

The missing letters

Lilia Ponce Duran

January 1929

JAVIER

Javier, the pianist, now is old and sick. He often goes through the alley where “Las Luciernagas” is located. It remains closed, with two thick timbers nailed as a cross on the old gate.

The sign has fallen down, it just remained hung by a corner swaying with the wind. Someday it will fall down completely and then it will go to the garbage. The man stood for a while on the opposite sidewalk, hoping to see Sue, Camila or some other of the women that worked there.

Javier had lived through the war of the Mexican Revolution apart from conflicts, playing his piano in the brothel, just observing and listening to the clientele commenting on the international complications, assaults and looting; about heroes who sacrificed themselves and people who took advantage of the circumstances. He met men who were enlisted in improvised armies and who left it to luck to which leader they should follow and obey. Javier

seemed insensitive to the horrible events of death and rape, he only cared playing his piano and sing.

In his attempt to see towards the interior of “Las Luciernagas”, he leaned on a window and, because of his good luck, it opened a little; he kept on pushing it until there was a good space to get in. Few people crossed the street, surely no one would pay attention to a homeless man seeking refuge.

He cried out of anger when he saw his piano in pieces and remembering that night in which everything was joy, screaming and laughter. Wine was served in abundance; women danced wildly, shaking their buttocks provocatively, everyone danced and sang. Couples kissed and did obscene caresses to each other.

When the soldiers entered, nobody was surprised, they thought that they had arrived with the purpose of joining the evening and having fun as many times had happened, but they began to take out their clubs and hitting everyone. They grabbed the prostitutes from their hair and shoved them up into some old cars. Few managed to flee among the the multitude that were going out frightened through wherever they could.

He saw Camila bathed in blood lying in a corner, he wanted to help her, but he was impeded by that big general of sinister smile that on several occasions had threatened to shut down her business and lock her in jail, because, according what he said, he had contracted there a terrible illness that impeded him from performing sexually successfully, as it corresponded to a male of his will.

The pianist was taken out of the brothel by pulling him and with blows with clubs, the soldiers left him almost unconscious lying on the sidewalk; Leo found him there, when he arrived hurried with the heartbroken soul, when he found out what had happened in Las Luciernagas. He helped him up, he dried the blood on his face and tried to revive him. At the moment, Javier did not remember anything, but little by little the dismal images of that night appeared in his mind. He remembered his dear Sue, she was probably hurt because he saw that she was bleeding; she struggled to get away from the gorillas, she shouted desperately: "My letters! My letters!", but she had the same fate as the other women.

The two men searched in prison, in hospitals, they asked in offices, they went through the city, but nobody knew anything.

The pianist wanted to take as a souvenir, at least, a few keys of his piano. He crawled looking for them among the rubble. It was getting dark and he could barely see. When he decided to go back home, his hand stumbled upon Sue's letter box. He recognized it because Maria del Consuelo had shown it to him several times when they had time and talked to each other the story of their lives.

Javier loved Maria del Consuelo, he loved her with all his heart, but he never dared to tell her. He knew that she was too sore for so much suffering and he preferred to remain silent and hope that with time she would forget of so many hardships.

The old pain began to bother him in the chest; he arrived to his little room and, without undressing nor take the usual coffee, he threw himself in bed to read the letters.

He rented a room in the shopkeeper's house, a rude and cruel man, accustomed to speak with vile words. He had two sons, the eldest, a soldier, was the son of his first marriage; the youngest, Leobardo, was the son of his second wife and he was always a delicate and silent young man, very similar to his mother; he lived fearful of the constant hitting and scolding that his stepfather gave to him when he forced him to help in the little shop.

The young man and Javier talked a few times, and he had suggested to visit the brothel, so the pianist was not surprised when he saw him arrive at Las Luciernagas, but when he realized that he used to frequent Sue, the claw of jealousy oppressed his heart and felt an uncontrollable desire to hit him.

The pianist already knew very well the story of that girl, but it did not matter, he wanted to read her letters and feel that he was close to her. He was short of breath, he could barely breathe, he felt very tired, he wanted to sleep because he felt his eyelids heavy. He kept the letters and hugged the box against his chest, he began falling asleep and... he died.

Two days later, Leo was the first to perceive the foul smell that came out of the room. The landlord gave notice to the police, who was in charge of breaking the door and of taking the rotten corpse wrapped in a blanket. Nobody protested, since Javier had no relatives.

Were useless the efforts made by Leo's mother to contain the curious people who were crowded together around the door of the little room; there were many bad dressed women, dirty, with the shawl on their backs. They all went in at the same time to take away the few belongings of the dead man.

Delicate hands pulled out the blue box with Sue's letters from the corpse that seemed to refuse to release it, since he hugged it with strength. Half chipped from one corner and with the lid more or less broken, it was carefully taken to a wardrobe and there it was kept between sheets and tablecloths that were smelling clean.

March 1913

Dear Remedios:

Suddenly, you vanished from my life, my sister. You and my father left like that, suddenly, I could not even say goodbye to you.

That terrible day they hid us under the bed. "whatever happens, do not move from here", the employer said. You were in the yard taking water out from the well when they arrived all together. Vociferating insults, they entered the house, emptied the barns, they took the chickens, pigs, some mules and horses. They began to take some objects from the room and the boss wanted to stop them, but they took his son Enrique, who then was twenty years old. Dad

also went along with some peons. Some went happy, they laughed nervously, I think that they imagined the wonderful changes that their life was going to have; surely they thought of the wealth and power that awaited them after joining the fight. Others, on the other hand, were reluctant to get away from their wives, their children and, between tears, promised them a soon return.

Fermin, Flora and I were going back to our hiding place under the bed, but I began to feel dizzy with the smell of the potty and the naphthalene balls that were under the mattress, so I preferred to go out and look through the window, but I only saw clouds of dust that surrounded a tumult of soldiers. Some were going horseback riding, most of them walked followed by their women loaded with the mat and cooking pots. Surely you were among them, but I could not distinguish you.

How did you fall in love with that soldier? Mom says that he was not handsome, what he was, he was young and very attentive. In the middle of all that rabble that shouted so many swearwords, he tried to behave decently and was able to convince the peons to join his troops. They all called him "Captain Salazar" and spoke to him with respect.

They were at the ranch for only five days and you went after him, fascinated, without worrying the hard life that you would have as a camp follower, without stopping to think that my mom and I were going to suffer a lot with your absence.

Don Gonzalo, the employer whose health was already delicate, with this displeasure got worse little by little. He remained laid there for a long time, with a lost look, as if he did not care about anything, and despite the attentions that his wife had for him, he died one morning. So, we stayed in the house only women: mom, the employer, Flora and me. The only men were Fermin, who was then fifteen years old, and two old peons, a little useless because of their advanced age.

Who were those assailants? Were they Zapatistas? Were they Carrancistas? Who knows, I believe that they were neither one nor the other. Perhaps it was some band that did not even know which army to join.

We did nothing but cry and pray. That way we spent many days, we almost did not talk nor ate. My mother and the employer filled the room with candles, they offered masses and rosaries and thousand things to the Holy Father, so He would do the miracle of returning their husbands and children safe and sound, but nothing! We did not see them again.

The truth, I was already tired with so many prayers. They prayed in the morning, at noon, at night. At the time when the rosaries began, Fermin and I made excuses to go out and we would go to the patio to smoke some cigarettes that Fermin brought, who knows how he used to get them, for sure he stole them from some place, because he did not have money.

