

Coffee In Castillo



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Published: September 2017

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Cover artwork by Xael A Mottier.

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Prologue

She reached the door and hesitated, one hand outstretched. The black heat washed around her body, its streamers licked over her skin and enveloped her in the velvet caress of a Mediterranean night. She felt the button under her finger tip, heard the muffled chime of a distant bell. In a bright rectangle of light the door opened. He was there, right in front of her, staring. She watched, faintly satisfied to see his eyes sweep down. That much had not changed, then. She found herself staring back. Cool air sneaked out through the doorway, chilling the bareness of her legs before slipping away and losing itself amongst the sleeping trees. He had been taking care of himself, still firm with masculinity that towered confidently upon muscled thighs. Would he still want her? She straightened up, remembering what her friend had said about posture. Shoulders back, chest out.

'So can I come in?' she asked. Her voice cracked, betraying her with a nervous squeak that interrupted the battle between the muggy night outside and the coolness of his home beyond that doorway.

He seemed surprised, guilty as he tore his eyes from her body and looked up at her face. 'Yes... yes, of course,' he replied.

The door closed again, cutting off the rasping overtures of the cicadas. The air conditioning rushed, its chill slipping over their bodies as she reached to kiss him.

Chapter One

Abbey parked the little white hire car on the boulevard. It was spring, before the crowds of summer families filled Castillo, and there was still plenty of space. Across the road, a row of shops and cafés faced the sea. Abbey crossed and walked a little way along. Café tables, round, simple and encircled with empty chairs, sprinkled the pavement. Abbey entered the first café that she reached.

'Hay servicios?' she asked the waiter. Her Spanish was terrible, she had just memorised a few words and phrases really. Still, it was enough to ask crudely for the bathroom. When she came back out into the sunlight she was feeling considerably less hurried. Impulsively, she decided to have coffee. It was a very small café, with maybe half a dozen tables set out under colourful umbrellas that flapped and fussed in the warm breeze. She sat down at one of the empty tables and ordered her drink. She smiled to herself when the waiter brought it to her, satisfied that she had achieved at least that much with her embarrassingly stilted attempts to speak the language. It was late in the afternoon and around her the other tables were empty, except for one man. She hadn't noticed him when she hurried in. She sat back a little and tried to watch him without being noticed. He lifted a cup to drink, turning slightly towards her. Had he seen her? She could not turn away now, that would be too obvious. Abbey's eyes drifted down to his hands. In one he held an open book. A trickle of blue smoke rose from a slim cigar in the other. Abbey strained to see what he was reading.

'Hello!'

Abbey gasped when he spoke, at once embarrassed that she had been caught staring yet relieved to hear an English voice so far from home. He turned to face her, removing his sunglasses. He had intelligent eyes set confidently in a well-tanned, rather angular face. Perhaps his short, dark hair was just starting to get a little thin on top. It didn't matter. He was compelling, his symmetrical face finishing in the squareness of his neatly chiselled jawline.

'Hello. I, um, I was just...' Abbey struggled to find something to say. Should she apologise for staring? That did not seem right. He was English, yet still she was struggling to speak to him. His eyes twinkled green as he watched her fumbling. He seemed to be waiting for her response. '...I was just wondering what you are reading,' she managed to say at last.

'Oh, this! It's nothing really.' The man closed his book, laid it down on the table and pushed it away as if to emphasise his point. He waved his hand at the chair next to him. 'Why don't you come and sit here? It will be much easier to talk.'

Abbey hesitated, then picked up her coffee and did as he suggested.

'So, what are you doing here then?' He turned to face her directly as he spoke.

'I'm here for Infotext.'

'Infotext? Is that a fiesta?'

'No, of course it's not,' she snorted, then immediately realised that she had fallen for his little joke. An explanation barely seemed necessary but she gave it all the same. 'We have an office in Castillo.'

'I know, opposite the station.' A wisp of smoke accompanied his words. He spoke softly, confidently.

'So, you live here then?' Abbey decided it was her turn to ask questions. She watched as he slipped his sunglasses back on.

'Yes, I suppose I do now. It's a long time since I went back. I have an apartment here.' His hand gestured again, vaguely suggesting that his home lay somewhere along the beach-front road. 'You'll have to come for a look, it's nice. Small, but nice.'

Come for a look? She didn't even know his name. 'I go back to England soon. Maybe if I visit Castillo again.' Abbey's caution got the better of her.

He laughed, and his laugh was soft like his voice, gentle and reassuring. He turned towards the open door of the café behind him. 'Juan!'

The waiter appeared alongside them. He stared at the English woman, taking in the pale skin and blue eyes. She stared back, surprised by his rudeness. He was overweight, brown and faintly

sweaty. A voice interrupted.

'Dos cafés, por favor.' Two coffees, please.

'Sí, Señor Lewis.' The waiter turned and slipped away.

'Oh, sorry, I should have introduced myself.' Lewis offered his hand to Abbey. She took it, but it was not the firm, businesslike handshake that she was accustomed to at Infotext. Sensitive, effortless, she felt his fingertips brush across the hollow of her palm as their hands separated.

'I'm Abbey,' she announced breathlessly.

'Pleased to meet you.' Both of them spoke at once, and they laughed together.

'So, what do you do at Infotext then?' enquired Lewis.

Abbey wondered how to make her answer sound at least a little glamorous. She hated being defined by what she did. It was boring, tedious, a job that sounded great but failed to deliver.

'I'm a business analyst.' Abbey blurted out the words, as if admitting to some kind of minor atrocity.

'Hey, that sounds fun.'

He could not possibly be serious, but Lewis looked like he believed his words. A disarming smile played around his lips. Abbey found herself wondering what it would be like to be kissed by them, to feel the softness of his lips against her skin as he made his way down her neck. Was that his leg touching hers under the table? The brief sensation brought her back to the present. 'No, it's very dull really,' she admitted. 'I prefer painting... when I get the chance.'

'Oh, an artist!'

'Hardly!' Abbey laughed. 'I just paint for fun. It's a hobby, that's all.'

'I am a writer,' Lewis offered.

Abbey nodded, waiting for him to fill in the details.

Lewis lit another cigar and spent a couple of minutes watching people passing. It was getting busy and the sun was casting longer shadows. 'Do you like people-watching?' he asked casually.

Abbey nodded emphatically. 'Yes, I love it. I could do it for hours.' All those people, every one of them unique, each with their own story. A man in blue overalls passed by, carrying a little step-ladder. A young woman went the other way, carrying herself lightly. Everything she wore looked expensive, from the sunglasses on her face to the shoes that clicked as she skipped. She looked so carefree, like nothing in the world mattered.

'Jackie!' Lewis called out to her as she passed. Jackie spun round and danced across. She arrived at the table in a couple of strides and her eyes were laughing. Lewis addressed her as he waved his hand. 'This is Abbey. She's an artist.'

