

POINTS OF FIRE

A Pan-American Tale

BY JONATHAN COHEN

The sun this morning rose out of the sea like a mythic god. It scaled the stone fortress wall of El Morro, as no warrior had ever done before, and it entered the centuries-worn cobbled streets of San Juan, as if dressed in the fresh white suit of a tropical doctor making a house call. And at that early hour, it quietly cast its first light on Muna's empty house, which overlooked the harbor that was just waking up with the maritime activity of another day. The governor's black sedan passed near it as he left La Fortaleza, his mansion, with a single motorcycle escort on the way to Mimiya Hospital, driving slowly through the old narrow streets and then picking up speed on the palm-lined main road leading to Ashford Avenue along the sea, where the shiny new hotels of the Condado towered above the few remaining Spanish-style houses near the water.

Arriving at the hospital, not far from there, the car stopped in front beneath an old royal palm, and the driver stepped out to open the door for Don Luis, who emerged from the car with the verve of a young man (which he no longer was), then stopped short and glanced up at the hospital with eyes that for just a moment were the saddest eyes in the world. He was a tall man like that old palm tree, still very handsome, too, at sixty-six.

He walked up the short flight of steps, entered the white hospital, and knowing exactly where he had to go, he proceeded down the hallway, taking a long deep breath as he mustered the courage to go back in time and back in his heart, in order to move forward with his life and his all-important work. On seeing him coming toward her, Munita stood up quickly from the simple wooden chair on which she was sitting. Her eyes flashed and turned hard as obsidian. Her wavy black hair seemed to spread out in fiery points of will, as she confronted her stately father in the hallway of the hospital, outside the room where her mother lay asleep, dying of cancer.

"Noooooo, no way in hell, father," she told him in whispered anger. "How could you even dare to show up here, and without any warning?"

"I want to see her. I must. I am the reason she is here," he replied with a firm but muffled voice. "Munita, my dear, you must step aside, you must understand that—"

But suddenly and forcefully, she stepped on his words, pinning them to the ground, as she stood in front of the door to her mother's room, like a guardian who would sooner die before letting anyone pass, particularly him. "You've done enough for her already. She simply can't be stirred up now. She deserves peace. It's too late, father—too late for *your* tenderness."

Despite the volcanic nature of his blood, despite the force of his personality, and despite his arrogantly selfish desire, he slowly closed his eyes and took another deep breath. Then without a word, he turned around and walked away, down the hall, looking small in stature by the time he reached the end of it. The heads of a few nurses turned to catch a glimpse of him, as the front door of the hospital was formally opened for him to leave.

The sun poured in.

Standing for a moment in the doorway to collect himself, he looked out at the tops of the palm trees in front of the hospital waving gently in the breeze, and his eye landed on a lone flame tree—a *flamboyan*—and then in his mind he utterly left this world. He was seeing Muna for the

first time. He was back in New York City, his town of big dreams that became their town, filled with poetry, once upon a time.

The year was 1918. The Great War in Europe wasn't over yet, despite the recent armistice, and President Wilson had just sailed for the peace talks in Paris. That is when Muna Lee arrived in Grand Central Station, having crossed half of the country by train from Oklahoma City to Chicago to New York—to serve her country as a “confidential translator” for the Secret Service, as much as to serve her personal dream of a bigger life. The excitement she felt about being in New York, on that first day, rivaled the ecstatic high ceiling of the station with its fancy astrological depiction of the heavens. It was early December, and outside it was snowing lightly, giving the city the look of a fairy tale.

Bundled in the red wool coat her mother had given her in advance for Christmas, and with the help of a jolly porter, who whistled jazz as he carried her luggage to a cab, she was soon sailing up Broadway to Mrs. Delgado's townhouse on 72nd Street, just a block west of Central Park, where her new room had been readied for her arrival with freshly ironed bed sheets and new lacy white curtains, and where a letter from Mr. Mencken of *Smart Set* magazine was waiting for her—a letter of introduction that would change her life forever.

Mrs. Delgado greeted Muna at the door. She was Cuban, and a handsome woman around sixty, who always wore a pair of gold earrings with tiny rubies. She worked as a translator for the Secret Service, going through mail on its way to Latin America, or coming here from there. She did what Muna was going to do. Her late husband, also Cuban, was a professor of literature. He had collected thousands of books, creating a fabulous library that filled an entire floor of the house that looked like a paradise to Muna, as she passed it on the way to see her room.

