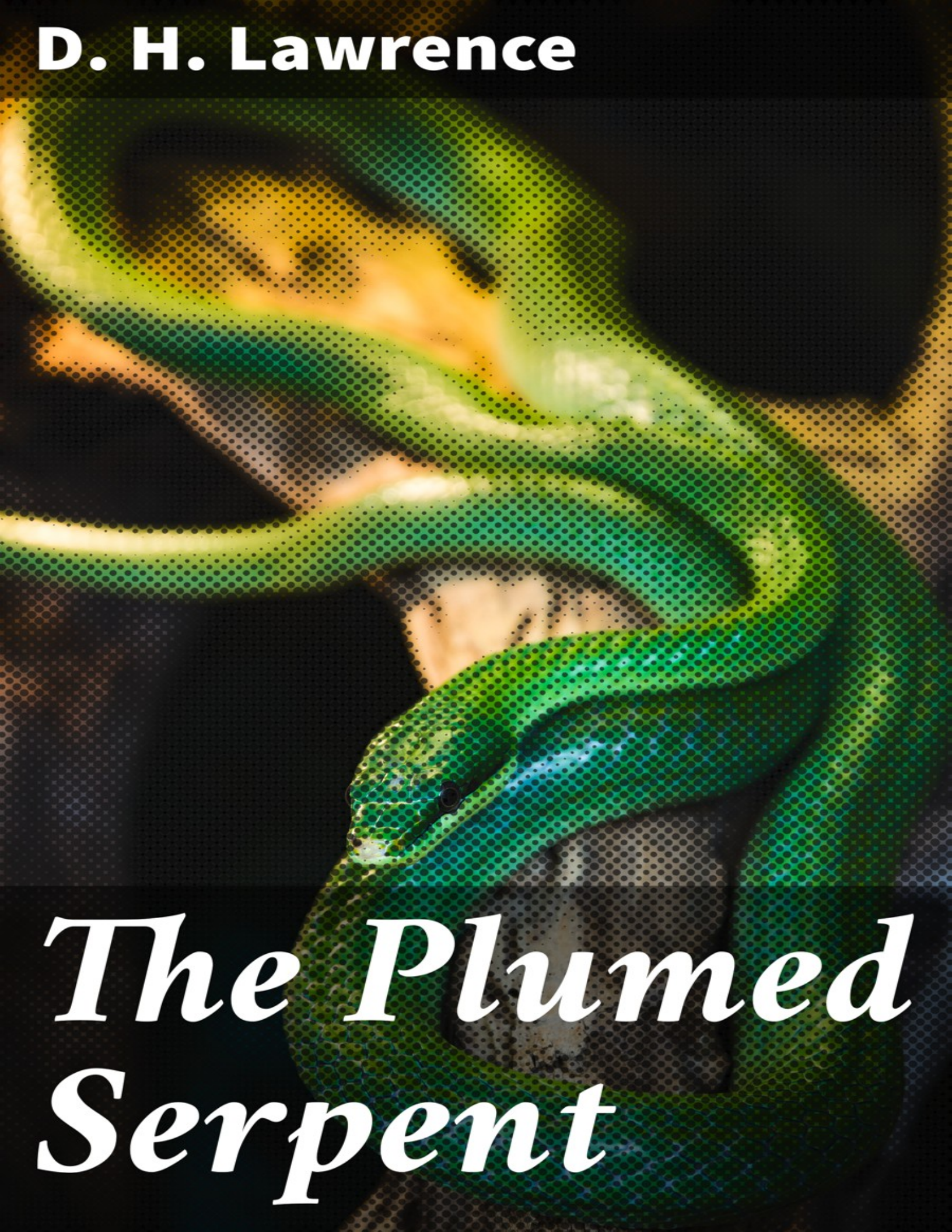
D. H. Lawrence



The Plumed Serpent

D. H. Lawrence

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CHAPTER I

Beginnings of a Bull-fight

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It was the Sunday after Easter, and the last bull-fight of the season in Mexico City. Four special bulls had been brought over from Spain for the occasion, since Spanish bulls are more fiery than Mexican. Perhaps it is the altitude, perhaps just the spirit of the western Continent which is to blame for the lack of 'pep', as Owen put it, in the native animal.

Although Owen, who was a great socialist, disapproved of bull-fights, 'We have never seen one. We shall have to go,' he said.

'Oh yes, I think we must see it,' said Kate.

'And it's our last chance,' said Owen.

Away he rushed to the place where they sold tickets, to book seats, and Kate went with him. As she came into the street, her heart sank. It was as if some little person inside her were sulking and resisting. Neither she nor Owen spoke much Spanish, there was a fluster at the ticket place, and an unpleasant individual came forward to talk American for them.

