

Prologue

The old Catalan town of Roses was silent. An echo of light footsteps could be heard vanishing into the distance. As those sounds trailed away, a regular beat became louder and more purposeful. It was the resounding steps of more than one person, marching in unison. The definition of those, created fear in whoever heard them. They were familiar and unwanted.

Six Guardia Civil police appeared in the night-filled street. They arrived at one of the townhouses, with its old wooden door and closed wooden shutters. It looked deserted from the outside. One of the policemen took his gun and struck the door with a number of resounding blows. As the aggressive knocks died away the scurry of footsteps inside could be heard, alongside low fearful whispers. The door creaked as it slowly opened and a woman peered out into the dimly lit street.

“Felipe Ramirez,” said one of the officers. The woman, with terror in her eyes, tried to block the door but the men pushed her to one side, unceremoniously knocking her down in the hallway as they barged their way into the house.

When they reappeared back in the hall they were dragging a young boy and he was clearly only a boy. Just seventeen years of age. Tears of terror were already streaming down his fresh, innocent face.

The mother, having struggled to her feet, started to scream in Spanish “Please don’t take my son, he’s a good boy, he has done nothing.”

“Felipe Ramirez you are under arrest. You know why?”

“Please no!” shouted the hysterical mother.

“Get out of our way bitch,” said one of the policemen, and he slapped her viciously across her face.

She reeled again.

“Mama!” screamed the boy. But by now he was being dragged outside and half pushed and half kicked down the street.

Shutters were opened just enough for the occupants to see what was going on, then, on realizing what was happening, they were firmly shut again.

The woman cried out from the doorway, but the marching steps became fainter and fainter and eventually were lost in the night.....

Two days later the mother could be seen walking up that same street, with her husband, carrying the bloodstained body of their young son, now wrapped in a sheet. Blood oozed and dripped from every part of his body.

Felipe Ramirez was now unrecognizable, beaten to a bloody pulp. All that remained was raw flesh hanging off every centimeter of his young fragile body. Another victim amongst the many to be found in these Catalan streets. The year was 1949.

Chapter 1

William Hale sank into the seat of his yellow taxi cab, with a huge sigh of relief. The year was 1958, business was booming and relaxation was a luxury which he seldom enjoyed. He was on his way to New York's Idlewild International Airport, to catch a plane to Paris France, he was really looking forward to seeing his sister Madeleine who lived there with her family.

At twenty-seven years of age, Will had already achieved a great deal. He couldn't complain, life had been good to him. He was, he knew, very talented. He'd left Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, finding a job in journalism almost immediately and in no time he had made quite an impression on his bosses. He had a resilient nature, nothing fazed him, he could always get a foot in the door and produce articles that people wanted to read. He was a risk-taker, which generally paid off. He now worked in San Francisco, but his head office was here in New York.

He was reasonably tall with dark wavy hair and a face that bore strong and determined features. Of course, he was completely unaware of how attractive he was to women. Work was incredibly important to him and most of the time he was so engrossed that he found few spare moments for social frivolities, which he knew he needed to address if he was going to make the right life decisions. He had recently made the momentous decision to end his two-year relationship with his girlfriend Jenny Malone, who worked at the famous 'Emporium' department store in San Francisco. She had struggled hard to get to the position of buyer, but he had realized that though he liked her a lot, they were not looking for the same things in life. She wanted a career and he knew that with the right girl he was ready to start a family. It would not be easy, as he was never attracted to the typical girls who just wanted to be housewives, he needed intellect as well.

He hadn't been surprised when Frank Dexter, his editor and boss in New York, had called him into the office the day before his flight. He had told Frank about his trip to France to see his sister, which was a long overdue vacation.

Frank had suggested that they meet and Will was pleased to have the chance to touch base with him as there were always issues to discuss regarding the office in San Francisco. They were a leader of the famous 'penny press', which enabled working people to read and enjoy their stories. It was this genre that was leading Frank in the new direction he was so enthusiastic about. He believed in the numbers game, papers priced to sell to the masses, not an elitist few.

Frank's Secretary, Phyllis, welcomed him on his arrival, ushering him to take a seat, she called Frank who came out smiling broadly "Will my boy come in, we need to talk." He sounded serious, Will was intrigued. Phyllis came back with two coffees for them and then left them to chat.

Frank leaned forward across the desk. "I have a question to ask you, but I do appreciate that this trip to France is for a well-earned vacation and believe me I sure don't want to spoil it." Frank stood up and walked around closer to Will. He sat on the edge of the desk and faced Will head on. "The owners of the paper have been approached recently by a Spanish friend of theirs, who now lives here in New York. The man's brother recently escaped over the border to France." Taking a deep breath he continued. "I gather that there is some serious trouble going on in Spain, General Franco, their leader, appears to be a devious guy. Apparently as far as visitors and tourists are concerned, life there seems quite normal, but our contact has told our guys some pretty grotesque stories of serious tyranny taking place right now. He has a relative there in the north of Spain who may be a good contact." He walked back to his chair. "You probably can see where this is going?"

Will leaned back in his chair, surprised by this information. “So you need me to go over there soon, you think it's urgent?” Franks took on a serious look, he nodded, “Yeah, the sooner the better I think. Would your sister be too disappointed if you headed to Spain before spending time with her?”

“Well, I can't say she won't be disappointed, but I reckon she'd understand, I'd go there first for a few days just to touch base, then I could go on.” A feeling of excitement was already building up in Will's belly, he recognized that sensation, which always happened when the prospect a good story was on the horizon. This sounded like a greater challenge than he'd had in the past. He could make quite a name for himself with an opportunity like this.

A look of happy satisfaction crossed Frank's face, he couldn't hide his own excitement at the prospect of Will's new assignment. “I knew it my boy, I didn't think you'd want to pass this one by. Having a journalist on the doorstep is a lucky coincidence, especially when that journalist is you. I've a call booked with an old friend Garry Thorne. He is American, but is currently editor of the Times newspaper in London. I don't want to give him too much information but I'd like to find out if he's heard any rumors.” Will had considered the conversation all evening, Frank was right it was a golden opportunity.

The New York traffic was, as usual, a frantic and noisy affair, as vehicles fought their way through the congestion to reach their numerous destinations. His yellow cab had an easier time than private cars, as the driver knew the best way to avoid some of the worst areas, slipping through the mad myriad of vehicles during one of the busiest times of the day. Will's flight was scheduled to depart at eleven-thirty in the morning so he'd started his day early to make sure that he'd left himself plenty of time.

Unfortunately, his rather morose cabby left a bit to be desired, hardly acknowledging that he was carrying a passenger at all. Will felt relieved when he finally reached the airport, then dragging his bulky bags from the cab, he begrudgingly paid the miserable man. Seeking out a trolley, he loaded his luggage and made his way to the check-in desk, then on to the departure gate.

His Pan Am flight to France was called, so grabbing his travel bag, he made his way towards the aircraft. Walking across the tarmac with his fellow passengers, he climbed the steps into the plane and smiled at the attractive air hostess who welcomed them at the door, from there he was ushered to his seat. Stretching back he let out a gentle sigh of contentment and settled down for the long journey to Paris.

Will settled himself down and was pleased that he'd been allocated a window seat. Even flying from San Francisco to New York he always took pleasure in the take-off, as well as a chance to enjoy the good views from above. This was to be his first transatlantic flight, he was looking forward to visiting France and Spain, it was an adventure he badly needed.

He altered his watch, knowing he was going to lose six hours, then lighting up a cigarette, he opened his book, one of the series 'The way some people live,' by the reputed writer John Cheever - often regarded as the Chekhov of the suburbs. This book was currently receiving mixed reviews and Will was interested to understand why. In general, he appreciated this author's work, particularly the complexity of his characters and the disparity between their attractive, outward appearances and their often corrupt, inner qualities.

He knew he'd have to endure a short stop-off at Shannon in Ireland for refueling, but he was now feeling far more relaxed and the comfortable spacious Pan Am seating made that easy. He was already thoroughly enjoying the attention from the sophisticated flight attendants.

Will was quite glad that now he had time to think. The last year had been a tough one after the death of his mother, a sudden death, when she suffered a heart attack that came as a complete shock to the family. He'd tried to concentrate on work but had found it hard to stay as focused as usual.

His sister Madeleine, who was five years his senior, had flown over for the funeral. Seeing her again had made Will realize how much he was missing his older sibling. Maddy had been a ballet dancer, she had performed with the New York City Ballet, but had always wanted to live in France. Once there, she had joined the 'Ballet de l'Opéra de Lyon' in the lovely French town of the same name, and thrown herself into her dance. She met her husband Jean-Luc who was a photographer, when he was taking pictures of her dance company in Paris, where their romance had then blossomed. Maddy loved her career, but Jean-Luc worked his magic, they married and settled in the country not far from Clermont Ferrand.

From time to time Jean-Luc made the odd trip to Paris on business. He had become very well known and prestigious organizations liked to commission him, though generally, he managed to find enough work locally to create sufficient income. He had his own studio and darkroom in a side building that had previously been used as a stable.

Madeleine set up a small dance school in the village where she taught ballet and tap dance to local children. The French language had come easily to her as it was used in the ballet world anyway. She and Jean-Luc spoke French together but cleverly, she had made a point of speaking to her own

children in her native tongue and sometimes even her young students chatted with her in English. She was now an integral part of the local community and not regarded as the strange American she'd once been.

When she returned to the States for her mother's funeral, it was obvious that she would not be staying for long, France was now her home. They had two gorgeous little girls, Angelique who was six and Odette who was four. William had seen their photographs, but this was the first time he would meet them and he was looking forward to being an uncle in the flesh.

Sitting in the seat to his right was a rather plump but cheerful lady with her gaunt, gray-faced husband. Will noticed how different they were and wondered what had attracted them to each other in the first place. The writer in him always asked these kinds of questions and inevitably he found himself analyzing strangers. She smiled at him and offered him some gum for the take-off.

"It works well for take-off and landing, I find when I go up and down my ears pop," she grinned, "I'm told particularly when we land, I have plenty more for that purpose as well." William smiled, gratefully accepting. "Where are you going?" she asked.

Her husband gave her a sharp nudge. "Don't be so nosy Sadie, leave the poor man alone."

"No problem," smiled Will, feeling a slight loathing for her straight and, what appeared to be, domineering husband. Thinking to himself, she probably ate more than she should as a means to drown her sorrows.

"I'm visiting my sister in France," he replied. He told her where he was going and she was genuinely interested.

“We're going over to Europe for two months,” continued Sadie. “First to Paris as Cyril has a business associate to meet there, after that we will drive through France to enjoy the countryside, then we're planning to travel to Spain. We would like to see as much of Europe as we can, it's a lot of dough to spend if we don't make the most of it, so if we can see more than one country, we'll feel that we're getting our money's worth.”

In due course, lunch was served, which was something of a gourmet experience. He had read that Pan Am flights were catered for by Maxim's of Paris and he was not disappointed. The smoked salmon starter, decorated with caviar, melted in his mouth and the charcoal-broiled steak which followed was a feast for the taste buds. The good food proved a welcome distraction and he made the most of it, ordering a good French wine to go with the delicious meal, now he really felt that he was on vacation.

After lunch, Sadie nodded off to sleep. Unfortunately for Will, she leaned in his direction, with her head partly resting on his shoulder. Cyril yanked her away, with the frown which seemed to be permanently frozen on his miserable face.....“Sorry,” he mumbled.

Will smiled, “No problem, I'm fine.” When she eventually awoke they continued to make light conversation, Cyril looked pretty agitated at their comfortable rapport. The rest of the first half of the flight was long and uneventful. Will read and slept intermittently but eventually, they started the slow descent into Shannon airport. Sadie offered him another piece of gum and he had to admit, it really did help with the pressure in his ears. They were told that their stop-over would be about 90 minutes and they were welcome to leave the aircraft for a break.

It was still night and much to Sadie's surprise, Cyril announced that he would stay and sleep. Will and Sadie made their way along the aisle and once outside, were ushered towards a coffee shop and restroom facilities. When Sadie came out of the restroom, Will already had his coffee and immediately asked if she would care to join him. Sadie took a coffee, happily sitting down opposite him.

“Have you flown much before?” she asked.

“Not much, only within the US, between New York and California, so this is the big one. I suppose it’s the way forward, soon everybody will be flying regularly.”

A thoughtful look came over her face, “I'd love to see more of the world but unless it's for work Cyril thinks it's a waste of money.” Will felt such a warmth for this sweet woman.

He replied, “I suppose if money is tight, then that would make sense.”

She grinned a little cheekily. “Money isn't tight, but Cyril is!” Then she looked guilty. “Sorry, I shouldn't have said that.” Will smiled, he looked around pretending to check that nobody could overhear him, then replied, “Don't worry, if you don't tell him, I won't.” He continued, “Actually, I’d never thought about this before, but talking with people when traveling is ideal. Take us for example, we have never met before, we get on well, yet we are unlikely to ever see each other again, so in fact, we can talk about anything and get away with it.” Sadie was grinning now, it was clear that she never really had a chance to relax. Remembering Cyril's malicious words Will was determined to put her at her ease once again.

“Yes you’re right, this is so nice, I don't have many friends, so I don't get to talk like this very often. You see people don't like Cyril, well, I think it's that, though he says it's me!”

Will felt the familiar sense of loathing in the pit of his stomach, on her behalf. Her husband really was unbelievable, trying to keep the conversation light, he replied. “Hey Sadie, don't let anyone say you're not worth it, believe me, you're a great lady. I thought that the minute we started talking.” She colored a little red. “Why, thank you. I think that’s the nicest thing anyone's said to me for a very long time.”

She looked down, “Cyril and I have been together for twenty-five years but it’s been hard. Normally I wouldn’t talk like this, especially to a complete stranger, but you make me feel so relaxed, you’re a very kind, considerate man. I’ve been unhappy with my life for so long, but somehow breaking away is more daunting than staying put. Talking with you makes me realize that it could be more worthwhile, I’m not very confident, but maybe I need to look at things differently.”

He leaned forward. “Confidence grows, we all make the mistake of looking around us and thinking others are so much more confident than we are. I was at a dinner a while back, a friend next to me said ‘look at all of them, I wish I were that confident.’ I said the same to him, Don’t kid yourself they all have something about themselves that they don't like.” He grinned at her, “The truth is, we all have room for improvement. Take me, I’m good at what I do, but sometimes it takes over my life and I need to focus on the things that matter. One day I would love a family, but there is no room for that right now. I suppose I have to make room, that means change, If I'm honest that scares me a little as well.”

He lightly touched her hand, “You get out and about from now on and, believe me, I won't be the only person telling you that you're special.” He saw slight tears in her eyes as he said this. “Thank you, that means so much,” she replied, glancing down shyly.

Soon an announcement was made for all passengers on flight Pan Am 322 to make their way back to the aircraft. They joined the line of passengers waiting to reembark. Once inside the cabin they found Cyril asleep exactly where they'd left him. They then settled down for the last leg of their journey to Paris. He dozed again, already feeling that his body was uncertain of the hour. This rather lethargic sensation was not pleasant, he was aware that he had a long train journey ahead when he reached Paris, which certainly didn't fill him with excitement.

It was early morning and the flight was scheduled to land at seven o'clock. As they began the descent into Orly Airport it was still pretty dark. Peering out of the window through the dim early light he could just pick out the cream-colored terminal building and the bold, red writing “Paris – Orly”. It was a small building and as they walked across the tarmac, Will assumed that it would not take long to collect his bags.

He felt a huge relief to have arrived in France. The thought of the days ahead catching up with Maddy and meeting her kids for the first time. A new energy seemed to surge through his body. America already seemed a lifetime away.

Chapter 2

Will followed the line of other passengers through custom where his passport was checked and stamped, then arriving in the baggage hall, he collected his suitcase and made his way out to the front of the terminal building. Immediately he noticed the Parisian ladies, so different in style and dress to most American women. Their sheer fashion sense was clear to see.

He said goodbye to Sadie and Cyril whom he saw waiting inside the terminal and couldn't resist giving her a hug. Cyril didn't look too impressed, but Will reckoned it was the first hug Sadie had received for a very long time. "Thanks for the gum." He laughed and waved as he made his way outside to hail a taxi cab.

The difference from his New York cabby and this French one was marked.....

"Bonjour Monsieur," said the ruddy-faced cabby. He grabbed Will's bags and unceremoniously threw them into the trunk of his cab. With a huge smile and a flamboyant gesture to the back seat, he ushered Will in and closed the door. Nodding merrily as Will gave him the name of the train station he needed.

In broken English, the man said, "you are English Monsieur?"

"No, American," replied Will.

"American!" the driver exclaimed, "I am very honored, are you a movie star?" "Hell no!" Will laughed. The driver was obviously a bit disappointed. He was probably hoping for an autograph.

The cabby was not the best driver that Will had come across. The cab veered all over the road while its friendly owner continued to chat away merrily, as he manoeuvred the car through the streets of Paris on the way to Gare de Lyon train station. Will had hoped to see a bit more of this fabulous city but, at the same time, he knew that he needed to see his sister.

The train journey was slow but fairly uneventful, he had lunch in the dining car and dozed the rest of the way. In some ways he wished now that he had spent some time in Paris, but seeing Madeleine was more important, he planned to stay a few nights in the amazing capital on his return journey. When they had arrived at Clermont Ferrand, he had been half asleep and so he made a hasty exit from the train just as it was about to pull out of the station, steam billowing in its wake.

He made his way through the ticket barrier and out of the exit, into the sunshine and towards the parking lot. He couldn't wait to see Maddy after all this time. Suddenly his exhaustion from the journey vanished and he now experienced a thrilling anticipation and excitement which was pumping through every vein in his body. He felt more alive now than he had done in months.

Glancing around the parking lot, he quickly spotted his sister standing next to Jean-Luc. Their two little girls were in front of them, laughing and jumping up and down with excitement. Maddy's face lit up, she was her normal, delightful self, with her long blond hair, very little makeup, large hazel eyes. She was fairly tall but not as tall as Jean-Luc, with his piercing dark eyes and slightly long wavy hair he stood out like a true artist. Anyone looking in their direction would not be able to ignore them.

Will smiled broadly at the happy family group and for a moment he felt a slight twinge of envy. They looked so good together and he had no such ties, but knew that he still had time. He wasn't really worried if he didn't settle down until his mid-thirties.

When she saw him, Madeleine sprung forward and threw herself into his arms to hug him. "Hi Maddy, how are you all?" smiled Will, wrapping his arms around her waist and hugging her tightly. "Great! And all the better for seeing you," she replied.

He then bent down, to give both his little nieces a kiss and they smiled up at him shyly. Up to now, they had only seen photographs of their uncle.

Jean-Luc put his arm around him, "How are you Will? You look very well." His accent might be French but he spoke impeccable English, albeit with a very faint American drawl. Although he knew they spoke English to the children at home, he was amazed how the two small girls dropped any sign of French accents when they chattered in their mother tongue - even with them the American drawl was very distinct.

"The car is just over there," Maddy said, "Let's get you home, you must be exhausted."

"Yeah I am a bit, it was a long flight and it seemed to take forever. The train journey was pretty tedious, so I slept most of the way - these changes in time are killing me.

They all managed to squeeze into Jean-Luc's old Citroen. The car was filled with the babble of voices. The two girls were so excited that they didn't stop talking, and of course Maddy and Will had a lot of catching up to do.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon and the late afternoon sun flooded the countryside with its beautiful golden rays, the glorious landscape was ablaze with color. The pretty French villages were so picturesque with their red-tiled roofs and rustic stonework. It was such marked contrast to what he'd left behind.

Eventually, the car made its way down a country lane and drew up outside a pretty, old-style farmhouse, clad in the familiar multi-colored stone. Angelique and Odette flung open the back doors of the car and jumped out in excitement. Will took a more leisurely pace, collecting his bags from the trunk. It was a stunning setting, with mile upon mile of glorious open space all around.

Maddy opened the front door and ushered him in. "I've already cooked something for dinner," she said. "Beef in red wine. All I have to do is heat it up. I know you had lunch so you can eat as little or as much as you fancy. Why don't you guys go and find something nice to drink."

"Come, Will," said Jean-Luc, "This is our chance to escape before she thinks of any jobs that need doing."

They laughed as Jean-Luc gave her a playful kiss on the cheek, then they both made their way into the large sitting room. The heavy oak beams and impressive inglenook fireplace took Will's breath away.

“Hey man! This place is great!”

“Yes, we knew the minute we walked in here it was for us, plus of course there's so much space outside for the kids.”

Jean-Luc waved to a cabinet in the corner. It had an art-deco facade and, as he opened the heavy door, it lit up. Bottles and glasses glowed as if to invite them both to sample its delights.

Will smiled, “What a selection, we're spoilt for choice.”

“Let's have an aperitif, maybe a Martini cocktail and we can have wine with dinner,” suggested his cheerful host. “Now that sounds like a plan,” replied Will, falling back into a very comfortable leather armchair. It was great to be here and to be able to properly relax for the first time in days.

Jean-Luc opened the French-window which led out onto the cobbled patio and allowed them to fully enjoy the garden.

“These chairs are more comfortable than those outside, but if you prefer to get some fresh air just say so,” he commented. “No, I'm fine here this is so comfortable and it's good to lay back, I know I've been sitting all day but the time difference, added to such a long journey, is taking its toll” replied Will.

Maddy came in with a plate of freshly-made cheese straws, some olives and a bucket of ice. She spotted the Martini's that Jean-Luc had prepared.

“Oh, yes honey, now you're talking, I'd die for one of those.”

Jean-Luc poured out a Martini cocktail for her and popped ice into all three glasses.

“How long will dinner be Cheri?” he asked. “Not too long now,” replied Maddy with a smile.

“I would have shown Will around the garden,” he replied, “but by the time we've finished these drinks it's probably not worth it.”

“No,” she replied “let's all do that after we've eaten, it will still be light enough. Will's bags are in the hallway, so maybe before dinner, you could take them up to his room. Is that OK?”

“As soon as we've finished our drinks I'll show him up,” smiled Jean-Luc.

“OK, I'll carry on in the kitchen and then we can eat in there with the girls.”

The two men continued their relaxed dialogue until the Martini glasses were drained, then Jean-Luc helped Will take his bags upstairs. His bedroom was cozy and welcoming. The glow of the evening light was very soothing, casting flickering shadows on the rugged stone walls. The colors of the light in France seemed so different somehow and this appealed to his artistic nature and he already felt as if he'd been here for years.

The bedroom window looked out onto the garden and he could see the narrow lane that was probably only used by the occasional farm vehicle. Stretching out before him was a rolling undisturbed landscape, green and lush. The quality of this place took his breath away, no wonder Maddy loved it so much. He'd never imagined living anywhere other than the States, but suddenly he felt a desire to learn more about the history and culture of this wonderful country. Then, of course, there was the famous French food which he couldn't wait to taste. He'd have to do this on his return trip. He wasn't looking forward to telling Maddy the new plans.

Returning downstairs to join the family, they sat together around the large wooden table in the farmhouse kitchen. Garlic hung in strands from the wall and copper pots and pans swung from the beams.

Will noticed swathes of dried hops hanging from the ceiling. Madeleine laughed. "No, they don't come from here. We went to visit JL's sister in Alsace in Northern France. I saw these and thought they would look good in the kitchen."

Jean-Luc joined in, "What would we do without your creative ideas? A true homemaker aren't you?" he smiled. Will could see the deep, admiring love in his eyes.

"One's home reflects one's personality, it should never be bland or boring," she commented, with a slightly sarcastic, militant air.

The two girls then decided to join in the conversation. They chattered away to their uncle telling him all about their friends and their school. Little Odette proceeded to embarrass her sister, telling her new found Uncle how Angelique had kissed a little boy called Bertrand at school. Angelique denied it and he grinned as Odette retorted,

“You did so!” She sounded so American, it made him smile. Born in France, but when speaking English you’d think she was from the States.

“That's enough Odette!” said Maddy, “Uncle Will didn't come all this way to hear you two squabbling. He will need to learn some French so why don't you teach him?”

This appealed to his two nieces who threw themselves into the job of trying to teach Will a few words of French and turn him into a Frenchman. They giggled as he struggled to correctly pronounce the words they asked him to repeat. Will was becoming aware that he was actually enjoying this example of family life, that up to how had seemed alien to him.

Supper was wonderful, and the rich Bordeaux wine which Jean-Luc provided, complimented the food perfectly.

“Jean-Luc thought you may like to borrow his motorbike, then you can pop into the village or into town when we have work to do. Will had not been relishing this moment, his face colored a little.

“Hey Guys, I’m not sure how to tell you this, but there’s been a slight change of plan. Thank you Jean-Luc when I’m around having your bike would be awesome.”

Jean-Luc looked pleased, “You are very welcome my friend, make yourself at home and stay as long as you want.” “Can we chat about this in the morning, it’s a work thing?” They it’s nodded, Will was too tired to explain about his pending trip to Spain, it would end easier in the morning.

After the girls had been put to bed, the three adults wandered around the lovely garden. As the sun started to set, tiny bats fluttered in and out of cracks in the eaves and the quiet hoot of an owl could be heard in the distance. It was such a perfectly idyllic setting.

When they returned to the house, Will was ready to hit the sack. It had been a long journey and he was feeling the weight of tiredness descending. He kissed his sister goodnight, patted his brother-in-law on the back, thanking them both for the warm welcome and made his way up the creaking, wooden stairs to his room. He remembered little else as his head hit the pillow and he slid into a wonderful dream-filled sleep. He found himself struggling with exasperating French lessons surrounded by tiny little giggling French teachers.

Chapter 3

The early morning light tumbled in through the window as Will stretched and smiled to himself. He was already beginning to forget the pressure of work back in New York and having nothing particular to do first thing was quite a luxury.

He was desperate for a coffee but, as he slept naked, he realized he needed to put on some clothes. So, not bothering to wash yet, he threw on the long pants he had worn the day before and put on his shirt, then fastening up some of the buttons he made his way down the old wooden staircase to the kitchen.

He now realized how much he wanted to spend time with his sister and to make the most of this stay so that they could both rekindle their strong childhood bond. He felt a slight discomfort in the pit of his stomach, a dread of leaving her so soon, now he was here it felt so wrong.

Maddy was already standing at the old stove. “Hi brother dearest,” she smiled, “Did you sleep well?”

“Like a log,” he replied, giving her a playful hug. “Actually I haven’t slept so well for months. I’m so used to all the street noise in San Francisco that I find it so beautifully quiet here. I’m glad I left the shutters open or I would still be out for the count.”

“Coffee?” smiled Maddy.

“Please, I’m desperate, hence my unwashed self.” He took the cup of steaming coffee from her and looked out of the open window.

The kitchen had a sunny aspect. The old oak furniture suited this room perfectly. There were cornflowers on the dresser and a checked cloth on the table with breakfast plates already laid out. French doors led straight out onto the adjoining cobbled terrace which could be seen from the living room. They took their coffees outside to sit in the morning sun.

“Where’s Jean-Luc?” Will asked.

“Oh, he’ll be back soon. He just popped into the village to buy some baguettes and croissants for breakfast.” He looked around, “Where are the girls?”

“It’s Friday,” Maddy replied, “they went to school an hour ago.”

“Of course, I’ve lost track of days.” Will leaned back in his chair. “Oh, it’s so good to be with you Sis,” he said.

“It’s great to have you here at last. You were sounding a bit vague about your travel plans, so how long will I have the pleasure of your company?”

“I had planned to stay two weeks then have a tour around France and come back for a little more time at the end of the trip, but there’s been a change of plan.”

“I was certainly looking forward to seeing you and spending some quality time with you.” she answered.

“Well, I had originally planned a longer stay first. But I’m expecting to hear from Frank, he’s looking into recent stories that are coming out of Spain and has suggested that I travel over to take a look. He said that he’d be in touch as he may want to cover it for the paper. I may pop over there and come back for a longer time after that, if that’s OK? I would like to see as much as possible anyway, I met a lady on the plane who was going to do the same. It makes sense to see as much as possible after such an epic journey.”

Maddy looked interested she smiled, “Yes the flight costs are so high you should make your journey worthwhile.” “Even if Frank hadn’t mentioned it I might have popped over to. Spain anyway. The Spanish border is the nearest to here so it’s an easy trip. I can even write about my travels when I get back. It could make for interesting reading. When I eventually have to go back I’d also like to explore Paris before I leave. I didn’t want to waste time on the way, I just wanted to get to you, but it would be a shame not to see the sights.” Maddy looked a little sad, “I can see that this work is important. You know I can’t get enough of you. I would obviously prefer you to stay a couple of weeks but I can see that this is a great work opportunity. See what Frank says and stay as long as you like, this is such a treat for me, and I know Jean-Luc enjoys your company. Actually, I hope you don’t mind another idea before you go off , but I asked him last night if he would take some photographs of us together. We have so few and we may not have another chance for quite a while.” “Hey! That sounds cool! Am I photogenic enough?” he grinned.

She tweaked his ear playfully, “Now come on, don’t you go fishing for compliments, you handsome son of a bitch. You know you are irresistible to women.”

He laughed. "Actually," he said, "My last lady dumped me just the other day, well in fact, it was by mutual agreement I was going to speak to her and she got in there first.. Maddy looked surprised "What Jenny? Why was that?" she asked. Then, not waiting for a reply, she smiled, "Knowing you, you spent too much time at work. We women do need a little bit of quality time spent on us you know!"

"To be honest I think it was more the other way round, she's a career lady. Yes at this moment in time, work is everything, but I really envy what you guys have. If the right person came into my life, I may actually like to be more of a family man. That was the problem with Jenny, she never wanted kids. Still, there's plenty more years for all that." Maddy pulled a serious face, "Not as much time as you think. Don't leave it too long, you're twenty seven now. It takes time, and my girls are longing for cousins."

They heard the sound of a car pulling up outside. The door burst open and into the kitchen bounced Jean-Luc, armed with long French loaves and a large bag of croissants.

"Salut beau frère," he laughed, "you slept well?"

"Sure did, the country air is already doing me good," said Will.

"It's not just country air, it's French country air, it's different from all the others, especially American," chuckled Jean-Luc.

Maddy and Will both laughed with him. "I'm glad you're back with the bread, cheri," said Maddy.

"We're starving." She grabbed the croissants and baguettes, then began to arrange the breakfast on

the table. As well as the typical preserves, she included some local ham and fresh eggs, as she knew that Will also liked savory food.

Jean-Luc turned to Will, he held out his hand. "I met the postman in the lane, he gave me this for you." It was a telegram. Will opened it and saw that it was from Frank. It read, 'Spain on. Call me.' Will turned to Maddy, "Well! I said I may need to go to Spain fast. Frank wants to talk to me, I'll need to call sometime this afternoon when it will be morning over there."

"You can call from here later, I thought we could pop into Saint Martin this morning. It's market day today so there's always a lovely atmosphere." She smiled, "Jean-Luc has put work aside today as you're here, so we can have a bit of quality adult time. The girls are staying at school for lunch, normally they come home but they consider it a treat to stay."

"Thanks, yeah, I'll call collect later. Don't want a charge like that showing on your telephone bill. What time are you planning to go to town? I'll need a wash and find some fresh clothes."

"It's OK, we can leave at about elevenish, plenty of time to look around, we'll come back here for lunch."

Turning to Jean-Luc, Maddy said, "Will may need to leave us and come back, his boss wants him to go over the border to Northern Spain."

Jean-Luc looked serious. “Well, it would certainly give you some interesting subjects to write about but you may be surprised at what you will find. I hear mixed reports from Spain. Some good and some not so good. Franco is not popular with everyone, particularly in the north just over the Pyrenees. His modernization program seems impressive enough, but there are many people being forced to leave the country as a result of his repressive regime. I’d take care if I were you!” Will looked surprised. “Gee! So Frank is maybe on to something? We don’t hear about that sort of stuff back in the States, it could be interesting!”

“Well, don't take any risks,” replied Jean-Luc. “I met a family only the other day who were forced to flee to France, as they had been persecuted in Spain. Franco’s regime has torn families apart.”

Maddy looked concerned and Will read her worried face. “Don’t fret Sis, I’ll be fine,” He smiled but could see that she wasn't quite so confident.

They enjoyed breakfast and after he’d dressed Will made his way downstairs with a few small gifts that he'd bought for the family. He found Maddy hanging out washing. “If you have any washing at any time let me know and I can add it to ours,” she smiled. He moved behind her and hugged her, “I’ve missed you Maddy, you have no idea how much.” She laughed, “Hey Willie, getting soft in your old age?” Willie had been a childhood pet-name and it seemed so strange to hear it again after all these years. “You haven't called me that for ages.” He smiled warmly at her. “It makes me realize how long it's been.” She grinned, “It doesn’t really suit you much now, you’re a bit too sophisticated these days.” They both laughed.

Jean-Luc and Maddy were delighted with their gifts. She was equally overjoyed when she saw the maple syrup and peanut butter. Her smile was still electric and her vibrant personality shone through every second of the day. Will could see why Jean-Luc was so in love with her and he realized then that this may be a part of the reason why he had not yet found the right girl. He couldn't help comparing all the women he met with his sister and not one came close.

Jean-Luc brought the car round to the front of the house and they climbed in. It was a glorious day, the scenery was breathtaking and the three of them spent a relaxing few hours in the village of Sant Martin, it was so different to home that he felt as he'd arrived on another planet. He commented out loud.

“Wow! I can see why you guys love this so much. Who'd live in New York or San Francisco when you can have this?”

Maddy smiled. “Don't forget our lives changed when we settled down and had the girls. Before that JL and I loved the bustle of the city. We adored Paris and the pace of life there, though even that is a bit different from New York, though maybe more similar to Frisco. Once we had the kids our plans changed and we longed for this type of lifestyle. Now I wouldn't swap it for the world.”

Will felt that slight twinge of envy yet again, would he ever find the right person with whom he could share this type of idyllic way of life? His job didn't help because, as a journalist, he needed to

be where the action was. The middle of the countryside like this was not quite the place, but how he wished he could find a solution.

They arrived in Saint Martin and Jean-Luc parked the car close to the old medieval church, then they sauntered through the quaint streets which led to the market square. William wished that he could buy all the produce he saw in the shops and take them back to the States, as they would go down a storm. The smell of the freshly-baked bread coming from the boulangerie made his mouth water. Maddy bought two more baguettes. Then they arrived at the market and wandered around admiring the array of fresh produce as well as clothes and small gifts, in fact everything you could wish for. Maddy bought some of the largest garlic cloves that Will had ever seen and other vegetables including some enormous artichokes. They headed to the stall selling local honey where the owner offered small slices of bread so that customers could sample the tasty variations. Will had not realized that honey could come in so many different floral flavors.

He had exchanged dollars to francs in New York so he paid for the coffee and then before they made their way down to the river, he stopped at the newsagent to buy a map of Spain. This would need careful studying, one of his jobs for tomorrow. The setting of the village of Saint Martin was beautiful. It was a walled market town which had once been a small fortress. The river flowed around the edge of town via a moat. The old walls dipped their toes into the glistening water and ivy trailed down to the river's edge to take a drink. Dozens of swifts flew high in the sky in their search for food. Some ducks were enjoying the spring sunshine and the soft breeze ran through their feathers. They waddled away from the group and plopped one by one into the mote. Will broke off a small piece of Maddy's bread and threw it to the ducks, watching in amusement as they

squabbled, eager to catch the first crumbs.

Back at the house Will spent a while after lunch looking at his map. He wanted to familiarize himself before talking to Frank. It was now four in the afternoon so a perfect time to call his boss. Will made his way to the hallway and Jean-Luc spoke to the operator for him, then he waited to be connected, a friendly, familiar voice answered. “Hi Phyllis, is Frank around?” Phyllis had accepted the collect call so knew it was him, “Oh Hi Will, yes he’s been waiting for your call. I’ll put you through.”

There was a short pause, then Franks cheerful voice could be heard. “Hey Will, how was the journey?” Not waiting for a reply, he continued. “How are the Frogs?” Will couldn’t help smiling. “Haven’t eaten any yet Frank, I’ll let you know when I do.” He could hear Franks chuckle at the other end. Frank then directed him back to the purpose of the call. “I had a meeting last night with the guys at the top, they feel that having you in Europe, not too far from Spain, is a golden opportunity and not to be missed. How did your sister react to you visiting Spain sooner rather than later? Is she okay if you stop off with her on the way back at the end of your vacation?”

“Well, obviously she's a bit disappointed, but I told her I can catch up at the end of the trip, so she understands.” Will answered

“Ok, you need to go in as a tourist, also try not to put your head above the parapet. Our original Spanish contact has a cousin in a place called Roses which is fairly close to the French border, his name is Fernando. He is in real estate and he knows a great many people and can also arrange accommodation for you. He will book you into a hotel for when you arrive, his cousin here will call Fernando, to fill him in with more detail of your visit, as he may know a few locals who you can

talk to. From what I can gather there is some bad shit going on there. My contact Garry Thorne at the Times has been taking an interest in this news, as he has an old contact at the L'Humanité newspaper in Paris. This guy is sure there are some quite troubling stories coming out of Spain. In fact I think that they may be interested in buying some of your transcripts if you manage to uncover some good ones. Since the war they've had a massive circulation, they are always looking for this type of news."

Will was intrigued, "When you say bad shit, what did he mean?" Frank sounded frustrated, "To be honest, not a lot. It's been years since the Spanish Civil War, but there still appears to be deep unrest. All we hear coming out of Spain is that Franco is the guy to modernize things, anything else is not that obvious, which I assume is what the government there want us to think. If we can dig up some human stories, there are a plethora of other European papers who may be interested." Will paused, Frank continued. "We'll pay you for this Will, expenses, accommodation. We can do a separate deal on the stories. I'll give you two months, that should be enough, but for God's sake be careful my boy."

Will replaced the receiver, returning to the kitchen to break the news to Maddy. As expected she was pretty disappointed, but when he pointed out that he'd stay longer at the end of this trip, she was forced to look on the bright side. "I'll need a few days to get organized, it's not like it's going to be tomorrow," he said and then Jean-Luc verified much of what Frank had told him, he agreed that some chilling stories were leaking into France.

He told them that Frank had suggested a place called Roses, not too far from the border. “Hold on, I need to make a call,” replied Jean-Luc. We know a lady in the village who I’m sure is linked with that place.” He left the room and went into the hall to call the friend. “Yes I was right, Yvette would like to pop round and meet you before you leave. I’ll arrange it.” This surprise suggestion of a meeting gave Will a sense that this journey would surely have some purpose.

As he gave way to his dreams that night he felt a new stimulus for the weeks ahead of him. He had been watching Maddy and her family and thinking that a new lifestyle would really suit him in the long run. Frank had offered him a massive challenge and this excited him more than he’d expected. He realized that he was, in fact, ready for a complete change, maybe there was a new life ahead, perhaps this was fate. He wouldn't mention it to Frank at this stage, but perhaps he could stay in Europe, possibly as a foreign correspondent, this may well be the way forward?

For the first time he was thinking of the future, with his own family one day and it gave him a sense of well-being which he had never felt before. It seemed so strange that only a week ago, he was knee-deep in another world, now he was visualizing everything from a completely different perspective. With a trip to Spain imminent, maybe this opportunity would give him the space he was after to reevaluate his life and what he truly wanted. He felt an excitement welling up in his belly, that sense of the unknown that was driving him.

The next next evening Jean-Luc arranged for Yvette to visit for wine and hoer d'oeuvres, to speak to Will. She arrived and they were introduced. Yvette was an attractive dark haired woman in her early thirties. Once she was seated she explained in perfect English that she was French but her

husband Ramon was Catalan and that they used to live close to Barcelona. He was now living in Roses, hoping to recover his life in a coastal setting. She tried quickly to explain what the difference was between Catalan and Spanish, but that left Will a little confused, he would try to figure this out at a later stage,

“Ramon’s younger brother was arrested and in-prisoned in La Modelo prison in Barcelona.” She explained. “Up to that moment Ramon and I were happy, hoping to eventually start a family but nothing was the same again after Eduard was arrested. The conditions in La Modelo were inhuman and Ramon took it upon himself to make sure that his brother was fed. Of course I cared for them both, Eduard was a lovely young man and darling Ramon is a wonderfully kind person, which was the reason I fell in love with him and I quite understood his loyalty towards his brother. However, unfortunately it was to the detriment of our marriage. Living there within the Franco Regime was difficult enough, but I was prepared to put up with that for Ramon. This just took it to a level that was impossible for me.”

Yvette took a sip of wine and a bite of a vol-au-vent, then continued. “I admit that sometimes I feel selfish. I didn’t blame Ramon for his love for his younger brother, but Eduard was incarcerated in La Modelo for five years. I knew that Ramon could no longer concentrate on our marriage or starting a family of our own. After two years of Eduard’s confinement, I left Ramon and came back to my mother in France. I eventually met a Frenchman here and Ramon and I are now divorced. That too was terrible, as I was forced to accuse him of desertion to make it possible, although he completely understood. I wish the laws would change so that this didn’t have to happen, it’s hard

enough breaking up without adding unpleasant accusations. I still write to him from time to time. He knows I never really stopped loving him.”

Will could see how much she cared. This decision for her must have been heartbreaking. She continued, “although I could tell you some of this story I think it would be better for you to speak to Ramon personally. He knows more detail than me. For me it was about our relationship, but for him it was all focused on Eduard. Here is his telephone number, I will let him know you are coming and I know he will be happy to talk to you, in fact in someways it will do him good, he needs to move on now with his life.”

For the rest of the evening they talked about other topics. Will liked her and could see that she was a sweet woman, he was impressed by her openness and easy manner. She eventually left, promising to contact Ramon and tell him to expect a call.

Chapter 4

Will woke up to hear the sound of laughter and children's voices coming from the garden below. For a moment he'd forgotten where he was, but then he remembered that this was the cheerful banter of his two little nieces.

He climbed out of bed and looked out of the window into the garden. Odette was swinging from a simple homemade swing which hung from a tall tree. She squealed with excitement as she drove herself higher and higher. Angelique was sitting on the grass making a posy of wildflowers. Will could not take his eyes off them. Their happiness was all-consuming, he wanted to soak up the moment and to savor every glorious minute in this place.

He made his way to the bathroom, shaved and took a quick shower. He was looking forward to spending some final time with the family, before setting off to Spain the next day. He was annoyed with himself that it had taken him this many years to make such a long, overdue trip. He was also cross that he'd waited until after the death of his mother to come over. She could have joined him to visit her grandchildren. Every moment was precious, he'd only just realized that since he arrived.

He remembered his mother's conversations with him and that she had resigned herself to never seeing her daughter or her grandchildren. His father had died suddenly ten years before. This would have been a dream come true for her. Will contemplated that this is what people always say about regrets and the philosophy of living every day as if it were your last. No point regretting those dreams that never happened, as Mom used to call them 'The should-a -would'a- could-of's'.

Maddy was sitting on an old wooden garden bench with a cup of coffee watching her happy little family with a contented smile on her face. As Will walked towards her, the smile deepened and it showed clearly the sisterly love she bore him. Glancing down at her watch, Maddy chuckled, “What sort of time do you call this?”

Will grinned, “If it hadn't been for those two little tinkers, I'd still be a dead dog. I can't believe how well I sleep here, I never normally stay in bed this late, though I think my body is still getting over the journey.

He sat down next to her. “Do you fancy a coffee?” she asked. He gestured for her to stay sitting, these moments of innocent joy should surely be treasured. He made his way into the kitchen, helped himself to coffee and joined her once again to watch the girls at play.

Will had made one firm decision, he was going to re-evaluate his life and make some distinct changes. What those changes would be was still a mystery, but after his conversation with Jenny he knew that if the right door opened he should consider walking through it.

The last few days had sped by fast. He had met a man in the village who'd helped him book his journey to Spain, first by train to the French border town of Perpignan and then he'd take a coach and travel over the mountains to Roses in the Costa Brava. This was where Fernando lived as well as Ramon and also happened to be the first decent sized coastal town on the map.

They had taken advantage of a walk with the children for Jean-Luc to grab the opportunity to take some photographs of Maddy and Will. These would be treasured by both of them. He planned to leave his copies with Maddy to pick up on his return, no point taking them on this trip.

Will had kept himself busy as he packed and planned for his journey. Also he'd gone out alone on a few trips to look around the area as much as he could. The agent from the village turned up with the tickets and train times and he was now ready for his new adventure.

At the station the next morning, William and Maddy hugged each other and reluctantly said goodbye. He had not spent as much time as planned with his sister and her family and was determined to make it up to them on his return when this work was done.

He would definitely go back to see her for longer before he went to Paris where he was planning to spend a few days before flying home. To come all this way and not take in the wonders of their famous capital city would seem criminal.

Will's train journey south was pleasant enough, the views from the window were a delight and this time he was not too tired to appreciate them. He changed trains a couple of times, eventually following the coast on the way to Perpignan. He saw glimpses of the sea from time to time as they came closer to the Pyrénées.

Although it was pleasant warm spring weather, as he came closer to Perpignan he could see that there was still snow on the mountains. 'Hey!' he thought to himself, 'I could go skiing if I lived here.' Will loved skiing back in the states and realized that this was an activity he would miss. To have the sport on his doorstep could be a real bonus.

The train duly arrived in Perpignan. He had a little over an hour to kill before his coach was due to leave, so he went for a coffee and looked around a few shops. This part of town was nothing special, but he imagined there would be more to see and do in the centre. Luckily the coach station was close by and he easily found the right bus for his journey to Roses. So loading his cases into the hold he climbed on board and chose an unoccupied seat by a window and settled down. The coach started to fill up quickly, one or two were obviously tourists but there were quite a few French passengers.

It proved to be a rather arduous journey, winding mountain roads that seemed to go on forever. Will chatted a little to the young man sitting next to him and at the border the police came on to the bus and checked passports. Daniel explained that he was half French and travelled back and forth fairly regularly. When Will mentioned briefly why he was here, Daniel changed the subject, clearly uncomfortable with political dialogue. Will realized even then that he would need to be more careful. When they were getting closer to Roses, Daniel left the bus at a small village and the last words he uttered were "Be careful."

As the coach rolled into Roses, he breathed a huge sigh of relief, it was good to know that he could begin to settle and find his way around this new country. He was in no rush to travel again for a while, very relieved that this was not going to be a hasty assignment.

His hotel, El Gran overlooked the bay. As soon as he had checked in, he took his bags to his room. He wasn't particularly hungry so he went to the bar for a cold beer and a bag of potato chips. He took these outside and sat by the pool. Dipping his fingers into the water he felt the temperature but thought it was a little too early in the season for a swim. What a shame! A swim would have been so refreshing. Maybe during the day in the sun it would feel warmer.

He made his way back to his room, taking in very little of the surroundings. It had been a long and tiring day so he went straight to bed and, in no time at all, fell into a deep sleep. He was woken up quite early in the morning by unfamiliar noises from the street below. Although the sun was not completely up, he could feel the warmth of the day already, yes the pool may be ok later.

Climbing out of bed he opened the window, breathing in the soft breeze of a Mediterranean spring morning. Stretching, he made his way to the shower. It was not a large shower room but, like the rest of the hotel, it was perfectly adequate, if a little basic. The hotel name El Gran was a bit of an exaggeration, it wasn't particularly grand at all, but everything he needed was here. Plus he wouldn't be staying here long.

