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Chapter 9 - Casa De Las Cuentas

Kate was soon fond of the limping, untidy Juana, and of the girls. Concha was fourteen, a thick, heavy, barbaric girl with a mass of black waving hair which she was always scratching. Maria was eleven, a shy, thin bird-like thing with big eyes that seemed almost to absorb the light round her.

It was a reckless family. Juana admitted a different father for Jesús, but to judge from the rest, one would have suspected a different father for each of them. There was a basic, sardonic carelessness in the face of life, in all the family. They lived from day to day, a stubborn, heavy, obstinate life of indifference, careless about the past, careless about the present, careless about the future. They had even no interest in money. Whatever they got they spent in a minute, and forgot it again.

Without aim or purpose, they lived absolutely à terre, down on the dark, volcanic earth. They were not animals, because men and women and their children CANNOT be animals. It is not granted us. Go, for once gone, thou never canst return! says the great Urge, which drives us creatively on. When man tries brutally to return to the older, previous levels of evolution, he does so in the spirit of cruelty and misery.

So in the black eyes of the family, a certain vicious fear and wonder and misery. The misery of human beings who squat helpless outside their own unbuilt selves, unable to win their souls out of the chaos, and indifferent to all other victories.

White people are becoming soulless too. But they have conquered the lower worlds of metal and energy, so they whizz around in machines, circling the void of their own emptiness.

To Kate, there was a great pathos in her family. Also a certain repulsiveness.

Juana and her children, once they accepted their Niña as their own, were honest with intensity. Point of honour, they were honest to the least little plum in the fruit bowl. And almost intensely eager to serve.

Themselves indifferent to their surroundings, they would live in squalor. The earth was the great garbage-bowl. Everything discarded was flung on the earth and they did not care. Almost they liked to live in a milieu of fleas and old rags, bits of paper, banana skins and mango stones. Here's a piece torn off my dress! Earth, take it. Here's the combings of my hair! Earth, take them!

But Kate could not bear it. She cared. And immediately, the family were quite glad, thrilled that SHE cared. They swept the patio with the twig broom till they swept the very surface of the earth away. Fun! The Niña had feelings about it.

She was a source of wonder and amusement to them. But she was never a class superior. She was a half-incomprehensible, half- amusing wonder-being.

The Niña wanted the aguador to bring two botes of hot water, quick, from the hot springs, to wash herself all over every morning. Fun! Go, Maria, tell the aguador to RUN with the Niña's water.

Then they almost resented it that she shut herself off to have her bath. She was a sort of goddess to them, to provide them with fun and wonder; but she ought always to be accessible. And a god who is forever accessible to human beings has an unenviable time of it, Kate soon discovered.

No, it was no sinecure, being a Niña. At dawn began the scrape- scrape of the twig broom outside. Kate stayed on in bed, doors fastened but shutters open. Flutter outside! Somebody wanted to sell two eggs. Where is the Niña? She is sleeping! The visitor does not go. Continual flutter outside.

The aguador! Ah, the water for the Niña's bath! She is sleeping, she is sleeping.' No!' called Kate, slipping into a dressing-gown and unbolting the door. In come the children with the bath-tub, in comes the aguador with the two square kerosene cans full of hot water. Twelve centavos! Twelve centavos for the aguador! No hay! We haven't got twelve centavos. Later! Later! Away trots the aguador, pole over his shoulder. Kate shuts her doors and shutters and starts her bath.

'Niña? Niña?'

'What do you want?'

'Eggs boiled or fried or rancheros? Which do you want?'

'Boiled.'

'Coffee or chocolate?'

'Coffee.'

'Or do you want tea?'

'No, coffee.'

Bath proceeds.

'Nina?'

'Yes.'

'There is no coffee. We are going to buy some.'

'I'll take tea.'

'No, Niña! I am going. Wait for me.'

'Go then.'

Kate comes out to breakfast on the veranda. The table is set, heaped with fruit and white bread and sweet buns.

'Good morning, Niña. How have you passed the night? Well! Ah, praised be God! María, the coffee. I'm going to put the eggs in the water. Oh, Niña, that they may not be boiled hard! - Look, what feet of the Madonna! Look! Bonitos!'