Abbey made to interrupt him, then changed her mind. He was talking to Jackie in English and it was obvious that they were long-standing friends.

'Join us. We're going to have cakes.' Lewis was standing. He drew up a chair for Jackie. She ignored it, her eyes sweeping over Abbey as she weighed up Lewis' new friend. Jackie's thick, sweet perfume filled the air.

'I'd love to, you know that. I have to get home. Maybe tomorrow?' Jackie's voice rose in pitch, turning the statement into a question.

'Ok, tomorrow then,' Lewis laughed, reflecting Jackie's easy optimism.

Jackie tossed a parting smile at Abbey and Lewis as she skipped away. They turned back to their coffee. A plate of assorted cakes had appeared on the table. Juan must have brought them out unnoticed.

'Oh, I can't,' protested Abbey.

'Why ever not?' Lewis challenged.

'Because... because...' Abbey glanced down at her belly and Lewis followed her gaze. She wore business trousers, grey and cream. Her work blouse, off-white and tight over the two rounds of her breasts, hid the rest. 'Because I'll get fat!'

'Fat? You?' Lewis spat out his coffee. 'You don't need to worry just yet!'

Abbey began to relax a little, allowing the inner tension to subside. She chose a cake and looked up into those green eyes again. She could feel his gaze drawing her, pulling her in. The sun

was so low that its evening caress licked his face. She dreamed of doing the same, imagined him taking her in his strong arms. The orange rays warmed their skin as their faces moved closer together. Perhaps it had been worth coming to Spain on business after all. Now she could smell the spice of his aftershave. Infotext could wait.

'Oh my God!' shrieked Abbey, leaping up. 'I have to meet my boss at seven. It's already half-past!'

'It's ok, Abbey. You're in Spain now. Half an hour is nothing,' said Lewis calmly.

'No, Lewis. You don't know Vanessa. She'll be so angry... again.' Abbey pictured Vanessa's face, narrow and pale with those horrible skinny lips pursed and her cheeks sucked in. 'I have to go. I'm sorry.'

She took a few steps away, then glanced back for a second. The tables were filling up with evening diners and Juan was bustling about taking orders. Lewis was already picking up his book again. Above the café entrance, the blue awning was lettered in white. Cafetería de la Luz. The café of light.

The day dragged. It was Friday and everything had to be settled, put to bed. It was chilly in Infotext's Castillo offices and Abbey shivered. The meeting went on and on. Papers rustled on the big round table as the conference closed at last. Abbey burst out of the building into the warmth of the evening air. The sun was already nestling in the hills behind Castillo, throwing up golden rays that decorated the mountain's crown of clouds. She glanced at her watch as she crossed the road to her car. Ten to eight. Her heart sank as she climbed in and started the engine. Surely he'd be gone by now, even if he had been there at all. She turned the car around and was soon back on the coast road again, heading to Cafetería de la Luz. It was busy on the road, and it took until nearly eight thirty to get there. The shops and cafés were buzzing with life. Spaniards thronged the pavement and a constant stream of cars was passing. Her heart was pounding as she parked the tiny car. She got out. The shadows cast by the buildings stretched across the road and reached her side. She crossed over, already searching the faces at the tables. It was so busy that there was barely an empty seat. She got closer, pressing through the bustle. A woman bumped her shoulder.

'Abbey! Hola!' Hello. The woman slipped her sunglasses off, revealing her identity. It was Jackie, casually dressed in impossibly new looking jeans. The women paused briefly, each assessing the other. Jackie broke the awkward impasse. 'Lovely to see you again, Abbey. I wondered if you'd be back.' She spoke easily, with no trace of guile.

'I was looking for somewhere to eat,' explained Abbey.

'Well, here you are. La Luz is the best. Anyway, must rush!' Jackie threw the last few words over her shoulder as she left.

Abbey approached the café with unexpected nerves fluttering inside. If Jackie was around then Lewis might be close by too. There he was, seated at the same table.

'Abbey, come on, I was waiting for you.' Lewis smiled, his head haloed by the amber rays of the setting sun. He pulled out a chair for her. She sat down in a heated fog of childish excitement, momentarily embarrassed that she had allowed herself to get so carried away. 'Would you like coffee?' Lewis was asking her, leaning towards her slightly so that his soft voice could be heard above the café's background babble.

'Yes, Lewis. Thank you,' Abbey replied automatically. Empties from at least a couple of rounds of coffee already lay cold in front of them on the table. 'What's this?' Abbey picked up a magazine that lay alongside the cups.

'That's for you,' stated Lewis rather matter-of-factly. 'I thought that you might like to read it.'

Abbey picked up the magazine and flicked it open. Incredibly thin fashion models with fantastic tans stared back at her. *It's all in Spanish*, she thought. 'No-.' Abbey just managed to pinch back the words before she pronounced her dismissive thoughts aloud. Politeness was probably best. 'Thank you, Lewis, I'll read it later.'

Abbey watched Lewis's face, where mischief played and twinkled in his eyes. Realisation dawned upon her. 'Lewis, how did you know?' she ventured.

'Know what? That you would come here again?'

'Yes. You were waiting for me, weren't you? How did you know I would come back again today?'

'I just knew you'd come back,' he said simply. 'Juan?' Lewis was already looking around, searching for the waiter. An arm reached around, clearing the table then placing fresh coffee and a large plate in front of them. 'Gracias, Juan.' Thank you.

'Tapas?' Abbey looked at Lewis, questioning the plate of marvellously colourful and varied treats.

He nodded, amused at her naivety. He softened again quickly. 'Yes, Abbey. This is tapas. Welcome to Spain.'

The aeroplane gained height, climbing quickly away from the twinkling lights of Castillo. Soon they were left behind and Abbey sat in a little bubble of thought with the roar of the engines and the fidgeting of other passengers for company. It had not been a successful business trip. They had failed to get the agreements that they needed and the post mortem with the directors on Monday was going to be horrible. Abbey was preoccupied, not with the meeting but with Lewis. His face seemed to be etched into her vision. Wherever she looked she saw those emerald eyes in that tanned, friendly face. Idly she wondered what would happen next. That was when it hit her. Apart from his first name, she knew nothing about him. Nothing. The captain's tinny voice filled the cabin. Slow, authoritative and utterly without emotion, he described the weather forecast for their destination. England was rainy, cloudy and cold. Abbey shivered. It would be a miserable journey home.

'I said, is it ready yet?'

An insistent voice brought Abbey back to the reality of her office with a jolt. Instinctively, she looked to see where the question came from. She swept back her long brown hair, stunned with surprise and shame.

'What? Oh, the report. Yes, Vanessa. It's ready.' Abbey could feel herself blushing as she spoke. It always gave the game away. Of course the report wasn't ready, she'd been daydreaming again, her mind drifting off to somewhere better. She had to admit the truth. 'Well, it's nearly ready, Vanessa.'

