

Maria Lee

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RB
CS
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CPA

Confidential

Dearest Ruby, dearest Herb -

My instinct, and my practice, has always been never to tell anything which must necessarily hurt with a double edge in the saying and in the hearing. By following that instinct I have just made such a ghastly error, wounded so much more deeply than any simple painful fact-telling could have wounded, a friend of mine and Luis; to avoid wounding whom I would willingly have endured any discomfort, that I am forced to see that my way of silence was that of the coward and the appeaser. And as I shall try to be more intelligent than my instinct and tell you both just what the situation is. Which it is now obvious, is what I should have done in the case of this other friend. In any event, there is no reason why it should be a tragic situation for anyone except possibly for Munita and Luis - indeed, almost certainly for them unless I proceed with balance and foresight, as it is my intention to do. The simple statement that Luis and I have decided on divorce involves no tragedy in itself - the sufferings and perplexities are all in the complications. There is no need to go very far back into the past: you,

Both of you, are in fact much better acquainted with
 the details of Luis' personal life during the first eight
 years (shall we say?) than I am. Three years is
 far enough to look back. After the 1936 campaign, and
 the terrific loss of prestige and influence and friends which
 that brought to Luis and through him to us, his family,
 you will remember that several of us, while Luis was still in
 Washington - but mainly Jesus Pineros, heart of gold that he is,
 and I - tried to make a successful enterprise out of La
Democracia, something that would give Luis a solid interest,
 help him get a grip on himself (because defeat is almost
 inenarrable to him), and be at once psychologically and
 economically profitable for him and for us all. It seemed
 that with his great gifts he could be a great editor and
 a great power for his people. So we left the big
 house on Alameda Avenue and made living quarters
 in La Democracia and there moved and there moved and the children
 and I moved and there we were installed when Luis
 arrived. Meantime Jesus and Genaro Gauthier and one
 or two others and the children and I were working
 vicarious hours on the paper. I borrowed first \$1500
 then another \$500 from the bank to help finance
 all this - and paid it back out of my
 salary on which I also supported the family and
 several of our editorial assistants - in two years.
 (Of course I had my detective story writing as well
 as my job, but I didn't have much sleep over
 any time to see even such intimate friends as the Blomss.)

Well, it didn't work. Luis doesn't like newspapers, hates editing, and yet can't bear for anyone else to do anything on his paper. So the Democrat, which had begun to climb - no, creep, out of the red soon got deeper in than ever and the new readers and new advertisers began to drop off. Luis had decided to fling all political activity, disgusted and disillusioned with all party methods; and he drank to a dangerous and heart-breaking degree, and he found his customary compensation in a woman.

You may know her personally - you have in any case heard both of and from her. She is Inés Mendoza - at that time Inés Mendon de Palacios, wife of a young Puerto Rican painter who is one of the staunchest and finest people in the world - and she had just been very unjustly dismissed from her high school teaching job because of her testimony before the Hayes Committee - a flagrant injustice, with no shadow of excuse. Inés, with her husband Rafael, was a frequent and always welcome visitor to our place, and she and Luis soon fell in love. (Rafael meanwhile had gone to New York to see if he could establish himself

there, which, I am glad to say, he has done very successfully.)
 Dora left her two children by Rafael with her parents,
 and she and Luis were together intermittently, but most
 of the time, for about a year. Meantime he conceived
 the idea of the Popular Party, a party of the people; threw
 off his political inertia; and plunged into the all but
 impossible task of achieving it. How magnificently
 he did so has become part of Puerto Rico's history,
 and nobody knows the story better than you, Ruby
 and Herb. I asked Luis if he did not wish a
 divorce so that he might marry Dora. He said that
 he would not marry her if she were the last
 woman in the world (I am quoting - I do
 not know why he said it, nor see any reason
 for his doing so.) Furthermore, he said, Dora
 admired me above all women and she herself
 did not want me to divorce him because - I
 am still quoting - she said that in his heart I
 was the woman he really loved and - said Luis -
 that may be true. (Here I should like to add my
 own notation that I think Luis has absolute
 confidence in me, far beyond any confidence
 that he has in anyone else in the world, and
 I know that for half a dozen years after our
 marriage he was romantically "in love" with me;
 but I don't think he has ever really loved anybody

not even his children. ^{Certainly not me.} I think she has even really loved him. They simply each helped take the other's mind off great aching frustrations and mid chances in their own immediate lives. But that is neither here nor there: few love affairs and few marriages have any better basis than that - and when one does really love in most inalterable truth, one is so often utterly helpless.)

