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When the sun does break through the rain clouds in Costa Rica, the countryside glistens on hilly coffee plantation and flowering shrubs and trees; 750 species of orchids grow wild in the country, and fence posts in the ground become trees.

Their civil codes and procedures, I was told, are based on the private property concept. Loose cattle, however, free graze the townships and road right-of-ways. At dusk, young boys and girls are seen hunting for the small bunches of cattle in what they call their "pasta larga," or "long pasture."

The cattle lean toward the flop-eared, humpy type. I suspect along with the free ranges, generous supply of internal and external parasites are included; however, from the looks of the kids' shoes while they're out gathering the cattle, it appears that the cows do have the strength to be hard to find on the outskirts of town.

My host keeps a pack of six dogs and an armed watchman to protect his properties at night. In the daytime when the dogs are off duty, they watch the electric controlled gate for a chance to escape and run strays and his neighbor's cattle.

One of the German Police dogs is kept chained. The month before my visit, she killed a grown cow. At nights I'd hear her prowling around outside my bedroom windows. Also, about the time the dogs had made their rounds, a screech owl the natives call a "lechuza" would start an eerie cry exactly like the calls Hollywood used to have the Indians make before they attacked a wagon train ole John Wayne was leading westward.

On the evenings when my host selected sinister political fugitives as a topic and I was careless about how much I ate of such rich delicacies as seafood stews or fresh asparagus pie, I'd go to sleep hoping my pistolero host wasn't as jumpy as I was and wouldn't start shooting at the sounds of those screech owls.

Every morning the maids put fresh bouquets of flowers in the rooms. Blossoms flourished and citrus fruits ripened around the pools and fountains. And then the bright sun would dry away the dew from one of the loveliest spots in the Americas.