the grandmother, she increased her research and contacted several more charitable foundations, urging

them to send donations, and anxiously awaiting tardy replies.

#

As matters fell into a more rhythmic pattern, Kamille ventured out more often into the small towns and villages, watching the Indians and listening to Rodolfo's informative histories of myths, gods, and rituals. The Indians of her expanding community fascinated her.

The Mam were taller than other Indians, handsome, proud, and extremely courteous. They preferred to speak in soft voices, as loudness was considered vulgar. The young women's neat, raven-black hair was often braided with colorful ribbons, and above their full skirts they wore exquisite, embroidered blouses called *huipiles* of a style centuries old. The men's heavy cotton shirts were hand-woven and sported large red fluttering collars. Black woolen breeches covered long pants woven with wide red and white stripes. To this costume might be added, in the coolness of morning or evening, a black cloak, and upon their heads they tied a red bandanna and capped it with a leather-belted straw hat. Their enduring sandals were the traditional Indian footwear that one might find engraved, little changed, on a thousand-year-old Mayan temple or stone piece. Known as *caites*, the sturdy thonged sandals, with raised leather backs to protect the heel, carried these

constant walkers over the most rugged mountain trails. It was a great joy to see a Mam in native dress walk quietly into her office and sit down, or to pass a traveler, tall and silent, on the roads leading through the valley. They walked alone with dignity, carrying small bundles or large burdens, or sometimes beside their loaded burros.

Kamille was anticipating the pageantry of All Saints' Day on the first of November when she planned to attend a storied festival in Todos Santos. Learning of the old and colorful celebrations, which included a horseback marathon and the traditional Dance of the Conquest, she had made Rodolfo promise to take her there. He was only too happy to comply, and on the appointed day Kamille set off with her enthusiastic manager.

To reach Todos Santos it was necessary to climb over a craggy mountain and drop back into its cradled valley. Rodolfo was driving the Land Rover, and Kamille sat beside him, full of questions, her eyes darting everywhere. With gears grinding, they zigzagged high into the clouds above the terraced hillsides of irrigated vegetable plots, rattling over a twisting dirt road that from a distance appeared etched in the precipitous flank of the mountain like a fragile knife scratch. Passing over the summit, they crossed a barren plateau, hoary white with frost, and carefully descended into a fairy tale valley. A low, sun-shagged cloud rose up, coiling over stone corrals, grazing

sheep, rocky outcroppings, and gnarled, weather-choked little oak trees. Soon a rancho appeared, then several. Their roofs were not the red-tiled roofs of the ranchos below but instead were made of spruce from trees which grew nearly as tall as those of Esperanza. The wild, dark stands of pine, spruce, and cypress lent a mysterious air to this remote highland valley with its rustling patches of bent and drying cornstalks. Kamille felt as if they were racing the morning sun across the dew-sprinkled land, and very soon she could smell the resinous aroma of copal incense used in Indian ceremonies. It was a captivating and pungent odor like no other, enhancing the rough mystery of this time and place. The strong essence of copal signaled their entry into the lively little town of Todos Santos, which, aside from festival and tamer market days, might have been as empty and lifeless as the frosty, uninhabited plain above.

A magical throb of exotic sounds filled her ears the moment she alighted from the Rover, and she stood by the car enthralled, listening to the strange warbling notes that were like bird calls echoing in a wood.

"Oh...fantastic! What are those sounds, Don Rodolfo?"

"Come," Rodolfo said. Delighted with her interest, he was in a great hurry to lead her to the place of the music makers.

"I see...a flute, sweet and haunting as an oboe."

"It is called a *chirimía*."

"And what is that, a sort of drum?" she shouted above the wild cacophony, pointing to a hollowed-out, sealed log with slits on top being struck with a rubber-tipped stick.

"A *tun*; it sounds two notes. And there is the instrument that makes the rattling noise, the *chinchines*."

"Wonderful! Wonderful!" she cried, excited blood flushing her cheeks. "Oh, a marimba -- I've played one. And I think I recognize that little oblong object with holes. Yes, he's blowing on an ocarina."

"Si, si!" Rodolfo called with happy affirmation, for Kamille's high spirit was quite infectious.

"Oh, this music...this music!" she said with laughter, "It would melt the stoniest countenance."

The burning mountain sun had chased away the fog by the time they had strolled through the town, with the ceaseless music always throbbing in their ears and the sweet blue smoke of copal incense filling the air as potently as an enticing aphrodisiac.

Kamille had dropped her jacket in the Rover and was wearing only an embroidered, white huipil, which Ixil had given her as an arrival gift, and a red, hand-woven skirt bound with a multi-colored twisted sash. Her bare feet were strapped in Mayan sandals of soft leather and she carried a broad-rimmed straw hat which Rodolfo now cautioned her to put on against the unmerciful highland sun. As he did so he took the hat from her hand and set it gently on her head,

his black eyes sparkling with the daring of an act that seemed so natural in the rarefied atmosphere.

They walked through the crowded marketplace, passing among the appetizing aromas of the food vendors. More people were arriving by the hour, including a number of noisy, camera-happy tourists. Rodolfo bought her a hot *chuchito* which was made of corn dough stuffed with spicy meat and wrapped in a corn husk.

"Mmm, I like it. *Comida típica*," she said, pulling away the corn husk. She blinked with surprise as, in a fleeting moment, her memory brought forth the sound of Steinlöwe's mellow voice pronouncing those Spanish words.

"Native food is very good. Another for you?"

"No, *gracias*. I'd better not," she said with softened voice. "A little at a time."

Just outside the marketplace in a narrow avenue, Kamille spotted a big green Mercedes sedan, sedately waiting. It was unmistakably Steinlöwe's. Of course, the curious Frau Bilder would be hot on the trail of a fiesta such as this one. No matter. With the crowds and all the confusion, they might easily escape meeting, and even if they did, Kamille planned to make the encounter brief as possible. Nothing was going to spoil this long-awaited day.

They walked to the outskirts of town where the horseback marathon was already going on. Kamille was startled to see Stewart Bartel whom she had supposed was in

Guatemala City. He was with his Indian girl, Mata, and a thin ladino to whom he was handing *quetzales*, Guatemalan paper money equivalent to the American dollar. He appeared to be placing bets on the marathon riders. Being already tipsy, his expression was one of distracted paralysis cast in the bilious red of the inveterate drinker. She turned away. Another person to avoid.

The purpose of the marathon was a dubious one, Kamille decided, but it certainly produced some humorous, and on occasion injurious results. The rider running the course had to take a drink of the powerful *aguardiente* each time he completed a turn. The man who stayed on his horse the longest was the winner. Rodolfo warned her that this questionable sport would very likely go on all night. Sometimes the rider was so drunk that he could not move upon falling from his horse. She was disturbed to see that no one was in any hurry to pull the fallen men from the path of trampling hooves. She watched with guilty consternation, sometimes laughing, sometimes horrified and sad at this brutal self-infliction for glory. The rider is doing this cruelty to himself, she thought, but doing it with such a childish joy and gusto.

After she had seen enough, they went to see the Dance of the Conquerors. This spirited revel Kamille found more to her liking. Rodolfo explained that the dance teams took their honored positions very seriously and invested what was

for them a great deal of money for rented costumes of ingenious design. The devoted participants also spent a fair amount of time rehearsing for this grand event.

The performers who played the conquerors donned shiny, pink masks with the rosy cheeks, blond sisal hair, and large noses of fair Spanish lords. They wore plumed velvet hats and were swathed in costume trappings from head to toe so that none of their brown skin would show. Dancing furiously in alien, tight-fitting boots, always the Conquistadores triumphed over the Indians. The dancing would also go on long into the night with the dance teams taking stimulants and aguardiente to keep them going. The wild music was so inspiriting that it soon spread to the onlookers who had begun to dance around the edges of the performance and wherever there were spaces on the narrow streets.

Kamille leaned against a mason wall in the shadows, intent on taking everything in while herself remaining unnoticed. Fully engrossed, her keen senses fine-tuned every stimulus: the haunting music, the pungent aromas, the crisp air and light, the frenzied movement with flashes of brilliant color, and the little personal dramas going on all around her. She had just congratulated herself on having experienced the true ambiance of a Guatemalan festival when she felt a tug on her arm and was suddenly face to face with a reeling Stewart Bartel.

"I say, if the little heiress hasn't gone native," he

intoned in a thick British accent muddled by liquor. "You do look...striking...yes, very stunning. Can you dance? Let's see if you can dance, luv."

While she made a discreet attempt to resist, Bartel pulled her rigid body along behind him into a crowd of whirling dancers, many of them also exhibiting the effects of the very wicked aguardiente. She grimaced when she saw the crude whiskey flask sticking out of Bartel's back pocket. Rodolfo had gone to find her some juice, and looking back she saw him coming through the crowd. Then she was jerked away into the rowdy melee.

"Stewart, I don't want to dance. Stop it!" she said in a shouting voice which he pretended he couldn't hear. She tried to free herself and was amazed to see how strong he was in his besotted state. He whirled her round and round, never once letting go long enough for her to break free.

"Please let go. I'm getting dizzy. Stop! Stop it!"

"Dance!" he ordered. "Dance! Dance! Pay the piper."

Rodolfo stepped up and tried in his polite manner to intervene.

"Remove yourself, employee!" Bartel shouted, sneering at him. "Out of the way or you're sacked!" he yelled, dancing off with Kamille.

She caught a glimpse of Rodolfo looking very perplexed as to what his next move should be, but she could think no more about it. Bartel was spinning her around faster and

faster, and she was beginning to stumble with dizziness. His reddened eyes had a gleeful, sadistic leer, and his alcoholic breath made her head pitch in nausea as he pulled her against him.

"Let go of me! You let go!" Kamille screamed. She had forgotten altogether her attempt to remain discreet.

As her head was jerked back, she saw the crook of an arm come around Bartel's neck from behind; in an instant, his grip relaxed. Clutching at his throat, he was dragged backwards as he struggled on. In a flurry of movement, he was thrown to the ground with such force that he lay on his back for a moment without moving. Steinlöwe stood over him growling something in Spanish which Kamille could not make out but which Bartel apparently understood very well. His face went a livid crimson as he wobbled to his knees and raised a fist over his head. "Damn Nazi...Nazi murderer!" he rambled on in an enraged voice. Fumbling about, he stood up and reeled back to take a swing, but Steinlöwe pushed him out of his way and turned toward Kamille. Still intent on having at his adversary, Bartel pulled the whiskey bottle from his pocket and raised it in the air.

"Stop it! Stop it!" Kamille cried out, her head still reeling with dizziness. She felt a tingling in her scalp and the ground turned beneath her as she went down on one knee in a futile attempt to shake off the dizziness. Shoving Bartel aside, Steinlöwe caught her and steadied her.

Then, seeing her face, he lifted her up above the spinning ground and carried her away from the crowd of staring eyes.

Her head rolled against his shirt, and she saw the low, red-gold sun falling at an odd angle toward the earth. The clamor and push of the throng grew distant as he walked to the little town's edge, out to an old stone resting place in a shadowed grove of cypress. He put her down on the bench, holding his arm under her head which was angled back, for in all the furious activity she had developed a nosebleed. He pressed his handkerchief over her nose, holding it there for a few minutes then folding it away but continuing to hold her head at a safe angle.

"Merry Christmas, *Kind*," he said, speaking for the first time. "I did not approve of your dancing partner."

Her attempted laughter surprised her.

"Hold still. Do not...don't laugh."

"Sadly...you've told me this before."

"Well, do not laugh very much...until it stops. Altitude will sometimes do this with too much activity."

He held her head back with a calm patience, staring down at her eyes for endless silent minutes, as though time were of no importance whatever. His head was framed by the early evening sapphire sky, and she saw that now his eyes had a certain amount of blue in them. His long fingers slid through her tousled hair. Without taking his eyes from hers, he lowered his head by degrees until his mouth touched

her lips. This warm arousal was very soon converted into a deep, hungry kiss, lasting until she gasped with a need to draw breath through her mouth.

"Where is...Frau Bilder," she asked between breaths.

"Sweet *Kind*," he said. "Do you not ever think of me?"

Closing her eyes, she muttered half to herself, "It isn't me you want."

His fingers tightened in her hair. "Isn't it? Are you trying to ruin my thoughts? Your powers are elsewhere."

"It's you who...Oh, I end up this way whenever I get near you. Then I have to flay myself mentally with irons for it."

"Ah, *Lehrerin*, you are dramatic. Did you perhaps teach drama? At the most serious of times you make me laugh."

"I think it's one thing you actually liked about me."

"One of many things I love about you. Present tense."

"It's been a strange courtship," she said with an attempt at humorous sarcasm.

"I have tried to stay away from you," he explained, kissing her lips separately because they were parted so that she could breathe through her mouth.

"It doesn't seem that way," she answered when she had a chance to speak.

He kissed her several more times, touching his tongue against hers with a devastating effect. "Mmm, *dulce*," he muttered. "Have you been eating cinnamon candy?"

"If you keep doing that you may get everything you want," she said from her helpless position.

"Please stop it!" he demanded. "That is precisely the reason I am forced to leave you alone."

"Then do. May I sit up now?"

"Try it."

She eased herself up. "I think...I think it's all right. Oh, here comes Rodolfo with Frau Bilder. How very beautiful she is...as usual. Will you marry her?"

"Damn it, you are tactless. Do you want me to?"

"Isn't she perfect for you?"

"I prefer the imperfect: you." He grinned. "And look at Rodolfo, my little peasant. He is in love with you."

"Ridiculous."

"Are you blind, *Kind*?"

She studied the anxious-faced Rodolfo as he hurried forward and bent over her. Her confusion was observed by Steinlöwe, now smiling at his accuracy. Her face flushed with the unwanted revelation.

"Andar, Liebling, you have blood on your shirt!" Frau Bilder exclaimed as she handed him his jacket.

"It has come from this small, upturned nose," he said, laughing as he put his hand under Kamille's chin and tilted her head back, thumbing a spot of blood from her nostril.

"Señorita Penine!" Rodolfo agonized.

"I'm all right, perfectly all right," she insisted with

a light-hearted manner. "Just a little nosebleed. Herr Steinlöwe has been very kind to this dizzy victim of a drunken fool. So sorry about your shirt," she added.

"You must be careful with Bartel," Steinlöwe warned. "He is in a vindictive mood."

"As soon as I find him sober, I intend to have a serious talk with him...very serious. Some things will be resolved," Kamille assured everyone. "I was very angry to see him treat you so badly, Don Rodolfo."

"I understand aguardiente, Señorita Penine. Do not concern yourself," Rodolfo replied.

"Despite this craziness, I've had a wonderful day," Kamille announced, smiling at the worried Rodolfo with assurance.

Glancing at Steinlöwe, she felt her face go crimson. He had flung his jacket over his shoulder, holding it by his thumb and offering her an intimate smile as he spread his fingers over the blood on his shirt. She tried to tell him with her eyes that he was being offensive, naughty was the proper word, connoting a gleeful, childlike quality which she had somehow elicited from this often aloof Saxon. He would have her believe that she was in unwitting possession of a singular power resembling witchcraft. As he winked at her and continued to smile, she remembered his mouth on her. Her wrists began to ache. She had to look away, far more convinced that all the sorcery was his.

#

"All right, I was drunk and rowdy and disgusting," Stewart Bartel admitted. His frustration bordered on anger. He was pacing up and down in his long, white studio in the pear orchard beyond the outbuildings of Esperanza. "I apologize to you," he went on, "but I'll never--"

Kamille did not let him finish. She knew that there was little hope of inducing him to apologize to anyone else for his conduct. In the wait for his return from another of his flights to the city, her anger, augmented by daily contemplation, had been stored up. "If you think I'm going to put up with constant threats from you on your drunken binges... If you think you can ever again treat me the way you did in Todos Santos, then you don't know Kamille Penine," she informed him "Any more alcoholic stunts like that and you can pack your bags. After the way you acted, I feel no remorse at...at throwing you out."

"Just a minute, my dear. You cannot waltz into my studio and--"

"I can and will! I don't care for your...your bigoted opinions. I'm already familiar with them. When I heard you were living here, I was prepared to...to meet a human being, and I was prepared to--"

"I doubt that, not after Steinlöwe filled your head with lies."

"He spoke nothing but the truth. He doesn't--"

"Steinlöwe! Steinlöwe! What is this? Can't you see what he is? My God, you aren't falling in love with that bloody bastard? Look, girl, he wants Esperanza. If Cathline were alive today she would say the same thing. I don't care what you think I am. Creative people are often neurotic...insecure...alcoholic, besieged by devils... Half the time I can't make any sense out of who I am and what I do. But in spite of that, you must believe I am right in this: Steinlöwe did not get to be a rich German land baron in Guatemala by *falling in love* with little schoolteachers from North America."

"You hate him because he's strong...self-assured and successful. That's why you can't stand his trying to help."

"To help!" Bartel emitted a wild laugh. "To help himself, you mean. Ah, you are blind...blind! Is it already too late? Forgive me. I've come at you all wrong."

She stepped back unnerved, for Bartel, clad in blue jeans and paint-smearred sweatshirt, had thrown himself down on his knees before her, and there were tears in his eyes.

"Get up, Stewart. Please get up. This is just a device of yours to make me feel sorry."

"Yes, feel sorry...feel sorry for me," he implored. "Let us be friends. Let us get along." He kissed her hand, with his unkempt hair falling over his eyes. "I'll take you around...show you wonderful things...orchids...I know where there are magnificent specimens...and monkeys, butterflies,

giant ferns...parrots, jeweled toucans...splendid ruins... Please come with me. It's time for me to go out and work again, to be recharged. I'm wasting in this rotten funk. All this business with Cathline -- the unknown quantity, Kamille Penine -- has been horrid. But you've turned out kind, understanding. You can see how I might have been worried...insecure. All I have is my work and a terrible weakness of the flesh. You could be good...so good for me. No, no, don't look at me that way. I mean as a friend, only as a friend. Please."

"I'm sorry, Stewart. You know I have really heavy responsibilities with the school and the coffee. How would it look to the others if I just went off into the jungle to watch you paint? Of course, I want to see it all. I'll get to it later, when I feel more secure about the school. So many of the children need--"

"Nonsense, the school runs itself, and what do you know about this finca anyway? Your lovesick lapdog Rodolfo is already doing a bloody good job of it."

"Just where do you think you'll get talking like that? You can't even pretend to have compassion. You're terrible, Stewart. You don't care about anyone but yourself."

"No, look, I didn't mean it. I'm full of anger. I'm bitter now. My life hasn't gone so well. I can still learn to be human. You're a good influence. Give me a chance. Help me. Please," he begged, putting his arms around

Kamille and shedding a few small tears upon her skirt.

Even though she started to draw back in disgust, she also felt immense pity. Here was a wretched body wracked with misery over a pinched little soul that might never expand, never escape and fly. It was truly sad. Lifting her hand to touch the disheveled head, she pondered for a moment and let the hand fall. It had occurred to her that Bartel was of such a divided personality that in the next hour, or surely by tomorrow, he would hate her for having witnessed this groveling immersion in self-pity.

Bartel sighed and stood up, looking around him with uncertainty. He turned and walked with awkward steps out the door and down the orchard row, never looking back.

Oh, the hopelessness of it, Kamille mused as she ambled back to the casa. Had she done any good at all? No, that kind of censure was useless. It was too late for mere angry words. She was certain that Stewart Bartel would never change without some terrible and unlikely cataclysm to turn him around. Nothing had really been resolved. The more she learned about him the more he would hate her. She already knew too much. He was in danger of falling so deeply into dissipation that he would never right himself, much less lift a brush. How could an artist with such power of vision not see the black road he painted with his wayward life?

#

Entering the small cozy library near her bedroom,

Kamille stared at the portrait Bartel had done of Aunt Cathline. Steinlöwe was right. It was good. There, hung a noble-faced old woman with a coiled braid of silver hair and amazing blue eyes; they danced, they winked, they sparkled with life and vitality, the same fervent eyes that Kamille remembered so well from her childhood. She studied the long, straight nose, high cheekbones, full, almost playful mouth, and the graceful fingers that had fluttered so ardently over her mother's piano. Those busy, worn hands were resting for a moment, clutching a little book as though holding a treasured companion at the end of day.

"Aunt Cathline, I wish you could give me some magic formula, a few simple words that would snap everything up into your fine old rhythm," she whispered. She heard a soft rustle and lifted her head to find the dark eyes of Ixil watching her through the open door. Ixil hurried away.

The Mam were very superstitious and did not like to have themselves imprisoned in photographs or portraits, fearing that evil could then be done to them. She wondered what this wizened little woman, still very much entrenched in the old ways, would make of talking to a portrait. Searching the rooms, she finally wandered into the courtyard where Ixil had taken herself with her water pitcher. There, Ixil at first pretended thorough absorption in the watering of a yellow rose. At last, she looked up with a question smoldering in her frank eyes, watching as Kamille offered an

encouraging smile and dropped down upon a bench under the single, tall cypress enclosed within the garden.

Setting aside her pitcher, Ixil smoothed her hands over her woven, navy skirt. "You talk to the Doña," she said with cautious voice. "What does she say?"

"Oh, Ixil, I wish the Doña could tell me so many things, but it's only a painting and can't help me."

"You go to the *brujo*, the prayersayer," Ixil advised. "He tell you what the Doña say."

"But I thought that *brujos* were almost non-existent, *brujos* all gone, no more, Ixil." Kamille spread her hands.

"Fah!" Ixil said, laughing and waving her arm to indicate what nonsense this was. "Many *brujos*...many. I know. I take you."

A thrilled anticipation came over her, the possibility that with the help of Ixil her curiosity might finally be satisfied. In the course of her discussions with Rodolfo and Don Tomás, she had learned of the ancient office of the prayersayer, keeper of the sacred bundle, a small pouch containing seeds and rock crystals which the *brujo* threw out upon a table and arranged according to certain days of the Mayan calendar. The *brujo* had been specially schooled and ordained to read the messages of the sacred bundle and to foretell events, heal disorders, or bring news of dead relatives. Rodolfo and Don Tomás had made light of this, perhaps fearing they would be thought backward. Still, they

told her that some *brujos* were said to be sorcerers who would do evil for their patrons.

"Ixil, I would love to go," Kamille said with a quick enthusiasm.

"Tomorrow day after," Ixil replied, folding her arms with a new stance of importance. "I fix."

#

A noisy rooster crowed. Kamille opened her eyes and stretched, remembering then the promised adventure of the morning. She slipped from her bed and stood before the small fire Ixil had set burning on her fireplace grate, just enough fire to warm her while she hurried into her clothes. She put on her long Indian skirt, huipil, and sandals, then drank the steaming black coffee Ixil had brought to her tray table along with a round slice of warm banana bread. She bit into the sweet bread, holding it while she pulled aside the curtain and looked out at the fog and the ground white with dew. Somewhere above in the eastern sky the sun was burrowing through to open up her dazzling world.

At the back gates, where the path leading into the hills began, Kamille waited while Ixil stepped toward her bearing a large red *perraje* which she had insisted would be needed. Flinging it over her shoulders, Kamille was soon glad for the thick shawl's warmth. She recalled how Steinlöwe had wrapped her in his jacket, his concerned voice

scolding her for coming away without a coat. Her divided heart leapt.

They set off across the valley and up one of the many little goat-like trails which the Indians regularly used to reach their ranchos and corn fields. A Mam passed them with a silent nod. He was traveling light with only a half-stuffed shoulder bag, and his dark eyes roved with interest over the full basket which Ixil carried on her head. The basket rode with graceful balance atop a thick, flat pad of cloth called a *tzute*. Higher and higher they climbed, still unable to see the fog-shrouded valley below. At last they came to a little stone cabin set off the trail beside a crag of rocks and stunted pines. Near the cabin was an old rock steam bath, a tradition as old as the Maya culture.

"What are you bringing, Ixil?" Kamille asked, curious because Ixil had revealed nothing about her load.

"Eight new corns and aguardiente."

"Aguardiente! But the brujo shouldn't drink it, should he?"

"Maybe he not drink now, but is *bueno*. Good thing. Aguardiente he like best. He tell you good things."

Near the cabin door, a plump woman knelt grinding corn on her flat stone. When she saw them approaching she stood up and hurried inside. A thin man stepped out, followed by the woman. He wore the Mam costume with a red bandanna tied under his straw hat. The woman darted away to lean against

the cabin's rough exterior, crossing her arms and staring at them without expression.

"This Pap Ixtlan," Ixil said, touching Kamille's arm with her fingertips. "My brujo. This Señorita Kamilla Penine. You give her the words of the seeds, Pap Ixtlan."

The old man pulled off his hat and scratched his white head while looking Kamille over from head to toe. He asked Ixil to repeat her name. Then he saw that Ixil was bending over her basket, and his solemn face broke into a hundred lines of happiness. Ixil was unwrapping the aguardiente.

"Viene," he directed Kamille, motioning her into his cabin with a lively step. He pulled a rough bench up to the hand-hewn table where they would sit as he cast the sacred bundle over a handsomely woven cloth.

Ixil stayed outside, talking with the old man's woman. Kamille could hear their soft voices and laughter.

Pap Ixtlan tossed out the seeds mingled with a few shining pebbles and studied them, arranging them as he took note of their positions. He began chanting over and over in Mam; calling to the souls in the netherworld or praising the animal spirits, Kamille supposed. The air smelled of dust, wood smoke, and copal incense, sweet, resinous, and mysterious.

Letting her eyes search the room, she saw that it was almost bare of furnishings. There were drying corn husks hanging from the walls, a corn husk bed, a few stones in the

corner for wood fires, a clay jug, a bowl, a pot, a little altar with a cross that was placed in one corner, and some woven things hanging with a few bundles from the narrow ceiling beams. That was all. The floor was hard-packed dirt, very much worn and swept clean. A hen clucked into the room, turned its head and fixed Kamille with a beady, jet eye, then waddled out the door.

"*Señorita...gringa,*" Pap Ixtlan said at last, "*la Doña usted escribe. Yo no leo.* You must read the words. *La Doña* cries for *la escuela, la hacienda,* the land. She knows not if the *gringa* does right. She cries.

"*Gringa,*" old Pap repeated, lifting his black eyes and staring into hers, "there is one who smiles on you...much trouble. This person has not his *nagual*. I know not what is *malo*. Eyes must be open. There is evil. There is *peligro...danger*. A soul travels...*perdido...here and there sin cuerpo...having no body. El fin.*"

Pap Ixtlan sank once again into his chanting, done in a beseeching, lyrical cadence that transported Kamille far from the present moment. She felt herself rising and falling with the repetition of the words until she was floating on a steady, hypnotic rhythm. Her fast-beating heart gradually slowed. She sat back amazed and let the sound wash over her. Then Pap Ixtlan stood up, touched her hand, and the incantation was finished.

Trudging back down the damp trail, Kamille pondered her

experience. "What is a *nagual*?" she asked Ixil.

"This is your animal spirit. You must have. Always," Ixil answered. "Brother spirit...sister spirit...animal."

