Chapter 1

Moscoso's Conversion

On November 5, 1940, Teodoro Moscoso spent the day packing his car with as many *jíbaros*—Puerto Rican farm workers—as would fit and driving them to the polling precincts. It was a race against time. At two in the afternoon the voting was scheduled to start and the doors to the precincts would close. Police officers would be posted to prevent anyone from entering. Only those already inside and identified as registered voters were allowed to vote, ensuring that no one could vote more than once.

Moscoso's wife, Gloria Sánchez Vilella, was nine months pregnant with their second child, José Teodoro. The first, Margarita, was born in 1938. Gloria had set up a sandwich assembly line for the jíbaro voters. As the day wore on the tension and expectation mounted.

Finally, in the early evening, the results started to trickle in. Puerto Rico, at that time, elected its legislature, mayors, and municipal assemblies, and its resident commission in Washington, a member of Congress with voice but no vote. The governor was named by the president of the United States. At the beginning it seemed that the conservative Republican-Socialist Coalition—that strange alliance of the Republican Party, controlled by the island's sugar barons, and the Socialist Party, representing the labor unions—had been returned to power. It led Luis Muñoz Marín's new party, the Popular Democratic Party, in total voting. What was crucial, however, was the vote distribution, as it determined the legislative composition. The following day the newspapers reported tentatively: "Everything Indicates Populares Dominate the Senate, Coalition the House."[1] This was only half right. The Populares won the senate by one vote, while the House was evenly divided between the Coalition and the Populares, with the splinter group, the Triparty Unification, controlling three votes that initially swung to the Populares.

There was nothing tentative, however, about Muñoz's reaction to the election result. He declared that he and his party had received a mandate to carry out to the letter the sweeping economic and social reforms promised in the campaign. Muñoz went further. The election, he said, changed the fundamental power structure in Puerto Rico. Through the "electoral mandate," power had been transferred from a conservative elite to "the people." Muñoz was determined to make November 5, 1940, second only to July 25, 1898—the landing of American troops on the island—in historical importance and thereby mark the beginning of the island's "peaceful revolution."

Moscoso had decided only a few months before the election that he wanted to be part of that revolution. He became a Popular in the summer of 1940, following a meeting with Muñoz that took place in an isolated wooden house at a coffee farm up in the Adjuntas Mountains.

Dr. José Gándara, a physician married to one of Gloria's sisters and a new member of the Popular Party, came by the Moscoso pharmacy one afternoon and invited Moscoso to accompany him to Adjuntas. Gándara had been summoned to treat Muñoz, who had suspended his campaigning due to a bad cold and high fever. When they arrived at the house, they were told that Muñoz was unable to get out of bed. Gándara went inside to treat his patient. When Gándara emerged he told Moscoso to go inside for a few moments to greet Muñoz.

Muñoz was unshaven and clearly worn down, but he asked Moscoso to sit down. Despite the illness he seemed eager to talk. Moscoso was struck by a sensation of authenticity. Muñoz was the only son of Puerto Rico's greatest nineteenth-century political leader, Luis Muñoz Rivera. But unlike the island's traditional *políticos,* he was natural, down to earth; there was in him no posturing, no trace of ego-inflation. Muñoz seemed confident and spoke with deep conviction. Politics was clearly no game for him. The younger Muñoz, dubbed *El Vate,* the poet, had turned into a controversial politician, intensely feared by some, adulated by others.

In the farmhouse, stretched out in a jíbaro hammock, dressed in simple clothes, Muñoz seemed totally in his element. Moscoso saw immediately how radically different he was from the island's traditional leaders, stiff and formal men, always dressed in jackets and ties, who gave long speeches punctuated by obscure words that only a few could grasp. The jíbaros called them *picos de oro,* men with golden tongues, for they were seen essentially as entertainers playing the role of "political leaders." They seemed to take themselves very seriously and often referred to their "patriotism" and "sac-

rifice." But the jíbaros saw all of this as only a contest between machos, a thrilling cockfight at which bets were made. Most jíbaros sold their votes for two dollars. If the jíbaro was lucky enough to have backed the winning party, the vote could pay off with a job for himself or a favor for his family. But the candidates' promises and programs remained meaningless to the jíbaros. Forty years of insular partisan politics and elections had changed nothing in their lives, and there was no reason for them to believe that it ever would.