Then Inés went to New York - she and Luis apparently having decided to end the affair. And Luis came to me as a child to his mother, asking for the sympathy and consolation I offer (which is part of love, but not love) - and receiving it, as I hope and believe. But Inés soon returned. Rafael, when Luis told her of the divorce, objects to it seems, insisted on divorce. When Luis told me this, he said, "It seems Rafael objects to her sleeping with another man." "You probably would yourself." "Yes," said Luis after a moment. "I would." Again I suggested that we be divorced and he many Inés, and again he said that I was the only woman in the world to whom he could possibly be married. (But I suspect he more than half

consciously meant that my being his wife - I especially who could never try to hold Luis nor anyone by any bond or force nor any conceivable means than a mutual need and a mutual delight - kept him beautifully secure from the danger of having to marry anyone else. (Because Luis is the freest husband I have ever known, not because he insists on freedom - I really believe he would prefer dramatic scenes to quiet restraint - but because I could never count anything as really my own, nor worth my keeping, if I had to set guards against its going.)

Then, February, a year ago, it became advisable for my mother to come live with me, and as there was not room for her at the Democrazia, and it was cheaper for the children and me to live near the University, and Luis said one place was the same as another to him, I took the apartment here which you visited. Meantime he and Inés saw each other often, Luis was sometimes at home but mostly out over the Island organizing the Campaigns, and once in a while he stayed here, where of course his room has always been ready for him.

A few days after I moved out, Inés came to see me for the first time since her divorce. She said she had a little daughter, which was Luis' child, and that she and Luis couldn't support it and she thought the child would be much better off with me; so would I take it. (I had known nothing about the child until that moment.) I answered that I could with difficulty support my own two children - that I should have liked to have more and had not had another child of my own simply because of the difficulty of giving adequate care to three - and so for the child's own sake, I could not take on the responsibility. We spoke as friends and parted amicably. But I cannot say that I enjoyed any phase of the incident.

Next day I talked with Luis and suggested several things for the child. But he said that all Inés' visit meant was that she wanted to hurt me, and that for himself, he wished that I had taken the child either to keep it or to let him have it and take it

definitely from Inés - who was obviously getting on his nerves. Later, apparently, he and Inés were separated for some time, she with the child, until she finally came with the child one night to Ellenor's farm at Treasure Island, where Luis was staying and writing his book, and announced his intention of staying there or raising such a scandal that he would find his political life in Puerto Rico at an end. So she stayed, and eventually another little girl was born. These last two sentences are what Luis' mother says. She insisted on telling me the story as she knew it. She is heartbroken, all her later affections being centered on Juvenal and Luisito, and her creek arising being offended by the fact that Inés has - distinct strain of colored blood, quite apart from the illegitimate status of the second household which Momá befalls with Victoriana suggests. (I do not mean to speak rightly not hardly, but simply to indicate as accurately as I can Momá's reactions, which have their place in the story.)

The story as for overlaps your visit and Herb's to the Island. You saw the situation when you were here - Luis was on perfectly friendly terms with the four of us: his wife, his two legitimate children, his mother; but

we saw him seldom. He lived nowhere very
 consecutively, more at the Democracia with
 mamá thana anywhere else. But nowhere normally.
 I kept in constant touch with him, usually by
 telephone, about things of interest to him: suggestions
 for the press, arranging interviews for
 people I met who wanted to see him and
 might be useful to him, and the like - giving
 him messages from you. Ruby, for instance, or
 seeing that a feature writer got an interview with him.
 That sort of thing. In April we had our Inter
 American Writers Conference here, and one of the
 speakers, Ernesto Montenegro, is an old and dear
 friend of Luis' and mine whom we had not seen
 for many years. Luis intended to meet him at
 the airport with me, but that day there was a
 crisis in the Senate - then in session - so
 he couldn't go. Later he saw Ernesto when I
 took him to Luis' Senate office, and saw the
 other writers of the Conference the same way (they
 all thought he was grand - except Ernesto, judging
 who while thinking Luis was wonderful was
 a little surprised and hurt to find him so
 great a man that he could not spare a
 private hour to an old friend. But apparently

and here I am deducing the Writers Conference was too much for Inés, who was at the time apparently again with Luis. She loves celebrities and she is intelligently fond of literature, she gets along well with people and craves prestige — and it seems she resented the fact that I, not only met distinguished guests in my own right but figured in their minds as Luis' wife while she was relegated to non-recognition. This sounds pretty silly but I think that's the way the thing has come about. At any rate, during the Conference and after Luis has not appeared ~~at all~~ at any public place with me, has accepted ~~poised~~ invitations gives us both without letting me know they had been extended, (has — as with Rex Tugwell — hemmed and hawed rather awkwardly to avoid our attending an informal dining together, for instance), has completely dropped Muriel and Luis — not that he had paid much attention to them before. However, before the break became quite so absolute, I saw Luis several times to read letters from mutual friends to him, or see about

the picture for your article, Ruby, and so on. Luis' manner with me was unchanged. I really think he has been blackmailed in a peculiar fashion. But I'll get to that in a moment.

