On a July afternoon, in a picture-book-perfect, colonial Mexican town, high in the mountains, my five-year-old daughter, who is adopted from Guatemala, draws happily with markers in the shaded corner of the otherwise sun-dappled patio of our brightly colored, art-and-plant-filled Mexican casa. My husband and I bought this house six years ago, and we’re deeply attached to it, although we’re able to stay here just a few months of each year. Our demanding jobs back home in New York City, where we live in a two-bedroom apartment, approximately one-fifth the size of this house, preclude longer vacations. When we’re not here, we keep the casa rented.

I watch my daughter as she bends her head intently over her coloring book. Her long, black hair, loose and shimmering, falls across her heart-shaped face, and I note, not for the first time, how much she resembles (far more than she resembles me) the sisters-in-law, our claustrophobically small kitchen—struggling to ‘keep the vermin that attracts. Fairly quickly, I came to see that there’s nothing intrinsically demeaning about taking care of one’s home and that, in fact, housework really is honest and noble work.

Expanding upon my mother’s words, my always loud and didactic father said, with great feeling, “All the work in one’s home is noble and honest! Grow up” — he looked hard at me and my sister, who very much resemble me. “And do all your own work!”

My parents would be right, of course. But here’s my dilemma: I vowed to myself, like so many rebellious daughters before me, that I would grow up to be nothing like my mother. I assured myself that such pointless, trivial domestic tasks were beneath me, too.

I was wrong, of course. As an adult, I quickly discovered what the point was of all that seemingly endless sweeping, mopping, washing, and dusting: Living among filth is disgusting. Women’s work or not, I didn’t want to live surrounded by clutter, schmutz, and all the vermin that schmutz attracts. Fairly quickly, I came to see that there’s nothing intrinsically demeaning about taking care of one’s home and that, in fact, housework really is honest and noble work. But, I still loathe doing it.

Therefore, for two fabulous months each year, I do no housework at all. Señoras Carmen and Silvia sometimes laughingly tease me, speaking slowly because they know how primitive my Spanish is: “Señora Janice, we don’t believe that you know how to boil water or sweep a floor!”

In my grammatically flawed Spanish, I laughingly respond, “En mi casa en Nueva York,” I do both of these tasks, plus more. “But not,” I add honestly, “as well as you do them, Señoras!”

My parents would be right, of course. But here’s my dilemma: I hate doing housework. And so, despite my own progressive social and political beliefs, I can’t stop myself from taking advantage of the fact that, here in Mexico, I can afford to pay someone else to do it for me.

As a child, back in the Bronx, in our claustrophobically small kitchen, my parents, and brother, although at me most of all, the sloppiest and most rebellious of the three of us — “and do all your own work!”

Were he and my mother visiting me today in my Mexican casa, they would bring up, with self-righteous passion, the fact that my daughter’s ancestral history in Guatemala very likely contains numerous sad, and enraging, stories of cinnamon-skinned women who did all sorts of “so-called dirty work,” for low— or no—pay and who were horrifically exploited by unfeeling, imperialistic gringos and gringas who very much resemble me.

My parents would be right, of course. But here’s my dilemma: I hate doing housework. And so, despite my own progressive social and political beliefs, I can’t stop myself from taking advantage of the fact that, here in Mexico, I can afford to pay someone else to do it for me.

As a child, back in the Bronx, in our claustrophobically small kitchen, day after day, I watched my mother as she swept, dusted, washed, and wiped, while my father, despite his rhetoric about “noble, honorable work,” never once lifted a finger to help her to do what to him was “women’s work” and, therefore, beneath him. I swore to myself, like so many rebellious daughters before me, that I would grow up to be nothing like my mother. I assured myself that such pointless, trivial domestic tasks were beneath me, too.