Muñoz was different, Moscoso thought, not only in what he was saying, but in another way. They were speaking in Spanish, of course, but Moscoso felt that he was communicating with a man thinking, organizing, and presenting his ideas in a way—including the sense of humor—that was typically American.

Instead of the usual sweeping, evident generalizations, Muñoz described concrete, specific social reform projects. Moscoso became excited; he too wanted to talk about specific reforms. He wanted Muñoz to believe that while he was certainly from one of Ponce's elite Republican families, he abhorred the inhumane social and economic injustice on the island, that he had touched and smelled the inequality in the horrid slums of Ponce.

Gándara looked into the room to see why Moscoso was taking so long. Muñoz waved for him to come in and join the discussion that he was obviously relishing. Muñoz went on to describe his campaign, *Verguenza Contra Dinero*—shame versus money—the seemingly quixotic attempt to convince the jíbaros not to sell their votes. How would he do it? Simple, Muñoz answered: by convincing them that their votes are worth much more than the two dollars the parties paid for them. Muñoz would draft a series of specific economic and social reform bills. Then he would have all the Popular candidates publicly raise their right hands at a giant public rally and swear that if elected, they were going to vote for each one of the bills. This was a binding contract, Muñoz declared, that would give the people "real power" for the first time in island history.

A half-century later, Moscoso recalled: "I am sorry to say that coming back from that farm to my house my memory is blurred, principally because I was so emotionally enthralled by the experience. I was conscious that I had met a superior person, a superior human being, a superior mentality, and everything from then on that I was to assess in my mind had to be weighed against the standards that this extraordinary man had set for me in that conversation which lasted a couple of hours. The standards were so high, the demands were so great—for integrity, for honesty, for striving, for

becoming involved in the problems of the community, of the city, of the island—that you had to rearrange your values."[2] He did.

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It was a decision bound to disturb Moscoso's father. Muñoz and his party represented everything the elder Moscoso detested. The poet-turned-politician was a danger, a demagogue who fomented a destructive class war to win jíbaro votes. The senior Moscoso argued that even if Muñoz was not a rabid anti-American with a Communist agenda, his followers certainly were. Thank God, his father declared, that the Americans still governed; they would not permit Muñoz and his leftist ideas to ruin the island. How could his son be attracted to this man and this party that were out to destroy the Moscosos' world?

Moscoso, in fact, was already caught between conflicting family loyalties. While his own family was solidly conservative Republican, Gloria's family was liberal and now strongly backed the Populares. Gloria's father, the successful merchant Luis Sánchez Frasquieri, was elected to the House of Representatives as a Popular. Her older brother, Roberto Sánchez Vilella, had also joined the party and was to be recruited into Muñoz's new government.

For Moscoso, however, it was not a matter of politics. He had never thought of participating in the futile game of partisan politics. The sterile status debate reminded him very much of the obsession his father, a former seminarian, had with theology: mental constructions that were irrelevant to reality, to the day-to-day life of the Ponce poor. He accepted without much thought his father's insistence that Puerto Rico would eventually become a state of the United States. It seemed evident to him that for an island so poor and overcrowded, independence from the United States was economic suicide.

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But personal independence was exactly what Moscoso desperately longed for, independence from his father. The elder Moscoso, a native of Carolina, Puerto Rico, had married Alejandrina Mora Fajardo, a tall, imposing woman born in Soller, in the Balearic island of Majorca, Spain. In 1909, while living in Ponce, Alejandrina convinced her husband to allow the family, which included Carmen, the firstborn, to spend a long sojourn in Barcelona, the Catalonian capital. The elder Moscoso, by then a successful pharmacist, agreed and made arrangements to travel as frequently as possible between Puerto Rico and Spain.