

Maid in Manila

Continuing Maid in Oaxaca



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MAID in MANILA

By Monica Graz

Continuing Maid in Oaxaca I & II
CHAPTER 36 – Travelling to Manila

“Show me your new Mexican passport again sweetie?” Pat said to Cristina as they were packing for the long trip to Manila.

Cristina dutifully opened her small bag where she kept all the important documents and retrieved her brand-new passport received just hours ago.

Pat looked at it with a faint smile, “I can see in your photo the white collar of your dress, were you wearing a maid’s dress when that photo was taken?” She mischievously asked.

“Yes Madam, remember when you sent at the apartment the special photographer to take the photo? I was in the middle of my morning chores and she said that she was in a terrible rush, she had to move very

fast uploading the photo for my e-application to proceed, so I simply removed my apron, combed my hair slightly and there I was, Cristina in her preferred role," She answered in an equal mischievous manner.

Pat had a silent laugh, "Try not to show that passport to my mother sweetie, you will enforce her strong belief that you never stopped being the 'help' in my household however I try to say the opposite to her."

Cristina moved her head in an affirmative manner as if she was saying, 'Yes, I know what you mean' but said nothing.

Pat gave the passport back and said, "We both use our American passports to exit the country but we enter Philippines with our Mexican ones. There is an e-visa already issued by my father waiting for us at the Filipino border police e-system; Isn't it useful to have the ambassador as your father?" She asked in a chuckle.

"As Mexicans in Manila we'll feel closer to the locals, we shouldn't forget that both countries have been colonized in the past by the Spaniards," Cristina said in a militant tone of voice, something that made Pat smile again.

"I can see that as a Mexican you already had started the process to fraternize with the Filipinos; that would be useful when you will start mixing with them as a domestic worker," She jokingly said looking sharply at Cristina who was furiously blushing.

"Shall I pack some uniforms then?" she asked a bit impertinently but still blushing.

"Of course, you do, just your practical ones, no fancy black dresses, it is a bit like the Oaxaca hacienda, the climate is hot and humid so you will be needing your nice cotton dresses and aprons." Pat said seriously this time.

"Si Señora," She replied remembering her Spanish again.

"Ok Cristina, finish your packing and come and help me to finish my packing. You are much better than me in folding clothes and creating extra space in a suitcase," Pat added and left for the master bedroom as Cristina gave her a small smiling bob with the usual 'Si Señora.'

The Qatar Airways flight to Doha was the longest leg of the trip to Manila, about 14 hours and Pat thought for the tenth time that flying business class was worth it. She looked around her, she had a window seat and Cristina was sitting next to her dressed in her usual prim way, a blouse and skirt outfit, since she knew the rules, pants were not allowed. The rest of the people traveling business class were Arabs, probably Qataris going back. She was fascinated looking at women covered in their black abayas and knowing that underneath they were dressed in their usual over the top manner. Arab women were notorious that way.

"Can you think what is hidden under those abayas?" Cristina asked as she was looking at those ladies in a fascinating manner."

"Don't stare Cristina, it's not very polite, you can look in a discreet manner as I do," Pat said as she squeezed her hand.

"You are right of course Madam, but I'm totally fascinated. Look at those two on our right two seats back, they wear a niqab as well covering their face. It is called niqab isn't it?"

"Yes it is, they probably are Saudi women, they live under the strictest rules in that part of the world. But as I read many times, underneath they wear anything you can imagine, they can be total sluts or wear just a nightie. You are right it is fascinating."

"I wish I could wear clothes like this during my early transition phase when I was so worried that I might be publicly exposed."

"I can tell from the way you look at those women that you are intrigued, you would probably like to wear an abaya and a niqab and pose as a Muslim woman," Pat said ironically.

"Yes, I'm intrigued," Cristina conceded blushing all over again.

"Would you like some champagne Ma'am," A female flight attendant standing in front of them asked with a smile, holding a small tray with two flute glasses.

They both were startled but Pat was quick to answer, "Yes, thank you, Cristina could you pass me a glass please?"