And Juana stooped down, fascinated to touch with her black finger Kate's white soft feet, that were thrust in light sandals, just a thong across the foot.

The day had begun. Juana looked upon herself as dedicated entirely to Kate. As soon as possible she shooed her girls away, to school. Sometimes they went: mostly they didn't. The Niña said they must go to school. Listen! Listen now! Says the Niña that you must go to school! Away! Walk!

Juana would limp back and forth down the long veranda from kitchen to the breakfast table, carrying away the dishes one by one. Then, with a great splash, she was washing up.

Morning! Brilliant sun pouring into the patio, on the hibiscus flowers and the fluttering yellow and green rags of the banana-trees. Birds swiftly coming and going, with tropical suddenness. In the dense shadow of the mango-grove, white-clad Indians going like ghosts. The sense of fierce sun and, almost more impressive, of dark, intense shadow. A twitter of life, yet a certain heavy weight of silence. A dazzling flicker and brilliance of light, yet the feeling of weight.

Kate would sit alone, rocking on her veranda, pretending to sew. Silently appears an old man with one egg held up mysteriously, like some symbol. Would the patrona buy it for five centavos? La Juana only gives four centavos. All right. Where is Juana?

Juana appears from the plaza with more purchases. The egg! The four centavos! The account of the spendings. Entonces! Entonces! Luego! Luego! Ah, Niña, no tengo memoria! Juana could not read nor write. She scuffled off to the market with her pesos, bought endless little things at one or two centavos each, every morning. And every morning there was a reckoning up. Ah! Ah! Where are we? I have no memory. Well then - ah - yes - I bought ocote for three centavos! How much? How much, Niña? How much is it now?

It was a game which thrilled Juana to the marrow, reckoning up the centavos to get it just right. If she was a centavo short in the change, she was paralysed. Time after time she would reappear. There is a centavo short, Niña! Ah, how stupid I am! But I will give you one of mine!

'Don't bother,' said Kate. 'Don't think of it any more.'

'But yes. But yes!' and away she limped in distraction.

Till an hour later, loud cry from the far end of the house. Juana waving a scrap of greenery.

'Mire! Niña! Compré perejil a un centavo - I bought parsley for one cent. Is it right?'

'It is right,' said Kate.

And life could proceed once more.

There were two kitchens, the one next the dining-room, belonging to Kate, and the narrow little shed under the banana-trees, belonging to the servants. From her veranda Kate looked away down to Juana's kitchen shed. It had a black window-hole.

Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! Why, I thought Concha was at school! said Kate to herself.

No! - there, in the darkness of the window-hole, was Concha's swarthy face and mane, peering out like some animal from a cave, as she made the tortillas. Tortillas are flat pancakes of maize dough, baked dry on a flat earthenware plate over the fire. And the making consists of clapping a bit of new dough from the palm of one hand to the other, till the tortilla is of the requisite thinness, roundness, and so-called lightness.

Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! Clap! It was as inevitable as the tick of some spider, the sound of Concha making tortillas in the heat of the morning, peering out of her dark window-hole. And some time after mid-day, the smoke would be coming out of the window-hole; Concha was throwing the raw tortillas on the big earthen plate over the slow wood fire.

Then Ezequiel might or might not stride in, very much the man, serape poised over one shoulder and big straw hat jauntily curled, to eat the mid-day tortillas. If he had work in the fields at any distance, he would not appear till nightfall. If he appeared, he sat on the doorstep and the women served him his tortillas and fetched him his drink of water as if he was a king, boy though he might be. And his rough, breaking voice was heard in quiet command.

Command was the word. Though he was quiet and gentle, and very conscientious, there was calm, kingly command in his voice when he spoke to his mother or sisters. The old male prerogative. Somehow, it made Kate want to ridicule him.

Came her own meal: one of her trials. Hot, rather greasy soup. Inevitable hot, greasy, rather peppery rice. Inevitable meat in hot, thick, rather greasy sauce. Boiled calabacitas or egg-plant, salad, perhaps some dulce made with milk - and the big basket of fruit. Overhead, the blazing tropical sun of late May.