Vanessa did not answer. Thin, stick-like, she stamped away. Abbey stared at the screen, her blue eyes stinging with tears. She hoped that no-one would notice behind her glasses. Abbey didn't wear much make-up, just lipstick and a touch of perfume. She didn't mind wearing the glasses when she was working. People told her that her round face looked better with them than without, and it was probably true. She sighed unhappily. There was always so much to do, it was never ending. And it was so dull. Outside, the rain of the late English spring lashed down from a low grey sky. Abbey's mind was already drifting again, back to Spain, the sun and the blue sky. *What is he doing now?* she wondered.

Freshened from its passage over the sea, a warm breeze played through the terrace of Lewis' apartment. He was sitting in the shade, a computer propped on his knees. He typed words rapidly on the keyboard, watching them appear on the screen, flowing and melding at his behest. A squawking sound interrupted his thoughts. Tanned face uplifted, his eyes followed a small flock of bright green parrots as they settled in the top of a palm tree. Absent-mindedly, he drew on a little cigar. Its smoke joined the wind, thinning and dispersing as it was carried away towards the hills that lay behind Castillo.

'Día!'

Lewis' housekeeper greeted him as she breezed in with a warm smile and a new mop. Short in height and broad in waist, she never said more than was necessary. Even her greeting was the shortest possible way of saying good day. She brushed past him, then turned and came back.

'What is wrong, señor?' She had noticed something about him, something sad and distant in

those intelligent green eyes. Gabriela was a proper Spanish woman, motherly and direct. Her black, wiry hair was filling with grey and her face was dark and lined with the years of care. Her onyx eyes scrutinised Lewis, searching for an answer. 'You are thinking about her again, aren't you, Lewis?'

'Sí. Yes. I am thinking about her. I was wondering...' He answered her in fluent Spanish, only his accent betraying his English roots. 'I was wondering what she is doing now.'

'Maybe you will see her again. I can feel it... quizás.' Perhaps. Gabriela's voice tailed off as she spoke. She picked up her mop and left Lewis alone on the terrace with just his thoughts, the warm breeze and a little cigar for company. He turned back to his computer.

Every day was duller than the last. Abbey used to love her job, but now she could barely face each new morning. Nothing had been right since the divorce. Her beautiful house was gone. She rented someone else's sorry semi-detached house and drove a tatty, ageing car. It was already rusting and it only had two doors. Just two doors! Small things mattered to Abbey. A lot of these irritations seemed to come from her boss. Vanessa was always sniffing and making those silly tum-tee-tum noises. She interrupted Abbey all the time, checking on progress God knows how many times every day. Sometimes, Vanessa came over to Abbey to discuss a piece of work, but it was just an excuse to check up on her yet again, to see that she was working instead of daydreaming.

Perhaps Vanessa had a point there. Abbey was always daydreaming. Her mind left the office and slipped away from the grey English skies. It escaped to hot, sunny places where palm trees grew and there were no folders full of papers to analyse. She used to paint beach scenes when she was younger, fantasy-like sunsets reflected in gentle seas whose waves kissed the golden sand. *Relax, you're in Spain now. Half an hour is nothing.* Abbey remembered Lewis' words. Ah, Lewis. She had thought of little else since she got back to England. Imprinted upon her vision, his face haunted her. Like the fragrance of his drifting cigar smoke he was always there, following her, teasing her. Yet she knew so little about him. Abbey sighed. She had not had the presence of mind even to find out his surname, even less his telephone number or address. He was gone now, a lost dream.

Chapter Two

'Mum! I'm hungry!' The walls were thin and Luke's voice passed straight through them.

'Alright, in a minute!' Abbey shouted back, trying to disguise her frustration. *It's no good. This just isn't working.* She gave up, tossing her brushes into the dubious care of an old, stained pot. Washing up could wait. She stepped back from the easel and bumped against the wall. The smallest bedroom in Abbey's house was unworthy of its name. If you put a bed in there then you would not be able to close the door, let alone move around. As an artist's studio it was hopelessly cramped, but better than nothing. To paint, she needed to have her heart in it, to be fully engaged with her creative sensations, connected with feelings that were hard to find in the airless confines of the little room. Her heart lay elsewhere and she knew it.

'When you get a minute, can you take a look at these?' The scene was Infotext's London office, the voice was owned by Vanessa and the words that she spoke formed more of an instruction than a request.

'Yes, of course I will. No problem,' replied Abbey. That was a lie. She was tired, she already had plenty of work to do and she knew that she would not get a minute to look at yet more of it. She was not sleeping well at night and by day it was hard to keep focussed on sales figures, statements and reports.

'Thank you, Abbey.' It was Vanessa's turn to lie. She was in charge and deception was just part of the job. The office full of workers was there to serve her, to carry out her instructions and deliver results. For her, truth and honesty were irrelevant.

Vanessa was a terrible nuisance even on a good day. She took a devilish delight in her role as manager. It was not just Abbey that suffered as a result, everyone in the office fell victim to Vanessa's morale-crushing control. Her all-seeing radar left no-one in peace for a minute. As a result, they had all become quite adept at looking busy. If any slacking showed through, even for a moment, Vanessa would be right there in an instant. It was a well-rehearsed show. She stood by the victim, swept back her ridiculously dyed blonde hair to reveal her pinched face, then launched her attack. She always wore far too much make-up for work. The smell of it went ahead of her, advance warning that she was approaching to discharge another pile of folders and unload more work onto some unlucky wretch.

'Thank you, Vanessa,' Abbey said slowly and deliberately, taking another fat green folder of paperwork from her. 'I'll get on to it as soon as the Germany figures are done.' Abbey was lying again. She did not want any more work, she had too much already. Today, Abbey seemed to be catching more than her fair share of Vanessa's attention. She took a great deal of care to keep staring at the screen, doing lots of needless tapping and typing. Still, Vanessa seemed to be visiting her desk hourly.

'Abbey,' cautioned Vanessa, 'I'm waiting for the Spanish report too.'

Abbey just nodded and turned back to her screen. Report this, report that, report the other. It passed the time and paid the bills, that's all. She huffed, stood up and shouldered her bag. It was time to meet Debbie for lunch.

'Hey, Abbey, shall we sit outside today?' Debbie was cheerful and red-cheeked as she greeted Abbey. 'It should be warm enough if we keep out of the wind.'

'Here?' suggested Abbey as they rounded the corner. Behind the building, the ground sloped upwards forming a sheltered, grassy embankment.

'Yes.' Debbie was already sitting on the grass and unwrapping a triangular pack of sandwiches. 'I've got cheese today.'

'You always have cheese.'

'No, I don't.'

'Alright, nearly always then.'

'Well, it's easier to make cheese sandwiches. You just butter the bread, grate some cheese and

shove it in. Done!' Debbie explained with a laugh.

