



BRETT HALSEY

A STORY OF TRAGIC LOVE,  
BLOODY WAR, AND SHAMEFUL BETRAYAL  
IN 19TH CENTURY CALIFORNIA.

MY SOUL  
TO KEEP



*Teenage Luis and his pregnant young love, Carolina, run away from their homes in Seville, Spain, to escape the wrath of her father. Caught and beaten nearly to death, Carolina loses their child and Luis is spirited off to a monastery and becomes a devout priest. Fate carries him to California where 'Padre' Luis exerts a major influence over the lives of all he meets. Especially Ramona and Dolores, two orphaned sisters who sail with him from Spain to the New World.*

## **My Soul to Keep**

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*The first explorers and settlers in California were men without women. Many mated with the local Indian women and produced children known as "Mestizos" or "Half-breeds". It was generally, if not openly, acceptable for white men to marry Indian or mestiza woman, but a white (Spanish) woman could never have relations with an Indian or mestizo man. In fact, it was looked down upon for the Catholic California-Spanish women to have relations with any foreigners - even white Protestant Americans.*

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First Edition

## **Dedication**

This book is dedicated to my California  
ancestors who lived this story.

And with special thanks to: my wife Victoria,  
Dorris Halsey, Norman Kahn, Judy Hilsinger,  
Helen H. Jackson, Sandy Leiberson, John  
Murray, Sam Perlmutter, Marianne Rogers,  
Mary Strobel, Carol Summers.



## Prologue

Unconcerned and unaware how her relationship with the young Luis Balcazar would affect her entire life, Carolina Vicario, the pretty, adolescent daughter of Barbara and Don Rafael Vicario, enjoyed her moment of quiet defiance by choosing Luis as her secret friend. "I'm old enough to choose my own friends," she decided recklessly.

Don Rafael, the successful personal tailor to the Bishop of Cordoba, imagined himself and his family to be the social superior to all their working class neighbors. He carried himself with an air of distinction, and planned his ascension into the aristocratic class by marrying his daughter into it. Don Rafael *felt* aristocratic, the only thing he lacked was a genuine coat-of-arms, which would be provided when Carolina married one of the young nobles he had in mind. "One such as Count Mariano Hidalgo," he smiled to himself as he watched his young Carolina intent on the delicate handkerchief she was edging with fine lace.

Never, *ever*, would it occur to him to allow her to marry one such as Luis Balcazar. What a bizarre thought! Luis served as an apprentice to the cabinet maker Enrique Silva, who lived next-door in the working class artisan's section of Cordoba. Don Rafael regarded Luis as a nice enough lad, but just another of the poor neighborhood orphans, whose only purpose was to work and serve his master.

While growing up, Luis and Carolina had little contact, but in time and in spite of her father, their

friendship ripened. The clandestine nature of their meetings became like a game for them – a game which became more dangerous on the day they stumbled onto the thickly overgrown entrance to a deserted walled garden. And what a garden it was – dark and dense with long neglected wild roses and lilies, and spicy odors lingering in every corner.

Their secret garden became a refuge. They discovered a crumbling stone bench among the tangle of leaves and tall grass, which became their place to sit together and share their thoughts and dreams and feelings. Free of Don Rafael's obsessive control, Carolina could scoff at the idea of having to follow tradition and marry a man of her father's choosing – she could laugh about 'Count' Mariano Hidalgo's awkwardness, and declare to Luis that she would rather give herself to God and become a nun than to even *kiss* her father's noble friend.

Luis silently dismissed his thoughts of Count Hidalgo's 'noble' hands on Carolina's delicate body. He accepted his lowly station outside the garden walls, but inside the walls, he was every man's equal and could fantasize a future where he would be his own master – in his own house - and perhaps...even have a girl like Carolina at his side.

Late one Sunday afternoon, in the darkening shadows of their garden's ancient leafy trees they drew together into a succession of cautious kisses. One kiss followed another until overcome by their youthful passion they fell together in the sweet smelling grass to experience their first thrilling moment of romantic love.



The Bishop's demand for an elaborate new garment, fit for a visit from the King, kept Don Rafael so occupied that he didn't notice Carolina's more frequent absences. Her passionate meetings with Luis became an almost obsessive chain of stolen moments, until the day their fantasy world was shattered by the realization that Carolina was with child.

In their fear and ignorance, both tried to ignore the situation until at almost six months, they had to face the fact that Carolina's condition had become impossible to hide. Her mother also tried to ignore the increasingly obvious, and when told the truth, the shock left her howling with despair. Barbara Vicario's distress soon turned to fear for Carolina when she anticipated her husband's violent reaction to the loss of all his grand, noble dreams.