Kamille was silent, thinking of the brujo's words and smiling now and then at her little flashes of annoyance. She had to concede that the brujo was very effective, a special kind of professional, one who had mastered the skill of bringing his patrons into a shadowy realm of spirits. He was a psychologist. After this meeting she was much more convinced of the power a brujo could wield. Certain people learned to have power over others. It was as true a thing in the thriving hills of Seattle as it was here on a remote mountain among people very close to the voices of the earth. The brujo had gained her respect with his ancient knowledge. She knew that he believed everything he said. For him, it was all true, therefore he could make it true for others.

That evening Kamille lounged in the sala, sipping her coffee before hot, snapping fire logs. The dancing fire tongues invited restful ponderings, and she began to reflect on becoming a part of this land. What a wrench it would be if she had to give up now. Even with her pained heart, she had already resigned herself to forging ahead with ever more determined plans. Held in the sway of drumming blue and orange flames flickering above the resinous pine, it took a while to realize she was hearing a woman's screams on the wind. Once again they sounded, faint but high and chilling.

Pulling her warm perraje from the back of a chair, she twirled it over her shoulders and hurried outside, stopping once beyond the veranda to listen. The cries were coming from the orchard, from Bartel's studio where he often slept. Almost without thought, her rushing feet carried her through the darkness. She stumbled to one knee but rose and hurried on, moving down a rough, cultivated row between the slender pear trees. The studio door was slightly ajar. She pushed it further, peering around its edge.

On a low bed at the far end of the studio, the delicate-boned Indian girl, Mata, was crouched in fear. Her nude body doubled over, clutching the blue coverlet as she tried to protect herself while Bartel, shirtless, his back shining with sweat, struck at her with his belt. Mata gave a moaning cry and rolled over on her back. Making a futile grab for his arm, she threw herself off the bed onto the floor, her arms encircling his drunken, lurching calves.

Furious, Kamille started to rush forward, but something forestalled her, froze her into place even though she wanted to turn away. The idea that she was witnessing something expected had attached itself to her aversion, something accepted, often repeated, and thoroughly understood by both participants. The girl's resignation amazed her. Moreover, with her arrogant head thrown back and her plump little breasts swaying, Mata was calling fervent Spanish love words through her tears.

"Little bitch, bloody little strangling vine...wanna choke me, don't you? Don't you? Answer me, I say! Speak English!"

"Yes, Stew, love. Yes, Stew, my love!" Mata cried, her dark hair glistening with sweat as loose strands fell over her wild eyes.

"Come here," he demanded, kneeling over her. "Come here, you little bitch, you little vampire bat."

He picked her up, giving her a very rough kiss, then cast her down on the bed and threw himself atop her with savage force. Her body twined around him at once.

Kamille snapped out of her trance, ducked behind the door, and started to run. She ran all the way back to the casa and stood on the veranda, leaning against the wall and panting for breath. Her scalp burned and her fingers clenched with the desire to strike something. It was, of course, Bartel she most wanted to strike.

In the morning, Mata was her normal but rather sullen self as she went about her chores, more sullen than usual because of Bartel's plans. He was up early and arguing with Kamille about his latest excursion. He was going over to *Alta Verapaz*, he told her, and for this reason he had made a point of joining her for breakfast. There, in the high jungle, he planned to paint orchids. An entire new show was in the making, he assured her. This time he would give his agent something grand to dangle before the buyers in London

and New York.

The idea of Bartel painting exquisite sprays of orchids was repugnant to Kamille. She thought it an insult to the orchids. At first she could hardly look at him, and when she did glance up she saw an ugly red mark on his neck, obviously a gift in kind from Mata. None of it was her business. She tried to put it out of her mind and get on with the conversation, thereby ridding herself of Bartel. He was arguing that she must have a taste of the jungle.

"Why don't you change your mind and come with me. It's enchanting, and *La Guarida d'el Tigre* is close by. I'll probably stop in there to borrow a horse and guide."

"You would have the gall to ask Steinlöwe for a horse?" Kamille asked in amazement.

"Of course. Why not? He's loaned them to me before when I was in Alta Verapaz." He studied Kamille, then delighted himself with a fiendish laugh. "You really don't understand how things work here do you, girl? You still believe that life is either black or white, good or evil, fine or foul. Such notions are for innocent little girls, and you are quite grown up...a woman of some years--"

"Oh, stop it. I think no such thing. Sometimes we're all helpless or foolish or... There might even be a trace of good buried somewhere deep inside you, Stewart...but you surely hate the idea of it."

"Could that remark possibly be a kindness? In that

case, do come with me. Don't you want to see how the German lord is getting on with his glorious queen of the hunt? I've never yet known a woman to pass up Steinlöwe once she got within range of all that musky opulence."

"Is there anything sacred to you, Stewart?"

"Not even my own backside. Life is a ridiculous joke. I'm surprised, though, that you're not more curious about Herr Steinlöwe. The greedy bastard has quite a history. Look, if you come with me I promise to behave. You see, actually, I'm not so sure Steinlöwe will spring for a horse this time, and I know he would if you were there, Señorita Esperanza. You could feel you'd done your humanitarian duty for the entire week, simply by helping a destitute artist. Creation is all that matters. Surely you agree."

"Far from it," Kamille said, pulling her peeled orange into segments. "There is a limit to artist's license."

"You'll never be a Guatemalan until you've gone into the jungle, you little coward."

"It's not that at all. I'm not afraid," Kamille insisted as she slipped the juicy orange segment into her mouth. "Umm sweet. I have work to do here. I don't want to bother Steinlöwe. And I'm not all that excited about entering the jungle with someone who has so little reverence for life." She licked her sticky fingers.

"Oh, is that the problem? Look, Steinlöwe will probably give me his best mozos when he sees the company I'm

keeping. You'll have nothing to fear. Will you come? You'll swear you're traveling with Sir Lancelot, I promise."

"You're not taking any aguardiente with you? You do realize it turns you into Mr. Hyde, Doctor Jekyll?"

"Good God, aguardiente! I'm going to paint. Paint and aguardiente do not mix."

"Well..." Kamille said, gradually warming to the idea. The jungle was a magnet that had been pulling her slowly but surely toward it. However, she was more than a little nervous at seeking mozos and horses from Steinlöwe, even at setting foot on his estate. But at last the jungle won.

#

As they drove away Mata, who had sulked in the background all morning, ran up to the car window with tears in her eyes.

"Let me to come," she begged.

"Certainly not," Bartel said, his face emotionless. "I'll find a nice little girl in the jungle to keep me company, a deserving little animal spirit with no tongue."

Mata raved, shook her fist, and wept, but Bartel was immovable. He ordered her to stand back as he jerked the Land Rover away, leaving her in the dust.

"You're horribly brutal to that poor thing," Kamille could not refrain from remarking. "You've got to treat her better. I don't know why she bothers with you."

"It's good for her. Don't want her becoming too attached," Bartel said, giving her a cruel grin.

"Too attached!" Kamille cried with a groan. "Can't you see that Mata would lie down and die for you?"

Bartel stuck a cigarette in his mouth and made no reply, only increasing their speed to a punishing vibration.

His reckless driving left Kamille far below the comfort level, but he did indeed know how to get where he was going in the least amount of time and by the shortest routes. Soon they were flying through the busy trading center of Huehuetenango. Kamille remembered all too well her walk through the archways that shaded the sidewalks and out into the marketplace in the clear sunlight, where Steinlöwe had first kissed her and told her to put on her hat. He had been with Ursula Bilder, she reminded herself. She wondered if Frau Bilder had a great deal of money to go with her striking beauty, and was immediately disgusted with herself. She had never dreamed that she would keep running into Steinlöwe and find it necessary to keep saying good-bye with ever more torn emotions. It was exhausting and extremely painful, and now she was about to see him again.

Her attention was suddenly yanked away from her troubling thoughts by an impending disaster. Racing toward them in a cloud of dust came a rickety, overloaded truck. The road was narrow, winding, and barely wide enough for one car. Bartel quickly threw the Rover into reverse and shot

backwards, climbing the banked side of the road at an angle. The truck shifted down and eased by on the side that dropped over three thousand feet to the valley floor. When the truck was gone Bartel turned to Kamille and writhed with laughter, jerking his thumb at her. Her teeth were clenched, her body rigid, and her hands gripped the seat.

They came down into *Sacapulas*, a name which Bartel said meant "crumpled grass," a place known for its woven baskets. The place was arid and hot with stark little whitewashed houses lining the Chixoy River like the bleached spine bone of a prehistoric beast.

Out of nowhere, a smooth-faced woman came walking down the empty road in her striking costume. So remarkable was she in her white lace huipil, silver necklace, and pompom headdress that Bartel slammed on the brakes, swearing at her great beauty and the lost opportunity of such a stunning subject for his canvas.

"How lovely. What is she?"

"*Quiché*, a magnificent specimen of aristocratic womanhood," he answered with regret.

"Maybe you could come back."

"To what? The light, the woman, nothing would be the same, not even my frame of mind."

They wound onward toward *Cobán* where Bartel said they would stay overnight. He didn't want to press their luck for an overnight invitation at *La Guarida d'el Tigre*.

"I'll call Steinlöwe tonight and tell him we're coming in the morning. We'll get an early start."

He'll never believe that I've taken to jungle touring with Stewart after the festival incident, Kamille thought. Well, he could think whatever he chose. She did want to smooth out her relationship with Bartel, but it wasn't simply that. She also wanted to see the jungle and was afraid that later on she might not be able to leave her work at Esperanza so easily. And after all, Bartel was only dangerous when he was drinking, which he had promised not to do. She believed him because she knew that his desire to paint was strong. Furthermore, she was actually finding him quite a perceptive and intelligent guide.

"It will probably be raining somewhere around Cobán," Bartel said. "It almost never stops, but if we happen to catch a blast of sun you will find the highlands of Alta Verapaz the grandest paradise on earth."

Cobán rested on an elevation of 4,500 feet and was enclosed within even higher hills. At the pass above the winding road leading down, they had a commanding view of the surrounding green *cafetals*. Perhaps some of these coffee fields belonged to *Tigre*, but Kamille decided not to ask. It would only set Bartel to ranting about Steinlöwe again, and he was about to impose himself enough. For nearly the hundredth time, she began to ponder their audacity at coming to *Tigre* and asking favors, when she glanced out and caught

a closer view of Cobán. The town lay under a gray dome of clouds and looked like a city sadly dreaming of a glorious past. Its dusty streets and crumbling mansions were only an echo of the heyday that Guatemala City and the paved highway had stolen away.

They did find pleasant rooms in a small hotel familiar to Bartel. It was called *La Posada*, and the gardens within the square loggia of the grand old house were refreshing after the arid drive. Kamille soaked in a tub of warm water until she almost fell asleep and missed a delicious meal.

A rooster in full possession of the morning crowed its tenure. Kamille awoke smiling and leapt out of bed. She brushed and braided her hair, twisting it into a matronly roll at the nape of her neck so it wouldn't interfere with her hat. There would be no girlish pigtail today. She put on clean jodhpurs and a white cotton shirt and set out a rain jacket. Then, pulling on her chestnut boots, she stood before the mirror, eager and flushed with excitement. "At last you're going to see the real mystery of a wild jungle," she whispered to herself. A sort of Garden-of-Eden-Rousseau jungle print ran through her head, and she laughed at her childish notions. She was happy, but hardly dared admit to herself that it was because she was going to see Steinlöwe. It would be all right. Nothing would come of it. She would merely see him and then go away. She thought of him, his voice, his manner. Her face grew serious. She eased into a

chair, staring at nothing. Perhaps the whole reason she had come was to see him. Perhaps she was like a tired swimmer surfacing to breathe. Didn't he have her, then? Wasn't she gasping for his refined air? That's why he was sitting back waiting. *His intimate hands, his inescapable eyes.* Stop this, she warned herself, this paranoia...losing control. He wanted her, he didn't. She wanted him. She wanted him! A knock at the door sent her flying out of her chair. It was Bartel ready for breakfast.

#

They climbed up the valley for a number of miles and turned into a private, open-gated driveway that ran through an endless, pale green stand of tasseling sugar cane. She had first entered this gate in darkness. Now she saw that above on the slopes bloomed miles of coffee. Here was the kingdom of *La Guarida d'el Tigre*, the lair of the tiger indeed. She wondered if Steinlöwe had agreed to lend them horses and mozos, for Bartel seemed rather morose today. Deciding to wait and see, she said nothing.

Straight down the long row of royal palms they shot. And there stood the grand white casa, more like an exotic alcazar than a hacienda, Kamille thought, although its balconies were bristling with green leaves and trailing bright crimson bougainvillea.

As soon as the Rover rolled to a stop, Steinlöwe came

across the veranda, clattering down the steps in his riding boots. He gave a cool nod to Bartel and opened Kamille's door with a raised eyebrow, as if he expected to see her bound and gagged.

"Good morning," he said with an approving voice, having instantly caught Kamille's excitement. "Come up and have coffee," he invited with a conspiring wink at Kamille. "Go on up," he motioned to Bartel. "I want to show Kamille something."

Bartel looked about to protest, but changed his mind in a slow retreat up the steps, glancing back over his shoulder while Kamille stood in the morning sun, waiting.

When Bartel had turned his back for good, Steinlöwe guided her down a pleasant walk lined with towering banana plants, toward a stone-lined, sparkling turquoise pool. They never reached the pool area, for he had no intention of showing Kamille anything but his concern.

"What is it?" Kamille asked, noticing the stormy cloud that had passed over his solemn profile.

He turned and stopped in front of her, very close so that she had to look up. Too close, she warned herself.

"I suppose you think it none of my business, but I will have to disagree. It *is* my business. Tell me yourself that you intend to go into the jungle with that maniac."

Kamille backed up. "Surprising I guess. I wanted to see it. He's promised not to drink."

"Oh, the hell he has!" Steinlöwe threw back his head in a growl of protest. "I cannot let you do that."

"You won't... You don't have to loan us horses. I don't blame you for--"

"You can have all the horses and mozos you want, but that will not guarantee Bartel's sanity. I will have to go with you."

She heard exasperation. "I'm embarrassed that we've imposed on you. We'll find horses somewhere else." Kamille turned away.

"Wait!" he said, taking ahold of her arm.

The place where he touched stung. She was angry at that, angry that her knees were turning to jelly, so angry that she tore her arm free with blazing eyes.

"Kamille! I have never seen you like this. What has happened? A moment ago you were happy."

"I am. I'm going to see the jungle. That makes me happy. This does not. Please don't touch me."

"Liebchen," he said, his eyes filled with a very convincing attentiveness, "do you not think this thing that happens to you also happens to me? Please know that I am thinking only of you. I love you." He hesitated a moment then lifted her chin beneath his cool fingers. "How can I let you go out there alone with Bartel? I cannot. The man is...is trouble, really sadistic, unpredictable. He tortured you at Todos Santos. My blood boiled. I cannot

forget what I saw...what I know."

"I...I made light of your help. I'm sorry. I was so thankful you were there...but Stewart isn't drunk now."

"Not now, but tomorrow or the next day, what then?"

"I'm not afraid of him. He seriously wants to paint. And I want to see...to see everything. We shouldn't have intruded here. It was wrong!" She had frightened a peacock that had strolled out from under a banana stalk.

"You cannot imagine how glad I am that you came to me."

"And if we hadn't come at all?"

Steinlöwe's eyes held a barely contained frustration that clearly bespoke his loathing for the manner in which his hands had been tied. "What if -- something I ask myself every day. What if something has happened to Kamille? Something I might have prevented."

"I'm sorry but I don't believe it. I can't. I can't! It's such a tidy little remonstrance, so...so... Oh, don't look at me like that. You can still hurt me, whether it matters or not."

"Can I? Then there is hope. You have hurt me a great deal. I can only forgive you...go on hoping."

"I don't want to hurt you, Andar."

"You...you've used my given name. What can it mean? Something loving? On your mouth it is something loving."

"If we hadn't come here I might...might easily have never seen you again."

"Impossible. Not in this world."

"Oh, across a room, maybe, but--"

"You think I could not find my way to your door, that I would let you slip away from me?"

"Esperanza slip away?"

"Ah, how can it be that you cause such anger in me, when all I want to do is...is have you...touch you...love you...hold you in my arms and make us both happy?"

Tears of frustration welled up in her eyes...too many tears. She threw back her head and stared at the sky, now all blue beyond the fluttering banana leaves. A magnificent day was in the making for her first jungle experience.

"I want very much to make love to you," he continued, watching her. "That close there is almost no mistrust in you...the only way I can reach your heart."

Her eyes fluttered and she shivered a little then swallowed and said, "What did you say to Stewart when he called?"

"That he could have what he wanted, that it looked like a perfect day to show Ursula the jungles of Alta Verapaz."

She frowned.

"I am sorry. You think I intrude, but I have to."

"I'd certainly be ungrateful if I thought that."

She sighed. No wonder Bartel had looked so sour. Then she laughed a little to herself, resigned to making the best of things -- yes, hopeless as everything was, she was happy

that Steinlöwe was coming. "I suppose we'll all get along somehow. This day already takes my breath away."

"We will drive to a station further north where my mozos keep the cattle horses. Do you want coffee now?"

"No thank you. Are you sure you can put aside your plans in order to do this?"

"I am always putting aside plans; it is the way of things. I wish I were taking only you...just you."

V

The three mozos chosen would serve one as forward guide and the others in charge of the three pack mules. They were proud horsemen, good-natured, husky Indians who, Steinlöwe assured everyone, knew the jungle well. The riding horses carried rifles and rain gear, and the mozos also carried coiled lariats and machetes, as did Steinlöwe.

As they penetrated the silent outer layer of jungle, Kamille had ample time to think. Sometimes, she glanced at an animated Frau Bilder, conversing with Steinlöwe in brisk German. She wore khakis and a helmet and looked very much like a fashion photographer's idea of a woman on safari. Steinlöwe wore a felt hat which he removed and strung over his rifle scabbard as soon as they were in the deep shade. Now and then he whistled rather complex birdcalls that Kamille was surprised to hear answered.

The sounds of the forest changed as it closed around

them. *Ceibas*, giant cedar trees, and the fragrant towering mahoganies formed a thick canopy where lively spider and howler monkeys played, argued, and scolded the intruders below.

"One life up there, another down here, with day and night shifts," Steinlöwe said as he rode up to Kamille. She was watching the monkeys with delight.

"These are the first monkeys I've ever seen in their natural habitat...so playful. I love to watch them."

They rode along in silence until Kamille spoke again. "We really had a lot of nerve, ordering your day. You should have sent us packing."

Steinlöwe laughed. "I did, but I came along. I am glad," he added. "Look there, a *morpho*." He pointed to a huge moth with jeweled wings like stained glass windows. It fluttered high above through sun spangles.

"Oh wonderful!" Kamille said, taking a long breath. The air was moist and heavy, mingling sweet and fetid odors. She thought if she breathed that deeply again she might pitch off her horse in a drunken swoon.

Bartel held a sketch pad and rode behind at a slow gait, giving over complete control to the nimble horse and sketching as it carried him forward.

When Steinlöwe was called back, Frau Bilder rode up to meet Kamille, dabbing at her forehead with a handkerchief. "It is steamy in here," she said with a sigh.

"Why don't you take off your helmet," Kamille suggested. "It must be hot, and there's plenty of shade."

"I do not trust those howler monkeys. I've heard stories about them," she said with a regretful laugh. "You look fresh and cool, I must say. Clever to carry your hat strung on your back. May I call you Kamille, dear?"

"Please do...if I may call you Ursula."

"Ja, of course. That will be nice."

"My husband loved jungles. He liked to go into dangerous places. He was killed in a common automobile accident...struck by a man who had taken too much Schnapps."

"I'm very sorry."

"Ja, I was very sorry, too."

"Are you maybe a little afraid to sleep in the jungle, Kamille?"

"I don't think so, not with all of these clever men along."

"You do not feel subjugated by men?"

Kamille laughed a little. "I can't recall having been denied anything I wanted by the opposite sex...except perhaps honesty. Some women have good reason to complain."

"I think you have had a happy childhood," Ursula said.

"Yes," Kamille answered with brightening face, "I did. Lucky for me. I was something of a little tomboy."

"Oh, *Range*," Ursula said. "Ja, you seem like you would be quite a romp. Do you have brothers and sisters?"

"No. I wish I did. But it did make me very inventive, discovering ways to entertain myself. And the loneliness made me want to go out and help others; that was good. When I was in high school I did volunteer work with invalid children. I was the one who received the greatest reward from it...and then, of course, it made me want to teach. But what about your childhood?" Kamille asked.

"Oh, I was a spoiled youngest child with two brothers. I never worked...simply finished school and married my father's young partner in business. I have a son."

"Oh, how nice. How old is he?"

"Twelve. He is at school...a good boy."

"Well, I have no husband, as you can see, and no children," Kamille offered, wiping her damp forehead with the back of her hand.

"I must ride over and take a peek at Mr. Bartel's sketch pad. Do you think he will mind?"

"He'll probably be flattered."

Kamille was now riding just behind the two Indians who were the vanguard. The one who was called Patulu grinned and pointed into the vigorous, broad leaves of a massive twining philodendron climbing a ceiba. She squinted with care and saw a small, pencil-thin green tree snake that she would surely have missed had it not been pointed out. An attractive little creature, so delicate, poised for its lunch. She was glad the mozos were noticing such things.

The forest was beginning to overwhelm her, stillness and then bird echoes and then stillness again, the atmosphere so heavy steam was visible, rising up in pale shafts of infrequent sun penetrating the canopy. There were airy ferns growing high above on tree branches, cascading orchids, and darting colored birds, so tiny, called *colibri*. She saw iridescent green, blue, and vermilion moths that were brighter than the most dazzling colors one could invent. A yellow and green parrot squawked overhead as a howler monkey went flying between branches, his red fur flashing where the sun could find him. She rubbed the back of her neck which hurt from so often gazing up. She could not stop looking.

"Getting tired?" Steinlöwe asked from behind her.

She turned in her saddle and saw that he had rolled his sleeves and opened his shirt almost to the waist. "No, not tired, but...out of practice...riding any distance." She rubbed her neck. "And...my neck is a bit sore from...from craning at everything."

He reined in beside her and wiped her forehead with his handkerchief, his bold hand caressing her face. "You are perspiring, Liebling; it will make your eyes sting."

"Thank you." She smiled like a shy girl and looked to see where Ursula was. She was far in the rear, fanning herself with a broad leaf one of the *mozos* had given her.

It was impossible to accustom herself to the strange

threesome they made. Ursula back there. Steinlöwe here, and she somewhere...somewhere in the middle. Now and then, a frustrated anger would flare up, confounding her, and then, when she felt him possessing her with his eyes, she almost wanted to strike him. Some of this she had created with her fluctuating, raw emotions, giving herself to him, taking herself back. And on and on went the oblivious steadfastness of Ursula. Kamille moved her horse away from everyone and tried to stay in that position, unable to resolve anything. Finally, Steinlöwe returned.

"What is troubling you, Kamille?"

"How do you know anything is?"

"I think I have come to know so much in your head."

"Stop it! Leave me alone...please." She realized she was crying a little, angry tears.

"You are tired."

"Get away from me. I'll be all right."

Left alone, a slow peacefulness descended upon her. In another two hours of riding she had still not seen enough. Every turn brought a strange insect, a brilliant bird, or perhaps a wine-spotted orchid of gold. In her present state, she wanted to keep on moving through her dream, certain that she would wake up and find it gone.

They set up camp by a sparkling black river called the Rio Dulce, which cut through walls of dense growth. Bartel had discovered a ninety-foot ceiba strung with garlands of

delicate white orchids which he was preparing to paint. And, Ursula, fearful of the dread *paludismo*, wanted her rest behind spread mosquito netting which she hoped would fend off the malaria. Her tent was shared with Kamille.

Deciding to have a walk along the river, Kamille found herself at once accompanied by Patulu at Steinlöwe's request, and then followed by Steinlöwe himself. When she looked over her shoulder she felt a terrible sense of loss and loneliness, for he had complied, leaving her alone. She asked herself which was worse, his attention accompanied by her suspicion and guilt, or the severance of his devotion, leaving her in desolation? I am fickle as a mayfly, she thought. With aching heart, she turned around, looked directly at him, and said, "Can't you come and walk with us?" He shook his head from side to side in mocking disgust at her capricious nature; this was followed by a shrug and reproving smile, then he came to her side but remained silent. Soon he and Patulu were hacking out a path with their machetes. She loved the quiet camaraderie of the two, and the way they understood and shared each other's humor. Steinlöwe's few words were German, which Patulu apparently knew well enough.

They met an Indian who was carrying an iguana on his back; it was trussed up with agave fiber. He offered to sell them a precious clutch of eggs. The conversation was in a soft Indian tongue.

"Please tell me what is going on," Kamille begged with an eager impatience.

"He is peddling eggs," Steinlöwe answered as he pulled a crumbling leaf from Kamille's hair. "The Indians cut open the iguana's belly and remove the cluster of perhaps five or six dozen eggs; they are much prized."

"But the poor iguana," she said.

"They sew up the wound and seal it with pliant tree resin. The eggs have soft shells...are mainly yolk...will not harden when boiled. Very rich. Would you like some for breakfast?"

"If the iguana doesn't mind too much," Kamille answered. Sliding into the warmth of his amused eyes, she found herself again light-hearted, almost playful.

"*Papilios*," Patulu said, pointing toward the river.

She saw a brilliant green cloud of butterflies whirling and drifting across the black river like a shimmering mirage, an exotic, costumed dancer on a dark stage.

She could feel Steinlöwe's eyes on her, enjoying her enthusiasm as she gasped in delight.

On the near bank among the tree roots a patient heron was fishing; another large bird on the far bank flapped out of the water, lumbering along with slow-moving wings.

"Oh," Kamille said, blinking her eyes and squinting. "I thought I saw a crocodile."

"Possibly. Do you like this wild place we call the

monte?"

"I wish that...I wish I could write poetry...so much beauty here," she answered.

"Enjoyment is an art, too. But there are evils in this paradise," he cautioned. "Infectious thorns, man-rotting fungus, poisonous insects and snakes...malaria." He ended his dark warning in a lighter vein. "Be careful because you are haute cuisine for every kind of appetite...especially mine."

Then, as if to substantiate his warning, a dark snake nearly six feet long with a strip of yellow at its throat suddenly sprang up near Patulu's foot. His machete flashed so quickly she saw only a glint of steel.

"*Barba amarilla*," Patulu said, kicking aside the decapitated body.

"Yellow beard," Steinlöwe said. "Sorry, but it would have bitten...too close to get away from safely."

Kamille's pulse had shot up very fast, still she hated killing anything for simply protecting itself. "I think an herpetologist would be angry. Are they very poisonous?"

"Very," he answered, slicing a vine from their path. "You know it as the fer-de-lance."

"He's really fast," she said, with a respectful nod at Patulu. "*Muy rápido*," she said to Patulu, who grinned.

"The machete is an extension of the Indian's arm. He keeps it razor sharp...to cut his mustache or hack down a

sizable tree," Steinlöwe told her.

"I'm impressed...and so amazed at everything. I want to soak it all up. Could we sit on those rocks near the water, or will an anaconda suddenly appear and embrace me?"

"How could he resist?" Steinlöwe said, falling in with her sudden offering of humor. "You can stay there as long as Patulu or I have not turned our backs."