He was soon dressed and ready for breakfast and looking forward to exploring the town. He had a day on his own. He would be meeting Fernando the next morning as the real estate agent had business further down the coast today.

The dining room was already busy. A large group of tourists were having their breakfast in readiness for some excursion or other. He had read that tourism was slowly becoming more popular in this part of Spain.

The happy, laughing, rather boisterous group of holiday makers, mostly seemed to be English. He smiled at the banter that was coming from one of the tables. They were definitely in high spirits.

A friendly-looking waiter made his way over and Will ordered a black coffee and croissants. When the young waiter returned to fill his cup a second time Will asked, "Can you recommend a nice place for lunch, somewhere with a good midday menu perhaps?" The waiter smiled, and replied, "There are many here but personally I would recommend my family restaurant. It is owned by my aunt and her husband. She is a very good cook and chooses their menu well, it is local food and always very tasty."

Will was delighted. "Can you please give me directions?"

The waiter looked pleased, "It is in a small road set back from the seafront and you will find mainly locals there. As you walk along, you will see a yellow building on a corner, on the opposite side of the road to the sea. At that corner, turn right into Avenida Santa Maria. Go to the end, turn right

again, then left, you will find the restaurant about 20 meters down on the left. It is called 'El Berganti,' tell them Pepe sent you, they will look after you well."

"OK Pepe, thanks for that." Have you worked here long?" Pepe smiled cheerfully, "Two years now, it's a good hotel and I improve my English. We have a lot more English visitors now as well as a few other nationalities. Where are you from?"

Will had been waiting for this, he knew his accent would sound different. "I'm from San Francisco, in America.." Pepe looked really fascinated. "We don't get many Americans here; it's too far for them to come."

William then explained about his visit to France and told Pepe about his sister. Pepe was genuinely intrigued, he explained that he had a big family here. "I was born a little way down the coast in a place called Begur, it's a pretty medieval village, you should make a trip there, it's completely different from here." Will said he may well do that.

After breakfast he said goodbye to Pepe and left the dining room, then wandered out of the hotel. He planned to turn left and make his way to the fish market. Then he'd walk back, retracing his steps, to continue the length of the promenade all the way to the other end. This would allow him to take in more of the town.

The fish market was alive with the hustle and bustle of fishermen and what looked like local hoteliers, hoping to purchase fish directly off the boats. The public fish market was not yet open, but he could see money passing hands, as the local restaurateurs pushed and shoved their way in, to obtain the best deals. He loved the smells, the sea air mixed with the smell of fresh fish, it was so natural, he could almost taste the salt. A sense of well-being wafted over him, he was enjoying every moment, it was so different from his normal lifestyle, this was great! He felt like he had reached a new chapter, a fork in the road.

A few little fishing boats were still sailing in and Will stood for a while watching the shiny, glistening catches which were being transferred into large wicker baskets. There was everything from large fish, most of which he couldn't name, to tiny ones and all sizes of octopus to tiny squid which he already knew were called calamari. Will spoke a small amount of schoolboy Spanish although his was South American Spanish which he knew would be slightly different, however, he could at least make himself understood a little. Language had been far more difficult in France and he was looking forward to practicing Spanish.

As the sun started to rise higher in the sky, he decided to start his walk. He stopped off from time to time to take the odd picture for his eventual return to the US. He knew that the camera around his neck clearly indicated to everyone that he was a tourist, but then he was sure his clothes did as well. He noticed a pretty little bar on the other side of the road overlooking the sea front, with a raffia roof and matching raffia sunshades. He decided to stop for a cold drink and asked for a fresh orange juice which he drank greedily. He was feeling warm already even though the day had hardly started.

The weather was mixed at this time of the year. He had read that he could expect gray skies as well, but today the spring sun was definitely welcoming him in.

As usual he enjoyed 'people watching'. At one table there was an old man who looked very local, and at another a young couple, who looked liked tourists and whom he was certain must be either English or German, probably German owing to their coloring. She was a pretty blond and he was tall with blond hair too, both had great suntans, they looked very much in love. For a moment, Will felt that familiar small twinge of envy, back home he didn't mind being single, here he wished that he had someone to share all of this with him.

Chapter 5

Paying for his drink, he realized that he needed to move faster if he was going to walk the length of the promenade before lunch. He crossed the road again to be closer to the beach and sauntered along looking out to sea, admiring the attractive palm trees which lined the route. On the other side of the road there were a number of bars and restaurants filling up with happy, smiling people. It was too early in the season for many tourists and the few foreigners he saw were mainly retired, escaping miserable weather in their own countries. It was such a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.

Will noticed small children coming out of morning school, wearing little blue smocks over their clothes, with white Peter Pan collars. They ran and jumped like tiny animals. He listened to their high-pitched voices chattering to their mothers and grandmothers. Once again he felt that sensation of slight envy in the pit of his stomach, what was it? Why should he, of all people, be affected by all of this? Deep down he knew, there was something different about being here compared to home, it offered something genuine and real.

Even apart from the fish market, the smell of the place was different, cooking smells mixed with the fresh sea air. An urge to be part of this new world overwhelmed him but he pushed the thought away. He was being ridiculous, but he still glanced back to look at the mothers with their chattering offspring as they walked home for lunch.

It was twelve noon already, how time had flown, when he'd actually done very little. As he walked along he noted the yellow building Pepe had mentioned and the road to the right, but carried on walking past, determined to continue exploring. It was still too early for lunch anyway, so his plan was for one more beach bar stop before he searched for the restaurant. He needed to earn another rest, so he quickened his step to a brisk pace.

He was feeling warmer and was now wishing that he'd put on his shorts. It rather surprised him that many of the locals he saw were wearing sweaters and, in some cases, coats. His cotton trousers had been fine when he started out, but now they felt too heavy. It was too far to go back to the hotel to change, so he decided to put it down to experience and wear lighter clothes next time.

A small black and white dog followed him as he made his way along the beachfront. The little guy didn't appear to be with anyone. Will was quite pleased to have a small companion, even if he did look a bit flea-ridden and ragged.

He made his way onto the beach and rolled up his slacks, then walked to the edge of the sea. It was fairly early in the season and, although there were quite a few people sunbathing, it was by no means as busy as he was sure it would be during the height of the summer. He picked up a small stick and threw it into the sea for his new friend. The tiny terrier ran after it but stopped dead at the water's edge. "Hey little guy, are you scared of water?" The dog dodged the waves as they tumbled onto the sand, it was very clear he was happier to stay dry. Considering that he was covered in

shaggy fur, he seemed unaware of the warmth. Will concluded that, like the locals, he was used to this climate.

Then he noticed an interesting looking bar at the very end of the beach. It was situated on the promenade itself and he needed to climb some steps to reach it. Will and Buddy, the name he'd decided to call his scruffy friend, played on the sand for a little longer, then made their way towards the bar at the end of the beach, climbing the stone steps which led to a shady terrace.

He ordered a beer from a waiter who arrived as soon as he sat down and then surveyed the other customers. There were a few more locals here than tourists. He imagined that they didn't tend to wander this far to the other end of town, and he assumed these local people had been working all morning and were now having a well-earned rest.

Already Will had noticed how conversations seemed so much louder in Spanish than in English. However, there was a small group at the table next to him who, from time to time, lowered their voices and appeared to be conversing quietly in an unrecognizable language. He recognized Spanish but this language was different somehow. It then became clear to him that his presence worried them and they spoke loudly in Spanish again. The waiter brought his drink over along with a plate of local olives.

"You are English Señor?" he said.

"American," answered Will.

"We don't meet many Americans here," the waiter smiled. Will realized that he was

going to have to get used to this phrase as an American sure was a novelty. “Where are you from?”

“San Francisco,” Will replied. “I would love to go there,” said the waiter, “I have read books from there, also much about New York that sounds like a wonderful place.”

“It is,” replied Will, “I travel there a lot on business to our head office, but I love the atmosphere here, it's very different.”

The waiter carried on serving other tables as large plates of mussels and squid were bought out from the kitchen. Will was hungry now but determined to visit the restaurant in the back streets instead.

He looked out towards the sea, enjoying the fabulous scenery and the view of small yachts bobbing about on the calm, glistening water. He delved into his pocket pulled out some pesetas and paid the waiter.

Buddy had given up when he'd realized that there wasn't any food on offer. He'd sat with Will for a short time until he'd seen another small dog and happily wandered off, tail wagging, to join his new companion.

Walking back along the seafront, he watched a man with his donkey weighed down with two baskets which hung on either side of its scrawny back. They were filled with vegetables. He must have spent all morning picking them to sell in the town. It was a hard life for these people. The difference between here and the US was very apparent. This was almost third-world, though there was a certain romantic charm to it all which was lost in so many parts of the United States. Of

course San Francisco and New York were certainly very different to the midwest and other more rural areas.

He retraced his steps, now hoping lunch at the restaurant would be as good as Pepe had described. When he reached the yellow building Will turned left and sauntered down Avenida Santa Maria. He followed Pepe's directions and soon found the restaurant "El Berganti". There were a few tables outside but these were all occupied, so Will peered inside to see a fairly large dining room. It was quite busy and clearly this was not a restaurant favored by tourists. He noticed a small table tucked away in a corner that was free and took a seat. Now he wished he was not alone a companion to share this with would be so much better.

A stocky man with a round, ruddy face and large mustache approached him, smiling, and shook his hand - much to Will's surprise.

"Buenas tardes," he said, then, looking closely asked in very broken English, "Are you English Señor?"

"American," smiled Will.

"Espera un momento, voy a buscar a mi hija". He spoke quickly but Will did catch the word for daughter. The man walked back towards the kitchen and Will wondered whether he'd been forgotten, as the guy was away for what seemed like ages. He then came back, still smiling from ear to ear and, to Will's astonishment, he brought with him one of the most beautiful young women he had seen for a long time.

She had a natural beauty that completely took his breath away. Long, dark, slightly wavy hair cascaded down her back. She was wearing a simple cream dress, no-frills, but it looked tailor-made and clung unashamedly to her slim, yet perfectly sculpted body. She smiled a soft melting smile and walked towards him. Then, in perfect English, she said, “Hello, my father thinks you may need a little help with the menu.”

“Hi, yeah, I most probably will,” he smiled.

“Are you staying here for long?” she asked, as she placed new cutlery on a mat and added a crisp white linen napkin.

“I’m not sure yet, I came over from France where my sister lives.” Will could not take his eyes off her. He was doubting his own behavior, hoping she couldn’t see through him, but with her looks, this must happen to her all the time.

“Do you mind if I sit down, then I will explain.”

His heart took a joyous leap, she could sit by him all day! For a lifetime, he thought to himself.

“My name is Isabella. What is yours?” she asked.

“William,”

“Ah, Guillermo.” She said he smiled, it sounded amazing in Spanish.

“My friends call me Will.” “Then I shall call you Guille, is that OK?”

“Sounds good to me.” He could hardly believe himself, gone was the normal, self-confident man, and in his place, a shy and timid schoolboy, almost too frightened to speak. No woman had ever had

this effect on him before. He grappled for his strength and confidence to return. She would think him a complete fool if he continued in this vein.

Isabella seemed unaware of the effect she was having. She remained relaxed and calm, producing a menu which she proceeded to translate. William chose mussels to start and a rabbit stew which she assured him was delicious.

She left to take the order to the kitchen and Will felt overwhelming disappointment. It was as if he didn't want to spend a minute without her gaze on him. He was sad to see that his lunch was brought to him not by Isabella but by a younger boy. Will was hungry and ate with relish, but could not take his mind off Isabella.

He finished with a coffee as he could not manage a dessert. The food was delicious as promised, but now he was full to bursting. The owner came over beaming from ear to ear once again.

“You like?” he gestured to the menu.

“Very much,” Will smiled. “Pepé told me to come.”

“Ah, you stay at El Gran?” “Yes I am, but I don’t expect the food to be as good as this, I’m only there one more night.”

Her father seemed genuinely interested. “Where do you go from there?” “I’m meeting a real estate agent tomorrow called Fernando Torrellas he’s finding me a rental apartment locally,” Will replied.

“Ahh si, I know Fernando well, he has a cousin Juan Torrellas who lives in New York. He was the talk of the town when he left here. Not many are brave enough to make that trip. I gather he has done well there.”

“I don’t know the gentleman personally he is a friend of my bosses, but considering their family connections I would imagine he is doing very well.” Will was enjoying this easy rapport. Carlos looked down and a flicker of emotion briefly showed on his face. His brother Agusti is not as fortunate,” then he checked himself as if he realized he was talking too much. “But that is another story.”

Just at that moment Isabella came back out. Her father beckoned to her, and she came over and explained in Spanish that Pepe had recommended them. She smiled. “My cousin Pepe is so lovely he likes to send people here, but he always chooses the ones he thinks will like local food. If they are too, how you say it? typical tourist! He never sends. Only people who do not order English food.” She laughed and it was like listening to music.

Her father continued, “He is meeting up with our good friend Fernando, so he will be staying a little longer.” Isabella smiled, Will was hoping she may be pleased and that maybe she had noticed him in the same way as he had noticed her. Will wanted to see her again but was almost lost for words. He just couldn't find the right moment so he paid the bill and left, but just couldn't get her out of his head.

He sauntered down the little streets, not in any rush to go back to the hotel. He had had a taste of the outside, non-tourist world, and he liked it. The locals were welcoming and friendly and the atmosphere suited him so much better.

He stopped for another coffee on the seafront once again and watched four boys playing football on the beach. One was pretending to be the goalkeeper and the other three were shooting a ball into a make-believe goal. It took him back to his own childhood. He seldom looked back, but this place had an effect on him. It seemed to encourage him to romanticize everything.

He decided to walk further. Strangely he had only been here twenty-four hours and already this place felt familiar, he'd loved France but he liked the buzz of this coastal area. He spent longer walking that he'd realized, just meandering through side streets and coming back and forth towards the sea each time - a perfect way to get to know this town with its maze of tiny streets.

Time flew and the light was already changing. He watched the fishing boats as they started their afternoon sail. They would be out for the night, attracting the fish to their nets with their bright lights. He almost envied these men, they had no heavy pressure, just the belief that they were carrying on a tradition that had been in their families for hundreds of years, knowledge passed down from father to son, generation to generation.

Returning to the hotel he spent a quiet evening at the bar, drinking whiskey and playing cards on his own, and trying to decide how he could arrange to meet that captivating woman again.

Chapter 6

As he sat sipping his coffee at breakfast the next morning, he contemplated his next move. He had realized that this project was not going to be straightforward, as he needed to gain the trust of the local people. He remembered the look on Isabella's father's face when he started to talk about Fernando's cousin. Will had sensed the fear of talking about such matters, people would not talk easily that was for sure.

Pepé came past smiling openly as usual and Will thanked the younger man for his recommendation as the food in his family restaurant had been very good indeed. Pepé beamed, "I always recommend El Berganti, nobody is ever disappointed. Have you met the Englishman who is staying here? I sent him and his wife there a few days ago, he's been back again since. His name is Señor Charles Green. He is, how I say it? your sort of person", then he leant closer and lowered his voice. "Some of the tourists are not as elegant as you Señor."

Will smiled, and laughed, "Thank you Pepe, that's very kind of you, please call me William or Will, Señor sounds a bit formal." Pepé smiled. "If you do not mind I will call you Señor when I am on duty, it is the rules. If we meet outside work then I will call you by your name." Will assured him that it was fine like that.

"I was introduced to your cousin," Will continued, "she is a very attractive young lady." Pepé smiled. "Yes she is, it is a great shame that you are not here for longer as she would enjoy your company I am sure. Isabella had a bad experience with a local man here and she very nearly

married him, but just in time she realized that he was not suitable for her. Now he seems to follow her everywhere, which I think has frightened her a little. She has not had a boyfriend since. Just then the Maître d' beckoned Pepé over so he excused himself and hurried to his boss. Will left the table and made his way towards the terrace and pool area. It was already fairly busy, even though it wasn't the height of summer, older tourists from Northern Europe were taking full advantage of a little sun. Picking up a newspaper he made his way to the pool bar for a cold drink. He was meeting Fernando at lunchtime so he had a few hours to kill. As he looked around he realized this setup was not for him, relieved that Fernando would help him, as he would have little chance to meet any of the locals by staying in a hotel that catered solely for tourists.

The guests varied in every conceivable way and Will was amused by the fact that in no way would such a diverse mix of people be found altogether anywhere else. The only thing any of them had in common was the desire for some sunshine. In a few years time, now people were traveling more, this place would be bursting at the seams. Although most of these tourists were not his type, he respected them for making the journey because travel of this kind was a new experience for most, so only the more adventurous personalities would find their way here.

At the bar, he ordered a fruit juice and overheard the conversation between an Englishman and his small daughter who was standing next to him. "Ann, you've just had an orange juice, I think one is quite enough for now." The little girl was pulling a face so this was obviously not what she wanted. "Please Daddy, it's holidays." Her father was obviously not good at saying no. "Go and ask Mummy, see what she says," he replied. She ran off and he turned and smiled at Will.

“Have you got children? If not make the most of it!” He chuckled. “No not yet, but she looks pretty cute.” replied Will. “Oh I assumed you were English.” “No I’m American,” replied Will. “Ah, you must be the chap Pepé was talking about,” he smiled. “He said that we should meet.”

Will smiled, “Yes he just said the same to me, I gather he thinks that you and I are a bit too sophisticated for this place.” The other man laughed, “I don’t know about sophisticated, but Irene my wife and I were saying, just this morning, that although we love the area, we may choose different accommodation another time”.

“By the way, my name is Charles.” They shook hands and Will agreed. “Hi Charles, I’m Will, yes, I’m about to move. I’m meeting a local real estate agent who is finding me an apartment to rent, I hope to see one today. I intend to do a bit of work here and could do with my own space.” “What do you do?” Asked Charles. “I’m a journalist in the States, but I like to write generally.” He decided even with Charles it was probably better not to say too much about the real reason he was here.

He liked Charles and acknowledged to himself that Pepé had got it right when he said they would have something in common. They decided to order a beer and carried on the conversation until they were joined by his wife Irene. She was a pretty woman and she also had the easy, social way of talking in the same manner as her husband. She teased Charles a little for drinking beer so early, but he laughed saying he was on holiday, so it was allowed.

He asked where Ann was. “I managed to divert her attention from a second orange juice, which would have made her too excitable, luckily another family are by the pool with a little boy of a

similar age, they are happily playing and she's forgotten. They're French I think but the language doesn't seem to be a problem for the children.”

Charles turned to Will. “Irene this is Will, he's just arrived.” “How do you do Will, lovely to meet you,” she smiled warmly. “Is it school vacation?” Will remarked, “Not exactly, we sandwiched a few extra days onto the half-term holiday, it’s so much more expensive in the height of summer.” replied Irene.

Charles was a lot shorter than Will and was a slight build. Irene was a similar height to her husband, it was clear by the way they spoke to each other that they had a very equal and close relationship. Will picked up straight away that she was a strong woman, the kind of personality he gravitated towards himself.

As William finished his drink Charles said “We must meet up again, it’s so nice to have a bit of intelligent company. One thought, Irene and I are booked to have dinner at hotel Duran in Figueres in two nights' time, we are told it is a good experience, would you care to join us?”

Will was enthusiastic. “Hey, yes that sounds great. What time?” “Let’s meet in reception around six and we can take our time driving in. I’ve hired a car.” Will agreed. Telling Charles that if for any reason he needed to change his plans he would leave a note in reception. He explained that he may have moved by then but he would still love to come.

As he walked back to his room, he bumped into Pepé again. “Hi Pepé, would you be free for a drink when you are off duty?” The young man smiled. Will continued “I was hoping that you may be able to help me.” Pepé looked intrigued. “I am happy to help if I can. I finish my shift at five o'clock. Shall we meet at the first bar you would come to on the seafront?” “That sounds perfect, I’m going for lunch but should be back by then, see you there,” replied Will.

Will was waiting in the lobby of the hotel when Fernando arrived to meet him. When a tall, intelligent looking man with a short slightly graying beard, strode in, Will was sure it would be him. He introduced himself and the two men made their way outside.

Fernando led Will to his car and they drove slowly out of town in a northerly direction along the coast road. The views were spectacular, Will commented. Fernando replied, “I thought that it would be prudent to accommodate you a little out of town. Due to the nature of your business it is probably better if you are able to stay just outside Roses.” Will appreciated his concern. He was sensing the same reticence he had felt in the restaurant, it still seemed a little strange to him.

As they rounded the coast, the beautiful bay of Canyelles Petites came into view. It was only a short way out of Roses, but compared to the much longer seafront of the bigger town, this was completely different. Rugged rocks lined the sandy bay and the landscape was typical of what gave the Costa Brava its name - 'Brave Coast'.

The clear blue sea twinkled and glistened like diamonds and the sand looked warm and inviting. A few houses were built up the side of the mountain behind the bay. It was such a pretty place with its small well-formed beach, noticeably less commercial compared with the bigger town of Roses. The road ran along the seafront and there were a few small hotels and apartments, plus he could see some newer buildings under construction. It was clear that this was a popular village and the growing tourist population would love it, although so far it appeared fairly undiscovered.

The car drew to a halt outside a shop, with café above it. A friendly looking man came out to greet Fernando he was stockier and shorter in stature with a large mustache. The two men warmly hugged as old friends. “William, this is Señor Deulofeu. He owns the apartments I will show you. “May I introduce the gentleman I mentioned, this is Señor William Hale.” They shook hands and Will sensed a strong personality and confidence in this man, feeling very comfortable in his presence.

Fernando continued, “Although I have a few apartments in Roses, I felt that you would like these better. If you don't we can still go to Roses. Señor Deulofeu has two apartments to show you here; one is set back away from the sea and therefore a little cheaper and the other is nearer the sea and so it is a few more pesetas, but they are both very pleasant. There are two bedrooms in each one, I am afraid that we have no one-bedroom places at the moment, they are always reserved by couples who book ahead.”

“That's fine,” said Will knowing that he wasn't short of cash and he had already noticed that everything here was far cheaper than the States.

“We will go to the one furthest away first.”

Will stopped him, “Tell you what, show me the one by the sea first, if I like it we'll go no further.”

Fernando threw his head back and laughed loudly. “Señor Hale, I can tell I shall like doing business with you! Bien, follow me.” They walked down the hill towards the road, then turned right up a pretty set of stone steps which were lined on one side with sweet-smelling foliage. Fernando beckoned them through a door, then up two more flights of steps, until they were on the top floor.

He ushered them through the hallway, then led the way into a large seating area with an adjoining kitchen. Off this main room was a terrace, which was bigger than Will had expected, with a view that was absolutely perfect. He now looked down on the sparkling bay with its beautiful sandy beach. This was more like it! he thought, smiling to himself. He could write in peace here, with a natural bathing facility on his doorstep, fabulous!

They did the deal there and then, and made their way back to the café where Señor Deulofeu insisted Will accept a brandy. “Salut,” smiled Fernando as he enthusiastically raised his glass.

Chapter 7

Fernando led Will back to the car and drove them to a very pleasant local restaurant with an elevated terrace overlooking the sea. It was a good opportunity to become better acquainted.

They ordered the midday menu and started to talk. He realized now why Fernando had carefully steered him towards a particular table on the corner of the terrace. It was secluded, enabling the two men to speak easily with no risk of being overheard.

Once they had food in front of them and they were alone again Will said “So Fernando you know why I’m here. My editor Frank assured me that you were in agreement with your cousin Juan. I want to write as many stories for a wider audience worldwide. I have not yet met many people but that’s my intention.” Fernando nodded looking serious, “Yes you are correct, I agree with Juan that his brother’s story needs to be shared. However, I must emphasize that talking out in America and going public here are very different. Your must be very careful. We are not as safe as you may think. There is a great deal of danger even now.” Although this was a lot for Will to take on, he remembered his brother in law had given him the same warning.

They continued to eat and Fernando described his time with his cousins when he was a child. Two very different personalities. Juan liked to travel and meet new people and learn skills. While Agusti became very political from a young age. Juan was not pro-Franco but he preferred to play safe and concentrate on his future. He didn’t necessarily disagree with his brother’s views, but his own desire was to leave Spain and start a new life. He initially made his way to Italy and made friends with

Italians who were looking for a new life in America, so he joined them on the journey. With his knowledge of the Italian culture Juan had opened a small restaurant with an American partner in New York. This had been an overwhelming success and they now had a group of top eating venues which is how he had become acquainted with the owners of the paper.

Juan was concerned when he heard that only recently Agusti had been forced to flee to France. His brother had always supported the republicans without his views being made public, but then he had heard that his name had been mentioned a number of times by right wing supporters and after a visit from the Guardia police he knew that he needed to leave fast. His wife Maria went with him, she was expecting their first baby and they couldn't risk her safety. Fernando was happy to share the story of a difficult escape, as long as names were changed. He appreciated that for his cousin in the United States the changing of names may not be so important, but he couldn't risk his own business.

This story highlighted the warning Will had received from Jean-Luc. To assume that life here was normal was definitely a mistake. This was not a democratic county, even though on the surface it seemed like other countries.

Will spoke next, "Fernando, I wonder if you can help me with a general question? As a journalist I am always trying to delve deeper under the surface for any story. You know that I am here to find out more, already a few people have warned me to be careful. I don't have enough understanding of the depth of this situation. Considering the Civil War here was over ten years ago what changes have happened since?"

Fernando let out a heavy sigh. “William my friend, that is a very good question and one which many people would be reluctant to discuss, but I like you and I believe I can trust you. This conversation is not to be repeated. I will try to explain things without making my answer too complicated.” He took a sip of his wine before continuing, “You need to understand that back in the 1930’s, our country was deeply divided and politically torn, not only between the left wing Republican party and the right wing Nationalists, but also by a number of other political organizations. The country was so unstable, that, eventually, in 1936, the army rebelled and forcibly removed the Republicans from power. That was the start of the civil war.”

Will could see that Fernando was becoming emotional as he explained this, so he didn’t interrupt him, allowing his new acquaintance to continue. “Catalunya had always been a Republican stronghold, but their army was ill-equipped and could not match the strength of the Nationalists, who were even supported by both Hitler and Mussolini. Many Catalans have said since ‘Why did the rest of the world not help us? The truth is many of these stories went untold.’ Will quickly asked, “So why didn’t the Republicans get any help from other nations?” “Politically it just didn’t benefit them” Fernando replied. “At the start of the war your President Roosevelt immediately announced that the USA would remain neutral and the British and French governments were never going to get involved. The only help the Republicans received was from a few thousand international volunteers, but these people were not trained soldiers. They were well meaning individuals, but idealists, joining in with good intentions to fight against Franco’s fascist regime.”

He paused for thought for a moment. “The fighting here in Catalunya was fierce. Barcelona was bombed without mercy for days on end, and it became clear that our capital city could not hold out

for long. In early 1939 Barcelona finally fell and was occupied by the Nationalist army. This was a truly terrible time for Catalunya. Thousands of Republican soldiers and civilians including women, children and even the elderly, were forced to flee north to the French border. It was winter and very cold so many died. The Franco army pursued them mercilessly. I remember hearing that perhaps 500,000 people crossed the border into France to escape the fascist tyranny.” Fernando stopped once more, after a deep sigh he continued.” So this is when our language was banned, our books destroyed and our newspapers taken over by the right wing Francista supporters. Franco wishes all to be a hundred percent Spanish, so we are still banned from speaking Catalan. The same applies to other similar regions in Spain. Perhaps now you can begin to understand why we are such fiercely independent people. The civil war destroyed so much that we held dear. Even though ten years have passed, the wounds of that horrific time are still open and bleeding.”

Will leant forward “Fernando, I am truly shocked, I had absolutely no idea of what has really taken place here. Thank you so much for sharing it with me, I won’t repeat this conversation, it has clarified many questions that I have been asking myself.” Now, he was beginning to understand the oppression that these people had suffered and why he needed to be so careful. Clearly oppression was still lurking and the scars from the past just would not heal. He needed to pass this on to Frank, somehow he had to get beneath the surface of this fascinating culture.

They discussed the apartment and his move in general as they ate. Fernando knew a man who owned a garage in Roses and hired cars, so he gave Will the address. Will was going to stay in the hotel at least one more night and would go the next morning to ask about a car.

As they left and walked towards the car Will thanked Fernando again for trusting him. He felt flattered that this man liked him enough on first impression to talk to him so openly. It was clear that he needed to be careful, not everybody would be as open to him.

“I hope you enjoy your stay here,” Fernando said, as they reached the hotel, telling Will to call him any time if he felt that he could be of any assistance. Will had a short time to spare before his meeting with Pepé. He was glad he’d talked to Fernando as he was now in a stronger position to talk to Pepé, he could now see how complicated the situation here was. He needed to tread carefully.

He arrived at the bar close to the hotel just before Pepé arrived. Ordering a beer he found a table in a quiet spot. Pepé waved as he crossed the road and joined him. Pepé was delighted to hear that Will had met Charles and his wife. Will told him how right he had been, that they had enjoyed chatting.

“Pepé, I need your help. Or maybe you can point me in the right direction.” Pepé smiled. “What can I do to help, my friend?” William knew he was taking a bit of a risk, but had no choice.

“I think I need to be careful on this subject, but I feel sure that I can trust you.” Pepé looked intrigued. Will then explained why he was here and the reason he needed to speak to locals. A serious look crossed Pepé’s face.

“I trust you William, and your association with Fernando is also to your advantage, but you are correct, I too need to be careful. The situation here is, not as you see on the surface. Your bosses are correct, there is a great deal of political unrest here. I think many people here would be pleased if

the outside world knew more. But they are also very frightened. I will speak with my family and let you know.”

Will was grateful even for this slight glimmer of hope, any help would be so welcome. Pepé explained that his aunt Carmen and her husband Carlos would probably be interested in talking to Will. However, the person he really wanted to introduce to Will was Isabella’s aunt. She was Carlos’s older sister. She was very political and he felt sure William would find her really helpful. Will asked if she spoke English. Pepé explained that she owned a very smart hotel at Cadaques so her English was impeccable. “Far better than mine.” he laughed. “I believe you will like her, she too is very elegant. Out of earshot we call her ‘La Reina - The Queen’.”

They agreed to speak again after Pepé had contacted the family. They would meet up in reception the next morning. Will felt that possibly he was a little closer to his goal. This was far more complicated than Frank had imagined, but he was determined not to fall at the first hurdle. If there was one thing he'd learned in the few years he'd been in journalism was that giving up was not an option.

As they parted company, Will thanked him gratefully and they went their separate ways and he made his way in the direction of the garage. Walking along the little winding streets he felt a distinct sense of satisfaction and things were definitely falling into place. After a few turns he soon found the small garage. The owner was a short, stocky man had a serious look on his face with an expression that gave Will the impression that everything in his life was in turmoil. He did, however, raise a slight smile when, in broken Spanish, Will explained that he would like to hire a car for a

few weeks. He was obviously accustomed to the normal two-week rental that most visitors would choose, so this interesting American made a refreshing change. Will explained where he would be living and the man knew Fernando so was happy to arrange a longer hire.

Always looking for a good deal, Will firmly negotiated until they both ended up with a satisfactory outcome and he pulled out some pesetas to pay a month upfront. He was given the choice of three available cars and although he realized that he needed to be careful with an open roof and too much sun over the next month or so, he was sure that a soft top would be great fun in this climate, so he settled for the Ford Thunderbird. It was a few years old but, compared to most cars here, it was in reasonable condition. The garage owner agreed to valet the car ready for the morning.

Arriving back at the hotel he smiled cheerfully at the receptionist, halting for a moment to explain that he would like his bill organized for the following morning. He spent a quiet evening in the bar and decided that he should have an early night as the next day was going to be busy.

Chapter 8

The morning of his move was a positive one for Will. He had been a bit later rising than he'd intended. Breakfast always finished fairly early, so he nipped down to the dining room, just in time to grab the last remains of a decent breakfast and a much-needed coffee. He knew he would be busy today so starting the day with a proper meal was the right thing to do. As he cast his eyes around the holiday-makers for the last time, he breathed a huge sigh of relief.

Packing didn't take him very long, and he then made his way down to reception to check out. He asked the receptionist if he could store his bags for a couple of hours and she was happy to oblige.

When he arrived at the garage, they were just finishing the valet so he didn't have long to wait. He was pleased he'd chosen that model. Driving out of the garage he returned in the direction of the hotel, maneuvering the narrow streets with care. As he turned a corner into the main street, he had to stop suddenly to let a young woman cross the road. To his amazement and delight, it was Isabella and Will felt an excitement, fancy bumping into her, could life get any better?

Again, she took his breath away. She was wearing a pale blue sundress, tight on her small waist, sleeveless, with a large white collar. The dress flared out prettily to mid-calf. Her hair was tied in a ponytail and she looked fresh, young and alluring. William called out, she turned smiling, but when she saw him a more serious expression came over her. It was not the response he had hoped for. "Ah Guillem, hola!" He was already spellbound. The way she pronounced his name made him feel like the only man on the planet. However, there was an air about her that left him feeling uneasy.

Before he knew what he was saying, he asked the question. “ Isabella! I was hoping to bump into you, I’m moving into an apartment in Canyelles Petites today and I wondered if we could have dinner one evening.” She looked at him, but he sensed her reticence. “Yes Pepe mentioned it, thank you Guillem, but I am unable to come,” she tried to smile, then turning and without looking back, she continued up the road. Will couldn’t remember feeling quite so deflated for years. He sat in the car for a moment, unable to drive or do anything. It was as if she had just hit him over the head with a lead weight. What was it that has changed? Then he realized, she mentioned that Pepé had spoken to the family, that had to be it, and for some reason she didn’t approve.

He refused to let her rejection dampen his spirits. He was sure that in time he may be able to persuade her. In the meantime he had a lot of work to do, so knew that he should concentrate on that.

Back at the hotel he loaded the car and stopping at a local shop to buy a few provisions for the apartment, he then made his way to Canyelles. He should be feeling excited and upbeat, but Isabella’s response had taken the wind out of his sails and his arrival at the apartment wasn’t quite as exciting as he had hoped it would be.

Parking on the road, right outside the apartment, he unloaded the car and let himself into his new home. The furniture was adequate but fairly basic. However, after hotel life, this was like a palace. The master bedroom had a double bed and the other, with two single beds, would be ideal as a dressing room and for storing his cases.

He put his groceries away in a cupboard in the kitchen. There was a small refrigerator for his milk and fresh items, which he sorted out and then he made his way out onto the terrace to enjoy the view.

Looking out at the sparkling sea and the clear blue sky, he gently sighed. The smell of spring flowers filled the air. The bougainvillea was not yet in bloom but other species that he didn't recognize, seemed to line every available wall with attractive foliage. A mimosa tree stood nearby already in bright yellow blossom. It was heaven and San Francisco seemed a lifetime away.

Will realized that deep down he was in no hurry to return home. He had already sent a cable to Frank informing him of his move, while also explaining the delicacy of this mission. He had tactfully tried to tell Frank that he hoped he could get what he needed in two months, but that it may take longer. All he required now was a typewriter.

He spent most of the morning in the apartment then around lunchtime he wandered down to the little bay for a drink and a snack on the beach. He wasn't very hungry and knew that he would be eating in the evening so he chose a small plate of tapas. He had taken a notepad with him and, as he sat there, enjoying the superb view and atmosphere, he began to jot down some observations about the area. He was still considering the idea of suggesting to Frank the position of foreign correspondent, but if that failed he might have to look at travel writing. Travel was a growing industry and he was pretty sure he could do well in it.

As he walked back up the hill to the apartment he bumped into Señor Deulofeu who was talking to another man outside the café. When Señor Deulofeu saw Will, an enormous smile appeared on his face. “Hola Señor Hale,” he beckoned Will over. “You speak Spanish do you not?” Will laughed, “Well Señor not very well, I need to practice.”

“This is my good friend Ivan. He owns a farm in the mountains and keeps hunting dogs. I keep a dog there with him. We hunt the, how you say? Wild pig, during the winter months when it is legal.” Will smiled, “We would say wild boar, but I understand. I have only eaten that meat once but it was fantastic.” “Yes it is my favorite meat,” replied his landlord. “Come, we are about to take coffee and a brandy would you care to join us?” Will was delighted, this chance to become better acquainted with local people was exactly what he had hoped for, though he had no intention of mentioning his real reason for being in Spain, that could wait.

This was a chance to get to know his landlord better. Over coffee and brandy he found out that his name was Mario. However, he found himself continuing to call him by his family name as the formality seemed to suit him.

Will went back to the apartment to shower and dress for the evening. He was looking forward to dinner in Figueres and the company of Charles and Irene would be a welcome change. He dressed carefully, he’d heard that it was an elegant hotel and wanted to make a little more effort, choosing his favorite cravat, as he felt that a tie would be a little too formal.

Driving to Roses was such pleasure, with the roof down and the sea air blowing through his hair, he felt like he was living in another world. In a way he was, this whole environment was so different to home, he may just as well be living on a different planet. He parked outside El Gran and made his way up the steps into reception. He was welcomed by the lady behind the desk who recognized him. Charles had not yet appeared, but just then Pepé, who had spotted him from the corridor came and shook hands.

“As I promised, I spoke with my Aunt and Uncle who in turn spoke to Sofia. They would like to meet you. They are having a family dinner on Sunday. After the lunchtime service they will have a siesta and then meet the family at around seven thirty in the evening and dine a little after. Would you be available?” Will could have kissed him. “Please thank them, I’d be delighted.” He responded with pleasure. Now he knew why Isabella was cold this morning. She knew he was coming and for some reason she wasn’t pleased. He hoped to turn her around when she realized what he was trying to do.

Just then Charles and Irene came into the lobby with little Ann. He walked with them to their car for the drive to Figueres. The conversation already flowed freely. It was as if they had known each other for years.

Chapter 9

They all piled into the hire car, the two men sat in the front, Irene said she was fine in the back with Ann. The road to Figueres was a fairly long one, but they eventually drove into the old town and, with the help of a map which Will read out to Charles, they made their way to a parking space not far from the hotel.

Hotel Duran was situated on a side road, which led into the main Rambla. These tree lined walkways were prominent in many towns, Will had read that the name Rambla came from Arabic for 'dry stream', they had one been river beds which had also acted as sewers. Now they had become important social walkways.

Sitting at a small café the three adults agreed to stay in touch in the future. Irene explained that their holiday was nearly at an end and Charles invited Will for a visit in the UK. Will explained that he had less desire to return to the United States, so this may be far more likely now.

When they had finished their drinks and the last of the olives were eaten, they settled the bill and made their way to the hotel. It didn't look much from the outside, but inside there was a lovely antique Spanish charm. They were welcomed into the restaurant by the Maître d' who, with much flourish, seated them at a round table near a window. The chairs were a traditional Spanish style with high backs, ornately carved and partly painted in rich colors. They were highlighted in gold, adding an extra elegance to the wood. The tables were dressed with starched white cloths and waiters who wore long, crisp-white aprons moved slickly between the diners. There was an air of

unpretentious elegance. Will was far more at home here than he had been anywhere for a while. His sophisticated American life was way more in keeping with this environment than the hotel they were staying in.

Charles, like William, was more accustomed to these surroundings, and they chatted and laughed with each other and to Irene as if they had been friends for years. William would have invited the couple to his new apartment, but they were soon to drive back home through France. They felt similar sentiments to Will, the hotel El Gran was a good first step to discover this unique area, but they wanted to be in a more relaxed place in the future. “I love this part of the world,” said Charles, “I know we'll be back, I want to get to know it better, I can see us retiring here one day.” Will nodded in agreement. If only the States was not so far away, he would definitely have bought an apartment here too. But there was still the conversation to be had with Frank on the subject of foreign correspondent, so nothing was definite.

He told them about Maddy and his visit to France. Charles was interested as he and Irene loved French food. Charles laughed as he explained, “When we drive through France and stop at small restaurants, Irene goes though the menu. ‘I know what that is, I know what that is, Ah! I don't know what that is, I'll have that!’ It always makes me laugh, but it's a great attitude in my opinion.” Will agreed and realized how much he was enjoying the company of this pleasant couple.

Irene ordered gazpacho soup and Charles and Will chose large prawns cooked in garlic. They also chose their main courses at the same time. Irene picked out a small tortilla for Ann which would probably be enough. They were just tucking into their starters and sipping a fabulously-smooth, red,

local wine from the famous Peralada vineyard when, suddenly there was a flutter of excitement at the front door. They all looked up with fascination. The waiters seemed to have lost interest in the other guests and were focusing their attention solely in that direction and all eyes turned towards the commotion.

An amazing looking man was ushered into the restaurant. He was not exceptionally tall as Will could see he was under six foot. His hair was left longer than was customary and smoothed back, but curled slightly at the ends. His unusual mustache was thin, heavily waxed and turned up at the edges but, unlike most mustaches it didn't meet in the middle. He was wearing a flamboyant, longer styled black velvet coat and lace cuffs from the shirt beneath could be seen, giving him a dramatic appearance. Also sporting a very bright red tie, which classically finished off the outrageous outfit, he was like no individual Will had ever seen. The new arrival was accompanied by four beautiful women who appeared to be models. These beauties were hanging on his every word and he was loving the attention.

The waiters beckoned him and his entourage to a discreet table set a little apart from the other diners in a slightly separate room. Ann was obviously star struck. Her eyes were wide like dinner plates and her little mouth was hanging open with wonder. "Who is that man Daddy?" she asked.

A waiter nearby turned to her. "Salvador Dali, the famous painter," he replied. There was no doubt this man was revered around here, with the same attention as a movie star would be in New York.

The atmosphere had changed: waiters buzzed to and fro, offering first-class service to their amazing new VIP guest. Irene explained to Ann how lucky she was to have seen this famous man. “You'll never forget this, I'm sure,” she said. Ann commented. “Daddy, why don't you wear clothes like him? He looks really pretty.”

Charles laughed. “Because I'm not a painter. I think when I'm selling joinery, windows and doors back home, my customers who are builders might run away if I dressed like that.” They all laughed. “On the other hand,” Charles winked at Irene, “those ladies would appeal to me!”

Irene laughed, replying with conviction, “Then I'm glad you don't dress like him.” Their easy rapport was so good to see. They were so in-tune with one another.

They were in no rush now, the unique experience was one to be savored. Ann had an ice cream and the three of them chose coffee and liqueurs; Irene a Grand Marnier and the men brandy. Charles handed Will a cigar and Irene lit up a cigarette. They talked, laughed, and enjoyed each other's company, while Ann kept on glancing over her shoulder at the superstar across the room.

They eventually paid the bill, with Will offering to pay his share, though Charles refused, “You're our guest,” he insisted. Will eventually insisted on paying for the wine as there was not time for a reciprocal invitation. They then made their way back to the car. Ann was asleep almost as soon as they had made themselves comfortable. Irene sat in the back with her and Charles and Will laughed and joked in the front seat. The drive home seemed quicker than the outward journey, they had so

much to talk about that time flew by. Soon they pulled up in the hotel car park. Irene took Ann to bed, and the two men decided to have a last nightcap, in what was now a nearly-deserted bar.

Eventually Will drive back along the deserted road to Canyelles. He felt so relaxed, he was sorry that his new friends were leaving so soon, but certain that they would all stay in touch. He must ask Fernando about Dali when next he had the chance. He was certainly considered a celebrity around these parts. He had already heard that the artist lived close to the village of Cadaques which was situated a little further north.

Enjoying a first class meal had also added to his satisfaction and he almost fell into bed, the sense of well being would, he knew, be conducive to a very good night's rest.

Chapter 10

Sunday couldn't come fast enough. Pepé agreed to meet him at the café in front of El Gran. Will was looking forward to seeing Isabella again and hoped that she may show some interest in him, as he had been thinking about her a great deal. Their recent encounter had not filled him with confidence, but he hoped today may be different.

Pepé appeared outside the hotel where they had arranged to meet, smiling broadly as usual and they made their way to El Berganti. It was now officially closed but the door had been left open. Will was disappointed that Isabella was nowhere to be seen. Carlos came out to greet them and told them to help themselves to a drink. Pepé went behind the bar and poured them both a beer. Then they sat on the terrace outside to wait for the rest of the family.

Soon they were all gathered and Pepé introduced Will to Isabella's mother Carmen and helped him settle in. Finally Isabella herself joined the group and Will couldn't help noticing the expression on her face when her eyes inadvertently met his. He concluded that she had purposely waited as long as possible to be with them. He found this a little disconcerting but tried to brush it away.

Space outside was not large enough for them all to sit, so they went into the restaurant, but to his surprise, they didn't stay there but continued on through a door at the back. They beckoned him in that direction and he found himself in a very attractive courtyard. It was not huge but big enough for a larger family-sized table. The walls were covered in green creeper with various colored foliage

mixed in. This cascaded down like a multi-colored waterfall on two sides, portraying the image of a really beautiful outside room. It was apparent that this family liked to make these moments together as special as they possibly could.

They may be running a local restaurant, but a sense of pride and high standards seemed to permeate their whole way of life. Of course, Will remembered that Isabella's father Carlos owned another restaurant as well as this one, so was clearly more of a businessman than a bar owner. Her mother who was a hands-on worker still exuded a confident air of sophistication, very similar to her daughter.

They enthusiastically welcomed him into the family gathering. It was an opportunity for Will to practice his Spanish although he noticed that they spoke to each other in what he assumed must be Catalan a language which he didn't recognize. It was the language people spoke in low voices, that Fernando had explained was not really permitted. He asked Pepé if this was correct, and the younger man nodded, explaining that yes, they were indeed speaking the local language.

Also joining the party was the chef with his wife and their two children. Finally the guest of honor, Isabella's Aunt Sofia, whom Pepé had previously mentioned, arrived just as they were sitting down. She had her own chauffeur and had been driven there from Cadaques. As Pepé had explained previously, she owned her own hotel. Sofia spoke excellent English. She introduced herself to Will and he was deeply touched that they were going out of their way to make sure he felt at home. Although older in years, Sofia was still a very beautiful woman. Her clothes were obviously expensive and she bore a regal quality, quite aristocratic in fact. It was clear that as Pepé had

mentioned before, she was the queen of the group, so now he understood why they called her this between themselves.

They seated Will between Sofia and Pepé. Isabella sat directly opposite, still harboring a look of uncertainty, which was doing little for Will's confidence. It wasn't usual for him to feel like this, but she seemed to have an unexplainable power over him as if her eyes could bore into his soul.

He explained to Sofia as he stood to be introduced, that he spoke some Spanish but really appreciated the kind thought of helping him to fit in. Sofia smiled a friendly but regal smile and before she was seated, kissed him on both cheeks as was the custom.

A large paella was brought to the table, together with fresh, warm bread - straight from the oven. Carlos poured him a very good Rioja red wine and Carmen helped him to a generous portion from the pan of succulent prawns, squid, and mussels, which were all Will's favorites. The aroma of this dish floated seductively into the air.