Afternoon, and greater heat. Juana set off with the girls and the dishes. They would do the washing up in the lake. Squatting on the stones, they would dabble the plates one by one, the spoons and the forks one by one in the filmy water of the lake, then put them in the sun to dry. After which Juana might wash a couple of towels in the lake and the girls might bathe. Sauntering the day away - sauntering the day away.

Jesús, the eldest son, a queer, heavy, greasy fellow, usually appeared in the afternoon, to water the garden. But he ate his meals at the hotel, and really lived there, had

his home there. Not that he had any home, any zopilote had a home. But he ran the planta, and did odd jobs about the hotel, and worked every day in the year till half-past ten at night, earning twenty- two pesos, eleven dollars, a month. He wore a black shirt, and his thick, massive black hair dropped over his low brow. Very near to an animal. And though, to order, he wore a black Fascisti shirt, he had the queer, animal jeering of the socialists, an instinct for pulling things down.

His mother and he had a funny little intimacy of quiet and indifferent mutual taunting of one another. He would give her some money if she were in a strait. And there was a thin little thread of blood-bondage between them. Apart from that, complete indifference.

Ezequiel was a finer type. He was slender and so erect that he almost curved backwards. He was very shy, farouche. Proud also, and more responsible to his family. He would not go to work in an hotel. No. He was a worker in the fields, and he was proud of it. A man's work. No equivocal sort of half-service for him.

Though he was just a hired labourer, yet working on the land he never felt he was working for a master. It was the land he worked for. Somewhere inside himself he felt that the land was his, and he belonged in a measure to it. Perhaps a lingering feeling of tribal, communal land-ownership and service.

When there was work, he was due to earn a peso a day. There was often no work: and often only seventy-five centavos a day for wage. When the land was dry, he would try to get work on the road, though this he did not like. But he earned his peso a day.

Often, there was no work. Often, for days, sometimes for weeks, he would have to hang about, nothing to do, nothing to do. Only, when the Socialist Government had begun giving the peasants bits of land, dividing up the big haciendas, Ezequiel had been allotted a little piece outside the village. He would go and gather the stones together there, and prepare to build a little hut. And he would break the earth with a hoe, his only implement, as far as possible. But he had no blood connection with this square allotment of unnatural earth, and he could not get himself into relations with it. He was fitful and diffident about it. There was no incentive, no urge.

On workdays he would come striding in about six o'clock, shyly greeting Kate as he passed. He was a gentleman in his barbarism. Then, away in the far recess, he would rapidly fold tortilla after tortilla, sitting on the floor with his back to the wall, rapidly eating the leathery things that taste of mortar, because the maize is first boiled with lime to loosen the husk, and accepting another little pile, served on a leaf, from the cook, Concha. Juana, cook for the Niña, would no longer condescend to cook for her own family. And sometimes there was a mess of meat and chile for Ezequiel to scoop up out of the earthenware casserole, with his tortillas. And sometimes there was not. But always, he ate with a certain blind, rapid indifference, that also seems to be Mexican. They seem to EAT even with a certain hostile reluctance, and have a strange indifference to what or when they eat.

His supper finished, as a rule he was off again like a shot, to the plaza, to be among men. And the women would sit desultorily about, on the ground. Sometimes Kate would come in at nine o'clock to an empty place - Ezequiel in the plaza, Juana and Maria disappeared somewhere or other, and Concha lying asleep like a heap of rags on the gravel of the patio. When Kate called her, she would raise her head, stupefied and hopeless; then get up like a dog and crawl away to the gate. The strange stupor of boredom and hopelessness that was always sinking upon them would make Kate's heart stand still with dread.

The peculiar indifference to everything, even to one another. Juana washed a cotton shirt and a pair of cotton trousers for each of her sons, once a week, and there her maternal efforts ended. She saw hardly anything of them, and was often completely unaware of what Ezequiel was doing, where he was working, or at what. He had just gone off to work, no more.

Yet again, sometimes she had hot, fierce pangs of maternal protectiveness, when the boy was unjustly treated, as he often was. And if she thought he were ill, a black sort of fatalistic fear came over her. But Kate had to rouse her into getting some simple medicine.

Like animals, yet not at all like animals. For animals are complete in their isolation and their insouciance. With them it is not indifference. It is completeness in themselves. But with the family there was always a kind of bleeding of incompleteness, a terrible stupor of boredom settling down.