'What is it like in Accounts?' asked Abbey, moving on to a new and more important subject.

'In what way?'

'Well, is everyone happy? Do you like it there?'

'Yes, I suppose so. What about you?'

'I hate it,' said Abbey sullenly. 'Every minute of it. Vanessa keeps giving me more stuff to do. She wants the Spanish report.' Abbey took a bite of her bread roll. 'She's right, though.'

'Who's right? Why?' Debbie was finding it difficult to follow Abbey's rambling.

'Vanessa. I should have finished the Spanish report for her a week ago.'

'And?'

'And nothing. It doesn't matter anyway. The figures are going to be terrible.' Abbey checked her watch. Half an hour was far too short a break. 'You know, they take two hours for lunch in Spain,' she observed.

'Two hours?' Debbie was impressed. 'But how do they get anything done?'

'Well, when I was at the Infotext office in Castillo, we stayed until seven each night.'

'That's late. No, I wouldn't like that. I mean, I'd get hungry,' frowned Debbie. Her light brown hair, cut tidily into a bob, was tucked behind her ears so that it would not annoy her by falling across the plumpness of her amiable face.

'It seemed better when they did it that way. The afternoons went faster there. Less of a drag. I don't know why really.' Pensively, Abbey munched her way through the last of her meal. Maybe it was the friendliness of the people or the welcoming brightness of the Spanish town that made the difference. The memories all mixed together into a hazy blend of chilled, modern offices and warm, busy streets. 'They were nice people,' she added, 'and I met a man.'

'A man? At Infotext?'

'No, in a café. He was from England, but he lives in Spain now. I think he's a writer.'

'Ooh,' grinned Debbie, 'that sounds exciting. What are you going to do?'

'I don't know, Debbie. I don't think I'm good enough for him.'

'What? Of course you are. You're good enough for any man!' Debbie was outraged. 'If you act good then you'll feel good. Chin up, shoulders back, chest out.' Debbie demonstrated her suggestion and her ample bosom bounced enviably.

Abbey tried it, holding her breath and thrusting her chest out in an exaggerated pose. 'Phaw!' she snorted as they both collapsed in fits of giggles.

'Well, it's a start,' laughed Debbie. She stood up and brushed the crumbs off. 'Come on or we'll be late back.'

Everyone looked up as Graham entered the office, letting the door slam behind him.

'Lovely day, isn't it?'

'Yes, glorious, great.' Everyone chorused their agreement obediently. Graham was Vanessa's boss. Bolshy, big and bald-headed, he commanded respect. Abbey felt a twinge of shame as she found herself fawning too, agreeing with his breezy, throw-away greeting just like all the others. Yes, the weather was good today - a proper English spring day with clear, pale-blue skies and fresh leaves on the trees. So Graham was correct, obviously, but it was just a greeting, a trivial everyday thing that really didn't matter. Abbey was jaded and tired of it all and she saw things differently. She took a mental step back and watched everyone, herself included. 'Yes, Graham. No, Graham. Ha ha ha.' They gave him the answers that he wanted to hear and laughed politely at his recycled jokes.

'Vanessa, we need to talk,' Graham boomed. He had the kind of voice that was always set to maximum volume.

'Yes, Graham.' Vanessa's voice was smarmy. She smiled up at him, the thin lips false in their tight-pressed curve. Perhaps she was flattered to be called into a meeting with Graham. Everyone else was watching, none of them were envious. Fat and thin, the two managers left the room together and the door slammed shut behind them. Each and every one of those remaining in the

office, from lowly administrator right up to international business analyst, had stopped what they were doing. They looked at each other questioningly. Something was afoot and it was soon revealed. 'Abbey?' Vanessa was already back, summoning Abbey to join the secretive meeting.

Abbey stared at the ceiling of her bedroom, wondering what terrible things were going to happen next. It had been a bad day, but she had been brave in the meeting with Graham and Vanessa. She had managed to stay calm, to avoid crying, even to be businesslike and polite. It was only her first warning and there had to be three of them before she could be dismissed. But what if it happened? Then how would she manage? How would she pay the rent and all the other bills, and feed herself and Luke? Eventually Abbey got bored with agonising about work. The same old worries just went round and round, like vultures circling a wounded animal. Her thoughts turned to love, a little trick that they always did to her sooner or later. She felt that hollow aching, saw the loneliness that stretched ever longer in her life. It was late and her room was dimly lit by a bedside lamp. She needed a distraction, something to take her mind off things.

I'll read for a while. Abbey reached under the lamp, into the little cavity of the bedside table where she pushed her books. Amongst them her fingers discovered the thin limpness of a magazine. She pulled it out and slipped it into the pool of light under the lamp. It was the Spanish magazine that Lewis had given her at the café. What use was it to her? It was all written in Spanish and she had only taken it to avoid offending him. Someone had been scribbling inside the front cover. She thumbed through the pages, then opened them out at random. Apart from the unintelligible text, the pages looked much like those in any English magazine. The article staring at her seemed to be a book review, a wordy critique topped with a picture of the book's front cover. Abbey idly examined the faintly familiar image, adorned in large letters with the author's name. It was a book by Lewis Coleman.

'Lewis Coleman!' Abbey sat bolt upright in bed, panting with excitement. Could it be? She tore at the pages of the magazine, hunting for the scribbled biro. There it was, hurriedly scrawled yet perfectly legible. Lewis Coleman, a phone number, an exclamation mark. She read it again and again, making sure that it really was true. Then she closed the magazine and lay back, pressing it flat against her chest, daring to dream again.

Jackie lazed in a pleasant pool of shade under the café umbrella, relaxing in the breeze that slipped and flicked around her. Summer was coming and it could get quite hot by midday. She lit another cigarette as she watched Lewis read. It was puzzling just how many times he could do it, reading and re-reading his own work, checking for mistakes.

'How do you do it?' she enquired, raising a pair of perfectly shaped black eyebrows above the top of her sunglasses.

'Do what?' More information was needed if Jackie expected an answer.

'How do you have the willpower to keep going through it?'

'I just do it. Like you do shopping,' stated Lewis daringly.

'You cheeky bastard! I don't 'do' shopping. And I only buy things I need.' The corners of her mouth turned up, revealing her playfulness even as she spoke. The cigarette smoke poured out with the words, softening and cloaking them. It was only social swearing and Lewis just smiled as he listened to his friend. Of course he knew that she was lying - she loved shopping and bought whatever she wanted.

'Go on then. What did you buy this morning, Jackie?'

'I bought a handbag,' she started. She stubbed out her cigarette, folding it in half in the glass ashtray. Broken, spent and discarded, it lay there amongst maybe half a dozen others.

'And...?' prompted Lewis, lifting his face and connecting directly with her.

'And a shawl. To match the handbag.'

Lewis kept silent, waiting to see if Jackie was going to add anything else to the list. He drained the last of his coffee.