It was obvious they ought to buy tickets for the 'Shade.' But they wanted to economize, and Owen said he preferred to sit among the crowd, therefore, against the resistance of the ticket man and the onlookers, they bought reserved seats in the 'Sun.'

The show was on Sunday afternoon. All the tram-cars and the frightful little Ford omnibuses called *camions* were labelled *Torero,* and were surging away towards Chapultepec. Kate felt that sudden dark feeling, that she didn't want to go.

'I'm not very keen on going,' she said to Owen.

'Oh, but why not? I don't believe in them on principle, but we've never seen one, so we shall *have* to go.'

Owen was an American, Kate was Irish. 'Never having seen one' meant 'having to go.' But it was American logic rather than Irish, and Kate only let herself be overcome.

Villiers of course was keen. But then he too was American, and he too had never seen one, and being younger, more than anybody he *had* to go.

They got into a Ford taxi and went. The busted car careered away down the wide dismal street of asphalt and stone and Sunday dreariness. Stone buildings in Mexico have a peculiar hard, dry dreariness.

The taxi drew up in a side street under the big iron scaffolding of the stadium. In the gutters, rather lousy men were selling pulque and sweets, cakes, fruit, and greasy food. Crazy motorcars rushed up and hobbled away. Little soldiers in washed-out cotton uniforms, pinky drab, hung around an entrance. Above all loomed the network iron frame of the huge, ugly stadium.

Kate felt she was going to prison. But Owen excitedly surged to the entrance that corresponded to his ticket. In the depths of him, he too didn't want to go. But he was a born American, and if anything was on show, he had to see it. That was 'Life.'

The man who took the tickets at the entrance, suddenly, as they were passing in, stood in front of Owen, put both his hands on Owen's chest, and pawed down the front of Owen's body. Owen started, bridled, transfixed for a moment. The fellow stood aside. Kate remained petrified.

Then Owen jerked into a smiling composure as the man waved them on. 'Feeling for fire-arms!' he said, rolling his eyes with pleased excitement at Kate.

But she had not got over the shock of horror, fearing the fellow might paw her.

They emerged out of a tunnel in the hollow of the concrete-and-iron amphitheatre. A real gutter-lout came to look at their counterslips, to see which seats they had booked. He jerked his head downwards, and slouched off. Now Kate knew she was in a trap--a big concrete beetle trap.

They dropped down the concrete steps till they were only three tiers from the bottom. That was their row. They were to sit on the concrete, with a loop of thick iron between each numbered seat. This was a reserved place in the 'Sun.'

Kate sat gingerly between her two iron loops, and looked vaguely around.

'I think it's thrilling!' she said.

Like most modern people, she had a will-to-happiness.

'Isn't it thrilling?' cried Owen, whose will-to-happiness was almost a mania. 'Don't you think so, Bud?'

'Why, yes, I think it may be,' said Villiers, non-committal.

But then Villiers was young, he was only over twenty, while Owen was over forty. The younger generation calculates its 'happiness' in a more business-like fashion.

Villiers was out after a thrill, but he wasn't going to say he'd got one till he'd got it. Kate and Owen--Kate was also nearly forty--must enthuse a thrill, out of a sort of politeness to the great Show-man, Providence.

'Look here!' said Owen. 'Supposing we try to protect our extremity on this concrete--' and thoughtfully he folded his rain-coat and laid it along the concrete ledge so that both he and Kate could sit on it.

They sat and gazed around. They were early. Patches of people mottled the concrete slope opposite, like eruptions. The ring just below was vacant, neatly sanded; and above the ring, on the encircling concrete, great advertisements for hats, with a picture of a city-man's straw hat, and advertisements for spectacles, with pairs of spectacles supinely folded, glared and shouted.

'Where is the "Shade" then?' said Owen, twisting his neck.

At the top of the amphitheatre, near the sky, were concrete boxes. This was the 'Shade', where anybody who was anything sat.

'Oh but,' said Kate, 'I don't want to be perched right up there, so far away.'

'Why no!' said Owen. 'We're much better where we are, in our "Sun", which isn't going to shine a great deal after all.'

The sky was cloudy, preparing for the rainy season.

It was nearly three o'clock in the afternoon, and the crowd was filling in, but still only occupied patches of the bare concrete. The lower tiers were reserved, so the bulk of

the people sat in the mid-way levels, and gentry like our trio were more or less isolated.

But the audience was already a mob, mostly of fattish town men in black tight suits and little straw hats, and a mixing-in of the dark-faced labourers in big hats. The men in black suits were probably employees and clerks and factory hands. Some had brought their women, in sky-blue chiffon with brown chiffon hats and faces powdered to look like white marshmallows. Some were families with two or three children.