When everybody had been served, Isabella's father stood up and raising his glass began to speak. Will knew that he was making a toast to him. Carlos was speaking in Spanish, of which he understood just a little, but it was clear as he looked cheerfully across the table at Will, that this was a very genuine welcome. Then Pepé stood up and also raised his glass. He translated, "Carlos wishes to welcome you into our family gathering. He hopes that you enjoy this evening with us." Will was deeply touched. He took a sidelong look at Isabella. He could see that she was the only

person not to be looking straight at him, instead, she gazed down in her lap, the same slightly distant expression showing on her face.

He stood up and thanked Carlos in his best Spanish, receiving raised glasses and applause from everyone, before they returned to their separate conversations.

Turning to Pepé Will asked, “Why is the language Catalan not heard publicly? What on earth is the problem?”

“Catalan is not allowed or accepted outside the house so we just speak it within the family,” Pepé replied. “General Franco will not permit it. As you know Spanish is now the official language.”

Will was remembering his conversation with Fernando. When he’d first arrived in this part of the world, he’d heard everyone in the streets speaking in Spanish and just assumed that was because he was in Spain. Now it all made so much more sense,

“So are the family all Catalan?”

“No,” Pepé replied, “Carlos and Sofia are originally from the South, but they have been here for many years and my family and Aunt Carmen are Catalan. Carmen is very political, this is one of the subjects she is very passionate about. We have lost friends and family to Franco’s regime. It has been a very violent dictatorship. The rest of the world has no idea and they don’t seem interested. Atrocities are not just happening in Catalunya, they take place in southern Spain as well. He is a very forceful dictator. This is why they were pleased to welcome you when I explained your intentions.”

He was beginning to understand things more clearly. He was here on a mission and at last he felt that he could discover what was hidden beneath the surface. There was so much more to this amazing country. Jean-Luc and Frank were right and he was now confident that there were stories to be heard. He listened as they chatted to each other in Catalan, although it was so different to Spanish that he couldn't understand a word. When Fernando had first mentioned it he had assumed it was simply a local dialect, but now he could hear that it was a separate language in its own right.

Sofia took pity on him, seeing that he was somewhat out of his depth, she started to speak to him in English. They talked about her home in Cadaques, she mentioned that the artist Dali who lived near there and was a regular visitor to the hotel. "I saw him the other day at Hotel Duran in Figueres when I was having dinner," said Will.

"Yes that is a favorite haunt of his," she smiled. "We welcome him as well when he visits the hotel, but his political views do not correspond with mine, so I suffer him. Carmen and I have similar views politically, actually so does Salvador's sister Anna Maria, who is also a dear friend of mine."

Will felt that maybe now was the time to glean more information. "Señora, as you may know, I am a journalist, please stop me if my questions offend you, but due to my profession I am a naturally inquisitive man and this subject intrigues me. I hope to let the outside world hear what is happening in Spain. Clearly, Franco has some very idealistic views, but to suppress an entire culture is difficult to believe. Why is the world so unaware of all this? And how has it been allowed to continue for so long?" he asked.

Sofia looked anything but offended, in fact, her face took on a very impressed and almost youthful appearance. “It is not just about suppressing our culture, other cultural variations all over Spain are also targeted. The history of Spain consists of a diverse melting pot of cultures. In our case Catalunya was in existence way back in history, only around the mid-1400s did we see the first sign of the dominance of Spain then, as the years went on this became more radical. I would like to continue this conversation another day it is far too complicated to gloss over during this lunch. As you are a writer, and as you are clearly interested in our history, I would like to introduce you to a family who live just a few streets away from here. The father José Maria is a good man, but he chose to speak out, and instead of targeting him they arrested and killed his young son. First, though, let us enjoy lunch together so that we can get to know one another better.”

Up to now, Will had been loving his involvement in the family and the friendly welcome he’d received. He was still pleased to be there, but the effect of these revelations was so shocking that he was quite stunned. He fell silent.

Sofia then took on a serious expression. “ I think you need to promise one thing.” He looked intrigued. “You don’t write about any of this under your own name.”

He sat back and thought, she had just sown a seed. He had never before considered writing under a pseudonym, but this was not beyond the realms of possibility.

At that moment the next course arrived. Sofia and Will stopped their conversation and the table fell silent as they tucked into dessert. They finished with coffee and as the ladies started to take the plates to the kitchen, Carlos poured a good Spanish brandy for Will and the other men.

Sofia stood up and they all rose as she departed. She turned to Will and asked, "Are you happy to join me for lunch tomorrow?"

"Yes, I have very little on."

She handed him a piece of paper with the name of a restaurant and basic directions. "Then I will meet you there at two o'clock. It has been a pleasure to make your acquaintance." Will kissed her hand, somehow this suited such an inspiring woman. "The pleasure is all mine." He smiled, as she glided out of the room.

He said goodbye to the family and before he left he made his way towards Isabella who was standing alone for a moment. "I am sorry you do not appear to like me very much, I hope we may get to know each other eventually." She looked coldly at him. "You are right, it is unfortunate that my family think differently." With a toss of her dark hair, she was gone. Will stood up, feeling like a spare part, deciding to leave as discreetly as he could, fervently hoping that the rest of the family hadn't witnessed this. He then made his way back to the car with mixed emotions. He was very pleased that the conversation had proved so fruitful with Sofia. However, he could not help but feel deeply saddened by the reaction of Isabella. The more she rejected him the more attractive she became. He had never been put in this position before. Women had always been flattered by his attentions. He wasn't an arrogant man, but he was not used to this kind of response. Still, he was here to work and the work was just starting and for the moment that was all that mattered.

Chapter 11

With recent conversations ringing in his ears, Will prepared himself for his lunch with Sofia. He dressed carefully, conscious that this was no ordinary woman. Her sophistication, which could almost be described as aristocratic, impressed him. He left the apartment in good time, so that he wouldn't keep Sofia waiting.

It was becoming clear that his quest for stories to send to Frank was by no means as straightforward as he had first envisaged. The situation here was far from normal. In the States he would have had no trouble making contact with people and encouraging them to talk. In fact, this was one of his strengths, it was very apparent that distressing stories were out there, but people were nervous. He had hoped to visit some other areas a little further south, but now he had a few contacts here, he couldn't risk losing them. Also, it seemed that this area of the country was suffering more than their fair share of repression. In the South of Spain, the language was not the issue, but the cultural diversity and voicing of left-wing views still produced a very adverse reaction from the authorities.

Even as he awoke Isabella flashed through his mind, her apparent disdain for him was driving him crazy. She didn't appear to like him and the chance her being attracted to him was slim, but could he blame her? An American journalist, arriving in town for a short stay. Why would she be interested? There was just so much about her, quite apart from her understated good looks. He was certain that if he knew her better they may actually have a great deal in common. He was sure that she wasn't shallow, far from it, he could see how intelligent she was. Maybe if he became more friendly with her aunt she would eventually trust him. The other problem was that he respected her and certainly didn't want to take advantage of her and then leave in a few weeks.

Anyway, he thought, as he sighed deeply, today was about business, so he needed to focus on that alone. He decided to approach Sofia differently, to show her that he could be trusted. He needed to be open with her so that she could be sure that he was no threat to people she knew.

Driving towards Roses, he turned right on the edge of town and made his way in the direction of the masia restaurant which she had described. It was tucked away a bit further out into the country. He saw the signpost and turned the car into a long gravel driveway. In front of him, was a stone house, probably it had been owned by the same family for years, so typical of the old buildings in this area. He parked and made his way through the open front door and into the dining room.

Sofia was already there, talking with great enthusiasm to a man whom Will ascertained must be the owner. She beckoned him over. “Good afternoon Señora, he said. “Do call me Sofia,” she replied, “I hate formality it makes me feel old.” Then smiling she turned towards her companion. “William, may I introduce you to Manuel. We have known each other for many years and I love the food here.” Will shook hands with Manuel, then their host found them a pleasant table near a window with views overlooking the countryside.

They chose a wine and ordered a full menu of the day. Then the conversation turned to the reason for their meeting. Will started, “Sofia, I can see that my visit here is not going to be easy. I am not used to the reticence of people who are too nervous to open-up and talk. I can assure you that I would not cause them any harm. I can change names, even locations to protect their anonymity.”

Sofia took a small sip of wine, looking straight into his eyes. He felt her gaze as it bore deeply into him. At that moment he recognized the similarity between her and her niece. There was a silence, her face was serious. “William, I can see that you are a genuinely decent and well intentioned man. I need to protect my family above all other concerns.” He wanted her to realize that he would never put the family at risk. She continued, “The problem is that we live in troubled times. On the surface all is well, but believe me, under the attractive facade, atrocities are still taking place. Nobody can automatically be trusted.”

Will sat in silence, he knew that she was right. He had intended to leave Roses and travel around looking for stories, now he could see how difficult this could be. Nobody in the current climate was going to have a conversation in any depth, with a random stranger, least of all an American journalist.

Sofia started to talk, “Politics is always interesting, though they do say one should not discuss it socially,” she looked at him with an almost childlike grin. “But personally this is my favorite time to discuss it! Normally, when these disputes happen, it can affect other nations and economies.

However, unless a country’s plight, politically affects other economies directly, they tend to keep their distance. During the Civil War we received help from private supporters. The International Brigade came from many countries during this time, to support our cause, but these were laymen, politically-motivated individuals. However, governments chose to ignore our plight. Most people abroad have wrongly assumed that after the civil war we all went back to normal, but this could not be further from the truth.”

“Can nothing be done?” questioned Will.

“Those who have tried have lived to regret it, or maybe I should say in some cases lost their lives. Only the other day another local family whom I knew of well, were forced to flee to France.”

Will was intrigued and leaned a bit closer to her, putting his chin in his hands.

“This is happening all the time,” Sofia continued. “The people I speak of were some of the lucky ones, others are not so fortunate. When they are violently murdered, nobody dares say a thing and so it continues. A month ago, a young woman I know who had a baby out of wedlock, saw the baby taken to be weighed and then, she never saw him again. He would have been adopted by a Franquista family, or worse still ended up in a children's home. He would be described as a ‘child of the red’, taken away for moral formation. So now perhaps you can see why I believe the world should know.”

“Would you trust me?” he asked simply. “Yes, I trust you and I am of the belief that people outside Spain need to hear our stories. So, for that reason, I will introduce you to certain families. Though as you say, you need to be prepared to change names and even in some cases locations. We certainly cannot risk these things becoming public. Take Isabella’s last boyfriend, he has friends in the wrong places and he is by no means alone.” Will started to relax a little, thanking her for her trust.

They then discussed life in the United States, how different it was, but how much Will loved it here. He told her about his sister and her family in France. He explained that another idea he had considered was to go back to France to see Maddy from time to time, to allow him to remain here for longer.

Suddenly he could not resist taking the risk to mention Isabella. “I realize that as a visitor, this is a lot to ask, but do you think your niece would give me the chance to get to know her better?” Sofia smiled a knowing smile. “As you say you are just visiting, I would not wish to see her hurt. She is very resistant at the moment to any young men, not just you. So my advice is to take your time. I think she deserves some happiness, even if it for a short time.” He looked relieved. “Remember though,” she continued, “Isabella is a very intelligent girl, she will not be pushed into anything.” He could see now, that there was a very strong bond between Sofia and her niece.

As they ate a delicious meal, Sofia told him more about the local family whom she had mentioned the yesterday. “Their young seventeen year old son was beaten to death by the guardia. It happened nine years ago and still the effect on the family shows dramatically, as if it was only yesterday, it is heartbreaking. If you are sure that you can cope with what you see and hear, I would like to introduce you.” Will was touched that she trusted him. “Their privacy is paramount, if you write their story it must be untraceable.”

She then explained that she had already preempted this conversation and and she had visited them before joining him today and they had both agreed to meet him. “So let us have coffee at El Berganti tomorrow and visit them then, would ten o’clock be alright with you?” Alright! He could have kissed her. This could be the start of something huge. Will insisted on paying the bill and they left the restaurant still deep in conversation.

Her chauffeur had arrived and they drove away in the opposite direction. Will made his way to his car, driving slowly back in the direction of Roses and on to Canyelles Petites. He felt like a new

man. This trip had just taken a turn for the better. He spent the rest of the day sorting out his apartment, trying to make it a bit more like home. He couldn't wait for tomorrow to arrive.

Rising the next morning he could feel a distinct spring in his step. He felt excited about the day ahead. Arriving at El Berganti a little early for his meeting with Sofia, who seemed far too

important to keep waiting, he asked Carlos for a coffee and insisted on paying for it, even though Carlos wanted to offer it to him 'on the house'.

Sitting at a table outside, he watched as people came and went in the little restaurant. It was a busy place, and very popular with the locals, as well as a few tourists who wandered in to order morning coffee or other beverages.

As he relaxed watching the world go by, he became aware of the tread of lighter footsteps behind him and Isabella appeared. Immediately he sensed her mood. "So you have arranged to meet my aunt?" she enquired, her voice distinctly cold. Will could feel her eyes upon him and it was not in the way he might have wished. "Yes, she has kindly offered to introduce me to a family." She moved closer, "I know the family. Have they not suffered enough? Do you not think it is cruel to ask them to relive such an ordeal? You arrive with your American arrogance, expecting people to openly discuss their innermost secrets. Who do you really think you are? My aunt may fall for your charm, but I can see what you are doing. You come here, for a few weeks, to disturb the peace, then vanish back to your country. Leaving us to pick up the mess which you will leave in your wake."

Oh, God! Will thought, he wasn't expecting this. He knew she was a little cold towards him but this took it all to another level. He felt physically uneasy, desperate to change her views which was not going to be simple, he couldn't leave it like this. He pointed to the chair opposite. "Please Isabella, would you take a seat for a minute?" Her look of distrust was actually quite unnerving. He tried to stay calm. She sat, but in a manner which without any words, made it clear that she had built a wall between them.

"Isabella, I understand why you distrust me, I would not expect an intelligent woman like you to just accept me at face-value. All I hope is that as you become more familiar with me, you will understand that I wish no harm to come to anyone here. I will speak to people if they are willing to open up to me. I just feel that the injustice taking place here needs to be understood by the world, or at least by the rest of Europe. It should not be ignored as it is now." He paused, hoping that he might be making some headway. She gave nothing away, her face remained icy. He continued, "Please believe me Isabella, I wish your family no harm. I appreciate that your aunt feels that she can trust me, I think you will agree that she is not a fool. She has questioned me in some depth and is now confident that I will not betray her trust. Please allow me to prove to you that I am not some shallow egotistical American, but a man with a heart."

For a second he saw a flicker of response flash across her beautiful face, as if for a brief moment he had slightly defrosted her heart, then she stood up. "I cannot influence my aunt. But it will take more than a few convincing words for me to believe that you can be trusted." With no further words, she turned and went back into the restaurant without looking back.

At that moment, the impressive black, chauffeur-driven car pulled up sedately outside and the elegant Sofia made her way to where Will was sitting. He jumped up to greet her. “Good morning Sofia,” he said.

She smiled at him. He thought again how utterly ravishing she must have been in the days of her youth. There was a subtle beauty lurking behind the older, but still so well-proportioned features. Sitting next to him she asked Carlos for a café solo. Admitting to Will that she needed it before she faced the family who they were about to visit.

They said goodbye to Carlos and he followed Sofia down the street. They took a few turns and now he was completely lost. To a newcomer these quaint streets with their old-style houses looked much the same as each other. The doors may be different but the layout was similar, so it was very easy to lose one's way. They came to a halt by a large, old wooden front door, dark wood with black studs, which had definitely seen better days. The front of it looked chipped, as if it had been purposely damaged at sometime. Sofia rang the bell and a lady appeared with a friendly smile as she opened the door to them.

She was middle-aged, with her graying hair drawn back in a tight bun and she was dressed completely in black. Her clothes were simple, her face was not unattractive, but without make-up she looked fairly plain and it was clear that she cared little about her general appearance. She stood out as the complete opposite to Sofia.

The two women embraced in the traditional fashion and he was interested to see a softness in Sofia which hadn't been as apparent before, as if she could adapt to suit any situation. She turned, and in Catalan she introduced Will. "May I introduce you to Nuria," she said, and he too kissed the woman on both cheeks, feeling that a formal handshake was quite out of place in this situation.

Nuria led the way into the main salon. It was simply furnished with seating nearer the door, and an oval wooden table with carved chairs at the other end. The decor was very traditional Spanish; heavy, ornate, wooden furniture and many old religious pictures on the walls. Other pictures depicted the town of Roses and nearby bays, the typical rocky Costa Brava coves which could be seen dotted about the local area.

There was an alcove in one corner of the room with an arch above it. A number of pictures were placed on the shelves there. In a prime position on the top shelf was a statue of the Virgin Mary and a small candle burned in front of her. There was no doubt that this space was a shrine, it was easy for Will to guess straightaway that the few pictures were of her young son. One had been taken around the age he'd died, while another two had been taken when he was much younger. Considering that her son's death was quite some years ago it was very apparent that she had never, and would never, get over it.

Nuria offered them coffee. They both accepted and she left the room. Sofia realized that Will had seen the memorial to the boy. "That is Felipe," she said. "He was only seventeen when he was taken from them. They have a daughter called Carlotta but they have never really been able to get over the

death of Felipe. I believe that Nuria in particular feels that it would be disrespectful to his memory to try to move forward.”

They heard the front door open and close and a man of medium height entered the room. He moved briskly over to kiss Sofia informally on both cheeks, chatting to her in what Will now knew to be Catalan. Sofia turned and introduced William who held out his hand and received a firm and friendly handshake from the ruddy-faced José Maria.

By this time Nuria had returned with a tray of coffee for everyone, along with a plate of homemade cookies. They seated themselves close to Will and he already felt less nervous as they were very friendly and welcoming.

Nuria didn't speak English so Sofia translated. She explained that their son was everything to them. José Maria spoke a little English, now and again he turned to Sofia for help, but he was managing to communicate pretty well.

”Felipe should have been named after me as is our tradition, but my brother Felipe died young and in his memory we named our son after him. He was the eldest son and so it seemed fitting.”

“Felipe was a happy, carefree boy, he had many friends and was always laughing and joking,” José Maria looked down in sadness. “At that time I was foolish and I aired my political views - not

completely openly, but rather too much - certainly within the family, but also to people whom I considered to be my friends. I could see how Franco was behaving and it was obvious that after the civil war, that tyranny was not abating. This was happening all over Spain but we were feeling extremely suppressed here. Even now, as you know, we speak Spanish in the streets as Catalan is still forbidden.”

Will admitted that until he'd met Sofia and her family, he just assumed that the Spanish spoken was because he was in Spain. To any tourists, Catalan was unknown. “Believe me,” continued José Maria, “Catalans have been suppressed even before Franco, our culture was in existence way before Spain became the dominant power, but after the Civil War which set father against son and brother against brother, we had hoped for a new beginning.”

He explained that he had openly complained. His young son heard this and proudly repeated his father's words to those he thought were his friends. At seventeen he knew no better and had no concept of what he was doing or the enormous risk he was taking.

“When the police came to the house on that fateful night it was to punish me. I would like to believe that had I been there, they would have taken me, although it was his name they called out. God knows I have wished again and again that I had been there to take his place. They found Felipe and knew that he was speaking out and that I had influenced him. They had a great deal of information regarding our family.

“Had I been here I may have managed to talk sense into them, or hand myself in. As it happened they could not leave empty handed so they took my boy. I think more to punish me than anything else.” Will could see the suppressed tears in José María’s eyes as he spoke these words. The pain was still so strongly etched in every line and crease of his face.

Nuria, who had been sitting quietly up to now, lifted her arms in the air and wailed desperate words in Catalan, rocking backward and forward, putting her face in her hands to suppress her tears. Will was not too sure what she said, but it was only too clear that her grief was as raw today as it had been nine years ago. For her, these events could have happened only yesterday.

Sofia was describing Nuria’s fear when the Guardia came beating on the door with their guns, how they had pushed her down and slapped her face, then dragged her beloved Felipe into the hallway and down the street - the last time she saw him alive.

Will was feeling more emotional than he had ever felt in his life. He was imagining how he might want to protect a child of his own. He suddenly realized that his life had changed forever. He was in this house, listening to this dreadful story, away from the normality of humdrum life in New York or San Francisco. The things which had seemed so important a month ago now paled into insignificance.

All over the world there were families getting on with their daily lives, oblivious to the tragedy that was Spain at this time. As he had seen when he first arrived, nothing was openly visible on the

surface. He felt privileged that he had been taken into the inner sanctum and trusted by these people. He couldn't let them down.

“You have a daughter?” Will asked, hoping to change the mood, but to his discomfort he realized immediately that he had said the wrong thing. He knew this, as soon as the words left his mouth, by the look of utter despair which came over both their faces.

“Our daughter Carlotta now lives with her aunt. She remained here for a few years but she could not cope with our grief and she chose to leave.” José Maria looked down as if too ashamed to look Will in the eyes.

Will couldn't help himself, he instinctively stood up. Then, walking over to his host, he gently put his hand on the shoulder of the other man. The gesture was certainly noted and José Maria put his hand up to Will's, to acknowledge his appreciation.

There was an unspoken stillness in the room for quite a few minutes. It was clear that they all needed time to collect their thoughts. José Maria broke the silence.

“They beat our boy to death! He was unrecognizable when we brought him back. We were summoned to the police station, then they ushered us into a room and there lay our beautiful son -

beaten to a pulp. We could say nothing, we didn't dare, all we could do was wrap him in a sheet and take him home. We will never really know what they put him through, but they must have continued to thrash him even after he was dead. There must have been more than one aggressor, it was a sport to them. They have carried out so much evil that they do not feel shame anymore.”

Will clarified that, as a journalist, he wanted to write about this for the American and International press, to highlight a part of history of which people overseas were completely unaware. He told them how much he wanted to help and that writing under a pseudonym may be the safest approach. Although on the surface life here seemed normal, it was clear that the tyranny had not vanished and he was so shocked by this. He sincerely hoped that somehow he could make a difference.

Nuria made it clear that she was happy for their story to be spread across the world. This way, she explained, her darling son would never be forgotten. She asked him to respect their name as they were not looking for further trouble and he promised that he would be careful not to mention their actual names or family name.

Soon, Sofia and Will bade them farewell, making their way in silence up the street. To speak seemed somewhat irreverent. She told him that she intended to quickly visit El Berganti to collect something. So they parted company, Will could not face Isabella a second time today.

He apologized to Sofia for not joining her, explaining that he was a little shaken by the meeting, she understood and hugged him gently, she could see how it had affected him and although she didn't tell him, she was now even more impressed by this young man.

He walked slowly back to his car and drove home with a heavy heart. As he passed the busy fish market where the fishermen were sorting their nets, the sight of ordinary people getting on with their daily lives hit him hard. Innocent men toiling in their day to day work, with the constant oppression lurking in the background, anything could happen to them at any time. He felt at this moment that his life here was never going to be the same again.

Chapter 12

After his meeting with Nuria and José Maria, Will was feeling just a little subdued, as their story had made a deep impression on him. This was just the first account that he had heard, and he could already see that he would have to keep his emotions under control if he was to do proper justice to these stories, as he reported them back to Frank in New York.

He also realized that, to some extent, he had been leading quite a sheltered life up to now. Of course, he had faced challenges back home, particularly when his work had required him to report on serious crime or even, in a few cases, murder. However, the situation here in Spain was quite different and the complexities of the political environment put a very different slant on life. Since the end of World War 2, the western world, in particular, was far more optimistic that better days lay ahead. The horrors of that war would never be forgotten but people would be shocked to read of the atrocities that were taking place here in Spain, right under their noses.

As he had not yet secured a typewriter, he decided to drive into Roses and find a café where he could relax and handwrite. At least then, as he re-kindled the story it would be a relaxing place to sit, it was still a depressing account, but with a pleasant backdrop, it would be easier to cast his mind back while keeping his emotions under control.

He had forgotten that it was market day and most of the stalls were being cleared away. So he made his way as far from the hustle and bustle as he could, to find a small café away from the market area. Here he sat down at a table, collecting his thoughts for the task in hand.

He started to write an account of yesterday's extraordinary meeting. Soon his pen took on a life of its own, as often happened when he was writing. It glided effortlessly across the page as if his presence was a secondary afterthought. He became totally engrossed, describing every element of the couple whom he had come to know only the day before.

He heard a faint rustle, the presence of someone close by, and looked up. To his considerable surprise, there stood the last person he could have expected, Isabella. She appeared a little uncomfortable and her face was a little pink with slight embarrassment. Will almost jumped, as he stood to address her. "Hi, how are you?"

"I am very well thank you, do you mind if I join you? I can see that you are busy." He drew up a nearby chair and she sat down at the table, then beckoning the waiter, he ordered her a coffee. They were alone at their table apart from one other man a few tables away whose head was buried in a newspaper, so it was easy to talk freely.

She played with her hands nervously, then looking straight at him. "Guillem, I think that maybe I owe you an apology." When he said nothing, she tried to explain. How she had not liked the concept of a stranger coming into their lives with romantic notions of what life in this part of the world seemed to him. However, contrary to her opinion, her aunt had described William's reaction to the Ramirez story, also explaining how he had shown an impressive depth of kindness to José Maria, a compassion which even Sofia had not anticipated.

William let her finish, then he spoke. "Isabella, I completely understand your reaction and had the tables been turned, and I was in your position, I am quite certain that I would have reacted in a similar fashion." She looked relieved. Will was sorely tempted to invite her for dinner, but he knew it may be viewed less than enthusiastically. He decided it was better to bide his time and get to know her a little better first. They talked some more as she drank her coffee, then she excused herself, "I hope that we may be friends," she said as she waved goodbye to him and left.

Will sat contemplating this latest encounter. He was now secretly wishing that he didn't have to return to the States. What if he had met his ideal woman? At this point, he could not be sure, but there was definitely something unique about Isabella which fascinated him. It was not just her looks, it was something far deeper. She was genuine, down to earth, yet with a distinct sophistication that he found most attractive. He was even surprising himself, this was far too soon to be thinking this way.

He sat down to continue writing but it was hard to concentrate, he was now completely alone, the other tables were all vacant, he knew he needed to continue his work but he was feeling a sense of extreme contentment and it took all his self-control to go back to work, though he knew that he needed to put his first story down on paper as fast as possible. He was pleased with the poignant dialogu that he had written. Real people caught in a time-warp and unable to escape from the past which would not, and could not, let them move forward.

He decided to touch-base with Frank so, as he left the bar, he asked directions to the post office where he knew that he would find a telephone. Sure enough there were three small booths in the post office. He made his way to one and sat down.

Speaking to the operator he made a collect call to the office in New York, then waited to be connected. He heard the friendly voice of Phyllis, Frank's secretary. She was pleased to hear that it was Will, asking how he was getting along. "Frank has been like a bear with a sore head, wanting to know where you are, he'll be so pleased to speak to you." They chatted for a minute and then she put him through to Frank.

"Hey, Will my boy," came the jovial tone of Frank's friendly voice. "How is it going? I was hoping to hear from you." "Hi Frank, yeah, good thanks. I've just written my first story, met a local family, their story makes for chilling reading." Frank was pleased, he had every confidence that Will would come up with the goods.

Will continued, "I'll do my best within the two month time-slot Frank, but this is much harder than first anticipated. I'm slowly getting to know a local family, they have good connections. It's just not like finding stories in the US. These people are scared. I've also realized that if I'm going to gain their trust I can't use my own name for writing, it's just too risky, for them and maybe even for me."

Frank leaned back in his leather chair, looking out of the window. His original office had been located in a shabby building and there had been no view to speak of. The new office was well-

located and he had a decent view of the busy New York streets. He contemplated Wills's words, he knew the younger man would not be exaggerating the situation.

William continued. "Getting people to talk is not straightforward Frank, they are really afraid. The problems here didn't end with the civil war, they are still very oppressed. I can't just ask people in the street, it doesn't work like that and gaining trust isn't easy. They're looking over their shoulders the whole time. I had originally planned to travel around to see more of the country and not settle in one place, but until I have a good rapport with local people I don't stand a chance."

"Well Will, I hadn't considered that it may be difficult to get locals to talk, but under the circumstances, I can see the problem. I'd not thought of a pseudonym either, but I see no reason why not, it would make sense. I'll leave you to come up with a name and I'll not let on to anyone here that it's you doing the writing. You go ahead, good to know we may be onto something." Will was pleased and relieved with Frank's reaction. "Okay, I'll send this latest story through. I need to get hold of a typewriter to make it quicker." Frank replied, "Check on telex facilities, we need easier access to your stories." "Yeah will do, I'll be in touch." Will replied, then they said goodbye and he replaced the receiver.

He made his way to the counter and asked whether a telex machine was available. The man at the desk, pointed to an office situated next door. It was being run as a separate enterprise and they had a machine. Will thanked him, making his way to the office. They explained cost and the hours they were open and he knew that he could work around it. As he walked away he considered to himself,

‘what is the risk?’ He mulled this over for quite some time and realized that a public telex machine could be a huge risk. At the moment he was safe, but for how long? The authorities only had to suspect him and his messages could be tracked. He hadn't thought about this before, how stupid he thought. Ideally, he needed to find someone private for this, but what was the chance of finding that person?

After this he decided that he was ready for a change of scenery and was in no rush to go back to Canyelles yet. He fancied taking a drive inland. He drove out along the country road which led past the restaurant where he and Sofia had met recently and then saw a sign for Cadaques to the right, which was where Sofia lived. However, he decided to drive in a different direction, the area here was fairly flat and all he could see were fields, it was an agricultural landscape. He saw many farmers walking their donkeys loaded with hay, vegetables and other items.

He eventually drew into a small village called Peralada. He remembered the name from the label on wine they had drunk at Hotel Duran, noting the vineyards which surrounded the village. As he drove into the village he was greeted by an impressive castle and driving past this he found himself in a quaint medieval village. He was in no rush, so parked the car and meandered through the narrow streets, eventually finding a small bar and ordering a beer. As he sat there people watching, who should walk in, but Ivan, Fernando's friend. He recognized Will immediately and patting him on the back, he asked if he might join him. Will welcomed the company and Ivan came to sit with him. With a lowered voice, Ivan explained that his friendship with Fernando went back a long way, their families had known each other when they were boys. For this reason, Fernando had felt that he could talk freely to Ivan. Ivan asked Will how his writing was progressing as he was genuinely

interested. Will explained to him that he was going to write under a pseudonym to protect his anonymity and that of the families as he was now confident that even he needed to be careful, just as the people he met wanted to be sure that they were safe talking with him.

Ivan then commented that he would like to introduce him to a man he knew, explaining that his story could only be described as unresolved. They finished their drinks and then Ivan asked Will to follow him in his car. They arrived at a local forge tucked away up a small stoney track. The blacksmith came out to greet Ivan and shook Will's hand. Ivan introduced Tomás and explained what Will was doing and asked if the blacksmith would like to relay his story. Tomás agreed more willingly than Will had expected and led them round to the back of the forge, he then ushered them into his kitchen where they sat around an old oak table. The room was very simple and pretty cluttered. Many of the kitchen implements had clearly been handmade by Tomás. It was very apparent that there was no woman in his life, definitely lacking in the feminine touches.

Dusting off three cups, he poured them all coffee out of a very old and battered coffee pot and explained that his brother Alejandro had disappeared. His brother was inclined to be rather open with regards to his left-wing beliefs. His girlfriend Paula who lived in Figueres was of the same opinion as Alejandro, but her older brother was not. Tomás was not able to prove anything but he was sure her brother was involved with Alejandro's disappearance.

Of course the problem was that he couldn't go to the police as they too may well have been involved in his disappearance. He didn't dare accuse Paula's brother as he would definitely tell the police and that would put his whole family at greater risk.

A single shoe belonging to Alejandro had been found behind some farm buildings when Tomás had gone searching in the local vicinity. There was no other clue, though he had seen tyre marks in the same area. He explained to Will that not knowing what had happened to his brother was the worst part. If a body was unearthed at least the family would receive answers and be able to put his memory to rest.

Paula was beside herself with grief as they had planned to marry next spring and she felt guilty as she too suspected her brother. She was in limbo, expecting Alejandro to walk in through the door at any moment, but of course, Tomás explained, that was very unlikely to happen.

He apologized that this was only half a story as it had no end, but the impact on the family was immense. Of course it could just be foul play and a normal crime, but there was no way they could discover this. He mentioned that similar situations happened to many people. In any other country, you would go to the authorities, but here they just didn't dare.

William could see that although it was indeed only a part of a story, it would probably remain unfinished forever, it was obviously all too common. A body would have provided closure, but this was like a rod around their necks, unfinished business, ruining every day and unlikely to be resolved. Will explained to Tomás that the names would be changed and that there would be no chance of the story being traced back.

They finished their coffees, Tomás showed them out and Will and Ivan said goodbye. Will thanked his new friend for his help, feeling sure that he could weave this incident in amongst some of the more vivid narratives he would be likely to hear, but it still had a sad resonance to it and he was certain that this was not an unusual scenario. Losing a loved one is never easy, but he knew only too well that closure is always so important.

He drove slowly back to Canyelles and spent the rest of the day jotting down this latest conversation and making the necessary changes to protect people's names. He also gave some thought to his pseudonym and decided on Tom Hook. He had no idea why he had chosen this but it had a certain ring to it.

The next day Will recalled his conversation with Yvette in France and thought that now would be a good time to call Ramon. He dialed the number and was pleased to find that Ramon spoke good English. They agreed to meet up that afternoon.

Ramon had given Will directions to his apartment in the center of town. It was situated in a small road in one of the backstreets. Will rang the bell then stood back, soon the sound of quick footsteps could be heard rattling down the stairs. Ramon opened the door, they shook hands and welcomed him in him, directing him up a narrow, dusty staircase to the 4th floor. The stale smell of cooking lingered in the stairwell. A lack of fresh air was noticeable, with no windows there was nowhere for the rancid odors to escape. He ushered Will into a very cramped hallway and they continued on into a small living room with a kitchen at the far end. It was very sparsely furnished, a sofa, a chair and a table but little else. The walls were bare and the simplicity of the apartment hit Will. It was clear

that money was tight for this man and Will felt a surge of empathy, he was always so grateful for his personal opportunities, on these occasions he became acutely aware that he was so fortunate, others were not so lucky.

Will accepted a seat on the sofa and Ramon hurriedly made coffee for them both. The emotion in his face was visible and when he began to recall the story, his voice broke from time to time as he fought to collect his composure. Will was already realizing that the account he was about to hear was going to be difficult to digest. He could feel the pain in Ramon's voice, the words quivering as he spoke.

“My brother Eduard is still a young man. He was good looking, but more attracted to young men than women, which has made him an obvious target for bullies throughout his life, even before his political leanings were becoming evident.

He was well aware that his homosexual tendencies were illegal. I struggled to understand him but he was my younger brother and I always wanted to protect him. I wished that he could change but I knew that was not possible, although he did keep his liaisons with other men as private as possible.”

Ramon leaned back in his chair and took a deep and slightly desperate breath. “I kept on pleading with Eduard to be careful when he shared his political views with others. We were working in a factory and he could not help expressing his trade union, Republican, opinions more openly than was advisable. His colleagues at the time were very vocal and became disruptive in the factory. This

spiraled out of control and eventually the owners were forced to call the Guardia and Eduard was included in the group they arrested.

He was first detained by the police at a local police station, but later they were taken to La Modelo prison on the edge of Barcelona. The prison was first built in 1910 with a new modernity, so really at that time, it was considered an exemplary prison. When it was built the cells were designed for only one prisoner per cell.

When I visited him for the first time he described his ordeal. The prison is a very different place now to what had been first planned. Eduard and the others were taken through a side door into the prison through several heavy metal gates, the hollow sound of those doors closing behind them one by one, added to their sense of total confinement. Eduard was terrified, had no idea how long he would be detained in this place. The guards took their fingerprints, after this all his possessions were taken away from him and he was forced to undertake a strip search which he told me was deeply humiliating. They even checked each man's anus to make sure nothing had been hidden. Eduard told me that he sensed the prison officer who was examining him seemed to take a special interest in his nakedness. At the time he had not realized that this man was to become his worst demon and at the same time his much needed ally. The officers were aggressive and were definitely of fascist persuasion, so regarded all these new inmates as the enemy.

They were handed disgusting, filthy blankets, unwashed and stinking. Encrusted with the semen of other men. Then they were taken to the isolation cells for six days. He told me later how terrified and alone he felt. The food he received was almost inedible and he was uncertain of the horrors that

may lie before him, well aware that this may be the place in which he would end his days. As Eduard was only a minor, he was sent to the galleried level which was allotted for young people. However, he was still surrounded by violent criminals. Most of those inmates were surprised that anyone would allow themselves to be imprisoned simply by demonstrating their political beliefs.

It became clear to Eduard that it was easier to speak openly about politics here than in the outside world. As I mentioned the cells in the prison had originally been designed to house one inmate, however, due to the large numbers of political prisoners the cells were severely overcrowded. Eduard had fifteen men confined in his cell and in others they struggled with up to twenty. They would take turns to lie down for sleep. The mattresses in the cells were filled with bed bugs and insects which bit their bodies unmercifully. Some of the prisoners would try to find ways to burn these mattresses but the creatures rose to the ceiling and then dropped down on them, so the miserable infected bites continued and their bodies were red raw with scratching.

They were only granted one shower a week, but this was also an unpleasant experience. The men were made to queue in a regimented line and as the water fell on them they were forced to soap themselves while walking through. It was a robotic occurrence, but for that short time they felt the filth fall from their bodies. With one dirty stinking toilet in the cell, the desire to wash sweat and excrement off them was overwhelming.

As I mentioned previously prison food was disgusting and Eduard was so grateful that I could take food to him. He explained to me that the good food which was brought in by families was shared with those political prisoners who were not supported by families living close by. The food

provided by the guards would be brought to the cells and the men were divided into smaller groups for this purpose as there was no dining area. The coffee, if you could call it that, which came in the morning, was undrinkable, served with bread for the breakfast. Then the stew which was provided as the main meal was almost inedible.

Soon after his arrival, the prison officer who had first strip searched him, found reason to send the other men in his cell to the recreation area. He told Eduard to stay there alone. My brother knew what was coming and though terrified, he reluctantly accepted his fate. He was pushed forward over a chair against the wall and the officer and a colleague took turns to rape him. Then was forced to suck them both in turn. It was a humiliating and painful ordeal, which became a regular occurrence. But later he realized that they would also stand up for him on other matters and it offered him a strange sense of safety as well. He became their slave, but they also became his allies. He told his fellow prisoners of his ordeal, some were already experiencing similar behavior from other inmates and so in a strange sense Eduard felt grateful as at least it meant that other inmates left him alone, they wouldn't risk upsetting the guards.

Most of the guards were fascists who had gained their positions via the "falangistas", or having supported Franco. They saw the prisoners as the enemy. They often carried canes. If a prisoner did not conform to their wishes they were sometimes taken from the cells at night in complete terror. Desperate screaming could be heard as they were tortured with whips and other devices.

Although Eduard never saw it firsthand, he heard the stories about prisoners who were put to death using the cruel garrote method. Strapped to a chair-like structure with a high back, the prisoner's

neck was chained or wired and an iron rod was twisted behind the neck and was gradually tightened. This was a slow and agonizing death and could take up to fifteen minutes during which time the prisoner's excruciating pain was clear. Often this was undertaken by convicted murderers who would have their sentence lessened for every man they killed.

Eduard was imprisoned there for a tortuous, uncompromising five years. When he was released last year I was waiting to meet him outside the prison. He looked like a different person and had aged far more than the years he'd been inside. When he saw me his face crumbled, he fell into my arms and he gave way to desperate sobbing, which he'd suppressed for so long. The look of desperation etched on his face was one which I will never forget until the day I die. I took him back to a family farm at Sitges, which belonged to my uncle. There, close to nature, he will be able to come to terms with his ordeal. His fight for what he believes politically has for now been lost forever, it was quashed forever by fear and torture.”

Ramon looked at Will and his sadness was so apparent. He too had been imprisoned. He had let his brothers time in La Modelo take him over body and soul. Delivering food, doing all he could to support Eduard, to the detriment of his own needs. His lovely young wife Yvette had left and here he was in a small apartment in Roses in his own kind of prison. Will felt such sympathy for Ramon. He chose his words carefully as he spoke. “I find it so hard to imagine that these atrocities are still happening right now. I can see how important it is for people to be made aware. I live in America where we feel safe, but I suppose we never really know. Our liberty is the most precious gift, without that we are lost. It only takes a dominant faction to take control and our freedom could be

taken away overnight. It's clear that we must never become complacent where politics is concerned. Dictatorship is potentially a serious threat.

Will was not going to hurt Ramon by mentioning Yvette, but Ramon sadly explained what a huge loss his wife's departure had caused, though he never blamed her. "She could not be expected to stay with me, I was not able to be a proper husband to her during that time. I moved here as soon as Eduard was safe, to try and salvage my own life, I need to search for normality again, but that will take some time. Maybe one day I will find true happiness once more,"

Will moved forward and touched his hand and told him that he was certain time would heal. As they walked back down the stairs he didn't even notice the rancid smells of stale food, that sense had now paled into insignificance. He left Ramon on the step with a heavy heart, but suggested that maybe they take a beer together some day. The smile that crossed Ramon's face offered Will a small satisfaction. This man desperately needed friendship. Will decided he would introduce him to Pepé, He was sure this way Ramon could meet others locally. He was confident that Pepé would be only too happy to befriend this man.

The story he'd just heard had made him realize how fragile life here really was. Had it happened twenty years ago perhaps he may have accepted it more readily, but to realize that this horrific behavior was still happening today sent a shiver down his spine. This account would be one Frank would find very hard to believe while sitting in his comfortable office in New York.

Chapter 13

The weeks were moving on fast. Too fast for Will's liking as he was becoming concerned that his two-month assignment would soon be over and he may have little to show for it. He had spoken to a few people who had shared their everyday stories with him, but he felt quite certain that he had not yet unearthed the more shocking revelations that lay beneath the surface. He needed to be completely trusted so that people would share their personal experiences which would more accurately describe the serious situation here.

Sofia was his best source so far as she certainly had contacts, but she was a busy woman and he didn't feel that he could trouble her too often. He had bumped into Isabella a few times and he was aware that his interest in her had grown. She fascinated him, he was annoyed with himself that she was becoming a slight infatuation, as he had never found himself in this situation before. He desperately wanted to invite her out but knew he had avoided it up to now for fear of rejection. So infatuated was he, that he found himself imagining his life with her, which he told himself was ridiculous. However even without Isabella in his life this place was slowly luring him in, he was feeling like a fish, floundering on the end of a hook. He had considered a number of times how it might feel if he settled here and possible options for making a living.

He'd already taken a few short trips out of town to become more familiar with the surrounding area. The main reason for exploring further afield was to try to gain a deeper understanding of the people here. To give his writing greater depth, he needed to feel that he was in touch with the heart and soul of this place.

He had been told that the landscape was more barren the further south one traveled, but this part of Spain was really quite verdant and not unlike Northern California. In the Roses area the land was more open, however, he was told that only a short journey down the coast the landscape changed again and cork-oak forests could be seen. The coastal areas of North Eastern Spain varied, from the larger sandy bays like Roses to the smaller rocky coves which gave the Costa Brava its name. He was coming across pretty fishing villages situated along the coast. Eventually, he also planned to explore the mountain areas, but for now, he was happy to follow the coastal route.

He had decided to take his overnight bag with him one day and stay wherever it suited him. This would allow him to travel a little further afield. He would pay for this out of his own pocket as he wanted to treat himself to a good, comfortable hotel if he could find one. He planned to follow the coast road south, and then on his way back, travel a little inland to visit the famous medieval city of Girona. He had heard quite a lot about this old medieval city and was now curious to see more.

Pepé had told him that he had been born in the old village of Begur so Will was interested to visit there. Begur was set high on a hill so he knew it would be a different landscape and he was looking forward to seeing it.

He was traveling through fairly open terrain with only a few mountains visible in the distance. As he drove past rice fields, the land was flat and marshy. He saw one other smaller medieval village signposted Pals and made a note to visit there another day. Then he continued on towards Begur. This location was breathtaking. To reach the village he had driven up a narrow winding road and could see the ruins of a castle in an elevated position high above the village. On the other side were

views of the sea, as he looked downhill from the road above, the vista was sensational. In the centre of the village he discovered a pleasant bar close to the church where he decided to stop for a coffee. It was clear that tourists seldom came here as he was receiving some curious glances from the locals. As he sat with his coffee at an outside table, the surrounding building suggested that this was probably quite a wealthy area, the architecture was quite distinctive, he must make a point of asking P  p   more about its history

As he watched people going about their daily lives, some elderly farmers passed him with their donkeys laden with straw, vegetables and fruit. They stopped and talked to each other as the docile animals nuzzled one another, drinking water from a nearby trough. This scene was so far removed from his world in America that he felt that he had traveled back in time. Nothing here seemed familiar, it was so alien to what he was used to.

After paying for his coffee and a light snack his plan was to go as far as Sant Feliu de Gu  xols today, so he didn't want to spend all day here in Begur. He wandered back to the car through the cobbled streets, taking in the cooking smells that drifted out of open windows along with sounds from people chatting inside. In some places he could hear the sound of animals moving around in their stables which were built on the ground floor of many of the dwellings.

He had never imagined himself writing about travel, it certainly was not his normal cutting-edge genre. However it occurred to him that if this modern climate of new opportunities to travel by air and sea continued, he may find a lucrative niche for himself doing just that. Travel journalism, not just here in Spain but other parts of Europe as well, might offer him a perfect reason to stay. More

and more he found himself thinking about a life away from cities and perhaps if he stayed in Europe he would be able to spend more time with Maddy.

This style of journalism would offer no threat to the authorities, unlike the political minefield he was researching now. In fact, promoting travel and tourism in Spain and France might even make him quite popular with the officials. He could even write under his own name again. It was certainly something worth considering carefully.

An hour later he arrived in a small bay with the name San Pol, set close to the village of S'Agaró. There were very few houses, but those he did see were more affluent, definitely not built for the peasant farmers which he'd viewed in other small villages. Looking carefully at his map he figured out that he was pretty close to his destination.

High on a cliff overlooking the bay was an interesting white building that stood out impressively, as he drove closer he could see that it was a very elegant looking hotel. Will decided that if there was room, he would check in here for the night. He would have plenty of time to drive into Sant Feliu de Guixols before returning to the hotel for dinner. He made his way to the front desk where the friendly receptionist confirmed that indeed there was a room available, so he checked in.

The hotel was called Hostal de la Gavina. A young man arrived to carry his bag to his room and, when he realized that he was American, pointed out cheerfully, that another foreign visitor who was involved in the movie industry was also staying at the hotel. Will was intrigued, he never expected

to meet anyone like that here. It sure was an elegant place, his room was spacious and the decor luxurious. He felt quite excited to be spending the night in this wonderful atmosphere. The hotel was certainly catering to a more elite clientele and he imagined that the food and service would also be excellent.

On his way back to his car, he noticed that a framed history of the hotel was hanging on a wall in reception. He read that building and the nearby urbanization had been developed in the 1920s although the hotel hadn't opened its doors until 2nd January 1932.