"Are you any good with a machete?"

"I have handled one since childhood. Perhaps I am not quite as fast as Patulu, but fast enough. He has made it into an art."

"Your best machete man."

"One of my very best, assigned to you because I know how high-spirited you are. You should be tired by now. I thought you were...but, no, I am more tired than you."

"Could I lose him if I tried?"

"Not when he is with you. What bad idea is forming here? You are beginning to scare me."

"I'm looking for something. I've thought of going off to commune with nature while everyone else is busy."

"Do not. In the forests of Washington that may be a fine idea. Here, for the inexperienced, it is suicide."

"I want very much to see a quetzal."

"You might, if you are lucky...have a quick eye...a silent horse. Otherwise, you will have to be content with seeing him fly on the Guatemalan flag."

"I won't leave until I've seen one...the famous green bird. It's what I came for."

"Then we had better build you a hut," he teased.

He sent Patulu back to help with the camp and offered to be her sole guard while she water-gazed.

She wanted to engage in her old practice of capturing the present moment, this one so perfect, and locking it up in her mind, like a spool of film to be rerun at will. The initial attempt to focus herself was made more difficult by his presence, but she sat completely still, waiting for the feeling to come over her; once achieved, she could merge with all the rich stimuli that her senses took in.

Gradually, the wall of green, the sound and flash of water, the purple passion flowers hanging thick with hummingbirds above the ripples, and she, the camera's eye, all became one boundless whole. He was there, too, off to the left of her vision, watching, becoming a part of her film. In awhile, she was no longer aware of what she was attempting, the infinite in a rapture of stillness, until she heard a gentle voice and realized that Steinlöwe had been speaking to her.

"*Kind*, you were so far away."

She tried to explain what she had done and was surprised to find how well he understood. "Now it is yours forever," he said. Yes, on a cold highland night before her fire, she would be able to put herself back into this scene, with the most intricate detail.

"You have a...a special gift for holding the moment. Such a gift one hardly ever comes across."

"A childhood pastime," she said, laughing. "Now you are trapped forever in my jungle head." Her searching hand found a rock fragment and hurled it across the water. They stared at the curving trajectory of skipping circles.

"We should go back," he advised. He had been sitting with his arms folded, the sun striking his light shirt in a blinding white heat. He stood up to help her down off the high rock where she had positioned herself.

"I can get myself down," she insisted, but at the same moment her boot caught and she fell against him with cries of surprise and embarrassed laughter.

He held her without speaking, and for a brief time she allowed herself the pleasure of relaxing against his warm, damp shirt, inhaling the scents that were Steinlöwe, listening to the strong rhythm of a heart that made hers fly.

"Put your arms around me, Kamille."

Her arms rose without thought, her hands stroking at the fanning muscle of his back. His chin slid over the top of her head, his arms tightening around her body, his face hidden from any discovery. He indicated nothing more until that mellow roll of accent opened her eyes. "We can go now. I do it, too, you see, fix moments in my head that I can relive." Her face was hot with confusion and desire as she

pushed herself away. She watched him pick up the machete leaning against the big rock. They went back along the fresh-hewn trail in unhurried silence, not touching but with a charged force pulsing between them.

Near the camp she went over to see the tree where a feverish Bartel was painting. The air was cooling. This was a cloud forest, just the environment that orchids loved, and their scents increased with the fresh vapors of evening. The trunk of the huge tree was hardly visible through the amazing and delicate interconnections of leafy vines, thick ropes of fiber, dewy orchids, and the fragile air plants attached to it. She learned that this giant ceiba was actually dead, strangled, Bartel told her, by a *matapalo*, a tree-killing vine which used the tree for support as it thickened its death-dealing tendrils. The ceiba's interior was half rotted away and replaced with crisscrossing lianas that formed a mesh much like a ladder. Kamille stuck her head inside, looking up. Above her hung a shadowy dapple of spiraling fiber ropes and leaves with a splash of golden sun at the far top, light at the end of a black tunnel that held only faint sun patches. Letting her eyes adjust to the dimness, she reached up, grasping a vine and hoisting herself over the broad, open-worked leaves of a philodendron. She put her foot into the mesh and began climbing up the inside wall.

"Better not put your hand on something that doesn't

want it there," Bartel called after her with a careless laugh.

Picking her way more carefully, but willful, she continued her ascent. Halfway up she called down, "Oh, no! I wonder... Think I should be afraid of this thing?"

"What is it?" Bartel called from an enshrouded spot far below.

"It's nearly...a...nearly seven inches across, has a furry body and eight extremely hairy...uh...legs."

"Oh, a bird-spider!" he called. "It should have elicited at least one good scream from you. I'm impressed. Actually, they don't kill humans...at last report. Better leave it alone."

"I told it I'm just passing through!" she called back.

She could just make out Steinlöwe's low voice speaking to Bartel.

"Kamille, come down!" Steinlöwe shouted.

"Sorry! I'm now checked into my sky chamber. It's wonderful up here! Everything is drenched in a red-gold light. I can see an incredible, stylish toucan in one of those palms..." She hesitated, trying to remember the name. "Corozo? Yes, a *corozo* palm...so tall and sky-minded. Oh, there go those tiny *colibri*...darting everywhere like little flashing sequins. And moths! Glorious jeweled ones. I can see a range of purple mountains...even smoke from a lonely rancho. Hello! Hello out there! Oh, I would love to make

a little nest up here and live just like the monkeys."

"You are a monkey...a fearless little monkey," Steinlöwe said as her mesh ladder shook and his arms slid around her.

"See what I mean? On top of the world," she said, now in a hushed voice. "A mountain peak wouldn't seem this grand. Oh, look over there! What is that? It's really beautiful...like a furry stuffed toy."

"A *micoleon*, monkey lion; they come out at night. Soft, musky little creatures. People like them as pets."

"No, let them be; let them all be. He's staring at us. He's never seen anything like us here before." She laughed.

They clung to the lianas, watching the little monkey until a handsome pair of macaws flashed by, their sapphire and crimson plumage brilliant in the dipping sun. Steinlöwe stepped over to another network of vines to take his weight off her foothold, but kept his hands on her waist.

"You make a perfect figurehead for this elaborate totem. Your coiled braid...your tinted face...red-gold in the sunset...Venus rising from her ceiba trunk."

"Ah, *finquero*, your eyes are glowing red."

They stood in silence, peering down over the twittering treetops of their private domain, until she felt his eyes on her and turned back toward him. They might have been standing in the middle of the river or on top of a building. For a moment she couldn't remember where they were.

"Is it all right if I am this close, *Schönheit*?"

As if they had never been locked together in lovemaking so consuming she couldn't allow herself to think of it.

"I'll fall," she whispered, turning away at last, but now the tangle of shimmering green was only a blur.

"I already have, *Kind*."

He tightened his grip on her waist, raising his hands so that his fingers touched her breasts. His mouth caressed her neck, nuzzling against her braid. A shivering thrill nearly toppled her, but she clung to her labyrinth of vines, unable to speak.

"I want you so badly I cannot move," he said with thick voice. "How in hell am I to get down in this condition?"

She turned her head over her shoulder and lifted her eyes, knowing that her face was a mirror of his feeling. "My God," he said in a low voice. He pulled her around and yanked at the tongue of his belt. "Undo your clothes."

She was dizzy, trembling, her face inflamed, tugging at the waist of her jodhpurs with one hand, hanging on with the other. Somehow she managed.

He lifted her against him in one arm, swaying with her in a short back and forth arc, until they were wrapped in dark, pungent tendrils. Her body rocked and was rent into small, shimmering tatters, a rippling butterfly impaled on an intoxicating plant. His tongue searched her lips. She felt the deep groan in his throat as he pushed her against

the wall of the great black cylinder. In a wild fluttering, she broke apart and dissolved, her cry stifled by his thumb across her lips, then their heads were thrown back, his thumb still for a moment pressed against her mouth. She clung to him, panting with spasms of fast breath.

"Oh, Christ!" he muttered in a low, astonished voice.

"Apparently, we are supposed to eat!" Bartel called out from some invisible point below their leafy tunnel.

Kamille couldn't remember exactly how she was disgorged from the vanquished ceiba's dark throat. Her hands fumbled and her feet slipped as they descended. Steinlöwe caught her a number of times, kissing her each time they touched. When they crawled out and found that Bartel had packed up and gone, he pulled her to the far side of the huge, twelve-foot-wide trunk and pressed her against thick-twining broad leaves, kissing her until her hair was tangled in the vines. He drew back and looked at her in amazement.

"Eventually...when you know me better...you... Will you think of marrying?...please?...please. I love you so."

She was unable to speak, felt her eyes ready to spill.

He removed a twig caught in her fine hair, smoothed the loose strands back into place and straightened her collar.

"We cannot go on much longer like this, *schöne* Kamille. Say nothing now...nothing until you can say yes. Please trust me and allow me to straighten things out in my own way. She is a long-time friend. I probably would not have

married her. Please understand that. I will wait for you. But hurry, for God's sake. Time...precious time," he added and kissed her spilling eyes, licking the salt from his lips.

She blinked, still speechless, and nodded with quivering mouth, then turned and began to run, Steinlöwe calling after her, "Watch out!" as she leapt over a rotting log, like a startled deer chased by something hungry.

#

While the others told tall tales of the jungle, Kamille sat in silence, toying with the fresh fruit on her plate. To think that she could have ever imagined herself ready to marry Charlie, have believed herself deeply serious in her relationship with him, and wounded and long-suffering at its end. She recalled all those speculative hours sitting with her colleagues in the college faculty room, talking about doing something different, daring. She had thought the daring thing was going to be marrying Charlie. Just now she wanted to run to her mother, crying or laughing, or both. The sudden realization that her soft, gray-haired mother was dead shocked her. She excused herself, hardly looking at anyone, and went to lie down in her tent. I am getting old, she thought, and yet I feel like a lost child, a *Kind*? I haven't the slightest idea what will happen next, but I'm so sad and happy all at once. I can't do any more crying. It

makes my eyes burn.

She awoke when Ursula came in, rustling about to check the mosquito netting and finally, seeing that she was awake, warning her about vampire bats.

"You know they will come and take a little blood from your toes if you leave them exposed, dear."

Kamille began to laugh. She laughed so loud that she thought everything in the forest, all the night shift diners, would surely stop munching to listen.

"Quiet down there, you she-cats!" Bartel shouted from the tent he was sharing with Steinlöwe.

Then came a low, snarling scream, a nervous, wailing complaint that danced up her spine. "What was that?" she called.

"A *tigrina* on the hunt. She likes your sense of humor," called Steinlöwe with amused voice.

She tried to picture the stealthy jaguar, eyes of golden-mottled green shining in the moonlight, prowling through leafy thickets, the keen, wet nose coming first and finally the long, twitching tail.

The Indians were speaking in their soft language and throwing wood on the fire, comforting sounds.

"I think vampire bats are entitled to a little blood now and then," she said.

"Not mine," Ursula assured her.

"Well, maybe I'll leave out one toe," Kamille said,

with a playful snigger.

"You must promise to tap out your boots before putting them on in the morning," Ursula insisted.

"I do promise," Kamille said with soft laughter.

The moon was very bright and she thought of getting up to look at it one more time, but she drifted into asleep.

In the morning, she shied away from Steinlöwe who, nevertheless, came to give her a leg up on her big horse. He whistled as they packed to move further up river.

Bilbo, Kamille's horse, was a restless, prancing mount who liked to move quickly and was very sure-footed. She patted his shiny, sorrel-roan coat whenever he snorted, and talked to him in simple horse language, causing Ursula to raise an eyebrow and look at Steinlöwe who only smiled.

Kamille was riding with Patulu and speaking with him in a little Spanish while he pointed out things of interest.

"You will soon be teaching us Spanish, Liebling," were Steinlöwe's first words to her when they came together on a narrow trail.

She pursed her lips in a pleased little smile and said, "You hardly ever use contractions when you speak English."

"Not often...sometimes. Most of my English is for you, Kamille. No one else needs to hear it. I did often speak it with the Doña, of course. She did not seem to mind."

"Oh, but I love...I like the way you speak English," she said, still driven to modify her enthusiasm. "It's so

very...really so perfect."

"I am not sure of that, but when you have mastered Spanish, you will find that my Spanish is more playful, much more relaxed, I think. It is a language in which love words sound more loving, *mi querida*."

She looked at him with a side glance over her raised shoulder, her lips forming a small curve of pleasure which remained, and which she only discovered after she urged her horse forward, catching up to Patulu.

Once they stopped while Bartel sketched orchids, and Kamille wandered afoot, relieving herself after having drunk too much yerba maté, looking for quetzals, and trying to memorize the great beauty of the flowers. She studied the delicate *Monja Blanca*, the white nun orchid, Guatemala's national flower. The large, waxy flowers were nearly six inches across and very fragrant. She cupped a proud bloom in her hand, thinking that in the forest shadows it looked like the pure white essence of the moon.

They were riding again, into a changing landscape, coming gradually onto a high, barren forest floor where towering, heavily scented mahoganies and ironwoods were greedy for light. New species of birds appeared, fluttering among the branches. Kamille thought at any moment she might see the magical quetzal of exotic legend, a bird so splendid that the ancient Maya had made it into a god and worshiped it: *Quetzalcoatl*.

Within an hour, a number of unforeseen things happened. One of the pack mules dropped half its load and the two mozos, who took great pride in their packing expertise, each blamed the other. Patulu rode back with Steinlöwe to settle the matter. Ursula dismounted to pick a spider orchid, fearing they would soon be scarce, and Bartel immediately went to work with his sketch pad, calling out the price the finished painting would bring on the New York market.

Impatient Bilbo was prancing, and Kamille, seeing no danger in a short ride, gave him his head. With a little prod from her heel, they disappeared down a slight incline. Further ahead in a tall ironwood, she was certain she had seen a green wing flashing, and urged Bilbo forward again. He danced and broke into a trot. Nice to have galloping space, she thought, and, eyeing the bare forest floor, let him break into a leg-stretching gallop on the soft earth. Soon they were over their second rise, and suddenly Bilbo was laying his ears flat and rolling his eyes. He reared high, pawing the air, as Kamille caught sight of the object of his terror. Displaying its menacing tusks, an angry wild pig was trotting toward them at a furious pace. Bilbo reared again, bucking a little, and took off with lightning speed. For several minutes, low branches were flying by in a blurring rush. Kamille tucked her head against Bilbo's blowing mane, her vision useless. Instead of trying to rein in, she had decided to ride out his terrified flight and let

him tire until he was more manageable. This strategy lasted for awhile, then a limb swept her out of the saddle before she could duck, and sent her tumbling into a ravine.

She lay a moment, mentally checking her body. When no unbearable pain was evident, she stood up and dusted herself off. Seeing neither hide nor hair of Bilbo and having no idea which direction he had gone, or which direction she would have to go to find her way back, she stood very still, listening. Nothing but the sound of birds. The ground around her bore no sign of hoof prints, appearing undisturbed to her untrained eye. It would take an expert tracker with a keen eye to find Bilbo's mark in this dry, spongy ground.

Don't run in circles, she warned herself. She stood pat in the middle of wherever this was that she had landed, listening carefully for the sound of humans. Again, she heard nothing but the occasional echoing cry of a bird. In the lonely silence of the forest, it became clear to her that Bilbo had carried her a much greater distance than she had imagined. Leaning against a nearby ironwood tree, she began a little interior monologue to boost her spirits.

Well, I'm not going to run off in a panic and complicate things. I'll stand here until nightfall, if necessary. Then what will I do? Climb a tree? Surely they'll find me before night. But if they don't... Oh, I'm such an idiot! Why did I leave them? He warned me. He

warned me, and I didn't listen. What must he be thinking now? That I'm a silly fool. I deserve whatever happens. Oh no, not that. "Hello! Hello, I'm here!" she called.

She looked up into the tree limbs and saw a pair of sapphire-blue parrots plucking at each other's feathers. She watched them for several minutes. They were comforting, very domestic, talking to each other with soft crackling noises, so fond of one another. Nearly an hour later when they departed, she was sorry to see them go. A pair of wings would come in handy. She could hardly allow her feet to carry her anywhere. All directions looked the same, and a few degrees off the correct route might place her in the lap of something worse. She sat down, leaning against the ironwood tree and brushing away a few stray ants, wishing she could take a nap. A nap! She had really startled herself. Just fall asleep now, she told herself, and life will pass you by...or eat you up.

She thought of Steinlöwe, of how quickly he had consumed her and of how quickly Bartel had sabotaged her trust in him. What did she really know about him? All of those rumors, deadly rumors that were eating away at her heart. Could she ever believe anyone again? She thought of his apparent concern for others, his attentiveness, his lovemaking. The thought of his tenderness was unbearable. How could it be false, contrived? If he would only come to her now, if he would only care enough to... She waited and

the static waiting stretched on and on, so fatiguing.

Her head began to nod. Perhaps just a short nap... What was that? Something. She stood up, spinning in every direction. Yes, something...hooves...the snort of a horse. Then she saw him coming over a rise, his head down tracking.

"Andar!" she shouted and began to run.

He stopped at a short distance, looked her up and down as if to convince himself that she was all in one piece, then jumped from his horse. He yanked the rifle from its scabbard and fired two shots. Glancing at her again, he slammed the rifle back into its leather sheath and stood with folded arms watching her run toward him.

"You are horseless but nothing is broken I see."

She stopped dead still before reaching him, seeing that his face was tight with anger.

"Did you think I was talking only to hear myself when I warned you not to do this?"

"I didn't do it on purpose. Well, anyway I'm glad to see you," she said, her face blooming with embarrassment. "I'm sorry about Bilbo, but I only rode a little way, and he was frightened by a pig. I think he'll find us. Horses always find their way back when they--"

He had moved forward and pulled her into his arms with such ferocity that she no longer tried to explain anything.

"Where is your good sense? After I warned you... Why did you do that...go off like that, *Kind?*"

"I...I thought I saw a quetzal."

"Good God! I will find you one, put it in a cage, and hang it over our bed."

She pushed herself away from him.

"But...I am afraid it will sing nothing but a sad little song of desire for its lost mate...as I am to sing. Is that not what your face tells me?"

"I don't see how I can marry you, Andar. It would be so easy that there must be something wrong with it."

"You will always doubt my intentions. Then marry me and give Esperanza to the government. They will let you run it."

"No! You know I won't do that, not Aunt Cathline's life work. You know so well. Oh, how can you want me if you know I doubt you?"

"I cannot help myself, or explain it any more than you can explain your doubt. Perhaps you would come to love me enough to...trust me."

He placed his arm over his horse's neck and stroked it in silence.

"I did this all wrong. I was afraid Bartel would destroy us before we ever began, but maybe he has done so anyway. I made love to you when I should have waited, gone slowly. It looks very bad, does it not, *Kind*? But...it is not just the physical you I want, though, God knows I cannot seem to leave you alone. And it certainly is not the land.

I keep learning more things about you that I so like -- your spirit. You give me a...a heightened purpose. Do you understand? And I want to help you. You are a fresh...a natural...a beautiful person all the way deep inside...but hurt. I wish..." He stopped a moment, looking perplexed. "How can you respond to me as you do and not feel what I feel? You like making love with me. This I know."

"Yes."

"But...you do not love me?"

"Oh, Andar, I think you're right -- it's all gone too fast. Do you know what I was thinking before you came? At first, I was sure you'd think me a fool for this stupidity. Then I was wondering what to do when night came -- I had no idea. Finally, I thought only of seeing you again...thought if I could see your face once more I'd never leave you. Then you came...so angry. I thought: this is real life. This is the way things really are."

"If I had known, I would have jumped off my horse and made love to you on the spot. It was what I wanted. For two and a half hours I looked for you and imagined... At least let me hold you...let me..."

With eyes lost in his she watched him come against her, felt his hands and then his mouth. Is it all over now? she thought, feeling a little dizzy from her fall, or from him. Is it going to be all over like this? I can't do anything but what I'm doing, not this close, never this close.

She put her hands on his chest and leaned back. "I really know so little of you. You deny almost nothing... Oh...forgive me, but you say so little about yourself."

"Kamille...remember the morning we met in the pine grove and you rode off so angry and left me thinking under the cold sun? I had already decided to leave you alone, to somehow start all over with you after a reasonable time. But I kept...kept running into you and wanting you, and I could never distance myself enough to begin again. I thought you would have time to learn about me...to hear along with the bad things...perhaps a few good things. But only your mistrust grew. If I hold you like this much longer I will want to make love to you -- the only way I can erase the doubt from your face; I will get my spare blanket from Tänzer here -- only too happy to carry us back." He patted his snorting horse with a fond caress. "I will spread it over there and we will lie together, and it will be unbelievably good. You are so good to have, *Kind*. But you will not give yourself entirely to me...no, not entirely...because something in you has chosen to...to believe what your alcoholic tenant has told you. Lies. There is so much love in you. Why will you not recognize the same in me? Why?"

"I want to...I want to! There's no one I've ever wanted more."

"Then why? Why? Ah, but you have told me why, have

you not? Without saying it. You are afraid of me."

He knelt down on the dry, spongy earth, picking up Tänzer's reins but still kneeling there in thought. In another minute, he stood up, unrolled the blanket at the back of his saddle, and, glancing at her with resignation, tossed it over the ground.

She gave him a surprised look and backed up, her hands behind her meeting the hard trunk of the ironwood tree.

"No," he said with a grin. "I have misled you. I am not going to make love to you -- at least, I do not think I am. I am going to talk to you. Please sit."

"Will they wonder where we are?" she asked, letting herself down upon the far edge of the blanket.

"No. Patulu has heard my two shots and knows what I meant -- that you are found and safe. They can wait. This is more important."

He sat cross-legged, positioning himself near her without touching any part of her nervous body.

"You have been wondering so many things. The questions are always in your eyes. My father and grandfather were not Nazi sympathizers. Impossible to believe? Perhaps. Hardly a single Guatemalan believed it, but President Ubico did. I will tell you why. As for myself, I was not old enough to sympathize with anyone but my constant companion, a worn, stuffed bear sent to me from a great-aunt in Germany.

"When World War II reared its vile head my father and

grandfather tried to warn their German friends, to make them see, if not the wrongness of it, at least how much they had to lose by supporting Hitler's madness, his overreaching nationalism. My family had relatives in the United States who were taking a beating, literally, a few honest men who loved America and hated Hitler, but were crucified anyway along with Hitler's supporters, as we were crucified here by both our German friends, who were finally thrown out of Guatemala, and by other Guatemalans. At first my father held meetings among the German community. He tried to tell them to shut up about 'Deutschland Über Alles' and to be Guatemalans instead of fanatics. He was shouted down, vilified, and finally ostracized from the German community-- this while other Guatemalans were calling us Nazis. A few still take pleasure in doing this -- Bartel, for instance, who lately came to this country and proceeded to criticize my family, who have lived here for several generations, devoted to both the land and people. But I am not concerned with him. He is a self-destructive type which does not proliferate...though there is always another to take his place. At any rate, corrupt Ubico was grateful to my father for what he tried to do. We were not asked to leave, nor was our *finca* confiscated and turned over to the government. Naturally, we lost many of our German friends. And there have been -- continue to be -- troubling times in this country. Because of all the early strife, I have always

been careful to stay out of politics, have kept a low profile, running the business as carefully and humanely as possible. If my political views are expressed at all, it is as an equitably-minded *finquero* who grows coffee for anyone who wishes to pay a fair price. But it is not easy to walk a tightrope in times of upheaval."

He stopped to brush a few needles from Kamille's hair. "Liebchen, did you hurt yourself coming off that horse? Forgive me, I did not even ask."

"No," she answered after a moment. She was still coming back from a deep immersion in his story -- how different his life, his history, was from her own. She had to stop and think about the present. "Oh, perhaps a few bruises here and there. Luckily, the ground was soft."

Falling silent, waiting for more, she watched him start to recline, leaning on one elbow, and then quickly sit up, looking into the branches of the ironwood tree. "Visitors," he said.

"Oh, the parrots, dear old friends. I was very sad when they flew away."

He ran his finger backs down her cheek. "*Kind*, were you afraid?"

"Trying not to be...mad at myself...and my horse, too."

"Ah, wild pig. Poor Bilbo. The horses go absolutely loco at the sight or smell of *jabali*...but I would not feel much sympathy if Bilbo had hurt you." His hand came around

her neck, drawing her face toward him. Kissing her very lightly on the lips, he drew back with serious intent.

"Now...*ja*, now about my father...if I can do it without...without--"

"Don't...not if this is painful...please."

"No, I have to. You have a right to know. Let me get it over with.

"I was twenty-two, young, defiant, fearless, and very stubborn. And arrogant, too, very arrogant. As far as I was concerned I had been going to school for an eternity. At last, I had come home from Princeton to be a *finquero* -- not if my father had anything to do with it. He wanted me to be a doctor...I think because my mother had always wanted it. She saw me -- in her great respect for culture and learning -- as a venerable adjunct to Sigmund Freud. My poor mother died of cancer when I was nineteen. My father was not a demonstrative man -- except for anger -- but he loved my mother deeply, thought he had neglected her, ignored her wishes. But really, until the time of her illness, she was quite happy. Nevertheless, I was to atone for my father's guilt...and, of course, I rebelled. He wanted to bring a young cousin here from Germany and train him to manage "Tigre." I was furious. I knew everything my *mager* years -- oh, excuse that -- meager...meager years would allow about our *finca* -- human relations, animals, insect plagues, coffee, sugar cane, and cattle --, and I

loved everything about the life of a *finquero*. I thought my father had forsaken me. I could not move him. He was a big, red-faced, stubborn man, even more stubborn than I. I knew," Steinlöwe said, his eyes dimming with regret, "that because I was away at school so much I had lost a certain rapport with him that I had as a boy. He could not see how independent I had become...and ready to assert myself. The Indians have a saying for a young person when he is still unaccountable for his mistakes: he has not yet found his soul. Well, I had found my soul...and it was here in the land.

"At this time, there were many uprisings, fomented by rebels who decided that the way to make everything equal was to do away with privately owned *fincas*...and with *finqueros*. In some cases they were right, but it mattered little to them whether the landowners were honest or dishonest. This sort of thing does not concern a political ideologist...any more than the taking of any life interfering with his ideology concerns him -- blood must always water the earth for the so-called greater cause.

"On that fatal day I..." Steinlöwe stood up and leaned against the trunk of the tree, looking out across the forest floor with the increasing pain of memory. There was dread in his eyes at an approaching horror only he could see. "You know...I did not realize how long it has been since I thought of this." An interior voice urged her to put an end

to the agony he was inflicting upon himself merely to appease her. But how could she deny him his vindication? She waited in silence.

"It was late afternoon of a very hot day, a day when heat penetrates everything...everything you touch burns your fingers. On such days your body feels swollen and your patience is stretched beyond its limit.