The fun began. The game was to snatch the hard straw hat off some fellow's head, and send it skimming away down the slope of humanity, where some smart bounder down below would catch it and send it skimming across in another direction. There were shouts of jeering pleasure from the mass, which rose almost to a yell as seven straw hats were skimming, meteor-like, at one moment across the slope of people.

'Look at that!' said Owen. 'Isn't that fun!'

'No,' said Kate, her little *alter ego* speaking out for once, in spite of her will-to-happiness. 'No, I don't like it. I really hate common people.'

As a socialist, Owen disapproved, and as a happy man, he was disconcerted. Because his own real self, as far as he had any left, hated common rowdiness just as much as Kate did.

'It's awfully smart though!' he said, trying to laugh in sympathy with the mob. 'There now, see that!'

'Yes, it's quite smart, but I'm glad it's not my hat,' said Villiers.

'Oh, it's all in the game,' said Owen largely.

But he was uneasy. He was wearing a big straw hat of native make, conspicuous in the comparative isolation of the lower tiers. After a lot of fidgeting, he took off this hat and put it on his knees. But unfortunately he had a very definitely bald spot on a sunburnt head.

Behind, above, sat a dense patch of people in the unreserved section. Already they were throwing things. *Bum!* came an orange, aimed at Owen's bald spot, and hitting him on the shoulder. He glared round rather ineffectually through his big shell spectacles.

'I'd keep my hat on if I were you,' said the cold voice of Villiers.

'Yes, I think perhaps it's wiser,' said Owen, with assumed nonchalance, putting on his hat again.

Whereupon a banana skin rattled on Villiers' tidy and ladylike little panama. He glared round coldly, like a bird that would stab with its beak if it got the chance, but which would fly away at the first real menace.

'How I detest them!' said Kate.

A diversion was created by the entrance, opposite, of the military bands, with their silver and brass instruments under their arms. There were three sets. The chief band climbed and sat on the right, in the big bare tract of concrete reserved for the Authorities. These musicians wore dark grey uniforms trimmed with rose colour, and made Kate feel almost reassured, as if it were Italy and not Mexico City. A silver band in pale buff uniforms sat opposite our party, high up across the hollow distance, and still a third 'música' threaded away to the left, on the remote scattered hillside

of the amphitheatre. The newspapers had said that the President would attend. But the Presidents are scarce at bull-fights in Mexico, nowadays.

There sat the bands, in as much pomp as they could muster, but they did not begin to play. Great crowds now patched the slopes, but there were still bare tracts, especially in the Authorities' section. Only a little distance above Kate's row was a mass of people, as it were impending; a very uncomfortable sensation.

It was three o'clock, and the crowds had a new diversion. The bands, due to strike up at three, still sat there in lordly fashion, sounding not a note.

'La música! La música!' shouted the mob, with the voice of mob authority. They were the People, and the revolutions had been their revolutions, and they had won them all. The bands were their bands, present for their amusement.

But the bands were military bands, and it was the army which had won all the revolutions. So the revolutions were *their* revolutions, and they were present for their own glory alone.

Música pagada toca mal tono.

Spasmodically, the insolent yelling of the mob rose and subsided. *La música! La música!* The shout became brutal and violent. Kate always remembered it. *La música!* The band peacocked its nonchalance. The shouting was a great yell: the degenerate mob of Mexico City!

At length, at its own leisure, the bands in grey with dark rose facings struck up: crisp, martial, smart.

'That's fine!' said Owen. 'But that's really good! And it's the first time I've heard a good band in Mexico, a band with

any backbone.'

The music was smart, but it was brief. The band seemed scarcely to have started, when the piece was over. The musicians took their instruments from their mouths with a gesture of dismissal. They played just to say they'd played, making it as short as possible.

Música pagada toca mal tono.

There was a ragged interval, then the silver band piped up. And at last it was half-past three, or more.

Whereupon, at some given signal, the masses in the middle, unreserved seats suddenly burst and rushed down on to the lowest, reserved seats. It was a crash like a burst reservoir, and the populace in black Sunday suits poured down round and about our astonished, frightened trio. And in two minutes it was over. Without any pushing or shoving. Everybody careful, as far as possible, not to touch anybody else. You don't elbow your neighbour if he's got a pistol on his hip and a knife at his belly. So all the seats in the lower tiers filled in one rush, like the flowing of water.

Kate now sat among the crowd. But her seat, fortunately, was above one of the track-ways that went round the arena, so at least she would not have anybody sitting between her knees.

Men went uneasily back and forth along this gangway past the feet, wanting to get in next their friends, but never venturing to ask. Three seats away, on the same row, sat a Polish bolshevist fellow who had met Owen. He leaned over and asked the Mexican next to Owen if he might change seats with him. 'No,' said the Mexican. 'I'll sit in my own seat.'

'Muy bien, Señor, muy bien!' said the Pole.