'It's purple,' she said eventually. Jackie knew that purple was Lewis' favourite colour. This

somehow made her shopping trip a little easier to admit to. She reached for another cigarette.

'You smoke too much,' accused Lewis.

'I do as I like,' retorted Jackie. 'You smoke cigars, so what's the problem?'

'But that is the problem,' he explained. 'You make me want to smoke more.'

Juan brought more drinks. Lighters clicked, smoke billowed, a silent truce descended. Across the boulevard, little white-tipped waves whispered as they visited the yellow sand.

'Lewis?' It was Jackie who eventually spoke first.

'Uhuh?' Lewis sipped his coffee and examined Jackie's face over the top of his cup. They always used plain white cups at Cafetería de la Luz. Juan said it was because they were cheap and Lewis kept breaking them. That was not true. Well, he had broken one cup. Jackie's face peered back at him, brown, sweet and friendly just like the coffee. 'Yes, Jackie? What's up?' he prompted again.

'I just remembered that girl.' Jackie's London accent made her comment sound somehow cheap, like one of those blue plastic disposable forks that they give away in chip shops back in England. It was an Essex accent really, but Lewis was from the Midlands. To him, every Southern accent sounded pretty much alike.

'Abbey. Yes, that's her name. Did you like her?' Jackie continued, probing a little.

'Well...' Lewis sat back and pondered. He and Jackie had known each other for a couple of years now and they had an easy friendship.

'I mean, what did you think of her hair?' The Essex twang continued, following Jackie's restless mind as it jiggled about, darting between each and any thought that happened to occur to her. 'And those eyes. Yes, I liked her eyes.' She gave her own opinion without waiting to hear his.

'Yes, I liked her eyes too,' joined Lewis, 'I noticed them straight away. So blue.'

'Anyway, she was fat,' stated Jackie flatly and quite unexpectedly.

'No she wasn't!' Lewis snorted. The insult was surprising even when it came from Jackie. She was a lovely person and she was fortunate enough to sport an enviable shape, but that did not give her any excuse to be so rude about other people. 'I didn't think she was fat at all,' challenged Lewis. 'Anyway, it was hard to tell.'

'I could tell,' insisted Jackie. 'Straight away.'

'Personally, I thought she was lovely.' Lewis spoke as if he might be revealing a special, carefully-guarded secret. His friend was quick to exploit the opportunity.

'Ha! So you do want her then!'

'I didn't say that.'

'That's what you meant.'

'No I didn't.'

'Did.'

'Did not. Juan! La cuenta?' Lewis put an end to the childish conversation by asking for the bill. The deep pool of his shadow fell across Jackie as he stood up.

'Jackie, I'm sorry, I'll have to go. I've got a lot to finish this afternoon.'

'Ok. Same time tomorrow?'

'Of course. See you.' A quick peck of a kiss on each cheek brought another lazy lunch, languid under the shade of a colourful umbrella, to a close.

Jackie turned back to her smoke-riddled pondering. Her eyes alighted on the table as she knocked off the cigarette ash. One end wedged securely under the heavy ashtray, their bill for two lunches and countless coffees fluttered expectantly.

'You bastard, Lewis,' she muttered as she dived into her new purple handbag.

'I still can't see why you want to go.' Rita was strutting about and trying to be bossy. It didn't work any more. Sensing her failure, she tried another tack. 'Why do you want to go all that way just to see a stranger?'

'He's not a stranger, Mum.' Abbey tried to discharge the energy that drove her mother's argument.

'Yes, he is.' Rita was adamant.

'No, he isn't!' Abbey sighed sadly. She didn't want to argue with her mother. At eighty two, Rita was frail and her voice kept breaking up into pathetic lumps of sound. 'Mum, take your hands off your hips and sit down,' she ordered. 'You can sit here, I've cleaned under it already.'

Rita sat down heavily in the arm chair and brushed over her lilac-tinted white hair with a skinny, blue-veined hand. 'Abbey, I'm just saying. I don't want you to get hurt.' Her eyes were distant. 'It's a long way from home, Abbey.'

Where is home? Abbey wondered. For her mother it was simple. Rita lived in her flat in Calborough and that was her home. She owned it, Abbey cleaned it. Calborough was a nice village, even a bit posh. There was no litter or dog mess, and people spoke to you on the street. Abbey lived in a smelly rented house in Bullwood, a post-war urban estate. It was horrible. Abbey shivered in disgust. The contrast with Calborough could hardly be more stark and the urge to run away, regardless of whether that would be sensible or foolish, was quite compelling.

'Mum, I've told you. He's really nice. He's completely genuine and I want to see him again.' Abbey turned on the vacuum cleaner and fussed about the maroon carpet with it so that the noise drowned out her mother. Eventually she stopped and straightened up. *Why does she still treat me like a little girl?* 'Mum, I'm nearly forty!'

'Yes, Abbey, I know.'

'So why-' Abbey changed her mind and stopped. There was no point. 'Look. I'll ring you when I get there so you know I'm ok,' she suggested as she coiled up the cable and packed away the cleaner.

'Yes, love.' Rita seemed to give up the fight. 'Thank you.'

There was plenty of room to park on the road in Bullwood. The only other people on the estate that owned cars were the small-time drug-dealers who plied their shady trade in broad daylight. There was nothing to stop them, the police seemed powerless. Abbey slammed her car door and stepped over a squashed beer can on the pavement. She reached for it, then changed her mind. What was the point in picking up their litter? It would just be replaced with something else, soon dropped by mindless hands. She went inside and shut out the street. She paused at the top of the stairs, then bravely pushed the bedroom door open. She looked in across a sea of discarded pizza boxes, crumpled pop cans and God knows what else. The bed was at the end of the room farthest from the door.

'Luke,' she started. There was no response. Luke, skinny and long, was folded untidily on his bed. He wore headphones that completely covered his ears. 'Luke! Stop playing that game and listen, will you?'

'Oh, it's you.' Abbey's son connected with her at last. He did something with his game controller to pause the action. The shooting and screaming noises stopped and life-like figures that were killing each other on the screen halted. The mayhem was at least temporarily suspended. 'What do you want?'

'What?' Abbey was stunned. From time to time Luke just blurted out the most thoughtlessly offensive comebacks.

'I said, what is it?' Luke looked inquiringly at her over the crumpled bed-clothes and plates of dried-up, half-eaten food. He ran his fingers through the length of his straight brown hair, crudely combing the worst of it back from his face. 'Sorry Mum, I didn't hear you come in.' He swung his legs over the edge of the bed and stood up. In a couple of steps he was alongside his mother, towering thinly over her.

'Luke, I'm going to Spain again,' she announced simply. She decided not to tell him that this time the trip was not for business. It would only complicate matters.

'Spain? What about me?'

'I'm just going for the weekend. Well, for four or five days really.'

'When?'