The two girls could not be apart: they must always be running after one another. Yet Concha continually teased the big-eyed, naive simpleton of a Maria. And Maria was always in tears. Or the two were suddenly throwing stones at one another. But with no real aim to hit. And Juana was abusing them with sudden vehemence, that flickered in a minute to complete indifference again.

Queer, the savage ferocity with which the girls would suddenly be throwing stones at one another. But queerer still, they always aimed JUST TO MISS, Kate noticed the same in the savage attacks the boys made on one another, on the beach; hurling large stones with intense, terrible ferocity. But almost always, aiming with a curious cast in the eyes, just to miss.

But sometimes not. Sometimes hitting with a sharp cut. And then the wounded one would drop right down, with a howl, as if dead. And the other boys would edge away, in a silent kind of dread. And the wounded boy would be prostrate, not really much hurt, but as if he was killed.

Then, maybe, suddenly he would be up, with a convulsion of murder in his face, pursuing his adversary with a stone. And the adversary would abjectly flee.

Always the same thing among the young: a ceaseless, endless taunting and tormenting. The same as among the Red Indians. But the Pueblo Indians rarely lapsing from speech into violence. The Mexican boys almost always. And almost always, one boy in murderous rage, pursuing his taunter till he had hurt him: then an abject collapse of the one hurt. Then, usually, a revival of the one hurt, the murderous frenzy transferred to him, and the first attacker fleeing abjectly, in terror. One or the other always abject.

They were a strange puzzle to Kate. She felt something must be done. She herself was inspired to help. So she had the two girls for an hour a day, teaching them to read, to sew, to draw. Maria wanted to learn to read: that she did want. For the rest, they began well. But soon, the regularity and the slight insistence of Kate on their attention made them take again that peculiar invisible jeering tone, something peculiar to the American Continent. A quiet, invisible, malevolent mockery, a desire to wound. They would press upon her, trespassing upon her privacy, and with a queer effrontery, doing all they could to walk over her. With their ugly little wills, trying to pull her will down.

'No, don't lean on me, Concha. Stand on your own feet.'

The slight grin of malevolence on Concha's face, as she stood on her own feet. Then:

'Do you have lice in your hair, Niña?'

The question asked with a peculiar, subtle, Indian insolence.

'No,' said Kate, suddenly angry. 'And now go! Go! Go away from me! Don't come near me.'

They slunk out, abject. So much for educating them.

Kate had visitors from Guadalajara - great excitement. But while the visitors were drinking tea with Kate on the veranda, at the other side of the patio, full in view, Juana, Concha, Maria and Felipa, a cousin of about sixteen, squatted on the gravel with their splendid black hair down their backs, displaying themselves as they hunted in each other's hair for lice. They wanted to be full in view. And they were it. They wanted the basic fact of lice to be thrust under the noses of those white people.

Kate strode down the veranda.

'If you must pick lice,' she said in a shaking voice to Juana, shaking with anger, 'pick them there, in your own place, where you can't be seen.'

One instant, Juana's black inchoate eyes gleamed with a malevolent ridicule, meeting Kate's. The next instant, humble and abject, the four with their black hair down their backs slunk into the recess out of sight.

But it pleased Juana that she had been able to make Kate's eyes blaze with anger. It pleased her. She felt a certain low power in herself. True, she was a little afraid of that anger. But that was what she wanted. She would have no use for a Niña of whom she was not a bit afraid. And she wanted to be able to provoke that anger, of which she felt a certain abject twinge of fear.

Ah the dark races! Kate's own Irish were near enough for her to have glimpsed some of the mystery. The dark races belong to a bygone cycle of humanity. They are left behind in a gulf out of which they have never been able to climb. And on to the particular white man's levels they never will be able to climb. They can only follow as servants.

While the white man keeps the impetus of his own proud, onward march, the dark races will yield and serve, perforce. But let the white man once have a misgiving about his own leadership, and the dark races will at once attack him, to pull him down into the old gulfs. To engulf him again.

Which is what is happening. For the white man, let him bluster as he may, is hollow with misgiving about his own supremacy.