“Here you are,” Mrs. Delgado said with a warm maternal voice. “Get settled, dear, then join me for tea in the parlor, or a sherry if you'd prefer. There's a letter for you on the desk.”

Muna's room was on the top floor, overlooking the street. She went back downstairs to fetch her suitcases, which were especially heavy because of her books. And she carried them, one at a time, up the four flights of carpeted wooden stairs. She was no shrinking violet, no shadow among men. She was a prairie girl from Oklahoma, where daily life used to be hard work. “I can do this,” she whispered, as she urged herself through the task. She was strong in body and soul, of bold stock, like her family tree with its roots in Mississippi, and those first English settlers of Virginia.

Once alone in her room with all her things, as if having just reached a clear meadow on top of a grassy hill back home, she sat down at her new desk, enjoying the luxury of the cushioned chair, to read the letter awaiting her:

Dear Miss Lee:

Welcome to the city of tall buildings, my bright poetry star! I am coming up from Baltimore next month, and hope to meet you in person then.

Another contributor to *Smart Set*, a young poet and newspaperman from Porto Rico who lives in New York, wants to make contact with you to inspire you to let him use a few of your poems we printed that he has

rendered in Spanish for his new little magazine called Indies Review, that's in both his native language and ours.

His name is Luis Muñoz Marín. Did you see his verses in our last issue? He is from a high-standing family, the son of a prominent statesman (a poet too) who led the fight for independence from Spain and set up an important paper called Democracy.

Please send us more of your poetry for Smart Set. Do keep the blinds open when you write, and let your genius tell it straight.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'H. L. Mencken', written over a horizontal line.

H. L. Mencken

Muna folded the letter neatly and put it back in its envelope. She was flattered, and not just by Mencken. The idea of being translated into Spanish meant that her world was getting bigger. That was a happy thought, as much as it was overwhelming, too, coming to her amid this day's excitement, this bustling metropolis with its multitudes, this genteel home where she would board that was so unlike any home she had ever known, with its Latin decor and atmosphere, its haunting works of Spanish art on the walls, and its library of dreams.

She stood up and walked over to the window. Looking out at the snow-covered street, she marveled at the steady stream of cars and the horse-drawn carriages with bells and all the people on the sidewalk hurrying somewhere. Bright icicles hung from the rooftops. The white branches of the trees below her window glistened in the late afternoon sun. At that moment she felt like a bird flying above the street, circling her nest at day's end, and she felt a poem stirring within her. She was happy to be here. Most of all, she looked forward to what was coming next.

After she unpacked, Muna went downstairs to meet with Mrs. Delgado. They had sherry together, then dinner. They talked for hours about everything, and they became friends.

Life moves fast in New York, like the cars and commerce on the streets of the city. Muna had successfully started her government job down in the Village, on Washington Street. Her command of Spanish was rapidly improving out of necessity. She was helped by her explorations of the poetry in the Delgados' library, where she fell in love with the verses of Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, translating them from Spanish in her mind as she read them: "Stupid men, who accuse / Women, in and out of season, / Never seeing you are the reason / Of the faults that you abuse!" How progressive, she thought, for a woman of the seventeenth century. (She later told Mencken, "Sor Juana was the first feminist in our hemisphere.")

Luis had obtained Muna's address from Mencken, at her request. She was expecting a letter. But not surprisingly, as a self-confident young man of action, who passed her home street during the course of his daily travels on the Upper West Side, where he also lived, Luis decided like a burst of fire to seize the moment and simply knock on her door, to introduce himself in person. And that's exactly what he did.

It was a Saturday morning around noon: the Saturday before Christmas, to be precise. A light snow was falling, and shoppers filled the stores along Broadway and Columbus Avenue. It was a hopeful day on which the front page of every paper in the city was filled with encouraging news of the president's efforts in Paris to bring the war to a formal end.

Mrs. Delgado answered the door and greeted him.

"Madam, I am Luis Muñoz Marín, and I am here to speak with Miss Muna Lee, to whom I am no stranger," he said with confidence.

She was immediately dazzled by his dark but luminous physical beauty that reminded her of how her husband had looked in his youth, with his fiery eyes and his jet-black hair. She was struck by his height and his fine Spanish features; very European, she thought. In response to his stated desire to speak with Muna, she exercised her great powers of formality.