Since you left, you are in my mind, little sister, I talk to you and I feel like you are here, by my side, sitting, and

together we remembered those beautiful days at the ranch, when we rode through the sunny countryside, challenging the passing of the train. You were screaming mad with happiness, but I, who was walking behind you, trembled with fear clutching tightly to your waist, until one day we were shot from a wagon. The children of the employers, Flora and Fermin, backed away quickly, but our horse was doubly loaded and a bullet hit him in one leg. There he was left lying and us too, although the scare made us recover from the blow and we ran until we reached the grove. The moon was already rising in the sky and the birds were silencing when we arrived at the ranch. We went in very silent so that no one would notice, but mom was very distressed waiting for us, and when she saw us with those looks, covered with mud and clothes in tatters, she pulled us into the house by the ears.

How I wish that one day you can read my letters so that you realize how much we miss you and you want to return to the ranch.

Kisses.

Sue

December 1913

Unforgettable sister:

Fortunately, crying calms the anguish of the heart and little by little we resigned ourselves to accept our reality. The employer regained her strength of character; mom, with her customary meekness, leaned on Mrs. Sara and seemed not to miss my father so much.

The employer thought that the best was to return to Puebla, since in those places so far away, our lives were in danger; we felt threatened by bandits and criminals who arrived suddenly near the ranch.

We went to Tecamachalco. The place where the train was supposed to stop, we waited impatiently for his arrival among a pile of boxes and suitcases. When we finally heard the whistle of the locomotive, among the smoke appeared the few wagons that pulled full of soldiers and people who were able to board in previous stations. It was impossible for us to board.

Discouraged, we returned to the ranch, and Mrs. Sara decided that we would leave in the cart. The trip was very long and tedious; the whole journey we were trembling with fear, afraid of some assault. When would we return? Who knows.

I embraced the landscape with emotion, those places where my life had passed, I took them in my heart. Deep

inside me bitterness arose, I rebelled to say goodbye to the flowery plains, with its mountains, its trees, with the herons that crossed the sky to get later to the river, there, where we loved to go swimming and watch the sunset. We laughed to see each other as orange as the water, as the sky and the clouds. I did not look away from “Los Conchos” (that is what the ranch was called; I never knew the reason of that name) until it disappeared in the distance. We made several stops to eat and rest. When we finally arrived to the city, Fermin, Flora and I were well asleep; when we woke up, we gave thanks to heaven for finishing that horrible trip.

Every day I think of you, Remedios, I remember you as you were: tall, slender, beautiful, with your black braids that reached your hip, always laughing and singing. I do not know how you learned so many songs. I hope that you have not changed a thing, so that, when I see you again, I can hear your singing, always so toned and dreamer

I want to see you already.

Maria del Consuelo

July 1914

Dear Remedios:

The mansion of the bosses – do you remember, sister? – it is in the neighborhood of La Luz, at the banks of the city. The street is wide, with hills and slopes it goes as far as the small square where the Church of “Nuestra Señora de la Luz” is.

When we were younger, we went with the bosses to Puebla and you took me as far as the temple. In the small square they sold “cocolos” (*sesame seed buns*) and hot “pambazos” (*bread roll*), very tasty. Now there is a shortage of bread vendors, the few ones that are there have to be fighting with the greedy people who want to take the merchandise without paying.

The house has a huge hallway, very resistant, but even like that, we live in constant anxiety. The troops enter and leave the city constantly, some soldiers walk peacefully, but sometimes angry mobs break glass and hit the gates because they want to enter. People lock themselves up in stone and mud and no one leaves their houses until the crowd moves away.

The basement of the house where we used to play hide and seek when we were little, is now a hiding place. Since it is in the back garden, its entrance can not be seen because the vines disguise it, and when we hear many shots, we run to protect ourselves there.

Almost at dawn, we always witness a grotesque spectacle: in the street there is garbage and dirt everywhere. Some drunks fall asleep among vomiting and urine. There is always a dead person with gunshot or dagger wounds thrown in the middle of its already dry blood full of flies.

Flora and I are forbidden to go outside to the street; few times we look out the windows. We spend the time sewing or reading, although the books that are in the house are law books and I find them very boring because I do not understand anything. The only one who goes out to the street is Fermin, also mom when she goes to get something to eat. They bring us newspapers that we read eager for news, with the desire to find some indication of life, yours and of my father or of Enrique.

It is not easy to understand this bloody war, the clashes of factions, the attacks to cities, the abuses against peaceful populations. Ones and others contradict themselves, they are assassinated with the greatest tranquility, constant changes of leaders who make a thousand promises of peace and progress, but who knows for when will it be.

We read that in Mexico are theater performances, people walk around and go out to the streets; despite the terrible situation, it seems that life goes on with certain normality. But here it is not like that; water and food are scarce, sometimes we have to drink pulque because, of course, pulquerias abound and on the streets men often pass pulling donkeys loaded with barrels of pulque that they sell quickly, because everybody buys them.

I take advantage of the time to write to you, Remedios. Fermin has been concerned with improving my reading and my spelling and every afternoon he sets me to write something, because he says that I have a terrible handwriting. Now, when you read my letters, you will understand me better.

When will that be?

I embrace you.

Maria del Consuelo

January 1915

Sister of mine:

The carrancistas have entered the city. People try to be careful, they commit many injustices and outrages. When someone calls their attention or does not pay attention to their foolishness, they pretend that they are contraries to the carrancismo and they mistreat them, worse for him if he protests, because he is sent to the jail of San Juan de Dios which, according to people, it is such a filthy place that it is preferable to die than to be imprisoned in there. That is why, when soldiers stop at our door and they knock it, instead of going out and complaining, we hide in the basement of the house until they leave.

The other day, after several weeks of relative calm, we were awakened by the insistent ringing of the bell, calling us to mass. We were all encouraged to go out, since it seemed a quiet day. We left our confinement and we walked to church. The street seemed beautiful to us with its houses very clean; some workshops of artisans who make nice things in clay were opened. We all laughed and talked loudly, greeting everyone as if we had a lot of time knowing each other. In front of the Church were the bread vendors with their huge baskets on improvised tables, full of pambazos, cemites and cocoles, whose delicious smell floated up to our nose.

The Virgin of the Light, in the tile façade of the temple, smiled at us as if she wanted to calm the sorrows and anxieties experienced during this harsh war. We were happy, we walked along the riverbank and sat under the shade of the trees. The breeze seemed delicious to us after so many days of confinement.

At dusk, when the lanterns were lit, the unmistakable proclamation of the mueganero was heard: “La tri, la Pue, mueganos, mueganos!” it had been a long time since we heard it and we ran out to buy those delicious sweets. We were so happy to have had such a beautiful day that we forgot to lock the gate and close the windows. Suddenly, we heard a lot of shouting, we saw armed men running from one side to another, pushing each other, insulting each other with laughter and spits. We barely had time to get to the basement. With their horses they pushed the gate and entered up to the living-room. My mother stayed in the

kitchen because she was preparing dinner. Poor mom! She had to endure the impertinences and foolishness of those savages. They broke mirrors and furniture, they lay down on our beds as they were, all filthy and sweaty, full of dirt.

We felt them very close because some of them went out into the garden to urinate and defecate.