The show did not begin, and men like lost mongrels still prowled back and forth on the track that was next step down from Kate's feet. They began to take advantage of the ledge on which rested the feet of our party, to squat there.

Down sat a heavy fellow, plumb between Owen's knees.

'I hope they won't sit on *my* feet,' said Kate anxiously.

'We won't let them,' said Villiers, with bird-like decision. 'Why don't you shove him off, Owen? Shove him off?'

And Villiers glared at the Mexican fellow ensconced between Owen's legs. Owen flushed, and laughed uncomfortably. He was not good at shoving people off. The Mexican began to look round at the three angry white people.

And in another moment, another fat Mexican in a black suit and a little black hat was lowering himself into Villiers' foot-space. But Villiers was too quick for him. He quickly brought his feet together under the man's sinking posterior, so the individual subsided uncomfortably on to a pair of boots, and at the same time felt a hand shoving him quietly but determinedly on the shoulder.

'No!' Villiers was saying in good American. 'This place is for my *feet!* Get off! You get off!'

And he continued, quietly but very emphatically, to push the Mexican's shoulder, to remove him.

The Mexican half raised himself, and looked round murderously at Villiers. Physical violence was being offered, and the only retort was death. But the young American's face was so cold and abstract, only the eyes showing a

primitive, bird-like fire, that the Mexican was nonplussed. And Kate's eyes were blazing with Irish contempt.

The fellow struggled with his Mexican city-bred inferiority complex. He muttered an explanation in Spanish that he was only sitting there for a moment, till he could join his friends--waving a hand towards a lower tier. Villiers did not understand a word, but he reiterated:

'I don't care what it is. This place is for my *feet,* and you don't sit there.'

Oh, home of liberty! Oh, land of the free! Which of these two men was to win in the struggle for conflicting liberty? Was the fat fellow free to sit between Villiers' feet, or was Villiers free to keep his foot-space?

There are all sorts of inferiority complex, and the city Mexican has a very strong sort, that makes him all the more aggressive, once it is roused. Therefore the intruder lowered his posterior with a heavy, sudden bounce on Villiers' feet, and Villiers, out of very distaste, had had to extricate his feet from such a compression. The young man's face went white at the nostrils, and his eyes took on that bright abstract look of pure democratic anger. He pushed the fat shoulders more decisively, repeating:

'Go away! Go away! You're not to *sit* there.'

The Mexican, on his own ground, and heavy on his own base, let himself be shoved, oblivious.

'Insolence!' said Kate loudly. 'Insolence!'

She glared at the fat back in the shoddily-fitting black coat, which looked as if a woman dressmaker had made it, with loathing. How could any man's coat-collar look so homemade, so *en famille!*

Villiers remained with a fixed, abstract look on his thin face, rather like a death's head. All his American will was summoned up, the bald eagle of the north bristling in every feather. The fellow *should not* sit there.--But how to remove him?

The young man sat tense with will to annihilate his beetle-like intruder, and Kate used all her Irish malice to help him.

'Don't you wonder who was his tailor?' she asked, with a flicker in her voice.

Villiers looked at the femalish black coat of the Mexican, and made an arch grimace at Kate.

'I should say he hadn't one. Perhaps did it himself.'

'Very likely!' Kate laughed venomously.

It was too much. The man got up and betook himself, rather diminished, to another spot.

'Triumph!' said Kate. 'Can't you do the same, Owen?'

Owen laughed uncomfortably, glancing down at the man between his knees as he might glance at a dog with rabies, when it had its back to him.

'Apparently not yet, unfortunately,' he said, with some constraint, turning his nose away again from the Mexican, who was using him as a sort of chair-back.

There was an exclamation. Two horsemen in gay uniforms and bearing long staffs had suddenly ridden into the ring. They went round the arena, then took up their posts, sentry-wise, on either side the tunnel entrance through which they had come in.

In marched a little column of four toreadors wearing tight uniforms plastered with silver embroidery. They divided, and

marched smartly in opposite directions, two and two, around the ring, till they came to the place facing the section of the Authorities, where they made their salute.

So this was a bull-fight! Kate already felt a chill of disgust.

In the seats of the Authorities were very few people, and certainly no sparkling ladies in high tortoise-shell combs and lace mantillas. A few common-looking people, bourgeois with not much taste, and a couple of officers in uniform. The President had not come.

There was no glamour, no charm. A few commonplace people in an expanse of concrete were the elect, and below, four grotesque and effeminate-looking fellows in tight, ornate clothes were the heroes. With their rather fat posteriors and their squiffs of pigtails and their clean-shaven faces, they looked like eunuchs, or women in tight pants, these precious toreadors.