"Is Miss Lee expecting you?"

"No, not exactly, madam. But a letter of introduction has recently been sent to her on my behalf. I am here on literary business, as the publisher of a magazine."

"Please come inside," she told him, "and wait in the parlor. I'll find out if Miss Lee is available at this time." Muna had already told Mrs. Delgado about Luis and the letter from Mencken, and of course Mrs. Delgado knew of his distinguished family, of the fabled heroism and prominence of his father. She had explained to Muna that Luis must be something of a Puerto Rican prince. He certainly looked like one now, with his shining fedora.

His full name was José Luis Alberto Muñoz Marín.

Mrs. Delgado went up to Muna's room to tell her she had a visitor: that poet Muñoz Marín they had recently talked about, the one described in Mencken's letter. Muna, who was in the midst of getting ready to go out, was standing in front of the tall wall mirror and putting on her hat. "All of a sudden, just like that," she said, "knocking on our door? That's okay. Please tell him I'll be down in a minute, and that I am on my way out, but can speak briefly with him about the poetry matter."

Muna was very feminine and always made an effort to look pretty. Studying herself in the mirror, she said aloud, "Petite am I, brave sparrow in the sky of this metropolis!" And she made a mental note of these words. She had an extraordinary memory. Whenever someone commented on it, she liked to say, pedantically but with a smile, the mother of the muses was the goddess of memory.

A few minutes later, Muna came down the stairs with her red winter coat in her arms. Mrs. Delgado had engaged Luis in a conversation about Puerto Rico and the recent earthquake there. Muna entered the parlor with her usual air of confidence. He stood up quickly, and looking him in the eye, she extended her hand for a firm handshake, saying, "Señor Muñoz, this is a great pleasure, indeed."

"No, Miss Lee, the pleasure is mine," he said. "I am most honored to meet the celebrated poet herself—the rising star of Monroe's *Poetry* and Mencken's *Smart Set*. You did, I trust, receive his letter of introduction about me?"

"Oh, yes, I did. It was here when I arrived in New York, a couple of weeks ago."

"Then you know something of my interest in publishing your work in my own magazine, in order to bring it to the attention of the Spanish-speaking world, where I believe your lyrics will enjoy a very warm reception."

“I am on my way out to buy Christmas gifts for my family. Why don’t we go to the new Automat restaurant, on Broadway, for a cup of coffee? It’s a comfortable place,” said Muna, and with a laughing smile, she added, “It’s poetic, too, with its displays of food like museum pieces. We can talk about your magazine there and your interest in my verse.”

Luis was taken by Muna right from the start—by her graceful Southern voice (not at all like a New Yorker’s); her natural poise; the fine lines of her rosy lips and their inviting pursed look when she said “oh”; her hazel-green eyes and the seriousness of them and their sparkle; the whiteness of her perfect skin; the pretty curl of her hair that spilled out from under her modest hat, and the color of this curl, like honey from the Yauco hills back home; the gold pin beneath the high collar of her white blouse; her ample breasts and thin waist; her long slender fingers; and her tiny feet.

All in all, she looked to him like a very pretty modern woman—like a beautiful song.

“Yes, yes, that’s a great idea. We can talk there.”

Mrs. Delgado ushered them to the door, like a mother with secret happiness.

On the street the conversation between Luis and Muna seemed to flow from a deep spring, with great comfort and ease, as if they had known each other a long time.

“Your English is perfect.”

“Yes, it should be. I went to a prep school in Washington, at Georgetown, and of course, *everything* was in English there.”

“Oh, my poor Spanish! My spoken Spanish is rather elementary, but off to a good start. I can read it very well, though. I love Cervantes—and Sor Juana, too. She’s just brilliant.”

Muna was struck by the contrast of his dark looks and the snow in the air.

Arriving at the bustling restaurant, they were lucky to get a small table by the front window, because the place was packed with holiday shoppers. Ever the gentleman, Luis sat Muna at the table and went to bring coffee for both of them.

“Anything else?”

“No, thank you.”

Her eyes followed him as he disappeared into the crowd at the restaurant, then she turned slowly to look out the window at the people passing by and the snow, feeling excited about her present social adventure, but also feeling very much alone, so far away from her family.