"Yes Madam," Cristina automatically answered as she picked one of the glasses from the tray, making the flight attendant to look at both of them in an inquiring way. 'Madam'? Were they in some sort of 'special' relation those two women? She wondered as she gave them one of her best smiles.

"Have you seen how she looked at us?" Cristina asked as soon as the attendant left.

"Yes dear, because you called me 'Madam' so she was wondering what we are up to," Pat chuckled.

"I don't even think about that anymore, its automatic for me," Cristina conceded smiling back.

"Well then, keep it that way, I like that Mistress/maid approach in public it's so much fun to see the expressions of people around us. And I think I'll buy you an abaya and a niqab just for fun when we land in Doha. You would like that wouldn't you sweetie?" Pat innocently asked Cristina knowing already the answer.

“Yes please Madam, I’d love that, I’m very intrigued,” Cristina said equally innocently trying to hide her inner excitement.

It was a long fourteen hours and they managed to have some disturbed sleep but they finally landed at Doha’s Hamad International Airport where they had to spend four hours in transit.

They badly needed to stretch their legs so they started wondering around. The airport was vast and the shops were of all kinds. They were looking at shop windows until they came in front of the shop they were looking for. It had traditional middle eastern products in it but in one section they were selling traditional Arab clothes like djellabas and abayas.

It wasn’t difficult to choose, Pat picked a plain black cotton abaya with some discreet gold piping, the most popular one among Qatari women as the sales person said and a niqab that wasn’t that simple to find because it wasn’t very much used in Qatar, usually Saudi women were the ones to buy it.

As they left the shop, Pat said in a giggle, “I have an idea Cristina, we have still three hours to kill at this airport. Would you like to try on what we just bought and pretend that you are an Arab woman? That would be great fun!”

Cristina was shocked but intrigued, even excited. She was always fascinated when she was looking at those covered Arab women. Dressed in an abaya and niqab? That was one of her dreams over the years. “But how can we do it? Not in front of thousands of eyes?” she asked in an excited voice.

“That’s simple enough sweetie, we go to one of the changing rooms that the business class lounge provides.” Pat said.

When Cristina emerged to the lounge a few minutes later she had become one of the many faceless women that circulated at the airport. The abaya cov-

ered everything below her neck and the niqab left only her eyes out. But under that disguise she was nearly trembling from excitement and some fear. Was she an impostor? What if she was arrested for impersonating an Arab woman.

Pat could feel her anxiety and excitement and said in her usually calm voice, "Don't you worry Cristina, nobody can harm you, you are not doing anything illegal; any woman can wear an abaya and niqab, in particular in this part of the world where even foreign women that live in the Emirates and Saudi Arabia are encouraged to do that."

"I feel so weird Madam," Cristina said in her slightly distorted voice because of the piece of cloth that was covering her mouth and part of her nose, "I feel invisible and yet exposed as if everybody is looking at me."

Pat scanned with her eyes all the people around them and said, "Nobody could care less about you sweetie, this is the beauty of the abaya and niqab, you become completely anonymous and lots of women feel nice about that. Now let's walk around a bit and look at the shops and then let's have a cup of coffee and see how you are going to drink it without removing your face cover," She finished with a giggle.

During the next two hours Pat and Cristina had a lot of fun and when time had come to go to their gate for boarding the plane, Cristina had to remove her abaya and niqab with a certain amount of regret. She had immensely enjoyed the whole experience and had loved every moment of it, somehow she saw it as another step of her transition, another experience of being a woman in an alien environment.

This leg of the flight from Doha to Manila was a bit less than 10 hours and the business class was practically empty except for another two people. But the economy class was packed and when Pat asked one of the flying attendants what was the reason she got a

simple answer, "Most of our economy class passengers Ma'am are Filipinos, men and women going back to their country, they all are working in Qatar as foreign workers, the men mostly in the building industry and the women as foreign domestic workers, FDWs as they are called all over the Gulf states."

"Of course," Pat exclaimed looking meaningfully at me, "I should have thought of that, thank you very much."