'Tomorrow.'

'Tomorrow!' Fear swept over Luke's face. He was twenty, but that was just a number. Luke had somehow failed to keep up with the years. 'But what will happen to me? What will I eat?'

Abbey surveyed Luke's filthy bedroom, scattered with remnants and rubbish. From the various remains, it looked like he never managed to eat more than half of each meal anyway. 'You'll have to stay with Nan. And when I get back you can tidy up this disgusting room. Honestly, it looks like a bomb-site.'

'Stay with Nan? Oh, Mum.' Luke slumped back onto his bed. He detested staying at his grandmother's. There was nothing to do, none of his things were there, it was a dead loss. And as for cleaning his room, well, that was simply unfair. 'Can't I stay here? There's nothing to do at Nan's. Do you have to go to Spain?'

'Yes, Luke. I've told you. You'll stay at Nan's, she'll look after you. And then...' she waved her hand at the dirty socks and screwed-up lottery tickets that littered the stained carpet. '...and then we'll clean your room.' She squeezed out and closed the bedroom door behind her, cutting off his protests.

The plane ticket was the cheapest that Abbey could find and of course this meant that it was for a flight which arrived at its destination at night. This time she was paying her own way and she was starting to see the cost of following her dream. *What if I get lost?* It was not just the money, thought Abbey. She had never been much good at finding her way around unfamiliar places and just thinking about the journey made her heart race with apprehension. She did not feel much happier once she arrived at the airport and actually started doing it. The place was enormous. She seemed to have walked for miles along identical corridors with endless glass walls and doors with No Entry signs on them.

'Passport please.' The young man was smooth-skinned and fresh-faced. Abbey thought that he could not be much older than Luke. He looked too youthful to be wearing that smart blue shirt and black airline tie.

'Yes, of course,' hurried Abbey, showing the airline official her document. 'I'm going to Castillo,' she added, in a nervous attempt to confirm that she really had managed to find the right boarding gate.

'Through here, Madam.'

Abbey glanced back through the glass door as she left the building. Courteous, efficient and fine-looking, the official was smiling and nodding as he waved through another gaggle of passengers. Abbey sighed. If only her life always flowed so easily. The sounds from outside faded as Abbey stepped into the plane and took her seat. It looked like a new aircraft. Everything was shiny and clean, but it had hard, thin seats that were set much too close together. *At least it's a short flight.* The doors were closed, the engines whined. Her journey back to Spain had really begun.

The sky over Castillo was inky black, pierced by stars. Although the sun had long set behind the mountain, the buildings were still alive. Their thick walls remained warm to the touch after spending another day basking. All low-rise, squat and whitewashed, the apartments lined up like huge square ghosts peering between the night trees. 46 Calle los Calamares. Number forty six, on the street of squids. *What a silly name for a road.* Abbey walked through the screen of palms and stood under the white arch that framed the doorway. Heart pounding, she pressed the door bell and waited.

Chapter Three

'I think I will try... this one.' Lewis spoke aloud as he picked the bottle up and checked the label. *Vino Tinto de Castillo*. Red wine, made locally from grapes grown in the vineyards that clustered along the lowest slopes of the mountain behind Castillo. He picked up two large wine glasses as he passed through the little kitchen, then stepped out into the brightness of the terrace.

'Blast.' Back into the kitchen again. A slim packet of cigars was still waiting patiently for him on the table. At the last moment he remembered to pick up his favourite lighter too. Fully equipped at last, he returned to the terrace and dragged two chairs into the soft rays of the late afternoon sun. He lit a cigar and poured some red wine, then settled back to wait.

'Debbie, why is Abbey away?'

Debbie looked up from her desk and a thin, puckered face stared back. *What is Vanessa doing in Accounts?*

'I don't know, Vanessa,' answered Debbie after a pause.

'Well, I'm not happy. There's a lot of overdue work and I've got no-one to do it. She should have cleared her time off with me first.'

Debbie stared at her. *Why should I tell her anything? Bitch.* 'I'm sorry, Vanessa. I don't know why she's away.' Two more words popped into Debbie's head. Together they formed a very simple way of telling the intruder to leave. It was tempting but she could not do it. 'Perhaps she arranged it with Graham,' she offered carefully. *Oh dear, that might have been the wrong thing to say.* Debbie wanted to get rid of Vanessa, but without saying anything about Abbey that would drop her in it. She smiled at her thoughts. *Drop her in it, what a strange expression.*

'Humph!' Vanessa spun round and marched out of the Accounts office, leaving a trail of bad perfume and lingering hostility behind her.

Darkness fell like a heavy cloak over Castillo. The doorbell rang. Lewis placed his glass of wine on the terrace table and carefully balanced a half-smoked cigar on the lip of the ashtray. The bell rang again just as he got to the door. He opened it and there she was, nervously framed against the silent, darkened trees outside.

'Abbey, so good to see you again. You look great.' Lewis gushed, perfectly sincere in every word of it. He looked her up and down. She had taken the trouble to dress exactly right, not too formal yet spruce and smart enough to impress. Jackie was wrong and it only took a couple of seconds to see how unkind her comments had been. Abbey looked perfect. 'Don't stand there, come in,' beckoned Lewis.

Abbey made as if to kiss him on the lips.

'No, no, you do it like this!' exclaimed Lewis. He kissed her, quickly, on each cheek in succession. Left, right, left. 'We are friends, meeting again,' he explained as a puzzled smile lit Abbey's face. 'I know it's old-fashioned, but I like it,' Lewis continued. 'You'll get used to it. It's so... mmm... so Mediterranean.' His explanation was a little vague, but that was all he could think of. 'How was your flight?'

'Oh, it was ok. The plane was full.' Abbey stepped into Lewis' apartment. 'It was noisy for the whole flight. And the seats were uncomfortable.' Abbey regretted her words immediately. She did not want to sound like a complainer. 'But it was fine - it was nearly on time and it looked brand new.'

'That's good. You often get groups of lads on those cheap flights. It's more like a bus trip really.' Lewis reached to close the door behind her, shutting off the trees and the unseen cicadas that rasped and chirped in them all night.

'Come through to the terrace. I've opened a bottle.' He offered her one of the chairs and pushed a wine glass towards her on the table.

'Oh, no. No thank you,' protested Abbey weakly.

'It's good wine. It will help you unwind a bit after your trip. I like flying, but it always wears

me out. And you?'

'Yes, I suppose it tires me too.' Abbey thought for a minute, watching his face, following the leafy greenness of his lively eyes. 'But I don't like flying. I don't like it at all.' She was being perfectly honest, there was absolutely nothing about it that she liked. The airports, the queues, the cramped seats on board. She spoke her thoughts aloud. 'I hate it all.'

'Maybe you'll get used to it,' suggested Lewis. He picked up the bottle and made as if to pour from it into her glass.