Luis returned with two cups of hot coffee and a piece of pumpkin pie he offered to share with Muna. He talked a lot. He seemed so alive to her. He asked her about her job. He asked for her opinion of New York. He asked her to tell him what Oklahoma City was like. He asked about her family. He asked her what she thought of Mencken and his firebrand style of journalism. He asked if she thought Charlie Chaplin were funny: the way he walked as the tramp—and they burst out laughing together. Being serious again, he wanted to know when she started to write poetry.

“When I was a little girl,” she said with a smile. She was relaxed and enjoying herself now. “How about you? How long have you been writing verse?”

“Always. It’s in my blood. Besides, I was born under a full moon.”

He then took from his coat pocket a new poem he had written called “Panfleto”—that is, “Pamphlet” in English. He unfolded the single sheet of paper and leaned it on her coffee cup for her to read.

“Okay,” she said, and took a deep breath to help her move from the laughter of the last few minutes of conversation, to the seriousness of poetry. She translated the poem as she slowly read it:

I have broken the rainbow
 against my heart
 as one breaks a useless sword against a knee.
 I have blown the clouds of rose color and blood color
 beyond the farthest horizons.
 I have drowned my dreams
 in order to glut the dreams that sleep for me in the
 veins
 of men who sweated and wept and raged
 to season my coffee . . .

After the opening lines, Muna glanced up to look at Luis, with a fierce look in her eyes. He told her heatedly to keep reading:

The dream that sleeps in breasts stifled by
 tuberculosis
 (A little air, a little sunshine!);
 the dream that dreams in stomachs strangled by hunger
 (A bit of bread, a bit of white bread!);
 the dream of bare feet
 (Fewer stones on the road, Lord, fewer broken
 bottles!);
 the dream of calloused hands
 (Moss . . . clean cambric . . . things smooth, soft,
 soothing!)

The dream of trampled hearts
 (Love . . . Life . . . Life! . . .)

I am the pamphleteer of God,
 God's agitator,
 and I go with the mob of stars and hungry men
 toward the great dawn . . .

Finishing the poem, Muna looked up at Luis and said, “You clearly take God seriously, don't you?”

“Yes, you're very right about that. You *are* smart. I take life seriously—and love, too.”

“I think God is hard at work with the stars,” he added, “and that his silence is profound.”

“I do too.”

“I know you do,” he said. “We have something to say to each other!”

At that Muna blushed, and for an electric pause in their conversation, they stared into each other's eyes. Then Luis continued, “I have translated into Spanish your verse about trying to hear Him, and this is the business at hand. I would like your permission to publish it along with your English original. There are other poems of yours, as well, that I want very much to do in Spanish.”

Muna was flattered and intrigued, not only by his proposal, but also by him alone and his radiant smile. His burning eyes glowed with intensity when he spoke about this.

“I have started a magazine called *Revista de Indias*. It’s published here. It’s bilingual, in both Spanish and English. Essays, poems, short fiction by South American and North American authors. I’ve done two issues already. And people like it a lot, I’m proud to say. My dream is that it will help bring together the nations of our hemisphere. That’s a big dream of mine! If we can become better acquainted with each other, mutual understanding and respect can grow, and then real social progress—the necessary progress of our times—can finally be made.”

Sitting upright with her hands folded in her lap, Muna listened carefully to him as if she were listening to a song.

“I can tell you the Spanish of your poem,” he said.

“You mean the one called “The Seeker”?”

“Yes.”

“That’s just a couple of quatrains?”

“Yes. It’s a great lyric, so impassioned yet restrained, and finely crafted.”

At that, she leaned forward, for the sake of discretion, to recite the opening lines to him in a muted voice, and he leaned a bit toward her, locking his eyes with hers:

*I who had sought God blindly in the skies—
listening for heaven to thunder forth my name,
waiting for doves descending to my head,
looking to see the bushes burst in flame—*

And in turn, following her breath perfectly, he recited:

*Yo, que tan ciegameamente busqué a Dios por las nubes,
creyendo que mi nombre relámpagos y truenos
llamarían, y lenguas pascuales, y la zarza
que vería, de pronto, bajo mi planta, ardiendo,—*

“Yes, *comprendo*, that’s me, indeed; but so much more melodious, the song so much more pronounced, thanks to the natural ability of your Spanish: *muchas gracias, poeta!* All the warm internal rhyme is, well, simply delightful.”