"We had a guest, a doctor for whom my father had great respect. All afternoon he had been holding me up to this man, pushing me at him in a most embarrassing way. I liked the man. He was a fine, skilled doctor, but I was relieved when at last he rose to go. Then my father spoke with *freimut*..." He stopped and looked at Kamille with an apologetic smile. "Frankness," she said in a soft voice, very touched by the way his misery had interfered with his impeccable English and returned him to his native tongue. "Ja, frankness. He waved his arm at me and said, 'I want you to be like the doctor, not a *finquero*, not a sun-blasted target for the rebel's gun!' You see, my father loved our *finca*, loved his work, but he was frustrated by the uprisings, probably quite fearful of them...and, of course, frustrated by his past: the loss of my mother and his failed attempts to keep his German friends...to make them realize, stop their foolishness.

"I walked down off the veranda to say good-bye to the doctor...in a somewhat apologetic manner. And my father

followed, still caught up in the madness of the heat and his own frustration. The doctor drove away, probably by then eager to be gone. 'This is humiliating,' I said to my father. 'I have never seen you act this way in front of a guest.' 'You have driven me to it,' he answered. He grabbed me by the collar and shook me as if I were still a disobedient boy. His face was very red. He repeated, 'You have driven me to this conduct with your stubbornness, but you will do as I say!' Then he pushed me away."

Steinlöwe slid down the trunk of the tree, squatting on his heels and rubbing his face with his hands.

"I...I stared at his broad back, turned against me hard as a rock wall. 'I will not!' I shouted, 'The heat has gotten to your stubborn brain!' 'You will!' he answered, turning and putting his hands on my neck. It was then I pushed him away from me with feelings of...of violence. I hurried to the stable where I intended to saddle a horse and ride out. The heat of the day, anything, was preferable to lingering over this horrible, sad moment. Then...then I heard two shots. I hear them now...two shots, the monstrous irony of it...my father's grisly prophecy... I turned, ran back, found my father lying on the ground. There was blood everywhere...gushing from a wound in his chest...another in the side of his...head. I looked up at the hill beyond the casa and saw the backs of two men, long black shadows disappearing. They carried rifles. I squinted into the sun

like a madman. Why was I still alive? Why not me? Why not me? My father's head was in my hands...hot...scalding blood...his rattling voice...his last breath... 'Do not let them do it to you.' His eyes...the soul gone...gone out of them. I was alone."

Kamille moved toward his slouched form and knelt on the ground, her arms clasped around him, her head against his chest. "How could anyone?...how could they say--"

"There were two of my father's oldest mozos at the stable. In fact, I had just called one of them to get my horse when we three heard the shots. I sent one to catch up with the doctor and bring him back. He was shocked when he saw my father. I could see by his eyes that he thought I had done it. Unbelievable! So unbelievable. I thought he knew me, but people do not judge with coolness at such times. I went up on the hill and searched until I found the shells. I threw them down in front of him. He talked to the mozos and apologized. Nevertheless, the story spread. People gobbled up the idea. They gloated. You know a Nazi could easily murder his father. He could easily--"

Kamille's emotion-fired reflex was to stop his mouth with hers, stop the words, even the pain, the memory, if only for a moment. She drew back from her kiss. "No more...no more. Please...please! This isn't a fair price you've paid...just to hear that I love you...that I fell in love with you the moment I found you standing by my

chair...standing in that incredible violet jacket. I couldn't help it...but how can I believe you love me? I feel like a...a shallow little brook...all sparkling with the sunlight you've given...but...but bumping into rocks and banks...so uncertain where I'm going."

"There is pure poetry in your heart, *Kind*...and not a thing shallow about you. I want you...that is certain... My God, the most certain thing I know."

They came together in a rushing string of urgent kisses, slipping back on the blanket and staring at each other in a dazed silence.

"Aren't we supposed to be somewhere?"

"Not important...right now," he said between kisses. "And...I could not get back on my horse anyway. I am afraid... Liebchen! Your face is a flaming hibiscus."

"I am really a shy person, provincial in some ways."

"But not in others."

He kissed her, a long, hungry kiss sliding over her parted lips and leaving her breathless, shaking. Her head dropped back in his arms, he, staring at constricted nipples outlined, uncovered beneath her blouse. She watched his long, tan fingers slip the buttons through the holes.

"It was...so hot...this morning," she offered as an excuse, then wished she had not tried to explain anything.

Was her crashing heart audible to him, she wondered, as he kissed her firmed nipples, exploring with a devouring

pleasure. The warmth increased, a flashing sensation of heat rushing up and down her spine, consuming her. She twisted her body against him and cried out his name.

"What?" he asked with teasing voice, "What *Kind*?" His mouth nuzzled her pulsing throat.

Silent, she held him back and fumbled with the waist of her jodhpurs, most of her shyness now swallowed by desire.

"Undo me, too," he said, watching as she reached out with an unsteady hand and took hold of his belt.

"Hungry little tigrina," he whispered, "but sweet. Fresh as the *Monja Blanca*."

He slid his hands beneath her, coming down to fit her body with his.

She shuddered, murmuring through dry lips and throwing surrendered arms above her head. Her spontaneous body writhed, dissolving against him with longing. He stared into her eyes, his own shining with questioning amazement as she tossed her head and ran her tongue over parched lips.

"You are sensual, *Kind*. My God, you are sensual!"

His palms pressed down upon her opened hands as he slid his mouth across her parted lips in a deep-fused kiss that eased her into the rhythm of his body. In an instant, she was pulled up tight against him and rocked with an unbelievable hunger. This fierce wildness caused a small fear to break her swelling desire. His eyes plunged into hers with a sharp perplexity.

The Green Bird Sings Desire
Karlene Kubat - 191

"No, do not hold back, *Kind*. You are holding back.
Give me! Give me! My God, I want all of you!"

With thoughtless motion then and total strength, she threw herself into the heat of him, higher and higher until she arched against him, crying out at the same moment that a muscular groan tore from his throat. Her breath was thoroughly spent, and she gasped against him, clutching at his shirt. He rolled over, careful, still holding her as she took deep breaths.

"Have I hurt you? Damn! I was too rough."

She lay atop him, smiling and kissing him. "No, no, no. I'm learning you. I...love...your...mouth. I love the way you growl... the way you always grin...a sort of teasing little curl at the corner of your mouth."

"And I love the way you cry out with such joy against my skin...the way you hold your head in the sun," he counter-offered, "the way you talk to horses...how your knees bend on a horse...the way your perfect little ass hugs the saddle and--"

"Ouch!" she cried, rising up with startled protest.
"Something stung me!"

He crushed a large black ant racing along her thigh and bent over her hip, sucking the sting.

"I feel strange...oh...little cold chills."

"Formic acid. Unpleasant for awhile, but it will not hurt you. We had better move on, *Kind*. Before they carry

us off in pieces. If the soldier ants had come along our *compadres* would find two clean white skeletons locked together in...I think it is called carnal embrace."

"Ugh! How gruesome."

They rode in silence, down out of the empty-floored hardwood forest. She sat up straight behind him, her hands on the saddle cantle, touching his back only when they passed over rough places, until he protested.

"You are riding with no comfort. Relax...lean against me, *Kind*. Put your arms around me."

She did so, laying her head against his back, at once warmly aroused as she had expected, breathing in the sweet smokiness and dry-leaf smell of his damp shirt.

"Better," he said, laughing a little.

"Yes," she whispered, rubbing her face against his back, so content...content to contemplate an endless ride through Eden.

"Look what I have for you, Kamille," Steinlöwe said, awakening her with a low-modulated voice.

She lifted her head and saw a shimmer of green. There, skimming between the dark tree trunks, flew a dazzling male quetzal. As though preened for an elaborate ceremony, his long, curl-tipped tail feathers fluttered and flowed out, bouncing on the air. He floated down, transformed to an emerald shaft of light, and Kamille caught a thrilling glimpse of his scarlet breast.

"Oh, so beautiful!" she exclaimed in a whispery voice.

Steinlöwe reined his horse in the direction of a giant *aguacatillo* tree, although they had lost sight of the quetzal.

"The bird lives on the fruit of this tree. It hollows out a nest on the soft, rotting trunks of the *aguacatillos*," he said in a softened voice.

He swung his legs over the front of his horse and lifted her down. They walked over the ground, a spongy carpet of rotting vegetation, until they came to the base of the rotting *aguacatillo*. They looked up and, several feet above their heads, saw the secretive bird's startling, bluish-green tail feathers trailing nearly three feet down the trunk outside the nest hole which had been bored in the bark. This was the back opening of the nest he whispered to Kamille; it was made solely to accommodate the bird's dangling tail feathers which might otherwise break when he flew away. He took her hand and guided her, with caution, around the trunk to the front of the nest. The male peered out, looking no larger than a small hawk. He wore a stunning, raised plume crown of feathers on his head and proudly displayed the splash of red on his breast.

Steinlöwe looked down at Kamille as she turned to share her joy. His expression was as proud as the quetzal. The awe and interest and thankfulness on Kamille's face prompted a grin from him so broad his nudging cheeks crinkled his

clear gray eyes.

"*Liebchen*," He lifted back a strand of hair which had fallen over her eyes, "the quetzal has only one mate. In Mayan myth he was created out of green, blue, and red butterflies as they rested on flowers."

"Where is his mate?"

"Somewhere high up, perhaps bringing something for the nest, or watching us. The male is a good father. He will help raise the brownish-colored young when they hatch from small, pale blue eggs."

"Andar...thank you...thank you so much," she whispered.

He watched her a moment longer as she stared up at the bird, then took her face in his hands and ran his thumbs over her glowing cheeks. "I and the quetzal are of the same mind, Kamille." His voice was low and serious. "But we can neither of us stand to have our feathers bent," he added as he leaned to kiss her inviting mouth.

#

They returned to camp only a few minutes after it was discovered that Ursula had been stung by a rather poisonous but nonlethal scorpion, which had crawled up her sleeve as she was resting. She was at first hysterical and already in a great deal of pain, although Patulu had skillfully treated the sting with his own mysterious remedy of crushed leaves, and calmed her with a mildly narcotic tea. Now she was

complaining of fever, and Kamille ran down to the cooling river with Patulu to bring a damp cloth for her head.

"We must get her back immediately," Steinlöwe said when Kamille returned from the river. "She is going to feel much worse soon. Bartel does not want to leave until he finishes his painting, and I cannot leave you alone with him."

"Yes you can," Kamille insisted. "You and Patulu can travel faster with Ursula, and I'll only be someone extra to worry about."

"If I leave you here you will be. You will come with us. Please gather your things."

"No, I'll stay until he finishes, and you can leave one of your men or both, as you wish."

"Kamille, I have no time to argue with you. I must take Patulu because he is more skillful in medicine, and I will not leave you here."

"Please go, Andar. When Ursula is safely in the hospital come back...if we're still here. But don't worry. I'll be careful."

"You have seen the quetzal you wanted to find. Must I drag you out of here?" he said, growing impatient.

"Perhaps I'll see him again," Kamille replied in her firmest academic voice. "I'm going to stay. That is final."

"Damn your stubbornness!" he swore with exasperation. Looking around to see who might notice, he kissed her a

hard, punishing kiss which failed in all but arousal.

"Don't worry, my growling lion, nothing will happen to me," she said, so imperturbable his concern only increased. She gave him a little push, her hand half caressing his chest, then hurried toward the prostrate Ursula, who had bravely insisted upon riding her own horse.

Steinlöwe managed to persuade Bartel to retreat to the previous night's campsite, but only because he wanted to finish work on his ceiba with orchids which he was convinced would bring him a handsome sum. When they reached the old camp, Kamille stood watching Patulu, one pack mule, Ursula, wobbling in her saddle from the effects of Patulu's sedative tea, and finally Steinlöwe moving away down the trail. He looked over his shoulder at her with an alternating annoyance and concern until he was swallowed up by the jungle. For a moment, she felt abandoned in a solemn and eerie miasma of creeping vines and primitive watching eyes. Everything had happened so quickly that she had not had time to think of the overall effect of remaining behind, and a tremor of foreboding asserted itself in a small back chamber of her mind. Then she heard a raucous complaint above her and looked up to see a vainly fluffed toucan dipping its magnificent banana yellow, faint rose, and turquoise beak at her. Her face brightened.

"Well hello, lovely," she called.

The shiny black bird hopped back and forth, turning his

The Green Bird Sings Desire
Karlene Kubat - 197

elegant, outsized beak as if he were about to speak, then with a buzzing chirrup he flew to the top of the ceiba where he shone regally in the sun.

Continuing to stare up at the exterior of the tree's hollow cavity, she began to think of herself and Steinlöwe up there high above the jungle. That thought, together with the soreness of her bent neck and her tiredness, made her feel weak with dizziness, the ground spinning a little as she reached out for a ficus branch. No man had ever revealed to her quite the depth of intimacy Steinlöwe had felt compelled to share. He was so very different from any man she had ever known, and there remained about him something utterly mysterious.

Focusing on a more down-to-earth scene, she saw that the two mozos, Maguey and Cepi, were in the process of reestablishing the camp, and Bartel was already busily extracting profit from his ceiba.

She decided on a cautious walk to the river, and soon learned how explicit Steinlöwe's parting instructions had been when Maguey immediately dropped a piece of firewood and unsheathed his machete to walk with her. Patulu knew a few words of English, but these two Indians spoke only a little German and Spanish besides their native tongue. She thought of conversing in German, which she hadn't done in some time, certainly having been reluctant to do so with Steinlöwe, but now she could think of nothing to say that was worthy of

breaking into the dignified Indian's preferred silence. She knew that, with these Indians, words were not meant for small talk, but for things that needed to be said.

In the next moment Maguey motioned for her to follow him and walked ahead, parting a clump of thick brush and pointing into a little clearing. There stood a large and shaggy anteater, sniffing the ground.

"*Raro...nocturno*," he said with a soft voice, implying that it was unusual to see one strolling boldly about in daylight hours, for they hunted mostly at night.

It must be especially hungry, she thought, whispering "*Tiene hambre*," to Maguey who shook his head, grinning in agreement as the anteater hurried away.

When she had been sitting by the fragrant, dark river for some minutes, she admitted to herself that once again she was pondering her insecure love, how deep and troubling it was. Recalling the two of them standing together by the large rock and then their heated lovemaking overwhelmed her. I am hopeless, she thought. Perhaps this parting was a good thing; possibly it will bring me to my senses. Cepi came to the water, and she watched him with interest and contentment as he fished for their supper.

#

Cepi's white-fleshed fish were delicious, but she alone was inclined to pull the tiny, pin-like bones from her mouth

The Green Bird Sings Desire
Karlene Kubat - 199

after she had begun to chew. A little annoying, but she still thought the flesh very sweet and liked the crisp, smoky taste resulting from the coals of the fire.

"Quite delightful here, now that the Nazis have departed," Bartel said, leaning back in his camp chair.

"Oh, please don't start that," Kamille implored. "Herr Steinlöwe has been so generous to you. I think you say these things just to annoy me. Why?"

"I say them because I really dislike him, dear girl. I see right through him. Of course, he has you precisely where he wants you. You're in love with him, any fool could see. The German goddess is obviously on to you. She probably put the bloody scorpion up her sleeve just to get his attention...drag him away from you."

"You're disgusting."

Bartel made no response but slapped a mosquito buzzing around his head and lit a large black cigar. She saw that his face glittered with malice, and she stared into the firelight, rigid, her anger burning as bright as the flames. His accusation had caused her face to flush so thoroughly that she was thankful for the shadows of the night.

"How can you take such pleasure in hurtful lies?" she asked, struggling out of their heavy silence.

Bartel looked at her with a cunning smile. "Did you know that Steinlöwe had a rich young wife -- a rather plain creature, I'm told -- who perished on a mountain road at

night on their way to the hospital? He probably parked the car and walked away. She was in the throes of childbirth and both died. I can just imagine--"

"Stop it! Stop it!" Kamille shouted. "I should have gone with them. What a fool I am. You're a vicious...selfish... Oh, you're a pitiful excuse for a human being! You're so afraid I might care for him...so...so mean...cruel for no reason. How can you talk like this?"

"I have countless reasons to hate Steinlöwe, none of which I care to discuss."

"Because they might shed some light on your own guilt," Kamille retorted, jumping up from her chair. "I've heard enough. I'm going to bed."

Stalking off to her tent, she turned up her lantern and tried very hard to concentrate on a guidebook of Mayan ruins. She was far too distraught to fall asleep, but she was also too upset to read. The words wavered and blurred before her blinking eyes. Why must she always learn intimate things about Steinlöwe in the most degrading manner? She was sickened to think of the blows he had suffered, mortified to think of her own cruelty. A tigrina screamed a long chilling complaint, as though it had taken on something far beyond its mastery. Turning off the lantern, she batted out the mosquito netting in the darkness and closed her eyes, waiting for the release of sleep.

#

Was this a dream? No, it couldn't be, yet something was terribly wrong. Someone was rolling her over and over down a lumpy path to the river. Then she saw that the way was strewn with writhing snakes. She scrambled up and ran along the shore. Steinlöwe was with his wife, a woman with her face in shadow who wore a long, white dress. They were strolling, quiet and preoccupied, on the distant shore. Kamille felt a deep loneliness and wanted to call to him, but couldn't. The wife stepped into the sun, her head dropping back against the sky, and Kamille saw that it was Ursula. This time Kamille did call, and he came to the river's edge, carrying a baby. He knelt down, released the infant into the current, and as it swam toward her she saw that it was a crocodile. It came closer and closer, opening wide its toothy jaws. "No....No! No!" she muttered and then tried to force out a scream.

Something touched her shoulder, and she gave a low moan, opening her eyes. There was movement, someone in the tent with her. She sat up in a fright, trying to haul herself out of her troubling sleep. At that moment, she could smell the disturbing reek of alcohol. Outlined by the dim light of the campfire, a dark figure leaned over her and a hand clamped across her mouth.

"Don't scream, m'dear, and I'll let you go. You hear?"

Don't want his damn mozos coming around," Bartel said. She squinted at his black, unsteady form swaying above her.

"God, you've been drinking! I can't believe this! You promised you wouldn't."

Bartel gave an evil laugh. "I said...said I wouldn't bring aguar...diente...local rotgut. I quench my thirs' on oney the ver'bes' gin. Gin! Gin! Never go anywhere 'thout it. Wunnerful stuff, gin...ab...absolves you of sin...gin."

In one moment, Bartel seemed able to speak with a deceptive clarity, and the next he was incoherent. Her heart plummeted like a heavy stone, for she saw that he was very, very drunk, without inhibitions and completely unpredictable.

"Please get out of here."

Bartel stumbled and half fell half sat on her cot.

"If I were Stein...lö...we, yu'd have your clothes off...off!...drunk or not. Hah, I know better...how...tuh treat a woman...like you."

"Oh, God!" Kamille exclaimed. Recalling poor Mata's beating, a derisive laugh, a little too loud, escaped her.

"Don't laugh at me!" He drew himself up in a stiff rage and slapped her a stinging blow across the face.

With a pained cry she fell back on the cot, horrified at this ugly metamorphosis, for now it was clear to her that the barest civility had been stripped away and here was the mad beast that lived down inside. Her face hurt all the way

through her cheek to her throbbing gums. Oh lord, could he possibly imagine he was beating his little love slave into a submissive response? She cringed and opened her mouth to cry for help, but with the first utterance he slapped her again, much harder, and dragged her off the bed by her hair. He was beginning to revel in the violence.

"Tramp...Nazi-loving tramp!"

Paralyzed with pain and shock yet aware that she must somehow escape, she tried to clear her head. It was too risky to call for help. She muttered, "Please let me go."

"Ya too' the land I waited for. Thief! Slut! I know what ya need, heiress whore."

The buckle of his belt flashed in his hand. She opened her mouth to scream. The instant response of a smashing fist knocked her senseless; his large, carved-stone ring had become a brutal new instrument of abuse. She lay dazed while he reached down and ripped away the front of her nightgown and began driving his belt across her chest and shoulders in a wild frenzy. The searing pain ignited a blinding rage in her and she struggled to galvanize herself into action, but, oh, the ache in her head. She slipped into blackness then out again, knew she was moving too slowly. "Help me!" she called into the darkness. Her arm went back and the fingers groped, closing around the lamp. She swung it forward with adrenaline-powered force, crying out at the sharp pains exploding in her head. Bartel cursed

and staggered back just as Maguey and Cepi rushed in and pulled him further away. They fought him to the ground and dragged him all the way back to his tent while he shouted a string of incoherent curses.

Shivering from shock, Kamille thought she was merely cold and crawled toward her jacket, groping, awkward, trying to slip it around her. She touched her face and saw her pale fingers black with blood. "Oh...going to...pass out," she muttered. "Andar...Andar...oh, please." Everything was an echo, ripples of color and pain. "Something wrong...with my head. Andar!" she screamed. Someone was lifting her off the ground, but she could not hold up her head. It went down, falling, falling off her shoulders into blackness.

When she awoke it was raining. She was immobilized by pain. Every muscle ached, and her body was covered with lacerations and contusions. She stared at a bruised arm and let hot tears flow. There was something strange on her head. Reaching up with exploring fingers, she felt a poultice of acrid smelling leaves fastened there; it curled down over her face like a kind of half mask.

Bartel was gone, Maguey told her, and Cepi had gone after Steinlöwe. Maguey's black eyes shone with a sad remorse. He handed her a cup of steaming tea, an herb of some sort; not long after sipping it through a reed at the less swollen side of her mouth, she felt far away and drowsy. It was a relief to be raised slightly above the

pain, to be floating in a cradle of cool air. She stared out the tent flap, watching the shiny leaves dripping, dripping silver droplets in the rain. The long cries of the birds were melancholy now. Everything faded, brightened, faded. Night came, creeping up in between lapses of time. She moaned with pain, mostly from the left side of her head. Maguey came with more tea and a roasted fish which he fed her in little pieces and on which she choked as if she were eating cardboard. Loneliness and depression descended upon her with the darkness, but the tea made her sleep.

In the morning it was still raining. She awoke with a fierce headache and the sudden shock of her condition, and lay trying to sort out what had happened. Steinlöwe must not find her like this. The thought was too horrible to contemplate. She could not do this to him. Trying, with a dry, feverish voice, to arrange the appropriate sentence in Spanish, she begged Maguey to take her out of the forest, to take her home.

"No, no, Steinlöwe *viene*," he said with gentle voice.

Once she crawled out to relieve herself of so much tea, and found herself vomiting as well. With tears of exertion streaming down her face, she stumbled back in waves of pain. Now she lay slipping in and out of dread. Each hour, each minute brought their alarming meeting closer. He would come and find her like this because she had not believed his words. She was a soft-headed fool, and, yes, Steinlöwe had

been right: Bartel was a maniac. She knew that Steinlöwe would hold himself responsible, add this to his grievous anger and react in some drastic way. Her exhausted, aching head was again quite muddled, but the narcotic tea carried her into sleep one more time.

#

Awakening with deep depression, she rolled little by little toward the wall of the tent and cried. How could there be any tears left in her? He found her like that. Leaning over her and suddenly turning away with muffled German curses, he drew his hand across his face.

"I'm...so...so ashamed," she whispered.

"Shh...shh, *Kind*. Will you hurt if I hold you?"

"Do it...I don't care."

When his arms came around her she could feel the terrible violence burning inside him, seeping through his skin, and washing over her pain with dulling force. This love could turn to violence. It frightened her. As he touched her left arm where the belt had struck, she winced.

"God damn him! God damn him! Christ, I left you here with that...that...*that*! I will never forget this."

"I'm a grown woman. Every mark is...is my own fault."

"The hell it is! The hell it is! I will kill him!"

"Please don't say that. Where is he?"

"Disappeared. Vanished. I hope to God something

finished him off. It will save me the trouble."

"You aren't serious?"

"How can I look at you and not be? Who would blame me? But just now I am thinking only of you."

"Ursula...is she all right?"

"Strong and healing. It is you I worry about. You have a concussion. I must get you out of here. There is the problem of...of infection."

"Is that why I keep...keep fading in and out, or is it the tea...Maguey's tea?"

"Both."

"Oh, Andar, I didn't...there was no will made. Esperanza is...could you take care of it?...try to--"

"*Liebchen! Mein Liebchen*, I did not mean to frighten you. How thoughtless I am. You will get well, *Kind*. You will be fine." He touched her closed eyes and forehead with gentle kisses and said against her ear, "I love you. I love you, my battered little *Schatz*."

"Can you hold still now, while I remove this clever forest mask?" He talked as he worked. "*Herr Doktor* will...cleanse your face with anti-biotic cream...bandage this poor head. Here, slip this pill down your throat; you will not fall asleep, just float -- we need you awake."

"For kilometers I wanted to kill...now all I want to do is get you out of here. Could you sit a horse with me?"

"I could...do...anything with you."

"I will remember that," he promised. "I will help you dress...then get you on Tänzer." He was smiling, but every time he looked at her there was anger and pain in his eyes.

Steinlöwe had ridden in on another mount, stringing Tänzer along to keep him fresh for the return trip. He carried Kamille out to Tänzer who was held by Patulu near a log suitable for mounting without spilling Kamille.

"We will ride without a saddle. That way I can hold you close to me," he told her.

"Won't that be...difficult...clumsy riding for you?"

"I live on this horse," he answered, patting Tänzer's neck. "He would rather go without a week's favorite grains than disgrace himself by letting me come off his back."

He lifted her up, then, still holding her waist to steady her, stood on the log and mounted easily behind her. His arms came around her body, cradling her against him.

"Come on now, Tänzer. I have kept you idle for this. Come on...*Arbeit zu tun*. Help me get my woman home."

A groggy Kamille had decided that no matter how it pained her to ride she would do it if she had to bite her tongue in half, adding another contusion to the long list. Patulu rode ahead with Maguey and Cepi behind, bringing the mules and equipment. Slow-measured hooves carried them through the wind-brushed, dripping jungle, homeward, homeward. Just managing to keep her promise, Kamille lost consciousness only once. It didn't last long; turning to

jelly in his fast grip, she muttered, "Sorry," as her eyes came open. They were on an incline, and Steinlöwe moved them over to a level place with great care, then stopped Tänzer. He leaned around her and looked at her face.

"I'm okay," she whispered.

He kissed her on the neck, and she began to feel a little warmth shooting through her arteries along with the pain. She ran her hand over his supporting fingers.

"Hmm...hmm," she muttered, floating dreamily in and out of here and now. Her waist throbbed beneath his grip.

"Make...love...to...me." Had she said it out loud?

There was the low tone of his laughter close to her ear. "Now I know you are going to be all right, *Kind*."

VI

The nightmarish encounter with Bartel had been pushed to a vague, dark place at the back of her mind and Steinlöwe had been gone three days when Kamille was visited at the hospital by Ursula.

"We are Andar's invalids," Ursula remarked with a cheerful, encouraging voice. "Poor Andar takes his responsibilities very seriously. I am worried... Oh, but do not mind me. I am thinking out loud."

"You don't have to keep anything from me, Ursula. My head is working again...I want to know everything."

Ursula sat beside the bed with her hands folded in her lap, looking gorgeous and dramatic in a cream linen suit.

"Well, you know perhaps that Andar went to find Bartel. Or you assumed that he would."

"I didn't hear that he had and I didn't really think that it naturally followed, but I knew it as if I'd dreamed it," Kamille answered, thinking that she had known it by his absence at her bedside.

Ursula frowned and twined her fingers together, bouncing her nervous hands on her lap. Kamille, knowing Ursula to be a very decorous person, took these involuntary gestures as an unfavorable sign. Her heart gave a small lurch, accelerating its beat.