The moment the flying attendant had left Pat turned to Cristina and half-jokingly said, "You should probably be seated back there in the economy among your fellow maids, you might not be a Filipina but you certainly are a domestic worker, aren't you sweetie?"

"I guess I am, but I'm your spouse as well and as such I have the privilege and honor to sit right next to you," Cristina replied somehow impertinently but in a joking mode as well.

Pat chuckled as she squeezed Cristina's hand, "Of course you are my spouse, wife and all that but don't fool yourself, you will be working as a maid in Manila," she said half-jokingly again.

"I guess I'll be a FDW there since I'm not a Filipina," Cristina said laughing, deciding to go along with Pat's joking mood, "After all I'm a Mexican maid with vast experience in the Oaxaca hacienda."

"And since you mentioned your vast experience, that will come handy when you start working at the ambassador's residence, helping the two Filipinas. My mother keeps hinting that the domestic staff is not enough, but the embassy can't afford to pay extra people." Pat continued.

"So, it will be a repetition of what had already happened at the hacienda back in Juchitan? Full time maid for your parents?" Cristina said with her usual mixed feelings, a sunken heart because she was dreading to

be seen as a maid by Pat's father, but also an excitement of a totally new experience in her preferred role.

"Well, yes and no sweetie," Pat said, a cunning grin on her face, "I think now is the time to tell you what will happen during the next three months."

Cristina gasped in surprise, "Three months? I thought we were going for a month to catch up with your parents and see the country."

"That was the initial thought but then something came up at my work and I thought I would combine this trip with a work trip," Pat cryptically said as she started caressing Cristina's thigh through the thin material of her pretty cotton skirt.

Cristina liked that feeling as she said in a resigned manner, "Work trip to Manila? Or elsewhere? Are we going to another country after Philippines?"

"Not you sweetie, you stay in Manila for three months as part of the domestic staff at the ambassador's residence, but I'm going to Melbourne, Australia for 10 weeks. Melbourne university is affiliated with Columbia like Sorbonne and I am a lucky woman since I can do that academic trip only because my colleague who initially was going to go had family issues and couldn't leave US. So here I am, continuing traveling as an academic. This time I'll give a series of lectures but I will also find out more about Australia's indigenous community, the aboriginals. You know me, I have a strong interest for old cultures and civilizations like the Zapotec people in Oaxaca."

"Don't I know that? That's where I became your *muche*" Cristina replied in a chuckle.

Pat squeezed Cristina's hand and said excitedly, "Don't we have fun us two? Traveling all over the world to pursue our inclinations. This time you will be a maid in Manila and I will be a visiting lecturer in Melbourne. We are such a unique couple!"



"We are indeed!" Cristina murmured as she picked Pat's hand and placed it on her breast looking furtively around in case one of the flying attendants was looking at them.

"Naughty girl, you are getting excited," Pat murmured back and started caressing Cristina's very real breasts. "If we were elsewhere, I would have taken you on the spot but not on a Qatar Airways flight, you wouldn't want to end up in a prison in a Muslim country, in particular a special girl like you, you would have been completely destroyed."

"You are right Madam," Cristina reacted with a moan trying to compose herself. "A prison in Qatar wouldn't be the best option for a girl like me, but I want to kiss you so badly."

Pat leaned over her seat and gave her a quick kiss on the cheek, "That's all I can do young lady; You can go to the toilet if you want to relieve yourself," she said in a smirk.

Cristina blushing all over stood up, and straightened her skirt, "That's a good idea Madam, I need to stretch my legs anyway," she murmured with a cunning smile.

"Good for you sweetie," Pat said winking at her.

CHAPTER 37 – Settling at the ambassador's residence

As the plane was approaching Manila, Pat had the chance to explain a few more things to Cristina.

"We'll be together for two weeks in Manila. During that time, you will be a tourist with me. We'll visit various parts of the city and learn about the Filipino culture and history. There are some interesting museums according to my mother," Pat was saying as she was facing her.

"Are we going to appear as a legitimate couple or you have some other ideas?" Cristina carefully asked, somehow suspecting the answer.