“No, my thanks to you. It gives me great pleasure to hear you say this. These four lines took hours to get them right. I made the translation with my good friend, Salomón de la Selva. He’s Nicaraguan—a brilliant poet living here in New York. Do you know his new book called *Tropical Town*? It was just published here. He wrote it in English because he wants to speak to North Americans and share with them *our* America. It’s an extremely beautiful book. Have you seen it?”

She responded silently, shaking her head slowly to say no, but also out of the sheer wonder she felt about being in this crowded restaurant on Broadway, as in a dream, with this dazzling man, so bright and handsome and focused on her.

Then repeating her opening “*I . . .*,” she picked up where she had left off, with her own

song put softly in her muted voice:

*went from the temple with a weary throng
of questions in my soul, and told my grief
to the heart of the yellow flower with the scent
of citrus clinging to its pointed leaf.*

As if their recitation had been rehearsed, Luis followed her with the poem's closing lines, and like her, he repeated with emphasis the opening pronoun, "Yo . . .":

*presa el alma de angustias y preguntas, turbada
y sin saber mi rumbo dejé el altar del templo
y le dije mi pena a la flor llena de oro
que tiene olor de citrus, y amargura, en los pétalos.*

Savoring the "s" of the last word, he dramatically bowed his head like a virtuoso after the final note of a performance, and then raising his head, again locking his eyes with hers, he asked, "Do you like it?" With this he gave Muna a knowing smile that wrapped itself around her and swept her away happily, for an instant, into another world.

She sat there without a word, looking a bit stunned. But with her majestic poise, she thanked him once more, with a modest tip of her head.

"I am deeply touched by your interest in my work. Now, though, I must go," she said calmly, "to do my Christmas shopping before Santa leaves New York. But I would very much like to continue our conversation."

"Yes, absolutely. I agree. Let's have an early dinner tomorrow in the Village. I know a Spanish café, on 14th Street, that creates a divine sangria made for poetry. Are you free?"

"Yes, actually, I am."

"Bravo!"

"Please bring copies of your *revista*."

"Yes, of course. I'll come for you at Mrs. Delgado's at 5 o'clock tomorrow." They parted with a handshake on Broadway. She went downtown, taking the trolley to the fabled Macy's at Herald Square, and he went uptown by foot, walking swiftly with newfound vigor. Thinking of her, he conjured verses that filled his head. "These are singing things: the stars, the sea, lovers," he said out loud, over and over, as he made his way home. "These are singing things!"

The next day they had dinner together, and the next and the next. Conversation about everything came naturally to them, whatever the subject was—poetry, politics, art, or religion—no matter what came up. Muna wanted to know all about Puerto Rico. She quickly became attuned to Luis's dramatic manner, as when, for instance, out of the blue he asked, "Do you grow weary of waiting in vain for a bolt of song out of the silence of the stars?" She knew just what to say. They had much in common, despite their obvious differences. A sea-change was beginning to take place in Muna's life, and Luis was more than happy, in his proud way, to inspire it.

She was young, just twenty-three, but circumstances had denied her youth, until, with a sudden grandiloquence of gesture, chance had flung open a door. Now life stretched out before

her, after all those rigid years, beautiful and understandable, bewildering only in the sudden multiplicity of its promises. The romance and color bent down to her grasp. And she thought flinchingly of the constant struggle back home to keep the younger children supplied with shoes and pencils, of her father's unrewarded ideals, and of her mother's crippled hand.

Muna's new life in New York quickly became Luis, Luis, Luis: Luis with his extravagant promises, his unfailing response to her mood, his passion and tenderness and absurd jealousies; Luis laying down his salad fork to say with earnestness, "We must learn to know each other—talk to me more about God!"; Luis tracing in his palm the outline of his beloved *cerro*, south of San Juan, that overlooked the city and the sea; Luis somberly demanding forgiveness because his first kiss had been given to a woman with false teeth; Luis speaking rapidly with blurred s's in one of his delightful, tempestuous angers.

He was, she thought, preeminently the lover about whom one dreams without much faith that he will ever come true, and he had come true for her, she told herself. Glamour and romance were made for him, but she reminded herself also, with great respect, of the simplicity and Latin directness that frequently pierced his moods. If it seemed at times that they played a fascinating game in which the prize would go to the nimblest wit, she had nevertheless recognized his underlying sincerity, and she loved him. The make-believe had realized itself.