He was fascinated and enquired to the lady behind the desk, for more about its history. Her English was excellent and she was very pleased to share her knowledge. She explained that the father of the current owner had purchased a large area of land overlooking the sea. His ambitious son then took on the project and worked on the development connecting with many prestigious families in the area who were also inspired by the location. The general architecture reflected the link in this part of the world to Cuba, where many local people had made fortunes. The grand facades of the houses here were influenced by this. The development of Senya Blanca or The Garden City as it was known, was started in the early 20's. The magnificent hotel which he built gradually over time was considered the jewel in the crown.

Will thanked her gratefully for this information and again he could recognize the noticeable differences between the very rich in this area and the local working men. He left Hostal de la Gavina and made his way to his car.

Continuing along the coast road he soon arrived in the port of Sant Feliu de Guixols. Fishing boats were leaving the harbor and there was a busy bustle of local people hurrying about their chores, fitting in as much work as they could before the day ended. The beach and port area were abuzz with activity. Fishermen untangling nets, people walking and talking, small children playing in the sand after school. There were a few cafés open for business, so he grabbed himself a beer and settled down to soak up and enjoy the atmosphere.

In a fairly central position on the seafront stood a large yellow and ornately decorated building, the design had a distinctive Arabic appearance and seemed to be some kind of social club as it was frequented almost exclusively by elderly people who were clearly enjoying each other's company. The building was unique and stood out from the style of architecture which surrounded it, most of which were traditional fishermen's cottages. A number of slightly grander properties were dotted around so clearly this was a town with a diverse social mix.

Some shops were only just opening again after the traditional afternoon siesta. He had learned by now that they closed for a long lunch, opening again in the late afternoon. He had parked near the small train station where earlier he had noticed that a train destined for Girona had been ready to leave. Had he had more time he could have gone there by train instead of driving. On the other hand, he could still explore inland a little more tomorrow, and at his own leisurely pace.

Continuing on foot he explored the town and eventually he came upon an old monastery which enhanced the atmosphere of this fascinating place. The door was open so he peered into the main church. The grandeur inside seemed almost out of place with the rest of the town. Like so many of

these old towns the dominance of the Catholic church was noticeable. He came originally from an Irish Catholic family, but he always found this controversial issue of the richness of churches, directly situated alongside, in some cases, obvious poverty, hard to accept. It had made him question the church as he had grown up. This was certainly not a poverty stricken area as many of the houses around the town were distinctly affluent. The port had certainly brought some wealth to this town.

Walking back the length of the bay he returned to his car. He was ready to go back to the hotel as he was now looking forward to a change of clothes and a relaxing evening. He was glad he had made this trip. It had given him some further insight into the Costa Brava and would surely help to stimulate his writing.

The drive back, though a little bumpy, was easy enough and he parked close to the hotel. The receptionist handed him his room key and he made his way upstairs to fill his bath and enjoy the luxury of being in an elegant environment.

A long soak was sheer pleasure, he hadn't been able to have a deep bath for some time. He then dressed in smarter clothes, suitable for dinner, then made his way down the grand staircase to the foyer, where he could see that a few people were already in the bar. He found himself a table and sat down, as a waiter came over to take his order.

On overhearing his American accent another man came towards him with a hand outstretched.

“How do you do Señor, my name is Josep Ensesa, welcome to my hotel.” William stood and shook the man's hand. “How do you do sir, my name is William Hale. You have a beautiful establishment here.” The owner looked pleased. “We do our best Señor, it is a family business instigated by my father and of which we take great pride. Are you staying long?” Will smiled. “Unfortunately not sir, I am only here for the night.” His host then gestured towards another guest standing at the bar.

“May I introduce you to a well-known gentleman, he works with many Americans. Sam Spiegel has been visiting here a great deal recently while filming a new movie, which is due to come out next year”.

Will walked with him to the bar. The man in question had a confident, one could say slightly arrogant air. He was with a young woman who was clearly much younger than him, their age gap was all too apparent. Almost immediately Will knew that he had nothing in common with this man, but it would have been unnecessarily rude not to shake hands with him, so he smiled politely at the movie producer.

Sam Spiegel was not a tall man, he was considerably shorter than Will and fairly stocky, with a heavy face, hair greased back and well dressed. His accent was not American and Will detected an Eastern European lilt. He exuded a strong self-assured persona which was not surprising as nobody could deny that he was very successful within the film industry.

The young woman he was with was a blond called Sheila who looked particularly uncomfortable not only in Spiegel's presence but also maybe, being introduced to this younger man. She could not

help but flush as Will shook her hand. His sympathetic smile did nothing to quell her look of discomfort.

Sam continued “I was in the States in March, receiving the award for best picture. ‘Bridge over the River Kwai,’ have you had a chance to see it?” Will apologized. “No Sir, I’m afraid I didn’t have that opportunity, but I hear it is a truly amazing movie.” He smiled, “Yes we were all pleased, I hope my new production, which we have been shooting close to here will do as well. The title of this will be ‘Suddenly Last Summer’ and stars Elizabeth Taylor, who has also stayed here at La Gavina, she loves it here. That movie will come out next year.” Will replied politely, “I will make a point of watching it Sir.” Turning to the barmen Spiegel said, “may I buy you a drink?”. Will pointed to his table. “Thank you but I have just ordered a scotch on the rocks.” Spiegel gestured and called to the barman, “put that on my tab.”

Will thanked him explaining that he was a journalist in San Francisco but was on vacation here. However, he was slightly on-edge due to the way the film tycoon behaved around Sheila, he pulled her towards him with his arm around her petit waist in a less than respectful manner. A couple of times Will physically flinched, Spiegel didn't seem to notice, but Sheila did and her face flushed again a bit more. Will had never liked this type of male behavior, from a young age he had been taught to treat women with the utmost of respect.

Eventually he was able to excuse himself, relieved that Sam Spiegel didn’t suggest he joined them for dinner. He was looking forward to this culinary experience and did not want anything or anybody to spoil it.

While he was in the dining room the owner Josep Ensesa came by once again to make sure he was enjoying his meal, Will assured him that it was fantastic. “Where are you going next?” Señor Ensesa asked. “Tomorrow I am going to visit Girona and then back to Roses, or at least a small bay nearby where I am renting an apartment, Canyelles Petites.”

Josep smiled. “Have you met many interesting people since you have been over here?” Will liked this man’s easy rapport. “I have not yet been to her hotel, but I have gotten to know a lovely lady, Sofia who owns Hotel Vistabella at Cadaques.” Josep explained that he didn't tend to travel in that direction very often, though of course he knew Cadaques well, “I am sure you are aware Salvador Dali lives close to there, he is a regular visitor to our hotel too.” He explained that he was generally dealing with clients who in most cases were based in either Barcelona or Girona. Also of course many visitors from overseas. He then bade Will farewell and made his way out of the restaurant.

The food was indeed superb, the most expensive meal he had eaten so far, but wonderfully orchestrated. He could not help thinking about Isabella and wishing that she was staying here with him. The thought of this sent a rush of excitement through his body, he even surprised himself with his sudden deep desire for her.

In no hurry to leave the elegant dining room, he ordered a coffee and a brandy to finish. Luckily Sam Spiegel was given a table at the far side of the room, so Will was relieved that he was not forced to make unnecessary polite conversation. Picking up his brandy he headed for the terrace and looked out onto the sea view which was quite breathtaking. The elevated position of Hostal de la Gavina offered a certain spectacular vista that could not be enjoyed in the same way at beach level.

On leaving the terrace he walked a little way up the path outside and admired the beautiful houses that surrounded the hotel, magnificent grand arches and columns gave this whole area an affluent and sophisticated atmosphere. This was certainly the home of the very rich from this area, such a contrast to the small villages he'd seen elsewhere.

Eventually he climbed the grand staircase, just catching a glimpse of Sam and Sheila, who were ahead of him. He noticed Sam's hand as it patted her rear, in a less than gentlemanly fashion. Poor girl, what was she doing with him? But of course he knew, she was probably hoping to enhance her acting career. Men like this took full advantage of a young girl's dreams. Will slid into the inviting crisp white sheets of his comfortable bed, he was asleep almost as soon as his head hit the pillow. He had driven a fair way today and was glad to relax. As he slipped into sleep he thought once again of the innocent girl in another room, enduring the amorous attentions of the unattractive film producer just so that she could maybe aspire to her dreams.

As he opened his eyes the next morning, he didn't really want to get up. This bed was way more comfortable than the one in his apartment and he just wanted to lie there and savor every luxurious moment. This change of scenery had done him good. It made him more aware of the menacing undercurrent to which he was being exposed. The stories he had heard so far were harrowing, but here it was as if he had landed in another world. He was beginning to truly understand the politics within this controversial country.

Eventually he dragged himself up, washed and packed his few possessions and went for a quick breakfast, before paying his bill. Then, jumping into his car he headed off in the direction of Girona

where he spent a few hours seeing the sights of the beautiful medieval city, before he finally took the country road back to Roses.

Chapter 14

It had been two days of complete change. He'd enjoyed wonderful scenic landscapes but he had also begun to understand the vast cultural differences here which made even more sense of the political mixture of views.

Eventually arriving back in Roses, he decided to take a walk to El Berganti to see if he could see Isabella again, as he had been thinking about her a great deal on this trip. However, as if his prayers were answered, as he walked along the street, who should come around a corner but Isabella herself. She smiled and stopped to speak, explaining that she was on her way to the tabac for her father. Will explained to her that he had been hoping to see her, so she asked him to join her. After buying tobacco for Carlos's pipe, they found a small café and started to chat.

Will told her of his travels over the last two days, including his stay at Hostal de la Gavina and the meeting with the American film producer. In fact, he painted a vivid picture of his journey and she was clearly enjoying his descriptions. She had been to Pepe's home in Begur in the past, so when he described his time there, she knew exactly where he had walked. She had been to Girona a few times but was not quite as familiar with it. Just then he saw his scruffy friend Buddy-the-dog again and introduced him to Isabella, who stroked and Petted him. Buddy was definitely enjoying the affection, he wagged his tail and licked Will's hand, then scooted off along the beach in hot pursuit of another small dog. Will was quite surprised that Buddy hadn't forgotten him.

“He is adorable, what a wonderful little character.” Smiled Isabella, Will watched Buddy’s retreat.

“Yeah I feel honored that he seems to have taken such a liking to me.” Will smiled.

At last, as the atmosphere was so relaxed, he plucked up the courage. “Isabella, would you consider coming out for dinner with me one evening? Maybe it would give you a chance to get to know me a little better.”

She smiled, blushing a little. “Thank you, I would like that very much, though it will have to be in a couple of days as I have some work to do tomorrow in our Figueres restaurant.” Then she looked down, but this time it was with slight discomfort and not the colder demeanor she had shown in the past. “Would you mind asking my father's permission. He will not say no, but he likes to be asked.”

William grinned, coming from city life it was not a notion he was used to, however, there was something rather refreshing about it. That would never happen in San Francisco or New York, but here, it seemed entirely appropriate. “Of course, I am happy to ask your father. Would Thursday night be too soon for dinner? I can come and see your father in the afternoon.” She looked relieved, agreeing that about three o’clock would be perfect after the lunchtime rush.

She stood up and he gently kissed her on both cheeks. The smell of her skin was alluring, it kindled a deep sense of yearning within him. As she walked away and as he sat back down he felt elated with the sweet scent of success, wafting over him. Maybe this was the beginning of something amazing.

So much had happened but in a relevantly short time he felt like a different person to the man who'd arrived from France. His whole life was changing. It had been an unknown world then, now it was becoming his world, he suddenly had a deep urge to make all this his own.

There was something intriguing about Isabella, Will knew it was ridiculous to become carried away but he had never felt such a deep sensation about any woman before. He could not believe he was thinking so deeply about her and letting his imagination run away with him this way, somehow something was changing him. It had been a busy but inspiring few days, his eyes were half-closed, he now felt so incredibly relaxed.

“Is this seat taken?” came a voice in English, he knew by the accent that the man in question was local. Looking up he did not recognize the face. “May I join you?”

“Of course, pleased to meet you,” replied Will, wondering what this strange man could possibly want with him.

There was something about him that looked menacing. He took the seat opposite, then wasted no time addressing Will. “Well Señor, I cannot say the same. I have seen you, as they say in English, sniffing around Isabella Garcia. My name is Antonio Lopez.”

Will's heart missed a beat as he recognized that name immediately. This was the boyfriend that

Isabella had turned down and he cast his mind back to his conversation with Sofia. “I suggest you leave this place soon. You are a tourist, you know nothing of our lives here. Our women are not for you. I have seen you speaking to Isabella, she needs people who understand her. Go back to your country before you break her heart or that of any other woman.”

Will was dumbfounded, who the hell did this guy think he was. “Look, I am not here to upset anyone but I'm not going anywhere, in fact, I may plan to settle here. So I assure you Isabella, or any other woman, will be fine, I'll make sure of that.”

A black and angry expression seemed to float across Antonio's face. His animosity was obvious. This man certainly hadn't gotten over Isabella, in fact, he clearly saw her as his responsibility. “I have friends here who will agree with me that you need to go, they are not people who should be ignored. If you ignore me you do so at your own peril.”

As Antonio rose deliberately from his chair, Will stood up as well.

“Are you threatening me?”

“Would you care if I was?”

Will felt his blood rising and realized that this was showing on his face.

“Yeah, I'd damn well care! Nobody dictates to me how I run my life. If I plan to stay here, then you'll just have to get used to it.”

He was almost surprised at the strength in his words. Without a word or a glance back, Antonio turned abruptly and strode away. Will sat back down, frozen, stock-still, feeling a combination of

shock and amazement. He'd found himself in a few difficult situations during his career but Antonio's aggressive manner had thrown him completely off-guard. Never had he felt quite so threatened. Should he tell Isabella or stay quiet?

This was the dilemma with this place, it was like living on a knife-edge, he loved it and he hated it, all at the same time. Emotions here seemed to change like the wind. He needed someone to talk to and Sofia sprang to mind. He liked her wise, measured approach. He paid for his coffee and made his way back to his car.

He had the telephone number for her hotel in his wallet, so found a telephone booth and dialed. He was through to reception before he remembered that he didn't know Sofia's surname, so he asked for the owner Sofia. The receptionist asked him to hold, first checking his name. There was a brief silence before she returned to say she was putting him through.

Then he heard Sofia's kind, friendly voice at the other end. He explained that he'd like to see her and she asked if he wished to visit today. He knew it was too late at this moment to do the drive, so asked her if she would be available the next day. She said she was and he arranged to visit the following morning.

He spent the rest of the day thinking of nothing else, deciding to get to bed early in preparation for the day ahead. As he drifted off to sleep, the sound of crickets outside provided some background music which was so different from the street noise he was familiar with back home. Oh! This was

so perfect! Or was it? Fear was creeping in, a predator was at large, waiting to kill the magical moments he wanted so much. He fell into a deep sleep to dream of the girl who was so very different from past girlfriends - who was becoming his new desire and addiction. However, lurking at the edge of the dream was a darkness, a threatening shadow in the corner, even in his deepest sleep, he could not escape it.

Chapter 15

The drive to Cadaques was something he'd wanted to do from the time he'd seen Salvador Dali in the restaurant - he knew that this area was the painter's home territory. He left Canyelles and drove past Roses, inland for a short distance in the direction of Cadaques. It was a rough and winding route that seemed to meander on forever, but as he climbed the mountainous road the views were breathtaking and for a short time he could see the horseshoe shape of Roses Bay to his right.

During the journey, the image of Antonio's aggressive face kept flashing into his mind. Not only did he feel personally threatened, but he felt that Isabella could be in danger as well. Maybe he should avoid his friendship with her after all. He checked himself, was he becoming melodramatic? Surely none of these threats could really affect him? What could Antonio do to a foreign visitor? Perhaps he was being foolish about going to see Sofia. But as he started to descend into Cadaques, Will was glad he'd made this journey.

He parked his car near the seafront and paused for a moment to collect his thoughts before visiting Sofia. He didn't want her to see the weakness that he was feeling inside. Ambling along the jetty which curved in front of the picturesque little fishing port, Will was taken aback by the beauty of the surroundings. Most of the houses here were painted white which was quite a contrast to many other small Catalan villages. It felt like he'd stepped into a painting containing an undefinable dream-like quality. Now he could understand why an artist like Dali would choose this area as home - it was inspiring! Fishermen were mending their nets and small sailboats were pulled up on the beach, while others bobbed on the water with sails at half-mast. Cadaques was certainly a hive of activity but at the same time relaxing and quaint in its own, totally unique fashion.

Stopping at a small bar, he ordered a coffee and asked the waiter for directions to the Hotel Vistabella. The young man pointed to the other side of the bay, explaining that to reach the hotel he would need to take the road out of town, the hotel would be seen standing out above him on the cliff-top.

Will finished his coffee and made his way back to his car, taking the route to the hotel. As he turned a bend, the hotel was right there perched on the cliff, the views were spectacular, he followed the sign to the entrance and found a place to park.

The large double-fronted door to the hotel was ornately carved and painted in a deep green color. In front of this entrance was a small roundabout full of colorful flowers and in its center was a very old and well-established olive tree.

Will made his way through the front door and into an elegant reception area. A friendly, auburn-haired lady with a welcoming smile greeted him. She was probably of a similar age to him. “Hola Señor, I am Sylvie, Señora asked me to escort you to her private apartment.” Walking behind Sylvie, Will wondered again if he'd made a mistake coming here. Maybe to ignore what had taken place with Antonio would be a wiser move. Perhaps Isabella would be annoyed that he had spoken with her aunt before talking to her? On the other hand, he didn't want to worry her. Sofia was a very practical woman and might see things from a different perspective. They reached a door tucked away at the end of a corridor and Sylvie knocked. He heard the quick footsteps of Sofia and the door opened briskly and her familiar smiling face appeared. She hugged him as if he was family, beckoning him into her drawing-room.

The elegant room reflected Sofia's personality perfectly. Luxurious drapes, deep colored rosewood furniture and exquisite marble floors - as the French would say 'chique'. She turned to Sylvie and asked for coffee to be brought to them.

He was already feeling more relaxed, her calm and easy manner seemed to strip away his nerves. She asked Will to sit and, as he made himself comfortable, he started to tell her about his meeting with Antonio. Apologetically at first, not wishing to over-play the situation. However, by the serious look on her face, he could see that she was far from angry and seemed pleased that he was telling her about his encounter with Antonio.

Sofia sat opposite him, on an elegant chaise longue, she was watching him closely. "My darling Will, I am so glad you felt you could share this with me. You're not overreacting. I remember when Isabella first introduced me to Antonio, I could see the sort of man he was. Dominating, a bully, egotistical, do I need to continue? It was I who talked her out of marrying him, she was captivated by his masculinity and charm, but clearly, he would never have given her space to grow." She stood and walked to the window looking out on the garden, then turned, and he could see her eyes had clouded over.

"Of course you do not know, but I was married to another man before I met José. I was twenty-four years old at this time. Rafa was from a rich family and he was a few years my senior, sophisticated and handsome and I was totally infatuated. He needed a young attractive woman who would be a

perfect social asset. We dined with important business associates and at first, I was flattered that he'd chosen me.”

“Then quickly things began to change. He became insanely jealous when other men even dared to speak to me, which was inevitable within our social set. He would tell me I was nothing special, that he had married me out of pity because I needed someone to tell me what to do. I began to lose my confidence. Then the beatings started, slowly at first with just the occasional slap, but then they escalated. He was clever, making sure that my bruises would not show publicly.”

“I still had some fight in me even then and as he came to hit me I would goad him telling him to go on and hit me if it made him feel bigger. I knew he would hit me all the same but it salvaged some of my own dignity and strength.” Will was now admiring her from a deeper perspective.

“Naturally his violence did nothing for our sex life. I avoided him and so the rapes began. I would creep off to bed early and he would carry on drinking, then come to our room and tell me he wanted to make love, but love didn't come into it. I would refuse and he would become intensely angry, rip off my nightgown and force himself upon me. I dreaded those nights but he would have killed me if I'd locked the door.”

“When I met Antonio, I saw the similarity to my first husband all over again. I eventually escaped Rafa's grasp and went to stay with a friend here in Cadaques at her summer home. Felipa also had a house in Figueres and, although 11 years my senior, we had met at a number of social occasions and

become close. Unfortunately, she died back in 1921 but left behind her son, the artist Salvador Dali, and a daughter Anna Maria with whom I'm still in touch. "I could not go to my own mother. I was expected to stay with my husband, she would have sent me back. I was only twenty-eight years old and Felipa was different from the traditional women at that time, but then really, what has changed? Nothing much even now, her husband Salvador, the artist's father, was deeply disapproving. He was a lawyer and notary. I was unable to stay with them long but it was the escape and refuge I needed to empower myself once again."

"I met José two years later. He was a young builder. My parents certainly didn't approve, as they did not think he was good enough for me. How wrong they were, he was the love of my life. We were unable to marry directly as I was officially still a married woman. So we were forced to wait five years until Rafa's untimely death in a car accident. I never looked back, José and I were inseparable, I loved him with every bone in my body."

Will sat mesmerized by her passion, her honesty, her commitment to Isabella's welfare. He was so pleased that he'd risked the visit. Even though he didn't know Isabella well, he could see now how alike she and her niece were.

Will asked, "I have arranged to have dinner with Isabella tomorrow night, I was wondering if I should just cancel, I don't want to put her in any danger."

She walked across the room, and leaned towards him.... “William, I think Isabella has a right to make up her own mind, she should be aware that Antonio would behave in this way to any new suitor, however it is not acceptable.” He sat back in his chair to reflect, she was right, of course, he liked her measured approach, he understood now why Isabella listened to her aunt. “Tell Isabella what you told me, tell her we spoke, I know she'll appreciate you came to me. She and I are very close. However William, and I emphasize this, please be very careful! Antonio has powerful friends. He has always supported Franco, even against the wishes of his entire family, another reason for me to warn Isabella against him, as our whole family is opposed to what our dictator stands for and the suppression which has resulted in his leadership. Antonio is a man I would not trust, I think that he hates me, as I am sure he knows I influenced her decision to turn him down. But I know he is not yet over her. I still believe him to be dangerous. I know you would do anything to protect Isabella, but don't ever relax where Antonio is concerned.”

Will sat in silence taking in everything Sofia said, and realizing that he would need to handle this with the greatest of care. Sofia sat in silence waiting until he looked up and smiled at her.

“Come,” she said. “Let me show you around the hotel, I do hope that you like it.”

They left the apartment and made their way down the corridor which led to the reception. In front of them was a magnificent grand staircase. Every inch of the hotel reflected Sofia in a similar way to her apartment. He commented on this, she smiled and explained that she would expect her guests to enjoy the same sophistication she loved herself.

The main salon was large with two enormous glistening chandeliers at either end. An imposing grand piano stood in one corner, Sofia explained that music was her passion, he and Isabella must attend the next musical soirée.

Large glass doors folded back into a luxurious dining room. The tables had already been laid for service, with meticulous attention to detail. Pink and cream roses adorned every table, cut-glass glistened - this was the kind of restaurant which Will loved. Now he could see why Isabella seemed to have a certain sophistication. She had grown up with this opulence on her doorstep. He made it very clear how impressed he was and could see that Sofia was delighted.

“I shouldn't sound boastful but although this is a different hotel it has been likened to having the same glamour as the famous hotel down the coast, La Gavina, close to Sant Feliu de Guixols. The rich and famous from all over the world go there. I cater to those elitists who would rather not be photographed and talked about. I suppose the exception to the rule is Dali who actually wants to be noticed. As I mentioned before we give him the attention he requires, however, I avoid any political conversation, as our views are so different. But then politics and this business will never mix if one is to remain professional.”

Will smiled. “Funnily enough, I returned yesterday from a night at La Gavina, when I bumped into Isabella and was accosted by Antonio. It was quite an experience, I know what you mean about grandeur, though I can see the feminine touches here that reflect you, I think that there is something more delicate and romantic in this decor.” She looked delighted by this remark.

She showed him round the garden and the pool area, every minute attention to detail had been included. Every statue, tree, or flower bed had been designed with adoring love, it was an exquisite masterpiece.

“One day all this will be Isabella’s.” She looked at him with an earnest expression on her face. “All I ask of her is that my legacy continues, I can see you like sophistication. There is history here to be passed on to new generations.” As she made this comment Will felt a sense she was saying something else. As if she was willing him to take his relationship with Isabella further, or was he imagining that? He realized then that she liked him as a possible suitor for her niece, which felt like a massive responsibility, but then again, deep down, he was feeling this anyway.

Without even thinking whether it was the right thing to do or not, he walked up to her with arms outstretched and hugged her. “I am hugely attracted to Isabella, I have even tried to imagine how I could change my life to allow me to get better acquainted with her. Maybe Antonio saw from afar, something that I was not quite recognizing myself.”

“Come William! Let us treat ourselves to a Martini, or something else if you prefer.” She smiled cheekily as she suggested this. “A Martini sounds fantastic, thank you Sofia.”

They made their way back to her apartment and she carefully fixed them both a drink and handed him olives. They sat on her terrace sipping their drinks. A bond between them was definitely strengthening, he was almost feeling as if they had a mother-son relationship, which he had not experienced with any other older woman before, other than, of course, his own mother. She asked

him if he would like to join her for lunch. He said that maybe he should leave soon, so she rang reception and ordered two plates of tapas to soak up the martini.

Sofia suddenly looked up. “Ah! On another subject, I was thinking about you the other day. Tell me, when you send your stories to America do you use telex?” Will nodded his head, explaining that there was a telex machine at the local post office, though he had not yet sent any stories back to Frank.

Sofia explained that she was concerned that using a public telex machine might be a risk, in her opinion it may blow his cover. She explained that she had remembered Fernando talking about his telex machine a year ago. She was certain that if Will asked, Fernando would not mind him using it.

“I believe this may be a more reliable form of communication and less dangerous. Now you have had this unfortunate brush with Antonio, the need for care is heightened. Speak to Fernando I am sure he will agree.” Will was so grateful. This had been a concern to him, but up to now, he hadn't been able to come up with a solution.

He left Sofia standing on the steps, waving at him, as he drove away. She looked so elegant, so utterly gorgeous as only the most sophisticated older women can. He waved back as he left and began his journey back up the mountain road which wound its way out of Cadaques. Soon the white, bright buildings of the magical Catalan fishing village vanished out of sight.

He made the fairly long drive back along the rough road with a much lighter heart. He wanted to immerse himself in this family. Not only because he intended to write, but because he now felt as if he was becoming a part of their world. He needed to do more to prove to them how much he cared.

Chapter 16

It was early morning and Will felt a warm glow inside him. His planned meal with Isabella was all that he could think about. Even his unfortunate encounter with Antonio seemed far less important and looking out of the window at the sparkling sea and the clear blue sky, he gently sighed. The smell of fragrant flowers filled the air, it really was heaven and San Francisco seemed a lifetime away.

Since his trip down the coast, Will had concluded that he was in no hurry to return to America. He had already sent a cable to Frank explaining why he needed to stay a while longer. The main reason was perfectly true as it was taking longer to unearth newsworthy stories than he had first anticipated, though he did feel that his pending meal with Isabella and the chance to get to know the family at a deeper level may help his mission. Though this was certainly not why he was happy to be spending time with her at last.

He felt at total peace with the world and decided that, rather than making coffee in the apartment, he would go out for breakfast at Señor Deulofeu's café.

Slipping on a pair of shorts and a light shirt, he decided to take a shave as he wanted to look good later on, other days he preferred to skip this as it was so good to really relax and not feel he was being scrutinized. His landlord was in good form which, Will concluded, was most of the time. He smiled cheerfully at Will, beckoning him over to a table by the open window and brought him a café solo. The small restaurant was on the first floor above the shop, so he sat by the window with a good view of the road leading to the seafront.

Will noticed that there was an egg dish on the menu so he ordered that. It turned out to be two fried eggs with tomato sauce which was delicious. He mopped up the sauce with a piece of bread until the plate was spotlessly clean. Señor Deulofeu asked him what he had in store for the day ahead. Will explained that he was hoping to take a lady out for dinner. Señor Deulofeu smiled. “A very lucky young lady, there will be a line of ladies quite soon all wanting to have dinner with the new American.”

Will laughed, “I’m not sure about that, but I feel very honored to know this one, she’s very beautiful.” The older man chuckled as he made his way around the café from table to table. Will sat back in his chair and looked out of the window as a group of children passed by, laughing and jostling each other as they made their way towards the bus stop. They looked so happy and carefree. How great to be young he thought, unaware of politics and unrest.

He paid Señor Deulofeu and walked down the hill to the beach and took off his sandals to feel the soft sand between his toes. He then made his way to the far end of the beach so that he could walk back the length of the bay in the shallow, foaming water. At this time of the day the sea seemed to sparkle more than usual. A few small shells were scattered on the wet sand and he was almost alone on the beach. A small boy was running up and down with his father close by, protectively watching him and yet again, Will felt that familiar slight pang of envy, the new unfamiliar idea of family life that he was currently missing out on. On previous occasions, such thoughts had disturbed him, but now he felt he was ready. Surprised by this realization, he decided that maybe Maddy was right about his age!

A gull flew overhead and he watched as some of the last fishing boats made their way back into Roses with their night's catch. They were followed by noisy seagulls diving from the sky, hoping for a sneaky, quick snack.

He thought how pretty Canyelles looked as he looked back at the village from the beach, and realized that he was in no rush to leave this fabulous place to return to the madness of San Francisco, he could live here forever. This revelation surprised him, as up to now, he'd always seen himself as a city man. Now, suddenly he longed for a different lifestyle. Even before he'd arrived here, spending time with Maddy and Jean-Luc had somehow opened a new chapter in his life, and being here was making sense of it all.

He made his way back to the apartment. He needed to be at the restaurant to see Isabella's father at the end of their lunchtime rush, aiming to get there at about three to three-thirty in the afternoon.

He put on long cream pants and a cotton shirt but rolled up his sleeves and left the collar open. He wanted to look sophisticated but relaxed - the kind of man any father would be pleased to see with his daughter. He knew Isabella had said this was just a formality but, somehow, he felt that it could still go wrong and that must never happen. A little later he made his way to his car and cruised along the coast road with the sea on his left. He felt like a Hollywood movie star, cool, confident, part of a perfect film set, it was surreal. He felt the desire to pinch himself to make sure that he wasn't living in a dream. The anticipation he was feeling now was quite overwhelming.

Arriving in Roses, he parked in the center of town without too much trouble. The last of the fruit and vegetable market stalls were being cleared away and there was a strong smell of fresh produce. It was so different from the more clinical element of big cities to which he was accustomed. It was dusty, earthy and vibrant. He breathed in the air, the smells and the ambiance of the place, it was addictive, providing an overwhelming sense of peace.

When he arrived at the restaurant he remembered that he'd had nothing for lunch, and the eggs he'd eaten for breakfast seemed a lifetime away. He didn't want much as he wanted to enjoy dinner, but hunger was gnawing at his stomach.

Isabella was there to meet him, a slightly nervous expression on her face. She led him to a table and offered him a drink and chose a cooling beer. "I purposely haven't had lunch but do you have something small I could eat?" he asked.

She smiled "Do you like anchovies? He nodded. "Leave it to me," she said, slipping away to the kitchen. She arrived back shortly after with what they called in these parts 'pan con tomate', lightly-toasted bread, rubbed with garlic, olive oil, and tomatoes. She had added an anchovy to each piece of bread. 3"Perfect!" he smiled. "That should keep me going until dinner, that is if your father approves of me."

Just then her father, such a typical restaurateur, always presenting a cheerful smile, made his way over to the table. Will stood up and put out his hand to shake it, but Isabella's father pulled him into a welcoming hug and patted him unceremoniously on the back.

“Hello Sir, how are you?” Will started in English. Then realizing that although Carlos spoke some English he must speak slowly. “If necessary can you translate Isabella? I don't want to risk a mistake with my Spanish.” She went to the bar and poured her father a beer as well.

Carlos sat down at the table. Will felt like a child again, at school, in front of the principal when he'd done something wrong. He was not used to feeling this way, he was always so confident and self-assured. This feeling of apprehension felt alien to him, but then this whole scenario was most definitely unusual.

He took a deep breath. “Sir, I would be most honored if you would give me permission to take your daughter to dinner.” He looked at Isabella, feeling quite desperate. She duly translated his request, though he realized that Carlos understood.

Her father took on a serious expression, 'Oh my God,' thought Will, 'he's going to refuse.' Then Carlos's face broke into an enormous grin and he threw back his head and laughed. Isabella translated the answer. “Of course young man. As long as you take special care of her, she is my precious jewel.” Will smiled now in sheer relief. “Have not fear Sir, I will treat her as a goddess.”

Isabella kissed her father and looked so pleased and happy. Will was close to losing his cool image by dancing around the restaurant like a small child. This he managed to resist, but with great difficulty. “I'll come here at seven o'clock tonight.

We can go to the restaurant and have an aperitif first before we eat.”

“I’ll be ready,” smiled Isabella. She stood at the door waving, as he jauntily walked down the street. He hardly dared look back for fear of tripping over his own feet.

He vaguely remembered making his way to his car. Then he realized he hadn’t decided on a restaurant for this evening. As he was in Roses he dropped into the real estate office to see Fernando who was just clearing up and about to close his office for his siesta.

“I would like your advice for a really nice restaurant that serves quality food and has a good ambiance. What can you suggest?”

Fernando leaned forward on his desk contemplating.

“La Samandra,” he said. “It is very romantic, quite special and the chef is very famous in these parts. It is not cheap though!” “Money is not important, I want the very best,” said Will.

Fernando smiled and gave Will a knowing look. “A very lucky lady,” he said with conviction. Will let him in on the secret, admitting it was Isabella. Fernando smiled approvingly.

It was only when he was driving back that he remembered that he’d forgotten to ask Fernando about the telex. He must do this soon. On his arrival home, he decided that he would take a nap before dinner. Tonight needed to be the most perfect night of his life. He had no idea why - it just had to be.

He dressed with great care that evening. His plan was for a more formal approach. In San Francisco he would have worn a dickie bow but, as Spain was more relaxed, he decided to wear long, dark pants and his light linen jacket with a cravat. He pushed his dark wavy hair back. He was so unaware of how handsome he looked, with his newly-acquired light tan he could not go unnoticed. Then, to complete the effect, he applied his most expensive aftershave - one to which he'd treated himself while in France. He finally pushed a handkerchief, which picked up the color of his cravat, into his top pocket and smiled. Yes, he'd do!

He left the apartment a little earlier as he wanted to find a florist open in Roses. He also wanted to check that there was a table at the restaurant, so he followed Fernando's directions and made his way to the front door, where he met a waiter who assured him that a table would be available.

From what he could see, it was clear that this was a smart restaurant so he wanted a corsage for his beautiful companion. He parked his car close to a florist and waited as the lady carefully arranged the simple, cream flowers which he'd chosen, into an artistic cluster. As he had no idea what Isabella would be wearing, he'd chosen a neutral color that could go with anything. He didn't want to put her off by anything too ostentatious so the simple arrangement seemed just right.

He paid the florist and drove off in a different direction to usual. Usually, he parked at the seafront to avoid the narrow back streets but tonight he wanted to arrive outside El Berganti in his car. His date was to be given the full treatment, nothing less would do.

Isabella was waiting at the door of the restaurant as he drew up outside. He took a sharp intake of breath when he saw her standing there; she looked even more exquisite than normal. Her long dark hair, which was normally loose around her shoulders, was gently pulled up into a chignon. She was wearing a short-sleeved, cream dress with a pink floral design, with a large blue sash tied in a bow at the front. It was simple but so perfect. Her pink shoes complimented it so well and he was relieved that his flowers would add to it perfectly.

Will led her to the passenger door and opened it. She slid in and settled into a comfortable position as he gently closed the door, making sure that her dress was clear of it, as it shut. She was delighted when he handed her the corsage and she pinned it to her bodice. She looked so ravishing. He felt a surge of passion, it was almost too much and nearly overwhelmed him, catching him by surprise so early in the date.

Her parents stood at the door, smiling. As they waved them off, Will drove in the direction of the seafront again towards the far end of town where the restaurant sat on a slightly elevated cliff, boasting breathtaking views. They spoke very little to each other and it was clear that Isabella was much more nervous than usual. He parked the car and they walked hand-in-hand up to a beautiful terrace that would have been perfectly suited in Hollywood. Flares were lit around the area, candles flickered, and there was a fountain in the middle - all designed to create an atmosphere of sheer elegance. Fernando was right it was clear that only the very rich would dine here.

The waiter whom he'd met earlier was wearing a long, white apron and ushered them to a table which overlooked the sea and the beautiful bay. Will asked Isabella if she liked French champagne. She blushed, "Of course, I just don't have the opportunity normally."

"Then we will tonight," he smiled.

He appreciated Isabella's presence as understanding the Spanish menu would have been difficult and she was able to explain what treats were in store. This was no ordinary menu. It was clearly designed to romance the palate. He chose an artichoke soup with a garnish of truffles. Isabella picked a salad with slices of wild duck in a delicious sauce. She looked aghast at the prices but Will told her to ignore them and choose anything, as it was her special night tonight. They both decided that lobster was irresistible and ordered that. The excitement on Isabella's face was clear as she surveyed the food as it arrived.

She was now beginning to relax. Clearly, this environment was outside her normal daily routine but Will was impressed with how well she fitted in. It was as if she was meant to be there, like a princess who had never set foot in a palace before but was destined to be there and who blended naturally into the exotic setting. Isabella had the type of class that some people are born with, money for her was not important. She was striking and charismatic and stood out among the other women in the restaurant. Of course, she was used to the elegant ambiance of her aunt's hotel, which would explain this.

“Guille,” she whispered. Wow! he felt the deep sensual ache for her as she uttered his name in Spanish. “This is wonderful but you do not need to spend money on me. I am looking forward to getting to know you better, but next time I would be happy with a picnic.” He smiled, already he was feeling emotions that he had never felt before, he'd heard of love at first sight but never believed it, now he was not so sure. He had picked up on her words ‘next time’, so maybe she was thinking that there would be a next time.

He had been biding his time but knew that he needed to tell her about Antonio as well as his visit to her aunt. He decided that it was best to get this out of the way first, just hoping that she would not find it too upsetting. He relaid the story of Antonio’s sudden appearance and how he had done his best not to let her previous boyfriend intimidate him. Then he described his visit to Sofia yesterday and her aunt's amazing support in the matter.

Isabella sat in silence and Will was finding it hard to read her reaction. Was she angry that he had involved her aunt? He waited, hoping that this was not going to spoil their evening. After a few moments, she spoke.

“Guillem, I hardly know what to say. How dare he address you in this way. It is one of the reasons that I have not been out with another man since we ended our relationship. However, he should know that I have no intention of joining a convent! He has absolutely no right to say who I may or may not see. I am so pleased you visited my aunt as I value her opinion. She is right that we need to be careful. Antonio has some very unpleasant friends.” Will openly sighed in relief. “I didn't know what to do for the best Isabella. I am growing to like your aunt more and more and I wanted a

woman's perspective." She smiled "I know she likes you, she has told me this already, it will certainly strengthen the bond you have with her. Let us put Antonio out of our minds for now. We are in a beautiful place and I would like the chance to become better acquainted."

With this conversation out of the way, they were now much more relaxed and Isabella began to talk about her family. Her grandfather, Manuel, had been born in Andalusia. He had traveled north as a young man and started work on a farm just outside Figueres. However, he soon realized that farming was not for him, so when a local bar owner offered him work in town, he'd welcomed it. He was obviously quite entrepreneurial as when he suggested certain changes to the business and his boss, who by this time was treating him as one of the family, embraced his ideas.

The bar took off and developed into a popular restaurant. When the owner died, with no sons or relatives to pass the business to, he left it to Manuel - who proceeded to open another restaurant in Figueres and then a third in Roses. He had three children. His first son was named after him. The younger son was Isabella's father Carlos, and the eldest child, his daughter, was Isabella's aunt Sofia.

Isabella's grandmother was a girl from this region and her father, a successful lawyer from Girona, was originally of Italian descent. Her father had been Italian and her great grandmother was from Madrid, her name was also Isabella. At first, they had disapproved of Manuel as he was not what they wanted for their daughter. But he had proved to be quite an entrepreneur. When he died he left the three restaurants to his two sons. Carlos purchased his brother's half share of the Figueres restaurant and his brother sold the other. Her Aunt Sofia had inherited a large piece of coastal land

on the edge of Cadaques, from her mother. "So as you know she and her second husband built a hotel and a few houses on the land. As you have now been to Cadaques you will know how lovely it is and it is close to Port Lligat, the home of Salvador Dali."

She told him that, as Sofia had no children, Isabella was her only younger relative, she would inherit her estate eventually. Her cousin Pepe from her mother's side was also included in Carlos's will.

Carlos had met Isabella's mother Carmen at a local dance and they had married two years later. Her mother had lost two babies early in pregnancy and so Isabella was very precious to them. Carmen was a hard worker and having grown up as the daughter of a local fishmonger, she wasn't afraid of getting her hands dirty. Even though they employed a chef, her mother liked to be involved in the kitchen. Isabella also explained that her mother was very highly principled and would always stand up for what she believed.

This insight into Isabella's family drew Will even closer to her. They were strong as a group and this was reflected in the confidence he saw in her. Unlike many women of their era, these women were not pussy cats, they had minds of their own. Maybe her striking beauty was a reflection of her Italian ancestry. He could see already that they were no ordinary family. "My mother is a little too political at times, I think if she could, she would run for local mayor, or better still president." She laughed. "Of course that is not possible now." Will was becoming intrigued again and he tried to ask a little more about General Franco. "Let us not spoil a wonderful evening," she said. "Maybe another time."

Will had to agree it was a very special evening and, as he had no intention of spoiling it, he dropped the subject. They chatted about art and music and she told him that, as a young child she had learned to play the violin. "I still play as much as I can, I am a member of a small local orchestra." She really was full of surprises!

Will told Isabella about his unusual evening at Hotel Duran and how much of an impact the painter Dali had on his audience. Isabella looked less impressed than he expected. She seemed to take on a different persona which, as yet he couldn't quite pinpoint. It was as if, for some reason, the artist left her cold in some way. He wanted to know more, but instinctively held back. Isabella didn't need to talk to give a clear indication of which subjects she would discuss and those she preferred to avoid. It was this side of her that was fascinating Will more and more. She had a depth in her character, he could see an intelligence and perception which were not always so pronounced in younger women. He was beginning to think that he must seem positively boring next to her. They had thoroughly enjoyed their meal and both agreed that a dessert was out of the question so they finished with coffee and liqueurs.

As they left and walked down the steps outside, Will stopped. She looked up at him as if she was reading his mind. He knew that he should ask, but his passion for her had reached a crescendo, he pulled her firmly but gently towards him and bent to kiss her. To his surprise, her response was entirely mutual. He had at first wondered if he was being too forward, it was not typically correct to kiss on a first date, well, just cheek to cheek. However, it was clear that she was willing him to continue. They gently touched lips at first, but he felt the sheer magnetism between them, and as his tongue parted her lips, he felt her move closer to him and kiss him back with equal emotion.

He wrapped his arms around her and she sunk into him. Will couldn't remember an experience like this, ever. He'd kissed many girls but this was a fusion of body and soul, as if they were made for each other, never to be apart.

She looked up at him and he felt the electricity running through him, so strong that he knew she felt it too. A small smile crossed her lips. He grinned down at her.

"What are you doing to me?" he said. She smiled back.

"The same as you are doing to me," she answered simply. They embraced again, this time with even more conviction than before.

'Is it possible to fall in love so quickly?' he thought to himself, but by the look of happiness on Isabella's face he was sure it was. She seemed to feel the same, but he knew that he must curb his desires, this relationship must be savored not rushed. He drove her home, holding her delicate hand in the car and wishing tonight would never end.

He parked the car just past the door of the restaurant, a little away from prying eyes, then he turned and kissed her once more. It felt as if they knew each other so well, it was unlike any other first date he had ever known. She welcomed his kiss and again reciprocated but this time with a degree of more urgency and he knew the passion he was feeling was certainly felt by her. He walked round the car, opened the door and Isabella slipped out. "When can I see you again?" he asked.

"When would you like to?" She smiled a sweet smile. "But remember a picnic next time, I'll bring the food. I have some jobs to do for my father tomorrow."

"Then the next day, please." he laughed. "If it's OK, how about I pick you up and we go early evening to Canyelles bay?" "Shall we swim first?" she suggested. "Say at five o'clock then we can change and eat later."

Will was now feeling even more excited at the thought of swimming with Isabella. "I will be here for you twenty minutes before. We can change in the apartment after our swim - best to leave the food which I will bring in the refrigerator." She waved and smiled as she made her way through the front door of the restaurant.

He returned to the car but sat there for a moment, taking in the atmosphere and trying to understand the depth of his feelings which were so intense. Then, reluctantly he started up the car and drove towards home. Yes, even that was strange, he already felt that his new apartment was home. He was in a state of sheer bliss, in a newly found heaven. He wanted this wonderful woman so much. What was he going to do? This was no holiday romance, yet his home was on the other side of the world. He knew she was the one, the only one with whom he would ever be truly happy. How could he feel this so soon? He just knew it was something indescribable and so unique, that had never happened to him before. He drove back to Canyelles with her face on his mind and the delicious taste of her on his lips.

Chapter 17

Early the next morning Will popped along to the café to see Señor Deulofeu to ask if he might use his telephone. He offered to pay, but when he explained that it was a local call, his landlord waved his hand. “Oh no my friend, you may pay for an American call but this one is not a problem, ‘un regalo’.” Will thanked him, he much appreciated his easy-going manner.

He dialed the number for Fernando and after a couple of rings he heard his voice. Will asked about the telex and Fernando told him to meet at his house and gave him the address. Will went back to the apartment to collect his bag and then made his way straight to his car.

The house was on the edge of Roses town, but far enough out not to be overlooked. It was a large, prestigious looking home. He could see Fernando had been successful in business, he would have been in no doubt once he arrived in front of the imposing facade. The front door was set inside large carved stone pillars and impressive stone steps led up to it. Ringing the doorbell, he stood back surveying the area. It was a fabulous place to live, close enough to town but far enough away not to be disturbed.

He heard footsteps from within and Fernando opened the door, he was wearing casual cream slacks and a checked shirt untucked at the waist. He welcomed Will into an impressive marble-tiled hallway, this too was surrounded by stone pillars.

Then he led Will through the drawing-room and out into a very attractive garden. Here there was a wrought iron table and two comfortable wicker chairs. He left Will for a moment while he went to fetch coffee, arriving back with a tray, containing all they needed and which also included a very tasty looking cake.

Fernando began to talk, “My wife Bernadette and I were married for 29 years. She was French but her family lived just across the border in France, so she still had Catalan roots. Historically my family were right-wing and when we married she was not very popular with my mother, who was from a staunch aristocratic Spanish family. The civil war forced me to reevaluate my views, I am angered when I see what has been done to our people. Catalans who live on the French side of the Pyrenees are strongly sympathetic to our plight.”

Will told him about his conversation with Daniel on the coach as he travelled to Spain. At that time he had not really understood the young man but now he could see that Daniel would have had Catalan links even in France, so no wonder he had warned Will. It made so much more sense now. Daniel’s warnings had fallen on deaf ears at the time, now he viewed them with greater clarity.

