

MY HEART LIES SOUTH

The Story of My Mexican Marriage

YOUNG PEOPLE'S
EDITION



ELIZABETH BORTON
DE TREVIÑO

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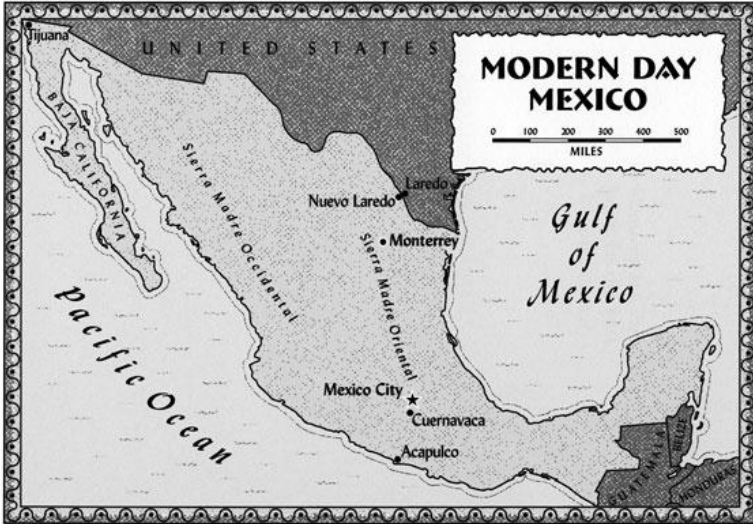
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*To Mamacita and Papacito
I dedicate this book
in loving memory*



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Chapter 1

“MISS BORTON!” bawled my city editor. I hurried up to his desk.

“You’re always yammering about going to Mexico,” he said. “Here’s a bunch of due bills. Airplanes, trains, hotels. . . . Take ’em and see how far you get. When you run out of money, write something for us.”

I got as far as San Antonio, and there I called on a man whose name the city editor had given me.

“Look up this man,” my editor had said. “He loves every inch of the highway from Laredo to Mexico City. He’s always lecturing about it. If you can get as far as San Antonio, he can probably get you the rest of the way.”

The name was William Harrison Furlong.

Kindly big Bill Furlong took me under his wing, and personally drove me to Laredo, where, in answer to his insistent wire, the Monterrey Chamber of Commerce had dispatched its young public relations man to receive me, waft me across the border, and conduct me to Monterrey with the dignity due the newspaper I represented.

Accordingly I sat in a hotel lobby in Laredo with Mrs. Furlong and Bill when the emissary from Monterrey arrived. It was very hot and the young Mexican who hurried into the lobby mopping his brow, only one hour late, was dressed in a short-coated white linen suit and carried a *jipi-japa*, which is the south-of-the-border version of the boater.

This was my first glimpse of my husband.

Tall and spare, with large sad black eyes, black curly hair, a fine beak of a nose, a small Spanish mouth outlined by a sparse black mustache, he is, he says, “the villain type.” He was tired and hot and he looked at the lady who was to be his charge with scant interest, politely bowing.

“Hello Luis!” said Bill. “This is Miss Borton. When you get to Vallecillo, buy her an ice-cold beer.”

Luis laughed nervously. There is nothing he likes better than a cold beer, but the lady he had taken across the border for the Chamber of Commerce two weeks before had resisted the beer with desperation as if it might be the first step in a seduction, and

the lady last week had been Dorothy Dix, who was even then rather tired from pushing seventy or so and inclined to be tart with young men eager to waste her time in taverns.

Luis spoke excellent English. The revolution had driven the Treviños with many other families to take refuge in the United States when Luis, the fifth son, was about eight. He had gone to school in Texas and Indiana, where he eventually dominated English in all but two particulars. The little confusion persists to this day: he cuffs when he has a cold on his chest, and due to the criminal negligence of his wife, the coughs of his shirts are frequently frayed.

We bade the Furlongs farewell. I was turned over to the vaccination, immigration, and customs authorities, and at last, in a car which had been provided by the Chamber of Commerce, complete with chauffeur, we set out for Monterrey. I had my hair tied up in a scarf and I was wearing a large black hat as well as sun glasses. Now the sun began to go down and long violet shadows crept across the plain. I took off my hat.

“Ah,” breathed Luis.

I undid the scarf.

“So?” remarked Luis.

I took off the black glasses.

“Wonderful,” he decided, aloud. He leaned toward me and looked at me soulfully.

“Shall I sing you a song about love?” he asked.

“Why yes,” I agreed, thinking this must be a gag.