"Thank you for asking, I was coming to that," Pat eagerly replied, "No, we're not a couple, you are Cristina Torres a Mexican cousin of mine, shall we say a 'poor relation from Oaxaca?' A transgender cousin from a difficult family background who grew up as a '*muché*' with not much money or education. A cousin who came to New York to look after my apartment."

"In other words, the 'poor transgender relation acting as a maid to her rich and educated cousin?" Cristina asked a bit ironically.

"Yes, something like that and you don't have to be sarcastic about that. It is a choice of yours to be in that position, don't you ever forget that." Pat replied, a hint of anger in her voice.

"Yes Madam, sorry Madam," Cristina said in a humbler voice.

"Philippines is a catholic and conservative society, especially the middle class, so you being introduced to the people we meet in Manila as my transgender wife wouldn't go down very well, plus we have to protect the reputation of my father as the Ambassador in the country. Imagine the gossip among the diplomatic circles if they knew that the visiting ambassador's daughter is married to a transgender person. The society is not yet ready for that in this country."

"I guess your parents are aware of that and in agreement?" Cristina asked in a more careful tone of voice.

"They are the ones who suggested it, I was ready to be more outgoing and introduce you as what you are, my wife, maid and companion. But both my parents said that this would be unacceptable and either I come alone or if you were going to join me you would pose as the Mexican cousin from a poor background that I financially help."

“And that will explain why I’ll be working as a maid at the ambassador’s residence after your departure,” Cristina cautiously said.

“That’s absolutely true my sweet pie,” Pat said in her mellow and sweet voice, “The moment I depart for my professional trip to Australia, my poor cousin Cristina cannot sit idle doing nothing in the residence that needs extra working hands, she will be put to work next to the other two maids.”

“What a devious and cunning plan,” Cristina said in a nervous laugh.

“Yes, a devious plan, but beneficial for my parents and exciting for you. You will be able to bond with the two Filipinas working there, you are a nosy girl, you will be able to gossip with them and find out more about their lives and families. I know you like that sort of thing,” Pat chuckled.

“In what language Madam? Will they be able to speak any English?” Cristina asked in a cunning smile. She clearly was enjoying that prospect. Now that Pat explained everything the whole project appeared more realistic.

“I’m sure they speak basic English, but that will be your chance to learn a bit of Tagalog, their main dialect. My mother will probably give you a dialog booklet,” Pat continued, “and speaking of languages, in the presence of my family we solidly speak Spanish, you have to brush up your Mexican Spanish.”

“Si Se?ora,” I jokingly replied.

At that moment we’ve heard the pilot’s voice, “Please return to your seats and fasten your belts, in 15 minutes we land at Ninoy Aquino International Airport.”

“My father’s driver will be waiting for us. His name is Marcello,” Pat said and they both felt their ears pop out as the plane started its descent.

It was midmorning when they came out of the passport control and Marcello was there waiting, holding a notice with Pat's name, 'Mrs. Patricia Martinez Torres'

Pat waved at him as they approached dragging their oversized suitcases. He rushed towards them with a big smile, "Good morning Mrs. Patricia," and then turning to Cristina, Good morning, Miss..."

"This is Cristina Torres my cousin from Mexico," Pat said casually.

Good morning Miss Cristina," he said but he picked Pat's suitcase, he clearly knew what the pecking order was.

The embassy SUV was impressive with dark glasses and it took 30 minutes to arrive at the residence. Pat and Cristina were impressed with the highway system outside Manila and the rich and leafy suburb they entered.

"This is Makati City, the richest suburb of Manila, all the embassies are here and many rich and famous people live here," Marcello said proudly as they entered a covered garage through an electronically controlled door.

As Marcello opened the car door to let Pat and Cristina out, an excited voice exclaimed in Spanish, "You are finally here, my little girl had arrived."

It was the voice of Senora Alicia, Pat's mother who rushed towards them. Pat and her mother kissed and hugged for a long time before Senora Alicia turned to Cristina with a thin smile and said rather formally without any hugging or even hand shaking, "Welcome to 'Villa Rosa' Cristina, this is the official name of the Ambassadorial residence."