The last of Kate's illusions concerning bull-fights came down with a flop. These were the darlings of the mob! These were the gallant toreadors! Gallant? Just about as gallant as assistants in a butcher's shop. Lady-killers? Ugh!

There was an Ah! of satisfaction from the mob. Into the ring suddenly rushed a smallish, dun-coloured bull with long flourishing horns. He ran out, blindly, as if from the dark, probably thinking that now he was free. Then he stopped short, seeing he was not free, but surrounded in an unknown way. He was utterly at a loss.

A toreador came forward and switched out a pink cloak like a fan not far from the bull's nose. The bull gave a playful little prance, neat and pretty, and charged mildly on the

cloak. The toreador switched the cloak over the animal's head, and the neat little bull trotted on round the ring, looking for a way to get out.

Seeing the wooden barrier around the arena, finding he was able to look over it, he thought he might as well take the leap. So over he went into the corridor or passage-way which circled the ring, and in which stood the servants of the arena.

Just as nimbly, these servants vaulted over the barrier into the arena, that was now bull-less.

The bull in the gangway trotted inquiringly round till he came to an opening on to the arena again. So back he trotted into the ring.

And back into the gangway vaulted the servants, where they stood again to look on.

The bull trotted waveringly and somewhat irritated. The toreadors waved their cloaks at him, and he swerved on. Till his vague course took him to where one of the horsemen with lances sat motionless on his horse.

Instantly, in a pang of alarm, Kate noticed that the horse was thickly blindfolded with a black cloth. Yes, and so was the horse on which sat the other picador.

The bull trotted suspiciously up to the motionless horse bearing the rider with the long pole; a lean old horse that would never move till Doomsday, unless someone shoved it.

O shades of Don Quixote! Oh four Spanish horsemen of the Apocalypse! This was surely one of them.

The picador pulled his feeble horse round slowly, to face the bull, and slowly he leaned forward and shoved his lance-point into the bull's shoulder. The bull, as if the horse were a

great wasp that had stung him deep, suddenly lowered his head in a jerk of surprise and lifted his horns straight up into the horse's abdomen. And without more ado, over went horse and rider, like a tottering monument upset.

The rider scrambled from under the horse and went running away with his lance. The old horse, in complete dazed amazement, struggled to rise, as if overcome with dumb incomprehension. And the bull, with a red place on his shoulder welling a trickle of dark blood, stood looking around in equally hopeless amazement.

But the wound was hurting. He saw the queer sight of the horse half reared from the ground, trying to get to its feet. And he smelled blood and bowels.

So rather vaguely, as if not quite knowing what he ought to do, the bull once more lowered his head and pushed his sharp, flourishing horns in the horse's belly, working them up and down inside there with a sort of vague satisfaction.

Kate had never been taken so completely by surprise in all her life. She had still cherished some idea of a gallant show. And before she knew where she was, she was watching a bull whose shoulders trickled blood goring his horns up and down inside the belly of a prostrate and feebly plunging old horse.

The shock almost overpowered her. She had come for a gallant show. This she had paid to see. Human cowardice and beastliness, a smell of blood, a nauseous whiff of bursten bowels! She turned her face away.

When she looked again, it was to see the horse feebly and dazedly walking out of the ring, with a great ball of its

own entrails hanging out of its abdomen and swinging reddish against its own legs as it automatically moved.

And once more, the shock of amazement almost made her lose consciousness. She heard the confused small applause of amusement from the mob. And that Pole, to whom Owen had introduced her, leaned over and said to her, in horrible English:

'Now, Miss Leslie, you are seeing Life! Now you will have something to write about, in your letters to England.'

She looked at his unwholesome face in complete repulsion, and wished Owen would not introduce her to such sordid individuals.

She looked at Owen. His nose had a sharp look, like a little boy who may make himself sick, but who is watching at the shambles with all his eyes, knowing it is forbidden.

Villiers, the younger generation, looked intense and abstract, getting the sensation. He would not even feel sick. He was just getting the thrill of it, without emotion, coldly and scientifically, but very intent.

And Kate felt a real pang of hatred against this Americanism which is coldly and unscrupulously sensational.

'Why doesn't the horse move? Why doesn't it run away from the bull?' she asked in repelled amazement, of Owen.

Owen cleared his throat.

'Didn't you see? It was blindfolded,' he said.

'But can't it *smell* the bull?' she asked.

'Apparently not.--They bring the old wrecks here to finish them off.--I know it's awful, but it's part of the game.'

How Kate hated phrases like 'part of the game.' What do they mean, anyhow! She felt utterly humiliated, crushed by a sense of human indecency, cowardice of two-legged humanity. In this 'brave' show she felt nothing but reeking cowardice. Her breeding and her natural pride were outraged.