But he launched into “Palm Trees Drunk with the Sun,” went on to “The Sea Gulls,” and then sang “The Green Eyes,” in a light baritone voice.

“Very nice,” commented the chauffeur from the front seat. “Now sing ‘Farolito.’”

He sang it. After our beer in Vallecillo, Luis sang other songs. He sang all the way to Monterrey.

I didn’t realize it, but I was being courted.

On a high place, before we dropped down into another valley, we could see the far-off lights of Monterrey. “That’s it! There’s Monterrey!” breathed Luis. “Isn’t it beautiful?”

Like most Mexicans, he is passionately devoted to his *patria chica*, his *tierra*, the place where he was born.

As the days went by and I was busy gathering material for articles, Luis, acting for the Chamber of Commerce, arranged my interviews for me and when necessary interpreted for me. I had studied Spanish, and Mexicans are extraordinarily kind and patient with anyone who is trying to speak their language. I suspect that I needed the interpreter more than I knew. But through all this Luis frequently made me stop and admire the Saddle Mountain, which dominates the town with its curious, almost grotesque shape. The Saddle Mountain is beloved of the Monterrey people; when far from it they dream of it, but always they speak of it with deep sentiment. Luis wanted to arouse this devotion to his mountain in me. I should have realized that his interest was more than the routine politeness of the public-relations expert. It would have been clear to anyone but a candid American, when he made a detour to show me the *ranchito* of his father and mother, their summer and week-end place, a lovely rustic spot with a swimming pool under the pecan trees.

“What’s that?” I asked, pointing to a field which glistened white as snow and moved softly in the breeze.

“Those are the *margaritas* (daisies) of Mamacita,” smiled Luis. “She loves this flower, so when Papacito bought the ranch, he planted an acre of them for her, and when they were high, he brought her here to see them.”

I was touched.

“You will meet Mamacita tonight,” he told me.

This was tantamount to a proposal, but again, I didn’t know the customs and I didn’t realize that showing me to Mamacita was crucial.

I had finished my work in Monterrey and Luis had invited me to go out dancing. I accepted with alacrity, thinking this to be one more polite gesture from the public-relations department. But when he called for me at my hotel he was nervous; he mopped his forehead, he passed a long brown forefinger around the inside of his collar. He looked me over very carefully. I was wearing a long cotton dancing dress, with a neck and sleeves. This was fortunate; Luis sighed with relief. Rather pale with the pallor of the South Spanish type, the pallor described by Garcia Lorca as “olive and jasmin kneaded together,” he led me out to where a lady sat in a car. She was, I thought, in early middle age; there was not one silver thread in the dark curling hair piled

high on her head. In truth, she had just turned sixty. She was very plump and firm in a dark voile dress, and an incredibly small fat hand like a baby's manipulated her fan. Around her shoulders was a dark lace scarf. She smiled, showing tiny even white teeth.

"Mamacita," said Luis in slow English, "this is Eleesabet."

Very large eyes, wise and sparkling, looked me over, a dimple popped in and out. She had a great sense of fun, and she enjoyed teasing, a strong Mexican characteristic. She was teasing Luis, for she knew he hung on her judgment.

"I do not spik Eengleesh," she offered at last in a deep contralto.

In my careful Spanish I said that I was delighted to meet her, and her black brows arched with surprise and pleasure. She turned on Luis and gave him a short thorough tongue lashing, fanning very fast. Evidently he hadn't told her that the "mees" knew Spanish. She then made a place for me in the car at once and asked me in rapid succession my father's name and age, my mother's name and age, where I had studied Spanish and if it were true that Chile Tem-play (Shirley Temple) was really a dwarf.

We deposited Mamacita at a *cine*, or movie, where a small nephew was awaiting her, and then we went to collect another *pareja* or couple.

They proved to be special friends of Luis, a young lawyer who knew English well enough to have acted a season of Shakespeare in the States, and a slim girl with dead black hair and a camelia-fair complexion, who had been to schools in San Antonio. They were Alejandro and Mercedes, and they were engaged.

We went to the Jardines de Terpsicore. These were gardens in very truth. A paved space was arranged for dancing among the trees. A fountain splashed at one end of the dancing pavilion, near the bandstand, and dozens of large crystal parasols shattered the moonlight into rainbow colors.

Luis is a wonderful dancer and I have always been an enthusiastic one. Only already well into the evening did it occur to me to wonder why we never exchanged dances with Alejandro and Mercedes. But we didn't. Alejandro and Mercedes gyrated past us; we swooped around them. All evening. Between dances we drank the clean bright-tasting Monterrey beer. We had a sandwich. At half-past eleven Mercedes revealed that her Mamacita