"After a day and a half of tracking, Andar returned without any trace of Mr. Bartel. However...the next day Patulu came through the area where Andar had been, and he..." She hesitated, looking with a searching gaze at Kamille, "he found Stewart Bartel."

"Was he...still drunk?" Kamille asked.

"He was swinging by one of his legs in a mass of vines and orchids covering a steep wall above that dark river."

"Swinging by one of his legs!" Kamille exclaimed. "He must have been intoxicated out of his mind."

"It appeared that he had fallen or...or thrown himself over the side."

"But you don't mean... Is he...is he alive?" Kamille asked with a sharp little pain growing in her stomach.

"I'm afraid not, my dear, quite horribly, horribly

dead. You see the ants... Oh, I should not be telling you this. Andar will not approve."

"Oh, God!" Kamille said, sitting up. "Oh, my God!"

"Well...he was already mostly skeleton, swarming with ants. Oh, I am sorry, Kamille...so grotesque. Sooner or later you would have to know. What a nightmare this has been. And now...but, no, I think you must sleep."

"Tell me the rest," Kamille demanded with the muscles in her cheeks tight and her hands cold as ice.

"No, I should not. I have already said too much. Andar will be so angry with me."

"Ursula you must tell me the rest. Do you think I can just drop off to sleep after hearing this?"

"It is only that I am worried. You must not tell Andar. The *policía* have been questioning him very closely as to how...well, as to how Mr. Bartel came to be where he was. Since Andar was in the area before Patulu found Mr. Bartel, and since there is a history of...of discord, they... Naturally, they have to make such inquiries, and that is why I... Oh, dear, poor Andar. I am so worried. Yet, I suppose he has some influence with the authorities. Please say nothing."

Kamille dropped her head back on the pillows as if she had been struck all over again. So her worst fears, the ones she had pushed back and back into a dark recess, were to be forced into her consciousness. It was all her fault.

All. All! She studied Ursula for several minutes in silence, wondering if Ursula believed that Andar had killed Stewart Bartel, and wondering if she herself could believe such a thing. Again she was in agony. Would she never be free of this strangling doubt? It poisoned everything, as if Bartel could still reach out to her with his evil accusations. But he was dead, and the gruesome scene, so clearly painted by Ursula, had already begun to haunt her. She remembered how he had fallen down before her with his arms around her knees, begging her to help him find his soul. Then she saw the crazed hand raised above her in the semi-darkness of her tent, and the memory turned her heart to ice. But again she saw the ants...

"You and Andar..." Ursula suddenly began, and Kamille looked up startled, realizing how obvious her feelings must be to this discerning woman. Ursula, who believed herself affianced to Andar, must have held herself in all this time only by the firm habit of good breeding.

"Oh, Ursula, I think I do want to sleep now," she interrupted with a large dose of shame. But when Ursula was gone she did not sleep at all. She tried instead to compose a face for Andar. But what face? How?

#

He brought her gardenias, and the gesture somehow distressed rather than pleased her, but she smiled, inhaling

the distinctive fragrance she had always loved. Teasing her with his eyes, as though devoid of the slightest concern, he sat beside her bed with one tanned arm dangling over the chair back. She stared at his hand, large and strong, at the elegant tapered fingers, and her involuntary thought went to Bartel. She was devastated that this thought could cross her mind at such a moment, but when Steinlöwe held her in his arms she thought of nothing else. His touch could lift her from the darkest place, and he was all she wanted.

"Lock the door," she whispered, and he laughed, holding her head between gentle hands; then, sliding his long thumbs over her bruised face, his mouth turned grave. There was a certain sadness -- or was it apprehension? -- in his gray eyes, mingled with intense longing.

He mentioned nothing of Bartel or the police or his unproductive jungle search, and she was afraid to ask a single question. With only their increasing desire for each other manifested, it appeared to Kamille that they were playing a game of silence, dense and threatening. Was her overwrought imagination carrying her off again? He was only trying to keep her from stress, she told herself, to hasten her recovery with a tranquil environment.

"I want to go home," she said not long after his first few visits. "Don Tomás and Rodolfo and you spend too much time doing my work."

He shook his head, insisting that he was happy to go on

checking in at Esperanza, that all was well there. "Your caretakers are doing a very good job," he assured her.

"If you don't get me out of here I'll call a taxi," she threatened. The big green Mercedes was duly put at her disposal.

She sat beside him, winding through mountain canyons and staring in silent thought at the dark, sweeping limbs of the tall Montezuma firs.

"It's almost Christmas," she said mostly to herself, catching sight of a pair of deer, a buck and a doe, bounding through the pale highland grass.

"Kamille." He took her hand in his. "I have something in mind, and... I usually give a large Christmas party. The harvest is coming... But I am...this time I will leave everything in the hands of my very capable *administrador*. I do not plan to be home for Christmas."

She looked at him with surprise and disappointment.

"No, wait...listen. You are part of my plans. You see, Ursula always intended to go home after Christmas, but I think she intended to go home with...with quite different plans. There were a couple more places I had promised to take her... I want you to come along."

"Me? Oh, but I--" She twined her fingers tight.

"Let me go on. Esperanza is running smoothly at present. A change of scenery over the holidays will be good for you. You have not been very happy -- no, no protest.

You cannot think your moods go unnoticed by me, *Liebling*. I feel responsible...so responsible for what happened...but I... Anyway, I have owed Ursula an explanation for some time now... Do not look like that. I love you. I want you with me. We three will make this one last journey, and we will try to see that Ursula parts from us a friend. She has been a very good sport. You know I have to take care of this and... Will you come along...please?"

Kamille frowned, thinking of the displeasure her presence would bring to Ursula. She was also unsettled by something inexplicable, menacing, gnawing at the back of her mind. Still, she said in a voice fraught with worry, "I don't see how I can refuse, even though I am in some ways -- oh, lots of ways -- very uncomfortable at the prospect."

"Then help me to make it easier, *Kind*, by telling me what I have not heard in a long time."

She looked or, as she often described it, fell into the waiting gray eyes, finding there the same strain she had lately been experiencing herself. No, help me, she wanted to say, help me because I can't help my feelings. And perhaps her eyes said this, but her words came out with simple truth, "I love you."

#

Ursula was not as compliant as they would have liked,

but neither could blame her. She resisted any attempt to bring matters to a head and went right on with her stubborn fight for Steinlöwe as if nothing had changed. This bold but earnest maneuvering steadily increased Kamille's discomfort, for while Ursula grew more openly affectionate with Steinlöwe he grew more understanding and patient with his irrepressible guest. Kamille, in fact, found herself regularly fleeing from their company, wandering off alone to nurse a bout of jealousy and awkwardness. She felt inept and spiritless in the face of Ursula's expert facade. Sometimes it even seemed as if the two conspired against her, but then she would blame this paranoia on Charlie.

On their way to the Pacific coast, they had spent Christmas Eve amidst the merrymaking throngs of Guatemala City. Despite her discomfort, Kamille could not escape a rewarding immersion in the color and excitement of the continuous festivities. There were endless church bells ringing, elaborate processions marching down the streets and filing into the cathedrals at all hours, and the night air was heavy with the sulfurous odor of exploding fireworks. Glorious for two lovers, she thought with a dose of guilt.

On the way back to their hotel after dinner, they were caught in a pressing crowd, and at one point Kamille ducked into a church foyer to avoid the surge and catch her breath. Between the clangings of echoing bells, she heard the high, pious voices of a choir, and then found she was standing

among hundreds of potted white lilies. The heady smell nearly caused her to swoon with its exotic sweetness. She looked down at the seed pearls on the cream, lace-collared evening dress she had bought that very day because the long sleeves and high collar covered her bruises. Forming patterns of flowers and leafy tendrils, the swirling pearls glowed in the soft light of hundreds of prayer candles that spilled out into the entranceway. Airy wisps of hair, coiled high and arranged to cover her bruised temple, came floating down around her eyes. I feel like a fragile old ornament, she thought, an ornament someone forgot to hang.

With a woeful laugh, she suddenly realized that she had been followed by a handsome, dark ladino, very striking, whom she had admired in the street because of his beautiful apparel. He was costumed in dark tights and a belted, high-collared black velour tunic with voluminous and belling sixteenth-century sleeves. Entering the foyer, he caught sight of her and strode over to her with happy recognition, wishing her a merry Christmas and offering an appreciative smile. But as she was attempting a polite response he reached out, swept her into his arms, and kissed her squarely on the mouth, rocking her back on her heels. Astonished and thrown off balance, for a moment she could only cling to his broad velvet shirt, inhaling his strange cologne. In the same instant, she heard Ursula's cheerful voice: "Ah, here she is, Andar. But, Liebling, our Kamille

has found an interesting pastime." The burly stranger whispered some Spanish eroticism in Kamille's ear and let go of her with a good deal of reluctance, then dipped his body with a nod of his head. He turned to Ursula and Steinlöwe, explaining that he had been captivated by an angel, then presented his felicitations and rushed back into the street. Ursula shrugged and offered Steinlöwe another of her looks. He stood with his head angled over one shoulder, studying Kamille. Ursula had surprisingly left them together, hurrying off to peek at the ornate nave.

"Men follow you, my love. I cannot blame them. You look like a painting...your gown...you could even...marry me in that. Angelic...as if you belong at the top of an *altmodisch*...at the top of an old-fashioned tree."

"But I feel more as if I were out on a limb," she answered, straightening her skirt.

"It is not easy to watch a man kiss you."

"It isn't easy for me either...to...to watch you with Ursula. This really wasn't...wasn't a good idea. I wish--"

He interrupted by taking her in his arms, but had to withdraw with sudden discretion when Ursula reappeared.

Remaining behind for a minute, Kamille stood alone among the overpowering lilies and flickering candles, then walked into the street. In recent moments, she had felt more desired by an adoring stranger than anyone else.

"Merry Christmas to you, too, dark prince," she called into

the exploding night.

#

They had driven down to a place on the Pacific coast called Likin, and made their way to a low-slung, wide-arched resort hidden in a cluster of palms on a dazzling white sand bar. The coast there had myriad inlets and keys. To reach their destination -- the long, sun-cured beach -- they had to take a motor launch out through channels lined with dark mangroves whose roots were so thick nothing but egrets and perhaps snakes and crocodiles would be able to penetrate their secretive density. It was the hottest part of the day. Beyond the rustling, thatch-roofed cabañas, the wind was whipping the turquoise waves to a white froth.

"Let's all take a siesta and meet later for a swim," Steinlöwe suggested. Ursula was quick to agree, as they followed the steward carrying their bags down the interior arcade to their spacious screened rooms.

Everything was light and airy here. Kamille felt more relaxed than she had in days. She took a shower, examining her bruises which were slowly fading, then toweled herself dry before her wide seaward window, watching the crashing surf. The air was warm, but the white ceiling fan offered relief. She lay naked atop her bed for awhile, unable to sleep. Finally, she put on her bathing suit and a beach jacket and opened her sliding door which led onto the beach.

As she passed Steinlöwe's room, she glanced through the window, supposing him to be asleep, and was startled. He was not alone. An opened book was turned over on his bed. Presumably, he had been reading when Ursula entered his room. He was propped on the pillows in his shirt and slacks, and Ursula was holding his hand. Transfixed for mere seconds, Kamille stood half hidden by a potted palm. Ursula's lips were moving but all at once she bent her head and leaned toward Steinlöwe and his arms came around her. Kamille's paralyzed body sprang to life and she fled.

"So this is how it feels to be eaten alive with jealousy. Cruel...cruel," Kamille mumbled to herself as she hurried down the walk. She wanted to slink away and hide as wounded animals do, far away with her suitcase. Instead, she stumbled off to a convenient bar she discovered under a wind-whipped, thatched roof. Half of the stools were in the swimming pool -- the better to drown oneself in drunkenness. She ordered a double rum with coconut milk.

There was only one person in the pool. He came out almost at once and sat beside her. He was a blondish, young Texan -- at least his duffel by the pool said *Texas* -- with a rich walnut tan.

"This sure is a lonely place. Y'all care if I buy one?"

"No thank you," she answered, but she tried to smile because she really was grateful for a friendly, uninvolved

face.

"Ma name's Hollis. What's yours?"

Her eyes traveled over the smooth, nicely-hewn face holding such honest blue eyes. "Kamille."

"Sound like a Yankee. What state y'all from?"

"Washington."

"You mean the other one? Lord, that's way up yonder in the green north. What's a nice lookin' woman like you doin' way down here?"

"Well, that..." Kamille began with pondering voice.

"I know -- is a long story," he finished, grinning and watching her drain her glass. "Two more...make 'em doubles, *por favor*," he called above her protest.

"What are you doing here, anyway?"

"Kinda takin' a lil vacation from an oil rig."

"Oh, a Texas oilman," she said with a limp smile.

"Sure do look nice when you smile. You was lookin' a little peak-ed...with them bruises and all."

"I had an accident. Good-bye and thanks." She pulled her beach jacket around her with rapid tugs and slipped off the stool as the drinks arrived.

"Wait just a minute! Hey, don't waste this." He handed her the glass and watched her hesitate and then drink. "Can we maybe go for a walk? Nice to have someone to talk to speaks English. And looks so pretty...even if it's a Yankee," he teased.

"I'm going on the beach. You can walk along if you want," she answered with polite indifference.

The Texan grabbed his canvas bag and followed her with an earnest voice. "Got a towel and suntan lotion in here if you want some."

"I plan to walk a long way then lie in the sand and burn to a crisp."

"Well, I wouldn't go that far. You upset?"

"Let's steer away from that subject. Perhaps we could just talk about the coconuts floating up on the beach...that sort of thing."

"Sure...okay. Say, could I hold your hand? I feel a little dizzy...all that booze."

"That's what my grandmother would have called a real good story. How many did you have before I arrived?"

"Oh two, maybe three...kinda lonely, you know."

"Yes, I know," she agreed.

Hollis stashed his duffel under a palm. They walked about a mile then came three quarters of the way back to the palm and threw themselves down on the toasty sand.

"Here, better get on this lil ol' towel," Hollis said, pulling a thin roll of terry cloth from his duffel.

By this time the rum and Hollis had lifted Kamille's spirits a trifle. His soft Texas humor was entertaining.

"Y'all better let me put some of this stuff on your back. Burn real bad here."

"Oh all right. Go to it."

"Got some imported ale in here, too. Want some? Still cool. It's kinda stronger than beer."

"Ale sounds good," Kamille said, sliding the sweating green bottle from his hand. She drank the entire bottle and lay down on the towel Hollis had spread for her. He began to smooth lotion over her back, his big caressing hands surprisingly gentle.

"Feels nice," she said with groggy voice. "If I fall asleep, don't let me die out here."

"Want another ale?"

"Another one?"

"Yep."

"All right," she giggled, reaching for it.

Hollis lay down beside her and put his protective arm over her waist. It felt nice, uncomplicated, comforting. Then he told her a joke about a kangaroo. She rolled over, giggling, and realized she must be drunk. His slow fingers were stroking her thigh.

A shadow fell over them. With her head to one side resting on her hand and one glimpsing eye, she saw that it was Steinlöwe. He looked down at her with no definable expression, his skin glowing dark against his white, open-necked polo shirt.

Lifting her head, she shaded her eyes and looked back. She felt dizzy, a little giddy, and said, "*Wie geht's?* What

happened? Did Ursula fall asleep?"

He didn't answer, merely knelt down beside Hollis and introduced himself, putting out his hand which Hollis quickly took, making his own introduction.

"I am sorry, Hollis," he said. "I know you must have thought yourself very lucky, but I am afraid you have something that belongs to me."

"I'm not *something!*" Kamille shouted with a hot flash of anger.

"Right now you are something," Steinlöwe answered.

Hollis looked at the bruises and muttered, "Sure don't deserve her, though."

"He didn't do it," Kamille explained with dizzy exasperation.

"Nice meeting you, Hollis. If you are still around later I will buy you yet another drink," Steinlöwe offered.

He took Kamille's hand and led her off, leaving poor Hollis staring after them with forlorn eyes. "I'm sorry, Hollis," she called back, but she didn't resist. She had the beginnings of a headache, felt like crying, like sobbing actually, and wanted to get to her room without words.

When they reached her door, still in silence, she tried to leave him outside, but he came into her room and leaned against the sliding glass with his arms folded.

"Why did you do that? Did you need attention so badly? If you need a man let it be me."

"Andar, I'm drunk and I'm sad. Please let me alone."

She threw back the bedspread and tugged at her bikini with clumsy fingers while he watched. He moved to her, reached out around her unfastening the top, then knelt and slid the bottom down away from her hips with a soft groan. "I seem to remember doing something like this before," he said with a wistful laugh. "Your bruises are fading."

It was so long since he had touched her, and now he seemed almost afraid of hurting her. She took his head in her hands and ran her fingers through his hair and over his neck, swaying a little, unsteady. He stood up and his fingers supported her like a rope of fire around her waist.

"Why are you drunk? Why are you sad? Did you perhaps see me with Ursula? Do you remember my asking you to let me do this in my own way? I was telling her about us. Do you not understand?...telling her I--"

Kamille had drawn him near the bed and was struggling with his shirt. He pulled her fumbling hands away and worked with quick fingers, removing the shirt then the rest of his clothes in rough jerking motions.

"Are you too drunk?" he asked, pulling her body against him. "You are so hot from the sun, or is it... My God, I have been wanting you. Why must we hurt each other, *Kind*, when we can do this?"

She shook her head. "I don't know! I don't know! I don't know what's happened. I can't remember anything, but

I...I feel like something wounded. I only want to touch you. I have to touch you and touch you and touch you."

They sank down upon the bed, their restless hands stroking skin and hair, their consuming mouths, their hearts reveling in what only they could give to each other. There were no coherent words, only cries of pleasure as their sweating bodies merged in one fierce rhythm until the light faded from the indigo sea.

"Are you hungry?" he asked when she opened her eyes.

"Yes." She laughed and put his thumb in her mouth.

"Oh...where is Ursula?"

"Gone."

He told her that Ursula could not bring herself to stay, under the circumstances, and had gone on to the ruins of Tikal, where they were going in two days. "I have deep affection and admiration for her," was all that he offered concerning their relationship.

They ate Christmas Day supper by torchlight at a semi-private table on the flagstones above the sea. Kamille sat nestled in the crook of his arm, listening to a small group of musicians while he fed her champagne and bits of lobster from his plate. All her senses were tuned to the nearness of him so that she could hardly taste anything.

"Tell me about you."

"No, tell me about you," he insisted, "your childhood. You had a long pigtail, almost white, did you not? You

climbed trees and ran through the mud...a little piglet."

"Yes...yes," she answered, laughing. "My parents were so good to me. They were so knowledgeable...such good teachers. I miss them terribly." Her eyes were suddenly moist with sadness. They would have appreciated Andar, she thought, wishing they could have known him.

"I am sorry. I understand that," he said as his fingers brushed a tear from her cheek. "They taught you well."

Even as a very young child, they taught me...read me hundreds of stories, all the classic children's stories, and Kipling and Kenneth Grahame and...and *Heidi*. Did you know *Heidi*?" she asked with a whimsical exuberance.

"We never met...but, I have heard of her," he said, running his finger down her nose.

"And when you became a college instructor did you have glasses resting on the tip of this clever, upturned nose?"

"Sometimes...I was very serious about my work...good at it, too. I'm a good teacher."

"I know it. I know how intelligent you are."

With a disbelieving laugh, she slid her fingers over her green silk bodice and asked, "How do you know that?"

"Because you love me," he answered.

She smiled and laid her head against his jacket, reflecting in silence for a minute.

"I hope that some day I can look at Aunt Cathline's

portrait and say with conviction and honesty, 'I've carried on your tradition, Aunt Cathline. With all the energy in me I've made this school as good as I possibly could.'

"You will say that," he said with prideful voice, "and sooner than you imagine. You are a dedicated soul."

"Now tell me about you," she urged.

"But I am just beginning to learn of you."

"No, it's your turn."

"What?" he asked, shrugging and laughing.

"When you were a boy."

His face brightened with happy memories. "When I was a boy I hunted and fished with the Indians. They taught me everything I know of the jungle. I went around half naked and thought I was Tarzan. I was certain that nothing could harm me...even when a lot of things did."

Kamille touched his angular jaw with the backs of her fingers. It was a little bristly and made him stirring and vulnerable to her. She kissed the place where she had touched. Whenever she did this, he responded very quickly, kissing her back and whispering German love words that sent a pulsing warmth through her body.

"Were you ever sick?"

"Of course. I drank bad water and acquired parasites like everyone else. I was bitten by snakes and scorpions, fell off horses and out of trees, and kept our poor doctor at the peak of his skills. That is why doctors are so

highly revered here."

"Because of you?" she said, laughing against his hand.

"Almost solely," he answered with a grin.

"What sorts of things make you afraid?" She hesitated, wondering if she had gone too far, feeling his eyes on her as she looked away at the crimson horizon.

He leaned close and waited for her eyes. "I do not always know if I will have you. That makes me afraid. I do not want to lose you. But enough of this. We should go to sleep soon, unless you plan not to leave in the morning."

"I don't want to go anywhere."

"Not even to bed?" he teased.

"Your eyes are very dark tonight, and your mouth frightens me a little."

"Do not be melodramatic, *Kind*. It is lust. You have your hand inside my shirt. What will people say?"

"I hope they are enjoying it a fraction as much as I."

He held the champagne up to her lips, watched her swallow, then kissed her damp mouth. "Ummm...secondhand champagne is better," he said, kissing her again.

She put her head back against his shoulder and smiled a little because his eyes were filled with torchlight.

"Will you marry me before something else happens?"

"Yes," she heard herself answer with remarkable ease.

He lifted her hand and slipped a ring on it, a large teardrop emerald. She gasped in amazement. "Andar! Oh,

Andar...oh, it's...amazing!" Tears nearly as large as the emerald ran down her cheeks.

"Thank God. I thought I would never get this far," he said with a half-serious show of relief.

He kissed her a long joyous kiss while a hushed and reverent silence fell over the entire dining area. When at last they broke apart there was a soft whistle and polite clapping. Looking sheepish, they both burst into laughter.

#

They were supposed to meet Ursula at Tikal, 190 miles north of Guatemala City in the dense lowland jungle of *El Petén*. But, when their Aviateca flight landed on the rough airstrip, Steinlöwe was handed a message stating that she had returned to Guarida d'el Tigre to pack her things and might see them there if they returned in time. With her customary good manners, she pointed out the things she had enjoyed at Tikal and wished them a pleasant excursion.

Kamille felt a rush of shame and sadness as she stood watching Steinlöwe turn the note over in his hand with frowning countenance. He looked up, saw her expression, and smiled. "Do not feel bad. We cannot have everything just the way we want it."

"I can't blame her. I wouldn't behave as well. If I imagine myself in her place I feel sick."

"Do not...don't do that. It accomplishes nothing."

Come, we will get our things up to the Jungle Inn and take a jeep to the ruins. Or we can walk if you are not too tired; it takes only twenty minutes."

Flying in over the green-matted jungle, Kamille had sometimes seen flashes of water from man-made reservoirs, for there were no natural wells in the dry, porous limestone of this area. Water was scarce even when the rains came. The liquid flash of reflected blue sky beneath the secretive foliage had suggested the winking eye of some ancient Mayan god. The white temples jutting up out of the emerald wilderness were often called America's first skyscrapers. But when Kamille stood in the Great Plaza of Tikal and looked up at Temple I's high steps leading into the sky, she thought the sight even more astounding than the view from the plane.

They started up the temple steps, a steep climb which Kamille thought somewhat arduous in the heat but which deterred her not in the least. The risers were unnaturally high and exacted a great deal of energy and balance. Her enthusiasm for reaching the top was heightened by the knowledge that the structure she stood upon was built by Mayan architects in 700 A.D. "Let's see," she calculated, "from 1981 to...more than twelve hundred years ago all of this was being constructed and painted in dazzling color". She knew that numbers were of supreme importance to the Maya and that every proportion in the design had a sacred

religious significance.

Once in leaning a little too far out, she felt dizzy. Sweat broke out on her forehead and nausea uncurled in the pit of her stomach. What was this? She had always been the first to reach the top of any hill, even if it was more a matter of stubborn will than strength. Steinlöwe turned to check on her progress, saw her face, and came back down to her. He lifted her hat and let it fall against her back, holding her neck, and blotting her face with his handkerchief.

"Do you want to go back down?"

"No! Not for the world. I think I leaned out too far. The angle is strange...so steep." It probably wasn't the pyramid at all, she thought, because she had been a little dizzy earlier. So much excitement and so much Andar. She smiled to herself.

When they reached the top entrance she said, "I read that the roof comb is 145 feet up, so we are high." She stood under the entrance lintel, leaning against the wall. The ledge at the doorway was narrow and left her with the feeling of plunging down through space.

"Come inside," Steinlöwe called.

She entered to find the three temple chambers narrower than she had expected. Above were the grand corbelled vaults. "The famous Mayan arch," she whispered in awe.

"Yes...ingenious. You like architecture?"

"Of course...and everything about the Maya."

"Then you are in the right country," he assured her with lighthearted voice. "Do you feel better?"

"Yes, I'm fine."

"No one is around to bother us. Let me kiss my sacred princess."

"And then throw me down the steps?" she teased.

"Not very amusing." He pulled off her hat, brushed her hair away from her forehead and kissed her there then her cheek, as if testing her temperature. "Your cheek is damp."

She swayed against him, swallowed, and closed her eyes.

"You are dizzy, Kamille," he said with worried voice.

"Yes," she muttered with a careless laugh against his shoulder, "because I've found a lion in the Temple of the Giant Jaguar. Everything here is jaguars and serpents."

"The same jaguars and *barba amarilla* that are out roaming the jungle at this moment."

They gazed over the wild verdure then down on the Great Plaza, which he told her had a pre-Christian history. Across from them was the lower Temple of the Masks.

"Once these temples were painted in brilliant colors," she said. "What I wouldn't give to see into the past when everything was new and flourishing in all its grandeur and mystery."

"Some things were not so pleasant in that thousand years or more of drama. There was occasional slaughter in

the cult of the mathematical wizards," he reminded her.

"Just like real life," she commented.

From their high vantage point they stood with arms entwined, looking out across the jungle. How many secrets still lay beneath the tangled vines, Kamille wondered.

"I guess we should make our descent," she said with more courage than she felt.

"I will go first, Liebchen. Take your time and keep your head down facing the steps."

They worked their way down the steep risers, leaning in against the pyramid in the beating sun, until they reached the last step, from which he jumped and then lifted her, rewarding her with a kiss. Her face was flushed and she was perspiring.

"We will not go to the museum today," he said. "I will put you to bed and leave you alone so that you can rest."

"What will you do?"

"First I am going to call 'Tigre' and see if Ursula is there. Do you understand, Kamille?"

"Of course," she said at once. "And then what?"

"I have a friend here. He will invite me for a drink, and we will solve a few of the world's more recent problems."

"I love this place. I feel different here. There's something magical... And I love sharing it with you."

"Then we will come back until all the sly Mayan gods

have whispered their secrets to you," he promised.