She thought love had not proved more different from her conception than any other aspect of life. If there had been any pretense with Luis, it was pretense that deceived herself as well. That first afternoon over coffee when he exclaimed impetuously, "We have something to say to each other!" the mystery and magic of youth had surged around them, overpowering their will to speak. The next evening after dinner, strolling together in the Village, he had burst out with that amazing, unpremeditated proposal of immediate marriage. "But you have never seen me with my hat off," she protested, and removing it had lifted her face to the moonlight, laughing, as he leaned to her lips.

She recalled her apprehensive question, "What will you tell your family about me?" and the bravado of his answer: "That you're a lovely Puerto Rican girl who happened to be born in the States." A few months later, in a moment of mutual passion, they decided to get married and on their own terms. And so, on the first day of July (a few days after the peace treaty had been signed and her government job had ended), they were married at city hall. Afterwards, Muna was all sunshine, and Luis lit up a Cuban cigar. Before the evening of champagne with a small circle of friends at Mrs. Delgado's home, they bought the tickets for their honeymoon aboard the S.S. Borinquen, on the Porto Rico Line.

When their ship finally sailed into the harbor of San Juan, after three blissful days at sea on that luxury steamer, the sun was going down, and the sky was slowly going ablaze with tropical red and orange. The massive stone fortress of El Morro, built by the Spaniards for protection against attack by pirates or enemy vessels, stood high and bold on the headlands at the entrance to the broad harbor. The old Spanish town was flanked by its ancient sea wall. High above the wall were two palaces, and beside and beyond these, other houses of graceful Spanish line, with white or pastel sides, roofs of colored tile, and verandas with Moorish arches. Seeing all of this for the first time was another dream come true for Muna. To the south, a blue mountain, El Yunque, shimmered in the last rays of the sun, like a gigantic precious stone.

Luis had his arm around Muna's waist, as they stood lovingly on the ship's deck. He felt happy—happier than he had ever felt before. He watched her with great pleasure and with pride. Observing her eyes drinking in the sights of the island he was so proud of and that he had so often described to her, he thought her smile was a beautiful poem.

“Oh, Luis,” she said, “this *is* divine!”

In virtually every corner of the island, the male coqui frogs—those famous little frogs of Puerto Rico—were starting their all-night serenade, and in the twilight sky, a full moon rose over the royal palms by the pier where their ship docked. This Antillean island would become what Muna always called her rich port, and the place she called home. It was certainly where her heart always was, ever since she met Luis, and came under his spell, like a flower that follows the sun. And here they were, as husband and wife, with their first child (Munita) in her belly. Together, they were going to change the world.

With her brilliant political mind and her practical approach to life, Muna would help him to become the great man he became: the Father of Modern Puerto Rico, as the press called him, and the Poet—*el Vate*—as well. His famous campaign slogan he owed to her: “*Pan* (Bread), *Tierra* (Land), *Libertad* (Freedom)!”

Then suddenly, bringing him across the years into the present, his driver called to him with concern, “Don Luis! Sir, are you all right?” He was standing in the doorway of the hospital with a blank stare. The day had already become quite hot. He shook his head quickly to clear his thoughts, and replied “yes, yes” to assure him. He took a long deep breath and to himself he whispered her name, as he walked down the steps to his car. He returned to La Fortaleza and his official business—and to his vain second wife, Doña Inés, who long ago had stolen him from Muna, and for obvious reasons (in view of their public adultery) had put a taboo on mention of her name by him or by anyone else on the island.

Muna died in her sleep in the middle of that night. Munita was the first person to find her. With a peaceful look on her face, she was holding in her arms a leather-bound album of news clippings about Luis and his rise as a champion of his people . . .

*He is tall as a palm, is my lover.
As a flame tree, vivid is he.
Dusk and fire is his utterance;
And about and over me
Are the warm soft wings of the trade winds
That blow from the tropic sea.*



[The white marble tomb of Muna Lee, plain and unadorned, is located in the Cementerio Santa María Magdalena de Pazzis, in Old San Juan at the foot of the great lawn of El Morro, overlooking the sea. Her home was a couple of blocks away, on [Calle del Sol](#).]