One of the things that I've seen him about during the past two months was to tell him that a very able and brilliant Venezuelan, Eliseo Vivas, a friend whom we have both loved and who has in turn been devoted to us for fifteen years, might come to the University to teach Philosophy at Wisconsin. Luis was delighted. He said nothing would seem so good to him as to have long talks with Eliseo ~~the~~ as in old times and that he knew Eliseo's classes would be a fine thing for the University. So the appointment went through without any except budgetary difficulties. Eliseo finally being given a much lower salary than he had been led to expect.

After this appointment had been made, and after considerable correspondence on my part - relayed to Luis, who has an

immense respect for Elías Vivar's mind as well
 as liking for him - it suddenly became impossible
 for me to get in touch with Luis at all. I mean
 literally that: if I called, his secretary said he
 wasn't there; I knew it was useless to send a
 letter for he himself rarely sees his mail. A
 number of things come up about which it was
 necessary to see him - for one thing, Luis is
 was in bed for ten days with incipient ap-
 pendicitis and during those days I could not
 get in communication with Luis. (Don't
 misunderstand: if I had said Luis is
 very sick, he would doubtless have come; but
 he wasn't very sick, I didn't want to cause
 unnecessary alarm - but I did want to
 discuss ways and means which were getting
 a little out of hand.) Finally I asked one
 of Luis' good friends - Dr. Ferris, you
 both know him, of course - to tell me what
 was the matter and let me know frankly if he

thought that Luis wished to be free legally; that
 if so, I would of course give him a divorce
 at once, but that any such situation as one
 in which I was definitely and conspicuously
incommunicado from my husband was
 simply absurd for us both, and painfully difficult
 for Munita and Luis, etc. Luis saw me
 almost immediately; said that he was living
 in hell, that Inés threatened him and their
 little girls (or perhaps it was herself she threatened -
 the story was too incoherent for me to be
 quite sure) with a revolver when he tried
 to see the children, and that he idolized
 the eldest. Apparently he didn't want a divorce
 and viewed nothing with such honor as a
 life with Inés but he had made up his
 mind to "rescue" the older baby from any
 such environment - the rescue to be by rather
 romantic and dramatic means, I gathered,
 I told him that if a divorce would help, he could

have it. He apparently didn't want it, but instead began talking on a tangent - but I assumed as a manner of answering - about how we should manage our ^{joint} income next year so as to keep it from infringing on the law of nepotism. (I think together we make just above \$3200 - or maybe it's just below. Anyway, the whole idea was that malimony is a rather permanent affair.)

A few days later when I saw him again he wanted to be divorced. I said very well. He said he had never realized what an awful stigma illegitimacy was and he must not let those children suffer from it. If I would divorce him, he would marry Inés and then the children would be legitimate and then he could get rid of Inés - I could not quite gather whether by another divorce or by expulsion from bed and board - and he could keep the elder boy

(apparently I was to retain the smaller) and so he could regularize his life and doubtless Marina and Luisito would be better friends with him than ever and perhaps I too. (All this in a tense strained voice which made me feel very sorry for him; not angry; not really resentful: it was pathetic.) I told him that about the divorce there was no question; but that perhaps about some of his other plans there might be. To specify: while I do not believe children can be really legitimate — by which I mean that to my mind every child has a right to its parents' protection — the law takes another view, and Puerto Rican law does not permit even the subsequent marriage of their parents to legitimize legitimate children born in adultery. Luis said: "I can change the law: I am the Law here." Well, he can change the law and he is the law, so that question was answered. I said that y...

he married I'm sure she had a right to stay with
 him and the children, that it might be an
 error to assume that in every marriage he
 would have as much freedom as in ours.
 He said no woman could make him
 stay with her if he didn't want to. (Which is
 obviously true - but if he left, she could
 keep the children, especially if the law did
 not recognize his paternity) I asked how
 he intended to care for the child if he did
 get control of her and got free of Inés. He
 said he would hire a woman to look
 after her but would himself stay with her
 all the time; he would have a house or an
 apartment and his office would be in
 one room and the child would be in
 an adjoining room with the door open. He
 could not live without her and he wouldn't
 live long anyway because he supposed he
 would have to drink a bottle a day for the
 rest of his life. At that point - for the talk

wasn't getting anywhere, I said I'd come to his office on Friday and we could decide on procedures. And that I wanted things to be as well as possible with him and with me and with Munita and Luisito, and that I hoped we could arrange things with a minimum of unpleasantness for Dora and her children. And he was quite ~~amused~~ moved and grateful and I felt profoundly sorry about it all.