Flora and I were hidden by the boss, between things and accessories of the corners, and she ordered us not to talk nor move from there. We cried out of fear and tiredness from being in the same position for so long. We were falling asleep, when shots of bullets were heard and a loud voice that shouted:

- Everyone get out of here, this house is for me! So get out! I do not want to see any slut nor a fucking drunk man! And you are going to clean this mess that you have left! Fast or here you die!...

Once more shots of bullets.

- Yes, my commander, to the moment – it was heard with a drunken and sleepy voice.

Racing noise, curses and then... silence.

Someone closed the doors and placed the bars. What were we going to do? Surely some soldier would take over the house. The anguish closed our throats and we did nothing but pray silently.

- Boss, Mrs. Sara! – shouted mom –. Come here, come and see who is here!

We ran out of the basement and in the living-room we found a robust soldier with mustache who was none other

than Enrique. Mrs. Sara was crying out of emotion hugging her beloved son.

Enrique brought meat and cakes, and that night we had dinner as we had not done it for a long time. And he stayed with us in the mansion of La Luz. He told us that he had passed by the ranch and that he found it very neglected, producing just a little of what was sown there. The old foreman told him that we were in Puebla, and fortunately he arrived when we needed him the most. With him here, we no longer are so afraid nor hungry. We almost do not go out, now it is not because of fear of the soldiers, but because there are many tramps and hungry beggars who assault even for a bread.

Enrique had risen rapidly in the army. Since he knew how to read and write very well, he almost did not work on the battlefields, he rather carried out administrative tasks, he prepared charts and agreements, he answered the correspondence and he became indispensable among his superiors. He told us that, when they were enlisted, he stayed with my dad for a while, but then they separated and each one went to a different regiment. About you, Remedios, he did not bring any news, he said that he did not see you again. We love to hear the stories that Enrique narrates about the battles. At an early hour, we close the doors and sat in the living room to listen to the episodes, so gruesome, splashed with blood and death.

I close my eyes and it seems to me to see you running among the bullets, loading a rifle next to your man. Oh,

little sister! I can imagine what you are going through living as a camp follower.

Kisses you.

Sue

October 1915

Remedios of my heart:

Many months have passed since we arrived to Puebla, I have grown too much, now I am fifteen years old and I think that I am very beautiful. The color of my eyes is quite weird. As people say, they are light blue with green tones that attract a lot of attention. Enrique looks at me insistently; I see the desire in his eyes. He has the habit of approaching to me silently and I feel his agitated breathing on my neck; I am afraid of him and I do not separate myself from Flora or mom when he is present. The piano in the living-room is not abandoned anymore, because Mrs. Sara plays it very well and she is also very toned, she wakes us up in the morning with some very nice songs, although some are too sad. She sings one that goes:

They say that the dead rest calmly,
That there is no suffering in the other mansion.
That if the body dies, never dies the soul.
And that is the one who loves you with crazy passion.

Poor lady, surely she misses her husband too much; mom tells me that they loved each other very much. My mother also suffers from the absence of my father, but I think that she has resigned herself sooner than Mrs. Sara.

But leaving behind so many atrocities, the boss, already more comforted, decided to return to the ranch. We were surprised by her decision and integrity and we obeyed without hesitation, all of them, except Fermin, who wanted to continue studying and preferred to stay although he promised to visit us frequently.

Good thing that we returned to Los Conchos, I already missed this beautiful place; now, there are many swallows nesting in the eaves of the house. At nightfall, a multitude of fireflies invade the field turning their lights on and off as if they were tiny little lights. I fall asleep joyful, lulled by the continuous croaking of the frogs.

Mrs. Sara runs the ranch with iron hand, but everyone loves her and respects her; she knows the names of each of the peons, she knows if they are married or not, how many children they have and she cares about the children going to school, although it is too far away from them.

Enrique leaves by seasons, and on his return he treats us as if we were soldiers of his regiment; he brought us rifles, pistols and enough bullets to teach us how to shoot. We spent many hours practicing target shooting; he trains us on how to make trenches, we crawl quickly, stuck to the ground, crawling like snakes. We learned to dodge bullets by running in a zigzag or by doing turnings in the air; we increased our skill to ride and to hang with skill on one side

of the horse's belly, as to hide. The boss laughs at all that and assures that training is not necessary anymore, because the country is calm and we will never be soldiers.

"Who knows, mother, who knows. We still cannot be calm, things can change", Enrique assures.

Dear sister, I must tell you something terrible and painful: the other night I was in the kitchen finishing up the dishes, when Enrique entered very drunk. He stumbled over me and started kissing me in the mouth, which were rather bites and not kisses; he squeezed my breasts furiously and imprisoned me against the wall. I was struggling to get away, but he crushed me on the wall and pulled my clothes off. I tried to scream, but with his mouth on mine I could not do it. He opened his pants and I felt how he separated my legs with brusqueness; blood began to wet my clothes. At that time, I saw that the boss and Fermin came in, but after that I did not hear anything else. When I woke up, I was in bed, and Dr. Alejandro was with me. He injected me and prescribed me a lot of cleanliness and rest.

Alejandro is very handsome. Since that day, he comes often pretending that he does it to prescribe me, but the truth is that he comes to see Flora who has become very beautiful and she is very happy when she sees him arriving.

I know that everything has changed for me, that I will never be a worthy and respected woman. The boss is silent, she loves us a lot, but Enrique is her son. Mom does not know what to do, she says that it is best to leave that house, but it is difficult for her to separate from those people who for so many years have been our only family; besides,

where would we go? We do not know anyone; we do not have a house or anything.

Thinking of getting rid of the responsibility of marriage, Enrique decided to leave; I hope it will be forever. Mrs. Sara was very sad, but she thought that it was the best. She did not dare to throw us out of the house. In the bottom of my heart I thanked her, even knowing that I had been the victim. It took me a long time to recover, I thought that I would never be able to have children, but Alejandro got me out of doubt by giving me a thousand scientific explanations about virginity and fertilization.

Oh, Remedios, if you were with me in these difficult times you would console me with the usual patience and together we would look for the most adequate solution.

Come back, Remedios, come back.

Sue

May 1916

Dear sister:

Fermin is still studying in Puebla because he wants to be a great lawyer. He comes to the ranch frequently and at night he visits my bedroom. When we are lying down, he makes me promises of marriage. He asks me for patience, because he must finish his career first.

To all this I am quiet, I do not protest or anything like it. Very inside me I feel as if Fermin was doing me a favor in order to decrease his bother's guilt. And it happened what had to happen: I am pregnant. Neither mom nor the boss imagined our night encounters, so Fermin, full of bravery, told everything to Mrs. Sara; she said nothing, but in her face the disappointment and the rage was foreseen.

Mother and son promised to take care of the creature, but nobody talked about marriage. His mother defended him saying that he was still too young to take responsibility. Then, Fermin asked me to go see a lady who, giving you I do not know what concoctions, could cause a miscarriage. Of course, I did not accept and he got quite upset, because he had the excuse that because he was studying it would be very difficult for him to keep his promise. I, as always, kept silent, without defending myself, without protesting, without demanding anything. Just by crying I comfort myself a little. How silly I am, am I not worth anything?

Flora tries to cheer me up. She talks to me about motherhood, about pregnancy; she also promises to support me at all times, I appreciate it very much, but I see her so devoted to her courtship, so happy in making plans for the future, that I doubt very much that she has time for me.