Full speed ahead, then, for the débâcle.

But once Kate had been roused to a passion of revulsion from these lice-picking, down-dragging people, they changed again, and served her with a certain true wistfulness that could not but touch her. Juana cared really about nothing. But just that last thread of relationship that connected her with Kate and the upper world of daylight and fresh air, she didn't want to break. No, no, she didn't want finally to drive her Niña away. No, no, the only one thing she did want, ultimately, was to serve her Niña.

But at the same time, she cherished a deep malevolent grudge against rich people, white people, superior people. Perhaps the white man has finally betrayed his own leadership. Who knows! But it is a thing of the brave, on-marching soul, and perhaps this has been betrayed already by the white man. So that the dark are rising upon him.

Juana would come to Kate, telling her stories from the past. And the sinister mocking film would be on her black eyes, and her lined copper face would take on its reptile mask as she would continue: 'Usted sabe, Niña, los gringos, los gringuitos llevan todo - you know, Niña, the gringos and the gringuitos take away everything . . .'

The gringos are the Americans. But Kate herself was included by Juana in the gringuitos: the white foreigners. The woman was making another sliding, insolent attack.

'It is possible,' said Kate coldly. 'But tell me what I take away from Mexico.'

'No, Niña, no!' The subtle smile of satisfaction lurked under the bronze tarnish of Juana's face. She had been able to get at the other woman, touch the raw. 'I don't speak of you, Niña!' But there was too much protest in it.

Almost, they wanted to drive her away: to insult her and drag her down and make her want to go away. They couldn't help it. Like the Irish, they could cut off their nose to spite their face.

The backward races!

At the same time there was a true pathos about them. Ezequiel had worked for a man for two months, building a house, when he was a boy of fourteen, in order to get a serape. At the end of the two months, the man had put him off, and he had not got the serape: had never got it. A bitter disappointment.

But, then, Kate was not responsible for that. And Juana seemed almost to make her so.

A people without the energy of GETTING ON, how could they fail to be hopelessly exploited. They had been hopelessly and cruelly exploited, for centuries. And their backbones were locked in malevolent resistance.

'But,' as Kate said to herself, 'I don't want to exploit them. Not a bit. On the contrary, I am willing to give more than I get. But that nasty insinuating insultiness is not fair in the game. I never insult them. I am so careful not to hurt them. And then they DELIBERATELY make these centipede attacks on me, and are pleased when I am hurt.'

But she knew her own Irish at the game. So she was able to put Juana and the girls away from her, and isolate herself from them. Once they were put away, their malevolence subsided and they remembered what Kate wanted. While she stayed amiable, they forgot. They forgot to sweep the patio, they forgot to keep themselves clean. Only when they were shoved back, into isolation, did they remember again.

The boy, Ezequiel, seemed to her to have more honour than the women. He never made these insidious attacks.

And when her house was clean and quiet and the air seemed cleaned again, the soul renewed, her old fondness for the family came back. Their curious flitting, coming and going, like birds: the busy clap - clap - clapping of tortillas, the excited scrunching of tomatoes and chile on the metate, as Juana prepared sauce. The noise of the bucket in the well. Jesús, come to water the garden.

The game, the game of it all! Everything they did must be fun, or they could not do it. They could not abstract themselves to a routine. Never. Everything must be fun, must be variable, must be a bit of an adventure. It was confusion, but after all, a living confusion, not a dead, dreary thing. Kate remembered her English servants in the English kitchens: so mechanical and somehow inhuman. Well, this was the other extreme.

Here there was no discipline nor method at all. Although Juana and her brats really wanted to do the things Kate wished they must do them their own way. Sometimes Kate felt distracted: after all, the mechanical lines are so much EASIER to follow. But as far as possible, she let the family be. She had to get used, for example, to the vagaries of her dining-table: a little round table that always stood on the veranda. At breakfast time it would be discreetly set under the plantas by the salon; for dinner, at one o'clock, it would have travelled way down the veranda; for tea it might be under a little tree on the grass. And then Juana would decide that the Niña must take supper, two eggs, rancheros, in the dining-room itself, isolated at the corner of the long dining-table meant for fourteen people.