Frightened of the certain consequences, and secure in the faith of their adolescent love, Luis and Carolina decided to resolve their dilemma by running away together. Neither had ever ventured more than an hour or two's walk from home, but Carolina remembered a distant cousin in the far-off seaport city of Malaga, so they decided to gather a small bundle of supplies and set out on foot for Spain's southern coast. Waiting until each of their household's were quiet with sleep, they slipped out into the night and embarked on their journey.

The late morning sun blazed down on them as they cleared the outskirts of Cordoba, and sensitive to Carolina's fragile condition, Luis insisted they stop to rest under a shady tree at the side of the road. After about an hour of nestling in the comfort of his shoulder, Carolina took Luis' hand and rose from their

resting place. "I'm ready," she announced, lightly caressing her belly, "We can walk some more."

Luis also lightly touched to her belly and gave her a gentle kiss, then linked her arm in his and looked down the road where in the near distance he could see a grove of palm trees. "We'll stop there," he said, "And maybe we'll find some dates."

"That would be wonderful," she grinned. "I'm so hungry!"

They continued walking, each wondering what their future held. Lost in their own uneasy thoughts, they didn't immediately hear the sound of horse's hooves racing up from behind them. Carolina turned first and gasped with fear. The blood drained from Luis' face when he too turned and saw her father charging toward them on horseback, followed by his two brothers in a horse-cart.

Luis stood his ground, but Carolina began to run. Shouting the foulest of angry curses, Don Rafael leapt from his horse and caught her. He threw her to the ground and savagely punched and kicked her as she tried to escape. Luis ran to intervene but Don Rafael's brothers grabbed him from behind and pummeled him into unconsciousness.

Don Rafael didn't listen to Carolina's screams and pleas for mercy as he roughly threw her into the rear of the cart, nor did he care about the dark blood running down his daughter's leg and oozing through the coarse material of her skirt as she lay slumped in the cart, moaning in pain.

Two priests passing on foot intervened to save Luis from being beaten to death. They were too afraid to interfere further and watched silently as the brothers brutally bound and gagged Luis and tossed him into

the rear of the cart with Carolina. Bellowing to his brothers to follow him in the cart, Don Rafael furiously put the whip to his horse and galloped off.

With Luis unconscious and her uncles paying no heed, Carolina's muffled cries for help were ignored as she suffered through the excruciating pain of losing her unborn child. Luis regained consciousness shortly before completing their rough, jolting journey back to her home. He wept tears of anguish at the sight of Carolina's bloody body in its deathlike stillness, and strained ineffectively against his binding, unable to do anything to help her.

Chaos, recriminations and wails of grief echoed through the Vicario household when her mother saw her brutally beaten and bleeding daughter lifted from the cart. In the confusion, Don Rafael tried to escape his wife's fury, by looking to his brothers for support but they had prudently disappeared. Alone in the cart, Luis struggled free of his restraints, rolled out onto the road and stumbled home. His patron, Señor Enrique Silva, had little sympathy for the battered youngster, but mindful of Don Rafael's violent temper he arranged to hide Luis until he could decide what to do with him.

Enrique was reluctant to lose the boy who had become like a son to him, and went to reason with Carolina's father. Don Rafael exploded into such a vengeful tirade that Enrique feared for Luis' life. He immediately ran to beg the help of his cousin, a young priest who served as an assistant to the Bishop's personal secretary. Fortunately for Luis, the timing was perfect. The priest had just been given the task of finding and appointing a postulant to fill a place in a Franciscan seminary in the distant mountains of

Segovia. Luis had no will or strength to argue when they told him he must leave at once. Numb in mind and body, he stood ready for anything that might atone for his sinful deed, and offered no resistance when bundled off in the dead of night to Segovia.

The fortress-like seminary perched on the side of a stark mountainside, offered no physical comforts, but Luis hardly noticed. He concentrated on earning the privilege of being ordained as a Franciscan friar. He devoted his time to doing penance and burying himself in a single-minded dedication to his studies.

At his ordination ceremony, Father-Abbot Miguel Cortes told him the California Missions were recruiting young priests. Luis decided to answer the call. Vaguely aware of the wild land of California, somewhere off to the edge of Spain's distant westernmost frontier, he would go there and follow in the footsteps of legendary Father Junipero Serra. By devoting his life to converting heathen Indians into the Christian faith, he might in some way atone for the death of Carolina and their unborn child.

## CHAPTER 1

### A New Life

On a brisk, sunny morning in 1820, Padre Luis Balcazar, now tall, slim, with faint signs of a youthful beard, threaded his way through the dockside activity in Spain's busy port city of Cadiz.

A light breeze ruffled his gray Franciscan robe, as he marched past the many ships, merchant vessels and men-of-war that clogged Spain's gateway to the Americas. He ignored the soldiers, sailors and cargo masters, shouting at each other in foreign languages until finally, at the end of the wharf, he reached a large multi-sail merchant galleon with the name *Gloriosa* carved into its graceful bow. Luis paused, and looked at his travel documents. They confirmed that service on the *Gloriosa* was a condition of his passage, and that the splendid ship would carry him on the first leg of his voyage to California. He thought it ironic how Luis Balcazar, an orphaned cabinetmaker's apprentice, who had never seen the ocean, could be assigned to serve the spiritual needs of this splendid vessel and its crew.