#

Upon Kamille's return to Esperanza Ixil greeted her at the door, bowing her head and clasping her prayerful hands and then clutching either side of her wrinkled face with delight. Kamille hugged her with gratitude for such a devoted welcome.

Steinlöwe left her to her affairs after inviting her to the Little Tiger hacienda the next evening for supper.

She rushed over to the school, greeted the teachers, and listened to the children, the younger of whom were still singing yuletide songs. Their bright dark eyes followed her as they sang, tender, high voices soaring up to the rafter beams as she sat enjoying them and breathing in the strong wax and cedar fragrance of the room. A comforting feeling enveloped her and she knew that she had really come home at last.

In the late afternoon with the intense sun plummeting straight for the mountain peaks, she forced herself to go to Bartel's studio. It would not do to let the fear of going there grow to a troubling avoidance. With pounding heart she pushed open the door and entered. Once again, she heard Mata's yielding cries as she had lain exposed on the blue-clothed bed. The girl was gone -- Ixil had said this in a succinct voice without explanation. Kamille intended to

look for Mata and try to comfort her, imagining that her suffering must be great. Pondering a little more the pretty young Indian girl's disappearance, she sorted with haste through Bartel's personal effects. She paused a moment. Should these things be sent to someone? If so, to whom? Perhaps there was a clue somewhere. At the back of a secret desk drawer, which she had manipulated until she discovered the method of release, she caught sight of a journal with a marker in it. The sprawling words were written in blue ink. Surely somewhere inside was the mention of a family member, a relative. She flipped back and forth through the pages until her eye fell upon the name of Steinlöwe. She began to read the entry, dated nearly two years earlier.

"Today has been hell arguing with that intransigent woman. It is Steinlöwe's subtle intervention, this new will giving remaining interest to the daughter of the North American couple. Anything to keep me from Esperanza. A young woman in possession here he could deal with, since they seem to flock to his door. I see that the fight is really between me and Steinlöwe: the drunken artist, as I am known, and the Nazi con artist. Who will win? He knows as well as I do that there is nickel-bearing ore under the lower valley floor of Esperanza, enough to rival the lucrative

deposits at Lake Izabel. The export value is undeniable. For the moment he has the upper hand. If the land goes to the daughter, he knows he can get it. That is precisely how confident this womanizing bastard is. I have a few tricks left, only I must stop drinking. I am a damned bloody sot."

With shaking hands she closed the journal and, tucking it under her arm, walked from the room, dazed, absently bumping into things. Thus Bartel reached out from his grave to taunt her with more deadly poison; a poison that she could taste, that might seep into her heart, driving her from Steinlöwe forever. If only she hadn't fallen so quickly under his spell. Suspicion mounted upon suspicion, Steinlöwe's passionate devotion, his concern, his gentleness distorted, warped by a few devastating words on a page. Was it happening already? Was her impassioned heart succumbing to the creeping fear that Steinlöwe was really someone with unspeakable, self-serving interests? Now, because her love was again tainted with Bartel's venom, there must be another agonizing confrontation, one that already left her body cold as ice and drained of hope.

The soothing shower, the siesta intended after her work in Bartel's studio were forgotten. She was weak with dread and fear, her knees almost buckling under her as she walked straight to the Land Rover. She was on the road before she

realized what had happened. Her long braid lay across her breast; fine hairs teased loose by the blowing wind played over her fixed gaze. Still dressed in her casual slacks, sandals, and shirt, she cared for nothing but the end of what was to come. On the seat beside her lay the journal. She had read nothing more in it, could hardly bear to look at it. There was an acrid taste of fear in her mouth. She was driving too fast, sliding over loose debris on the curving road.

Remembering almost nothing that had passed before her during the drive, she found herself in front of the tile-roofed casa of El Tigre Pequeño. She got out of the Rover with slow movements and studied the house. Its broad dark windows leered back at her. Picking up the journal she walked toward the casa, her heart racing out of rhythm.

Steinlöwe came from the yard, wearing khakis over work boots. He hurried toward her with questioning eyes, but the look on her face brought him to a standstill before he reached her. "Kamille! What is it?"

She found herself unable to speak and looked at him with a helpless, frozen gaze. He started toward her, amazed when she put up her hand and stepped back.

"Who are you?" she managed, her voice strained and broken. She saw unmistakable fear in his eyes. Fear for what? Discovery? Her body was visibly shaking.

"Come here, my love," he said, moving toward her.

"No!"

"My God, what has happened? Let me get near you."

"No! When you get near me I'm lost."

"Come up on the veranda." His voice had gone strange and cautious, as if dealing with hysteria.

Was she hysterical, she wondered as she climbed the steps. The journal was held in her fingers like something about to catch fire, and she sat ready to spring away.

"What is that you have?"

She laid the journal in her lap, fingering it with nervous hands. "It was Bartel's."

"A journal...with information that seeks to incriminate me in some further way," he said. His voice had cooled.

"Yes," she whispered.

He knelt beside her chair, the pupils of his eyes large and black, consuming the soft gray irises.

"Kamille? Oh, *Kind*, what are you doing?"

"Don't...don't...don't," she implored.

There followed a long silence, and then he said with a slow, dead voice, "You do not love me, Kamille."

She felt nauseous, overcome by a wrenching sadness. "I loved the Andar you gave to me."

"Oh, Christ! That is clever. It so easily sets you free while leaving me with my guts torn out. You keep trying me *in absentia* for the same crimes." He stared into her eyes. "Or are there more crimes this time? Yes, I see."

I said I was going to kill Bartel, so of course I am guilty, even though cleared by the police. There is something in his journal which proves this, *et cetera, et cetera.*"

Kamille had never seen him like this -- angry, yes, but never so distraught and wild. He stood up and began pacing, his boots clicking on the tiles while he put his head back and groaned. Then, stopping before her, he stared down at her in silence and disbelief.

She opened the journal and held it out. "I only want honesty between us," she said with gentled voice.

"No!" he roared. "I will not touch that filth!...not assault my eyes with the ravings of a lunatic! I cannot believe..." His voice broke and he lowered his head, running his hand over his face. "Kamille," he whispered in a harsh voice of desperation. Then in the next instant a change came into his eyes. They were very hard now and resolute as he spoke. "We were not meant to be." He smiled with bitterness. "Take your evidence and go, poor *Kind*. You have made your point. You are free from me at last."

She stood up, twisting at the ring on her finger.

"No!" he shouted, throwing out his hands. "Stop it! You have earned it. I have made you suffer...keep it!"

She couldn't get the ring off, felt herself now truly hysterical. "I'll send it!" she cried and ran to the Rover.

She cried all the way home, an erratic drive through blinding tears. What had happened, she wondered. Oh, what

had happened? Since the day she arrived in Guatemala, life had been nothing but a seesaw of ecstasy and pain. Now leaden pain plunged her to the depths and held her there while ecstasy was catapulted far out of reach. Bartel had his victory at last, and perhaps even Charlie, who had taught her so well to mistrust. It sickened her. She sickened herself. When she stumbled into her bedroom the bed looked far too soft and comforting -- the place where she had first lain with Steinlöwe, so enthralled and well-loved. The recollection would finish her now. That pain needed another to dull it. She threw herself down on the hard floor, tossing with agony. In awhile, she groped her way to the bathroom and searched, with swollen eyes, for the sleeping pills she had almost thrown away. She downed two of them, kicked off her shoes, and crawled atop her bed in her clothes. If only she could sleep until she were old as the Cuchumatanes Mountains.

VII

The high peaks were dusted with snow when Kamille drove home one day from a visit to her doctor in Huehuetenango, having verified the assumption she had had for some time that she was pregnant. How puzzled and myopic she had been over the nausea and dizziness at Christmas. The idea of becoming a mother was something she had never really much contemplated until some time after she met Steinlöwe. Then

later still, with a heart full of love, she had thought of replacing his lost child. Now, she told herself with a sad irony, she was replacing Steinlöwe with his child. What this meant had not really sunk in. With the onset of the pregnancy, she had felt herself becoming more helpless and child-like instead of more mature. This she attributed to the absence of a doting husband or parent, whose coddling would soon have driven her to the opposite extreme. The helpless feeling had finally abated. For a while she cried a great deal at odd moments and vomited regularly at breakfast but that, too, passed.

Her trusted mozo, Miguel, had been sent to Steinlöwe with the boxed emerald, but Miguel returned after the long drive with the ring still in his possession. She slipped it on her finger, remembering every detail of the night it was given to her, then lowered her head and wept. She tucked it inside a lavender pomander and laid it away in a corner of her lingerie drawer.

The planters around about had continued to invite her to parties and small dinners or meetings, but she so often declined for fear of running into Steinlöwe that the invitations dwindled. Often alone, she struggled to find solace in innovations for the school, especially a small natural history museum to which the eager children made varied and sometimes surprising contributions: live bats; hatching iguana eggs.

Always, she went to talk with the boy Tzuli when he managed to be carried to school. He sat in the classroom on a pillow on the floor, because it was more comfortable. He was used to sitting this way in the busy marketplace where he helped his grandmother spin. She tried to explain that it would take awhile to have answers from the letters she had written on his behalf.

"I have no hurry," he answered. "I do not think of walking...that it comes to me."

His limpid brown eyes looked up at her with a peaceful innocence, but his jaw was clenched tight. How he had steeled himself, she thought, so much so he would not even allow himself to dream of it. She sat down beside him on the floor and brushed his hair from his eyes.

"It's all right to have large hopes, larger than we may ever expect to have come true. But this hope for you to walk is not beyond us, Tzuli, not at all."

"You hope, Señorita Penine. I will do what I do."

She squeezed his hand and thought how quick and alert he was, and how deserving of so much more than he possessed.

#

The coffee harvest was over and, thanks to Rodolfo, things were going well for Esperanza. She did wonder if poor Rodolfo would flee in disgrace when the condition of his Señorita Penine became obvious. Indeed, she worried

constantly over how the lifestyle of Esperanza's gringa would affect the school. The Indians would perhaps forgive her, because they thought it unnatural for a woman of marriageable age to be celibate, husband or not. As to the unborn child itself, her desire for it grew more consuming than she would ever have believed. She already thought of it as a dependent little person who would fill her life with joy and busyness. Old Ixil went about with a shrewd glint in her eyes, knowing everything in loyal silence. Her early prophecy had come true, and she was not surprised.

The last prediction Kamille herself would have made was that the appearance of Mata would lift her from her wretched despondency. Mata simply came out of the blue one day, standing in the yard bedraggled and in tatters and most noticeably pregnant. Kamille, though far from showing her own pregnancy, felt an immediate bond with this soulful young girl who was so faithful in mourning her dead lover. Without a moment's hesitation, Kamille walked across the veranda, took the girl by the arm and said, "Come with me." She led Mata straight into her tile bathroom, for the grieving young woman, once proud of her immaculate cleanliness, had been roaming the wilds in desperation and was covered with filth and lice.

Mata had learned her English from Bartel and spoke with peculiar accented expressions which at first froze Kamille's heart each time she heard them. After a time, she grew fond

of the British sound in the charming young Mam Indian's voice, and even found it amusing.

"I will take you to my doctor, Mata," Kamille said as she scrubbed the girl's scalp and thick black hair that first day, watching the fat lice drop into the bath water.

"Don't need no bloody doctor," Mata replied with scorn, and Kamille got her first dose of Bartel's lingual influence.

"But you will come for me, won't you? He is a good man, and I'm not afraid of him."

"I am not afraid of him, too," Mata said with a large smile.

"Oh, where on earth have you been? There are little burrs in your hair. I'm afraid we'll have to cut them out. And you have insect bites all over your lovely skin."

"*Garrapatas* and *mostacillas*," Mata said, meaning big and little ticks. "I have old woman kill these quite well, but more come. I go to the sacred ceiba to burn copal before idols for Stewart. I very busy. I go to the brujo in the high up, who says Stewart simply will not speak to me now. I have to get clean first...my soul clean. I think my soul is very clean now. I burn incense. I sing all night and ask my nagual god -- this is a clever bird -- to fly where Stewart is."

"Oh, Mata," Kamille said with tears in her eyes. "You are so trusting, so faithful."

"Look at this water. How dirty it is. Ugh! I really abhor this. But I am clean all over and my soul, too."

Mata lifted her dripping head and gave Kamille a broad, white, heart-melting grin. Her sad doe eyes began to sparkle with new hope now that she was reclining in such fragrant splendor. She held up the bath salts, studying the bottle. "I like this pink trash you put in. Smells like flowers in the *monte*...nice." She leaned back and closed her sleepy eyes.

Kamille stared at Mata's shining tan belly swollen with child. A few iridescent bubbles, so cheerful, rested on the smooth mound of stretched skin. The girl was hardly more than a child herself, yet in the eyes of men she would be very much a woman, exquisitely formed and very tempting.

The girl was tired, but Kamille wanted her to eat. She asked Ixil to make Mata a sandwich and to give her a large glass of milk and fresh fruit.

"Milk make her sick," Ixil said. "Her stomach not want this."

"All right then orange juice."

Ixil mumbled to herself as she worked in her large, orange-red and blue tile kitchen. "This place going to be full of babies. No man...just woman and babies. Sure some how-do-you-do."

Overhearing this, Kamille laughed with great relish. She could detect expressions that must have been her Aunt

Cathline's, but she heard almost no British sound in Ixil's speech, for while Aunt Cathline's voice had been high and perfectly formed, she had not the strong accent of Bartel.

Next to Kamille's bedroom was a little sewing room and she had Miguel move a single bed in there so that Mata could rest safely and be near when her time came. Mata was overjoyed. Her little brown hand slid over the mahogany bedstead, and she threw herself onto the soft quilted bed with such force that Kamille was fearful for the baby.

"Really...don't worry," Mata assured her. "This baby is capital. I think it will be Stewart again."

"Oh God, I hope not," Kamille whispered, rolling her eyes toward the ceiling.

"I really think you ought to teach me better," Mata said, staring at Kamille while reclining on her back in one of Kamille's printed flannel nightgowns. "I am quite sure that sometimes my English is very mistaken. Stewart did not like it, and I think it is because he will not speak to me now from the brujo."

"You think it is *why* he will not speak to you," Kamille corrected her, and thus began the first of endless sessions in English grammar, which gave Mata much pride and Kamille a warm familial pleasure.

One afternoon as Kamille, Ixil, and Mata were all sitting around the large pine work table in the kitchen, trimming and cutting up sweet white-fleshed Guatemalan pineapples for the children, Mata asked, "You have some man where you live before?"

Kamille looked up, startled. "Some man?"

"Husband...lover? You pretty old, no?" Mata persisted.

"No! I'm...I'm...I don't know if I'm *that* old."

"How old?"

"I've just turned thirty, you little busybody."

"So old! You look like some girl," Mata said with surprise.

"A *Kind*," Kamille muttered, feeling a little pain starting in her chest.

"No man?" Mata insisted.

"Yes, yes, I had a man. He was a...a bad person."

"A bad lover? He beat you?"

"Neither of those."

"Not very bad, I think," Mata said. "You are like Stewart...too -- what does he say?-- too partica."

"Just like Spanish: particular," Kamille said with little enthusiasm at being compared to Stewart Bartel.

"Men always bad," Ixil interjected. "Always trouble."

For heaven's sake, look at your own lover's terrible faults, Kamille wanted to say to Mata, but she had no intention of bringing up Stewart again, hoping he would

eventually be expunged from Mata's conversations.

Yes, Charlie had been a good lover. Certainly, he had never laid a finger on her, although she thought of him as dangerous. But he had not really loved her...not in the way she had been loved by... What could she be thinking? Hadn't she refuted Steinlöwe's love as false.

"Stewart need me big much...but stupid," Mata broke into Kamille's dark perplexity with a matter-of-fact intuitiveness.

"What does this man? His work?" Mata inquired.

"Oh lord! He was...is, I suppose, a lawyer."

"A liar?"

Kamille threw down her knife and giggled with Mata and Ixil, who were laughing right along with her without knowing why. "Oh yes! Oh yes, he was certainly a liar!"

"All man liars. So," Mata said, her lively face settling down to a sharp understanding, "he has too many woman?"

"Well, that, yes, and a job I didn't like."

"Too many woman," Mata said, convinced of her assumption.

"Too many woman is here," Ixil said, "and no man, not one...but the *jefe* out there." She waved her arm to the outside where, in the distance, Rodolfo could be seen mounting his horse.

"What do you mean, Ixil?" Kamille questioned with a

close look at Ixil's unrevealing face.

"These *piñas* done," Ixil said, punctuating her statement by sticking her knife point down in the cutting board.

#

Near the end of February, the finquero Señor Juan Moreno's wife called to invite Kamille to a large gathering at their hacienda.

"If you do not come this time I will think you do not like us," Señora Moreno said with frank persuasion.

"Oh, how untrue!" Kamille protested. "I haven't forgotten how kind you and Señor Moreno were when I came to learn about coffee. I like you very much."

"Then will you not come?"

"I...you see, I've never invited you here, and this I intended...I want you to come, very much. I don't know when, but surely when the school and...and other things are better under control..." Kamille's rushing voice halted. She was falling through the holes between her words and feeling the flushed embarrassment rising in her face as she leaned against the wall, gripping the receiver.

"Of course, we will surely come one day. Do not concern yourself. But that has nothing to do with our invitation to you. Will you come?"

"With great pleasure. What time?" Kamille said,

utterly trapped. She hung up the phone and collapsed into a padded bamboo chair. After all her clever dodging she was finally to be forced into appearing at a place where she was bound to meet Steinlöwe.

She sat staring at her hands. The nails, she noticed, still contained some purple pigment; this morning she had been teaching the youngest children finger-painting. Truly, she had enjoyed herself as much as they, giggling with them and swirling her fingers through the lush purple color she had mixed herself. "Now this is a dove," she said with cheerful instruction, wiping off the purple-tipped braid of an amber-eyed little girl, "*La Paloma*. See the cloud above? Pretty. *La Nube* -- cloud." Running one of her violet nails beneath another, she continued to ponder her predicament.

What happy persona will I present at the Moreno's? she wondered, as if she must begin rehearsing a part for a stage play. Well, I can only be myself, she thought with a sigh, only my rather naïve and, as Mata says, *partica* self. She laughed aloud, but it did not bolster her confidence.

Although she didn't like to encourage Rodolfo's amorous notions, she decided to ask him to accompany her to the Moreno's, as a comforting foil for her weak knees. Perhaps now was the time, after all, to get out before she began to show her pregnancy, for then nothing would drag her to a gathering of gaping local eyes.

On the day of the party, she emerged from a dreamy soak

in her tile bath and stood looking at herself in her mirror from various angles. She really only *felt* that her abdomen had swollen slightly, for she could see that no one else would be able to tell at all. In what should she clothe herself? What understatement of fashion would complement her wish to go unseen? The day was warm and pleasant. She chose a mandarin-collared dress with short sleeves. The dress had a rather thick lining in the bodice, which was cut to give special support, so that she would not have to wear a bra; she hated their constriction, and lately her breasts were tender and sensitive. The satiny hue of the dress was a muted, pale beige with tiny shining threads of gold, which from a distance looked like thickly creamed black tea. When she tried it on she was surprised at how well it matched the portions of her hair that had been lightened by the sun. The dress color enhanced the depth of her amber eyes, which themselves possessed that spangled, chatoyant quality of tiger's-eye gems.

Her face was flushed, her expression more secretive and delicate now. Whenever she looked at herself in a mirror lately, she always felt astonished at her condition; the woman looking back possessed a certain soft serenity that made her smile. Today she had to keep telling herself that no one would notice all this mystery to which she was helplessly tuned.

Ixil came to do her hair, twisting it over her skilled

little hands in a soothing manner and piling it atop her head. She checked to see that it was not too severe, then slid her bare feet into a pair of openworked, caramel pumps, glad that it was perfectly acceptable to go around without nylons -- if one did not break any of the rules it was possible to move freely, unencumbered by gossip.

Rodolfo's polite eyes flashed over her with deep appreciation, and he bowed, holding his hat with both hands. Kamille was so touched that guilt leapt into her throat, and she hurried out to the car, averting her face.

When they arrived at the Moreno's, Rodolfo stayed by her side, introducing her to those finqueros on the fringes of the gathering whom the Morenos had missed in their felicitous introductions. They were all warmly generous with praise and acceptance. Steinlöwe was not present, and she was beginning to relax and enjoy this congenial society for which she had quietly longed. Standing where she could see the guests arriving, she was still wary, preparing herself for the worst. Eventually, Señor Moreno came up, teasing her with attentive praise and her eligibility for matrimony, and leading her off to show her the barbecue pit. A side of beef of massive proportion was slowly turning under a cloud of blue smoke. Her host then led her to a long table of drinks. She chose a punch, thinking it would be milder than a cocktail, but it was amply spiked. In no time at all, she was glowing with good will and feeling

excessively fond of all nature, especially the gold-dusted heliotrope mountains in the distance.

A band was playing just off the portico. A few people sat nearby, listening or talking; others danced. She stood by a column, sipping her drink and inhaling the sweetness of white ginger, its fragrance wafted up to her from blooming clumps below her feet. A steward passed by with more punch; lovely thick crystal glasses, sweating droplets of water and sloshing with the iced crimson liquid. She helped herself, a little amazed, but feeling so kindly toward everyone and everything, even the tall white ginger stalks for saturating the air with their spice. Rodolfo came up and asked her to dance.

"I wonder if I remember how," she said with a laugh.

"It is natural as walking, Señorita Penine," he replied with an encouraging smile.

With Rodolfo she found that it was indeed as natural as walking. She enjoyed it so much that she danced several more, and felt her face glowing with pleasure at the rhythm and at following him so well. He was an expert dancer, and she told him so.

"Ah, dancing is natural to me," he said with pride.

But then it happened, just when she was finally not expecting it, without warning or preparation, without being able to do anything but comply. Steinlöwe had put his polite hand on Rodolfo's shoulder and taken her away. He

must have stood with his drink and watched her. She could smell the alcohol, although he gave no indication of feeling more of its effects than she. How could he come to her like this, so easily, after so much of her cruelty and mistrust?

She couldn't lift her head. Her face brushed against the soft cashmere jacket and she stared at his open-necked shirt. There entered her nostrils the familiar smell of his cologne, tobacco, Spanish soap, causing her to stumble in a sudden rush of excitement which angered her. He caught her, readjusted his arm, very much felt over her back, and moved across the floor with effortless steps. The music stopped. He stepped off the floor, still holding her hand, and lifted another glass of punch from a passing tray, offering it to her. She was going to refuse, but it was something to do; heaven knew she needed something to keep her hands from flying around her. She could still feel the lingering sting of his arm burning across her back.

"Eventually you will have to look at me," he said with a small ripple of amusement in his voice.

She lifted her steadied eyes and looked into his. The enlarged pupils glittered with appraisal as he raised an eyebrow, concentrating hard.

"You seem happy. You are...more beautiful." He frowned and shrugged. "Perhaps you are in love. But I was wrong to give you this. I think you have drunk a little too much." He reached for her already half-empty glass.

Drawing her hand quickly away, she lifted the goblet and drained the remainder.

"I am sorry," he said with a laugh, "Forgive that. I always think I must watch out for you. It is this upturned nose. You look like such a *Kind*, such a helpless little *Kind*. But it is far from true. You are really...I think, very self-sufficient."

She could think of absolutely nothing to say, nothing cutting or clever or even polite. In fact, the spiked punch had gone bad. The drinker's maudlin stage swept over her prematurely, triggered by the word *Kind*; it would always be an intimate and painful endearment, and he knew it.

"I've been on my feet too long, and, yes, I've drunk too much for an empty stomach," she finally admitted.

"I will get you food."

"No!...thank you. I think Rodolfo will."

For a moment, he was silent and, she suspected, practicing his cultivated self-control. His darkened eyes traveled over the grounds, searching. "Rodolfo is over there talking. I cannot believe, however, that he is more fond of talking than of making love."

"You've just insulted us both," Kamille said, turning away in anger.

"Wait! Forgive me again...please...my apology. May I get you some food?"

"No, I couldn't...I mean not now...no thank you. Why

do you talk to me?" she asked in a hushed voice. "Why do you come near me? Why do you--"

"Perhaps we have both drunk a little too much," he interrupted with no response at all to her intimate questions. "As long as Rodolfo is otherwise occupied...maybe we can have a little exercise...get off the veranda and let the night air rain down on our abused heads."

He took her hand without waiting for a response, and Kamille's entire being was at once concentrated in her captured fist.

"What is this?" he said, examining her fist. "Such a tight knot of anger. Then have it back. We will walk."

She followed him, really eager to find a spot of coolness, to find a haven from the eyes which she had begun to suspect were staring. They walked away from the torch-lit barbecue, along a row of ti shrubs, and far out across the lush green lawns. He turned now and then to see if she was still there, and continued.

They came to a large cashew tree, a spreading, round abundance of dark leaves. Under it, they sat on a bench and watched the sun go down, gazing from beneath the leafy branches that held bronze-tipped clusters of ripening nuts. The party was only a distant hum, but the turmoil of their silence was scant relief. A melting red sun fell behind the peaks by degrees of gold, crimson, mauve, and gray.

Kamille's head was reeling with alcohol and confusion. How could he have wanted to dance with her, even to speak to her? And how could she have followed him? What was she doing sitting here as if with someone for whom she cared deeply? The sky was almost dark now, and she shivered as he leaned close to look at her face. Their relationship was as impossible to turn around as time. Nothing had changed. Yet she knew what was going to happen, and worse still wanted it. Completely overcome and bewildered by her mixed emotions, she pressed her hands to her cheeks. Her very bones seemed to shudder and come unjointed; her body now fragile, brittle as a broken figurine glued together and about to be dropped again. She realized she was crying.

"It is all right," he said. "It is just tonight...just whenever we get too close...especially after a long absence, because there is something...something we cannot find anywhere else."

"Stop it! Please stop it, Andar. I don't know why I'm here...can't understand why I do this. Oh, I'm--"

"Why could you not have loved me enough to believe? Why could you not have loved me that much?"

His voice was filled with a terrible wrench of emotion, sending her into a dark pool of misery in which she swiftly sank like a heavy stone.

"God! Oh God!" she cried, looking at him through her tears with flashes of anger. "You'll never know how much

I've hurt."

"I know how much. That I know well."

"I try to avoid you...I try to...to... I try not to go where you might be. I--"

He grabbed her shoulders and kissed her with a lunging, wolfish mouth, as though feasting upon something dreamed of through a long famine. He tore off his jacket and spread it on the ground beside the bench, then pulled her down on top of it. "Put your hands inside my shirt."

With dazed motions she unbuttoned his shirt and slid her hands over his chest, laying her face there and slipping her hands around behind his back. "Oh, help me! Help me to stop this," she begged the dark void, begged herself, even as her mouth whispered against that inescapable flesh.

He pushed her away from him and unbuttoned her dress to the waist, rubbing his face over her breasts while carrying on a frenzied dialogue in between short jags of bitter laughter. "It seems I am a masochist. Will I ever get you out of me? You want my blood. Don't you? Don't you?" His teeth clenched a tiny pinch of skin below her shoulder, broke it, and sucked. She swooned as a tingling sensation climbed the back of her head. "Do it to me," he demanded. She pressed her teeth against his shoulder and bit, tasting a drop of the amazing metallic fluid that drove his life, and swallowing. He groaned with the pleasure of pain momentarily canceling pain.