'No, I... Oh, go on then, yes,' conceded Abbey. Perhaps the wine would help her to relax. She sat back a little, taking stock for a moment. Open apart from low walls on three sides, the terrace was spacious with terracotta tiles on the floor and a large roof that covered much of its area.

'It really is lovely to see you again.' Lewis broke the silence. He watched her over the rim of his wine glass, allowing his thoughts to roam. *I wonder...*

'It's very... tidy,' offered Abbey, trying to find something polite yet honest and complimentary to say.

'Oh yes. I had a quick clear up. And Gabriela always cleans on Fridays. She's my housekeeper.'

A housekeeper? Abbey felt a rush of envy flow through her. How wonderful to have a housekeeper. That must be why it was so tidy. 'I like your furniture, it's all very practical. Neat and clever.' She had been anticipating a crowded apartment, crammed with dark and ancient wooden furniture. Perhaps it might even be littered and unkempt, with dirty pots in the sink, the sort of place it would be if Luke owned it. But instead it was lovely and clean, devoid of clutter and set out with simple furniture. It was modern and functional, making the best use of the space. Considering that it was owned by a man, it seemed almost impossibly well organised.

'It's a shame that it's already dark,' said Lewis. 'If you had arrived earlier then you could have seen all of this properly in daylight.' Abbey joined Lewis as he stood at the dwarf wall along the end of the terrace. Under the night sky it was quite difficult to see what he was describing. 'The ground drops away quite quickly below here,' he explained.

'So, are there gardens here?' asked Abbey, waving her hand at the broad black band directly below. 'And then is that another row of apartments?' She could make out the squares of their flat roofs, set out along unseen roads marked by the points of yellow street lamps like a children's join-the-dots puzzle.

'Yes, that's right. But they are not like English gardens really. It's too dry in summer. Of course it can rain a lot here in winter, but we still like to have palm trees and agaves. I even have a bit of a cactus collection.' Lewis hesitated, wondering what other interests an artist and businesswoman might have. 'There are more apartments, then shops and things. There are a lot of older buildings lower down, nearer to the sea.' Lewis attempted to fill in some of the missing details and then left the rest for tomorrow.

Abbey looked out over the rooftops, taking in what she could of the view. In front, over the fairy-lights of Castillo's southern suburbs, lay the sea, a dark and silent secret. To the right, the lights petered out gradually, thinning into the night-time countryside. Looking the other way, the town's lights grew in strength and number. Bustling and busy, they rose upwards from the sea. Above them, the floodlit stone face of the castle stood proudly, admiring the town to which it gave its name.

'We could take a look around the area tomorrow if you like,' Lewis suggested. 'I'll show you everything, then you will recognise it the next time that you look from the terrace.'

'Yes, that sounds great,' Abbey replied. She looked straight at him and felt something odd inside her. What was it that drew her so powerfully to this man? She spent a few moments admiring his face. It was healthily tanned and well-proportioned. The light set into the terrace roof set shards of green fire blazing in his mischievous eyes. 'Will it be sunny tomorrow? What's the weather forecast?' Abbey asked absent-mindedly.

'Weather forecast?' Lewis laughed softly. 'Oh, we don't need to listen to the forecast. It's June now. It will be sunny every day until September.' He paused for a minute. He used to live in

England too. 'Well, it will be like that nearly every day,' he admitted.

'It sounds just perfect.' Abbey's envy flickered again. 'You must love living here.'

'I like it in Spain. If I didn't then I would not have stayed. But I don't enjoy it when it's hot all the time. Luckily you sometimes get a few cloudy days.' His face brightened. 'Oh, and of course there are the storms too, especially towards the end of the summer.'

Lewis enjoyed the storms. Packed with emotion, they quietly waited on sultry afternoons, building and filling. Their towers grew, dark and foreboding, reaching above the mountains and finally descending, rushing down to lash Castillo. He liked the anticipation, then the release. In his books, he loved writing as if he were a storm, erecting a tower of emotion, decorating it with hope and charging it with jealousy. Then he would bring the tower crashing down, unleashing it, sweeping everything away in a tumultuous climax.

'Yes, I like the storms.' Lewis said quietly as he came back into the real world, to his terrace and the warm night and this beautiful woman. 'More wine?'

Abbey simply waited, her eyes following Lewis as he moved. For once she was just letting things happen to her.

'Here, let me fill your glass,' continued Lewis. He returned to the table and poured from the bottle into their glasses. Fragrance rose as the wine splashed, young and fruity.

'Thanks. No, that's enough. Too late. Oh well.' Abbey's limp protests seemed to fall upon deaf ears. Her glass was filled almost to the rim again and the bottle was empty. *Oh well, I suppose it will be alright.* 'This is good wine,' she agreed hazily, 'I like it.' She slurped at the glass noisily, but she was finding it harder and harder to care.

Lewis sipped and watched. There was no point pursuing serious conversation now. 'Is it ok if I smoke?' he asked, realising as he spoke that he may as well just get on with it. His lighter clicked, the blue smoke drifted from the terrace and lost itself in the sleepy gardens. He found himself in the store room again, bare feet cold on the hard tiles. He pulled out another bottle of the vino tinto and returned to the terrace. Abbey was still there, quiet, watching him through misty eyes. He poured and the red wine gurgled richly.

She asked about his writing, he asked about her painting. The polite carefulness of earlier faded, replaced by an easy openness as midnight came and went. He laughed as she told him about the scribbled writing in the magazine. She smiled as she recalled her nervous journey fuelled by restless energy. Its breathless promise was fulfilled. She was here now, sitting with Lewis, enjoying his effortless companionship.

'Let's look at the lights again,' Abbey suggested. She tried to stand up but something was wrong. The terrace seemed to be moving around, shifting under her feet. Beyond, the pretty street lights of Castillo danced. Lewis rose and joined her, wrapping a strong arm gently around her shoulders. Her pulled her towards him and looked down into her eyes.

'I think we should go inside,' he said.

Abbey pulled at the blinds and threw open the window. The fresh coolness of the morning sea air washed over her. Everything was bright and quiet, the night buzzing of the cicadas was gone. The apartment was silent. She found Lewis sitting on the terrace.

'Would you like some breakfast?' Lewis' face was full of promise.

'Do you have some orange juice?' Abbey could not face eating just yet.

'Lewis?' Abbey looked puzzled when he got back with two large glasses of juice.

'Yes?'

'Have you ever actually seen one? You know, one of those crickets?'

'Cicadas? Yes, of course I have. There are so many of them. In the summer they go on all day. I don't notice them any more but the noise after dark used to really irritate me.'

'Did they get very loud last night?'

'I think so. It can be a right cacophony sometimes, but I never even hear it now. I don't think you were in a fit state to notice much at all last night!'