The ring servants had cleaned away the mess and spread new sand. The toreadors were playing with the bull, unfurling their foolish cloaks at arm's length. And the animal, with the red sore running on his shoulder, foolishly capered and ran from one rag to the other, here and there.

For the first time, a bull seemed to her a fool. She had always been afraid of bulls, fear tempered with reverence of the great Mithraic beast. And now she saw how stupid he was, in spite of his long horns and his massive maleness. Blindly and stupidly he ran at the rag, each time, and the toreadors skipped like fat-hipped girls showing off. Probably it needed skill and courage, but it *looked* silly.

Blindly and foolishly the bull ran ducking its horns each time at the rag, just because the rag fluttered.

'Run at the *men,* idiot!' said Kate aloud, in her overwrought impatience. 'Run at the men, not at the cloaks.'

'They never do, isn't it curious!' replied Villiers, with cool scientific interest. 'They say no toreador will face a cow, because a cow always goes for *him* instead of the cloak. If a bull did that there'd be no bull-fights. Imagine it!'

She was bored now. The nimbleness and the skipping tricks of the toreadors bored her. Even when one of the banderilleros reared himself on tiptoe, his plump posterior much in evidence, and from his erectness pushed two razor-

sharp darts with frills at the top into the bull's shoulder, neatly and smartly, Kate felt no admiration. One of the darts fell out, anyway, and the bull ran on with the other swinging and waggling in another bleeding place.

The bull now wanted to get away, really. He leaped the fence again, quickly, into the attendants' gangway. The attendants vaulted over into the arena. The bull trotted in the corridor, then nicely leaped back. The attendants vaulted once more into the corridor. The bull trotted round the arena, ignoring the toreadors, and leaped once more into the gangway. Over vaulted the attendants.

Kate was beginning to be amused, now that the mongrel men were skipping for safety.

The bull was in the ring again, running from cloak to cloak, foolishly. A banderillero was getting ready with two more darts. But at first another picador put nobly forward on his blindfolded old horse. The bull ignored this little lot too, and trotted away again, as if all the time looking for something, excitedly looking for something. He stood still and excitedly pawed the ground, as if he wanted something. A toreador advanced and swung a cloak. Up pranced the bull, tail in air, and with a prancing bound charged--upon the rag, of course. The toreador skipped round with a ladylike skip, then tripped to another point. Very pretty!

The bull, in the course of his trotting and prancing and pawing, had once more come near the bold picador. The bold picador shoved forward his ancient steed, leaned forwards, and pushed the point of his lance in the bull's shoulder. The bull looked up, irritated and arrested. What the devil!

He saw the horse and rider. The horse stood with that feeble monumentality of a milk horse, patient as if between the shafts, waiting while his master delivered the milk. How strange it must have been to him when the bull, giving a little bound like a dog, ducked its head and dived its horns upwards into his belly, rolling him over with his rider as one might push over a hat-stand.

The bull looked with irritable wonder at the incomprehensible medley of horse and rider kicking on the ground a few yards away from him. He drew near to investigate. The rider scrambled out and bolted. And the toreadors, running up with their cloaks, drew off the bull. He went caracoling round, charging at more silk-lined rags.

Meanwhile an attendant had got the horse on its feet again, and was leading it totteringly into the gangway and round to the exit, under the Authorities. The horse crawled slowly. The bull, running from pink cloak to red cloak, rag to rag, and never catching anything, was getting excited, impatient of the rag game. He jumped once more into the gangway and started running, alas, on towards where the wounded horse was still limping its way to the exit.

Kate knew what was coming. Before she could look away, the bull had charged on the limping horse from behind, the attendants had fled, the horse was up-ended absurdly, one of the bull's horns between his hind legs and deep in his inside. Down went the horse, collapsing in front, but his rear was still heaved up, with the bull's horn working vigorously up and down inside him, while he lay on his neck all twisted. And a huge heap of bowels coming out. And a nauseous

stench. And the cries of pleased amusement among the crowd.

This pretty event took place on Kate's side of the ring, and not far from where she sat, below her. Most of the people were on their feet craning to look down over the edge to watch the conclusion of this delightful spectacle.

Kate knew if she saw any more she would go into hysterics. She was getting beside herself.

She looked swiftly at Owen, who looked like a guilty boy spellbound.

'I'm going!' she said, rising.

'Going!' he cried, in wonder and dismay, his flushed face and his bald flushed forehead a picture, looking up at her.

But she had already turned, and was hurrying away towards the mouth of the exit-tunnel.

Owen came running after her, flustered, and drawn in all directions.

'Really going!' he said in chagrin, as she came to the high, vaulted exit-tunnel.

'I must. I've got to get out,' she cried. 'Don't you come.'

'Really!' he echoed, torn all ways.

The scene was creating a very hostile attitude in the audience. To leave the bull-fight is a national insult.