Sliding his hands over her thighs, he found the small bit of lace she wore and removed it, his caressing hand exploring the moist center of her and making her quiver out of control. "I want you...need you...we need each other. May I? Please? I am not drunk. May I have you?"

"Yes," she gasped in a ragged whisper.

"Tell me if I am hurting you. Tell me what you want. Tell me, *Kind. Kind!*"

"You! I want you I want you I want you!" she moaned with an infinite surge of joy shooting up through her ever so slightly swollen belly into her throat and spilling out in a muffled cry against his spent flesh.

They lay holding onto each other, gasping, kissing, drained of strength, still in shock. He discovered one of his hairs in her mouth with his probing tongue and plucked it out in the darkness with his fingers. He nuzzled his head against her while she kissed his damp chest, whispering very softly, only for herself, "Oh, my darling." Too soon, she heard the far sounds of the world returning and sat up. He helped her dress, letting her finish the buttons.

"Have you slept with him?" he asked, tucking in his shirt.

"What! Who?"

"Rodolfo."

"Oh, no...oh, no...oh, no...please."

"Have you slept with him?" he demanded.

"No! Have you slept with Ursula?" she responded, already certain of the answer and feeling the heat rise in her.

"Ursula is gone."

"Did you sleep with her?"

"Of course. You know I did. She is not the kind of woman who goes without sex."

"And what kind am I?" she half sobbed, half shouted in a fury of self-hatred.

He stood very still, and she could see his silhouette, a livid black pillar against the distant lights. He knelt and put his arms around her, hurtful, running his hands across her back then suddenly letting go of her.

"You are my kind...unfortunately. You are a faithless little *Kind*, so erotic, but sadly perverted...with a taste for con men...Nazis...murderers."

Kamille was as stunned as if she had been slapped sharply across the face. Although bathed in warm air, she began to shiver beyond control. She stood up, swaying a little. He held onto her with one hand and snatched up his jacket with the other, giving it a vigorous shake. "I wonder what my coat looks like."

"I hate you!" she cried, tearing herself loose from him and running toward the lights. There was a searing pain in her chest. *He hates me. He hates me.* She saw clusters of people eating, stuffing food dripping with red sauce into

their mouths, forkful after forkful. Her stomach convulsed trying to vomit its contents but there was nothing of any substance in it. She was dizzy, so dizzy. Snatching up another glass of punch and downing it, she headed into the casa from a shadowy side. In the foyer, she searched until she found her purse, then waited for visitors to emerge from the locked and much sought after guest bathroom.

When she finally got inside and looked into the mirror, she was surprised at what she saw. Having expected to see a crumpled and depraved wretch, she found only Kamille with sad eyes and nothing in very much disarray. She quickly straightened her hair and dress, splashed water on her face, and applied lipstick. But her hand was shaking so badly she had to steady it against the mirror.

"I hate you," she said, looking into her stricken eyes. "I hate you! I hate you!"

VIII

Mata's baby started suddenly one morning at four o'clock. She tugged at Kamille's nightgown good naturedly and rubbed her hand over her swollen middle. Kamille yawned, releasing streams of tears, and stumbled off to wake Ixil, who had delivered many children of the Mam.

"How can we get a doctor at this hour?" she wondered half to herself with a worried countenance.

"Don't need," Ixil said. "Plenty babies come before

doctors."

"Nevertheless, doctors come in handy," Kamille insisted.

As they prepared Mata, Kamille tried to recall all the pertinent things she had learned in a first aid training class. Before long she realized that the labor was going to be protracted. Mata cried, so angry when the baby refused to arrive promptly.

"Baby knows the father not here to see him. Bloody shame!" Mata wailed, tearing at her shift.

"I'm worried, Ixil," Kamille said. "I'm going for a doctor right now."

"Baby is here when you get back," Ixil scolded.

Ignoring Ixil's calm self-assurance, Kamille dressed in a hurry and dashed out to the Land Rover. Just as she was pulling out of the driveway, the mozo Nino ran up with the news that the baby had at last arrived.

"*Niña*," Ixil said when Kamille came into the crowded bedroom. Three Indian women were standing in silence, watching. Mata gave a broad smile through her tears and was already holding the tiny bundle of wrinkled skin.

"Pretty," Mata said, "Looks like a little pig."

"Thank goodness it's a girl," Kamille muttered, having feared that Mata would name the baby Stewart and pretend that it was her lover incarnate.

The alert Ixil had heard Kamille's exclamation and

said: "Girl just more weeping."

A line of silent Mam was forming to have a look, and Kamille had to shoo everyone out of the room. She took the baby in her careful arms and sponged it with a special hygienic solution she had purchased in preparation for this event. All the while, she tried to tell Mata how important it was not to let people grab the baby and breathe in its face. She wrapped it in a sterile, white flannel blanket and laid it in its net-covered cradle so that Mata could catch a wink of sleep before feeding. The entire operation was like a rehearsal, and she wondered who would help her to reach a doctor when her time came. She didn't think herself as hearty a variety as Mata had proven to be. She would have to prepare with great forethought.

#

The relationship between Kamille and Mata grew into a bond of sisterly camaraderie, and as the days passed they shared with Ixil both the delightful moments and extra effort the baby had brought into the household. When Kamille fancied a trip to a more distant market, she would take Mata along with her, for Mata was both a good-natured and a helpful companion. Then old Ixil would tend little Guacamilla -- "That is too large a name for such a tiny baby, even if she does squawk like a little parrot," Kamille had told Mata. She had taken to calling the baby Millie, which

Mata thought very amusing.

On one of her market-fancying days, a fine clear day, Kamille decided to drive to the busy Thursday market at Huehuetenango. There she could find certain vegetables of which she had become quite fond and for which she lately had a craving. She waved good-bye to the little children in her very popular painting class and looked in on some of her prize math students. Finally, she hurried up to the casa. Hunting up Mata, who was changing Millie's diaper, she asked if Mata would like to go along.

"I will go if you let me to dress like you," Mata said. "I like *la ropa...the...clothes...of you.*"

"You don't want to wear your lovely huipil and *refajo*?" Kamille asked with surprise.

"No, no, I want to wear shirt and slacks...with the high heels."

"No skirt? But what will the women say? Perhaps they will say the gringa is making you look strange."

"I do not care. I think you are stunning...even for the *Mamá*," Mata teased, patting Kamille's slightly rounded abdomen.

"Oh lord, I wonder how big this baby will get," Kamille pondered, looking sideways in her mirror.

"How big is the father?" asked the wise Mata. Her inquiring eyes were suddenly full of thoughtful observation.

"A tall man, but not fat," Kamille answered, feeling a

sharp careen of her heart as she thought of Steinlöwe, and of the first image she had of him standing at the entrance to his *comida* before they went in to dinner: a dark blond, ruggedly masculine figure in a deep violet jacket, with gray eyes so full of light they set her adrift in the pearly clouds of a Washington sky.

She had been about to put on a full smock shirt, but leaned close to her mirror to examine the small scar between her neck and left shoulder. The sight of it made her wrists and ankles ache with a confusing anguish both delicious and terrible, always producing an unquenchable desire that she could in no way escape. Perhaps he had done this to make her think of him; it was not beyond his sly nature, she was certain. She had heard that the Indians of *San Martín Sacatepéquez*, a little town east of *Quezaltenango*, had among them tall, arrogant men who gave their women a fierce bite on the cheek when they made love, and the women were very proud of this mark. Mata was watching her with shrewd scrutiny, and Kamille grabbed her shirt from the bed, pulling it over her head.

"The baby will be just right," Mata said with tactful insight. She was examining Kamille's slacks with interest.

"I think my slacks would be too long for you, Mata. I'm considered short, but I'm taller than you."

"I can fix in a trice," Mata said, sounding so very British that Kamille had to laugh.

She handed over a pair of her tan slacks, and an excited Mata went off to make the alterations while Kamille played with Millie. Indeed, the surprising little seamstress was back in no time, wearing one of Kamille's white shirts with the sleeves rolled and the trim, pressed slacks. She had even coiled her sleek braid atop her head and put on new silver earrings.

"You look very sophisticated," Kamille told her with a genuine delight in her beauty.

"Whaticated?" Mata asked, giggling.

"So-phis-ti-ca-ted. Very pleasing...showing how smart you are...how many good things you know."

Mata repeated the word slowly. "I like this big word; a big word means more things."

"Sometimes, but not always."

"Mata, you know the women in the marketplace all wear skirts. Are you sure they will not be angry at you for wearing slacks instead of a *refajo*?"

"You do it."

"I know I do, and Ixil thinks I shouldn't. I don't like to upset anyone, but slacks are so practical. I'm glad they still fit...just barely."

"Do you think any man would like me?" a coy Mata asked.

"Oh, Mata, you are very beautiful and smart," Kamille assured her little Mam friend. She felt a bittersweet surprise, glad Mata was recovering from Bartel somewhat but

also worried, for what man deserved Mata? What if she were to find a man who liked too much aguardiente? Oh, I cannot go on worrying over everything under the sun, Kamille scolded herself while she smiled encouragement at Mata.

They drove off to Huehuetenango with Mata singing, laughing, pointing, and gossiping. Kamille was thoroughly entertained, laughing until she had to beg Mata to stop her antics before they had an accident. In the market the hilarity continued as they held up vegetables and fruits of various sizes and shapes, making jokes and laughing until Kamille's stomach hurt, although she could not have said precisely what was so funny. It was simply Mata, her wonderful, fresh spontaneity, her willingness to spring back to life after sorrow.

"Do put on your hat, Señorita Kamilla," Mata warned. "Gringos has...have the sunstroke."

Kamille put on her hat and then bought a delicate Panama straw hat for Mata and adjusted it on her head. "Very sophisticated," she assured Mata with an admiring smile. Mata looked quite pleased.

"Oh, look...such beautiful *chilacayote*!" Kamille exclaimed, pointing to a fruit the color and size of watermelon but like a pumpkin inside. "If I buy it will you steam it with brown sugar? You always make it taste just right."

"I will," Mata said with dignity.

Kamille had bargained long enough to please the seller and made her purchase when she looked up and, to her horror, saw Steinlöwe walking with a tall brunette, a striking woman whom she had never seen before. They were laughing, speaking in German, and carrying packages. Steinlöwe was bareheaded, his dark blond head easily discernible rising above the throng. She stared at him, the white shirt and suede jacket, the trim tan slacks and familiar gleaming sorrel boots. How handsome he looked and how stunning his companion. Kamille felt suddenly dizzy, drained, homely, sodden as a lump of clay. She ducked behind a stall, leaning against an old brick wall to catch her breath.

"Señorita!" Mata cried, looking at Kamille with grave concern and then back at Steinlöwe. "Ahh," she said softly, understanding coming quickly into her eyes. "I will find out who is this *mujer*," she said, stepping quickly away.

"No!" Kamille cried above the noises of the market.

"Do not worry about a little thing," Mata called over her shoulder, waving her hand and swaying off, almost with grace, on her high-heeled sandals. "I am not so stupid."

"Oh God!" Kamille said aloud, cowering behind the booth. She peeked around the corner and saw little Mata standing at a most becoming angle with her bared head tilted back, one hand shading her eyes, the other on her hip holding her hat. Just like a Vogue model, Kamille thought as she watched Mata talking to Steinlöwe. His eyes were

searching over the marketplace and about to discover her hiding place. Kamille ducked with a swift awkwardness, looking to see if anyone had discovered her strange behavior. Very upset with Mata, she thought of running to the Land Rover and sulking there, or even driving off.

Presently, Mata returned by a clever, zigzagging route and reported to Kamille.

"I cannot understand who that *mujer* is," Mata said with a quizzical expression. "Those bloody Germans has got names worse than so-phis-ti-ca-ted. Steinlöwe thinks I am so-phis-ti-ca-ted also. Is he not smart?"

"Oh Mata, I'm so angry with you. I didn't want you to go over there. What did you tell him?"

"I tell him nothing. I was helping," Mata said with a stubborn and disappointed folding of her arms. "That woman does not even speak English, for heaven's sake. I do not think he cares so much for her."

"It is none of our business. Let's go."

"We are not finish."

"Oh yes we are. I'm getting out of here. Are you coming?"

"All right," Mata grumbled, picking up the half-full market basket. "Just when I am having a little fun to be so-phis-ti-ca-ted."

"I wish I had never taught you that word."

"I like it. And Steinlöwe, he likes it also. Oh, I

forget. He say to tell you hello. Nice, no?"

"No."

The sun was slanting over the mountains, and a flock of birds wheeled, flashing like gold sequins above her windshield. She drove fast in silence, with images she had tried to put aside crowding in upon her again: the torn and bitter emotions Steinlöwe had shown her at the Moreno party. Yet, with the memory her heart began to pound and her face flush with thoughts that startled her. How long would his sudden appearance so easily devour her heart? Her only hope was to continue to avoid him until life had swallowed him up for good. Perhaps this woman was the one who would... Stop it, she warned herself. You chose the path your conscience recommended, now stop hurting, stop hurting. There was nothing to do but exist in the present moment, taking each day as it came and consigning the future to the deep pool of life's mysteries.

#

No one at the school had as yet dared to say anything, although the teachers seemed to greet her with a little more shyness. Did they know or was it her imagination?

It was the children who had become one of her main sources of pleasure. The natural history museum was an immense success and growing into other areas of interest.

"This was a wonderful idea, Señorita Penine," Señora

Ortega, one of the school's zealous young instructors told Kamille. "I've heard many favorable comments from the parents who wish their children to keep the beauty of the land and customs in their learning."

"The children take such interest and pride in the objects they bring that it's bound to succeed," Kamille said. "Even the parents are preparing things for their children to bring. It's really a good sign that we have this kind of family involvement, and it's their place, of course...their museum to do with as they wish."

The response was truly encouraging; as soon as the project got underway the parents, with as much enthusiasm as the children, were bringing artifacts and animal specimens which they thought important for the authenticity of their rapidly growing *museo*.

One afternoon as she sat laboring over her bookkeeping ledger, a little boy named Cozca came and stood politely beside her desk. His face was a smooth coffee-cream shade of tender flesh above his tidy uniform of white shirt and tan pants. As he waited he stared down at his nervous, shifting feet, covered in brown sandals, and whispered, "*Serpiente*." Then he looked up at Kamille, his dark eyes shining with eagerness. She smiled a greeting, noticing that he was carrying a jar with a slotted lid.

"Hello, Cozca. What do you have there?"

"It is the live coral snake...for the *museo*."

"Good lord!" Kamille cried, jumping up with such haste that she thought of a premature birth. She stared with fascinated horror at the small, colorful snake which lay curled like a pretty necklace in its confining jar.

"Cozca, you have brought this very, very poisonous snake in a glass jar. Do you realize what might happen if the jar broke and the snake escaped?"

"I am *cuidadoso*...care...careful, Señorita Penine. My fadder says we must have this snake...if our *museo* is to have the truth of the land."

Kamille could not help but smile at little Cozca's elegant way of expressing his earnest desire, and that of his father. But as she studied the boy's gleeful expression she sensed his mischievous delight at having startled her.

"I'm sorry, Cozca, I think in this case a dead snake properly prepared for an exhibit would be better. Mind you, I am not suggesting that you kill this one. And please be careful with that jar." She frowned at the way the boy held the jar, so fearless, against his chest.

"I will see what to do," Cozca said with a smile wise beyond his years. Still, he hesitated a moment, disappointed, perhaps hoping that he might be allowed to take personal responsibility for the treacherous but exquisite little reptile.

"You must return that to your father," Kamille directed with a firm voice. "By the way, your English is very, very

good."

This praise partially soothed his ruffled feathers, and an enthused Cozca went off determined to render the snake harmless with the help of his parents, and possibly by some mysterious process of sudden death which Kamille did not even want to contemplate.

"Don't kill it...please don't!" she called out as an afterthought. "And please be careful, dear," she added.

She sat gingerly back in her chair, sighing with relief, and began to laugh.

Inhaling deeply, she luxuriated for the thousandth time in the sweet resinous smell of the room's cedar and mahogany. Beyond her window she could see Rodolfo across the green lawn, talking to Nino. One relaxed leg was bent at the knee, crossing in front of the other, and he was lifting his Panama hat and settling it back on his head as he talked. She thought of Ixil's pointed innuendo, aimed at Rodolfo as the only man about the place; the only eligible man she had meant. What if Rodolfo were her husband? What if Señorita Penine vanished forever into the rhythmic flow of Esperanza, of this entire country, and she became truly a *Guatemalteca* at last? She still had seizures of fear, the fear of rejection and alienation. Yesterday, a shy but concerned Indian girl had asked her if the devil was truly the father of a baby growing inside her as some of the others had suggested. This sort of superstition, which was

rampant among the Indians, was what worried her most. It could too easily ruin all of her Aunt Cathline's long years of work and make her own position untenable. Shouldn't she have thought of that sooner? How could she so carelessly have jeopardized something so important? She grieved, and it was one of the reasons she dared to contemplate marriage to Rodolfo; a presumptuous idea. What made her think that Rodolfo wished to marry a pregnant gringa? And yet, she had Esperanza, of which he was immensely fond. The idea had more than once crossed her mind, as if she had nothing to do with its appearance. Then the hypocrisy of the notion would hit her full force -- it was just what had turned her from Steinlöwe, just what she could not rid her mind of assuming. Why then did it seem so unbearable in Steinlöwe's case and not in Rodolfo's. The answer flew at her like a bird with outstretched talons that raked her heart. She had wanted Steinlöwe to love her only for herself because she was so hopelessly in love with him. It was the slightly bent eternal triangle. Could she grow to love Rodolfo if he would have her? He was handsome, intelligent, attentive, and together they managed Esperanza very well. Perhaps after the child came Rodolfo would... No, she must depend on herself now. Everything else was wishful thinking, the speculation of a lonely pregnant woman who had learned a hard lesson. All those years of cautious living and now this. She laughed aloud with a sad bitterness.

"Andar Steinlöwe," she whispered with undeniable longing. How has this all come to pass? she asked in thoughtful silence. That night at the Moreno's I would have done anything you asked of me, anything, but you only wanted to punish me. There is nothing left but mutual cruelty. And the worst torture is the memory of your tenderness, those two days on the beach at Likin. You wanted to know more of my childhood and told me more of yours. Unbearable.

Those memories were repeated in weak moments when she lay alone and sleepless in her bed. They were powerful enough to send her rushing out into the cold night air.

#

A night of howling wind. Kamille climbed out of bed and began a restless wandering back and forth through the chill house. The eerie cry of the wind taunted her, unsettling, so lonely and haunting. At last, she made herself a cup of hot chocolate and went into the library. She sank down in the big leather chair behind the reading desk and stared at Bartel's painting of her aunt.

"Please impart to me a little of your wisdom," she whispered. "I am making a mess of things...of my personal life at least. In that department, you would not be proud of me. I'm so sorry."

The cheerful blue eyes stared back at her, always so full of hope, for wasn't hope the very word in Spanish her

Aunt Cathline had chosen to name her *finca*? She stared and stared at the portrait, trying to remember something, something that was tapping away at the back of her mind. A heavy tiredness pulled at her eyelids and weighted her feverish bones. Her head slumped over as she fell into a deep sleep of frenetic images.

She was sitting in the brujo's little hut again. The dark hen was cackling, and she could hear the laughter of Ixil outside the door. Then the glistening, dark eyes of Pap Ixtlan turned fully upon her. "Gringa, La Doña Usted escribe...*the Doña writes to you*...you must read her words." His voice was very clear. Once again the chanting began, repeating: "You must read her words...you must read her words...read her words."

Kamille awoke with a gasp. There was not a sound in the room, only the wind outside whistling over the casa roof. Looking up in the soft light she studied the painting of her aunt until her eyes fell upon the little book, clutched with such affection in the hardworking fingers. It was small and gilt-edged like a diary. A diary! Of course -- it was a diary. And it must be somewhere in the casa. But where? Her intent eyes traveled over the bookshelves, back and forth, searching, tired but with a growing excitement. There was no visible evidence of a book like the one in the portrait, but she was not disheartened. She would call Don Tomás in the morning and ask him, for she was

sure he would verify her strong conviction that such a journal did exist.

After breakfast, Kamille lay in her hammock on the veranda, waiting for Don Tomás. She was playing with little Millie, whom Mata had placed in the hammock beside her godmother, Señorita Kamilla. The baby curled its tiny hand around her finger. She could make it smile so easily that she was sure it was in no danger of developing Bartel's unhappy disposition.

Mata came and touched her hand with gentle pressure against Kamille's abdomen. "Why you not--"

"Why don't you," Kamille corrected.

"Okay, but let me to finish. Why don't you not tell that finquero about this baby?"

"Good lord, no!"

"Bartel not want...do not want me to have baby. I care not. I want. Plenty of woman come and go with Steinlöwe, but they got no babies. Why you think he let you have this one?"

"Well, he...he has no idea."

Mata shook her head. "You know what I say: he do not worry to make this baby. Why you think, Señorita Kamilla?"

"Because we didn't...he didn't...I don't know," Kamille said, puzzled at her own inability to answer. "I should have done something myself," she whispered, but without much conviction.

"That man plenty smart. I think he wants to make this baby, no?"

"No!"

"That man, he want something."

"Oh no, first Bartel and now you," Kamille said with a soft groan. "Please don't talk about this, Mata. And please...please say nothing about this to anyone. You promised."

"I not say nothing," Mata said with indignation.

Kamille handed cheerful, gurgling Millie to her mother and lay in the hammock with her eyes closed, thinking of Mata's discerning questions. Why had Steinlöwe never been concerned about a child? Was it more deviousness? Did he assume that if such a thing happened she would have to marry him in desperation? She blushed to think that in their heated encounters a child was far from her consideration. The responsibility was hers now. She would tell him nothing.

Presently, Don Tomás arrived. He sat on the veranda, a little more withdrawn than usual. Kamille wondered if he thought that he had somehow failed his Doña by allowing her niece to fall into personal abuse. She spoke of the school with excitement, trying to assure him of her devotion to its success.

"How is your work for the boy, Tzuli?"

"Oh, Don Tomás, sometimes it's so frustrating I could

weep. My heart breaks for this wonderful child. Letters keep coming back to me telling me how over-extended their funds are, how they would like to help but...et cetera, et cetera, et cetera!" She threw up her hands with a temporary dismay. "But I will not give up," she insisted.

"You will be much loved here," Don Tomás said quite unexpectedly. "The Doña would be most proud of you."

"I'm not so sure of that, but oh what it means to hear you say it."

"It is only the truth," he assured her.

At last she brought up the diary and waited for his reply as he sipped his coffee.

"Ah, si, the diary," he said, leaning forward with eyes that suddenly appeared mischievous. He studied her with a careful interest. "I think it was a very important part of her last days. This should be most useful to you. I thought you had read it by now, Señorita Penine."

"But I only guessed at its existence. I have no idea where it is."

"Is it not in the library safe?" he asked, now grinning widely.

Kamille excused herself and went at once to the library. Many times she had opened the old iron safe, and thought she was familiar with all its contents. This time she opened it and reached far into the back, running her hand over a narrow shelf very near the top. And there it

was! Her trembling fingers touched upon a small book, the book of so much mystery. She drew it out and saw that it was bound in morocco leather well worn with handling. All this time it had been at her fingertips. She almost wept with regret and joy.

"So you have it," Don Tomás said when she rushed out onto the veranda, waving the diary. "Then I leave you to your reading. Perhaps the little book will answer many of your questions. In fact, I have no doubt of it."

He smiled with twinkling eyes and bowed with a polite sweep of his hand. Then, easing his Panama hat down upon his graying crown, he departed the veranda.

"Oh, Don Tomás!" Kamille called after him. "I remember once...once you told me that Señor Steinlöwe was sometimes my aunt's enemy. What did you mean?"

His face was expressionless beneath his hat as he stood stock still in the drenching sunlight.

"Si, si, I'm afraid it was so, in a manner of speaking. My English sometimes deserts me. You will see what I mean." And with that he settled into his little French car and rattled away.

With the diary in hand, Kamille vanished into the library, sinking into Aunt Cathline's comforting leather chair. She read with devotion from beginning to end, as if she were immersed in a thrilling novel that could not be put down. Barely touching a sandwich Ixil brought her, she only

sipped at her guava juice until Ixil came in to scold her.

"That baby need food."

"Oh all right, I'm eating...see?"

She bit into the ham and cheese sandwich, staring out at the thundering purple mountain peaks above her valley. Yes, her valley, not by possession but by devotion and a feeling at last of kinship. So much had come to pass in such a short time. Yet in the handwritten pages turning under her eager fingers the land had reverted to, would always truly be, Aunt Cathline's: her streams; her cafetals; her orchards, now empty-branched, notched with violet shadows and swelling with tight little buds in readiness for the spring flowering which she described in her diary as one of the greatest joys of her life. Too excited to eat any more, Kamille left her unfinished sandwich and read on.

The diary was many things: a calendar of events; a personal history; a collection of amusing anecdotes, daily trivia, gossip; and sometimes a very intimate outpouring of heartfelt emotion. But beneath all of this spontaneity there appeared a conscious intent to set things down that would prove useful to her successor. By the time she finished, Kamille had been transported to a crystal clear point of view, as surely as if she had been taken by the hand and led over a foggy mountain path and out into the sunlight. She was filled with a shattering sense of remorse, caused mainly by one passage. This she read over

and over with an ecstasy and agony that left her prostrate:

"I have argued with Steinlöwe again today. This man drives me to exasperation. He worries about the fate of my land while giving his own away. He has really stuck his neck out this time. Apparently it was the only way he could assure his labourers clear title to their plots of land, which he sold them for a pittance of work. I have tried to follow his example as closely as I can in rate of pay and land access for the Indians, but I must keep my land intact for the sake of the school. Nevertheless, Steinlöwe has deeded half of 'Tigre Pequeño' to the Indians with joint trust to be managed by both the government and the Steinlöwe estate, with the stipulation that neither can revoke trusteeship or reclaim the deeds, which have been made out individually and also under a kind of perpetual group title. I don't understand the legal technicalities, but it seems to me a stroke of genius. This man is the most humanitarian gentleman to be found among all the landowners of Guatemala. I'm ashamed to say I would never have believed this of a German. Well, of course, I'm English. Still, I argue with him because somehow I feel that he is letting go of land from which the Indians may not get the benefit. But he believes it will work, notwithstanding general adversity; unless, of course, there is some cataclysmic upheaval from which we should none of us recover. And I suppose I must believe him. He is afraid Stewart will cause some trouble,

but I shall see to it that this does not happen. Indeed, as Stewart says, there is nickel ore here. I have kept this as quiet as I can. There is quite enough such ore at Lake Izabel without tearing up this land. My school must be as eternal as Guatemalan spring. In it lies the hope of Esperanza and much, much more. Poor Stewart is deluded by greed. Steinlöwe and I laugh at this delusion because we both know the government would never let us grow rich on nickel ore.