With so many problems that have arisen, mom has deteriorated a lot. I see her discouraged, tired, very rarely communicates with me and spends many hours crying locked in her room.

I would like to leave here, I would like to go and look for you. I am thinking it with insistence, I think that I should plan it very well.

Please, do not be surprised at my relationship with Fermin. Someday I will write you how it all happened, but now I do not want to do it because I feel embarrassed.

In each letter that I write to you, the desire to know where are you, is hidden in order to be able to send it to you, so you can know that there still shines in my whole being a little light of hope that calms my bitterness.

Fondly.

Sue

June 1917

Sister:

Mexico City appears in my mind as an obsession. It terrifies me to get to know it, but at the same time the desire to go, to be there, grows in me. How will I find you? Where to look for you?

I always keep the money that Fermin gives to me to buy clothes for the baby, waiting for the opportune moment to leave, but for now, all my plans fell down because mom got suddenly sick. Alejandro says that her heart is already very tired and he recommended her a lot of rest. I had to help in the chores that corresponded to her

and the months went by and I was getting fat, very fat. My belly was huge at six months of pregnancy, my feet were swollen, my hair fell, my feet hurt... But I do not want to continue telling you so many calamities, my dear Remedios, because if I talk about them it is as if I revived them. Mrs. Sara had to call other women from the ranch to help me with the tasks, since I could hardly move.

Flora and Alejandro are preparing their coming wedding and they are very happy. They will live in Tehuacan, where he has his doctor's office. Alejandro was attending me all the time, because he assured that I was not healthy and that I should have surgery when the birth was already close.

When little Rogelio was born, I could not see him until after three weeks because I was delirious, with very high fevers, half unconscious. In my moments of lucidity, I thought that I was going to die without knowing my son. Mrs. Sara looked for a wet nurse who fed my baby while I was recovering. When Fermin carried the baby he looked scared; I think that he thought that the boy was going to become an orphan of mom. On the other hand, the grandmothers went crazy with joy, they have taken care of the baby while I recovered my health. My mom even got up from bed and forgot about her illness, she did not leave the side of the crib looking at the little creature with rapture.

The arrival of Nemesia has comforted me a little. She is a young, tall and very robust woman. Immediately she devoted herself to attend me, she helped me move, to bathe. She taught me how to change the baby, how to feed

him, how to put him to sleep and she is teaching me how to sew the diapers and to weave small clothes.

Neme is a good company, she speaks little and, therefore, I do not know much about her life. She told me that she lived in Mexico City at the time when President Madero was assassinated and she saw many of the horrors that happened in the capital. She had a daughter who died recently, I do not know from what disease. I insist her a lot to describe me how is Mexico City, thanks to her I know about some of its streets, I know few buildings, also sightseeing and gardens. In my crazy mind, I can already see myself walking through those places carrying my little son and with you by the arm, Remedios. I wish it were true.

I had the intention of talking to Neme about my plans and inviting her to leave with me, but I held back because I still did not have enough confidence and I feared that she would tell Mrs. Sara, who quietly approached in silence to listen to what we were talking about.

I am firm in my plans to go to Mexico, I try to be patient so that my strength does not escape from me and I can be able to do them.

Maria del Consuelo

May 1918

Remedios:

Flora's wedding was very nice, that is what my mom tells me because I could not go, because I was convalescent and I had to take care of the baby. Flora looked beautiful dressed as a bride. I envy her, since I will never be able to live those moments which women long for. I console myself with my baby who is healthy and more beautiful every day.

It was approximately one year that mom was with her grandchild fully, after, her illness kept her constantly bedridden. I had to forget about my escape plans so I could take care of her and also the baby.

One afternoon, by the way very beautiful and calm, bathed in sunshine, mom stopped my hand when I was fixing her pillows and, with a voice that could hardly hear, she said: "Maria del Consuelo, forgive me, forgive me for being so weak, so dumb, forgive me for placing you on this path of suffering. God knows that I, like all mothers, would have wanted something different, something better for you, but I am leaving sure that you have enough strength to overcome so many calamities".

I kissed her flabby hand and she fell asleep little by little, she seemed calm. The scent of the jasmine had invaded the bedroom and the birds that returned to the nest seemed to be saying goodbye with their unstoppable trills. That night we kept vigil over her and the next day, in

the cart full of flowers that the peons had brought, we took her to the distant cemetery.

As expected, both, Mrs. Sara and I, and the servants spent many days missing her, it was hard for us to get used to her absence. Fermin came to the funeral, he was close to me all the time, but hardly spoke to me. He played with the baby, he carried and cooed him, but with me he was cold and indifferent. The boss blamed me for it and accused me of being unfair and ungrateful. What does this lady believe? Why can not she understand that I am the victim?

In the end, I began to think that Fermin had been good and understanding. I tried to change; when he arrived, I covered him with attention. That way the nights of feigned passion returned and I got pregnant again.

This time the pregnancy was very different, I did not gain a lot of weight nor I was ailing. Thanks to Dr. Alejandro, who attended me since the beginning, the birth was normal but very painful, like all births. My little girl Leonor looks a lot like her dad; small and thin, she inherited his huge and dreamy eyes. He has come more often, we talk a lot and, strangely enough, he tells me about his plans for when he finishes his career. He is working with a group of lawyers and later on he will open a law firm, but he never talks about marriage.

Little sister, I am so sorry that I let the months go by without writing to you. The truth, sometimes I think I am losing the hope of seeing you again. Now, with two children, I feel more distant the possibility of leaving, but that does

not mean that I have forgotten you, on the contrary, I always think of you.

Sue

November 1919

Adored Reme:

I preferred to renounce to every moment of pleasure than to risk myself to a new pregnancy, although with it the relationship with Fermin became increasingly distant. Mrs. Sara has totally hogged my children. As if she was the mother, she attends them at all times; the kids adore her and little coexist with me, because the domestic tasks absorb me. At night I am exhausted, I just want to sleep.

When Fermin arrives at Los Conchos, he brings many gifts, clothes and toys for the children. He does not forget to give his mother a present, but for me there is never an attention nor a loving word, much less a gift.

Fermin has made a lot of progress in his profession, now he is a great lawyer. He has a car that with thousand difficulties can get to the ranch, since the roads are nothing more than open gaps in the middle of the grass or on the banks of the fields. Whenever he comes, he takes Mrs. Sara and the children for a walk; sometimes they go visit Flora to Tehuacan or their relatives who live in nearby towns and

they take several days to return. When leaving, they give me a thousand commissions, but they never invite me to go with them and I do not open my mouth to protest. When I am alone, I have time to ride, I like to do it, I have enough practice and skill.

One afternoon, I stopped by the river. While my horse quenched the thirst, I watched the pale gloom of the afternoon as it fell and, thinking of you, Remedios, revived in my being the desire to go to meet you. So absorbed was I that I did not notice the presence of a rider until he dismounted and approached to me. He was a mature man, about fifty years old, a little fat and very tall. He introduced himself as Esteban Arias. He told me that temporarily he was living in Tecamachalco, he was hired to plan highway that would connect Puebla with Tehuacan, because there was only one horrible road full of holes that, in the rainy season, it became an impassable quagmire.