"It's nice to see you again Senora Alicia," Cristina replied in her careful Spanish, "Last time we met was back at New York when you were packing to go."

“Indeed, and I remember how good you had been helping Conchita with the housework and packing,” She added, looking meaningfully at her daughter who gave a benign smile.

At that point she clapped her hands and a maid appeared out of nowhere, “Ah Consuelo, there you are, help Marcello with the suitcases, my daughter Mrs. Patricia will stay in the large guest room and her cousin Cristina in the spare servants’ room, the one we use for the outside help whenever we have the chance to get one.”

“Yes, Ma’am,” Consuelo said with a small bob as she picked Cristina’s suitcase. She was small but her strength was phenomenal, she picked the suitcase and carried it a few stairs up without any visual effort.

Cristina heard all that with her usual mixed feelings. The die was cast! There was no return now. She had been instantly positioned to the ranks of the domestic staff. She looked at Pat for a reaction which didn’t come and then to Consuelo as she was carrying her suitcase, dressed in a very plain morning uniform, just a light blue plain polycotton dress with a white collar and white piping around the short sleeves covered by a simple white bib apron with two large front pockets.

Was she going to be similarly dressed shortly? The mere thought of that, excited but disturbed her as well. But deep down she knew that she wouldn’t be able to resist it. Her submissive nature was asking for it.

“Right girls,” Senora Alicia said, “Rosario had just made some fresh tropical fruit juice, let’s have some in the kitchen and then you can go to your rooms and freshen up. I’m sure you both badly need a shower.”

They followed Senora Alicia to a vast and modern kitchen where another maid, that must have been Rosario, identically uniformed, the only difference being that her dress color was pale pink, served us a delicious looking juice in tall crystal glasses.

"Consuelo and Rosario, very catholic and Spanish names," Pat remarked and added, "I love the simplicity of their uniforms and the fact that you keep them in different colors."

"Yes my dear," Senora Alicia replied, "The names are Spanish and catholic and sometimes I think that I'd never really left Mexico, in particular our state Oaxaca where lots of indigenous people live. There are lots of similarities and as you know the Spanish had been in both countries."

Then turning to Cristina, she meaningfully added, "I hope you packed some of your neat and practical Mexican uniforms Cristina, they will certainly impress my maids, I think they are of better-quality material than the ones here, they are 100% cotton. The ones that my girls wear are polycotton ones."

Cristina blushed all over and was about to answer but Pat answered for her, "Yes mother, I asked her to pack a few and she will certainly start using them after I depart for Australia in two weeks' time."

"So, for the next two weeks our Cristina will be a happy tourist," Senora Alicia said looking at Pat and then looking back at Cristina added, "I must say Cristina I see you again after several months and the difference is stunning. Your features are softer, your voice has a higher pitch and your boobs look very real. I'm impressed."

Cristina blushed all over again and this time she managed to answer, "Thank you Senora Alicia, I certainly feel more confident in my female identity and my boobs look very real because they are real! My hormonal treatment for over a year now, seems to work."

All that conversation in the kitchen was happening in rapid Spanish and Rosario standing in one corner of the kitchen was extending her ears, trying to understand.

Senora Alicia saw her and chuckled, "I know that you understand a few words of Spanish Rosario but we speak far too fast for you," She said in English, "But what you should know is that in two weeks' time you and Consuelo will have an assistant for the housework and other chores needed around the house. Cristina who is a competent housekeeper offered to help when her cousin Senora Patricia will go to Australia for ten weeks. Isn't that nice? You two girls always tell me that there is not enough time to properly accomplish all your house duties. Cristina will certainly assume some of your duties in two weeks and you and Consuelo will have to take her under your wings and show her what to do." She finished with another chuckle.