Steinlöwe, Steinlöwe! If I were thirty years younger I would be in love with him as all the women are. What a grand team we would have made. Ah, life is sad and funny and sometimes terribly hard. He is made of strong, strong stuff. What an outsized burden of tragedy he has borne: watching his mother waste away so young, and his father's life bleeding out in his arms, a man he really loved; atop all this, the accusations, name calling, threats. Then came the final blow: their car rolling on the mountain ice, and poor Marta in labour. Good lord, he carried her down from there in the darkness, himself with a broken arm and a heart full of guilt. After that no woman seemed to interest him for long. If I could wish him anything I would wish him someone he could love. But who deserves him? None of those imported social butterflies who keep fluttering around. I believe they leave him empty. Ah, it is indeed a shame and a sadness."

Kamille was crying with deep contrition when she finished this passage for the last time. All that echoed in her head were the worst things she had said and implied to him, and his own words of grief. Proof of love for him was hopeless now, even if she dared run to him with the swollen body of a distraught and mistrustful accuser. "Why could you not have loved me enough to believe?" The words twisted in her heart like a permanently imbedded knife. She sank lower and lower under the pain of their last parting, until lying sleepless and tormented through the night, she strained to turn her thoughts to the two perfect days they had spent together at Likin. In the end, she knew that the memory of this, too, would drive her mad.

Steinlöwe coming to her across the sand, whistling a tune. She had never heard such a joyous whistle, and rolled over on her back, shading her eyes, to study him.

"Is that a German whistle or a Spanish whistle?"

He stood looking down at her, very tan and wet, dripping with sea. "Neither, *mein Liebling*. It is the universal sound of contentment...the way a dove coos or a stallion neighs. Why do you ask?"

"I want to say things to you...to hear your voice, but only small insignificant things so as not to break the spell."

He rubbed himself with his towel, spread it out, and dropped down beside her. She closed her eyes and knew that

he was looking at her. His long fingers turned her head and his salty mouth closed over her parted lips. His voice, like the warm murmur of the sea, made her eyelids fly open.

"You can say anything you want as long as you love me. There is no spell. I do not like you to think we have something that will go away if we...if we pound on life a little too hard."

Rolling back to her stomach, she lifted herself up to gaze around her at the whipping palms, the white beach, the glassy green waves, and hot blue sky.

"But how can I go on feeling this? It's too much."

"Just live it...do not think so much about it. There is no spell. Eventually, you may want to swear at me...hit me even, with this generous little fist. You can say that...even do that, *Kind*, as long as you love me."

"Oh, no, no, no!" she insisted, laughing, leaning down and covering his face with kisses. "Will you hit me?"

"Never."

"Oh, you may want to sooner than you think...or at least yell at me. You don't know how strange I am. This morning I stole your lighter. Didn't you miss it? It's in my purse."

"So that is where it went. But you do not smoke."

"I can't help it. I wanted it. Because it's yours. Because it's so often in your hand. In this hand...the one I'm kissing...the one that will never hit me."

He pulled his hand free and slapped her across the backside.

She jumped up, screaming, and ran into the sea. Her swimming style was fast but not for very long. He caught up with her and dunked her, then held her in his arms a moment, her serene body stretched out over the water, floating as if asleep. Again she could feel his steady gaze upon her, and she opened her eyes, shading them against the burning sun. His mouth was curled in an odd smile.

"In Guatemala City on Christmas Eve, I took a small photograph...from your snatched wallet...while you and Ursula were in the powder room: a little blond *Kind* holding a blond puppy. It is in my wallet."

She fought against a wave and stood up with the sea at her neck.

"Oh, Andar, that was my dog, Honey. We grew up together. I had Honey until she was very old. She got slow and careless, but I couldn't give her up. One day on my uncle's farm she was trying to follow me and ran under a tractor. At the time, I thought it was the saddest day of my life."

"I am sorry, darling, *Liebling*, I will give it back."

"No...no. Oh, I'm glad you have it. But I *will* give back your lighter. I don't know what came over me. Maybe I thought I...that I'd have it for later...in case I was dreaming...in case you didn't want me anymore."

He merely found this wildness amusing, brushing his hand across her violent cheeks and sliding his soothing fingers down her neck until the protestations died within her. His hand dropped to his side.

"Let's go in, *Liebchen*."

They walked down the beach in silence without touching, both consumed with the touching to come, walking with single-minded assurance, until they reached the door that would lock them into their infinite world of each other.

How could she have thrown that away? She cast herself from the bed in a fit of wild nervousness, and went out to the stable to have her gentle mare Cuca saddled. As she was riding out of the yard, Ixil ran out, scolding her.

"You crazy señorita! Come down from this horse!"

Kamille backed the horse away from Ixil with a half-teasing, half-consoling smile.

"Don't worry, Ixil. I have to go. My spirit god, my nagual is calling. Nothing bad can happen. It already has." She spoke the last remark to herself as she rode off.

Cuca was mild-mannered and sure-footed, and Kamille was not yet dangerously clumsy. They plodded along with Cuca's alert ears pressed forward, testing the terrain as she went, as if sensing the importance of carrying her special burden. Kamille guided her through the orchards and down the valley along the path of a bubbling stream, distracted, always thinking, thinking how she might come into Steinlöwe's path

bearing only the truth, asking only forgiveness. There was no way, no feasible solution. Now, even in his bitterness, he might take her out of pity or a simple desire for his offspring. Why then could she not accept this, eat the humblest pie, take the smallest offering? She could not. Perhaps he had found someone else and all her speculation was pointless. She wandered up and down the valley, from time to time resuming her practice of collecting cloud shapes as they drifted over the mountains, soft, white, transient beauty.

IX

In late March, Ixil came to Kamille as she slouched half-curved in her library chair, looking with dejection at stacks of unfavorable letters from charitable foundations. She felt tired and tossed down the pen she had just picked up to begin yet one more attempt at helping Tzuli walk.

Giving Kamille a special look which Kamille now termed the *single whammy*, Ixil said, "Señor Steinlöwe on phone."

"I don't... Who? Andar Steinlöwe?" Her voice was almost a full octave higher than she had meant it to be.

"Si, that man...finquero," Ixil said with a scowl.

"Oh...I...I'm too busy. Tell him that...very busy."

"I no lie for you, señorita. You just sitting here waiting for this baby." Ixil folded her defiant arms. "Do I tell him that?"

"All right...all right, I'll speak to him." Kamille was so quick to recant she departed her safe chair a little too fast, resulting in dizziness. Her heart was pounding as she picked up the receiver, and she had to stand a moment taking a long, deep breath before she could speak.

"Hello, Kamille, sorry if I have interrupted something. I have not heard... How are you?"

"Oh...a...wonderful...really great...busy...I mean, busy. How are you?"

"At the moment wishing I could ask a favor...but really it is more for you...I thought you might like it..."

"What?"

"There are some people...I have guests...the Pedersons from Oregon. They have been touring South America and are working their way north. They have been away a long time and are rather lonely to speak to someone from their homeland."

"Oh really? Oregon...hmm."

"They heard about you...that is...I told them about you, and now they want to meet you. I haven't said your name...not wanting to put you in an unfavorable position in the event that you...would not come. However, in a sudden desire to please, I am afraid that I...I did say you would probably come to my casa for dinner the day after tomorrow. Can you...will you come?"

Staring at her abdomen, Kamille had started to say that

of course she could not come, but in the next instant a rush of words that astonished her formed themselves into the sunniest acceptance of his invitation.

"Oh, it would be delightful to meet someone from Oregon. Nice of you to call."

"Really?" The word rang with surprise. "Then you will be expected in the late afternoon. I will send the car. Thank you so much for...for getting me off the hook. You can stay over and return at your leisure."

#

Kamille went into a sudden depression as she tried to prepare a trim navy suit that had an accommodating little box jacket. Slipping on patent leather shoes, she rushed at her mirror to check her startling new form, backing away in despair. She was not so large, but he would know instantly. He always knew everything about her at once anyway.

"But my face is better now that I'm pregnant...don't you think, Mata? Yes, much nicer...softer, I think. I feel softer...sort of fragile. Silly isn't it? It could be that I'm even more sensual," she babbled to giggling Mata.

"Señorita, you are simply capital...just like a little girl. I want to come along and see that man's face."

"Oh no, not you. I wouldn't trust you at all. You are very sly, Mata." Kamille laughed with a heady delight.

That night she lay in her bed thinking, if only I can

do this one thing well. It's so important, a rare stroke of luck, so poignant, such a perfect chance to do my penance, droll wretch that I am. How will I ever contain myself, to simply come and go, asking only forgiveness, only that, only that?

#

When the car arrived, Mata carried out the suitcase and pressed her hand over Kamille's, patting it with sisterly affection. "You are very pretty, mamá."

Kamille squeezed the little brown hand and her lips quivered between laughter and tears. Her spirits remained as high as her prettily coiled hair throughout the pleasant trip over the mountains and right up to the grand and intimidating door of La Guarida d'el Tigre, at which time she had a swift reversal of feeling and wanted to turn tail and flee in terror.

She was taken to her room to freshen up by a surprised and discerning Maria, who managed to indicate that the others were in the sala beginning cocktails. Doing what she could to make herself presentable, she took one last turn before the glass and departed with great trepidation.

Steinlöwe stood at the elegant tiled bar, presumably mixing her a drink, having just received word of her arrival. Her heart turned over when she saw his tall profile clothed in the casual luxury of open-necked white shirt, camel blazer, neatly creased slacks, and shining

dress boots -- the finquero as always. Her eyes brimmed with grief and ascending pride. Hearing her footsteps, he turned with a well-made smile and reached out to hand her the whiskey soda which he knew she liked. His eyes traveled over her body and back to her face with a searching intensity. The eyelids blinked, the cloud-gray pools nearly flooding their banks with something large swimming therein. She held her eyes steady, just barely, and watched the glass slip from his fingers and crash on the shining teak floor.

Kamille suddenly felt as if her nerves were made of steel. "Whoops...sorry. Did I miss or did you?" she asked with the blithe voice of a friendly neighbor.

"Excuse me. I will make another...with no alcohol," he muttered. But he did not turn at once to do so, his eyes burrowing into hers until she couldn't take anymore. She smiled, thanked him, and moved across the room.

"And you are the Pedersons. How nice to meet northwesterners way down here. I'm Kamille Penine."

Mrs. Pederson was a trim, tweedy little woman with short gray hair, friendly brown eyes, and a ready smile. Mr. Pederson, a stocky, square-faced man in a cream blazer, stood up quickly, his tan face crinkling in a broad grin. He led Kamille to a chair, just like an attentive father, and she felt at once quite comfortable with the Pedersons.

"Oh, how lovely and radiant you are," wise Mrs. Pederson exclaimed. "I am correct in assuming you are

pregnant?"

"I hope so," Kamille said with a titter of laughter.

"There is something about expectant mothers that makes them unsurpassed in beauty."

"We certainly need to hear that," Kamille responded with a modest chortle of laughter as she flashed a glance at Steinlöwe.

He was taking a long time with her drink, but at last he came to her, handing it over with the steadiest gaze she had ever seen, in a completely unreadable face.

When she thanked him his lips curved into just the right amount of friendliness for a neighbor and a guest. Perhaps he has fallen in love with that German brunette, she thought, and then almost dropped the glass herself.

"Has it been an easy time for you, dear? You look so happy," Mrs. Pederson said.

"Well...at first I was very confused...that is...I wanted the baby from the moment I discovered its presence, but I was crying all the time and sick every morning."

"And naturally the father was no help at all," Mrs. Pederson said with amusement.

"None whatever. But, of course, how could he be?"

"How could he be?" Steinlöwe repeated as he paced before the open hearth, his fingers ruffling through hair that had begun the evening brushed into devastating waves.

"Now all of those disturbing times have passed, and I'm

fine most of the time...although, I can't ride my horse quite as fast these days."

"My God, you should not be riding at all!" Steinlöwe responded with ferocious censure.

"Oh no," Mrs. Pederson agreed, "you'd better stop that immediately. When are you due?"

"In July, middle of the rainy season...never rains but it pours."

"Have you selected names?" Mrs. Pederson continued, apparently delighted to go on discussing motherhood.

"If it's a girl, I'm going to call her Andara, and if it's a boy--"

"Anyone care for a cigarette? A cigar, Mr. Pederson?" Steinlöwe interrupted, and thereafter discovered that he was lighting his own pipe without tobacco.

"If it's a boy," Kamille went on, "I'm going to name him after my Uncle Jasper."

"Jasper!" Steinlöwe said with a surprised exhalation.

"Don't you like it?" Kamille asked with a playfully threatening edge in her voice.

"I think it's rather nice," Mrs. Pederson said, "Kind of cute."

"Is it not the sort of name one gives to a...a mule?" Steinlöwe asked with a dark glance at Kamille.

"I'll have one of those cigars now, instead of after dinner," Mr. Pederson said. "Seems fitting...passing out

cigars with a baby on the way." Selecting a cigar, he asked, "Do German fathers have that custom, Herr Steinlöwe?"

"I really don't recall," Steinlöwe said, slamming shut his cigar box, but then remembering to smile for effect.

The pleasant conversation went on and no one seemed to notice their host's sharp edge of coolness beneath the smooth manners, no one except Kamille who noticed it very much. She didn't want to tease him anymore, only to be forgiven. If she could somehow, somehow be forgiven, she would go in peace.

They sat at a candlelit dinner table over which Steinlöwe had ordered spread a light, authentic Spanish supper; the very supper Kamille had missed on the night of her arrival in Guatemala: a thick soup, fried plantains, rice and flan, along with three white wines that ranged from very dry to a hint of sweetness. There were other little side plates for the guests to dabble in, local things that Kamille, now familiar with them, could sample with delight.

"You have all the things I love," she said with a joyous warmth in her voice, looking directly at Steinlöwe. He turned his head from the steward who had brought more wine. The table, the candles, the Pedersons, all things slipped from Kamille's vision and mind. She was lifted for a moment on the crest of his smile, the first intimate offering she had received all evening.

"Better than duckling in cherry sauce," he said, adding

in a low voice really meant only for her, "No more alcohol."

"It must have been very difficult for a woman of the Northwest to come here and adjust to life on a *finca*," Mrs. Pederson said. "Is your husband Spanish?"

"No," Kamille said, looking at Steinlöwe. He merely held his empty fork and stared back at her with a consuming intensity that made her ankles and wrists begin to ache.

"Yes, it was difficult," she went on with quickening voice. "It seems I've learned a lot in a very short time. I started out very uncertain and confused...easily misled."

She paused, noticing that there was little food on Steinlöwe's plate. She had an urgent desire to know what the table held that he favored most. Please, please eat something, she begged in silence, but he would not comply, spurning everything but the wine, his burning eyes fueled by some turmoil of emotion she could not define.

"Well...then one day not long ago I found the diary of my benefactress...my Aunt Cathline," Kamille went on. "Without it, perhaps I would have gone on being an idiot. In that wonderful little journal, I discovered the truth of things and where all her trusts and sentiments lay. I was deeply sorry that I had not relied all along on my own initial judgment...because, you know...it was actually very close to Aunt Cathline's. But...that's how it is when you come into a strange new world. You are just like a baby, so eager and curious but afraid of everything...a real *Kind*, as

I'm sure Herr Steinlöwe would say."

Steinlöwe toyed with and then picked up his wine glass, sipping with his head angled back, his half-closed eyes still riveted on her with a fascination not altogether flattering.

She recovered enough to lower her gaze and let the Pedersons talk. In the charged environment, there was nothing more she wanted to convey, at least on the particular point of misjudgment she was belaboring, and she needed to regain her strength. Then she heard Mrs. Pederson speaking of the poverty and illness abounding in Guatemala.

"It is so sad to see children in need."

Kamille looked up, her eyes bright and focused again. "Yes...we do what we can to help at the school, and...oh, if only... Sometimes it's so discouraging. There's a young boy with twisted legs, who...when he can leave the spinning for his grandmother in the marketplace, is carried to school on the small back of another child. He's a beautiful boy...so bright... I've tried and tried to get together the money for surgery. But, it's so hard to get anyone to..." Her proclivity to cry was once again humiliating. She should never have started this at the dinner table...amidst excitement, worn nerves.

"Terribly sad," Mrs. Pederson said.

"I've seen the very same thing before. I know, know it can be cured with surgery, if we could just..." Her old

frustration produced a flash of anger. "My God! the letters I've written..."

Steinlöwe stood up and came around the table, touching her shoulder. "We will go into the sala."

As they were walking, he said in a softened voice, "Why did you not tell me...ask me, Kamille? I started a fund...we have a fund for things like this. Because of the immense need, we are very careful how the monies are applied, but it is there...there and used for just such things...and I have other connections."

"And we'd like to contribute something to that fund," Mr. Pederson, who had overheard, offered.

"Yes," Mrs. Pederson agreed, "That would make our trip very memorable...so much more worthwhile."

The sense of relief almost sent Kamille to her knees. How easy it now seemed. With just these few words Tzuli had already begun to walk his own path...walk to school. She wanted to embrace everyone while they continued to assure her of their help. Tzuli's lovely, stoic face floated before her as she thought of how she would tell him.

After steaming coffee in the warm and glittering sala and more animated conversation ranging between the northwestern United States and the tip of South America, the excitement of the evening finally drained Kamille's store of energy. Her head dipped for just a moment as she struggled to maintain her enthusiasm. Steinlöwe stood up at once.

"Our mother-to-be is tired, I believe."

All evening, she had felt his awareness of every subtle shade of her emotion. His voice energized her with a quick spurt of excitement, followed by a nervous fear of what was to come.

The Pederson's were quick to agree that Kamille needed her rest. They excused themselves and were led off to their guest room.

Once in her room and clothed in her nightgown and robe, the exhausted Kamille could not even lie down. She sat beside her bed with her hands crossed over her abdomen, staring at the astounding number of crystal vases and bowls of orchids which rested on every level surface. The lush islets of dark red, white, lilac, and gold extravagance spread their heavy night odors throughout the room, adding to the strange mixture of euphoria and anxious nausea which gradually took possession of her. In this state she sat for perhaps thirty minutes without moving, until she was startled by a light knock at the door.

"Come in," she called with tensing body.

Steinlöwe stepped inside and closed the door behind him, leaning against it with folded arms and simply staring at her. Finally he spoke.

"I did not intend to disturb you, but I--"

"You didn't," she interrupted with a quick glance at him. She turned her head away and sat with her hands folded

in her lap in fearful resignation. Her mind was a blur as she let her eyes wander over the dizzying orchids. How had she meant to begin? But the beginning was over, wasn't it?

"Kamille...if I had not invited you...would you have told me anything?" His voice held a bitter disappointment.

"After all I'd said to you...done to you...I couldn't say this. How could I--"

"And now I am expected to fall down in amazement and thankfulness?"

Her heart sank. She swallowed, gave a weak smile, and said, "No...*I* am. I wouldn't expect you to find me worth the trouble. Don't worry, I'm only here to apologize. I had to come as I am, but I want nothing more from you. Only...I think...I think I want to be punished. Is that perversion?"

"God!" he exclaimed. "I had this room filled with orchids! How insane...how ridiculous...if only to win you one more futile time...you...you unobtainable creature! What a fool I am, expecting more rejection, still refusing to... This is..." He stopped, looking down at her tear-filled face. "Kamille?...oh, *Kind*, please no more tears. Come. You cannot sleep here. This place is a damned florist shop!"

He had picked up her hand and pulled her from the chair, leading her out the door and down the arcade through the arousing smells of the patio garden. They entered a

great, baronial bedroom with an enormous fireplace, its flaming-log reflections climbing the white walls. A huge, mahogany fourposter asserted itself as the dominant piece of furniture in the cavernous room.

"I was born in this bed," he said with gentle voice, as though trying to humanize the formidable mass of carved wood and pompous quilting which her startled eyes beheld.

She stood feeling exactly like a small child about to be deserted in a ghost-inhabited room, dwarfed beneath the thick dark beams of the high ceiling, herself growing smaller by the minute as the room in turn grew larger.

"Please don't leave me here," she implored. "Not here. I'd rather go back to--"

"I am not going to leave you. This is my room, *Kind*."

She stepped forward a little, glancing at the bed and then at him.

"Do not look at me like that, *schöne Kamille*. *Liebchen, Liebchen*, I think I know so many thoughts in your amazing head. I do not invite women into this room. It is a place for a permanent arrangement...only that. Oh God, can we have such an arrangement?"

"You...you think my condition forces me to--"

"I think that nothing or no one on earth could ever force Kamille Penine to do anything she did not want to do."

As he spoke, she saw his scrutinizing eyes travel to her neck, to the sparkle of her chain, the dark outline of

the emerald under her nightgown.

"What is this?"

He reached out, pulling it from inside her gown until his eyes fell on the weighted portion.

"I see."

She had taken to wearing the emerald on a chain buried inside her shirts because it brought her a measure of comfort, as well as a kind of atoning pain.

She snatched the ring from his hand and let it drop, her face an effusion of red, while his whole cunning presence shook in soft laughter. Then she saw that all of the marvelous assurance and strength had returned to his face and manner, the fire flickering in his spirited eyes.

She stepped to the hearth and stretched out her hands, shivering with the emotions that swept over her. He came and stood behind her, spreading his fingers over her waist and kissing her neck. Each warm caress sent an explosion of shivers from the base of her spine. Then his long-fingered hands reached around her, caressing, touching her swollen abdomen with gentle fingers.

She slipped a little clumsily to the floor, grasping his legs and burying her face there. He knelt down at once and pulled her hands away, touching them to his mouth.

"No, *Kind*. Stop it...No!. Come here."

He lifted her up against him.

"Forgive me, Andar...it's what I came for, all I want."

"Please want more. Want as much as you can have. Can you not see that my love has forgiveness in it?"

"Oh, you shame me," she said, drawing back from him.

"I do not want to shame you...and never, ever again to hurt you as I did that night at the Moreno's. I wanted you so badly, and I could not really have you. It was torture. I thought..." His voice died away as a realization came to him. "You knew then...about the child. Christ! You knew and said nothing. You went away knowing and hating--"

"No, I never hated...I never hated you, Andar. Foolish words. Only words of pain. I thought you hated me...and I hated myself. I hated my confusion at loving you and being afraid."

"Of course you were afraid...of course."

He unfastened the chain, sliding the ring off and placing it back on her finger.

"There...where it belongs. I went out of my head with joy when you walked into the sala. Then I thought you had come to taunt me with the ultimate cruelty. How I wanted this child in you. Anything...anything to keep you thinking of me."

She smiled, remembering Mata's incisive remarks.

"Didn't you even question if it was yours?" she teased.

He laughed. "I thought only of what happens to us whenever we are together. You are as unashamed of pleasing me as I am of pleasing you. You forget even the making of

children with me."

"But I wanted it. I won't have to steal your lighter now," she said with a mischievous smile.

She stood on her toes and put her mouth against his with experimental gentleness.

"It seems such a long time that I've loved you, Herr Steinlöwe...but time goes so quickly.

"*Kind*, let us get into bed."

She sighed and spoke in one breath. "Andar, I can't give up Esperanza...all that it--"

"No...no, I know that. I saw tonight what it has come to mean to you, and I was proud of you...*am* very proud of you. I will help you."

"She loved you, you know...Aunt Cathline. Oh, I wish I could have talked to her. How I wish it."

"We had a fine friendship. I will tell you everything about her. Wonderful stories. We can talk for years."

He lifted her high up on the ancient fourposter, no longer formidable but a sumptuous promise as solid and abiding a bed as she had ever encountered. She watched him undress and come to her, holding her with tight fingers as if she might escape him yet one more time.

In awhile his fingers searched through her hair, pulling out the pins and tossing them on the night table. He slipped off her nightgown.

"I need to feel your skin." Running his exploring

hands over her, he said, "Something else has happened to you even besides this, little mother. Tonight you are more wonderful to me than I have ever known. My God! What if I had not called you?"

"I was trying to think of a way to come to you and be somehow forgiven...but not for the baby...not because it was an object of your guilt," she whispered against his throat.

"I have no guilt," he said with amused voice, and added in jest, "I only want you because of little Andara -- you were cruel to tease me like that before the Pedersons."

"What would they say if they could see us now, father of little Jasper?"

He laughed so loud she was afraid the Pedersons would hear and guess at everything.

"Ah, the Pedersons. Bless them. Some day they must hear the incredible story they helped write. And they will love it. But Jasper? My father had a mule named Jasper."

"Well, I have an uncle named Jasper."

They laughed together and then grew silent. He rocked her in his arms, speaking love words against her cheek.

"I did not imagine I would have you with me like this tonight. At least not until you began talking at dinner. How beautiful and honest you were at my table. What a feast -- your confession. You ate and looked at me, and your eyes said, 'See how I love your food.' I was so fascinated I dined only on you. There was *mi querida*, Kamille. I drank

my wine and thought, when will I get to her? My God, how long must I wait? When can I touch her? Then when I came to your room, you were closed away from me again. I thought I had imagined it all."

"And I thought you didn't want me."

"That will never happen, *querida*. I am no good without you anymore."

"What is your favorite food, *finquero*?"

"My favorite...I think now it must be duckling in cherry sauce."

"No, no," she said with laughing, scolding voice, "your favorite Spanish food...of those we had tonight."

"*Sopa de pescado con coco y tamales d'el Tigre*."

"The fish soup with coconut and Maria's incredible tamales. *Es verdad*...true?" she said.

"*Si, amada mia*."

"I want to watch you eat."

"What?"

"I want to sit and watch you eat the things you love."

"I will perform for you, my amusing creature, at breakfast...but now, *mi amor*, I am starving not for food. Do you understand?...very hungry."

She felt a curious shyness and reached out to touch his face. Soon her lips were exploring the hot wells of his eyes, and then his mouth found hers while her fingers twined through the tawny waves of hair.

"Oh, how happy I am, *mi finquero, mi querido*," she whispered against his caresses. She wanted to tell him he was her very own lover, to say it in the language he had first learned, the language closest to his thought. "*Mein Liebender*," she whispered with a slow dreaminess. She heard his utterance of delight as her words brought his arms fast around her. Still, he threw back his head and lifted her chin.

"And your husband, *nicht wahr*? Before the little quetzal leaves its nest. Just say, yes, Andar."

"Yes, Andar."

"Remember the small blue tapestry you handed me at the Huehue market?" she asked, sitting up and patting a pillow.

"Of course...the day I decided I must have you."

"After that little tapestry I was beyond all hope."

"All hope...of what?"

"Escape...any kind of escape."

"So, my wild, foreign bird is caged?"

"I'm not foreign. You've made me a *Guatemalteca* at last. I came here to teach, but I had so much to learn."

"I, too, *Lehrerin*; teach me now." His mellow laughter was mocking, and the thrill of this facile playfulness she had caused in him brought her to the same mood as she tossed pillows at him.

"No!...stop it, you little *Schädling*...little pest. It only makes me want you more. Come here to me, *Kind*...love

your lover...love your husband."

"Please say it in German."

She waited as he drew her against him with impatient hands, shaking his head and winking at her as he spoke.

"Komst du hier, Kind, liebst dein Liebender, liebst dein Mann."

"I'm here, my German *finquero*," she whispered, "and it feels like home."

The End