His conversation was pleasant and cordial, I felt very comfortable, but the afternoon light began to disappear with surprising rapidity and I had to return home in a hurry. It became a habit to find ourselves by the river in the afternoons. Our relationship was sincere, peaceful, without the uncertainty of sex. The confidences were arising without thinking, and soon we already knew enough about the life of the other. Esteban was married, his family lived in Mexico, he had a wife and two grown children. I confided him my restlessness to go to the capital, he did not discourage me: "Wait a little, Sue, my break is close and I want to see my family, then I will take you with me. You can

stay at my house with my wife while we investigate the whereabouts of your sister”.

Oh, Remedios, hope again illuminated my heart, the desire to fight for my happiness was reborn. I save all the money that comes to my hands and I even sing while I cook or while I wash.

Mrs. Sara looks at me with malice. When I go out riding, she asks me with irony where am I going and it does not take long for her to fill me with chores to avoid my leavings. I do not care; I continue with my plans. Fortunately, Esteban knows my situation and knows very well the cause of my absences: I try to go see him, although less frequently.

On one occasion, I realized that a peon was following me when I was riding, surely Mrs. Sara sent him, but I know several paths and I was able to mislead him.

Remedios, maybe the time is soon when we will see each other again.

I am dying of impatience.

Sue

May 1920

Reme:

So many years of living in Los Conchos and I did not know Tecali, that from here is as distant as Tecamachalco.

Esteban took me one day on one of our long walks, we wandered fascinated by the workshops where the onyx is worked, estimated for its transparency and varied colors. How many things there are! It seems as if in those marbles the dawn or the rays of the sun were portrayed. Esteban bought for me a yellow piggy-shaped piggy bank and a blue box in which all the letters that I have written to you can fit well, they have to be handled with great care, they are resistant, but they can be broken. I took advantage of the trip to say goodbye to this land where I was born, from this landscape that knows my life, my dreams, my sorrows and joys. It was rainy season and a burst of colors adorned the field. The sunflowers, being so many, looked like lilac colored carpets and folded their corollas following the afternoon sun; the wonders of different shades, red, yellow, blue and pink, abounded on the roadsides or in the fields. I breathed deeply to fill my body with energy of that country air that I would soon stop feeling, since Esteban's vacation days were about to arrive after a very long wait.

The ranch prospered thanks to the good organization and work from the peons who are honest and hardworking. Then, Mrs. Sara began to worry and to think very seriously about living in Puebla for good. Fermin got furious when he heard his mother's decision:

- The children are very happy here – he protested – they grow up healthy and happy. Why change their environment? Besides, the house is a mess, it will take a long time to fix it.

- Look, son – the boss answered –, it is time now for me to fix some issues pending. I have not felt well lately, also, we have to think about the children. Here the school is far away and they will have to study some day.

I did not worry about Mrs. Sara's decision, I had warned Esteban that sooner or later that would happen. Fortunately, I took the precaution of giving him the address of the house in Puebla. We were both very happy, because from that city it would be easier to leave for Mexico.

Despite everything, Fermin could not dissuade the boss and we marched to the city of Puebla. Neme got a good team of servants believing that we would have a lot of work to arrange the house, but to our surprise, we found it impeccable, very clean, with new curtains and full of flowers. The garden was impressive, the grass cut and the plants well arranged. We thought that Fermin wanted to surprise us, but he had left the city and he took several weeks to return.

Two days after our arrival, a car stopped in front of the entrance hall and a very well groomed lady descended. She was small and thin, but very pretty, with delicate features and large green eyes. She came in with a lot of familiarity and was surprised to see us there.

- With whom I have the pleasure? – she asked.
- I am the mother of Fermin and this is his wife (surprise) – said the lady pointing at me.

The young woman stared at us without speaking. At last she threw away the packages she was carrying and ran off.

When Fermin returned, he did not speak to me, he locked himself in his room and, when he came out, he tried not to see me.

Mrs. Sara demanded me not to reproach him nor ask for explanations, because soon everything would pass. I obeyed, as always, without asking for any clarification, but inside me, I felt furious with myself for being so weak in character. I was relieved to know that Esteban would soon come for me. Impatience had me tense. Every time that someone knocked on the door, I would rush out to open it. Neme soon realized my uneasiness; she constantly chased me and harassed me with questions. I ended up giving in to her insistence. I committed the foolishness of entrusting my plans, I thought that it was convenient to have an ally in case there were difficulties when it was time to leave. Days passed, months passed and Esteban did not appear. I was already deciding to leave without him, but fear stopped me: would I take my children? Where would I go? I wanted to know how much money I had, but when I looked for the piggy bank, it had disappeared. It so happened that in those days Neme had left the house. On several occasions, I saw her whispering mysteriously with the boss. What am I going to do, Remedios? I have to turn back all my plans and start over. How long will I resist?

I have stopped writing to you..., I do not even know why. Maybe because I have already lost hope that you are alive or maybe because I end up so tired after doing the daily tasks or maybe because the sadness has killed my spirit.

Esteban never appeared, or if he came, I did not realize. It may have happened that Mrs. Sara opened the door and did not allow him to see me.

Sometimes I dream that time is like the wind, that as it sweeps the streets in a wild race, it also stops to sleep among the trees and I stop time in my arms and I can go back to the past, to the happy days that I lived by your side, little sister.

Loves you

Maria del Consuelo

May 1925

Dear Remedios:

The afternoon is over, the air breaks with a few drops of rain more and more abundant. The heavy shower washes the narrow sidewalks and people run to refuge wherever they can. I try to write to you to tell you something about my life although I know that this letter, like the previous ones, will not know where to send it.

Soon I will hear the voice of Camila calling me to come down to serve customers who, despite the rain, are arriving little by little. Why am I here? Why I do not leave? I can do it, nobody will stop me, I can go out whenever I want, but I do not do it, why?

I do not want to describe to you how this place is. Despite the joy and shamelessness that it seems, each one of us who work here has a sad history full of suffering, sometimes it is a tragic story through death and misery. It is hard to believe that we have adapted to this life in which humiliations reduce your spirit and break the body, in which sometimes there are blows and insults.

When we lived on the ranch, the bosses treated us very well despite being the children of their servants. Since we had been born there, they let us play with their children and take classes with the teacher who arrived every afternoon up to Los Conchos. There were sometimes distinctions and refusals, especially when there were visits and we had to help mom to serve and attend to them. But, in spite of everything, we lived in peace. Dad told us that he had been lucky enough to find a job there: it was not a very large ranch, the salary was insufficient, but the bosses were generous. He told us that previously they lived in an Hacienda, back in the Sierra of Puebla, where they were treated very badly, almost like slaves; fortunately, they were able to flee and get here.

When we grew up, the young people of the house could enjoy my body, and the boss did not give importance to it. My mother, with her silence, seemed to accept it. Then, the mark of the servitude that has always accompanied me and that I have accepted as an inevitable destiny prevailed in my mind and in my heart.

Already, the cries of Camila begin: "Sue, at what time do you come down? I need you here".

The bells of the church throw their last sounds, slow, clamorous. The few lights that illuminate the sign of the entrance are lit: Las Luciernagas, some half-erased letters can hardly be seen, the door is rickety and broken with so many hits and kicks that it receives daily. When we close, we have to lock it tightly so that the drunks do not end up knocking it down.

