This, then, according to my father, was
the last outpost of civilization. I shivered
slightly in the sticky night air as I gazed
around the desolate station of Rodriguez-
Clara. Two months of voluntary exile
followed, two months with no escape, on
soil where no white woman had lived for
thirty years.

There was a train that ran from
Rodriguez-Clara to the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. We were
to go on that as far as we
could, and the last fourteen miles we were
to travel on a private mail car that strug­
gled daily from Cuatatolapam to meet the
main line.

The train we boarded there in Rodri­
guez-Clara was a two-coach, narrow-guage rail car. I was told that there was only
one distinction between first and second
class passengers: when the train stalled the
first class only had to shovel wood into the
engines; the second class had to get out and
push. The train had exceedingly hard,
slatted, wooden seats; no pullman facilities.
There
were no screens in the windows,
which were for the most part flung wide to
capture any passing breeze. Mosquitoes
were so thick that even the hardy had given
up slapping them. My dauntless mother
produced from nowhere a huge extermina­
tor, and as long as her energy lasted, before
she, too, succumbed to the heat, sprayed
the air to a saturation point with Flit.

Our solitary light consisted of an oil
lamp hung dangerously in the middle of
the aisle and swinging madly as the train
lurched. The cars were crowded, so filled
to overflowing with peons and their wives
and children that we could not find seats
together.

I sat next to an Indian woman nursing
a small child. At my feet was a large
crate of aroused hens, and across from me
sat a meek-looking man in soiled white—
a doctor traveling to the interior. Mother
and Dad had as companions two swarthy
half-breeds with a full bottle of cheap
whiskey yet to go between them. One
passed the bottle to my mother, who de­
clined with as much courtesy as fear and
repugnance would allow.

It was well after midnight when the
train sweated to a halt, letting us off at
Cuatatolapam. I had a queer sensation as
of being deposited at the jumping-off place
and told to advance. Our track car was
waiting for us, and by the dim light of the
lanterns, and the more familiar light of the
moon, we got in. The car was nothing
more than an open platform with trolley­
car wheels and an old Ford engine motor.
The regular night crew was aboard, armed
with pistols and machetes, (the long, curved
knives used for cutting cane), They were
all dark-skinned silent Toltecs, save for one
equally silent negro. No one spoke. The
only sounds were the slapping of the under­
brush against the sides of the car, and the
muffled effort of the Ford engine as we
advanced.

We arrived in Cuatatolapam proper
about two o'clock. Tired to exhaustion, I
only remember stumbling home in the
dark stillness by the intermittent flicker of a
pocket flash.

Cuatatolapam was a sugar mill in the
interior of Vera Cruz, in the heart of some
of the richest sugar cane land in the world.
The inhabitants were entirely native
Indians, with a few Mexican underhands in
the office. Many of the Indians had never
seen a white girl, let alone a barbaric
American one.

In Cuatatolapam the women wore four
petticoats and went barefooted the year around. Disease was rampant, but there were no hospital facilities, and the only substitute for a doctor was a pharmacist maintained by the company. There were no electric lights, except those connected with the manager's private generating plant—and that only from eight o'clock until eleven. There were no telephones, no wireless, and only two radios. There were no sidewalks in town, not even any roads other than the paths worn by mules and cane carts. The only method of transportation was by horseback. During the rainy season the most-traveled roads were continuous mud streams with gathering algae mats on top.

There was a piece of property comprising about four acres given over to the manager, on which there were two houses, known by reason of their size as the big and little "gerencia". These were situated outside of the pueblo itself, and were surrounded by spacious, cultivated grounds, the whole of which was enclosed by high barbed-wire fences.

Immediately separating the two houses was a rose garden and a profusion of orange trees bearing beautiful bitter fruit. Several gardenia plants that flowered daily grew wild in the yard. Of the two houses, one was one story high, fairly compact, the other two stories high, monstrous, and painted spasmodically in blue and green. Both were wooden, built up about three feet from the ground on stilts, surrounded by verandas, and in a total state of disrepair. We, by preference, lived in the smaller house; our only occasion to use the other was to invade the rotting library that the former manager had dedicated to the worms. In the two months I was there, I left the premises twice.

In our house, which had been untenanted for some while, there were bats breeding in the attic and rats nesting in the closets. The rats were so wild that they invaded the living room as we listened to the ten o'clock broadcasts, and they marched on the kitchen at midnight. Once we had to tear down an entire section of the back bedroom, because in our innocence we poisoned the rats. When they died they fell down between the walls. But the bats! They beat their wings on the roof until they made a nightmare of sound.

Through the month of July it rained daily; regular cataracts of water would pour from a black sky for an hour, and as soon as the pelts of rain struck the hot earth they rebounded as steam. The weather was the one sure topic of conversation in Mexico at the time.

When the rains came, the vegetables all rotted, and from July to October it was impossible to secure any. We brought enough canned food stuff to last us through those summer months. We made soups of herbs, and raised chickens for meat and eggs. Occasionally our table was supplemented by turtle and wild game.

But scarcity of vegetables was not our chief dread: with the rain came the mold. Overnight it spread like the plague through cupboards of linen and closets of clothes. If we left the closet doors shut, the next morning our shoes would be covered by a filmy, greenish mildew. Clothes and linen were forced to air daily. Even books were not safe, but had to be scraped and sunned.

Moreover, the river rose with the rain sometimes as much as ten or twelve feet, and often overflowed. There was a precarious wooden bridge spanning the river, which was carefully taken apart each summer, and stored in the mill, to be rebuilt in the winter. They judged the time for removal of the bridge when the water snakes began their exodus from the low river bank.

Cuatatolapam will always bring the
memory of quick thunder in the sky, heat intense and enervating, flaming sunsets and flamboyant trees. Then there will be wiry, brown-skinned Indians in thatched huts, with pigs, and mud, and flies. There will always be the startling contrast of the poverty of man against the abundance of nature; the sight of breadfruit and papaya growing wild, and children dying of diseases of filth and malnutrition. This much I shall never forget. It lives no longer as a reality even in my memory, but it remains indelibly as a glimpse of life at once novel, exotic, and disturbing.

OF WANTING

ROBERT PACE

... of wanting, of wanting, of searching, seeking, desiring, utter nakedness of desire, utter shining whiteness of naked want

... of forever seeking, forever the alone, the torn, the beaten, the ravaged of thought

... of always walking in shaded streets, of stopping in darkness and staring into lightness, all gay, happy, golden light of easy fulfilment

... of standing and staring and of wanting, and of turning at last back into the shadow and walking on

... of crying aloud into the unheard ear, of waving frantically at the unseen eye, of pounding and clutching desperately the unfelt hand

... of no escape, not even the solace of the martyred, of not even the clean-sheeted bed of the invalided, not even the padded cell of the labyrinthed

... of only a dusty room on a darkened street, only a padded couch, only the stupid frantic ticking, ticking, ticking of the kitchen clock, only the stupid staring antimacassars

... of not even a cat to rub, nor a dog to kick, nor a book to read

... of at last going to bed and lying, turning, twisting, and of at last going to sleep

... of at last going to sleep and of not even dreaming, never, never, never ever dreaming.