Blush, blush for Cristina once more, as Rosario looked at her a bit puzzled; a guest in the house to help with housework? How odd. But Pat came to her rescue, "Don't look surprised Rosario, Cristina has worked as a maid in the past in my mother's property in Mexico and she is used to that. She is a distant cousin of mine but from a poor family back in Mexico so she has to work for a living. She recently joined me in New York where she keeps house for me, so she will be very much in her element working next to you and Consuelo in this house. Isn't that so Cristina dear?"

That was the critical moment that was going to define Cristina's status in the ambassador's residence, and as she was asked a direct question she had to answer.

She deeply inhaled trying to control her anxiety and then simply said, "Si Senora Patricia, I have a vast experience as a housekeeper and cleaner."

Senora Alicia smirked when she heard that, "I guess this is gentler way of saying that you have been working as a maidservant dear, be frank about it."

Cristina, completely deflated now, conceded, "Si Senora Alicia, you are right, I have been working during the past two years as a maidservant."

"I'm glad you finally accepted your status dear," Senora Alicia said in a gentler voice now as Pat was giving her a look as if she was saying, 'Stop it mother, you made your point, don't embarrass her more'.

At that moment Consuelo appeared and said, "Ma'am, the rooms for our guests are ready if they want to go and freshen up Ma'am."

"Thank you Consuelo. Please take Senora Patricia to her room and I'll deal with Cristina," She casually said as Pat gave her another pleading look.

As Patricia followed Consuelo and Rosario started tidying up the kitchen, Cristina followed Senora Alicia to a different part of the house at the other end of the kitchen, through a door to a corridor with five small and plain doors. She opened one of them and moved in as Cristina came behind her.

Cristina's heart sunk when she saw the room, it was tiny and her large suitcase was taking most of the space, so Senora Alicia and her could barely fit in.

"I know the room is small but is the only one at the servants' quarters. The other two rooms are taken by the two girls. And I'm afraid that you have to share the bathroom and toilet with them."

Cristina wanted badly to protest. She was after all the legitimate partner of her daughter but she couldn't open her mouth, she was too scared by this formidable and arrogant lady so she stayed silent thinking that later she would ask Pat to interfere. She knew too well that the house had other proper guest rooms. She was hoping to get one next to Pat's so she could probably sneak in during the night.

"And this is your closet," Senora Alicia continued oblivious about Cristina's despair, "I put some dresses in here for you to wear, not uniforms, just cool pretty

summer dresses very popular in this hot country, dresses that a girl like you would love. They are called duster dresses and they are quite cheap, perfect for women with not much money to spend."

She stopped and looked at Cristina in a scrutinizing way, "Yes, they would fit you perfectly; on the other hand, I wouldn't even dream of giving them to my daughter, she would completely dismiss them as too girly or too cheap or both."

"Speaking of the devil mother! Here I am," Pat said rather aggressively, "I've just heard from Consuelo that you gave Cristina the smallest room in the servants' quarter and I came to have a look."

She moved in to the room and looked around then looked inside the opened closet and felt the dresses. "Those are the dresses that I heard you saying I wouldn't wear?" She asked her mother.

"Yes, they are," Pat's mother replied with an amused look, "You wouldn't go near them, would you darling?"

"I certainly wouldn't, you know me too well; but they are perfect for Cristina, totally her style," She said turning to Cristina and winking at her, then turning back to her mother continued, "I came to complain about the room but now that I see it, I think it will do, don't you think Cristina? It would be unfair after all to be in one of the guest rooms if you are going to be part of the domestic staff after my departure."

Cristina felt cornered since she wasn't backed by Pat so she had to accept her already clearly defined status, "Yes you are right Senora Patricia, the room is fine. The only inconvenience could be that there is only one bathroom and toilet for the three rooms. That might create problems in the morning when all three of us we'll try to get ready on time." She cautiously said.

“Getting ready in the morning for housework is not such a big issue,” Senora Alicia dismissively said, “All you have to do is put your uniform dress on, tie your apron and pronto you are ready. You are not going to any beauty contest Cristina, you are going to sweep and mop floors, so no time for titivating.”

“Si Senora Alicia, I understand,” Cristina said humbly, this woman was so forbidding, she couldn’t really oppose her.