I cry, I scream, I despair, but I am not leaving. Why? Is it fear? Is it shame? I do not know, I do not understand what is inside my head, I can not clarify the darkness of my soul. Sometimes, I go for a walk in the streets, I walk among people feeling that they observe me with contempt, but it is not true, they do not even see me. I arrive at the house where my children live, it is the same house of the bosses, there where we spent many days of our childhood, the same one that sheltered us in the long months of war. It has the same wide and heavy entrance hall, but now it is painted the same as the façade, it has an elegant golden bell to call from outside.

When I am able to see them, the desire to run and embrace them wakes up in me, to tell them that I am their mother, to shout them that I am innocent of this involuntary separation, but I do not, I stop, I hide myself so they do not see me. I watch them always go very clean, very well groomed, they go to school accompanied by a young nanny, still thin and low in stature, who never stops talking with them.

This time, Camila is banging on the door:

- What do you think, Sue? At what time are you coming down?
- I am coming – I answer with reluctance – I am preparing the clothes.

I try to be groomed as best as I can. When I see myself in the mirror, I see that my flesh is still firm and that, despite the sadness, my light blue eyes brighten my face.

I hate myself, I hate myself for being a coward, for not having the courage to defend myself, for not confronting Fermin and overcoming the fear of him, by knowing that he is such an important lawyer in this city.

When I arrived here, driven by hunger and cold, Camila hired me to do the cleaning and help in the kitchen in exchange for roof and food, but then she changed her mind and asked me to leave, unless I wanted to work like the others. What was I going to do? Where would I go? I did not know anyone and I needed money. I accepted thinking that it would not be so difficult, but it has not been that way. Fortunately, because of my coldness and reluctance, I have few customers. Camila constantly scolds me, she asks me to be more affectionate, more sensual, more passionate. She warned me that if I do not change, she will throw me out. I do not care. I have some money saved which I intend to use to go looking for you, but where? How will I find you, Remedios, how?

Maria del Consuelo

November 1925

My Remedios:

My life has changed a lot since those painful events that made me leave the house. It was a hot and dry afternoon, I did not know where to go, I had little money and I bought some loaves to mitigate hunger. I was wandering aimlessly with my heart aching from impotence and injustice. At nightfall, I went in to the atrium of a little church and there I stayed all night, huddled in a corner while crying without stopping not even for a moment.

Very early, the doors of the temple were opened and I was able to enter to pray and calm my sorrow. A lady who was cleaning approached to me to ask what was the cause of my anguish; without answering to her, I asked her for information about someone who could occupy me as a servant. She hesitated a little, but right away she informed me that in Las Luciernagas they needed a person to do the cleaning; I already imagined that it was a brothel, but oh well, I had to work.

The owner of the place, Camila, was already awake giving instructions to the cook; she is a slightly fat woman and low in stature, with blond curly hair, large dark circles around her small greenish vivacious eyes.

“Are you coming because of the job?”, she asked. Without quitting smoking, she put the broom and mop in my hands giving me instructions on how she wanted the house to be cleaned. The place was very dirty, full of

cigarette butts, some bottles of wine all over the floor and also some spits; oh well, I had to get to work.

I found later that Camila is a four-time widow, all her husbands have died mysteriously. As the pianist told me, the last one died from a blow with a potty which had broken his head. The potty should have been of lead or something extremely heavy in order to cause death. In those days, the confusion of the war and the unexpected battles had gained strength, the city was paralyzed and nobody wanted to be investigating scenes of jealousy. Besides, Camila had many acquaintances in the legal profession so that she, who had thrown the potty with all her strength from the second floor, was beyond suspicion.

Javier, the pianist, is tall and thin, a little old; he pummels the piano without mercy with discordant sounds that animate those evenings of madness and sex. But when there are no people, he plays pretty melodies, some very sad accompanied by his vibrant and in tuned voice; I listened to him when I used to clean the brothel. He played a tango that, according to him, it reached his soul and mine too.

Smoke buddy, smoke and let's chat.
And while you smoke, we will remember
that, like the cigarette smoke,
already the youth is leaving us

Why would Fermin have done this to me?

It had a long time without him speaking to me, cold and indifferent during the few minutes that we were

together. He constantly went out at night, probably to some party, because I heard him arrive half drunk.

When I used to go to bed, I would leave the door opened in case he wanted to go back to my bed and I fell asleep waiting for him. One night, I was asleep and I felt a body slide under the sheets, he fell asleep next to me, but I did not dare to approach him, although I still liked him, because after all, he was the father of my children. I thought that I was dreaming, but no, there he was, snoring very weird. I was going to turn on the lamp, when the door opened and Fermin came in: "Fucking slut!", he shouted turning on the light and approaching to the bed to hit me. The man next to me got up quickly, he was fully dressed and he ran without being hit.

I was the one surprised, who could not understand what was happening. Fermin dragged me by the hair, he kicked me and threw me out of the house warning me not to go back.

My children were sitting on the stairs in their nightclothes, they were crying but they did not come near me. His looked seemed full of hatred and reproach. I wanted to hug them, explain to them that it was a farce, a lie, but Fermin prevented me, he carried them and took them in his car. He yelled at me that he did not want to see me at his return. And Mrs. Sara? Where was she? Why did not she appear with the scandal that she surely heard?

How much I regret that you were not close, dear Remedios, you would have advised me, you would have

helped me to be strong and to face Fermin, even if he is a great lawyer.

I hug you.

Sue

February 1926

Sister of my heart:

In these days, Las Luciernagas remained closed. I ignore what was the problem Camila had; yesterday I heard screams from a client who threatened to go to the authorities and sue her and close down the brothel. She left early, very well groomed and recommended us not to look out of the place nor open the door to anyone.

I spent the time ordering the letters that I have written to you, I keep them safe in the box of onyx which Esteban gave me, waiting for an opportunity to send them to you.

The other day a very young student arrived, he felt scared and did not dare to take me. We better started talking and he told me that his stepfather makes fun of him because he has not had sex with any woman. He says to him: fag, little man, and a thousand more adjectives. I calmed him down and told him that little by little we would try; he thanked me gladly and promised to return frequently. Poor, he is very thin, that is why in his face his eyes stand out with a look of tenderness and fear; they

moved me so much that, unwittingly, Fermin's face came to my mind. He was like that, very thin, and in his eyes there was always a pious look full of love. I have not forgotten that afternoon when he returned from Puebla, he embraced me and took me to the garden. He made a crown with white and perfumed jasmine and with it he adorned my head; then, he took out a little ring that he put on my finger, while he kissed me on the mouth. His serene eyes saw me with love (or would it be compassion?).

"Now you are my wife – he said –, we are already married, tell me you accept." At first, I thought that it was a joke, an innocent game, like when we were little kids and we played that we were dad and mom, but it was not like that, really, Fermin believed he was my husband, because when he arrived to the ranch he would spend the nights in my bed. I accepted him resigned, making efforts to be happy, but I did not love him as to be his wife, although I thought that it was the best after what had happened with Enrique. I thought that as a dishonored woman, I had no other option.

The student has returned several nights to Las Luciernagas, which has already reopened after a week of break. His name is Leobardo, but I call him Leo, he seems to be losing his shyness and he is daring more each time. We spent a lot of time talking, with the consequent displeasure of Camila, for whom time is money. The other night she came so angry to my room that she almost shoved poor Leo out of the way, who very scared looked at me pleadingly to help him. Furious, Camila let in my room a drunken soldier

who supposedly was a commander of the constitutionalist army. Fortunately, in the first moves he fell asleep, snoring loudly and occupying the whole bed. I had to end the night lying on a mat shivering with cold. This time Camila did not protest about the delay, because I knew that the commander had paid a lot of money to enjoy from my attentions. Remedios, sister, despite the years gone by, your image has not gone from my mind. Why do not you come? Have you forgotten me? Please, give me a sign that you are alive.