“Did your wife and your mother ever get along?” Will asked. Fernando smiled, “They avoided politics at all costs, Bernadette never changed her views, but for my sake and our family she sidestepped certain conversations. She would have been impressed by what you are doing, she always said the world should know more.”

Fernando said he would show Will his office where he would be able to use the telex undisturbed. He suggested that if Will called in advance of a visit and he would make sure that he was home. He said his relationship with Sofia was good and was pleased that she had suggested this. She had, apparently, said a great many complimentary things to him about Will. They cut into the cake and enjoyed their coffee, then Fernando showed him into his office on the ground floor and pointed out the telex machine. "It is seldom used now, you can work here as often as you require. Will was so grateful and Fernando agreed that sending his work on a public telex may be inadvisable.

Fernando waved goodbye as Will climbed into his car, waving back, then he drove back down the road towards town. He was feeling elated, now he was sure he could work far more easily, undisturbed. He made his way into town for a midday beer. As he walked past Hotel El Gran, Pepé was coming out of the door, having just come off his shift. They went to a nearby bar for a beer and he told the younger man about his latest meeting with Fernando.

Just as they were taking their first sip of beer, Will was reminded yet again how unpredictable his life in this place could be. Antonio and one other man suddenly descended on them and walking up close to their table, Antonio pointed at Will speaking angrily as the other man addressed Pepé. The speech was fast, so Will was unable to fully understand what was being said, but the aggression in the tone left him in no doubt. Plus the word "Americano", was clear enough. As fast as they had arrived they left. Will turned to Pepé, asking him to translate.

Pepe sat back looking aghast and for a minute, he was quite unable to speak. Will's expression was urgent, he wanted to know what the two men had been saying. Pepé then turned towards him. "My

friend, you are going to have to take very great care from now on. The man with Antonio is Sebastian, he is a guardia policeman. Antonio has been stirring things up, I assume he has exaggerated your friendship with Isabella and he has told Sebastian that you are here to cause trouble. I do not think that he has any idea yet that you are writing, but they will be watching you.”

Will felt his blood drain from his face, but made no reply. He sat there frozen, unable to say anything at this moment. The sheer venom he had seen in Antonio’s face was a chilling reminder of the tenuous position he was in. Pepé turned now to look at him. “I need to speak to the family. They were both insinuating that we should all be wary of you. I do not believe that the family will wish to be intimidated by this, but we do need to inform them. I will go and talk to Carlos now, why don’t you join us for an aperitivo early this evening? We will have had time to discuss it with Sofia as well, come to El Beganti at around six o’clock.”

Pepé stood up, gripped Will strongly in an embrace and then strode off down the road in the direction of the restaurant. Will sat back down, feeling the familiar heavy heart which was becoming all too normal. These bullying tactics were so alien to him, he had never been intimidated like this before in his life. This uncomfortable position only highlighted the reasons why he was here. Although he could see that any normal person would leave, for him it seemed to be having the opposite effect.

He decided to go back to the apartment to lick his wounds and try to relax. All this incident had actually done was to make him more determined and his reason for being here was all the more

important. Yes, he needed to be careful, but this only highlighted the gravity of this situation, it somehow made him more determined to stay and this feeling quite surprised him.

As he sat on the terrace, wearing only his shorts and looking out on the sun filled bay, watching butterflies on the flowers which surrounded him, it was hard to imagine that there was any threat to his existence at all. To an onlooker he would be envied, sitting warm and comfortable in this idyllic setting. Will could see that however determined he was to share the secrets which lingered here with the world press, the meeting tonight could be the deciding factor, without the family and their trusting friends, there would be no story.

He made his way back to town early evening, a feeling of apprehension weighed down on him. He knew this was out of his control and he felt powerless to do anything about it. Leaving his car on the promenade he walked slowly to El Berganti, feeling that he wanted to put off the possibility of defeat as long as possible.

As usual Carlos welcomed him, this time he ushered him into the inner terrace where they had enjoyed their first lunch. Pepe was already seated with Carmen but Isabella was nowhere to be seen. Pepe explained, "Due to the nature of this conversation we felt that it was safer to talk here." They offered Will a choice of drinks and he chose a martini. Carlos explained in broken English that they were very angry at Antonio's aggressive behavior. They felt that this was more a case of punishing Isabella than any actual proof of Will's real reason for being here. Pepe explained. "Carlos feels that if we act as if we are guilty, or as if Antonio's claims have any validity, we will attract more attention. To carry on as if nothing has happened, but be aware of the danger Antonio could pose,

seems to make more sense. We have spoken to Sofia and she agrees, though warns that you do need to take extra care.” Will felt a weight dropping off him, he was not expecting such solidarity. “What does Isabella say?”

“So far she does not know, though we will need to tell her. For her own safety she needs to be aware. She has been at the Figueres restaurant again today. We wanted to discuss it with you first. We know she will be very angry. Antonio’s desire to control her will not be welcomed.” “This morning I visited the house of Fernando. He has offered me the use of his telex so that I don’t have to use a public machine, it was Sophia’s suggestion. This will certainly help me to keep my movements out of the public eye. I will be writing under a pseudonym and changing names and locations, so any connection with me here should be hard to prove.”

Pepe leaned forward. “At no time can you relax your guard. Sebastian is very ambitious. We have known him over many years and he will not let anything, or anybody get in the way of an opportunity for promotion, he is ruthless. This is why he and Antonio are such good friends, they are equally controlling.”

Just as he finished talking, the door opened and Isabella walked in. “What is going on?” she said in English, obviously for Will’s benefit. Carlos asked her to sit down and she accepted a glass of wine. He then explained in Catalan, the incident that had taken place, Isabella’s face colored slightly and she stood to speak. For Will’s benefit she continued to speak in English, turning to the family she replied. “This is outrageous! Am I never going to be allowed to forget that despicable man? I do not believe they have any proof about your writing, this is a vendetta against me, I hate him with a

passion. How could I ever have been so stupid as to think I could love him, he is a viper!” She walked angrily to the other side of the terrace. “If you still wish to see me Guillem, then we will continue our friendship, I will not be dictated to, by any man.” William was overwhelmed by her passion and her strength, he felt the familiar deep surge of emotion he constantly felt for her which undoubtedly made her stand out above all others. Threat or no threat, he didn’t want to leave this place while his feelings for her were so strong.

Isabella drew Will to one side. “Are you comfortable to continue our friendship? Please be honest if you prefer to leave.” He looked down at her, feeling the gnawing desire in the pit of his stomach. “No Isabella I don’t want to leave, I have a job to do, but I also wish to know you better, if you will allow that. You are different from any other woman I have ever met.” She looked up at him and smiled and he wanted to devour her there and then.

“So, are we still having a picnic tomorrow?” She smiled up at him. He grinned at her, replying, “yes a picnic it is!”

“Leave it to me, the wine is all you will need to arrange,” she touched his hand lightly, then continued to walk back through the restaurant. He said goodbye to the family and drove back to Canyelles. His desire for her was growing and tomorrow could not come fast enough.

Chapter 18

After a short walk the next morning, Will returned to his apartment for a coffee and to write as much as he could, hoping that this would take his mind off the threats from Antonio and Sebastian the day before. He spent a short time on the beach at midday, coming back for a light snack at the apartment, as he knew he wanted to eat with Isabella later.

At four-thirty, he made his way to his car which almost drove itself to Roses. He was casually dressed in shorts and a light shirt. Again, he drove up to the back streets so that he could make his way to the restaurant. Isabella was already waiting; her long hair tied back in a ponytail and she too was wearing her shorts. 'My God, she's beautiful,' he thought. She appeared more attractive every time he set eyes upon her, he could see he was being an incorrigible romantic, so out of character, but he just couldn't help it.

She was carrying a wicker basket, covered by a cloth as if to keep its contents secret. She appeared so much more relaxed than she had been on the drive to the restaurant two days earlier. Jumping into the car, she placed the basket on the back seat, it was as if she felt that she knew him now, letting her reserve down. He was seeing her real personality for the first time and his feelings for her were stronger than ever before. They put yesterday's revelations behind them, determined to enjoy the evening ahead.

When they finally arrived at Canyelles, Will drew the car up outside the apartment and they made their way upstairs. He showed her to the kitchen first, where she unpacked the basket of goodies into the refrigerator. She admired the view before he showed her around. She seemed to like the little apartment and he was pleased that she was so comfortable being alone with him. He had

wondered if she might feel a little vulnerable with him, alone in his space, but she was completely relaxed and chatted openly.

They grabbed two towels and made their way down the road to the lovely bay, which in the golden light of the early evening seemed so welcoming. The atmosphere was soothing and relaxing as if the sea was there to wash away the past and leave them to savor the present.

He had to stifle his emotions as she took off her shorts, revealing a costume with a small skirt. The bodice was tight and zipped at the back, her breasts seemed to tease him in a most provocative manner as if they were secure, yet about to burst out of their prison to escape and jump out at him. He felt the familiar sensation and hoped he could contain his deep attraction so that she wouldn't be aware of how he was feeling. The best plan was to get into the sea as fast as he could, so he joked, telling her to catch him if she could, making a hasty entrance into the clear water.

Isabella followed him into the water, laughing and teasing him. She was looking so natural and fresh, with such uncomplicated, vivacious beauty. As he watched her, she swam so easily, but that was inevitable when living so close to the sea. She took a dive into the shallow water and came up to the surface with her wet hair now sleek to her head and her eyes half open as she rubbed the saltwater from them.

They stood together now, up to their waists in shallow water and, without thinking, Will pulled her to him and kissed her. With no hesitation she kissed him back, this time with a passion that even

surprised him. Her tongue was salty as it entered his mouth. He could feel the curves of her beautiful body against his and they quite naturally merged into one, for a moment they were lost in their own private world. Suddenly becoming aware that they were not alone, and that there were still people on the beach, they realized that maybe this moment of passion was a little too public. They both laughed together and, almost as one body, dove together head first into the sparkling sea once again. They swam out a little further to where a few small boats were tendered. Here, behind one of these boats, they were able to kiss again, this time with an intimacy that felt so good that neither wanted it to end. He drew her into his strong arms and she nuzzled closer. There was something so sensual about being so intimate in the water.

After what seemed to be a long but glorious time, they decided to swim back. Compared to many other women Isabella was a strong swimmer, she swam with deft strokes and he watched her glide effortlessly through the water.

When back on dry land they lay down side by side. He dared not touch her as he knew his body would never be able to conceal his overwhelming lust for her.

“Are you hungry?” she laughed. “I think I am,” he said. So they wrapped themselves in towels and made the short walk back to the apartment. Isabella went into the bathroom to shower and came out with her costume which she hung on the balcony to dry. While he was in the shower she made herself at home in his kitchen preparing the food. They had decided to eat on the terrace away from the sand and flies on the beach.

Isabella produced a homemade tortilla, Serrano ham and a fabulous salad. Will brought out wine and glasses. They sat together at the wrought iron table, and ate and talked and laughed, as the sun gradually sunk out of sight and dusk cast its mystical shadows over the surrounding mountains.

They could almost breathe the romance in the cool night air.

They talked this time more about him; his work in San Francisco, his mother's death and his father, who had died a few years earlier but whom he'd seldom seen as his parents had separated many years before. He explained in more detail about his work and the diversity of his writing.

Isabella loved hearing about San Francisco and New York, saying how much she'd like to visit. She had read about America and it sounded so exciting. Will stretched his arms above his head, then leaned forward towards her and held her hand.

“Until I arrived in France and then came here, I couldn't imagine being anywhere else. I was a city boy through and through, but suddenly I'm realizing what I've been missing. Maybe I am just growing out of it. The problem is my work, I need to be where the action is, or change my career completely, this place certainly brings out the writer in me.”

Isabella understood exactly how he was feeling. “I have had times of frustration living here,” she replied. “My ambition was to live in Barcelona, not here. Although it's not a million miles away, the faster city life was appealing. When I started playing the violin I had a dream to one day be good enough to play in a leading orchestra. I should have followed my dream, but the problem is that my

parents would hate it if I was away. This is the downside of being an only child.” then she grimaced.

“And being a woman!”

Will understood, he could see the frustration in her face. “When our mother passed away last year my sentiments changed, that's why I came to see Maddy and the family in France. I have a great deal less to keep me in the USA now than previously. I loved Maddy's place in France, but that really is stuck out of the way in the country. Somehow I don't see a way of permanently making a living there. Here you have more of a buzz, with the tourism etcetera, but thankfully without the fast-pace of San Francisco. If we could only sort out our problem with Antonio it is idyllic. For a moment he regretted saying this as her face clouded over, but then she smiled again.

He continued “You and Maddy will have a great deal in common, although she is a little older than you, she was very involved with the ballet world and your violin playing would be an art that she would appreciate. I have sent her a telegram asking if they would visit here. She hasn't come back to me yet, I assume she is trying to find room in her diary for a visit, I'd love you both to meet.”

Isabella smiled, “I can't wait to meet her. I really do hope that we get on.”

He felt so relaxed talking about life with her. He had been feeling confused up to now, but little by little it was all becoming clearer. He knew the situation with Antonio and his friend Sebastian, was not over, but with careful handling maybe it could be laid to rest. One thing he was certain about, he was going to write some amazing stories and maybe later he could concentrate on the newly developing travel industry.

“I need to send more stories to Frank. I will be careful I promise, but there is so much to tell, I know that I’ve only touched the edges.”

Isabella fell silent for a minute, and the slight shadow which he’d seen before fell across her beautiful face. “Yes, there are so many tales to be told.” she replied. “Tales which you would find hard to imagine, especially when looking out to sea from a vista like this.” He waited, hoping for more, and she could see from his eyes what he was thinking. “You already know a certain amount via my aunt and now you’ve seen Antonio’s behavior. I believe that you will find out for yourself if you are here long enough. I feel that what we are discovering is special, I don't want to mix the two. It would be like putting a jinx on a magical time, is that the correct word? A jinx on what we have recently found.”

He understood her sentiment. Their time together was so precious and tender, to discuss political matters, or Antonio’s abhorrent behavior in detail, may taint what they were finding out about each other. She was a truly remarkable woman. Even her sensitivity over this warmed his heart.

He walked round the table and, taking her by surprise sat astride her knees, then he took her face in his hands and kissed her. She responded willingly and again he was conscious that she was completely at ease in his company. He really wanted more, but he knew that this perfect situation was too important to risk a false move. However, under it all he sensed that she was feeling the same, though he was sure she would respect him more if he took things slowly.

Later that evening he reluctantly drove her home. When they were close to the restaurant, Will stopped the car and, leaning towards her, kissed her again. "I don't want to leave here," he said. "I'm thinking I have to find a way of staying somehow. I have never met anyone like you before Isabella. I know it's far too early to be saying this but I can't help it, I don't think I want to lose you."

She leaned towards him, saying nothing, but kissed him back with such conviction that it even surprised him. "I have things to do tomorrow, can we meet on Saturday?" Will agreed to come and visit her on Saturday morning.

"I was dreading you leaving." she replied, "I feel different as well, I was thinking about how unlucky I was to have met a man so special but who was only visiting. With you, I feel emotions that I have never felt before, but I can't explain it, you make me feel safe for the first time for a long time. In the past I met only boys, you are the first man I have known." They clung to each other and kissed again with such passion. Will had never experienced anything quite like it before. They felt like one body when they were together, it was the most incredible and intense emotional bonding.

After what seemed like an age, they reluctantly pulled apart and he continued to drive, eventually drawing up right outside the restaurant. They had a final quick kiss this time, and she climbed out and grabbed the basket. "See you soon! Hasta pronto!"

He drove back to the apartment in a daze. He could smell her and taste her, he didn't want to lose her. He realized now that he was falling in love for the first time in his life.

Chapter 19

Two days later he was just making himself a coffee when there was a knock on his door. Opening it he saw Fernando standing there. Will knew by the look on his face that something was seriously amiss. Will invited him in and offered him a coffee. Fernando sat down and explained that he had just received a call from Sofia, he was struggling to continue and looking straight at Will he said. “I do not know how to tell you this William. She has asked me to inform you that Nuria Ramirez has taken her own life.”

Will froze, he had understood when he had met the couple that Nuria was not in a good place, but this was a tragedy. All he could think of was the terrible guilt and grief that poor José María must be feeling. He was feeling bad enough for the death of his son, but to lose his wife as well, really didn't bear thinking about. He hoped to God that it had nothing to do with their meeting.

Fernando finished his coffee and left the apartment, mentioning that a funeral would be held that afternoon. Will was surprised that funerals here took place so quickly. Thinking he may be invited to attend with the family he dressed more formally in black pants and a crisp white shirt, he felt that for the sake of José María he should attend.

As he made his way to Roses, he drove with a heavy heart. He had felt an immediate bond with José María and was wondering what words of comfort he could offer this poor man.

He parked on the edge of town approaching El Berganti from a different direction. Lost in thought he didn't pay any attention to anyone else until a voice called his name. He looked up to see Sofia coming towards him from the opposite direction. "Oh William, I am glad to see you. I am on the way to visit José María Ramirez, would you consider accompanying me?" Will was a little taken aback, though he could see that Sofia, normally so composed and elegant, was not herself today. She had been crying and she looked very pale.

"I would happily escort you Sofia, but I have only met the poor guy once. I am worried that our recent meeting may have affected her. May he not object to my presence at a time like this?" She nodded, completely understanding his reluctance. "Walk with me William and we can discuss this with him when we arrive, I would certainly feel happier with you at my side."

She then took hold of his arm, squeezing it gently and they turned to walk slowly up the street towards the old wooden front door. Sofia knocked and seconds later it was opened by José María. As he saw Sofia, tears welled up in his eyes. She said nothing, but took him into her arms and held him tightly. Will yet again was in awe of this impressive lady, she seemed to effortlessly know what to do at any given moment.

"William has walked with me," she said in Catalan, "he felt that you may not wish him to come in. He can walk back without me." José Maria turned to Will, "Please enter, you are always welcome." Will thanked him and shook his hand respectfully.

They made their way inside the house but they both refused coffee when he offered it. He led them into the salon and to Will's surprise, a young girl was standing there. Sofia went straight up to her and embraced her with her gentle tenderness. She spoke gently to her and they both began to cry. Wiping her eyes Sofia turned to Will, "May I introduce Carlotta, This is José María's daughter." As was the custom Will kissed her on both cheeks. They all sat and José María started to explain that Nuria was coping less and less each day with the loss of Felipe. Instead of the pain of grief diminishing over time, it seemed to be becoming worse. She would spend days hardly speaking to him. He tried to communicate with her kindly, but sometimes he would raise his voice, telling her she needed to move on. Of course, then, she would turn on him, blaming him for what had happened to Felipe, they would then argue and it just became worse.

José María put his head in his hands and began to sob. He was a completely broken man. William stood up from his chair and walked over to José Maria. Sitting next to him he put his hand on the man's shoulder to show his solidarity, he could feel José María lean towards him gratefully. It was as if, after their last meeting, the two men seemed to have a new, unspoken bond. Will was deeply relieved that their recent meeting was not the cause of her death.

Carlotta was talking now, looking at Sofia as she spoke. Sofia explained to Will that José Maria had arrived home yesterday to find the house silent and still. He made his way to the bedroom and found Nuria hanging there from a beam. A chair was on its side below her, he could see it had been kicked away. He realized that she was cold, so had been dead for sometime. Carlotta started to weep, she too was feeling guilty. She said to Sofia that if she had never left and had been there, her mother might still be with them.

Sofia knew that guilt in grief was the worst thing of all, she tried to give the poor girl the confidence that nobody could be blamed. But of course, this was not going to make it easier for either of them.

Will stayed in the salon while Carlotta led Sofia up the stairs to see her mother who was laid out in preparation for her funeral that afternoon. Will didn't feel that it was his place to follow and he was relieved that they didn't expect him to join them. José María escorted the two women up the staircase.

They were away for about fifteen minutes and in that short time, Will tried to collect his thoughts and come to terms with what he was witnessing. It was such a heartbreaking situation, would these two people ever be able to move on? He seriously doubted it.

Sofia returned, explaining to Will that there would be a short service in the church at three-thirty this afternoon. Only the family would attend the burial, other members of Nuria's family were arriving soon. José María admitted that he felt he could only just cope with the emotion of the church service, the burial would be worse for him. They said goodbye to the grief-stricken pair, knowing they would see them later, and walked down the street in silence.

Sofia spoke first, asking Will if he would mind accompanying her. Her brother Carlos was busy and she couldn't face her own company. Their family would be meeting her at the church. William explained to her that he was available to be with her for the rest of the day and she smiled through a few more tears. He had never seen her so emotional and he felt their bond deepen.

She suggested that they find somewhere quiet to sit for a little tapas, to which he willingly agreed. She led the way to a bar near the church so that they were close to where they needed to eventually be. The bar she chose had a small secluded garden-terrace at the back. He was pleased with her choice, as it allowed them both to relax and talk privately. She was still very emotional as the impact of this tragedy had affected her very deeply. They talked a little but also sat in silence for periods of time as they ate. Sofia was not entirely surprised that this had happened, commenting on how clear it was that Nuria had never properly come to terms with the death of her young son.

As the time for the funeral came closer, Will paid the bill and took her arm and they made their way to the church where Carlos, Carmen, and Isabella were already waiting outside. Isabella looked at Will, a worried expression on her face. At one point she moved away to join a group of local young women of a similar age to her, and he couldn't help noticing the slight side-glances which he was receiving, as if she had made some comment to them, he was naturally curious as to what she had been saying.

The group made their way into the church with Will still staying close on the arm of Sofia, he sensed that he was almost holding her up, gone was her normal confident strength. It was a large building and the huge wealth inside was very apparent. It had been a while since William had been inside a church, realizing that the last time was at his own mother's funeral. He sensed a slight welling-up of his own emotions when he considered this. This sad course of events reminded him of his own sadness at losing his mother. It made him think of Maddy and how much he had missed her these last few weeks. He hoped that she would be able to visit. If he was to develop a relationship with Isabella, they needed to know each other.

The open coffin was carried into the church and as it was placed at the edge of the altar. A few people walked to the front to pay their respects and view Nuria for the last time. It was very clear how loved she was, by the depth of sadness within the congregation. The priest opened the service speaking in Latin and the congregation responded in unison to his various prayers. Unable to understand the service Will found himself deep in thought, realizing that he needed to add this dreadful conclusion to his original story.

He glanced up again, as José Maria stood and leaned into the coffin to kiss his wife for the final time. As he watched this gesture Will felt a surge of emotion and had to hold back his own tears. He was not used to showing feelings to this extent and he was feeling physically drained. He made a mental note to himself to visit José María from time to time.

Subdued sobbing could be heard around the church, while the lid was placed onto the coffin and a group of older men carried it back out. Nuria's family followed behind and would now continue on alone to the cemetery. The congregation stayed in the church, out of respect, to allow them to leave without too many eyes on them.

Will turned to look at Sofia, she was by no means her normal self, her strength seemed to have left her and somehow at this moment she too looked older and a little frail, clearly this whole scenario had certainly hit her hard.

She explained “Nuria was the younger sister of a friend of mine and during those youthful years she was so alive, one would not recognize her as she was then, to the women you met. She was mad, impulsive and fun to be around, so pretty and colorful. That was the girl that José María married. He too was a lively, happy, enthusiastic young man. They were the perfect couple. From the day Felipe was taken, all that changed and they became the people you have seen. This is why Carlotta left, she watched her mother and father become changed individuals, a couple that she could no longer recognize as her parents.” Isabella’s family were going back to the bar but William made his excuses. He had found this episode a deeply moving one, so he preferred to make his way home and be alone to think. He said farewell to the family, kissed Sofia and Carmen and lightly kissed Isabella, for once unable to look at her in the way he normally did, almost frightened by his own sensitivity and emotion.

Driving home he hardly noticed the normal buzz of the fishing port, or the twinkling sea, drenched in the late afternoon sun. The grief he had witnessed during the day had left him feeling a deep sense of sadness, the frailty of life seemed to hit him at this moment. His own loss for his darling mother, but also the thought that Maddy was very important to him now. It was unthinkable that he could fly back to the States and seldom see her. As he drove into Canyelles bay, he let out a deep sigh, feeling every part of the deep grief he had witnessed.

Chapter 20

Will entered his apartment with a heavy heart, He was in no mood for anything. Pouring himself a stiff whiskey, he sat in his most comfortable chair, unable to throw off the melancholy which seemed to be overwhelming him.

Suddenly, as if in a moment, it felt as if the whole atmosphere of this place had changed. Gone was the idyllic backdrop, the blue sky and balmy summer nights which were gradually appearing. In their place, peering around corners, was a menacing undercurrent, up to this time unseen, but now it had become all too prominent. He was experiencing the reality of life here now as if he was one of the locals.

He went into the kitchen and fixed himself a sandwich, which he ate lethargically, hardly tasting the Serrano ham which he normally enjoyed so much. He finished, throwing the plate almost angrily into the kitchen sink, he'd wash it later. His feelings were mixed, so confused and all-encompassing, he couldn't remember feeling quite like this before.

Suddenly there was a loud banging on his front door. This was unusual, as he never expected visitors, especially at this time. He made his way to the entrance and opened it. To his utter amazement, Isabella was standing there, her expression was clearly worried. "May I come in?" she asked.

"Of course," he opened the door wider and ushered her into the apartment. She swept in with an

expression of deep determination on her face, then making her way to the terrace, which was tinted by the last rays of sun as the evening drew closer, she turned and looked directly at him. “How are you after today? When my Aunt came back to the restaurant, she explained what had happened at the house, then, of course, the funeral, she was emotional but she explained that you were too. She has returned to Cadaques, but I felt that I had to come and see you, I was so worried.”

Will drank the last of his whiskey, then brought out a bottle of white wine. Without even asking her he poured two glasses and handed one to her, then leaned back on the railing of the terrace.

“It was pretty tough I’ll admit,” he replied. “They’re lovely people, it was bad enough before, but now their lives will never be the same again. How many more people have suffered like that over the past years?”

She looked down. “A great many,” she said sadly.

There was a pause.... “Are you leaving?” she suddenly burst out. Will looked shocked.

“Why on earth would you say that?” he asked.

“Well, surely you feel differently about this place now.”

He moved closer to her. “Well of course, yeah, I feel very different, but I still want to get to know you. This just makes me more determined to try and do something about it, to do all I can to let the world know what’s happening here. I’ve been a journalist all these years and, at last, I can write about something that really matters.” The look on her face was a mixture of amazement and relief. Suddenly and without warning she burst into tears, covering her face with her hands, but unable to stop or suppress her deeply intense emotions.

Will put down his glass and took her in his arms. She sunk into him as if this was the only place in the world she wanted to be.

“Isabella, I know how you feel. This relationship has been a shock for me, it’s happened so fast, but it really matters to me, I just need to get to know you properly. If we give ourselves time to be sure, I really think that we might have something special Isabella, I’m in no rush to go back to the States, we just need more of these special moments together.”

She threw her arms around his neck and they began to kiss, slowly at first, their tongues only just touching, then with urgency and passion, fusing together as if they were one. The kiss didn’t come to an end, it’s emotional magnetism was immense, and they just clung to one another and savored the magical realization. This was a moment in time that Will knew he would never forget!

She looked up at him with the remnants of her tears still in her eyes. “I want to get to know you too. I realize it’s early and that we have only known each other for such a short time, but I’ve never felt like this before either. I thought you were different from the first day you came into the restaurant, but I didn’t want to let myself feel anything.”

He laughed, “Me too, I couldn't quite believe it either, this just isn’t me! I am always so measured, yet I could think of nothing else.” She giggled through the remaining tears. “I hope you can stay here, it’s like a dream Guill, I really need you in my life.” He knew deep-down he needed her in his, to say it out loud seemed to be tempting fate.

He picked her up in his arms and swung her around, then carried her to the bedroom and stood her up and slowly started to undress her, until she stood naked before him. It was clear that she wanted him as much as he wanted her, she just stood there in front of him, still, beautiful, motionless, almost unreal.

Then, with a little help from her, he started to take off his own clothes as he kissed her neck, her breasts and then started to move his hands gently over her perfect body. Her skin was soft and inviting. She looked so innocent, so beautiful, like an alabaster statue - too perfect to be touched. He had only been able to imagine this moment, all the melancholy fell away and he was his strong, assured self, once again.

When he too was undressed, they both fell together onto the bed and into each other's arms, locked in a perfect embrace, she offered no resistance. They kissed again, the urgency of their bodies intensified. He felt himself becoming aroused with passion and he could sense that she was affected in the same way. Their kissing continued to grow in momentum, she slowly moved over his body touching him with such sensitivity that he felt his passion rising. She was so sensual, he began to respond she was driving him into a deeper place, and they were both ready to climax even before he entered her.

Will moved on top of her now and felt the rhythm as she moved as one with him, beckoning him to continue. For a moment he pulled back a little, she read his mind, as if she knew that the gentleman

in him was doubting what he was doing. She thrust her hips forward to urge him on and he could no longer resist her. He felt his body with its deep overwhelming passion taking over, welling up like a volcano that had been dormant and was now erupting. She rocked against him again and again, and this time he felt himself surging into her. She seemed to be willing him with every part of her body to go deeper and he responded. He had never felt passion like this before, and he had certainly never met a woman like this and he now desired her so intensely with every inch of his being.

They continued to touch each other finding those hidden secrets, kissing, caressing and discovering those intermit sensual spots that only a lover can know. They were in no rush, time stood still as they savored every delicious moment.

The sensation heightened as her body willed him on and she greedily lured him to continue, he felt himself lose control as he lovingly and passionately took her again. She cried out in ecstasy, wrapping her legs around him and encouraging his every move. The culmination was so deep, so erotic, he was completely overwhelmed.

Later they fell back exhausted, she turned to look at him and smiled. He wrapped his arms around her once again as if he couldn't let her go. She was meant for him, he never wanted another woman. He'd known all along how he felt, but this lovemaking was so beautiful, so perfect, he knew it

could only get better as they become more familiar with one another and the thought of this sent a shiver down his spine.

She lay in his arms, curled up like a kitten. She was relaxed and content, she smiled. "I adore you Guillem not just for this, but everything, I really want you in my life." They dragged themselves up and showered, then decided to walk down to the bay, as the light started to fade. Stopping at the beach bar they ordered another glass of wine, realizing that their earlier drinks were still sitting half-empty on the terrace.

They watched as the old bus which connected Canyelles to Roses rattled by on its final trip of the day, its driver with his large handlebar mustache waved at Isabella as he recognized her. The bus was painted blue and cream and was windowless and open, only covered by a red-fringed canopy - such a pretty sight as it trundled up the road past the beach on its way back to Roses.

As they sat with their drinks, Isabella lightly touched Will's hand and he felt that same exotic shiver running through him. He was in a state of total happiness. In the same day, he had gone from the depths of despair to the height of ecstasy. He could see that this amazing place kept him on a knife-edge. It was full of gritty emotions which, somehow, made it so special. It was unlike anywhere else he'd ever been.

He came to the conclusion that the very next day he must contact Frank in New York and pitch his new idea. He wanted to stay here, but he also needed work. This was the perfect solution, he just

had to get Frank to go along with it. His pitch would have to be perfect, he would only get one crack at this, so it just couldn't fail. This was the only way he could make a life for himself in Europe and support Isabella and he knew now that this was paramount. He realized that he'd been lost in thought when Isabella gave his earlobe a playful tweak. "What are you thinking?" she whispered.

"I'm thinking I'm the luckiest man in the world. With you nothing seems impossible, I just hope my editor agrees."

"What if he doesn't?" She looked a little concerned.

"I move on to plan 'B'," he replied.

"What's plan 'B'?" she asked.

"I'm still figuring that one out!" He turned to face her, with a comical, rather sheepish grin on his face and she laughed.

He paid for their drinks and they walked back to the apartment hand-in-hand, each one occasionally giving the other a sidelong look, as if they were just checking that it wasn't a dream.

"I need to get back, Papa is expecting me to help this evening and he needs his car for an errand, so I don't want to be too late."

“I’ll miss you,” he smiled, taking her into his arms once again and kissing her in a way he had never kissed any woman before. She really might be the one, could he stay with her and grow old, until the day he died? ‘Yes’, he thought to himself, ‘I really think I could.’

“I don’t want to leave Isabella, if my editor won’t play ball we’ll think of something else. I don’t think I want to go back to the States. Do you know something? Up until this moment money and success seemed so important. With you I seem to forget all that.” Smiling she sank into his embrace once again.

He stood in the roadway after she had driven off, lost in his thoughts. In such a short space of time, his life had changed out of all proportion. He didn't fancy going back indoors yet. It would seem so empty without Isabella, so he walked along to the bar to see if anyone was there. He saw his landlord wiping a table, calling out hello.

“Are you closing? Or do you fancy joining me for a drink Señor Deulofeu?”

“I have time, yes of course,” he cheerfully replied as he walked over to the bar and poured them both a brandy. He also brought a plate of nuts which always went so well with an evening drink.

Returning later to the apartment he realized that he needed to consider his plans with regard to Isabella. That evening he thought about the best way to approach his editor. He needed to present a great pitch. Normally this was his forte but now he was nervous. This had to work, nothing, and nobody could stand in his way. It felt like a new life was just starting and to his surprise, it felt unbelievably good.

Chapter 21

Frank Dexter was sitting in his New York office. His secretary had just handed him his first cup of coffee of the day. He put the phone down following the call from the Chief Executive in Philadelphia. That guy always annoyed him, he just had a way of getting his back up. Frank hoped that he would be the last person to drive him crazy today. His newly-estranged ex-wife had called this morning putting more financial demands on him - so the day had started badly, even before he set foot out of the house.

Frank was middle-aged, a good height and his slightly graying hair was still thick, and not as short as was worn by some. This created a look of nonchalant sophistication. He was a man who exuded knowledge of his subject, plus he was seldom caught out by awkward situations and of course, this was why he was very much respected in his field. Today he was wearing a white shirt unbuttoned at the collar, though he never left the office without a jacket and tie. Women found Frank attractive. He had a rugged charm which appealed to the opposite sex, hence the demise of his twenty-year marriage. Angry though he was about the cost of his pending divorce, he was well aware that most of it was his fault.

The phone rang again and, as he picked it up, Phyllis announced that William Hale was calling him from Spain, was he available to take the call?

“Yes Phyllis, put him through... there was a pause..... Hi Will! Good to hear from you again, I’m looking forward to you coming back, the San Francisco office just isn’t the same without you, Sam’s doing his best but he just doesn’t have your style.” Frank had a high regard for Will, he liked the younger man’s dogged tenacity. In many ways William reminded him of himself in his younger years.

There was a silence which Frank picked up on immediately. He'd been in this game long enough to read the signs that others wouldn't even notice.

"Hi Frank, how are you?" came Will's warm, friendly voice from the other end.

"Cut to the chase Will, I can hear in your voice that you have something for me. Hell, I hope it's good. I sure do need cheering up today, it's been a pretty bad one so far."

There was another pause.... "Look Frank, are you sitting down? I have an idea I want to run past you, and I'm hoping you can see the scope in it that I do."

Frank rocked back in his leather chair and turned towards the window to look out on his beloved New York. "OK Will, fire away! I know that tone, so it had better be good."

Will took a deep breath. This was it! Whatever he did he couldn't blow this one. "Frank, it's like this, you know how I came here feeling like a tourist, in complete ignorance and as I explained the last time we spoke, two months seemed fine initially, but like I've already said it's taking far longer than any of us imagined. These stories are slowly unfolding. I have an even more dramatic and horrific end now to my first story." Frank was now intrigued. He could hear the urgency in Will's voice. He was also a tad anxious. Will was one of his best reporters and, though he'd never said this to him, he could ill afford to lose him. The tone of the younger man's voice put him on edge.

“Frank, have you ever considered a full time European correspondent? As I just said, I came to Spain in complete ignorance as to what is actually going on here. The fact is that even after the civil war Franco is still ruling these people in a pretty aggressive manner. The stories I'm hearing make for chilling reading. With your permission I'd like to settle here and cover stories that the world should hear. I know I can make it pay Frank. It will make us a leader in international news. Obviously I'd need to write under a pseudonym for safety's sake, but later maybe I could add travel to the remit.” There was a pause as Will drew breath.....

“Hey Will, this is a bit sudden you know. One minute you're having a well earned vacation and doing two months work for us and now you want to jack in your life here to move lock, stock and barrel to the other side of the world.”

“I realize it's not what you were expecting but I really think I can make it work.” Will knew Frank was considering it, at least he'd not shouted him down straightaway.

“Well I can't say I'm ecstatic, I'd rather have you here, but I can tell you're keen. Sounds different and I'd rather you wrote for us than someone else. Remember though after the two months are up, no story no dough!” “Course Frank, but believe me I'll come up with the goods. I know it'll work, I already have the first two stories and there's plenty more where they came from. Although the Spanish situation is the big story now, I'm happy to cover different issues in other countries, once I'm settled.”

“So who’s the lucky lady?”

Will could hear the sarcasm in Frank's voice, replying, “What makes you think there's a lady?”

Frank threw his head back and laughed loudly. “Will my boy, I've known you for a while now.

Would you decide to quit the States, good story or not, unless there's some broad at that end. She must be pretty damn hot is all I can say, to have this effect on you.”

There was a pregnant pause. “OK Frank, you got me, yeah I have met a pretty special lady. It's her family who have told me about all the atrocities that are happening behind closed doors.”

“Well I hope she's worth giving up your life here?” Frank wanted to wish him well but, at the same time, he knew that it was his loss. He was certain that Will would bring him some great stories but he had plans for him long-term and this would force him to change those.

“Yeah, she's more than special, I'll invite you to the wedding. Oh, and another thing Frank, I've been given access to a private telex in a local guy’s house, you know my first contact Fernando. It means that there is less risk when I send reports to you.” Frank was delighted, they then agreed to catch up soon. Will would be writing up his next stories and Frank was intrigued to see what was coming.

Frank returned the phone to its holder and sat back in his chair throwing his head back in frustration. The phone rang again, it was Phyllis.

“Sir, I have your attorney on the phone.” “Put him through,” said Frank.

“Hi Stanley, how can I help?”

“I wish it was the other way round,” said Stanley. “Your wife has put in some higher claims, she now wants the house amongst other things.”

Frank paused, “Give it to her, no argument.”

Stanley sounded taken aback. “Are you sure? I was expecting a fight.”

Frank sighed, “It's just a house Stan, put a smile on her smug face.”

“OK,” Stanley replied, “If you're sure.”

“I'm sure, see you soon.” Stanley said goodbye and the line went dead.

‘Shucks, can a day get any worse?’ thought Frank, putting on his reading glasses and going back to his paperwork with a heavy heart.

Will, on the other hand, left the telephone kiosk at the post office in Roses with a definite spring in his step. Things were looking up, he could start to build his life here and to concentrate all his efforts on his writing. He walked down to the seafront, to the bar where he'd gone on his first day. It had only been a relatively short time ago but so much had happened. He felt like a different person to the man who'd arrived from France. His whole life was changing. It had been an unknown world then, now it was his world, he could make it his own. He would start a family here. Well, not straight away, but Isabella would be the mother of his children of that he was certain. He ordered a café solo relaxing in the warmth of the day, feeling the sun's rays cascading down on him, he recognized that this was the beginning of a new life. He would need to be careful, it was a place full of danger, but it was this strange combination of the mix of tragedy and euphoria that was drawing him in gradually.

He had a sudden thought. When Maddy came to visit she would be so delighted to hear that he wanted to stay close. There might be a border between them but it was relatively easy to drive to France. She would adore Isabella and he was pretty sure the feeling would be mutual. He and Isabella could visit her, later but he wanted them to meet sooner.

He turned around and walked back to the post office and sent a telegram to Maddy..... Re visit (stop) Check calendar (stop) Come soon (stop) Staying Spain (stop) I'll call (stop) Will.

As he walked out of the post office, he saw Sebastian with another police officer on the other side of the road. Catching sight of Will, Sebastian glared, nudging the other guy and pointing. Will tried to shrug it off. As far as the police knew he was doing nothing wrong, so they were simply trying to intimidate him.

He made his way to his car as he wanted to drive to Fernando's house. He needed to add the final sad end to the Ramirez story for Frank. He checked a couple of times in his mirror in case he was being followed but he knew they had no reason to suspect anything, however, now he accepted that he must be more careful.

He was pleased to find Fernando at home and was ushered into the office to use the telex. Fernando left Will to make himself comfortable and closed the door behind him. Immediately Will became lost in the process of sending the last tragic part of the Ramirez story. He knew it was important not to leave these poignant stories too long as they needed to be sent while they still had an emotional

relevance to him. He was pretty sure that his writing would have a strong and meaningful impact on his readers. He knew this is why his copy was always so well received back home. He was very well aware that without other young, dynamic reporters around him, he needed to stay competitive at all times, working alone would be a challenge. It was this attitude that had put him in the leading group of his peers and unbeknown to him it was also this desire to stand out that drew Frank to him. Being a competitive man himself, Frank acknowledged that Will was a high achiever and he respected it.

He worked for some time, oblivious to everything around him. He was in no doubt that this final piece to the Ramirez story would shock his readers and bring home the sheer horror of the worst side of life here. When he finally sent the telex, he felt great satisfaction. This wasn't just copy, this was history. To know that he was here at the cutting-edge brought home a immense sense of achievement.

He left the room and made his way towards the drawing-room and found Fernando reading a newspaper. Smiling up as Will entered the room, Fernando pointed out to him how delighted he was to be part of something so important. Pointing at the newspaper he explained that so much of what he was reading was government propaganda and to know that just in the next room, the truth was being reported, made him feel very satisfied. "I enjoy my life and love the real estate business but in some ways maybe due to my age, life has lost some purpose. I realize that there is some risk to all this, but I am prepared to take that risk if it means that I am contributing to change in any way." William told him again how grateful he was, apart from anything else, a private telex machine

allowed him to take his time with the information he was sending. He felt it would be invaluable to the final results.

Fernando offered him a beer which Will declined, feeling that he didn't want to impose too much on his new friend. By taking their friendship slowly Will was sure that it would develop into something more valuable. Fernando may be older but he was his kind of guy, wise, thoughtful and intelligent, he hoped to spend many good years in his company. If he settled here, as he was now planning, he felt certain that they would become close friends. He cheerfully said goodbye to Fernando. This new arrangement had changed everything. Now he could easily start to send articles, from now on he could get down to serious business.

Chapter 22

A couple of days later Will decided to drive a bit further afield. It was a beautiful day and, although he could have spent the day on the beach, he felt the urge to see more of the surrounding area. Sofia had given him the name of a friend of hers who lived just outside L'Escala. María Ángeles had told Sofia that if William was ever in the area he should look her up, so he decided to take her up on this.

He drove to Roses and then took the road in the direction of L'Escala. On a map, he had seen that there was a large horseshoe coastline, with Roses on the northern coast and L'Escala to the south.

He arrived in the small village of Sant Pere Pescador which was quite charming with a wide river running past it. There were a number of attractive medieval buildings but the village was dominated by an imposing church in the centre, which was so typical of these old villages. Driving into the centre he stopped first for fuel, as he wanted to make sure that he had enough for the whole journey. He spoke to the proprietor of the little garage to check directions. The man told Will that there would be signposts clearly marking L'Escala once he had crossed the river to go out of the village.

Parking by the church he found a small café nearby ideal for a coffee and breakfast roll. He smiled and said 'buenos dias' to a couple of elderly gentlemen who were seated at another table. They smiled back, interested in this sophisticated young man who they could see certainly did not appear to be a local.

One of the men asked him in Spanish where he was from. Will managed to answer in

broken Spanish and when they realized he was an American they were, as usual, obviously

impressed. He was becoming used to this reaction and smiled back at them, telling them how much he loved their village. They looked delighted, raising their glasses to him. They were then joined by the local policeman and Will smiled to see that he too was having a morning brandy.

On his map he could see the village of L'Escala. He'd read about this little port, famous for its anchovies which the Greeks and Romans had discovered centuries before. This history fascinated Will and he felt quite inspired by the day ahead. He planned to have lunch close to the harbor where the fishing boats landed their catch.

He decided to travel inland a little first, to see the landscape of the area. He payed for his coffee and gestured goodbye to the two gentlemen sitting at their table. Setting off he made his way over the river via the picturesque bridge where he stopped briefly to take a few photographs.

Away from the coast, the roads were quite rough but as he was in no particular hurry he was able to enjoy the rich and verdant landscape of this beautiful part of the country. He had read that this part of Spain had more rain in winter than the south, and as the woodlands were mainly evergreen pine trees the countryside would remain green and lush for most of the year. The miles of farmland were fertile and the soil was a rich color. As he continued inland, the views became more and more stunning. Now he was enjoying the benefits of his open-top car but regretted that he hadn't waited for a day when Isabella wasn't working to bring her along too.

On either side of the road, the flowers were in full bloom, Will loved to see the poppies and sunflowers, the carpet of red and yellow was breathtaking.

Further on he stopped at another small bar for a beer. It was situated at the edge of a village opposite a farm. Will watched the farmer ploughing a field with his hard working draught horse. This heavy, calm, patient and well-muscled animal was clearly bred for this work. With his huge, strong head and muscular hind legs with the familiar shaggy hooves, he was an absolute pleasure to watch.

He could not help being impressed by the patience of the farmer as he painstakingly undertook the arduous task ahead. Will respected these country people who took on laborious daily chores with an attitude so unlike the business fraternity that Will was normally used to. Their lives had little variation and yet they continued to work with such pride.

Checking his watch, he decided that soon he should set off for L'Escala, if he was going to arrive in time for lunch. He drove into the lovely old village, parked the car and walked down to the port where fishermen were working on their nets. It was a great sight and again out came his camera, this was certainly a day for some superb photography.

He found a small restaurant nearby and decided to stop for lunch. Obviously he could not eat in this village without sampling their famous anchovies, so this was the perfect starter. The plate of fish arrived and Will was impressed how big the anchovies were - and absolutely delicious. He decided

that if he could buy them directly from the fishermen, he would take a box back for Carmen. He knew how much she would appreciate this.

On leaving the restaurant he returned to the port where he managed to find a fisherman prepared to negotiate a good price for a box of the famous catch. The man wrapped them up well, adding a little ice and telling him not to let it leak in his car. Will smiled, the man at the garage would not be impressed if he brought the car back wreaking of anchovies, so he purchased some thin sheeting to line the trunk of his car. He spotted a telephone kiosk and decided it would be wise to call María Ángeles to make sure that it was a convenient day for a visit. He introduced himself and she said that she would be delighted to see him and gave him directions to her house.

Returning to his car, he once again checked the map and could easily see where María Ángeles lived. He found that he was on a small, rough, dirt road and then he saw an imposing house in front of him. This was one of the famous masía houses, thick stone walls with a very grand exterior, an imposing turret much like a small castle. He arrived at a large iron gate and found a small bell which he realized he would need to ring for attention. He climbed out of the car, walked to the gate and pulled the cord. To his surprise, an elderly man made his way around the corner. He walked with a stick and had white hair and a large beard. He muttered under his breath but without needing any explanation opened the gate and ushered Will in.

