

# The last pleasure

*Rosamaría Casas*

**M**y friend Antonia, her mother, Doña María, and I arrived at the ranch during the hottest part of the day.

"Well now, aren't you pretty?" exclaimed Don Esteban when we got out of the car. "And who is this lovely thing?" he asked with a roguish glance as he looked me up and down.

"This is Guillermina, Papa. I asked her to spend the holidays with us, remember?"

Don Esteban's approving smile seemed to say, "You've passed the test, my girl." I thought what beautiful teeth he had; his sunburnt skin made them seem very white.

After supper, we sat under the canopy in the garden opposite the one-story house that was L-shaped to encourage the breeze. A few yards away from the canopy the rows of coffee plants and banana trees began. It was almost ten o'clock at night, yet it was as hot as at midday.

"Let's go down to the water tank to cool off, Mina," suggested Antonia.

We put on our bathing suits and went down to the tank. Our torches barely shed any light and the water looked black.

Our trips to the water tank to cool off three times a day—before the farmhands arrived, at midday when they had lunch, and at night—were the only times my body gave me any relief. The heat had made my skin sensitive, my breasts were swollen and my clothes rubbed against me as though a strange hand were stroking them against my will.

"The tropics make women bloom, my friend. Look how the girls' eyes are shining," I heard Don Esteban say to one of his friends. "They even walk

differently. Look at those hips—just like a mare's rump!"

I knew Don Esteban was talking to someone else, but his words were aimed at me. It wasn't the first time he had done this, while he glanced at me furtively. His gaze fell on me like a streak of fire.

I walked quickly to catch up with Doña María and Antonia, who were a few steps ahead. We went into church for the twelve o'clock mass. The coolness of the half-light was pleasant, but not enough to make the drops of sweat that trickled down from my arms to my waist evaporate. The image of Don Esteban stayed with me like a wave of fire. I don't know if I was blooming, as he said, but my body had begun to change ever since we arrived at the ranch. I couldn't bear the feel of my underwear. The unpleasant itching was only soothed by the water in the tank.

I was thinking about all this instead of listening to the priest's sermon, when I felt Don Esteban's hand on my calf. He had bent down as if to look for something. I froze, terrified that someone would see us. His hand moved up from my ankle to the back of my knee. It gave me goose bumps all over. I crossed my fingers and shut my eyes with a devout expression. I thought that Antonia, sitting next to me, would hear my heart beating. In church!

As we came out of mass, Don Esteban put his hand on my back, with his fingers under my armpit. I wanted to say, "You're just a dirty old man." I couldn't believe he had approached me so brazenly and I refused to admit, in my heart of hearts, that I enjoyed this little game.

I liked it so much in fact that I no longer went riding with Antonia. I preferred to stay at home, wander around the granary, and walk among the coffee trees, always in the hope of bumping into Don Esteban. I had never spoken to him alone; I wouldn't have known what to say. I was physically attracted to him, although I wouldn't have dared to admit it then.

I was lying in the water tank when I saw him in the banana plantation. He motioned me towards him. Before obeying, I put on my sandals and put a towel round my shoulders. I walked slowly towards him. He took my arm and we slipped behind the trees. He took my face in his hands, drawing it close to his until I thought I could see my reflection in his eyes.

"Guillermina, Mina, come closer," he murmured, holding me against his bare chest, that smelt strongly of damp wood.

My first kisses went beyond my wildest fantasies. My trembling and the desire that he caress my whole body with his hands came to an abrupt halt when I heard Antonia's voice calling him. I pulled up the straps of my swimsuit and ran out.

There is no silence in the tropics, I thought as I lay sleepless, listening to the sound of banana leaves rubbing against each other, and the cawing of night birds. Even the stars, twinkling endlessly, seemed anxious. They seemed to be sending me a message that I couldn't decipher.

The damp sheets stuck to my skin, making it even more difficult to fall asleep. Feeling hot, I walked out of my room to lie on the hammock under the canopy. I rocked gently, unable to sleep, when I felt Don Esteban's presence at my side. His hands stroked me expertly, from my ankle to my thighs and then the rest of my body. As he leant over me, he began to caress me with his tongue. I was afraid and wanted to speak, and tell him to stop, but I didn't. I enjoyed the caresses that made my body shiver with pleasure.

I covered my face, to hide my embarrassment and the beads of sweat. I did not move, until he put his hands under my waist drawing the lower half of my body closer to his. A sharp and yet pleasurable pain made me open my eyes. When I saw him astride the hammock and felt him in me, I was ashamed and wanted to stop him. I put my hands on his shoulders, to push him away. A shaft of fear went through me as I thought of Antonia, Doña María and what my parents would say if they saw me.

But instead of pushing him away, I put my arms around him and held him as tightly as I could. My fears subsided, my body was more important than any thoughts. The pain vanished and I was filled with new sensations.

When we were calm again, I tried to sit up and found I couldn't. With Don Esteban's full weight on me, I couldn't put my feet on the ground.

"Please get up, Don Esteban," I begged at the same time as there was a sound of splintering wood. The planks that the hammock hung from

had split. I fell backwards, with Don Esteban on top of me. The canopy roof, held up by the tree trunks and planks that the hammock had hung from, came down on top of us, with a terrifying din. All I needed was for a scorpion to land on me as I was trying to move out from under Don Esteban's body. I managed to push him to one side, get up and run quickly over to the banana grove before anyone could see me.

A few seconds later, the shouts of Doña María and Antonia, who had gone to the canopy to see what all the noise was about, told me that they had found Don Esteban, lying naked on the floor, in the midst of broken palms and tree trunks. I took advantage of the confusion to run to my room, I looked at myself in the mirror, completely dishevelled, with bits of straw in my hair. I cleaned my legs with a towel and dried off my body that was soaking wet, as though I had just come out of the water tank. Trembling, I put on my dressing-gown and walked out, pretending that I had been woken up by the voices.

With the help of two farmhands, Antonia and Doña María had lifted Don Esteban's inert body on to the sofa. I thought that a blow on the head from a tree trunk had left him unconscious. The doctor said that he had died suddenly from a massive heart attack.

During the funeral service, in the church where Don Esteban had stroked my leg, I felt a great sadness. It was painful to see his nose more sharply outlined in death, and his face without its happy, roguish expression. Besides, he had saved my life. His body lying on top of mine had protected me from the falling wood. His was covered in bruises. Thank you, Esteban, I said silently. Still feeling his heat between my legs, I drew closer to Antonia.

"Don't cry, Antonia. I'm sure your father was happy when he died. Can't you see he's smiling?" ❧



HE/UNAM.

Diego Rivera, Bather (watercolor).