Maria del Consuelo

October 1926

Beloved Reme:

Leo goes to the brothel very often and I tremble with emotion when I see him arrive. He has changed a lot, he is not so shy anymore, now he is passionate and very tender, he caresses me very carefully, as if he was going to break me, he speaks to me very quietly, almost touching my ear and his words are always sweet and flattering. I feel happy, I extend the time that I can be with him, I enjoy a lot his young body, slim and firm. When he is over me, I feel like I am going to heaven, I think that this cruel world does not exist, I forget everything from the past and I wish those moments would never end.

I resist to fall in love. Leo is much younger than me, I do not know how many years, because I have not asked him his age. I get very upset when it takes a while for him to come, I keep looking at the door and when he appears, we both run to meet, we hug, we kiss and we do not want to be separated anymore. Camila looks at us with anger, she insists that I should attend to more clients, but she is satisfied when Leo gives her enough money and then she stops bothering. Neither Javier, the pianist, looks kindly on Leo. The other day, very upset, he said to him that he was going to accuse him with his stepfather, but the student ignored him. Leo confessed to me that, on his own, he sells some merchandise from the store without his stepfather finding out. He is careful hiding them, before the old man can write them on his list; that way he can save money to pay Camila. He believes that his mother has already discovered his thefts, but he trusts that she will keep the secret. He rarely talks about her, but when he does, his big eyes are clouded with tears. He told me that the lady never talks about his birth. It seems that the father ignored her pregnancy and she had to face alone the wrath of her family who repudiated her. She had no choice but to accept the proposition of marriage from the shopkeeper who had wanted to go out with her for a long time.

What would God be thinking about when he created the woman? Why did he oppress us with so many prejudices? Chastity, dishonor, virginity. How many locks did the creator put on us in order to be happy! Would it be

God or is it just the mind of the man, of the male, of the macho, of the religion and of society itself?

Last night, Leo and I were very happy talking and having a drink, when the general arrived, the same one that I had already told you about who sued Camila. He was half drunk and started once again with his threats: "On me it will depend that this brothel disappears!", he shouted at the same time as he was firing towards the ceiling. Fortunately, there were other soldiers (I did not know what rank) and they were able to stop him by inviting him more drinks, until he was completely drunk and he stayed, drooling, well asleep on an armchair.

It is horrible. I see him as a dark demon, with little eyes like stripes and, in addition, pockmarked; his hair is too short, it bristles comically, especially when he gets angry.

Oh, Remedios, hopefully he would die in some battle, because although we forget about him, when he arrives and threatens us, we end up very restless, thinking about what is going to be of us. As I heard, he has many friends in the government and they appreciate him a lot because in the combats he is distinguished by his bravery and courage. Leo reassures me with his words full of love and optimism. He tells me that he is already arranging the things to get me out of here, what things will they be? I do not even want to think about it, it is not fair that we fall in love. Leo is very young, very decent and, despite his shyness, he has studied a lot. And what am I? A...

I love you.

Sue

May 1927

Reme:

Walking with Leo I have had the opportunity to know Puebla. One day a week he goes to Las Luciernagas for me and we go out to walk the streets of the city. At first I was ashamed to be seen by his arm, but he remains indifferent when people observe us, and just like that, he takes me by the hand everywhere.

According to him, Puebla is one of the most beautiful cities of our country, with a wonderful climate that makes it prosperous and happy.

We strolled through its gardens full of flowers, with fresh trees, such as Paseo Bravo, Paseo Hidalgo. We found a very nice colonial fountain at the beginning of La Paz Avenue, which was donated by the Spanish government on the occasion of the Centennial of our Independence.

I do not know how many churches we got to know, they are so many; we always sat in the atrium to contemplate its majestic towers and listen to the sonorous bronze of its bells. The church that I liked the most is the one of the Company, it is huge. Everyone says, that there are buried the remains of the Eastern princess that gave origin to the legend of the China Poblana.

We also visited many buildings, some very old. From the roof of one of them we could see almost the entire city, and in the distance we could see the impressive volcanoes that offered an incredible panorama.

I loved walking the street where the sweets shops abound: nun sighs, cannoli, pine nut pancakes, and exquisite sweet potatoes, whose adornments look like true laces.

In the portals of the Plaza de Armas there is a pastry shop, whenever we go there we sit down to eat delicious pastries while the bells of the Cathedral sounded, which is a wonderful monument. The other afternoon, after tasting the famous “nevaditos” of Mr. Hermilo, we walked down a wide street, under an intensely blue sky. Without knowing why, we stopped at the entrance of a building that caught out attention because of its tile façade. It could be read in a gold plaque: Lic. Fermin Mendizabal, lawyer. This time I did not stop. Without thinking, I entered and went up the stairs to the first floor. I stood in front of a very elegant cedar door that had the same name with brass letters. Leo kept trying to stop me, but I ignored him and pushed the door hard, before the surprise of the employees who worked there.

- Mr. Mendizabal? – I asked.
- Lawyer Fermin is out of the city – said a bald man with thick lenses.
- And when will he come back? – I insisted.
- We do not know, he changed his office to another city.

Leo took me by the arm and forced me to go out of there:

- What are you doing? – he asked me.
- I wanted everyone to know what their splendid lawyer has done to me. I wanted to scream at him that he has taken away my children, I wanted...
- Stop it! – Leo shouted –. Fortunately, he was not there, otherwise he could have charged you for raising false.
- What are you saying? You know well that these are not lies – I replied.
- Yes, I know, but, who is going to believe you? It would be his word against yours.
- The word of a prostitute?
- I did not mean that – Leo replied very ashamed.

I staggered out of anger and I asked him to go to the mansion of La Luz. When we arrived there, my knees were shaking, but I did not hesitate to bang at the door until they opened it. Finally, an old man appeared who, as he said, he was taking care of the house since Fermin had left to another city.

- To what city? – I asked.
- I do not know – he said –, it seems that to Mexico, he left with his wife and children; sometimes he comes to bring me money and look around the house.
- Did not he go to the ranch, to Los Conchos?
- No, the ranch was sold when Mrs. Sara died – who are you? Why do you ask so much?

I did not answer, I turned around and took the arm that Leo was offering me. Silent, we returned to Las Luciernagas. I said goodbye to him hastily, I just wanted to get to my room and cry; I cried a lot until I let out the pain and anger that I was feeling. Thinking about you, dear Remedios, I fell asleep.

Maria del Consuelo

December 1927

Little sis:

This Christmas we did not want to work. We had spent the previous Christmas attending to customers like every night, but this time we asked Camila to let us enjoy a different Christmas Eve.

We did not open the gate even though some men knocked the door with insistence. The cook prepared us an exquisite stuffed turkey, Javier arrived with sweets and cakes, and Camila opened some bottles of whiskey that she had kept. We promised not to talk about sadness or suffering, this night should be happy, full of laughter and joy!

Javier played very beautiful music, we danced to the beat of the waltzes: "Alejandra", "Sobre las olas" (*over the waves*), "Olimpica" (*Olympic*), "Morir de amor" (*to die of love*),

and many more that Javier knew. We sang, we joked, we laughed, we hugged and we toasted all, wishing to each other the best for the year that was about to begin.