The same with the dishes. Why they should, after washing up in the big bowls in the kitchen for several days, suddenly struggle way down to the lake with the unwashed pots in a basket on Concha's shoulder, Kate never knew. Except for the fun of the thing.

Children! But, then, not at all children. None of the wondering insouciance of childhood. Something dark and cognisant in their souls all the time: some heavy weight of resistance. They worked in fits and starts, and could be very industrious; then came days when they lay about on the ground like pigs. At times they were merry, seated round on the ground in groups, like Arabian nights, and laughing away. Then suddenly resisting even merriment in themselves, relapsing into the numb gloom. When they were busily working, suddenly, for no reason, throwing away the tool, as if resenting having given themselves. Careless in their morals, always changing their loves, the men at least resisted all the time any real giving of themselves. They didn't want the thing they were pursuing. It was the women who drew them on. And a young man and a girl going down the road from the lake in the dark, teasing and poking each other in excitement, would startle Kate because of their unusualness - the men and women never walked their sex abroad, as white people do. And the sudden, sexual laugh of the man, so strange a sound of pain and desire, obstinate reluctance, and helpless passion, a noise as if something tearing in his breast, was a sound to remember.

Kate felt her household a burden. In a sense, they were like parasites, they wanted to live on her life, and pull her down, pull her down. Again, they were so generous with her, so good and gentle, she felt they were wonderful. And then once more she came up against that unconscious, heavy, reptilian indifference in them, indifference and resistance.

Her servants were the clue to all the native life, for her. The men always together, erect, handsome, balancing their great hats on the top of their heads and sitting, standing, crouching with a snake-like impassivity. The women together separately, soft, and as if HIDDEN, wrapped tight in their dark rebozos. Men and women seemed always to be turning their back on one another, as if they didn't want to see one another. No flirting, no courting. Only an occasional quick, dark look, the signal of a weapon-like desire, given and taken.

The women seemed, on the whole, softly callous and determined to go their own way: to change men if they wished. And the men seemed not to care very profoundly. But it was the women who wanted the men.

The native women, with their long black hair streaming down their full, ruddy backs, would bathe at one end of the beach, usually wearing their chemise, or a little skirt. The men took absolutely no notice. They didn't even look the other way. It was the women bathing, that was all. As if it were, like the charales swimming, just a natural part of the lake life. The men just left that part of the lake to the women. And the women sat in the shallows of the lake, isolated in themselves like moor-fowl, pouring water over their heads and over their ruddy arms from a gourd scoop.

The quiet, unobtrusive, but by no means down-trodden women of the peon class. They went their own way, enveloped in their rebozos as in their own darkness. They hurried nimbly along, their full cotton skirts swinging, chirping and quick like birds. Or they sat in the lake with long hair streaming, pouring water over themselves: again like birds. Or they passed with a curious slow inevitability up the lake-shore, with a heavy red jar of water perched on one shoulder, one arm over the head, holding the rim of the jar. They had to carry all water from the lake to their houses. There was no town supply. Or, especially on Sunday afternoons, they sat in their doorways de-lousing one another. The most resplendent belles, with magnificent black wavy hair, were most thoroughly de-loused. It was as if it were a meritorious public act.

The men were the obvious figures. They assert themselves on the air. They are the dominant. Usually they are in loose groups, talking quietly, or silent: always standing or sitting apart, rarely touching one another. Often a single man would stand alone at a street corner in his serape, motionless for hours, like some powerful spectre. Or a man would lie on the beach as if he had been cast up dead from the waters. Impassive, motionless, they would sit side by side on the benches of the plaza, not exchanging a word. Each one isolated in his own fate, his eyes black and quick like a snake's, and as blank.

It seemed to Kate that the highest thing this country might produce would be some powerful relationship of man to man. Marriage itself would always be a casual thing. Though the men seemed very gentle and protective to the little children. Then they forgot them.

But sex itself was a powerful, potent thing, not to be played with or paraded. The one mystery. And a mystery greater than the individual. The individual hardly counted.

It was strange to Kate to see the Indian huts on the shore, little holes built of straw or corn-stalks, with half-naked children squatting on the naked earth floor, and a lousy woman-squalor around, a litter of rags and bones, and a sharp smell of human excrement. The people have no noses. And standing silent and erect not far from the hole of the doorway, the man, handsome and impassive. How could it be, that such a fine-looking human male should be so absolutely indifferent, content with such paltry squalor?