As Will drew up at the front door, an elegant woman came out to greet him. Now he could understand why she was a friend of Sofia's. María Ángeles was about fifteen years younger than Sofia, possibly in her mid to late fifties. She was dressed in stylish blue slacks which showed off her

lean figure to perfection, with an off-the-shoulder top which halted neatly at her petite waistline. Unlike Sofia whose taste was more 1930s than 1950s, this was a woman whose dress sense was very much up to date.

She came down the steps and kissed him on both cheeks as if she had known him for years, and ushered him through the impressive front door. Even the inside of the house had a style which was tasteful and opulent. Luxurious drapes hung from the windows and the elegant antique furniture stood proudly in every room. María Ángeles led Will through the drawing room, then outside to a grand stone terrace. A maid came out to meet them and she asked him what he would like to drink, they both decided to have a cup of tea.

María Ángeles asked him about himself and he explained what had brought him here. Then he asked her, “So, how long have you known Sofia?” She smiled, “I was introduced to Sofia about six years ago by my friend Anna Maria, the sister of Dali, who also lives in that area. I would like to see both of them more than I can and if Sofia lived in Roses it would be a little easier to do so, but Cadaques is so much further.”

She continued. “Sofia tells me that you are a writer and that you are interested in what is happening here.” He put down his cup and leaned towards her. “My editor had heard a few rumors, which led me here. At that time I was oblivious of the seriousness of the situation. I now feel that the rest of the world should know more of what is going on, I’d be interested in your view on it?”

She stood up and walked to the edge of the terrace and sat on the wall to look back at him. She was stunning, and at that moment as she turned to talk, she reminded him of how Sofia had looked when standing on her terrace, talking to him about Antonio and Rafa.

“You must understand that my views are not that of my family. In most cases aristocratic families such as mine lean firmly to the right, they are very pro-Franco. Although I understand this point of view, I think like Anna Maria, that freedom of speech is paramount in a civilized society. Political diversity, handled with care and consideration and with respect for all points of view, should be welcomed. I can't agree with dictatorship, or with any of the atrocities which have happened here over the recent years.”

She paused for a moment, looking out towards the garden and then turned back to him. “I would like to introduce you to a member of my staff. However, if she agrees to talk to you, it is really important that her story is relayed in total anonymity - I would not wish to risk her safety, I will need to translate as she does not speak English.”

Will explained that would make sure that she was protected as he had already done this for others. He was now feeling the familiar excitement in the pit of his stomach. Getting people to open up was one of the hardest parts of his current task as so many were just too afraid to speak openly.

His hostess rang the bell and spoke to the maid in Spanish. The young girl left the room and when she returned she was accompanied by another woman who was probably in her mid thirties.

María Ángeles introduced her. “This is my cook Lourdes. She has a recent family story to share. I have explained to her that the names will be changed and she knows I would not put her or her relatives at risk. However, she is so angry at what has happened to a member of her family that she wants to tell you”.

Lourdes shook his hand, sat down and began to speak. Little by little the story unfolded and William was shocked that it was not an incident from many years ago but was so very recent. As Lourdes spoke, María Ángeles translated “My cousin Juana Peregrin Jerez is married to a man called Salvador Jordan Vico. Juana was born in 1922 and her husband is three years her senior. They have been living in Badalona, near Barcelona, running a successful, small grocery shop. Salvador, like many others, had joined the communist party as it is the only party to work against the dictatorship.”

“One day the Guardia Civil police arrived at the shop. They put a rifle to Salvador's chest and demanded money if they were not to report him regarding his political beliefs. He and Juana have three little boys, Salvador junior who is nine years old, José who is seven and Manual who is three. He did not dare risk the safety of his wife and young family so he handed them all the money he possessed.”

“He thought he would be safe now, but a week later they came again, intimidating him with a rifle this time pointed at his head and yet again demanded more money. He told them he had no more money left, so they took a great deal of produce from the shop such as Serrano hams, sausages and many other luxury and expensive items. The police then left, but this time Salvador could not risk

their return - he could see that his life was in danger and that of his young family. They packed up and moved further south to his original home of Andorra de Teruel, in the center of Spain. Salvador went to work in a coal mine, hoping to be free from the danger, but the civil police found him again and put him in jail. Juana and the little boys visited him there, which was traumatizing for all. A few days later he was released, and it was then that he decided that he needed to escape over the border to France.”

“Salvador went alone to France to start setting up the new life for his family, and a few weeks later Juana packed up the house with only the help of her two older sons. She is an amazing woman, how she did this alone I will never know. She packed everything, not only clothing but even mattresses, kitchen equipment, as many items as she could carry, as she had no idea what may be available in France. Money was short so she could not afford to buy household items. A close friend helped her put the heavier items onto the train.”

“She and her boys then took the train to Portbou. The boys helped her to reload their possessions onto a French train with the help of a male passenger who took pity on her, these were heavy items and it was very difficult for the boys. They were carrying knapsacks on their backs which were full of coffee.” María Ángeles broke in, “You may not be aware but coffee in France is expensive; Spain sources coffee from Cuba, so it is good coffee and better value.” Lourdes continued, “the knapsacks were ignored by the border guards and their mother appeared to be no threat, so they were allowed through.”

“Salvador was asleep in his truck when his family arrived at St Raphael station in France, he’d been waiting for some time. He and Juana then loaded their possessions and drove to La Tourraque, only seven kilometers from Ramatuelle where Juana’s cousin Ana and her husband Paul, own a café called Café de l’Ormeau. This is the reason they chose that area, so at least Juana will have some support in her early months in a new place, and Salvador has found work there.”

“Juana made the trip to join Salvador only last week. She called me to say they had arrived safely - our whole family has been so worried. My cousin Ana had been calling me for news regularly since they left Badalona. She is so pleased to have them close to her at last, she is a great comfort to Juana. They are living in a disused farm building. Salvador will be working on it to make it a home for his family. It will be hard at first but at least they are now together and safe.”

As she finished Lourdes looked straight at Will, then María Ángeles translated her words. “Please do not mention the names I have given you and do not mention their destination. However, I beg you to tell the world.” With that she stood up and quietly left the room.

Will sat for a few moments, lost for words. To think Juana had made that journey only last week, brought the whole volatile situation into clear perspective. He must certainly make sure that this story is printed.

María Ángeles told him a little more about her own family but explained that she could not ignore stories like the one he had just heard. “This is happening all too often, in my opinion it is not acceptable.”

Eventually, they said goodbye to each other and she told him to bring Isabella with him next time and have lunch with her. He started to slowly drive back towards Roses. The familiar mood had taken him over, he was recognizing this and expecting it now. Every time he was told a story that made an impact and affected him so deeply, he felt grateful for his own life, but so immensely saddened by the lives of others.

It was now late afternoon and he was not in the mood for spending any time on his own. He needed to head to El Berganti to give Carmen the fish and he also hoped that Isabella may have some free time now. Although he had been feeling a little drained he knew that she would be the tonic he needed. He was already noticing that when she had a low moment he was there to pick her up. She did the same for him, this was another reason why he was sure that they had a future together.

Chapter 23

He parked the car in a nearby road and taking the box of anchovies approached the street leading to El Berganti. Just as he began to turn the corner, to his horror he saw Antonio Lopez sitting outside at a table smoking a cigarette. He hastily retreated into the shadows, now he was only too aware of Pepe's warnings. There was no sign of Isabella or the family. Just this man who he was growing to detest, sitting there like a sentry. To turn up at the restaurant now could antagonize Antonio and could also put Isabella in a very difficult position.

The alpha-male in him wanted to fight this man but he knew that to take the moral high ground was the best way to approach this. Although Antonio could do very little at the moment, William wanted to use discretion. There was no point fueling any antagonism as he wanted to be accepted by the local community. He certainly did not wish to become the man they wanted to avoid.

Retracing his steps towards his car he spotted a telephone booth. Searching around in his pocket he found the number for El Berganti which Pepe had given him when he first went there for lunch. He knew he had kept it tucked in his wallet. Putting the box down, he picked up the receiver and dialed the number and waited. Carmen's voice answered, so in his very best Spanish he asked for Isabella. She told him to wait and promptly handed the phone to Carlos.

Will knew that if he spoke slowly he could speak to him in English. "Carlos, is Isabella there?" Carlos didn't sound like his normal cheerful self. "She has gone to find you. Antonio is here. She was out so we contacted her and she preferred not to come back home. She decided to make her

way to Canyelles to search for you.” Will was relieved. “I came to the restaurant and saw Antonio outside, which is why I decided to call you. I’ll go straight home and find her, thank you, Carlos. Before I go can you please come around the corner, I have some fish for Carmen, which I bought in L’Escala?”

A few minutes later Carlos appeared and took the box off Will. He thanked him saying Carmen would be delighted. The presence of Antonio took some of the joy out of presenting the fish. He had been hoping to hand them directly to Carmen.

Now he hurried to his car. As long as she had not already returned home he knew he couldn't miss her. There was only one road in and out of Roses leading to Canyelles, so he should see her coming back if she had become fed up with waiting. In fifteen minutes he arrived at Canyelles seafront and as he turned left into his road he saw Carlos's car parked outside his apartment.

Isabella jumped out as soon as Will’s car ground to a halt. “Oh, there you are,” she said, with a look of relief on her face. “I was at the house of a friend when my father called me to say Antonio was at the restaurant. I didn't want to go back, so I came here. I was about to give up and go home - I have been here for quite some time.”

He put his arms around her and held her tightly. “I know, I went to the restaurant and saw Antonio, who luckily didn't see me, so I called your father and he told me where you were. I came as fast as I could, I'm sorry you've been here for so long.”

“You are here now,” she smiled as she looked up at him.

“Are you hungry? I had lunch but it was a while ago and I can manage something to eat.” She agreed she would like to eat something, so they decided to see if Señor Deulofeu was serving food. Sure enough, the little café was open and its friendly owner grinned from ear to ear when the two of them arrived, it was clear he was delighted to see them as a couple together, Isabella’s family were well known.

He ushered them to his best table by the window, offering them a menu. There was not a great deal of choice but all the food was fresh and home-cooked. Will chose homemade tortilla and Isabella chose a salad with wild mushrooms and goats cheese.

He told her about his meeting with María Ángeles, she too was saddened by the story, though through her aunt and her group of friends she had already heard a little of the Jordan story. She smiled when he told her about the anchovies, she knew how touched her mother would be. “Mama will love that, it was such wonderful idea. So sad you were not able to give them to her in person.” “Yes typical that Antonio even managed to ruin that.” sighed Will. “At the moment our only real problem is Antonio.”

She pulled a face. “Maybe eventually he will come to terms with you and me being together, but I think that will take time and in the meanwhile, we need to tread carefully. By the way! While I was with my friend, her father mentioned that some rather unpleasant things have happened to a man he knows. He wants to let more people know what is happening here below the surface. I told him

about you and what you wanted to report and he said he'd like to meet you and take you to visit his friend. If that is OK?" "OK? Of course, it's OK, that's just what I need, the more people willing to talk the better, both about things which are going on now and those stories from the past years."

Their food arrived and they were silent for a while. Even though Will had enjoyed his earlier lunch he ate with great relish. The little café was quiet, lunch service had finished some hours ago and it was far too early for the locals to eat. The café would be shut by the time the locals went out to dinner, it wasn't catering for an evening clientele.

Isabella broke the silence. "Actually, I am beginning to see the value in your writing, even if it does make me nervous. There are so many stories to be told. Even Claudia the mother of my friend, told me a terrible story today. She works at the hospital as a midwife. She is not happy with certain practices that she sees taking place on a regular basis. The other day a seventeen-year-old girl was admitted in labor. Of course, the father was nowhere to be seen, but she really wanted her baby. After the birth she was told that the infant had died. Claudia was shocked to hear later that the baby actually lived and was passed to a Franquista family for adoption. Apparently this practice is not uncommon."

William felt disgusted as the story unfolded, mentioning that he had been told a similar story . After they finished their meal they wandered down to the seafront. "Can you stay tonight?" Will half expected her to say her father would not approve, but she smiled. "Yes please," she said simply.

“Do you think your father would be angry?” Will said, looking slightly concerned, the last thing he wanted was to upset Carlos.

“I don’t think so, he knows I am safe with you and he also knows you and I are serious about one another now.” They fell into silence as the dusk took over and day gave way to night.

“You have no idea how serious I am.” Will pulled her closer. “I’ve never felt like this with any woman. You have made me realize how pointless my life has been until now - all work and no real meaning. Now I look to the future in a different way, finding the right place to put down our roots, starting a family.”

She smiled broadly, “So do you eventually want children?”

He laughed. “As many as you want, girls, boys, I don't mind, as long as you're their mother they'll be perfect.”

She put her arms around his waist and hugged him tightly. “Te amo Guillermo, mucho!”

They walked together hand-in-hand up to the apartment. Pouring a glass of wine for each of them Will led the way to the balcony and they chatted about the things that mattered and even planned their future a little.

“I was going to suggest a short vacation to France to see my sister, but I sent her a telegram the other day, so she just might bring the family here - I know you’ll both hit it off. I was expecting to return to France sooner, but now I’ve met you everything has changed and I really don’t want to

leave. As long as I can make a living here, I know I can make it work, I really hope that I hear from Maddy soon.

Isabella looked pleased, holding his hand lovingly, “I would love to meet her, you describe her with such affection, she sounds amazing.”

“She is! And the kids will love you too. I think you and Maddy will get on fine and if things workout between us as we hope, I think you'll be like sisters.”

He took a map of France out of a drawer and showed her where Maddy lived. “Maddy teaches ballet to the children in the village so she's really well known. It's as if she never lived in America, she's French through and through now. Though she does purposely speaks in English to the girls, I'd do the same if we had children, it's so important.” Isabella agreed, leaning closer to him, as she smiled, he felt that deep intense feeling in his gut, she was winning him over every day they were together.

Isabella sat quietly, obviously thinking about what he had said, turning towards him she looked seriously into his eyes. “Are we moving too fast?” He looked at her, totally understanding this question, he was well aware what others might think. Somehow though, it just felt right as if it was meant to happen. He had not come here expecting all this and surprised himself. Fate had brought them together.

“Look Isabella ! I know what you're saying, in fact as the guy I would normally be saying it before you, and yes we are moving fast. Hey! Sometimes these things just happen. I never thought it would happen to me, that's for sure, but then you came along and look at us now.” She smiled, knowing he

was right. He put his hand on hers. “We don’t need to rush, let’s take our time, get to know one another properly. When you meet my sister it will feel better. You can get to know me through her, though maybe that’s not such a good idea! She may tell you things about me I’d rather not tell you!” He laughed and she joined in. “If I can manage to stay, we don’t need to make any decisions for a year or two, I’m in no rush, we have years ahead of us.”

She put her drink down and walked over to put her arms around his neck, saying, “I just wish Antonio would go away and leave us alone. Then we could relax.” Will hugged her back.

“Hopefully he’ll get bored sooner or later. Ideally, he may meet someone else and you’ll no longer be so important.”

He poured her another glass of wine and she sipped it and looked out from the balcony and he could see how relaxed she was with him, it felt so good. He had no intention of spoiling the evening, but Antonio’s presence continued to haunt him.

That night she lay in his arms, so relaxed. To her, he felt strong and safe, and she snuggled in closer and they became as one. It was as if they were two people in a single body, she loved his smell, his skin, the way his strong hands held her. She was his and she wanted nothing more than to spend the rest of her life with him. Unbeknown to her he was lying there, almost in disbelief with identical thoughts running wildly through his head.

They made love but took their time, feeling every touch and every movement as if it was for the very first time. What they had now was so very special, so perfect, they couldn't let anything or anyone come between them.

Chapter 24

The days that followed seemed to fly by. Friends of the family slowly started to trust Will more and more, gradually becoming more comfortable approaching him with their stories. It was almost unthinkable that the civil war had come to an end almost twenty years ago, but feelings still ran so high.

Although the Franco regime was less oppressive now than it had been, there were still serious issues. Locals had to notify the town hall and be issued with permits to travel from one area to another. To William, coming from a free society like the United States, this seemed to be a gross case of excessive authority although, compared to earlier years, people had come to accept it - to a certain degree. This acceptance was something he never quite understood. Living under a brutal dictatorship for so many years had left people feeling crushed and subdued. They never argued about their rights as they would have done in the States. He was sure that even if Franco was no longer at the helm, this would still hold people back. The years of oppression had gradually quelled people's confidence, they never argued over injustice as they would back home.

He sent a number of articles back to Frank who was equally moved by what he read. It also gave Frank satisfaction and confirmation that he had made the right decision to send Will, as it was definitely something new and fresh to focus on.

Yet again Will was his star reporter and, although he missed having him on his team, he was relieved that he hadn't lost this raw talent altogether. To Frank, this innovative young journalist had

almost become the son he had never had. Blessed with two beautiful daughters whom he loved dearly, he couldn't help imagining what it would have been like to have a son. Will fitted that remit to a 't'. Frank always enjoyed watching soccer and he'd dreamt of the pleasure it would give him to take a young son with him to those games. The girls would certainly not have jumped for joy if he'd suggested it to them.

Tongues were now starting to wag in New York. Who was this mysterious, unknown new journalist, 'Tom Hook', who had suddenly appeared out of nowhere? He was writing some very disturbing articles about what was going on in Spain.

Frank had received an awkward call from the Spanish Consul, calling from their Washington Embassy office on 16th Street. He had asked Frank who this Tom Hook was? Frank had simply explained that he was a foreign correspondent but he had no further details. The Spanish Consulate was clearly not happy with this explanation, but appeared on the surface to accept defeat whilst insinuating that these stories were just not true. This only proved to Frank that Will did indeed have something very valuable to say. He was determined to protect his star reporter and made sure that nobody in the office actually knew the identity of Tom Hook. Although, as Will hadn't returned from Europe, he was well aware that a few people close to him were speculating.

Meanwhile, Will was on a roll, quietly interviewing locals. Frank was equally struck by the enormity of the situation. He was shocked when he was told that the local language was being suppressed, that Catalan books had been destroyed and even a famous Catalan dance, the Sardana,

could not be seen in public. Will explained to him that shop and bar owners would display pro-Spanish literature in their windows for fear of being closed down.

Will remembered arriving in Roses as a tourist and assuming that flamenco dancing and bullfighting were typical of Spain as a whole. But he gradually began to understand that these had their roots in the culture of southern Spain and were not viewed by the local population as normal entertainment. As he found himself gradually delving under the skin of this place, he unearthed another world. The locals were welcoming and friendly, that never changed, but the oppression they had experienced had not been completely erased. It may be less direct than in the past, but the continuous undercurrent was never far away. The pro and anti-Franco dilemma was an issue that Will clearly saw was causing deep divisions between families.

He was sympathetic to the locals, who were angry that their culture was being repressed. They were proud of their history and cultural roots, and if he were in their position he'd feel the same way. This was happening in other parts of Spain as well but, as he was in Northern Spain, it was better to concentrate on this area and become familiar with its people.

Will suggested to Isabella that once they had settled down as a couple, perhaps she would take a trip with him further south. She could act as his translator and he could talk to people in other parts of the country who were experiencing similar issues. Isabella was more than a little reticent as she was still very nervous that he may be found out and that this would undoubtedly cause them problems.

Even now, she was concerned that Will did not recognize the dangers from the perspective of the people who lived here.

“I cannot risk any of this affecting my family,” she said to him. He realized that maybe he needed to wait a while to undertake a journey of this nature. Even now families like the Jordan’s were being forced to flee to France, freedom of speech was not tolerated and harsh punishments were carried out. One afternoon he was invited to the house of a local lady, Maria Gironés. Carmen knew Maria well. She had been widowed when her husband was shot by Franco’s army in 1939 while trying to escape over the river Llobregat, close to Barcelona.

He arrived at her house in mid afternoon, on a glorious summer day. He had parked in the square and followed the simple directions he’d been given. Maria lived in a beautiful old cottage in the village of Castelló d’Empúries, not far from Roses. She ushered Will into a walled garden, not big, but every inch had been carefully designed. She had cleverly intermingled flowers and vegetables to offer both practical food and exquisite color.

He commented on this and she explained in broken English, that, by growing certain flowers amongst the vegetables it helped to keep the bugs away. Petunias, marigolds, chrysanthemums and lavender had been thoughtfully planted within her vegetable plot. “All of these act as insect repellents,” she explained, and she pointed to small bushes of basil. “This keeps away the mosquitos, I believe it kills the eggs. My father taught me this, he studied it for many years.”

Will was impressed, the scent was the really appealing feature of the garden. It smelt alluringly seductive. “Thank goodness I have a well in the garden for my water, or I would not have enough to maintain this,” she smiled.

Maria left Will sitting at a small wrought iron table with matching chairs. She arrived back with a jug of fresh lemonade with some fresh mint added for flavor. “It’s made from the lemons from that tree over there,” she said, pointing to a tree in the corner of the garden, laden with lemons. The cordial was delicious, similar to the one he had been given by Maria Ángeles but the flavor of the mint gave it a slightly different taste, both were far better than anything one could buy in a shop. Will was feeling relaxed and very welcome.

Maria explained that since her husband Lluís had died, apart from bringing up her family, she had immersed herself in her garden at every opportunity. The beauty helped to blot out the horror of his death. “I had just 25 years then,” she explained in her broken English. “I was carrying our second baby, a boy and our daughter had just 1 year.”

She looked so sad as she told him this. “I deeply regret that neither of my children knew their father. My son Lluís was born in January the following year. It was hard at that time, my family gave me help, but I struggled with my two little ones.”

There was a short silence. Will asked, “did you marry again?” “No,” she replied, “I could never replace Lluís, he was the love of my life.” Will understood this completely. As his feelings grew for

Isabella, he began to see how this must feel. He was trying not to show it, but his emotions for his girlfriend were growing daily.

Maria continued. “There were a number of Republican men, all escaping across the river. As they reached the middle, Franco’s soldiers could be seen on horseback on the opposite bank. They aimed and fired in unison and the entire group of men were mown down. There was a young boy hiding on the other side of the river and when it was over he was able to tell others what he had witnessed. It was a number of days after this that we identified the body of my darling husband.”

Just then the front door was opened and slammed. A young man stormed into the garden, with a face like thunder. Maria was about to introduce him but he never gave her the chance. He spoke to her in English. “Mama, what did I tell you about talking to this man, this is dangerous.” Turning to Will, he shouted: “Get out! You are not welcome here.” Will stood up, uncomfortable with the situation. “I’m so sorry, I never intended to offend anyone, I can assure you that I would never quote names. I am well aware that discretion is paramount,”

The young man continued angrily. “You stupid, ignorant American! Walls have ears, nobody is truly safe here. If you think they are, then you are deluded. Yes, the war is over. Maybe to your eyes life here looks normal, but all around us are Nationalist supporters, pretending to be part of our lives, but all too ready to see us pay for our beliefs.”

Suddenly and without warning Maria stood up and faced her angry son full on. “Lluis, I understand what you are saying, but for the sake of your father and those brave men who died alongside him, I

have to speak out. The names will be changed. William is a wise man. But we need to tell the world our story so that your children will be truly free again.”

She ushered Will to sit down once more. He did as she asked, then turned to Luis choosing his words with care. “I understand your fear. I want to protect my girlfriend’s family as well, for this reason I am writing under a pseudonym, so no one can trace me.” The young man looked at him with a serious expression, combined with an air of disbelief.

“Do not be so sure. I think you are treading on dangerous ground. One of these days the quicksand will drag you under when you least expect it. But if this is what my mother wants, then I can say nothing more. May God be with you! You may need him!” And with that he turned abruptly and strode out of the garden. They heard the loud slam of the front door as he left the house.

William felt disheartened and drained. What had started as a pleasant afternoon, now had a storm cloud hanging perilously over it. Even the dregs of the delicious lemonade did nothing to raise his spirits. He thanked Maria, kissed her on both cheeks and she led him out. He turned to her, “I will never tell anyone I met you. Of course the family know, but not another soul, rest assured.” She smiled but with a sadness in her eyes, then turned, closing the door behind him.

He slowly walked back to his car. He’d originally planned to have a look around the old castle but now his heart just wasn’t in it. His mind was racing, running Luis’s words over and over in his head. What if he was right? What if he was found out? What about Isabella and her wonderful

family? He could not risk putting their lives in jeopardy. Maybe Lluís had a point, the words ‘stupid, ignorant American’ were ringing in his ears.

He arrived back in Roses, parked on the seafront and walked through the back streets to El Berganti. Isabella was wiping a table as he came around the corner. She was able to read him by now and she could see that something was wrong. He was certainly not his normal happy self. He said nothing so she just walked up to him, put her arms around him and kissed him tenderly. He leaned into her, feeling his worries fall away and peace returning. She sat him down and poured him a cool beer which was so welcome. He sat back in the chair and looked her in the eye. “You were right when you warned me about going south, and maybe I need to be much more careful nearer to home.”

She looked somewhat surprised. “What has changed your mind?”

“The wrath of Lluís Gironés,” he replied.

Isabella sat down next to him as he explained. “I can understand that,” she said, “he lost his father so tragically and he never knew him. He can't put his mother at risk, she is everything to him as is his sister Lucia.” “Isabella, are you able to come back with me tonight? I can't bear the idea of my own company. I just want to cuddle and hold you, nothing else.” She smiled, “Is that possible for you?” This even raised a smile on William's face.

They drove back to Canyelles without much conversation. She understood his silence, after his encounter with Lluís Gironés he needed time to collect himself. To be close together was more important, along with the support of the woman who he knew loved him so deeply. Neither of them

were hungry so were happy to just nibble at some cheese and paté. After they had both showered they fell onto the bed and just lay together. Will wrapped his arms around Isabella, smelling her skin which carried the slight hint of her perfume. He didn't want to let her go and she moved closer to the man she was coming to adore. For once, which as Isabella had teased was surprising, they didn't make love. This special closeness meant more at this time. In a strange way making love would have ruined that deep, encompassing moment of true tenderness - the deepest feeling either of them had ever felt. Tomorrow was another day and would bring new adventures. Little did Will realize the challenges ahead, but then nobody could imagine them, not in a million years.

Chapter 25

Will and Isabella awoke, still wrapped in one another's arms, it seemed as if they hadn't stirred all night. The sun was streaming in through the open blinds, and the movement of the trees outside could be seen reflected on the bedroom wall. They could smell the sea air as they lay there and all the feelings of the day before seemed to drop away.

Once dressed, Will nipped up the road to the café, returning with warm croissants. They made fresh coffee and sat together on the terrace, just happy to be able to spend some quality time in each other's company.

As they sat together eating their croissants, drinking coffee and planning their day, there was a knock on the front door, it was today's post, this time a telegram from Maddy. Though the words were limited it was the news he'd been hoping for, 'Check accommodation (stop) Next week (stop) Call me.' "Good news, Maddy's coming, I'll need to check with Fernando or Señor Deulofeu, I can't wait for you ladies to meet, I know you'll hit it off." Over the weeks together with Isabella he now felt confident that this was the beginning of a new future, he felt sure that Maddy and his girlfriend would become friends.

Isabella wasn't working that day, so they decided to make the most of their precious time together. "I know," she smiled, "let's go and see Aunt Sofia, I haven't been to Cadaques for a while and it's such a glorious day, perfect for a drive."

William liked the idea as well. “Sounds good to me,” he said. Isabella was wearing shorts, but unsure what the day would hold, she had also brought a skirt with her. She decided to change, somehow shorts and the lovely hotel in Cadaques didn't quite go together. They popped to the café to telephone Sofia, who was delighted with the prospect of seeing them both. She invited them for lunch, which they gladly accepted. At the same time, Will quizzed Señor Deulofeu with regard to other rental properties vacant for next week. Luckily he had received a recent cancellation, so they arranged it there and then. Will was pleased to put new business his way, his landlord was generous in so many ways.

Setting off early, the plan was to have a look around the village of Cadaques before heading to the hotel. It was a lovely day for the mountain drive from Roses, the view of the magnificent ‘Bay of Roses’ stood out from the top of the cliffs, looking particularly impressive in the bright sunshine.

After the many twists and turns of the winding road, they eventually arrived in the picturesque village with its array of pretty white houses and cottages clustered unapologetically, in no particular order, around the rugged bay. There was something about the people here that fascinated Will. This place seemed to attract artists and less conventional types. He supposed that, due to its remote location, it was always going to interest those who were either born here and who had never left, or those who were seeking a retreat from the outside world. He reveled in the relaxed atmosphere, taking great pleasure as he watched Isabella physically and mentally unwinding. He knew she was still nervous where Antonio was concerned so being here was already clearly doing her the power of good.

They found a small café on a side street. It was a sunny spot and they chose a table on the terrace and sat down. A young girl came out to them, wearing a simple yellow cotton dress, pulled in tightly at the waist and flaring out to just below her knees. Smiling, she greeted them as they ordered two coffees. Isabella suddenly looked less relaxed. Her expression was one with which Will was familiar by now. It always showed on her face when Antonio was in her mind. He sat back waiting, knowing what was coming next, or at least guessing.

“Guillem, what happens if he never leaves us alone?” He leaned back in his chair. “Oh not Antonio again!” He looked at her tenderly. “I think he’ll get bored once he sees it’s a ‘fait accompli’, what can he do? In time he will see that I’m not leaving, then he can do very little.”

The waitress arrived with their coffees. As she left, Isabella continued. “I don’t think it’s as simple as that. He’s not the type to give up. He is the sort of man who would think that if he couldn’t have me, nobody could. Will could see how worried she was. “I’d like your Aunt’s opinion on this. She is wise, I’m sure that she will put your mind at rest.”

As they walked back towards the car, who should come around the corner but the man who had made such an impression on young Ann at Hotel Duran - Salvador Dali, the painter. Isabella whispered in his ear, confirming that the lady on his arm was his wife Gala. She was not at all what Will was expecting; not unattractive, but plain in comparison to the gorgeous women he had been with at the restaurant. She wore a white cotton shirt with ruffles at the front and tight, ankle length slacks in a deep green.

Dali was his normal striking self. He was wearing an American, Western-style shirt, in dual colors red and green. He was carrying an ornamental walking stick, more for effect it seemed, than the need as a walking aid. They smiled at Will and Isabella as they walked past, even exchanging the greeting 'Buenos días,' as they continued on their way. They stopped to chat to one of the fishermen who was untangling his nets. The old man's face couldn't be seen as it was covered by a large canvas hat to protect him from the sun, they talked informally and seemed to know him well.

It seemed strange to see this famous painter in such a relaxed setting, it was the complete opposite of the scene in the hotel. Will and Isabella made their way up the hill to where the car was parked, and once comfortably seated, they headed in the direction of Hotel Vistabella.

"His wife is not what I expected," Will commented. Isabella looked across at him. "No, many people say that, I think she keeps him grounded, he's pretty loco they say." Will grinned, "a bit like you and me then." She smacked his leg lightly, "as long as it's you who is loco and not me!" She smiled. They drove the short distance to the hotel still joking and laughing, both feeling so content, it was so noticeable as the days wore on that they could feel a bond growing between them.

Aunt Sofia was standing on the steps of the hotel with another woman. The woman looked to be in her late forties or early fifties, it was hard to be sure as she was very simply dressed. Although she wasn't glamorous she had a subtle beauty that caught the eye.

They drew up and made their way towards the two ladies. Isabella obviously knew the other woman. “Hello Anna Maria, so good to see you, this is my boyfriend William Hale. We saw your brother and his wife in the village just now.” Turning to Will, she said. “William, may I introduce you to Anna María Dali.” William stepped forward and shook her hand, feeling unsure whether a kiss was appropriate. Anna Maria smiled and her face lit up suddenly. Until now she had looked very serious. “Isabella! Your aunt has been telling me that you have met a handsome American, she is not incorrect.” Then turning to Will, she said “Do you realize how honored you are? There are men over many kilometers who would have given everything to be seen with this woman.”

Will laughed, “Oh, believe me I know how lucky I am. But then I am very fussy, so only the most perfect woman would have attracted me in the first place.”

Isabella was beginning to blush. “Oh, please stop it. I’m getting just a little embarrassed by all this attention.” Sofia cut in. “Anna Maria has only just arrived, I invited her to lunch but she can’t stay, so let us have a drink together before she has to leave.”

They made their way to Sofia’s apartment and she led them out onto her private terrace. The view out to sea was a sight worth savoring. Anna Maria asked Will about his work and about San Francisco and was enthusiastic to hear more information generally regarding America. She admitted that she was in fact having lunch with her brother and his wife. “If I am honest, I would rather stay here and have lunch with you. I am not all that partial to my brother’s wife, a little too domineering for my taste. On the other hand he does need very firm handling. He is a little mad you know! I am

afraid our political views differ as well, none of which makes an afternoon with them all that appealing.”

Will smiled at her. He liked this woman, she had an interesting way with her. “I suppose it fits the thinking that one can choose one’s friends but not one’s family,” he commented. She laughed, “Oh, how true, I generally only visit when we have family matters to discuss. My brother and Gala have been together a long time. They married in a civil service in 1934 but, as she had been married before, they were unable to have a Catholic wedding. Now, she has managed to obtain a special dispensation from the Pope so they are to be married again in August, the reason that we have some arranging to do. Some of the family who are visiting will stay here at the hotel.

Will was interested, “Where are the family coming from?” he asked. Anna Maria replied. “Gala has family in Russia, she was born in Kazan, in fact her birth name is not Gala but Elena. Salvador and I have other family in southern Spain. The Russian side are harder to please and I hope they will love this hotel for its understated elegance. The church at Els Àngels, which is near Girona, is not huge, so there will only be a few specially chosen guests.”

Sofia smiled gratefully and was clearly proud of Anna Maria’s comment. After his last encounter with her, William was sure that this was exactly the balance she had strived to create. ‘Understated elegance’ was, he thought, exactly the way she would have personally described her pride and joy. Anna Maria was clearly in no rush to go, but eventually she dragged herself away, bidding them all farewell. Sofia walked her to her car, while Will and Isabella savored the sweet aromas of flowers, which peered out from every nook and cranny of her delightful terrace.

They sat in silence most of the time. It was just wonderful to be together in this place, where they both felt so secure. Will could see that Sofia had, without doubt, taken on the role of a mother figure for him. Until now he hadn't contemplated how much he was missing the strength and support of his own wonderful mother. He wished so much that she was still alive and could meet Isabella, and be a part of the life he was already planning. He supposed this was the first thought anybody in this position would be thinking when they meet the right person, naturally, you want to share them with your family.

Soon after, Sofia arrived back on the terrace and Maddy's pending visit was a main topic of conversation. Sofia suggested that they should visit the hotel for a lunch with the family, as it would be something special for Madeleine. Will loved the idea, telling her he would pay, she grimaced, "you will do nothing of the sort!" He thanked her and she knew that her kindness was greatly appreciated. He explained that there would be two children and was mightily relieved when Sofia smiled with pleasure, "Oh, that will be a treat, it's been a while since this place rang with the sound of children's voices, I shall enjoy it."

She continued, "The Dali wedding is taking up much of my time right now. It will be an intimate affair, they will keep the numbers low for the church. They will all stay closer to Girona for the first night, then the group will travel here the next day. Salvador and Gala want their home at Port Lligat to themselves so they will meet the family here for a smaller reception and dinner. There are only four guests from Russia and the rest are Spanish but not local, so can't travel straight home. The wedding is the 8th of August so they arrive here on the 9th and will depart on the 11th. Not wishing

to dampen our lovely day,”broke in Sofia, “But have you seen any more of Antonio?” They both looked a little surprised.

“I haven’t, but Will saw him yesterday at the bar, I stayed away. He had another awkward meeting when he was with Pepe the other day, he made the comments to Will that you are already aware of, but we haven't seen much of him since.” Her Aunt looked hesitant. “Why?” Isabella questioned, “Have you heard something?”

“Well, I may be wrong about this, but my head chef Pedro Olmo Perez, whom I might add like us has opposing political views, has a brother who is in the Guardia. His name is Sebastián and his best friend is Antonio Lopez. Pedro overheard his brother talking and apparently, Antonio is not over you Isabella and he has been watching you from afar.”

Isabella looked shocked. “William has already had the misfortune to meet Sebastián, I remember him because we went to school together. He was older than me and he was the person who introduced me to Antonio.”

On hearing the comment from the chef, Will felt the color drain from his face. He had been so sure that Antonio would give up and move on. Now he was not quite so convinced. Sofia continued, “You both need to be careful. William, I know your writing is important, but you cannot afford to put yourselves at risk. Keep your eyes wide open.”

“Do you think he knows that I’m writing?” Will broke in.

“Maybe that you are writing. However, I doubt he knows about your pseudonym. On the other hand, it may not take much time for them to figure it out. If the name Tom Hook is mentioned, undoubtedly Sebastian will start to do his homework. I have been led to believe, that he has friends in high places.” “What would happen if he found out?” asked Will.

“Although we don't hear stories as often now, people are still killed for anti-Franco behavior. Families are still fleeing to France, as happened only recently with the Jordan's and their children. We still can't let down our guard.”

There was a knock on the apartment door and Sylvie popped her head around the door, making her way into the room. She walked towards the terrace. “Señora, your table is ready in the dining room.” Sofia smiled, “Thank you Sylvie, we will be right there.” They stood up. “We can carry on this conversation later, behind closed doors,” Sofia said quietly. For Isabella and Will, the desire to carry on talking was strong, unable to do so, felt quite unbearable.

Despite the slight tension caused by the earlier revelation, lunch was delicious and they discussed his sister's pending visit, as well as his writing so far and his growing friendship with Fernando, explaining how useful the telex machine was proving.

The dining room had such a pleasant aspect with French windows into the garden on one side and windows looking out to sea on the other, and with its charming decor and muted colors, it was so different from the more traditional styles in hotels and restaurants, which were seen in abundance these days. There was none of the normal, heavy dark wood, the French twist was really stylish,

providing an opulence and glamour that resembled a small palace. A pianist sat at the corner of the room playing unobtrusive music, adding a relaxed ambiance to the elegant surroundings. No wonder the rich and famous loved this place and were prepared to travel to be here. The sound of the crashing waves could be heard from the rocks below and the sparkling sea glistened in the distance and reflected the clear blue sky above. Will could never tire of views like this, but somehow here, it seemed even more perfect. Of course, seated between two beautiful women, both equally elegant, was very special, and more than he could have ever previously imagined.

After a leisurely lunch, they left the dining room and returned for coffee in the apartment. Isabella went to the bathroom and Will took the opportunity to quiz Sofia once again. “What can I do about Antonio?” he exclaimed. “He is hanging over our heads like a demon and we can't shake him off. How can we move forward in our lives if he is constantly following us around? Isabella is trying to be brave but I think she is becoming worried and, If I am honest, so am I. He is targeting me and wants me out of the way.”

Sofia walked across the room and held both his hands in hers. “I too am concerned, we cannot ignore this. I believe him to be a very dangerous man. He is controlling and manipulative. Honestly William! I am equally as uncertain as you, as to the next option you might choose to take. If you both remain in this relationship, maybe you should move a bit further away from here to live, this could give him the time to calm down and move on with his life. The problem is that if you move anywhere within Spain, he can find you, as all your information will be logged with the police and, as we already know, he has friends within that political group. France may be another option for a while, though that will make your writing more complicated. Also it won't be a popular decision for

Carlos and Carmen either.” William strode across to the window and gazed out onto the garden.

“Maybe you're right, Isabella and I are becoming closer by the day. It's been such a short time but I can't imagine life without her now.” Sofia smiled, she could see how they were bonding and that they looked perfect together.

“Maybe I should move away just for a short time, to let this blow over. I'd prefer to be together, but I know Isabella would not wish to move away, as her life is here!” Sofia sighed. “Sometimes we have to make sacrifices for the ones we love.” Will turned and looked at her, “Maybe she would have been better off if I had never come into her life.” She looked at him with motherly love in her eyes. “And maybe she would never have found true love and happiness, is that really what you think is best for her?”

At that moment Isabella returned and they moved on to lighter conversations. Eventually, they both hugged Sofia and made their way to the car, waving goodbye to the beautiful woman, who stood blowing kisses from the hotel steps.

“I am thinking that maybe we should spend a short time apart, to let the dust settle, we need this situation to cool off” William said, looking ahead as he tackled the bends in the narrow road.

Isabella looked across at him.

“How can you even suggest that?” she gasped. “Well, I mean enough time for people around here to get on with their lives and forget us for a while.”

She knew who he meant and that he didn't want to utter Antonio by name. How she hated what Antonio was doing to them. He was getting his own way as usual and creating the required effect. However, she knew that Will was probably right she was secretly hoping he may be the man she would marry, if that was the case they couldn't start a life together living in fear, expecting their nemesis to be creeping around every corner.

“Bien, I agree, but only if we go away together. We have no choice, this cannot be allowed to continue, or it will undoubtedly drive us apart and I am not prepared for that to ever happen. You decide what you think is the best move and I will accept it, as long as we can return eventually.”

“I'm not sure that your parents will approve of that! Especially as we are not married.” He gave her a sidelong look, her face bore a familiar look he was recognizing so well. Determination was etched on her face. “My parents may prefer us to follow protocol but even they must accept that we live in difficult times and that dreadful man could make this much worse.”

As he drove he thought seriously about their relationship. It was moving fast. He may have preferred things to have developed more slowly, but like she said, life here was by no means normal. At least if he was seen as her future husband, her parents would probably be a little more flexible. He decided to keep these thoughts to himself.

Will could feel a heavy cloud lifting, although he was a little worried as to how he could continue writing. What he would do is concentrate over the next few weeks and hopefully have enough material to work on while they were away. Maybe once he had lit the fuse with his stories, he could

write in a more journalistic fashion about his views, or even look at life in France as a new source of material.

They drove back to Roses as the light started to turn golden and the sun could be seen lowering in the sky, putting the day to bed. He kissed Isabella before she jumped out of the car, she ran round to his side, as if she didn't want to leave him and kissed him again. "Just wait a moment!" she said, she was only gone for a few minutes. Arriving back with a bag of fresh clothes, she said. "I told Papa and Mama about our day, I think they now know we are more serious, I know that they don't really approve of me staying, but they want me to be happy again. I will come back with you tonight, if you can bring me here in the morning." Will was delighted, she jumped in again and they drove slowly home towards Canyelles.

It had been a lovely day even though the wretched name of Antonio had been uttered once again. Will was beginning to really hate this man in a way that he had never hated another human being before. Even that made him mad! How could he let this evil 'son of a bitch' get into his head, creating the kind of anger he had never known.

They went to bed early and Isabella was asleep in a flash but he didn't sleep well, tossing and turning and seeing the menacing face of Antonio Lopez, leering at him every time he tried to close his eyes.

Chapter 26

They made their way back to Roses the next morning, it was becoming harder and harder for them to part company each time they were together. Her father had given her the morning off, so she was in no rush to go back to the restaurant quite yet.

“It’s Saturday, and although Papa said not to rush, they will get busy later, so I will go back to help.” Will totally understood and respected her commitment to the family business. “Let’s take a stroll,” he said, “an hour together would be good.” “Si, Bueno,” she smiled up at him. They walked along the promenade hand in hand and found the bar on the beach where he had first met Buddy the dog. Will always kept an eye open for Buddy but he’d never seen him again.

They ordered coffee and croissants and watched people walking by, each one with their own story to tell. A football was kicked in their direction from a group of small boys, two of them hurried over, apologizing for the intrusion. Will jumped up instinctively and lobbed it back to them, then running onto the beach he started to kick the ball around with them, while Isabella watched the fun and games, smiling contentedly.

The youngsters were happy to have this stranger join in with their game, they shrieked with excitement as Will kicked the ball further away so that they could run after it. He had played soccer when he was young and knew all the moves so he passed these tips on to the boys who were really excited. Expertly dribbling the ball, he was now looking like a professional and other kids started to gather around. Isabella sat with her coffee, nibbling her croissant and looking proudly on at her

energetic new man. The children clearly loved his relaxed demeanor, he came down to their level but not in a condescending manner, more as one of them. She imagined how he would be with their own children and it warmed her heart.

By this time even some small girls had joined the group, they were all giggling and chattering and Will was passing on his moves with precision. They were clearly hanging on his every word and gesture. Will had to work cleverly round the language barrier, but they didn't seem bothered, they were so adorable without a care in the world, so happy to fill their days with simple pursuits.

Eventually, he came back to her and flopped down in his chair. "Hey! I must do that more often, I hadn't realized how unfit I was becoming, the only drawback to writing is too much sitting."

Isabella leaned over and kissed him. "You're a natural cariño, imagine how you'll be with your own children."

He leaned back in the chair, "Kids are so lucky. They can just be kids, whatever is going on around them."

As he looked over at Isabella, he could just imagine how it would be to have children with her. The thought brought a deep smile to his face, he was satisfied and happy at this idea.

Just then a familiar furry face appeared from behind a chair. It was Buddy who had been clearing tasty scraps away from under the tables. When he saw Will he wagged his tail enthusiastically.

Isabella was fascinated, the little dog seemed to have taken quite a liking to his new American friend. Will bent over to stroke Buddy, who put his paws up on Will's knees as if he was his owner.

It was clear that the small dog was a stray, but he seemed to be in pretty good condition and they

concluded that local bars knew him and were feeding him. The scraps were probably just an extra which he enjoyed. Will had considered whether he should adopt the little dog. However, as his plans had not been finalized it was not a very practical solution. Buddy seemed happy enough and although Will quite liked the idea of owning a dog, they were both certain that he was probably better off where he was. Isabella called Buddy to her and the little dog licked her hand and showed his affection. She could see how Will enjoyed the company of this little animal. "I can see why you like him, he is adorable," Isabella commented.

They finished their coffee gave the small dog a final pat and started to walk back towards the restaurant, hand in hand, in complete contentment. When they arrived at the bar Carlos greeted them with his normal broad smile and mentioned that a large party had just booked for lunchtime. He asked if Isabella would go out to buy some more bread?

She took a wicker basket from the kitchen and Will suggested that he go with her. His writing could wait for a little bit longer. They made their way through the narrow streets to their favorite baker's shop. Just as they were about to enter the shop a small girl skipped in front of them, she was about seven or eight years old. A policeman, one of the Guardia Civil, was already buying bread from the owner's wife. The baker turned to serve the small girl, she'd obviously been sent on this errand by her mother. In very clear Catalan she asked for the bread her mother had told her to bring home. Will was beginning to understand the difference between Catalan and Spanish and could just about understand. She was smiling merrily up at the baker, with no thought of her words.

By the look on the shopkeeper's face, it was clear what was running through his head. Nobody spoke Catalan outside the house, but he smiled at her, as she was completely unaware of what she had done.

To everyone's horror, the Guardia policeman turned on the child. Without any warning, he shouted abuse at her and slapped her hard across her tiny face. She reeled and fell, clutching her now, red cheek, then broke down into floods of tears as she stumbled to her feet. He grabbed her viciously by the arm and pinned her to the counter, slapping her once more. Then turning abruptly, without another word, he walked out.

Will stood completely stunned at this spectacle. Watching this blatant bullying so close up, brought home his own vulnerability, highlighting how very fragile his situation was. Isabella knelt down, and taking out a clean handkerchief, she wiped the child's eyes, talking kindly to her and trying to calm her. The little girl was known to Isabella, her name was Gabriela, she nestled into Isabella as if she was her mother.