'Don't come! Really! I shall take a tram-car,' she said hurriedly.

'Really! Do you think you'll be all right?'

'Perfectly. You stay. Good-bye! I can't smell any more of this stink.'

He turned like Orpheus looking back into hell, and wavering made towards his seat again.

It was not so easy, because many people were now on their feet and crowding to the exit vault. The rain which had sputtered a few drops suddenly fell in a downward splash. People were crowding to shelter; but Owen, unheeding, fought his way back to his seat, and sat in his rain-coat with the rain pouring on his bald head. He was as nearly in hysterics as Kate. But he was convinced that this was life. He was seeing LIFE, and what can an American do more!

'They might just as well sit and enjoy somebody else's diarrhoea' was the thought that passed through Kate's distracted but still Irish mind.

There she was in the great concrete archway under the stadium, with the lousy press of the audience crowding in after her. Facing outwards, she saw the straight downpour of the rain, and a little beyond, the great wooden gates that opened to the free street. Oh to be out, to be out of this, to be free!

But it was pouring tropical rain. The little shoddy soldiers were pressing back under the brick gateway, for shelter. And the gates were almost shut. Perhaps they would not let her out. Oh horror!

She stood hovering in front of the straight downpour. She would have dashed out, but for the restraining thought of what she would look like when her thin gauze dress was plastered to her body by drenching rain. On the brink she hovered.

Behind her, from the inner end of the stadium tunnel, the people were surging in in waves. She stood horrified and alone, looking always out to freedom. The crowd was in a state of excitement, cut off in its sport, on tenterhooks lest it

should miss anything. Thank goodness the bulk stayed near the inner end of the vault. She hovered near the outer end, ready to bolt at any moment.

The rain crashed steadily down.

She waited on the outer verge, as far from the people as possible. Her face had that drawn, blank look of a woman near hysterics. She could not get out of her eyes the last picture of the horse lying twisted on its neck with its hindquarters hitched up and the horn of the bull goring slowly and rhythmically in its vitals. The horse so utterly passive and grotesque. And all its bowels slipping on to the ground.

But a new terror was the throng inside the tunnel entrance. The big arched place was filling up, but still the crowd did not come very near her. They pressed towards the inner exit.

They were mostly loutish men in city clothes, the mongrel men of a mongrel city. Two men stood making water against the wall, in the interval of their excitement. One father had kindly brought his little boys to the show, and stood in fat, sloppy, paternal benevolence above them. They were pale mites, the elder about ten years old, highly dressed up in Sunday clothes. And badly they needed protecting from that paternal benevolence, for they were oppressed, peaked, and a bit wan from the horrors. To those children at least bull-fights did not come natural, but would be an acquired taste. There were other children, however, and fat mammas in black satin that was greasy and grey at the edges with an overflow of face-powder. These fat mammas had a pleased, excited look in their eyes, almost

sexual, and very distasteful in contrast to their soft passive bodies.

Kate shivered a little in her thin frock, for the ponderous rain had a touch of ice. She stared through the curtain of water at the big rickety gates of the enclosure surrounding the amphitheatre, at the midget soldiers cowering in their shoddy, pink-white cotton uniforms, and at the glimpse of the squalid street outside, now running with dirty brown streams. The vendors had all taken refuge, in dirty-white clusters, in the pulque shops, one of which was sinisterly named: *A Ver que Sale.*

She was afraid more of the repulsiveness than of anything. She had been in many cities of the world, but Mexico had an underlying ugliness, a sort of squalid evil, which made Naples seem debonair in comparison. She was afraid, she dreaded the thought that anything might really touch her in this town, and give her the contagion of its crawling sort of evil. But she knew that the one thing she must do was to keep her head.

A little officer in uniform, wearing a big, pale-blue cape, made his way through the crowd. He was short, dark, and had a little black beard like an imperial. He came through the people from the inner entrance, and cleared his way with a quiet, silent unobtrusiveness, yet with the peculiar heavy Indian momentum. Even touching the crowd delicately with his gloved hand, and murmuring almost inaudibly the *Con permiso!* formula, he seemed to be keeping himself miles away from contact. He was brave too: because there was just the chance some lout might shoot him because of his uniform. The people knew him too. Kate

could tell that by the flicker of a jeering, self-conscious smile that passed across many faces, and the exclamation: 'General Viedma! Don Cipriano!'

He came towards Kate, saluting and bowing with a brittle shyness.

'I am General Viedma. Did you wish to leave? Let me get you an automobile,' he said, in very English English, that sounded strange from his dark face, and a little stiff on his soft tongue.

His eyes were dark, quick, with the glassy darkness that she found so wearying. But they were tilted up with a curious slant, under arched black brows. It gave him an odd look of detachment, as if he looked at life with raised brows. His manner was superficially assured, underneath perhaps half-savage, shy and farouche, and deprecating.