“Right then, I go back to my room, I badly need my shower,” Pat said as she started going back, then turning to Cristina added, “You have a shower as well sweetie and then put on one of the dresses my mother so kindly left for you to wear.”

“And we all meet for a light lunch in an hour’s time. Rosario will prepare something nice and light, she usually is the cook in this house,” Alicia’s mother said, “And the bathroom is all yours dear Cristina, at this time of day is usually empty.”

“Thank you Senora Alicia, I’ll quickly unpack and get ready.” Cristina said nearly curtseying.

CHAPTER 38 – Pat departs for Australia

The two weeks passed as in a dream. Pat had a genuine curiosity to find out more about Manila and Cristina was included in all her explorations. They were living in Makati City which is one of the richest parts of Manila and the center of its financial activities but Pat wanted to find out more about other parts of the city, including the poorer parts. Marcello the Embassy driver was very helpful because he knew the city like a taxi driver. He drove them everywhere; he even took them to visit his family in a low middle class area. Pat was very chatty and Cristina with a dialog book in her hands was trying to say a few words in Ta-

galog, *magandang umaga* (good morning) and *salamat po* (thank you) being the most common.

Cristina was encouraged right from the beginning to try and learn some basic Tagalog so she could communicate with the two maids in the house. Senora Alicia was quite persistent on that.

‘When you start working next to those two you have to be familiar with the basic vocabulary they use, common daily words about housework, ironing, cooking etc. Their English is good enough but when they are together they only speak Tagalog, so you wouldn’t be able to bond enough with them,’ was her motto.

So, Cristina took that seriously and every evening she spent at least an hour learning new words which she was trying to use the next day to the great amusement of Senora Alicia and Pat. But Rosario and Consuelo were very sweet in correcting her.

Pat was very loving and supportive and the few evenings they had to sit to dinner with her father the ambassador, she was there to protect her if needed.

Senor Martinez Torres was friendly enough but formal. He was mostly talking to his daughter about her academic career and her prospects. Cristina made a couple of efforts to make some conversation but her Spanish wasn’t good enough for the intellectual level they were talking, so she was mostly ignored. But at least she wasn’t excluded from the family table.

The evening before Pat’s departure for Melbourne there was a more formal dinner for eight people, that is the three of the Martinez Torres family, plus Cristina, plus two couples from the embassy, the military attaché and his wife and the head of the commercial department with her husband. Cristina was more nervous on that occasion feeling uncomfortable among all those diplomats and Pat in her usual manner tried to calm her, reminding her though that for those people she was her distant cousin and not her spouse.

There was an unexpected event that evening, Consuelo who was going to serve had a severe headache, some sort of migraine and had to go and lie down in her room. Rosario was completely immersed and busy with her cooking so Senora Alicia asked Cristina to help with the serving. Pat interfered and said they both would help but Senora Alicia was adamant, "Pat you must be present, those people are coming to meet the daughter of the ambassador, you can't disappoint them, on the other hand Cristina is just the cousin and not direct family. She really is godsent tonight."

"Ok mother but she sits on the table with the guests," Pat firmly said.

"Yes of course dear, Cristina is a guest as all the rest, lets us call her a working guest," Senora Alicia said in a chuckle.

The dress code was informal and Cristina was wearing one of her duster dresses, the one she thought was slightly 'dressier'. With Rosario's help she set the table and then went back to the kitchen to help with the dinner preparations. After many days she was back in her element. So, she eagerly had accepted the apron Rosario had offered her, she didn't want to soil her dress. It was a plain white apron similar to the one Rosario was wearing, a maid's apron, so Cristina should remember to remove it when the guests would be there and she would start the serving.

At this moment Senora Alicia came to the kitchen, and saw Cristina in front of the sink washing some pots and pans, the ones Rosario had been using for her cooking.

Her eyes instantly shone as she said in a mocking way, "There you are Cristina, at last in front of a sink with your apron and rubber gloves on, you must feel like a duck to water after all those days trying to pretend that you were a tourist."