The baker was a friendly man, he came round to the other side of the counter and he too knelt down and tried to pacify the weeping child. "How can an adult do that to a child?" Will exclaimed, feeling anger welling up inside him. He had wanted to hit the policeman but was already well aware of how dangerous that would be. Isabella looked up at Will, "Now you can see why I tell you to be careful. This is an innocent child, how much worse it would be for an adult." Will knew she was right, he felt the deep sensation of nausea in his stomach, so similar to his feelings when he had visited the Ramirez family.

They purchased their bread, Isabella took hold of Gabriela's hand and they left in the direction of the little girl's home. Will carried the basket and Gabriella's bread in his other hand. They walked down a number of streets that William didn't recognize, past a beautiful convent building and past the local woodyard - eventually arriving at a blue front door. Isabella knocked and Gabriela's mother opened it.

She beckoned them into the hallway, shocked by the state of her small daughter. Hugging Gabriela she explained in Catalan to Isabella that she should have reminded her not to speak Catalan in public. "I told her in Catalan so, of course, she just repeated what I said," she explained. She invited them in, but they explained that they needed to take the bread back to the restaurant. She thanked them profusely and they made their way in silence up the street, turning towards home. They were both completely lost in thought.

Will broke the silence. "For the first time, I'm taking your fears seriously. I've been far too blasé. I'm used to living in the US, where bad things may happen sometimes, but generally, we're safe. This is another world and I've only been dipping my toes in it up to now. At last, I'm beginning to understand things better." Isabella still didn't speak, but the darkness in her eyes said everything. Will gave her a hug when they arrived at the bar and left her to get on with work. He then walked back to the seafront. The children from earlier were no longer there. Somehow the fun and games enjoyed only an hour or so before were just a distant memory. He opened the car and taking out his writing pad and a pen he decided to find a beach bar where he could grab a beer and put some ideas together while they were fresh in his head. He wanted to get this last incident down on paper while it was still fresh in his mind. Writing while he was feeling this emotional always worked better. The

fact that this had happened to a small child had really affected him. He felt a deep disgust and loathing.

As he sat there deep in thought, he happened to glance up briefly and across the road saw three men laughing and joking. Immediately he recognized the Guardia policeman from the baker's shop, still holding the bread he had bought. When he saw the other men, his heart missed a beat. Antonio Lopez was with another man and Will was sure that he was the brother of Sofia's chef, Sebastian, whom he'd only seen once. They were obviously very good friends.

Will hoped that he had not been recognized and turned a little away. Perhaps Antonio wouldn't see him. The other men seemed far too engrossed in their conversation to look around much. He began to write, slowly at first, but soon his pen was running away with him. There was so much to say, he knew that this was when he wrote at his best. It was at moments like this he often looked at his work afterward as if he was reading it for the first time, sometimes he didn't recognize it at all. He was determined that this story should be heard. The look of terror on the tiny face of Gabriela, must be felt intensely by his readers. Although this incident was far less horrific than others he had heard, somehow his firsthand experience of this, made it all the more real and poignant. Especially after the fun he'd been having with the other children, such a short time before, it highlighted the frailty of life here. He glanced up once again and to his great discomfort, Antonio was now pointing him out to the two Guardia. It was also apparent that the policeman he had seen earlier recognized Will from the bread shop. Will could see the look of loathing and contempt on his face. The feeling was mutual, but it made him very nervous to have their eyes upon him, now aware that he had been picked out by this man and targeted in some way, he wondered what they were saying.

Then they continued to laugh even louder. The policeman was certainly telling them about Gabriela, Will could identify this by his hand movements. He felt so horrified that this incident was simply considered as a game by them, just something to be amused by.

He continued to write, determined to paint a picture of what he had just witnessed. Seeing the amusement, with such a complete lack of remorse on their faces - this was why this story had such resonance and pinpointed the significance of why it was so important for people to hear it. He realized that he would need to keep it for a later date. It would be far too dangerous to make it public at this moment, they would know who he was if they heard about it and it would blow the cover of Tom Hook, he would keep it for the future.

After he finished he strode back through town, stopping at the post office where there was a phone booth to make a call to Maddy. He needed to hear her cheerful voice that would help to ground him again. When he told her of the day's events, she was anything but happy. "Will, I'm getting worried about you. You need to be careful," came Maddy's concerned voice. "You're playing with fire. Jean-Luc is worried about you as well. You're not in the States now. It's dangerous. Please come back here, you can bring Isabella with you, she's very welcome. You can stay as long as you like, you know you can," she said with conviction. Will paused to consider, then he replied. "I may rent a small place for us for a few months while we let the dust settle, though somehow I will still need to earn a living. I'm not sure if her parents would approve of her coming. She only just gets away with the odd night here." Maddy sighed at the other end. "Well maybe just you then."

He could hear how nervous she was. “I’ll tell you what Maddy, why don’t you come here as we planned, and we can talk about it all then.” He replied. “Ok I’ll speak to Jean-Luc.” She replied.

They said goodbye and he put the phone back on the receiver and went outside. Their conversation was still spinning round and round in his head, a deeper fear was mounting inside him. This day had been an emotional roller-coaster. Clearly, from now on he would need to take this whole situation a lot more seriously. He must focus a great deal harder to get his work done as quickly as possible in case he was forced to leave.

He considered Maddy’s words while remembering the look on the faces of Antonio and his friends. Although he loved writing when sitting in a café, this was probably more dangerous than he’d first considered. He still loved this place, but the danger which lurked under the surface seemed to be pulling him under, like a devilish quicksand, as these words manifested themselves in his head, he felt himself jettisoned back to the garden of Maria with Lluís Gironés shouting these very words.

Chapter 27

The weather clouded over for a few days, so Will decided that it was a great chance to throw himself into some serious writing. He had made copious handwritten notes, but this was a perfect opportunity to spend several solitary hours typing up, in more detail, some of the more chilling stories he'd been given.

His plan was to send a few of these to Frank, preferably in one go. Fernando had produced an old typewriter, which he explained he'd kept for emergencies but never used. He told Will that he was welcome to use it for as long as he liked. Will welcomed this with open arms, he could treat himself to a newer model eventually, but in the short-term it made his job a great deal easier. He planned to post the fully typed version, but telex Frank the summery, so he could see what to expect.

The hardest part of this decision to work alone was that he wouldn't see Isabella. He knew that he should concentrate on the work in hand by putting his head down and he was already feeling a sense of satisfaction that he was catching up, with some compelling articles ready for Frank.

On the third day, he realized that his longing to see Isabella was driving him a little crazy, so he called her and suggested that if she was free he would like to take her out to dinner that night. Isabella immediately jumped at the prospect. She too, was missing her boyfriend, but she'd been trying to stay strong, as she was well aware that he needed to catch up on a few of his stories. He'd heard of a nice little fish restaurant which was newly opened on the edge of town, and she agreed that it would be perfect. He parked his car on the seafront and met her at El Berganti. They walked

together through the narrow streets until they came upon the small eating establishment. It had been painted blue on the outside and was freshly decorated inside as well.

The owner welcomed them in and sat them on one side of the restaurant. There was a larger group chatting loudly at a center table and on the far side of the room was a table of four. He also noticed another couple in the far corner. It was clear that this popular new restaurant was the talking point with the locals.

They had so much catching-up to do, even after only three days apart, there seemed to be a great deal to converse about. The fish was excellent and between mouthfuls they compared notes. Will could only talk about what he'd been writing, but Isabella wanted to share every moment of her last few days with him.

They were oblivious of others in the restaurant, but they were such a handsome couple that attention inevitably came their way. They had just finished their meal and were having coffee, when a lady walked towards them from the table in the corner on the far side of the restaurant. It was only as she came closer that they recognized her, she was the mother of little Gabriela, it was her and her husband that Will had seen on the other side of the restaurant.

Renata apologized for disturbing them. “No hay problema,” said Isabella and then for Will’s benefit, knowing that their visitor spoke English, she continued, “how is Gabriela after her ordeal?”

Renata smiled, “She is fine, a little nervous now to go out and very frightened of policemen, but definitely more cheerful now.” Turning to Will, she said, “I have a favor to ask you? I was speaking to Carmen and I mentioned our family and my youngest cousin. It was then that she told me that I should speak to you. I gather you are collecting stories.”

Will smiled back, suspecting what may be coming next. Aware that she mustn't be overheard, Renata drew up a nearby chair and sat down. “Would my cousin's story be of any use to you?”

Will smiled at her. “As long as nobody is told that I am writing, I would like to hear it. I am happy to change names for anonymity if you would prefer.” She looked around her in case they were being overheard. “If we can meet, I can tell you more.” “When would it be convenient?” Will asked “During the mornings Gabriela goes to my mother's house during the school holidays, as normally I am working. Would tomorrow be too soon? I am not working then.”

Will agreed that this would be fine and arranged to go to Renata's house at 10.30 the following morning. She stood up, wished them a good evening and returned to her husband. Isabella, as usual, was a little concerned that people were talking about Will, but even she said that she knew that her mother Carmen would only speak to a friend whom she was confident could be really trusted. This conversation had re-kindled Will's curiosity. His desire to find more stories was intensely strong. Every time he thought he had unearthed yet one more shocking revelation, another chilling account came his way.

They decided to have a last drink at El Berganti before he went home. He would see Isabella the next day after he had visited Renata's house. Carmen and Carlos were not around and they stood for a moment in the empty restaurant locked in each other's arms, savoring the peace and solitude. They were so in love now and the time apart had made them both physically ache. He drove slowly home, knowing full well that he would dream of her tonight.

When he awoke the next morning, he looked out of his window on another cloudy day, though it was still quite warm. A storm had been forecast for later, he was told this by Señor Deulofeu when he popped in for his morning coffee. It was the topic of everyone's conversation as it would inevitably clear the humidity from the air. He decided to drive with the car roof up today, as he didn't want to be caught out by any sudden downpour.

Parking a few streets away from Renata's house he made his way on foot, arriving a few minutes before the agreed appointment and knocked on her door. Renata opened it and gestured him into the hallway. Will immediately noticed the difference between this home and that of the Ramirez family. Though still very Spanish in style, it felt far less austere. Drapes and cushions had been handmade with great attention to detail. It was abundantly clear that this woman had excellent taste, and a more contemporary approach. He commented on the art on the wall which she modestly admitted she'd painted herself. She offered him tea or coffee and he gladly accepted the latter. At the far end of the room was a feature in the form of large glass double doors leading onto a terrace. This had been opened wide and the wicker chairs outside looked attractive and welcoming. He was pleased as he preferred sitting in the fresh air.

Renata beckoned him in that direction. They sat down and looked out on the small, but well-loved garden. Signs of Gabriela were dotted around this space, a ball, a skipping rope, other small items, scattered unceremoniously amongst the plant pots and flowers. He liked the mix of family life, where all generations were welcome.

Once she had handed him his coffee, Renata sat down opposite him and smiling, she began to talk.

“By now I am sure you are aware of the wide divide between our people. Personally, I do my best to keep politics out of my life, mainly because my family is sadly divided in its political beliefs, which upsets me greatly. “I am thirty-three years old and I have a brother Iván who is thirty. He has been influenced by our eldest cousin Arturo and, even after the recent attack on Gabriela, he still leans proudly towards España Franquista and their nationalist ideology. I tell you this as I promise you that neither my brother nor my cousin will ever hear of this conversation.”

“My cousin Arturo is older than me. He is the eldest son of my mother’s sister and is fifty four years. My mother was the baby of the family and her sister was ten years older. She had her sons young while my mother lost two babies before me so she was older when I was born, hence our age difference. “Arturo is very right-wing and a supporter of Franco, yet his younger brother Miguel, who is only three years his junior, has completely opposing views. It is Miguel's story that I feel you should hear, but names need to be changed and it must never be made public that this information came from me. I have my husband and Gabriela to consider.”

Will nodded and assured her that their conversation would be confidential and that for his own safety and that of Isabella and her family, confidentiality was equally important to him. Renata sat back in her chair and began to explain.....

“Miguel is a good man with a kind, gentle personality. But he is also passionate. He could never tolerate injustice and even in his school days he abhorred bullies. He fought to some extent during the war, but was young. When he saw the way the dictatorship behaved against innocent people, he was unable to remain silent.

“My brother Iván has disowned him and taken Arturo's side. We do not speak of him within the family, but I love him dearly and understand his views. I may never see him again but this will not stop me caring about him.”

“Miguel has written many letters to me over a long period of time. He wanted me to follow his progress as he knows how much I care. From the moment that the story I am about to tell you ended, I have been in contact with him and I have read his words so many times, I almost feel as if I was there with him, suffering his pain. Now, in happier times, he tells me about his current life and his family. This correspondence has been hard for me to bear as I have largely been forced to keep it to myself. I do talk to my husband, it has also been a relief to talk from time to time with Carmen.

She paused to collect herself....

“My cousin was very vocal soon after the war ended, and although he was not typical of the normal guerrillas who fled to the hills, he was forced to hide in this way. A group of young men like him made their way into the mountains above El Port de la Selva, which he knew well as he and Arturo grew up in that area. I find it incredible that up in the mountain terraces they managed to dig out caves for themselves, using large boulders to roll in front of the entrances. Here they lay low during the day, only daring to come out at night in search of food or other necessities.

Although the weather at this time of year is warm, in the mid-winter it can be extremely cold. His shoes wore out and he and his companions were forced to steal pieces of cloth to wrap around their feet. When he eventually relayed this story to me, he explained that his feet were red-raw during that time. He tells me that he is still limping, as they never properly recovered from the damage.

The group had friends who were sympathizers and, when they were terribly cold these people brought them rugs and sometimes food. They also needed warm clothes which in many cases they were forced to steal. It was always a risk but they had no choice, each time they went closer to civilization, they knew they may be arrested.” By now the distress was clearly visible on her normally calm face and tears were welling up in her eyes, so she halted for a moment to regain her composure. Will felt such sympathy for this kind woman who so desperately wanted to bring her family together. It was clear that she was a diplomat and that if she could get her cousin and his brother to meet halfway, she would. Though obviously this was never going to happen.

Standing up and taking a clean handkerchief from his pocket, he offered it to her. This she gratefully accepted, wiping her eyes and thanking him. His sympathy unleashed more emotion, but eventually she was able to continue. Will returned to his seat to listen.

“Miguel remained in the mountains for three years. During this period he struggled with the lack of food and the extreme discomfort, while enduring each painfully monotonous day. They dreaded the freezing conditions in the winter as these mountains are so close to the snow-peaked Pyrenees. The northern Tramontana wind was unbearable and there were many times he was convinced that today would be his last. Summer, with lack of water and intense heat, could be equally unbearable. They would creep into farms at night, scavenging for food, or for more rags to wrap around their bloodstained feet, hoping to gain some small comfort. They even resorted to eating handfuls of animal food from the troughs, which was sometimes the only much needed sustenance they could find to fill their empty stomachs. It became hard to think about life as it had been before, too painful to handle the memories of happier times.”

She paused for a moment to sip her coffee and then resumed, looking intensely into Will’s eyes.

“Eventually a small group of them made the decision that they must escape. The plan was to find a boat which was leaving the port, then to hide on board. The risk of being caught by the authorities was enormous, but by now Miguel had decided that death may be preferable to life.

One dark night Miguel and three other men made their way to El Port de la Selva. As they looked along the dock they saw a small container ship moored in the harbor, which was clearly being loaded ready for departure. Looking around them, to make sure they were not seen, they made their way up the gangplank, immediately hiding under tarpaulins.

They lay in silence in choosing different positions around the ship, not daring to check where each of their fellow travelers were hidden. The sound of voices could be heard as the ropes were untied, and the small ship began to move out of the port. Suddenly, without warning, a sailor happened to lift the tarpaulin covering one of his friends. Shouts were heard, and more covers were lifted. Miguel knew he had to jump ship. He climbed out from under his tarpaulin and dived into the sea. A shot was heard from the port as a policeman had been alerted by the commotion.”

As she spoke Will could hear the panic in Renata’s voice as if she was there with him willing him to safety, she continued.....

“Miguel didn't look around for his companions, all he could do was to swim to safety and think only of himself, hoping to reach the shore alive. He avoided the port and swam towards the nearby beach. The sea was icy cold, but he hardly felt it, as he drove his body through the waves in his desperate endeavor to reach safety. “When he found himself in shallow waters he looked back, but could see no sign of the others. So he made his way back up the mountain, shivering with the biting cold, here he was met by the group of men who had stayed behind. They wrapped him in blankets and he made it through the cold night. The next day one of his companions returned but they never heard what happened to the other two. Were they shot? Or did they drown? They would never know.”

She paused again to regain her composure and then she continued. “Some people would have considered this one attempt enough. But nothing was going to deter Miguel from his decision to leave his abominable hiding place, so a week later he and two others decided to try again. This time they were more familiar with the lay out of the port and felt more confident. They found a slightly

larger cargo ship, with absolutely no idea where it may be bound. As far away from this place was the only wish they all had.

Once aboard they managed to hide much deeper in the mass of containers that were stored under the tarpaulins. He was shaking with anticipation and fear, as the ship began its voyage out of the port. No voices were heard coming close, all was calm and still. It was a long and tedious journey. He was thirsty, cold and miserable and every bone in his body was aching. However, he kept on reminding himself that this was nothing compared to the three terrible years in the mountains. The thought of freedom beckoning him, lifted his otherwise tattered spirits. “The crossing took three days and still he had no idea where his destination might be. He was close to sickness a couple of times, but although the nausea was intense, he was not physically sick due to the fact that his stomach was empty and for that he was grateful. Lying in his own vomit was not something he would have relished.

At last, he realized they must be arriving in a port and this was going to be the final test. To disembark without being seen was not going to be easy, he could hear the familiar sounds of port life. The jangling of chains and the voices of men. Miguel pulled himself into a position to make his escape as easy as possible. As voices on deck trailed away into the distance he made the decision to run. Just then he heard shouting and realized that his companions had come up with the same idea and they had been spotted. Should he lie low or should he risk capture?

He decided to take the gamble, if they were concentrating on the others he may have a better chance. He edged his way out of cover and was now surveying a busy port. He crawled along the

deck and found a rope ladder hanging off the side of the ship and started to climb down. He had nearly reached the ground when he heard a shout. He had been seen, but by this time he was already on the jetty, so all he could do was run towards the nearest gap in a wall. Shaking with fear, he hid in a doorway until he could be certain that he had not been followed.

He was not too sure if there were police around the port, but if there were he seemed to have avoided them. He was receiving strange looks and realized what a sight he must be. Dressed in rags with no shoes on his feet, he looked in a terrible state. An old man was sitting on a low stone wall. He beckoned to Miguel, who, to his relief, realized the man was speaking Italian. He couldn't speak it himself but with his knowledge of Spanish, Catalan and French, he could understand. The man asked him if he needed help. Tears of happiness came tumbling from him as he knelt in front of the kind face, "si señor, por favor."

The old man stood up and beckoned him to follow. He had realized immediately what this young man had endured. It turned out that Luigi had been a local fisherman all his life and he knew only too well what was going on in Spain. Between them they managed to converse. They arrived at an old stone cottage and Luigi beckoned him inside."

At this point, Renata looked at Will and smiled, with grateful relief written on her face. "Luigi welcomed Miguel into his home and his life. In turn Miguel helped him on his boat, undertaking the heavier work that the elderly man found more difficult. He discovered that the port he had arrived in was Livorno, one of Italy's most active ports. There was no shortage of work and it didn't take long for Miguel to add Italian to his other languages.

Since then he has met a lady and fallen in love. They married and now have two children. His only regret is that he can never return here. I stay in touch with him but I never tell my brother or my cousin as they would not forgive me. Poor Miguel still limps a little, as his damaged feet never made a full recovery, but at least now he is settled and Luigi became a father to him. He misses his home but he has adjusted well.”

At this point she stood up and lit a cigarette, offering one to Will who accepted. This was a truly inspirational story. As she had talked he had made notes, so he knew that it would make a very moving and heartfelt editorial. Frank was going to be bowled over by this one. “Please wish your cousin well from me. To think these things are happening and we are oblivious to them. Even sadder is the terrible division between families. Thank you for sharing Miguel's life experience with me.”

She smiled now and the emotion of what she had shared was clearly visible on her face. However the sense of relief for opening her heart to such an understanding third party seemed to have relaxed her. She had been keeping these emotions inside for a very long time.

Will stood up now and she escorted him through the hallway. He turned on the doorstep. “I promise you,” he said with deep sincerity, “Nobody will ever know that it was you who told me this.”

“I know that, I know that I can trust you. I am so glad that Carmen suggested this. I needed to share the story just as much as you needed to hear it.”

Will walked slowly down the street, tossing his thoughts around in his head, imagining how he could write this. Other tales had touched him but this was one which affected so many people. Not only had Miguel been badly hurt by his ordeal, but Renata was suffering the loss of a cousin along with her own family conflict. Then there was the family of Miguel who were unable to have any contact with their relatives in Spain.

He turned down the street leading to El Berganti and saw Isabella outside the restaurant talking to a man at a table. As he walked closer he realized it was Iván who stood to greet him with a friendly, powerful embrace. At this moment Will welcomed the openness that this uncomplicated gesture offered. To feel strong arms around him was good, he told Iván to thank his friend for recommending the fish restaurant. Just then the heavens opened and the impending storm unleashed its flood gates. They grabbed any items that could be damaged outside and ran into the dry bar. Will was glad he'd had the forethought to close the roof of his car earlier.

The torrential rain that ensued seemed to highlight the story that he had just heard and the discomfort of the young Miguel. It was hard to imagine the conditions he had lived in for three agonizing years.

Chapter 28

As the storm was so intense, Isabella suggested they have lunch together and let the rain take its course. She mentioned that she needed to go to Figueres that afternoon. Carlos had asked her to meet a young man for a job interview in his other restaurant.

Carlos came up to them at the table as they ate. He clarified with his daughter that he completely trusted her opinion as she knew his business well. He was confident that she understood what he was searching for in a manager. He sat with them for a few minutes until Carmen, who had left the chef in the kitchen, also came out to see them. She was pleased to catch up with Will as she was aware that Renata had been talking to him.

Will assured her that the graphic account Renata had relayed to him would undoubtedly shock readers, being so far removed from the experiences of typical people leading normal lives in America, Britain, or the world in general. As usual, when he'd been told a harrowing story, he wasn't yet ready to talk about it in too much detail.

Isabella went with her mother to collect the paperwork that was required for the interview and Carlos and Will continued to talk. "You must have been surprised by the terrible story you have just been given." Carlos commented, "I admire you so much, in my youth I had political aspirations and I tried to make a difference locally, but due to the politics here, I knew that it was an upward struggle. I care about my local community but sadly my own views will never be that of our leader." Will appreciated this support. His respect for Isabella's father continued to grow. He was certainly

in no mood for his own company in the apartment now. He suggested to Isabella that he could drive her to Figueres which would then allow them to spend some quality time together after the meeting, with a chance to look around the town.

By the time they had finished their lunch, the rain was abating, so they quickly made their way to the car. The journey to Figueres was pleasant and he always enjoyed the scenery. Due to the fact that he was more familiar with one side of town than the other, he parked close to Hotel Duran and then they made their way on foot past La Rambla to the restaurant.

Toni, the current manager, welcomed them at the door. He had been running the business for a number of years but had recently explained to Carlos that as his wife was unwell he needed to spend more time at home to look after her. However, he was very happy to remain a little longer to help a new manager become familiar with the workings of the restaurant.

This was the first time Will had been to Carlos's other restaurant and he was impressed. It was a little larger than El Berganti in Roses and he wondered why Carlos didn't spend more of his time here. Isabella explained that her mother preferred Roses and had many friends there. For years Toni had managed the restaurant with ease, as if it were his own, so Carlos had been very happy to let him do so. However, now that he was leaving it was imperative to replace him with someone as good, someone he could trust and who would take full responsibility.

Isabella suggested to Will that he should stay for the interview, as she was interested in his opinion. “Until recently I think Papa would have asked me to take over, but he knows my mind is on other things now,” she gave him a sidelong look and a cheeky grin. Will felt a little responsible. “Oh no! So I came along and rocked the boat in every direction.” She grinned sheepishly, “Yes cariño, you could say that!”

The potential candidate arrived on time. He was smartly dressed and Will liked his open smile. Bernard, who was half French, was 37 years of age and had been working at his father’s restaurant in another part of town. He wanted a chance to prove himself independently, he was very enthusiastic. Will liked him but kept quiet as this was Isabella's department.

He was very impressed by Isabella's businesslike approach - asking many in-depth questions and staying very much in control throughout the entire meeting. Once again he was seeing yet another side of this multi-faceted woman. She never ceased to excite and amaze him. Her strength and modern approach was so unique and he instinctively knew that she was the right woman to grow old by his side and be part of anything they decided to do together.

Bernard was confident, without being in any way arrogant. He explained that his father's restaurant would be inherited by his older brother and that, currently, he was not in a position to afford his own business. He was keen to develop some managerial experience and fully intended to run the restaurant as if it was his own. This was exactly what Isabella wanted to hear.

Bernard asked her if he came up with any fresh or innovative ideas, would the family be interested in his proposals? Isabella explained that this was exactly the attitude they were looking for from a manager. She explained that they were keen to see the business develop and grow to its full potential and that any fresh approach was exactly what they were hoping to find. She told him that initially the family would oversee his work but once he was familiar with the way they wanted the restaurant to be run, they would give him more responsibility. Bernard looked truly excited by this.

Isabella offered him the position on the spot. Will knew that Carlos had given her carte blanche, but he was impressed by her confidence and determination.

She turned to Will after Bernard had left. “What did you think?” She looked at him, now clearly open to his views. “I think that he was the right man, young, enthusiastic, he had plenty of ideas and with the added knowledge of the restaurant business.” He sighed, “It makes my meeting with Renata today seem all the more poignant. Her cousin had such a hard time, yet this young man has all that opportunity mapped out in front of him.”

She showed him around the restaurant and introduced him to the staff. For different reasons, none of them had wished to take over as manager from Toni, but they welcomed the changes that new blood might bring. Bernard was set to start after the weekend and Isabella would spend his first day with him. She looked so beautiful, her confidence seemed to shine, it was clear that everybody with whom she came into contact was inspired by her.

They said goodbye to Toni and walked to La Rambla and sat in a bar on the tree-lined shady street. Figueres was not a large town but the buildings were of a grander style than those in Roses. It featured a more elegant style of architecture and it was clear that there had been money here over many years.

Isabella chose a gin and tonic and he opted for a cooling beer. They sat close, leaning against each other, it was yet another of those special moments which they loved so much. The time they spent together was precious and they were enjoying being somewhere different. Will could not ignore the fact that here in Figueres there was no chance of being spied upon by Antonio or his friends, giving them an even greater sense of wellbeing.

He was ready to talk now about the morning's meeting, so he relayed to her the life of Miguel which had unfolded earlier. She digested every part of the sad story, empathizing with Renata and the dreadful position in which she now found herself.

The storm had now cleared the air. As they sat on La Rambla enjoying the rays from the early evening sun and a fresh gentle breeze cooling their skin, it was the perfect time to totally unwind.

They were in no rush and took a pleasant walk through the streets, savoring the smell of delicious food, listening to people happily chatting outside the cafés, The majestic ochre color of the stone buildings was beautiful to look at. Shops were still open and people were enjoying the buzz of this favorite time of the day.

Before they drove back she asked if she could stay the night with him. He had wanted her to stay and so was pleased that she'd asked him. They took the road back into the center of Roses so that she could grab a change of clothes for the morning. He would resume his writing the next day, eager to put this latest revelation on paper before it lost its intensity and depth.

When they arrived in Canyelles there seemed to be a great deal of activity at one of the seafront bars. They stopped to see what was happening and were informed that the famous flamenco dancer 'La Greca' would be performing tonight. Will suggested that they had tapas there this evening to watch the show and Isabella enthusiastically agreed, telling him that she had seen this dancer once before and that in her opinion, she was superb, one of the best.

First they went to the apartment to put Isabella's bag inside and have a quick wash before wandering down to the seafront to find a table. There were a number of people already at the bar so they were both very relieved to see that one table was still available, as they thought that they may be too late. Others were not so lucky and were forced to take their drinks outside and sit on the wall which surrounded the restaurant.

Daylight was fading and the lighting dotted around the bar and terrace was looking really pretty. The musicians were already in position, drinking beer, and chatting with each other and with the landlord.

The arrival of La Greca herself was met with rapturous applause. She was stunning and so unusual compared to typical flamenco dancers, as her costume was completely different. She was clearly of gypsy origin and her black eyes looked menacingly at the musicians and the other male customers. Even as she walked onto the stage her head was tilted sideways with a flirtatious air. Her dress, if you could call it that, consisted of a black bodice with a skirt full of multi-colored ribbon, not typical of a normal flamenco dress.

She danced slowly and deliberately at first, building up the momentum, but as the wailing of the singer who accompanied her grew in force and clapping of the hands intensified, she twisted and turned and then took off like a bird. Her pace was quite incredible and she drove her feet into a rapid crescendo on the wooden stage and with her hands effortlessly working her castanets in perfect time with the beat. The audience responded with shouts of “Bravo” and “Olé”. She was now swirling round and round so that the skirt of ribbons became a rich medley of sweeping colors.

Will was mesmerized by this woman. With her power over her art and her control in every subtle movement choreographed to the nth degree, she was utterly consuming. She danced one dance after another until after a short break she returned in a classic red dress with a train, accompanied by a handsome male dancer dressed in a white shirt with tight black trousers, a waistcoat and the traditional black hat. The pair continued to tantalize the enraptured audience.

Will and Isabella hardly noticed their delicious tapas, or the cooling fruit-filled Sagria. Will realized why La Greca was so famous, he was certain he would not see another dancer of her calibre for a very long time, maybe never!

Afterwards on the way up the hill to the apartment, Isabella explained that Flamenco was of course of Spanish origin and that the classic dance of this region was banned, which he already knew. She admitted that she did love watching Flamenco, but that it grated a little due to its origins. They both showered, poured two glasses of water and made their way to the bedroom. She sat on the bed with her legs crossed, looking into his eyes, he knelt on the bed in front of her holding her chin in his cupped hands and kissing her deeply. Her mouth opened and he felt her tongue touch his, electricity seemed to pass erotically through his body.

Now every time they made love it seemed to offer something new. They were so natural together, so united, and it showed in every sweet passionate moment they spent alone. After everything that had happened that day it was so wonderful to delve even deeper into this love that had no end. He was now really looking forward to having and holding this perfect woman in his arms forever.

Chapter 29

A week later in the early afternoon, Will was sitting on a small wall by the seafront at Canyelles bay. He wasn't absolutely sure what time Maddy would arrive but had worked out that it should be imminent. The family would be coming by car, they had stayed overnight in France, as the journey from Saint Martin would have been too far to travel in one day, especially with his little nieces to consider.

As he sat waiting, he smiled to himself in contentment, this was such a wonderful treat, his close relationship with his sister had become stronger over the years. When they were young the age gap had been more pronounced, but as they grew older it had become insignificant.

The thought of settling permanently in Europe was becoming more and more appealing to him, he was now quite sure that he would feel the same even if Isabella hadn't walked into his life. He wanted so much to be able to visit Maddy and watch her little family grow. He was now imagining himself with a family of his own and suddenly, sharing precious moments with Maddy felt so much more important.

He glanced down at his watch. It was now just coming up to three-thirty. Just then a familiar car came gliding round the bend. His heart leaped when he realized that it was them. Maddy was leaning out of the passenger window, calling his name. "Will, hey Willy!" She called at him as the car drew up in front of him. He saw Jean-Luc's smiling face and heard the shouts of excitement of his two small nieces.

They all jumped out of the car and Maddy flung her arms around him, hugging him so hard he felt as if she was going to squeeze the life out of him. Then individually, he lifted Odette and Angelique off the ground and swung them around to the sound of their squeals of pleasure. He put his arm around his brother-in-law's shoulders. "How was the drive JL?" Jean-Luc looked relieved to be there. "Not bad, a few slow points but generally good. But it's certainly is great to stop." "What an idyllic place." Maddy looked across the bay, "you must just love living here". Will looked at the scene as if with fresh eyes. "Yeah, it's fabulous, but to be honest I think it will be far too quiet here in the winter. When Isabella and I get together as I now know we will, this won't be the right place to set up home. Actually, even if she wasn't part of my life I'd choose a less secluded location for a permanent residence. You're right though, at this time of the year it's idyllic."

They all clambered back into the car, Maddy squeezed in the back seat with the girls and Will joined Jean-Luc in the front so that he could direct them to their apartment. It was situated on the other side of Señor Deulofeu's bar, so only a few streets higher up the hill than Will. That gave them a stunning view of the bay. After they climbed the steps and let themselves in, they all stood on the terrace and surveyed the vista and were duly impressed with what they saw.

The two girls ran happily around, finding their room with two single beds. Maddy and Jean-Luc were on the other side with a stunning sea-view visible from their bedroom window. Will had popped in before and put a few essentials into the fridge. Milk, bread, eggs, cheese and wine and of course juice for the girls. He had visited the local font earlier in the day to fill a bottle with natural mineral water. This was always a novelty for him, such a traditional system to acquire fresh mineral water straight from the source. All it consisted of was a pipe poking out of the rocks, with a

continuous flow of fresh running water. He had booked a good local restaurant for dinner and Isabella had agreed to join them. For the rest of the afternoon, it was very apparent that all the girls had in mind was to swim in the sea. So after they unpacked, Will went home for his swimming trunks and they headed for the beach. Angelique and Odette spent most of the time in the water. After their long journey, they were so happy to be having fun splashing about in the warm, clear, salty Mediterranean.

The adults sat together watching them, pleased, for the most part, to catch up on the latest news. Will filled Maddy in a little, with what was going on, explaining his issues with Antonio and how happy he was with Isabella. Once again Maddy showed her concern. She could see that he was getting serious with Isabella but the local issues were a worry. She even suggested that maybe he should go back with them to France for a while, to let the dust settle. Will knew that he just couldn't leave Isabella, his relationship with her had gone too far for that. Maddy could see that her brother was besotted, she knew what he was like and that she would never be able to change his mind. The fact was that she had never seen Will like this before, she was certain this lady was going to be the woman for him.

Eventually, they coaxed the children out of the sea and made their way back to the apartment to shower and get ready for the evening ahead. They agreed to meet up just before six for an aperitif at the bar. Then they would meet Isabella later. He had picked a beautiful old restaurant, similar to the one he had eaten at when he had lunch with Sofia.

Señor Deulofeu was delighted to meet his new guests and Will's sister made an immediate impression on him. Her friendly, vivacious personality appealed to him and she and Jean-Luc were soon chatting to him in French. He explained to Will that due to the close proximity to France, French was the language taught in the schools here. Turning to Maddy he said that if she spoke in French most people here would understand, whereas English speakers weren't quite so common. They said goodbye to Señor Deulofeu and drove to the restaurant. Sure enough Isabella was waiting there when they arrived. Kissing Will first, she turned to Maddy and Jean-Luc and kissed them on the cheeks, saying how pleased she was to at last meet William's family. His small nieces took to her straight away and giggled shyly as she made their acquaintance.

They were seated at a round table in the restaurant and the conversation was relaxed and flowing. The easy rapport between Maddy and Isabella was immediately apparent, this didn't surprise Will as he'd been confident that the two women would find common ground very quickly. It was as if they had known each other all their lives.

The conversation soon turned to their growing relationship. Will was slightly surprised when Isabella quite openly told Maddy that she had never had such strong feelings for anyone else. She explained how she had been engaged to Antonio but, with the help and advice of her aunt, she had realized just in time that she was not in love with him. She continued to explain that Antonio had not taken this rejection well, his aggressive behavior had cast a shadow on her new and blossoming relationship with William.

Will was touched at how openly she discussed her feelings with his sister. She wanted to have a good friendship with Maddy and on top of everything else, this meant so much to him. If the two most important women in his life were good friends he could ask for nothing more. It was the same as his strong bond with Jean-Luc which he knew meant so much to Maddy. He suddenly concluded that he wanted to ask Isabella to be his wife, he was never going to meet another like her. As he looked at her tonight, he recognized the depth of his feelings. She understood him and he felt he could offer her the love she needed too, as he watched her talking to Maddy he was made aware how deeply he was feeling. Even if they were engaged, there was no rush to marry, they had time for that.

Tonight was a night for happiness and they all avoided politics, it was best left for another day. Will knew that Maddy was not going to let her concerns drop, but even she was well aware that tonight was a time for celebration and becoming better acquainted with his new girlfriend.

The food was everything he'd hoped for and more. Knowing that Jean-Luc and Maddy were used to good French food he had chosen the restaurant carefully, so it needed to be good. He had been given the name by Fernando and so he was confident that his sophisticated new friend would have good taste in cuisine. Fernando was unlikely to recommend anywhere that was not of a high standard. Angelique and Odette were a credit to Maddy, they behaved so beautifully and Isabella commented on this too. It helped that she was so great with kids, he noticed how she involved them in conversation, which definitely helped to stop them getting bored. She asked the waiter for paper and a pencil and from time to time drew them funny pictures, she was definitely already playing the role of the aunt that they didn't yet have.

When dinner was over they all said goodbye. Isabella would have invited them to El Berganti for a final drink, but she knew that the girls were now very tired and needed their beds. It was agreed that they would visit the family restaurant the next day for lunch. Will was looking forward to introducing Maddy and her family to Carlos and Carmen, he was confident that it would go as well as tonight.

They drove back to Canyelles in good spirit. Maddy was very sincere with her feelings regarding Isabella, telling Will that she really hoped that their new romance would blossom, and that a sister in law like Isabella would be perfect for her. She liked Isabella's easy rapport, also seeing how well suited she was for her brother.

He dropped them off at their apartment and turned down the road to park outside his place. He felt more relaxed than he had done for weeks. This time spent with his sister was going to be perfect. He also felt that outwardly he would come across to locals as a tourist again and maybe take the spying eyes off him for at least a week. He could really do with a break from the strain he had been feeling caused by Antonio and his friends.

With a whisky in his hand he headed for his terrace, loving the peace of the evening. The odd bat could be seen fluttering in and out of the trees and buildings, then there was the loud echo of the crickets which could be heard in every corner of the gardens below, it was really quite musical. How he had grown to love this place and this delicious atmosphere, he felt truly at home and so at peace. Even with the underlying threat that Antonio and his political friends seemed to pose, nothing appeared to matter right now. He started to plan his next move, to ask Isabella to be his

wife, he felt sure now that a proposal should take place during his sister's visit, so they could all celebrate together.

Maddy had indicated that she was keen to see as much of the area as possible, so Will planned a trip to Figueres, so this could be combined with a visit to a jewelry shop. It would be easier to find a good ring there. He felt excited. Leaning back he sighed with contentment. If Antonio eventually left him alone life here with his own family would be completely perfect.

In the apartment up the road, two excited little girls were getting ready for bed. It was late and they were tired but so pleased to be by the sea. "No story tonight girls, it's too late and we have a lot to do tomorrow." Maddy tucked them in and kissed them, then Jean-Luc popped his head around the door and came into the room to kiss them as well.

The two adults made their way to their terrace and sat together, soaking up the warm night air.

Maddy broke the silence. "I know he's hooked on this place and I can see why, I can also see why he's falling for Isabella, she's adorable. But I can't help worrying about all the other problems here. I still don't think he's understood how serious this could be."

Jean-Luc nodded and lit a cigarette, "At least we're closer, if he has a problem maybe

he can come to us for a while. He may change his mind when winter comes, it's not hot here then like the south of Spain."

Maddy looked at him seriously, “Jean-Luc, I know that won’t happen, well, maybe if Isabella comes too. I’ve never seen him act like this over any woman, he’s falling seriously in love, did you see the way he looked at her?”

Jean-Luc smiled “Honey can you blame him? Not only is she very attractive but she seems to be a genuinely sweet person. If you weren’t on the scene, I’d take a look at her myself. I think he’s found someone who is a lot like you, not in looks of course, but I can see she had your strong character. She’s a thinker, plus she obviously loves him, what man wouldn’t fall for that?” “Of course she’s lovely, there’s no denying that, but I kinda wish he hadn’t met her. That sounds awful even though I really like her and I think she and I will be good friends.” Maddy looked at him. “I love having him closer but he’d be safer back in the States.”

Jean-Luc moved towards her and put his arm around her shoulders. “You know it doesn’t work like that, would we have taken notice of politics, or anything else for that matter, had it stood in our way when we fell in love? They are in their own world, they’re ecstatically happy and that’s all they’re thinking about right now.” “Yeah I know,” said Maddy “but I reckon all this love is clouding his judgment. If what he’s told us is true, there is a great deal more to come and I just wonder if he’s ready for it.”

After breakfast the next morning, they met up with Will. For their first full day their plan was to lunch with the family. They all squeezed into Will's car and headed off to Roses. Parking at the seafront, Will took them for a walk along the promenade where they could watch the small boats moored in the bay and mix with people taking a similar stroll.

Will excused himself for a moment and crossed the road to the tabac to buy a packet of cigarettes. As he came out, Odette spotted him from the other side of the street and without thinking, darted out into the road to meet him. At the same time, a man was also crossing the street and, seeing that a donkey and cart was about to hit her, he quickly gathered her up in his arms to pull her from danger. As he turned around Will drew in a deep breath, who should it be but Antonio! His nemesis walked deliberately towards him, still holding Odette in his arms. He smiled unpleasantly a twist of the mouth and deep hatred in his eyes. "You should take greater care of your possessions," he commented, "you can never tell who might take them." Then he handed the little girl over to Will with more of a leer than a smile.

Will knew he should thank Antonio, but it was not an easy moment. The words were almost stuck in his throat. As Antonio passed the child to him, he felt him pull her back just for a second. It was so subtle that it could have been missed, but Will knew that it was a warning. He grabbed Odette and hurried back to her mother, who was now looking upset, but relieved.

He explained to Maddy who the man was, she saw straight away how much the incident had affected her brother. Will omitted to mention Antonio's words, or the subtle action that he'd observed, these needed to be kept to himself. He certainly didn't want Maddy to be anymore concerned than she already was.

After Maddy had knelt down to her small daughter, telling her how dangerous this incident could have been, she took her firmly by the hand and they made their way to El Berganti to meet the

family. Isabella welcomed them in and explained that Carlos, Carmen and Pepe would join them for lunch in the inner terrace. It was helpful that the family spoke French as everyone found it so much easier to communicate.

When they had a chance to speak quietly together, out of earshot of the others, Will explained to Isabella about the incident with Antonio and the words and actions he'd used. He told her how he wanted to make light of it with Maddy as she was already so worried for his safety, Isabella agreed to keep it to herself. She had asked her father if, during Maddy's visit, she could do less at the restaurant so that she could enjoy as much time as possible with William's family, Carlos had been only too happy to oblige.

Sofia had telephoned to arrange a lunch at the hotel the next day and was pleased when they reminded her that small children would be there. She made it clear that it would be good for the hotel to ring with the chattering of children's voices.

There were a few clouds in the sky the next morning, though the temperature was still warm, it would be comfortable in the car with the roof down, which pleased the children as it was a novelty for them.

Maddy put Odette on her lap in the back of the car, as she knew that when they arrived in Roses Isabella could sit in the back with her and the children, this way Jean-Luc could stretch his legs. Once Isabella joined them, they settled down for the drive to Cadaques.

Will took the drive slowly as he was aware that the winding road may bring on car-sickness. The two girls were happy looking out of the back. Angelique knelt on the seat waved at any vehicles which came up behind. Somehow with the whole family talking merrily with excitement, Will noticed that the journey seemed to take less time than usual.

As they drew into Cadaques, Maddy and Jean-Luc were genuinely impressed by the charming white village which lay before them. Will suggested that they all take a walk along the promenade first, before driving to the hotel, as this village was a gem and in case they didn't make the journey again, it was too good for them to miss. They made their way into the village and who should come out if a nearby bakery but Anna Maria. She was so pleased to see them and to welcome Will's sister to the area, telling Maddy that she certainly hoped to see them again before they went back to France.

Will explained to the couple who she was as they walked away and Maddy was fascinated. "So what's her brother like?" She said. "Well, apart from saying hello to him, I don't know him, but I believe he has opposing political beliefs to Anna Maria. I saw him first at Hotel Duran in Figueres, he certainly likes attention, a very flamboyant character. When I met Anna Maria first at the hotel it was very clear that they're not particularly close. He seems a bit crazy, but that's only what I've been told." At that point Isabella joined the conversation. "My aunt is not one to exaggerate, she says this too, so I am pretty confident it would be true."

Arriving at the hotel, Maddy was impressed with what she saw. As they made their way up the steps to the cool reception area, a man hurried past them and down to his car. They all noted that he

looked angry and Will commented that this was unusual as most people who visited the hotel seemed relaxed and happy.

Sylvie welcomed them, smiling broadly as usual and walked with them to Sofia's apartment, knocking gently on the door, which was thrown open almost immediately. "Oh I am so glad its you, for a moment I thought it was Gael returning." Isabella replied, "Is he the angry looking gentlemen we saw leaving?" Sofia grimaced, "Unfortunately yes, he is the brother of my late husband Rafa, I just refused a reception he wanted to host. With a group of very political right wing associates, as you know I try to keep politics out of my business, but in this case I just had to draw the line, I am familiar with most of them and I don't find them easy." She turned apologetically to Maddy and Jean-Luc. "I am so sorry, how rude of me. It is so lovely to meet you all. William has told me so much about you. This is an extra treat for me, as it gives me time with my darling niece as well." Isabella hugged her tightly and kissed her with such tenderness that it was immediately clear to Maddy how very close these two ladies were. It was more like mother and daughter relationship than aunt and niece. Maddy took to Sofia's simple elegance immediately, she now understood completely why Will held her in such high regard.

"Come in, come in," she beckoned them into the room. "Make yourselves at home." She pointed to the French doors and the stone steps which led down onto the lawn, turning to the children she said, "If you go in and out of that door, you can run around in the garden whenever you like. Would you like a drink, maybe orange juice before you go and look around?" Angelique piped up, "Can we take a look first and come back for a drink?" "Of course," smiled Sofia and the two small girls were off as fast as they could run.

“And now, more importantly, what about the grown up’s?” She opened the impressive drinks cabinet and she and Madeline decided on gin and tonic, while the men chose whisky, Isabella had a glass of rosado wine. They returned to the terrace to talk and to keep an eye on the happy laughing children in the garden.

When the children had worn themselves out, they came in for the promised orange juice and then they all made their way to the dining room. As usual the food was excellent. The two little girls were very impressed when smaller plates appeared for them with just the right amount of food on and all their favorite things, Sofia had left nothing to chance, as usual, she was the perfect hostess. The conversation came back to Rafa’s brother, Sofia explained that just like her first husband, his brother Gael had the same rather unpleasant streak which appeared to run in the family. Gael was older than Rafa by five years, he was a member of the National Movement which had developed from the right-wing Falange. Gael was a town councilor, Sofia knew it was a mistake to offend him as he had friends in important positions. Even when she had refused his recent request for a meeting at the hotel, she had been careful not to make her political feelings too obvious. She had used the forthcoming Dali wedding as an excuse. She was well aware that he could create problems for her in the future, which she could ill afford. She knew, however, that her refusal may be seen as a direct political statement, unspoken but still blatantly obvious.