Abbey made a fuss of her orange juice, swirling it in the glass and sipping it carefully. Its chill

sharpness was so refreshing. It tasted like it was straight from the fruit, not like the processed stuff that passed for orange juice in England. She needed to ask. 'What did you do last night? I mean, what did *we* do?' she ventured.

'Well, we drank some wine. Quite a lot of wine I suppose. I smoked some cigars. We talked.' Lewis laughed at the memory. 'Heh. You tried a cigar too,' he advised her, 'but you, um, you didn't like it!'

Abbey giggled, but the sound tailed off as she struggled to recall the night before. 'What happened after that? How did I get to bed?'

'I put you there. That's what happened.' Lewis took a moment to let it sink in, playing a little game. 'You were horribly drunk.' He smiled disarmingly as he connected with her eyes. 'It's ok. I just put you in the other bedroom and left you to sleep.'

The sun painted them with its sugary lemon yellow beams, sliding in low beneath the terrace roof. Lewis rested on the low wall facing her, haloed against the light. Abbey allowed her gaze to drink in the scene. Above smart grey jogging trousers, his white shirt billowed in the breeze that curled up over the gardens below. He caught her watching and raised his glass to her, offering a toast.

'To us!' he beamed.

'Yes, to us!' returned Abbey.

'Ah, so this is the next row of apartments.' Abbey stopped to take stock. So far all they had managed to do was to get through the gardens that brushed the terrace at the back of Lewis' apartment. Skipping and giggling, she had played along with him, teasing and hiding amongst the bushes and trees. Her new shoes, soft easy white trainers, were already coated with dust. She did not care. It felt like she was a teenager again. 'Do we go through here?'

'Yes, it's the shortest way to the shops.' Lewis led her through a break in the next row of apartments and she found herself on an old street, lined with ancient residences and little shops and boutiques. Old ladies carried their groceries in old-fashioned baskets. A few younger shoppers browsed. Lewis and Abbey joined them on the pavement.

'Hey, slow down. Take it easy. There's plenty of time,' Lewis drawled. Abbey was unaccustomed to the easy pace of the Mediterranean. Lewis took her hand and pulled her back towards him. With an arm around her waist, she had no choice but to amble along.

'Let's go in here. It smells lovely.' Abbey pulled him into the panadería and inhaled deeply. The fabulous aroma of baking bread filled the little bakery shop.

'Mmm. This one looks lovely,' Abbey exclaimed.

'Este dulce, por favor!' This sweet pastry, please. Lewis had ordered and bought it before Abbey could even begin to object.

'Thank you, Lewis. That's very kind.' They were out of the bakery and Abbey was leaving a trail of flaky crumbs behind her as she ate her breakfast.

They turned a corner and headed downhill again. The streets narrowed, funnelling into the heart of the old town which nestled comfortably in the castle's shadow. It was like stepping into another world, a half-forgotten place networked with cobbled streets that were little more than narrow passageways. The balconies of ancient whitewashed buildings crowded over café tables and racks of shoes.

'Ah, these are so cute,' exclaimed Abbey. Without stopping to think, she picked up a teddy bear from a boutique rack. 'Look, this one has green eyes!' she beamed.

Lewis turned to see why Abbey had stopped. The little girl inside her was standing there, weight on one hip, her eyes wide in hope and a furry grey teddy in her hand.

'Oh, I'm sorry, Lewis. I wasn't thinking.' Abbey started apologising, making as if to put the cuddly toy back with the others on the rack.

'Lewis! *Cómo estás?*' How are you? A Spanish voice, cracked with the ageing of years, interrupted. 'I haven't seen you for so long,' the old woman continued in Spanish. 'You want this one for the pretty lady? I'll put it in a bag for you.' To Abbey's eyes she looked rather comical, a fat old

lady in a white headscarf and a long black dress that pulled too tight over her stomach. Of course the Spanish words were lost on Abbey, but the old woman's friendliness was easy to see.

'Sí, gracias, Maribel.' Lewis thanked her, smiling broadly. An enduring friend, she was one of the first Spanish people he had ever spoken to and would always be special for that. He turned to Abbey, passing her the little bear. She looked radiant. 'Come on, there's more to see. Then we can go down to the sea. Adiós!' He turned back to shout a simple goodbye to Maribel as they left.

They sat on the wall that separated the sea-front boulevard from the yellow sand of the beach. Together they looked back over the town to where the apartment hid, high up somewhere amongst the jumble of ancient and modern buildings, the parks and palm trees and gardens. It had been a long morning for the explorers.

'It must be about time for lunch,' suggested Lewis.

'I was just thinking how lovely Castillo is. I'm not ready to go back to the apartment really.'

'Oh, we're not going home yet.'

It was the first time that Lewis had referred to this place as home in front of Abbey and she was surprised how much it shocked her. True, he could speak Spanish beautifully. It just flowed from him, so warm and natural, like the soft summer zephyrs that skipped through the streets of Castillo. But he was an Englishman, a foreigner. It was difficult to believe that Spain could feel like home to him. 'Shall we eat in the old town?' Abbey suggested bravely, throwing off her thoughts.

'I prefer to go to my usual café today,' Lewis replied gently. 'We'll eat in town tomorrow.'

Abbey tried to sort through the confusion of the morning's lightning tour. 'Where is it?' she asked.

Lewis turned to look quizzically at his companion. 'Where is what?'

'Your favourite café. Is it far?'

Abbey's child-like gaze was earnest. 'No, Abbey. I think you'll make it,' Lewis said, half-teasing. Casually, he pointed across the boulevard.

It was right there in front of them. 'Of course! Cafetería de la Luz!' Abbey laughed. She followed Lewis across the road and took her place next to him underneath the shade of a blue umbrella.

Abbey lay in bed as the English rain drummed on the roof tiles. She barely noticed it. In her mind she was still in Castillo, reliving every detail again and again. Her thoughts always returned to the last evening when the sunset draped its ribbons of orange and red across the sky. The endless warm breeze washed through the palms and danced up onto the terrace to toss and tangle her hair. Abbey closed her eyes and remembered the elation when Lewis at last took her in his arms and pressed her close. The sensation of that first proper kiss still thrilled through her, electric, passionate. Abbey reached out and picked up her grey teddy bear. She tucked the furry softness under her chin and smiled.

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Dear reader,

I hope you've enjoyed your free sample chapters of *Coffee In Castillo*. Did you have coffee with Abbey in Cafetería de la Luz? Were you caressed by the warmth and passion of a Spanish summer evening?

Will Abbey's hopes become reality? Will Lewis be everything she dreams of? Could Rita or Luke stand in her way? What roles will Vanessa and Jackie play? There's so much more to discover and [you're invited to stay on in Castillo as the story unfolds](#). I'd love your feedback even if it's just a few words so please [tell me what you think](#).

Thank you for spending time with us in the romantic, colourful world of *Coffee In Castillo*. You're always welcome at Juan's café, or come and find me at www.shonasilverman.uk.

Shona