A memory of Carolina and the loss of his past life crossed his mind, and drew his gaze out to the direction where he thought Cordoba might be. A flock of seagulls fighting over a spill of garbage floating in the harbor brought him back to the present, and he turned his attention to the shirtless stevedores on the *Gloriosa* who were loading weighty sacks of provisions

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that were like himself destined for one of Imperial Spain's new world possessions.

The new world, a new life, and new hope. But the question remained; could his work converting the savage California Indians to Christianity be enough to allay the guilt he still felt over the sin he knew would haunt him the rest of his life?

Could setting foot on the *Gloriosa* be his first step toward redemption?

## CHAPTER 2

### The Voyage

Padre Luis had left his tiny cabin and returned up on deck to watch the ship's crew busily preparing for departure when he spied Dolores and Ramona, two bright-eyed little girls arriving dockside. Their parents, Spanish Army Lieutenant Don Francisco Reyes, a balding, stocky young man, and his pretty young wife, Marisol, followed them closely. The ship's seasoned Captain Gabriel Rivas, greeted the Military officer's little family with cordial respect, and hustled them up the gangplank just minutes before the *Gloriosa's* scheduled time of departure. Lieutenant Reyes maintained his composure while out of the corner of his eye, he joined his family, gaping in awe at the galleon's intricate superstructure of tall masts, great white sails, and endless lengths of coiled ropes and cables.

The young priest was fascinated by the children's innocent wonder as the quartermaster hurried them all aboard, and he quietly observed Lieutenant Reyes and Marisol, openly express their own fascination with the bustle and commotion of the ship's crew making ready to set sail.

The first leg of the trip from Cadiz to the Canary Islands was fairly uneventful. The sea rose in long even swells. The days were beautiful, and warm, the air sweetened by the desert breezes blowing in from the West African coast.

Padre Luis' years in the seminary had conditioned him to maintain a stoic, solitary reserve, but barely out of his teens, he couldn't resist being drawn to Dolores and Ramona and their friendly, inquisitive playfulness. His attempts to gaze out over the ocean in solitary meditation were often interrupted when the girls insisted he join with them in one of their games, or begged him to answer their questions, both thoughtful and nonsensical.

Luis envied the love and affection lavished on their daughters by Marisol and Lieutenant Reyes. Their happiness and family unity were in sharp contrast to his memories of Carolina and of Enrique Silva's family back in Cordoba. He felt more connected with them when he learned that Marisol and Luis were both orphans. A lively young woman who always seemed to wear a smile, Marisol's sweet disposition never faltered as she related how she had lost her parents during a pestilence that swept through her native Aragon Province, and how her husband lost *his* parents when their estates was overrun by a French occupation force. It happened long ago, and each of them had been raised in reasonable comfort, so it gave her little distress to tell her story.

Francisco was more restrained during his nightly conversations with Padre Luis under the black night's star speckled sky. Luis was impressed by Francisco's straight-forward admission of how he felt privileged to be posted as Deputy Commandante of the Santa Barbara Presidio in the remote province of California. Convinced that the appointment would result in a prestigious addition to his military record, he was anxious to get on with his adventurous, and possibly dangerous, new life among the savages in the wilds of



California. It brought an embarrassed smile to each of their faces when they finally admitted that neither one could say *precisely* where in the world the Santa Barbara Presidio might be found.

After taking on provisions in the Canary Islands, the *Gloriosa* set out across the wide Atlantic for Panama. The few passengers soon became uneasy when the sight of land disappeared behind them, and their sense of adventure began to fade as the sky turned leaden gray and the ship began to pitch and roll in the rising sea.

Marisol was the first to fall ill and lose her strength to what became one day after another of vomiting and diarrhea. Francisco Reyes also fell ill, but not so seriously that he could not care for his wife.

Dolores and Ramona fared much better, as did Padre Luis. They were forbidden to go on deck because of the stormy danger, and were uncomfortable in their cabin, which reeked of their mother's illness, so the girls passed much of their time in Padre Luis' tiny cabin. It took only a few days for their cheerful presence to begin chipping away at Luis' gloominess and for a bond of true friendship to develop between the boyish friar and the high-spirited girls.

Gripped with never ending seasickness and suffering with each pitch and roll of the ship as it continued westward, Marisol was barely able to keep down her morning cup of tea, let alone help with Dolores and Ramona's breakfast. The girls didn't care for the tasteless gruel served in the crew's mess, but they *did* enjoy the attention they received from the

ship's cook and hard-working crew as each day they watched the ship come to life with the rising sun.