But there he was, unconscious. He seemed to have life and passion in him. And she knew he was strong. No men in the world can carry heavier loads on their backs, for longer distances, than these Indians. She had seen an Indian trotting down a street with a piano on his back: holding it, also, by a band round his forehead. From his forehead, and on his spine he carried it, trotting along. The women carry with a band round the breast.

So there is strength. And APPARENTLY, there is passionate life. But no energy. Nowhere in Mexico is there any sign of energy. This is, as it were, switched off.

Even the new artisan class, though it imitates the artisan class of the United States, has no real energy. There are workmen's clubs. The workmen dress up and parade a best girl on their arm. But somehow it seems what it is, only a weak imitation.

Kate's family was increased, without her expecting it. One day there arrived from Ocotlan a beautiful ox-eyed girl of about fifteen, wrapped in her black cotton rebozo, and somewhat towney in her Madonna-meekness: Maria del Carmen. With her, Julio, a straight and fierce young man of twenty-two. They had just been married, and had come to Sayula for a visit. Julio was Juana's cousin.

Might they sleep in the patio with herself and the girls, was Juana's request. They would stay only two days.

Kate was amazed. Maria del Carmen must have had some Spanish blood, her beauty was touched with Spain. She seemed even refined and superior. Yet she was to sleep out on the ground like a dog, with her young husband. And he, so erect and proud-looking, possessed nothing in the world but an old serape.

'There are three spare bedrooms,' said Kate. 'They may sleep in one of those.'

The beds were single beds. Would they need more blankets? she asked Juana.

No! They would manage with the one serape of Julio's.

The new family had arrived. Julio was a bricklayer. That is to say, he worked building the adobe walls of the little houses. He belonged to Sayula, and had come back for a visit.

The visit continued. Julio would come striding in at midday and at evening; he was looking for work. Maria del Carmen, in her one black dress, would squat on the floor and

pat tortillas. She was allowed to cook them in Juana's kitchen hole. And she talked and laughed with the girls. At night, when Julio was home, he would lie on the ground with his back to the wall, impassive, while Maria del Carmen fondled his thick black hair.

They were in love. But even now, he was not yielding to his love.

She wanted to go back to Ocotlan, where she was at home, and more a señorita than here in Sayula. But he refused. There was no money: the young ménage lived on about five American cents a day.

Kate was sewing. Maria del Carmen, who didn't even know how to put a chemise together, watched with great eyes. Kate taught her, and bought a length of cotton material. Maria del Carmen was sewing herself a dress!

Julio had got work at a peso a day. The visit continued. Kate thought Julio wasn't very nice with Maria del Carmen: his quiet voice was so overbearing in command when he spoke to her. And Maria del Carmen, who was a bit towney, did not take it well. She brooded a little.

The visit stretched into weeks. And now Juana was getting a bit tired of her relative.

But Julio had got a bit of money. He had rented a little one-room adobe house, at one peso fifty per week. Maria del Carmen was going to move into her own home.

Kate saw the new outfit got together. It consisted of one straw mat, three cooking-plates of earthenware, five bits of native crockery, two wooden spoons, one knife and Julio's old blanket. That was all. But Maria del Carmen was moving in.

Kate presented her with a large old eiderdown, whose silk was rather worn, a couple of bowls, and a few more bits of crockery. Maria del Carmen was set up. Good! Good! Oh good! Kate heard her voice down the patio. I have got a coverlet! I have got a coverlet!

In the rainy season, the nights can be very cold, owing to evaporation. Then the natives lie through the small hours like lizards, numb and prostrate with cold. They are lying on the damp earth on a thin straw mat, with a corner of an old blanket to cover them. And the same terrible inertia makes them endure it, without trying to make any change. They could carry in corn husks or dry banana leaves for a bed. They could even cover themselves with banana leaves.

But no! On a thin mat on damp cold earth they lie and tremble with cold, night after night, night after night, night after night.

But Maria del Carmen was a bit towney. Oh good! Oh good! I've got a coverlet!