On Friday I waited in Luis' office for three hours after the appointed time. I didn't leave - in spite of the annoyance of knowing that his secretaries were informed and greedily curious as they kept buzzing around - because I wanted this interview to be final. When Luis finally arrived, looking not very sure of himself, I reminded him at once that our friend Eliseo Vivas would arrive on Monday's boat and asked if he wanted us to meet Eliseo together.

or if he wanted to go alone or would
 prefer seeing him later. (I thought it would
 be better to let Elises reason of the situation
 as regards Luis and me, a situation
 which had culminated after his own arrangements
 had been made to come down, from Luis. I
 did not think he would misunderstand my
 part and did not want to let any remark
 of my own, intentional or involuntary, influence
 him against Luis, because I know how
 much their friendship for each other has
 meant to them both and know at the
 same time that Luis really doesn't show up
 very well in this story, no matter how
 many allowances one makes. (And nobody
 else, probably, makes so many as I.)
 At any rate, Luis said at once that we
 should both meet Elises, that he would
 come by for me in his car and we
 would go to the hotel. As a matter of fact,

I have had no word from Luis from that day to this, and Eliseo Vivos has not seen him, heard his voice, not had any line or message ^{up} welcome. And yet I do know that he is one of the few men whose friendship and opinion Luis really

prizes.

As for the rest of the interview, I told Luis that I too had come to believe a divorce was not only best but inevitable. He flared up and said that I should have divorced him ten years ago, then everything would be

friendly and these children I was legitimate. After saying that I bet and believed he would feel no lack of friendship ⁱⁿ me, I reminded him of the number of ~~the~~ times I had suggested divorce ^{only} have him say not only that he didn't want it but that he wouldn't marry ^{me} if he had it. He said he didn't remember

anything but that some of the phrases I used
 sounded like his own so maybe he had
 said it. I told him that I should like to
 the divorce to be as quiet, as secret, as
 possible, but that for my own protection —
 the protection of my own integrity, ^(of reputation) as wife
 and mother through these difficult years,
 I wished to get it for the three real
 causes he had furnished: non-support,
 adultery, and desertion. And then he
 practically shouted as he paced up and
 down the office. "Get it for adultery!"
 he kept on saying. "That will
 hunt me in the States but I don't
 care about that. But it's just revenge
 to get it for desertion! You can't
 say a man deserted his children!"

Think about these two million jobs!

Think what you will be doing ~~to~~
them! You are destroying their hope

in life!" And so on - appallingly so
and on. Finally he calmed down, talked

quite calmly and pleasantly about things

of mutual interest to us, University affairs,

Judge Malcolm's book on the Philippines,

the article for Common Ground, and as he

called the car for me he repeated that he

would be by Monday for us to go to the

dock together.

Well - two and a half weeks after
that interview I am sure of three things:

that I want to be divorced as soon as I
can get work in the States so as not to

be completely adrift;

that Luis can have the divorce on any absolutely
 unshakable grounds that he finds best for
 himself. As I look back over the years of
 our life together and my constant effort
 to do all I could for him, and his
 people, I don't believe that anyone I care
 about will ever doubt my integrity. So

I shall waive any insistence on such
 grim grounds as desertion and adultery and
 get the divorce for incompatibility or
 anything else true - and sufficient -
 which Luis prefers. It doesn't really matter.

And this, I want to take up life in my
 own country, feeling no fear and no
 hesitancy about doing so. There is nothing
 of which I am so completely certain as
 of my ability to meet life and live it with
 dignity.

If you wonder - as anyone
 must - why I haven't come to this

decisions of my own accord long
 ago instead of waiting for Luis to
 make it, I can only say that always
 I've hoped, and even in a way believed,
 that someday Luis would resume a
 normal life with his family and we
 should all four find life more
 satisfying and more good to live.

Resentment - my love to
 you both. Perhaps I'll see you soon -
 maybe this will all be over and done
 with in three months.

In a day or so I'll
 send a note about the suggestions
 for jobs in your two letters. And about
 my own ideas on the subject.

Again - my love.

Muna