The announcement by Captain Rivas that they were only two or three days from Panama's Atlantic port of Porto Bello buoyed everyone's spirits. With the girls busy *helping* the cook, Francisco and Padre Luis climbed to the forward railing above the bowsprit, and gazed out over the horizon, each hoping for a first glance of the fabled New World.

Francisco repeated his oft given thanks to Padre Luis for his help with the girls, and looked away as he awkwardly confessed that his parenting skills weren't equal to his skills as a soldier.

"You and Marisol are fine parents," Padre Luis said reassuringly, putting aside the memory of his own childhood.

"Perhaps," Francisco conceded, "But the truth is, I am a much better soldier than a parent. I believe I will have an easier time subduing heathen savages than controlling my two little girls."

"Subduing the heathen savages is my mission as well," Luis answered easily. "However the church wishes to do it with the love of God. If we are successful, your daughters will see your muskets and swords being used only for ceremony."

"A noble goal, and I of course share your hope for my children, Padre. But I have been trained to expect resistance, and if, God forbid, it comes, you will be protected with Spanish steel."

"Spanish steel and Spanish bibles," Luis mused. "The weapons God has given us to fight his enemies."

"Yes," Francisco replied, distracted by the sight of a sailing ship lurking on the distant horizon. Luis followed his gaze, then looked up to the crow's nest

where a sailor called a warning that brought Captain Rivas hurrying on deck to raise his telescope in the ship's direction.

Luis trailed close behind as Francisco hastened to speak with the Captain, "Can you see who they are?"

"I can't make out its colors. It could be another merchant ship like ours, and it could be pirates. English, French, Americans - they all hunt for easy prey in these waters. We'll have to wait and see."

"While we are waiting," Francisco said, "I will prepare a repelling party. They will not find us easy prey."

"It may not be a pirate ship," Captain Rivas reasoned. "But if it is, and they are heavily armed, I don't have enough men and arms to put up a successful fight."

"We cannot give up without a fight!"

"You have a wife and children on board, Lieutenant. If we are reasonable they may take my cargo and leave. If we fight and lose, it is likely they will take the cargo along with..." he glared significantly at Francisco before continuing. "...along with any *attractive women* - and then kill the rest of us and burn the ship."

Francisco glanced toward the cabins where the girls were playing and Marisol lay resting. "Even so, it is our duty to be prepared for any contingency."

"I am in command of this ship," Captain Rivas insisted, "And if we are attacked, I will decide whatever course of action we take. Do you understand, Lieutenant?"

Francisco stood rigid with defiance, but conditioned to obeying orders, he conceded, "As you wish Captain, I understand."

Lieutenant Reyes passed the mid-day hours between watching the mystery ship that seemed content to hold a position a few miles astern, and prodding a few of the reluctant crew into a repelling force that would most certainly surrender at the first sight of danger.

Marisol lay in her bed, oblivious to everything except resisting the urge to vomit her morning tea. Padre Luis remained close by as Dolores observed the action on deck with a premonition of danger, and Ramona played with the ship's kitten in a large coil of rope.

In the late afternoon, Luis approached Francisco, who stood in the ship's stern still watching the mystery ship which maintained its previous distance behind them.

"What do you think?" Luis asked.

"I don't know what to think," Francisco replied. "And neither does the Captain. They've had ample opportunity to attack all day, and they very rarely attack at night..."

"Does that mean they're going to leave us alone?"

"Maybe... Maybe they have some plan we don't understand... And maybe they're just another merchant ship following us into Porto Bello. And maybe... maybe they're not..."

As darkness fell, it started to rain, and the ship began plunging into ever deepening ocean swells. Luis and Francisco remained on deck until it was obvious there could be no attack from the mystery ship, and then fled below deck.

Padre Luis stayed with the frightened girls, and Francisco with his ailing wife, until the storm subsided and a peaceful dawn broke over the vast ocean

panorama. In the hazy dawn light, Francisco came to join the Captain who stood on deck, studying the horizon with his telescope.

"They're gone," Captain Rivas said calmly.

"Gone where?"

"To Hell for all I care," the Captain shrugged. "In another few hours we'll be too close to shore for them to be a problem. Then, by late tomorrow, Porto Bello!"

"Thank God," Padre Luis whispered, coming up from behind them.

"Yes, thank God," Francisco and Captain Rivas repeated quietly.



*Teenage Luis and his pregnant young love, Carolina, run away from their homes in Seville, Spain, to escape the wrath of her father. Caught and beaten nearly to death, Carolina loses their child and Luis is spirited off to a monastery and becomes a devout priest. Fate carries him to California where 'Padre' Luis exerts a major influence over the lives of all he meets. Especially Ramona and Dolores, two orphaned sisters who sail with him from Spain to the New World.*

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