Accustomed to sleeping at dawn, we spent hours enjoying until the whiskey began to make its effects and, despite our promises, the pages of our lives eventually emerged between hiccups and tears.

The first to speak was Javier, who was already drunk, he could hardly play the piano and often dropped himself over the keyboard sobbing when remembering his painful orphanhood, the lack of resources to finish his music studies, his life full of loneliness and without love; he told us about his heart disease, which we already knew about, because on several occasions we had to take him to the hospital as emergency.

Maria, who had arrived a few months ago, is tall, robust, rather dark and with braids like yours, Remedios. She told us that she and her husband worked in a ranch, back in Zacatecas. When the “villistas” arrived, they had to flee to hide in the hills and avoid being victims of those people. They stayed in the woods for a long time without water or food until the soldiers left. They left everything destroyed, they killed the peons, they took the animals.

That happened several times, because not only the villistas came to that place, other troops also crossed those roads. Finally, her husband left with one of the many troops and died in a battle near Zacatecas. Maria was left alone with her daughter, who later died in Mexico City from a badly attended typhoid.

The only one who did not have a sad story was Estela. She was happy with her parents, but they were poor; with lots of effort, they survived by selling sweets on the streets. Estela no longer wants to be poor, she wants to captivate some rich old man, even if she has to put up with him, but she wants to have a big house, car, jewelry, lots of clothes. She is young and pretty, but says that she does not care about love. I hope she achieves her purposes!

When they asked me to tell them my life, it was already dawning and almost all of us were falling asleep, so we better left it for another occasion.

That is good! Because I do not like to be remembering everything that has left my soul full of wounds. Do you think that this year will it be of good luck for us, Remedios? I want to be optimistic and think that yes, this coming year we will surely meet.

Sue

May 1928

Unforgettable sister:

Sometimes I think that Javier is in love with me. The other night I was showing your letters to him and he said to me: "And why do you write more? For what reason do you keep so many letters? It is silly, you will hardly know where is your sister in order to send them to her".

He had never spoken to me like that, on the contrary, he always used to encourage me to write to you and he even used to help me to look for some clue, about you, in the newspapers. I felt my heart became tiny, because I love him very much, but as if he were my brother or my father. Involuntarily the tears came out from me, he regretted and tried to comfort me with a hug, but then, Leo came in, who ran to me and separated me from his side; kissing me he dried my eyes. Javier was furious, throwing glances full of hatred to us, he moved back towards his piano.

The next day, when he was rehearsing some songs on the piano, I approached Javier smiling at him, as if to forget what happened the night before. We started talking, but soon his rancor appeared. His face broke down and he almost shouted at me that I was doing wrong by falling in love with Leo, because he is much younger than me and I looked ridiculous because he seemed as my son.

This time the stabbing annihilated me. I ran up to my room and threw myself on the bed, staying motionless. Maria consoled me by stroking my head.

- Let us go, Sue, cheer up. Forget the age and all those prejudices that drown you. Do not let pass this opportunity to love, God has sent it to you so you can be happy and forget all those horrible things that you have lived.
- God does not exist – I screamed hysterically –. How can you say that he loves me? For years, misfortune and suffering have persecuted me, and God, where

is he? I do not want anymore to believe in him, nor in the Virgin, nor in anything.

- As if God had listened to me at that moment and wanted to punish me for so many blasphemies and complaints, Camila went up to tell me that a woman was looking for me.

Immediately I got up believing that it could be you, Remedios, or someone who brought me news of Esteban, whom I had not forgotten. I wiped my face full of makeup and ran down the stairs. In front of me stood a very pretty woman, still young and thin, in whose look could be guessed the suffering.

- Good afternoon, Sue, I am Leo's mother.

I did not know what to say, because I never imagined that she knew my name. I invited her to sit down and the talk began...

- My husband has noticed the relationship between you and Leo. He constantly mistreats him and keeps him locked up to prevent him from visiting you. I came to warn you, because he is furious, he is capable to get here and cause you problems. Leo loves you too much, right now he is suffering, but I am sure that with time he will be able to overcome his grief. That is why I have decided to send him away with a brother of mine, that way he will stay away from the mistreatment that my husband gives him and he will be able to study quietly.
- And what can I do? – I asked, barely containing the crying.

- I want to ask you that, when he comes to look for you, to encourage him to leave. I understand that it is painful for you, but if you really love him, you will agree with me that this is the best thing.

Oh, Remedios! I do not even know why I promised her that I would do everything possible to help her achieve her goals. With her eyes still wet, she said goodbye to me, squeezing my hands with gratitude.

Now I stop writing to you, sister, I feel that I am going to die with this new suffering. I do not know what will happen, nor I want to think about it.

Maria del Consuelo

September 1928

Remedios of my life:

The days following the visit of Leo's mother, were atrocious. I asked everyone not to let him in. they were surprised, but they did what I told them.

I would stupidly get drunk, cried loudly, laughed like crazy, talked a lot of nonsense and, of course, I could not attend to anyone. Poor Leo! He stood outside the brothel watching all the disfigures that I made. Camila preferred to lock me up in the bedroom until I recovered. Many days passed in which I lived in the fog of despair. One afternoon, I do not know how, Leo entered:

- What has happened Sue? – Why do you refuse to receive me?
 - It has happened that I do not want to see you anymore, you have bores me enough.
- I need another kind of man, not a fool like you.
- It is not true! It is not true! –he screamed hugging me tightly –. I do not know why are you acting like that. I am sure that you are lying, that you still love me. This weekend I will come for you and we will go to Mexico – he said, and he kissed me passionately.

Mexico! The magic word. I decided to break the promise that I made to Leo's mother. I would go with him to Mexico and being there, I would get lost, I would hide, I would let him go, even if my life could go away with it.

Finally, the weekend arrived. I had my things ready, I said goodbye to Javier and my companions; I thanked Camila for everything that she had helped me and I went down to the living room carrying my purse and my little blue box with all the letters.

The hours have passed, it is getting late and Leo has not arrived. Javier observes me with mockery as I walk from one place to another, peeking continuously to the window. Why has not he arrived? Has his stepfather locked him up? Has he left without me?

Remedios, that someone tells me where the soul is, in what part of my body, to tear it to pieces and not feel anything, nor love nor resentment nor joy nor sadness. Nothing, Remedios! Nothing!

The clients start to arrive and I prefer to take refuge in the kitchen to write this letter while I wait for my love. The last time that I went to the door to see if Leo had already arrived, I saw several soldiers enter. I think that it is better that I go up to my room, in case Camila have the idea of calling me to attend to them. Later I continue writing to tell you how everything is going.

I love you so much.

Sue

July 1929

THE END

At last, the locomotive stopped, filling the terminal with an immense smoke. "Mexico City!", shouted a man peeping out to the door of a wagon.

In a moment the platform was filled with people getting off from the train carrying their luggage. Everyone walked quickly towards the exit and in a few minutes the station emptied. Only two women remained on the platform, looking restless everywhere as if waiting for someone. One is low in stature, has green eyes and matted hair that pretends to be blond; on her forehead she has a scar that looks like a recent blow. The other is still young and pretty, her huge light blue eyes are striking. They are dirty, dusty, with a small suitcase as the only luggage; slowly they start walking, losing themselves in the crowd of the streets.