'Thank you so much,' she said.

He called to a soldier in the gateway.

'I will send you in the automobile of my friend,' he said. 'It will be better than a taxi. You don't like the bull-fight?'

'No! Horrible!' said Kate. 'But do get me a yellow taxi. That is quite safe.'

'Well, the man has gone for the automobile. You are English, yes?'

'Irish,' said Kate.

'Ah Irish!' he replied, with the flicker of a smile.

'You speak English awfully well,' she said.

'Yes! I was educated there. I was in England seven years.'

'Were you! My name is Mrs Leslie.'

'Ah Leslie! I knew James Leslie in Oxford. He was killed in the war.'

'Yes. That was my husband's brother.'

'Oh really!'

'How small the world is!' said Kate.

'Yes indeed!' said the General.

There was a pause.

'And the gentlemen who are with you, they are--?'

'American,' said Kate.

'Ah Americans! Ah yes!'

'The older one is my cousin--Owen Rhys.'

'Owen Rhys! Ah yes! I think I saw in the newspaper you were here in town--visiting Mexico.'

He spoke in a peculiar quiet voice, rather suppressed, and his quick eyes glanced at her, and at his surroundings, like those of a man perpetually suspecting an ambush. But his face had a certain silent hostility, under his kindness. He was saving his nation's reputation.

'They did put in a not very complimentary note,' said Kate. 'I think they don't like it that we stay in the Hotel San Remo. It is too poor and foreign. But we are none of us rich, and we like it better than those other places.'

'The Hotel San Remo? Where is that?'

'In the Avenida del Peru. Won't you come and see us there, and meet my cousin and Mr Thompson?'

'Thank you! Thank you! I hardly ever go out. But I will call if I may, and then perhaps you will all come to see me at the house of my friend, Señor Ramón Carrasco.'

'We should like to,' said Kate.

'Very well. And shall I call, then?'

She told him a time, and added:

'You mustn't be surprised at the hotel. It *is* small, and nearly all Italians. But we tried some of the big ones, and there is such a feeling of lowness about them, awful! I can't stand the feeling of prostitution. And then the cheap insolence of the servants. No, my little San Remo may be rough, but it's kindly and human, and it's not rotten. It is like Italy as I always knew it, decent, and with a bit of human generosity. I do think Mexico City is evil, underneath.'

'Well,' he said, 'the hotels are bad. It is unfortunate, but the foreigners seem to make the Mexicans worse than they are naturally. And Mexico, or something in it, certainly makes the foreigners worse than they are at home.'

He spoke with a certain bitterness.

'Perhaps we should all stay away,' she said.

'Perhaps!' he said, lifting his shoulders a little. 'But I don't think so.'

He relapsed into a slightly blank silence. Peculiar how his feelings flushed over him, anger, diffidence, wistfulness, assurance, and an anger again, all in little flushes, and somewhat naïve.

'It doesn't rain so much,' said Kate. 'When will the car come?'

'It is here now. It has been waiting some time,' he replied.

'Then I'll go,' she said.

'Well,' he replied, looking at the sky. 'It is still raining, and your dress is very thin. You must take my cloak.'

'Oh!' she said, shrinking, 'it is only two yards.'

'It is still raining fairly fast. Better either wait, or let me lend you my cloak.'

He swung out of his cloak with a quick little movement, and held it up to her. Almost without realizing, she turned her shoulders to him and he put the cape on her. She caught it round her, and ran out to the gate, as if escaping. He followed, with a light yet military stride. The soldiers saluted rather slovenly, and he responded briefly.

A not very new Fiat stood at the gate, with a chauffeur in a short red-and-black check coat. The chauffeur opened the door. Kate slipped off the cloak as she got in, and handed it back. He stood with it over his arm.

'Good-bye!' she said. 'Thank you ever so much. And we shall see you on Tuesday. Do put your cape on.'

'On Tuesday, yes. Hotel San Remo. Calle de Peru,' he added to the chauffeur. Then turning again to Kate: 'The hotel, no?'

'Yes,' she said, and instantly changed. 'No, take me to Sanborn's, where I can sit in a corner and drink tea to comfort me.'

'To comfort you after the bull-fight?' he said, with another quick smile. 'To Sanborn's, Gonzalez.'

He saluted and bowed and closed the door. The car started.

Kate sat back, breathing relief. Relief to get away from that beastly place. Relief even to get away from that nice man. He was awfully nice. But he made her feel she wanted to get away from him too. There was that heavy, black Mexican fatality about him, that put a burden on her. His quietness, and his peculiar assurance, almost aggressive; and at the same time, a nervousness, an uncertainty. His heavy sort of gloom, and yet his quick, naïve, childish smile.