Jean-Luc asked Sofia whether she believed that the current political situation would continue. She told him that sadly she believed it would. She explained that her friends like Marie Ángeles in L’Escala were few and far between, in general the elite and the rich supported the regime. The less

influential people who regarded Franco as a tyrant were never heard, this is why the government needs to continue to suppress them.

They could see that the children were restless. Lunch had taken a while and they had behaved so well, so Sofia suggested that they all visit the village and have coffee there. They agreed, so Sofia took Isabella in her car, normally she used her chauffeur but he was away for the day. “You can drive Isabella,” she had laughed. They drove in convoy and parked close to each other.

When they arrived at the port, they walked a different direction than usual. A fisherman was as usual arranging his nets ready for a night fish. The children were fascinated and went down to the beach to watch him, so the adults found a nearby café and ordered coffee. “This makes such a pleasant change for me, I spend far too much of my time at the hotel, I need to do this more often.” Sofia was looking relaxed and she was enjoying the company of her beloved niece.

The two little girls were now chatting to the fisherman in French and helping him to spread his nets out on the stony beach. Will held Isabella’s hand and watched them with pleasure. Maybe one day they would see their own family, playing in a similar way in the years to come. She was thinking about this, slightly nervous to be considering such a situation. She now knew that she wanted this man, she hoped that he felt the same way. She was so in love with him, but didn’t dare say it in case she frightened him off. Little did she realize that at that very moment he was trying to decide the right way to propose to her during Maddy’s visit. He knew that he needed to get it right.

Sofia looked at the couple with warmth, she could see how well suited they were to each other. It was obvious to her that Isabella was in love and she just hoped that Will felt the same way. She was absolutely sure that Isabella was ready for a commitment. It may be early days but in these uncertain times, waiting was surely a mistake, life must be grabbed, none of them knew what was around the next corner.

The family were in no rush to go, the children were happy and the adults were really enjoying getting to know each other. Isabella was loving Maddy's easy-going manner. She had been nervous at the prospect of meeting Will's sister, but now, already, they were communicating as if they had been friends for years. Maddy was not a typical American, France had changed her, she understood the cultural differences and seemed to blend into the atmosphere here, like a neatly fitting glove. At the same time Maddy was thinking the same, she was so relieved that her brother had chosen this lovely woman. She too was surprised but pleased with the rapport between them and equally with her family.

Although Maddy had loved meeting Carmen, Sofia was very special, she now understood why Will had bonded with her. Losing their own mother had been tough and Will had been so close to her, but this woman had many similarities to their beloved mother. Her easy conversation, her strong views, all this reminded Maddy of her Mom and she too felt at home here. She was beginning to understand that it was not just his fascination for Isabella but his deep need to stabilize himself and put down roots. She had already done that in France, he'd not found it in San Francisco, but here, now she could see that this was different.

Later on they paid the bill, called the two little girls and made their way back to the hotel. Where they said goodbye to Sofia as Isabella climbed back into Will's car. The children waved goodbye to her as the car drew out of the gate to head back to Roses.

That evening Isabella planned to stay the night with Will. Somehow seeing him with his sister and his nieces, her view of him had not only grown but changed. It had allowed her into a part of his life that up to now had been hidden and unnoticed. Before she had seen a good journalist, a kind man and a lover. Today that had grown, now he was a family man with the depth that every woman wants in the father of her children. Now she knew that he would do anything for his family, he would cherish and protect her and their children. She had heard other men on the birth of their first child, say 'Now I can die happy.' She was sure Will would be one of those men, he would certainly not fight fatherhood.

When they were finally alone the first embrace came from her, in a way even Will least expected. She held his face in her hands and kissed him tenderly. She looked into his eyes and he felt a longing for her that was so intense, that it even surprised him. As their tongues met and she explored his mouth with a depth that he had never felt from her before, he found it hard to control the urge of passion that was welling up in him right now.

She took his hand and walked him to the bedroom with a determination that again, he wasn't expecting. This time it was she who slowly undressed him and his yearning for her became even more intense. She seemed to be controlling the mood, he was being driven at her pace, not his and it was the deepest passion he'd felt. He was waiting for her to make each move and it was so deep and

so purposeful that he felt like he was under her spell. Eventually the mood changed and she allowed him to take back a modicum of control. He could not hold on, as he found her irresistible and he wanted to be as one together. She pulled him closer with urgency and they felt that magnificent bonding of two bodies and two souls.

Now there were no inhibitions between them and they took it in turns to pleasure the other. He knew that he would never find another woman to love like this. At the very same moment she was thinking that whatever happened she would follow this wonderful man to the ends of the earth.

Chapter 30

The days with Maddy were flying by fast. One afternoon when the men were content to be on the beach with the kids, Maddy and Isabella decided to take a drive to the village of Peralada for a complete change of scenery, Will had told Maddy how pretty it was and she was pleased to have a little time for herself. Isabella drove and they chatted enthusiastically together. Arriving in the village they had parked the car in the old medieval centre.

A few locals were to be seen around, but not many tourists. The ladies sat at a table outside a small café and ordered soft drinks. Isabella broke in first, “I’m glad we are so comfortable together, I was a little worried at the prospect of meeting Will’s sister, especially as he holds you in such high regard.” Maddy smiled and laughed. “The feeling was mutual, I realized a few weeks back that only a special woman would have turned his head in the way you have. Yeah, I was a bit worried, but now I know you, I’m confident that you’ll both make your relationship work. He needs love but he also needs a strong woman and you are all of that.”

Isabella was silent for a few minutes. “I do worry about his work and his writing. I know he is doing a great thing, I believe in it, but in this current political climate, it is also so dangerous. Sometimes I just don’t think he is fully aware of the real danger.”

Maddy nodded in agreement. “Unfortunately when Will gets an idea into his head nothing will budge it. He was even like that when he was a kid, it drove my mom crazy, he’d get an idea in his head and make up his mind that he would achieve whatever it was. If he failed, he’d be so angry, he

was a natural winner, even then. The only problem with that, is he's not willing to admit defeat, even if it's staring him in the face. Isabella if the problems here become more serious don't either of you take any risks, come to France with us, you're always welcome, we have a pretty house in a quiet area. He could write and if it was for a longer period of time, you'd easily find work, the fact you speak French is a bonus." Isabella felt a sense of relief at these words, though she knew her parents would be upset. Knowing there was a safe place to go provided a sense of comfort. "My parents won't be happy, but thank you, it is helpful to have a plan in place, just in case."

They took a walk around the castle of Peralada, it was a magnificent building, built in the fourteenth century. Two ornate circular turrets stood at the forefront of the imposing castle, it was a superb piece of architecture. Maddy was loving the visit. She could imagine how impressive this would be to Americans, she was now used to chateaux in France, but this historic architecture would also give Americans something wonderful to talk about back home. The two ladies were in no rush to go back, so they took their time, the children were safe, and for Maddy, it was a chance to fully relax. When they did eventually make their way back it was good to see how well the two men were doing. The children were in high spirits and Jean-Luc and Will were still completely relaxed, admitting that they'd both been buried in sand during the afternoon.

The next morning while the family were enjoying the beach Will took the opportunity to drive to Figueres in search of a ring. He had suggested to them to join him but they'd decided it would be better to stay put with the children. He knew he would have a better chance to find what he wanted locally. Isabella needed to visit the Figueres restaurant, so he dropped her off there and headed for the centre of town. She had no idea what he was up to, which gave him a good feeling.

The search for a ring was no easy task, he'd been forced to go to a number of jewelry stores before he caught sight of the perfect engagement ring. Platinum was all the rage at the moment and he knew that with that the only sensible choice he could imagine was diamonds. He eventually saw a beautiful diamond ring with a central stone, that sat majestically between clusters of smaller stones. He was by this time in the most expensive shop in Figueres. However, compared to New York or London it was still a good price and for Isabella, nothing but the best was good enough. As he popped the small velvet ring box in his pocket he was becoming truly excited at the prospect of his next move.

That morning, frantically hoping that he would find the right ring that day, he had casually asked Carmen and Carlos if they would be available for a dinner the next evening. Under normal circumstances, he was sure that Carlos may have guessed the reason for this dinner, but with Maddy and Jean-Luc staying, it didn't seem out of the ordinary. Carlos had patted him on the back and assured him that he would find cover for the next evening, as it was the beginning of the week and he was confident they would not be too busy.

Will joined Isabella for lunch at the restaurant as planned, where he received a friendly welcome from Bernard, who now had the operation well under control. The tapas was great and he noted that it was a notch above many of the bars they frequented. The staff seemed happy working with Bernard and Isabella was pleased that she had good news to tell her father.

They left hand in hand and headed to La Rambla for a quick coffee, before making their way to the car to begin their drive back to Roses. Will was finding it hard to suppress his excitement, and

Isabella, who was sensing a slight change in him, commented a few times, he managed to use his sister's visit as the perfect excuse. Stopping off on the way back they took a country walk to stretch their legs and make the most of the precious time that they were having together. They lay down in a secluded field and he was tempted to make love to her there and then, but somehow today it didn't feel right. He wanted to save the final gesture of the day to be the perfect unspoiled moment. So they lay there looking skyward still hand in hand and even that moment for him was special. She sat up and kissed him. The temptation to become more passionate was alluring, but he bravely resisted as he knew that the time was wrong.

The afternoon was drawing to a close when they arrived in town, parked and walked to El Berganti. As they turned a corner they nearly collided with a young woman walking in the opposite direction. She smiled at Isabella and they kissed hello. Then Isabella introduced him to her, her name was Pilar. She was very pretty with bobbed, slightly curly hair and a sweet friendly face. Pilar smiled at Will saying she was so pleased to see Isabella so happy, she watched Will's face change slightly when Isabella explained that Pilar was Antonio's sister. Quickly intervening, Pilar was at pains to make it clear that there was no love lost between her and her brother. He saw this too, as the minute Antonio's name was mentioned a shadow crept over her face and a look of contempt was suddenly etched there. She didn't need to say anything, as it was obvious how she felt about her brother.

As they walked away, Isabella whispered, "Pilar is one of us. Everything about her is different from Antonio, even her politics are opposite to his. We are still good friends, we meet up from time to time, but we have to be careful. If Antonio knew we were still in touch he would be very angry."

Will had made a quick phone call to Sofia the day before explaining his plans in confidence as he knew that she would be discreet. He wanted Sofia's slant on the reaction he may get from Carlos and Carmen. She made it clear that Carmen had already expressed her wishes that the relationship between Will and their daughter would blossom, she was certain that Carlos agreed. This reaction gave him confidence that his preparations would go to plan. He asked Sofia to join them and she happily accepted.

Secretly at this very moment, Isabella was hoping for the very same outcome, though of course, she had no idea of his plans. She was pretty convinced that her parents would be happy, as it was clear that Will was not a ship passing in the night but a long-term partner for their treasured daughter. Although they had not been together long, they were both becoming convinced that their relationship was a good one. They expected challenges when they were living full-time together, but individually they were both pretty sure as to what the future could hold.

Isabella felt safe with Will and yet she also knew that anything she chose to do in the future would be backed and supported by him, which gave her confidence that she could grow emotionally with him. Will adored her with all his heart, he knew that she felt the same way about him. He liked the fact that she was happy to be a traditional woman, but at the same time, she had a spark of self-belief and confidence, if she wanted her own career in the future he would certainly not stop her. It was the same spark her mother and aunt were blessed with. He knew that she was strong and resilient, and could stand the tests that would inevitably come their way during life's ups and downs. She was not to be dominated but she respected him as he did her, in his eyes, theirs was a match made in heaven.

When they arrived back they both found Carlos and Carmen having coffee together. They all sat down and talked about the Figueres business and Isabella relayed what she had seen and Bernard's growing success and Carlos was pleased to hear this. He poured a brandy and offered one to Will, who accepted, knowing that he needed to wait in town until it was darker, as he wanted the perfect atmosphere for his proposal. So they chatted a little more until the sun began to set and the night was upon them once again.

Taking Isabella's hand they headed towards the seafront for a walk along the promenade. The moon was almost full which pleased him even more and it looked so close that they felt like they could almost touch it. They found a bench overlooking the beach and sat down. Then, to Isabella's surprise, William stood, putting his hand in his pocket and to her amazement, he suddenly knelt on one knee in front of her.

He looked deeply into her eyes, "Darling I've been waiting for this time, I know we haven't known each other very long, but will you do me the honor of becoming my wife?"

With that said, he pulled out of his pocket the small, black velvet ring box. Isabella was quite overwhelmed, she had definitely not expected this tonight. Her face colored slightly, and she did her best to remain calm as she opened the box which he had handed to her. Inside she saw the beautiful diamond ring and she gasped with pleasure and delight.

“Guillem, this is so beautiful, it must have cost you a great deal of money. I don't need a ring as expensive as this.” Will was still kneeling in front of her. “No, you don't need it but you do deserve it and I want it on your finger forever, to remind you just how much I love you. You have made me the happiest man ever. Only just a few weeks ago in France, I told my sister I had never met the right woman, but now I know I have. We'll build a life together, I hope we can have children and I will never stop loving you.”

She leaned forward and kissed him. “I want all of that too, I love you Guill.” She kissed him slowly, long and hard. Then he took the ring from her and slipped it gently onto her slender wedding finger. Sofia had given him an idea of her ring-size when they had spoken and he was pleased to see that it fitted like a glove. It looked so perfect.

Now Will stood up and took her in his arms, then kiss again with total, deep, unquestionable love. They knew that they could never again be apart - this was forever.

However, what they didn't see, was that they were being watched from beside a building on the opposite side of the road..... A dark, mysterious, menacing figure followed their every move..... Watching, as Will had knelt down in front of her, then taking in their passionate embrace. With malice and hate imprinted in his dark, deep-set eyes, Antonio Lopez looked on!

The couple continued to embrace, Isabella crying tears of joy. Tightly holding hands, they crossed the main street and followed the small road that would lead them back to El Berganti. Will then

explained his plan for the next day and they agreed not to mention the proposal to her parents until then. She would keep the ring in its box until he had formally asked her father.

As they took this route, they were so close to Antonio that he could have walked out in front of them, but he slipped back into the shadows, hatred written all over his angry, bitter face. With a deep fire of jealousy in his belly, he planned his revenge. Antonio had hated many people in his life, including Sofia, but this man! This man, whom he'd watched taking his Isabella in his arms, he hated him more than any other. He wanted him out of Roses..... out of Spain ...and out of her life, forever!

Chapter 31

Dinner the previous evening had been a resounding success, it couldn't have gone better. If Carlos had refused, Will wasn't too certain what he would have done. Will and Isabella had taken her parents and Sofia, out to a favorite restaurant along with Maddy, Jean-Luc and the children. Will knew that he was expected to formally ask for her father's permission for his daughter's hand so, with Isabella's help, he had learned and rehearsed in Spanish the short speech that he would make. Sofia was delighted this was happening and the anticipation had shown on her face from the moment she arrived. Of course, she had not told Isabella's parents that she already knew the plans.

Having Maddy and her family there as well, meant a great deal to Will. Their presence gave both families an opportunity to become better acquainted and it seemed only right that they had also been included in this special occasion. Although the two young girls hadn't understood what was going on, they were overcome with excitement when Maddy explained that Uncle Will wanted to marry Isabella and they would have a new aunt. It made Will very happy to see the easy-going friendship that was gradually developing between Isabella and his sister.

Without a doubt, Carlos and Carmen had been impressed by Will's efforts and though Carlos had looked concerned, he'd made it clear that although he was worried by the current political dangers, he was certainly sure that Will would make Isabella very happy.

After the dinner Maddy and Jean-Luc went back to their apartment as they needed an early night before their journey back to France. Will and Isabella had taken her parents back home. He had

such mixed feelings. Saying goodbye to his sister wasn't going to be easy, yet knowing that now he and Isabella were looking at a future together, gave him a warm feeling of contentment. The next morning his sister met him at the bottom of the road for a final farewell, Maddy hugged him tightly, before she and the family climbed back into their car. There were tears in her eyes and he couldn't conceal his own. He and Isabella stood close to where he had sat waiting for them only a short time ago. They waved until the car disappeared around the corner. He put his arm around Isabella's shoulder, so relieved that at least he still had her.

Will had decided that having taken a break, he needed to concentrate on work again, so he planned to go to Fernando's house to send some updates to New York. The political threats were still apparent, though for him the threat of Antonio seemed even greater, though really he knew that they were intertwined.

He dropped Isabella off in town, making his way to the house. Fernando had told him that he would be at home and he welcomed Will in and asked if he'd like a beer before he got started. Will accepted gratefully, as it was obvious that Fernando had something on his mind and wanted to talk. They sat together on the terrace, Fernando leaned forward, "William are you sure that you are being discreet?" Will looked startled, "Why do you ask?" he replied uneasily.

This was a strange question, especially as he had been taking a back-seat during Maddy's visit. Fernando sat back in his chair. "Unfortunately you are not the sort of person to stay unnoticed, good looking Americans are in short supply around here, so, unfortunately, everything you do will be

scrutinized. I have heard talk of a proposal of marriage to Isabella, the daughter of Carlos at El Berganti.”

Will was dumbstruck, they had only had dinner the night before with Carlos so he would not have had time to spread the word, how on earth would anyone know? He said as much to Fernando and the other man looked thoughtful. “Did anyone know prior to last night?” “Well, only her aunt and she would never have spoken.” Then he let out an angry sigh, “All I can think of is that we were seen when I gave her the ring two nights ago, on bended knee.” Then it hit him, and his blood ran cold, what if Antonio had seen them? Or one of his friends? What a fool he was to have chosen such a public place when he could have easily given it to her more discreetly, for example, when they stopped in the country earlier. His stupid, romantic, moonlight gesture could have been his downfall.

Fernando continued. “I gather that Isabella’s ex-fiancé Antonio may be causing a problem. His grandfather is a good friend of mine. Antonio mixes with a group of political right-wing supporters, both from within the police and amongst a prominent Franquista group. His grandfather's views oppose the regime, as do mine and there is a distinct rift within their family.” Will grimaced, “Yes I know, Isabella introduced me to his sister Pilar just the other day, she has the same views as you. I’ve never before seen such a look of contempt from a sister towards a brother.”

Fernando was silent for a few minutes. “Will, we all need to be extremely careful, there are eyes and ears in the most unexpected places. I value my safety, as I do yours.” Will was feeling rather uncomfortable as his movements were putting other people at risk. “How do you feel about me

visiting you here?" he asked and Fernando smiled. "I believe in what you are doing. The world needs to hear, but we do need to be vigilant. Never let your guard down. As they say 'walls have ears', so don't behave as you would in your own country. I realize you love it here, but we can never relax where underlying politics is concerned." Will couldn't help remembering again, the same words out of the mouth of Lluís Gironés. 'Walls have ears,' now at last he was beginning to truly understand.

Will made his way to the adjoining office with a heavy heart. He wondered what Isabella would say, she'd probably voice his thoughts, how utterly thoughtless he'd been. He sent a few shorter articles to Frank but knew that his editor wanted more. He'd met a number of local families recently, who had some dramatic tales to tell. Many of the stories he heard were from earlier years, just after the civil war. Some, however, were far more recent, unexplained, and frankly quite worrying incidents.

One story he sent to Frank today was about a woman called Rafaela who he had met through Pepé. She lived locally with her three small children. She had kissed her husband goodbye one morning as normal when he'd set off on the journey to Figueres for supplies. He was a building constructor, so took his lorry and drove away telling her he would be back by the evening. His lorry was found at the side of the road just outside Figueres but he was never seen again. The lack of closure had broken her heart. Her children were all she had, but money was in short supply and she was forced to work unbelievable hours. Her small family saw little of her, luckily she had wider family support and they helped her, but others weren't as fortunate.

He eventually left Fernando, promising him that he would be much more careful. Isabella had told him she was going to visit an old friend so he wandered into town and had a bite to eat at one of the cafés. It was a sunny afternoon and he was enjoying soaking up the whole atmosphere of the place he had grown to love so much, though still a little saddened by the latest revelation.

As he walked along the seafront he heard his name called and recognized Antonio's sister, Pilar. Considering his conversation with Fernando this was very coincidental. She beckoned him over and asked if he had time to join her. Will explained that Isabella was busy, but that he'd love to have a coffee if she had time. He secretly hoped that they wouldn't be seen. However, he could see that she had something on her mind. She began talking immediately. "Isabella tells me that you know what is going on here?" He was a little reticent. Although he realized that she held different political views to her brother, all the same, he felt it was a little close for comfort, so he smiled saying little. As if she read his mind, she continued. "Está Bien. Nothing I say to you, or you say to me, will go back to my brother. I hate the very ground he walks on."

Will could see by her face that she was speaking from the heart. "Even when we were children he was a bully, he would lock me in cupboards, telling me I was his prisoner. I used to ride horses and he would take my riding whip and hit me. Then he would tell me what would happen to me if I cried, or told our parents. I hated him then, and I hate him even more now. I was so glad that Isabella broke up with him - he was not good for her."

Pilar continued. "My brother is tearing our family apart. He has friends in the Guardia. Only the other day they came and arrested my grandfather. My grandmother has eighty-two years, she is

beside herself with grief. I know Antonio is behind it, but I cannot say that to them as it would break my grandmother's heart.”

Will was shocked at this terrible news “Why would he be arrested? Surely he is not a threat to anyone, How old is he?” he asked. “Eighty-six years, if he stays in prison it will kill him, they use his political leanings as an excuse, but really, this is Antonio trying to control and hurt the family.”

Tears welled up in her eyes as she uttered these words, he could imagine how she must be feeling. She continued, “I am sure my mother knows that it is Antonio's doing, but she is in too much fear to say it to his face, she will not even speak to me, she knows how I feel.”

Will sat in silence for a moment then replied, “You probably should not be talking to me. Antonio hates me, if he sees you with me he may become even angrier. I would not like to be the catalyst that puts you in any danger. You have enough to worry about.” “Yes,” she said, “You are right I suppose, but Isabella is so lucky to have found a man like you. I knew that you would understand, I am worried about what he could do to you as well.” Will told her of the recent revelation, how his proposal had been seen by someone, possibly Antonio.

Then he smiled, “Don't you worry about me, I'm sure that I can take care of myself. Your brother has already threatened me, but I have made it clear to him that I am not going anywhere.” Pilar now looked very concerned, Will could see an agonized expression showing in her dark eyes. “Please be careful, you are not in America now. This place can be dangerous, nobody is safe, especially if you

are vocal. The very fact that my brother hates you so much needs to be taken seriously. He is evil!” Will felt the depth of these last words. He paid for their coffees, said goodbye to Pilar, and walked away deep in thought.

This was happening to so many families, brother against brother. Anywhere else it wasn't normal, yet here it was all too normal. The civil war may have ended but there was still a state of conflict within many families, though never to the extent to which Antonio Lopez would stoop. He decided to make a call to Frank. He had the time and he hoped that Frank would be in his office as it was late morning in New York. He just wanted to see if any other inquiries had been made regarding Tom Hook.

His call was well-timed, as Frank sounded relieved to hear his voice. “Hey, Will my boy, glad you called. I think this situation of yours may be hotting up!”

William took a deep breath, “In what way?” He was feeling seriously nervous now. “We had a call yesterday from the Spanish Embassy. They've been tipped off by somebody who believes that Tom Hook is in the Costa Brava. They wouldn't give me any information, just said that this man was malicious and that he may be writing anti-government propaganda, which is not acceptable.”

Will felt his whole body go cold. He suddenly realized the enormity of this revelation. Frank continued. “Will, you need to start to take this situation very seriously. This is no longer just simple

journalism, or for that matter just the opportunity to be with a beautiful woman. Your safety and hers may be jeopardized. Have you considered that?"

"Yeah Frank, I'm pretty worried. There is a guy here who could be the perpetrator. I didn't take him seriously at first, but now I am. I have one piece of exciting news. Isabella and I are engaged, we will probably marry next year, I really hope you can come over here then. I'd love to see you. Ideally, we need to wait until all this has died down, we don't want to draw attention to ourselves." He could hear a small pause from Frank at the other end. "Gees, Will! Are you sure that this is the right time to be committing? I know I sent you out there in the first place, but I had no idea then what you might be getting yourself into. I'm feeling a little responsible for your safety."

Will was expecting this. "Frank, I understand what you're saying, but I've never felt this way about anyone before. For all the difficulties here, I know that I can't live without her. If the situation gets too difficult, we can always move to France for a while. I know my life wouldn't be the same without her Frank."

Frank sighed. He knew he was defeated. "OK my boy, but promise me this, please take care. I think someone is at the bottom of this, maybe the guy you mentioned, maybe not, but it's serious. What do you want me to do with the last article you sent?"

"Well, publish it of course!" answered Will emphatically. "I have a job to do and I intend to do it! I won't be bullied!"

Frank replied quickly to this. “Will, I don't think it's a case of bullying, I think your life may be in danger.”

This comment was hard to take, especially from Frank. Will already knew deep down that he was under threat, but hearing it voiced like this, from a man whom he respected more than any other, was unnerving. “I'll be careful Frank, but go on publishing, the world needs to know this.”

They said their goodbyes. He put the receiver down and walked into the warm sunlight once again. His heart was beating fast, the sweat he felt on his brow was not a result of the sun. He felt panic in every bone in his body. Antonio was really getting under his skin now, it had to be him! He knew he wanted to continue to talk to locals but from now on he needed to be even more careful. He decided to keep this new information to himself, there was no need to worry Isabella.

One thing was certain, he was not going to stop writing because that bastard was threatening him. Nobody pushed William Hale around, Antonio was just going to have to get this into his head. He had never been bullied into anything, so had no intention of this happening now. This thought gave him strength and he felt his familiar infallibility once again.

He wished that he and Isabella could marry this year. That way it would have been easy for them to visit France with the pretense of a honeymoon. Under the circumstances it seemed impossible. It would only draw unwanted attention to them. If they were looking for an American and then received a request for their marriage the authorities may well put two and two together.

He decided to make his way back to the bar and find out when the family would be available for a talk. He walked quickly now as he just wanted to see and touch his precious lady. Somehow, when they were together the tension caused by these situations always seemed to vanish into oblivion.

Carlos and Isabella were setting up for the evening. Carmen was still in the kitchen. Isabella turned and looked deeply into Will's eyes. She didn't need to speak, she knew what he was thinking. She took him to one side and they sat in the corner at a small table. "What's happened?" She waited for his reply.

He was silent for a second. "I just spoke to Frank and I also had a talk with Fernando earlier today. The situation seems to have gotten more serious. I wish we could get married sooner so that we could leave if we needed to, but that may draw attention to us even more. I'm not sure what is best, but I'm getting worried. My concern is that if they identify my nationality they may decide I'm the guilty American. Of course that depends on what they really know."

She looked surprised. "What's going on? What have they said?" He looked down thoughtfully. "It feels as if the warning signs are there. Fernando is concerned as well, I'm beginning to sense that we need to make some serious plans. I wish we could go together but being unmarried may pose a problem. I may have to leave suddenly and lay-low for a bit. Pilar worried me as well, Antonio is capable of anything!"

"What did Pilar say?"

“Well, apparently he's managed to have his own grandfather arrested. I now realize that if he's capable of that, he's capable of anything! And when I saw him the other day with the same Guardia who slapped Gabriela, it made me nervous. I also gather from Fernando that I was seen proposing to you.”

Will continued, knowing that he had not intended to tell her all this. “When I was talking to Frank, he mentioned that the Spanish Embassy has been in touch again. They are saying that the writer Tom Hook is in the Costa Brava, so even Frank is becoming nervous.” “Let’s speak to Papa. I'd like to see what he thinks.” Isabella got up from the table and went to speak to her father.

She came back in a second. “Papa suggested that we sit on the inner terrace and have a late lunch and talk about it. Are you free?” Will smiled, “Of course, that sounds like a sensible idea, I haven’t eaten, I was about to go home for that.” She left him for a minute and continued to tidy up, while he picked up a local paper and tried to improve his Spanish.

Chapter 32

Soon Carmen was ready and they followed her to the inner terrace. As usual, there was a good choice of food, much of it leftover from the lunch menu. Carmen had been talking with Sofia only the other day and Isabella's aunt was coming to the conclusion that this situation should be taken far more seriously. At the hotel, Sofia heard people talk, often when they were unaware that they were being overheard.

Will outlined his recent conversations with Frank, Fernando, and Pilar so that Isabella's parents could understand why his situation was becoming far more precarious. To make sure they understood everything Isabella repeated the conversation in Catalan.

Carlos had been taking all of this in without saying a word up to now. In Catalan, he explained to Isabella that he has been thinking along these lines as he had overheard Guardia talking among themselves in the bar. They mentioned no names but it was clear that they had their eyes peeled for a particular man who they considered to be a troublemaker. It was of great concern that the Costa Brava was on their list of hot-spots.

“Antonio's behavior does not surprise me,” replied Carlos taking a large gulp of his Rioja wine.

“Sofia was right to warn Isabella off Lopez, he is a man that I could never trust. I never liked him, but then I am a father, so I did wonder if I would feel like that with all Isabella's suitors. That was until you came along William, then I realized why I didn't like Antonio. However, rather than rush into marriage you may need to go away alone for a short time. Then we can arrange the wedding

later. As you say, if we ask for permissions, it will highlight your presence.” Isabella looked concerned, “I feel really bad,” Will started. “Before I arrived you were all leading a normal life, then I turned up with my romantic notions about writing and I've turned your world upside down, I'm just so sorry it's going in this direction. I suppose the truth is that Isabella was right to keep warning me and I just didn't take it seriously enough.”

Carlos continued. “Yes William, you are right. You have, how you say it, opened a can of snakes!” Will smiled at this slight slip of the English idiom but said nothing. Carlos continued. “I definitely respect your writing, your views reflect our deepest thoughts exactly. If I am honest, I wish I had the skill to write as you do, for certain I may have done the same as you. We have been and we still are, living in dangerous times - no man and no leader or his henchmen should be allowed to carry out these vicious acts without the world knowing. You made the comment that people outside Spain know a great deal about Mussolini and Hitler, but how much do they know about our General Franco? Not enough. On the surface he is seen to be doing good for Spain, modernizing, improving tourism. The world sees what he wants them to see, his many supporters back him and turn a blind eye to vicious attempts of repression - I am certainly not against your work, I am proud of you as if you were my son. However, we need to take care now, the danger may be moving closer.”

His words made a deep impression on Isabella and Will. Carmen had not fully understood but she knew her husband well. After many years of marriage, she knew his views. In the privacy of their home, during countless conversations between them, they had already aired these thoughts a number of times. Isabella leaned against her new fiancée, taking comfort from their closeness. Will continued, “If we are married first we could stay with Maddy for a few weeks and I can write a few

more good stories from there. Maybe that will take the prying eyes off northern Spain for a while. If it still looks dangerous we can rent a place in France for a couple of months until the dust settles.”

Putting her arm around his shoulder Isabella pulled a serious grimace. “Well, if we do eventually manage a wedding, I hope you don't think you will be spending the whole of our honeymoon writing? I know that keeping you away from a pen is not easy but I do intend to try.” Will laughed and hugged her. Then smiling, he said: “I promise I will give you at least two days of honeymoon!” She pretended to punch him. He jokingly reeled back as if she'd hurt him.

“Well, If we're finished I'd like to go for a walk with my husband-to-be. Mama, can you suggest to Aunt Sofia that, if she is due to come into town, maybe we could have a discussion together. It would be wonderful if we could have a small reception at her hotel for family and close friends and then a bigger reception next year. If there is any chance of arranging the paperwork. I just hope permissions could be possible.”

Carlos interjected, “Please do not raise your hopes Isabella, this may be far more difficult to arrange than you think. The bureaucracy alone is a problem and William's nationality may add a complication.”

Carmen nodded. “If we did get the permissions, I would need to speak to Señora Beade Sanchez about your wedding dress. She is by far the best seamstress in the area. You could consider the type of design you might like.” To William's surprise, Isabella answered, “something simple. If we are to

host a larger reception next year, I would need a dress which will not look out of place for that as well. I will consider some options and then we can talk to her.” Turning to Will she said: “Come along cariño, let us take a walk.”

Will and Carlos looked at each other. The women were getting carried away but they could both see the danger this entailed. Deep down Will felt now that it would highlight his presence. Perhaps it was easier to play along with them at this stage.

They left the restaurant and walked towards the seafront hand-in-hand. In one of the quiet streets, Will stopped, took her chin in his hands in a way she’d grown to love, and kissed her with such a feeling of reverence that even Isabella looked surprised. “I love you so much Isabella, You will never know how much. My life was nothing before I met you, a blank canvas waiting for a great artist to imprint his genius upon it. You are my new light and my inspiration for my writing and you give me hope for the future. I could never love another woman as I love you.” Her arms were now around his neck and she tenderly kissed him back. “Guillem, I never believed I could ever feel as I do now, especially after my disaster with Antonio. I cannot wait to live a wonderful life with you, to have our children and grow old with you. I will be by your side forever cariño.” The warm breeze blended with the salty air made them feel relaxed and refreshed. The bond between them, yet again, seemed to strengthen.

As they walked along the seafront they spotted Pilar, Antonio’s sister, sitting alone at a small bar close to the beach. They acknowledged her and, as she looked up, they could see immediately that

she was deeply upset. Her face was drawn and the tears in her eyes were still visible. They asked if they could join her and sat down.

Isabella held out her hand to her, “Pilar, what on earth is the matter?” Pilar’s grief-stricken face had brought them both suddenly down to earth and now they just wanted to comfort her. “My Grandfather.” She paused and started to weep again, then choking, she exclaimed, “Oh My God! My Grandfather is dead! He died of a heart attack in police custody last night. I will never forgive Antonio for this. I will never speak to him again.”

She began to sob uncontrollably, “My Grandmother is devastated, I do not believe she will get over this. They have been together for sixty years, I will not be surprised if the shock of his sudden death kills her too.” She leaned closer towards Isabella, now weeping heartbroken tears.

William and Isabella could say little. There was nothing to say that could possibly calm her in answer to this terrible news. This was the lowest that Antonio had stooped, could he possibly stoop any lower? William went to the bar so that the two young women could talk together. He ordered coffees for them and decided to have a beer himself. Just when the afternoon had been so wonderful. He felt really guilty thinking this, Pilar had every reason to be upset. It was just that this place, this country with its cacophony of emotions, was just so confusing! So why did he love it so much? One minute he was soaring as high as an eagle and the next, it was as if the eagle had been blasted from the sky with one shot from a stray bullet.

Leaving the ladies to talk on their own, he sat at a table a few feet away and looked out to sea. He always loved the afternoon light as it slowly mellowed and took on its golden hue. He knew why he loved it here, why it seemed to fuel his creativity. It was rich with every sense purging the human body and soul, tragedy and ecstasy seemed to walk hand in hand here. From one moment to the next, there was no knowing what would happen, around every corner there was a new challenge.

Tomorrow there would be a funeral. Unlike other parts of the world, funerals here took place quickly, there was hardly time to grieve or collect oneself. He suddenly felt acutely sorry for Pilar's grandmother and her family. The very fact that they had Antonio to blame made it all the more tragic.

He sat for what seemed like an eternity and then Pilar stood up and he too rose to his feet and walked towards her so that he could put his arms around her. "Thank you Guillem", she whispered. As she walked away he stepped towards Isabella and hugged her tightly, holding her close to him.

Isabella looked drained. "That man! And to think I ever thought I might spend my life with him, was I loco?" He could not answer her. He realized that relationships were strange and love, as they say is blind. Somehow though, he just could not imagine Isabella wrapped in the arms of Antonio Lopez, as she was with him right now.

He paid the waiter and they continued along the seafront, but now the joy of togetherness that they had felt earlier had vanished. In its place was the familiar, raw depth of impending doom which

seemed to keep reappearing within their otherwise perfect and blissful life. “We must go to the funeral to pay our respects, I will tell my parents now, as they will wish to be there. At least we won't see Antonio, I am sure he would not dare to show his face.”

Not wishing to comment, Will kept his thoughts to himself. Actually, he considered that this would not be as unlikely as she thought. Somehow, he was beginning to understand the mind of this man who he had learned to hate with a passion.

They walked back to El Berganti and broke the sad news to Carlos and Carmen. Carmen went to telephone Sofia. They were sure that she would also wish to be there to pay her respects. Although Will desperately wanted Isabella to be with him tonight, he knew that the situation had changed and that she would need to remain in Roses. He arranged to meet them in the morning as Isabella mentioned that Pilar had said that the funeral would be held at midday. He took a detour to tell Fernando, who was equally shocked by the death of his old friend, he also said he would be there.

On his way home he considered how he was going to handle this. He knew Isabella wanted him to be there, but would it refuel the deep hatred that Antonio felt towards him? Especially as Antonio's whole family would be against him for doing this, it was a dilemma on which he would need to sleep.

Chapter 33

William was sitting in the bar with Isabella, at the very same table at which he had sat when had first set eyes on her. He was trying to convince her that his presence at the funeral would not be missed by anyone. Isabella disagreed and he was beginning to understand what marriage with this adorable woman would entail. She was a beauty but, my God, she certainly had a mind of her own. He could see this strength in many of the Catalan women.

“I know you didn't know Pilar's grandfather but Pilar likes you, so you would be attending to support her. Also, people know that we are together so I think that they will expect you to be by my side.”

Will realized that he was losing a battle that had never really begun. Isabella was a strong individual when she had a cause to fight. It was this strength and vitality which had drawn her to him and with which he had fallen in love, so how could he now object when he came up against this strong will. “If Antonio is there, I'll be a catalyst. He won't like it one little bit.” Isabella looked surprised, “He won't be there! With his whole family against him? He'd be mad!”

Will raised his eyebrows. “Isabella, my darling, do sane people have their grandparents arrested?”

She was silent for a moment. “Guillem, I want you by my side.” With that, she stood up and he realized that it was clearly a ‘fait accompli’. The battle was over if you could call it a battle! Isabella had won! As he sat there quietly contemplating, he couldn't help smiling to himself. In his mind he could see an imaginary scoreboard with his name and her name at the top. Today he could see the

first tick under Isabella's name. Then he smiled as he thought about the same board in a few years time, with many similar ticks under her name. Yes, this was definitely a sign of things to come. His vibrant new lady with her strength of character was a force to be reckoned with.

What actually surprised him was that, not only did it not worry him, it actually appealed to him! This was such a revelation that he grinned yet again. He'd been right when he had said that she was like his sister Maddy who would be exactly the same if confronted with a similar situation, he smiled to himself again for a third time.

Isabella looked a tiny bit irritated. "Guillem! What are you grinning about?" He stood up to light a cigarette, "Nothing honey, absolutely nothing!"

Today was not as sunny as usual. There were still a few clouds in the sky and somehow this lent itself to a more sombre occasion. Will made a note to write something about this experience when he had a moment, as the funeral procedure here was so completely different to any funeral he had ever been to America.

They had all congregated outside the cemetery. He was used to burials, but this was unusual in so many aspects. Here, they placed their dead in separate compartments one on top of the other, within an ornate wall. There was a small glass front where a picture of the deceased or other items of remembrance could be placed. He had seen these before and had even walked along and read some of the inscriptions. However, standing here seeing an actual funeral take place, changed his original

perceptions. As they stood outside, the family started to arrive. Pilar with her parents and her openly distraught grandmother walked behind the coffin, which was carried in a very pretty, horse-drawn carriage. Isabella explained to Will that the horse belonged to Pilar's grandfather and so it was fitting it should be responsible for his last journey.

Friends and relatives approached the grieving party to offer their condolences. The group then made their way into the cemetery and found comfortable positions to stand around the open hole in the wall, the area which had been allocated as his final resting place. Will could not miss the man dressed in rougher clothes, who stood to one side carrying a bucket of white plaster which would be used to seal up the entrance once the coffin has been placed inside. There was something somewhat basic and earthy about this, almost irreverent, but the locals took it in their stride.

The coffin, which was an open box covered by a cloth, was carried slowly forward. The priest lifted the cloth and the grieving widow cried out as she saw her husband for the last time. She kissed her fingers and touched his cheek with them, a final and moving farewell gesture to the man who had been by her side since she was seventeen. Then the cloth was laid back over him and the coffin was pushed reverently into the mouth of the tomb.

The priest had just genuflected and was about to recite the first prayer, when from outside there was the roar of a motorbike, as it screeched to an unceremonious halt. The gate was loudly and irreverently thrown open and Antonio Lopez walked around the corner into the group. He bore a hard, arrogant expression on his steely face. Surveying the onlookers quite unashamedly he looked look on with contempt, well aware that he was not welcome, but clearly revengeful of the family

that shunned him. Pilar went white. She walked over to him, looked up at him and stared him straight in the eye. Then, glaring angrily at her brother, she slapped him, once across his face. Will was sure that in any other situation Antonio would have struck her back, but with a priest looking on, that was maybe not acceptable, even for him.

He stood there rigidly, now angrier than ever, but blatantly he had no intention of leaving. Pilar nodded to the priest to continue and walked sedately back to stand by her grandmother. The priest continued in Latin to give the introductory rite and to wish his fellow brother a safe passage to join his maker. Then the family members walked towards the tomb one by one and each laid a rose inside the foot of the coffin.

As the priest finished his words, Pilar's father walked forward and, thanking the group for coming, he made a point of turning his back deliberately on his son as he spoke. Antonio's rage was clear to see, he was like a bubbling furnace. God help anyone who dared to confront him today.

At last the guests started talking once again to one another and the man with the bucket of plaster began to seal up the hole as if there was no time to waste. Will could not help but watch this procedure in fascination. He had not seen Antonio make his way close to him and was shocked as he looked round to the steely stare of Lopez.

"What is this interloper doing here?" Antonio spoke loudly for all to hear. William felt extremely uncomfortable, this was exactly the reason he hadn't wanted to attend. Pilar came rapidly to Will's

rescue. “He is not the interloper my brother, the true interloper is you. You are not welcome in our family, you will never step foot in our home again. If you ever try, God forgive me, I will kill you myself!” Will was quite taken aback by the sheer strength of her words, as were many others. Pilar, normally so sweet and mild, had turned into a very different character, totally unrecognizable. Not that Will could blame her, he was certain that if his own sibling behaved like this to his family, he would feel exactly the same.

Antonio sneered at Will. “You may all think this charming American is an innocent man, but you will see, mark my words, one day you will see!” At that moment, from behind a group of elderly people came a man whom William didn’t immediately recognize. Walking up to Antonio and sympathetically putting his arm around his shoulders, he encouraged him towards the gate of the cemetery. Will was sure he’d seen this man but could not remember where. Then it struck him. It was of course, Sebastian.

Sebastian’s motorcycle was parked next to Antonio’s, so they both proceeded to drive off down the road together. The group watched them retreat with open relief. William felt physically sick. He had not wanted to be an antagonist, but what worried him the most was the way that Antonio had spoken. It was as if he had inside information. He could feel the walls of his world closing in on him. What would Antonio do next?

Isabella was distressed. She apologized profusely for not listening to Will. This outburst from Antonio had not been what she was expecting. Will mentioned that he had recognized Sebastian. “Yes, Sebastián is the brother of Pedro, the chef at my aunt’s hotel. He is equally as dangerous as

Antonio.” Just then her parents joined them, followed by Sofia, and they all showed their concern for Will.

There was no wake, as there would have been back home, so people just returned to work and the family walked together back to town. Aunt Sofia for once joined them, she would meet her chauffeur after lunch. She was pleased to have the opportunity to join them hoping to discuss their wedding, so they agreed to lunch together. They had closed their restaurant for the funeral, so the plan was to eat away from home for a change.

The dress code for a funeral here was less formal than it would have been back home, so none of them were overdressed for a lunch. They made their way to a quaint little restaurant at the back of the town, which Will had not been to before. This too had a terrace garden at the back which was open to the public.

They were seated by the owner who knew Carlos well. He welcomed them and they ordered a traditional black rice dish, which was easier to arrange and took less time to order than individual dishes. A large salad was placed on the table first, along with the wine and water, so they all helped themselves.

Will was seated between Sofia and Isabella and they started to talk about possible wedding arrangements. Isabella mentioned how much she wanted to marry sooner, rather than wait until next spring, explaining that if they needed to leave in haste, it would make sense.

Aunt Sofia began. “Although I am very happy to arrange a reception once the Dali wedding is over, I do have my doubts. I have been talking to a notary I know. He is a man I trust and without mentioning names and going into detail, I asked him what type of paperwork William may need to fill in? I am afraid that at this time I think it may put both of you in danger. I would have liked to have hosted a small event, after Salvador and Gala Dalí have renewed their vows on the 8th August which is a Friday so it would have been perfect for the following week. I even know the priest who is marrying them Josep Pol Arau, he would have been happy to help. Let us wait and reflect.” Secretly Will breathed a sigh of relief, but he said nothing, this was so much better coming from Sofia.

Isabella was disappointed and said, “I have already spoken to Señora Beade Sanchez about my dress. She was happy to make it and, as she is so good, it would not have taken her too long. She said that she would put all other work to one side for me.”

Sofia turned to her. “ I know you are disappointed Isabella but I have a suggestion. If you are asking Mercedes Beade Sanchez I will pay for your dress, she is an exquisite tailor, I know it will be fabulous. This way it can be ready to be worn as soon as the time is right.”

“Thank you Aunt, that is so kind of you. I intended to keep the design simple but still stylish. Then, if we could manage to have a small ceremony this year, we could invite a larger group to a reception next year and I could wear it again.” Isabella then stood up and hugged Sofia.

Sofia smiled, she loved her practical niece. She had good taste and was never ostentatious. “Then it is decided! We arrange for the dress to be made and wait for possible dangers to die down. You may still manage a small event this year. Will then commented, “Although I admit I am a lapsed catholic, our family originated from Cork in Ireland. When the time comes the paperwork may be more straightforward.” The family agreed. Sofia put her arm around Isabella. “I’m sure all will be fine eventually. It may be a sensible idea to be prepared for any situation, we cannot afford to be complacent. Obviously, if you need to go to France for a while it would be better to be married. Now, no more talking while I demolish this wonderful lunch!”

They all agreed with her. It seemed strange that what had begun as a sad morning had ended like this, even if there was still a slight sense of the unknown hanging over them. Will savored the moment. How he loved it here, even at its worst it was still a special place. Over the last few weeks his Spanish had improved and, although the family would normally speak Catalan at home, they made an exception with the language for Will’s benefit. Outside the house of course, in a restaurant like this they all spoke in Spanish anyway, and the lunch was enjoyed by all.

Chapter 34

Over the next few weeks Will had decided to keep a much lower profile so, on those occasions when he had to go into Roses, he deliberately avoided the main streets. He spent much of his time writing at home and only made the journey to Fernando's occasionally to use the telex machine.

He had now decided to buy his hire car from the garage and negotiated a really good deal with the owner. Both men were happy with the agreement they had reached and this transaction gave Will a sense of belonging. Will put it in Isabella's name to simplify paperwork. Obviously, they couldn't drive a car over the border if they did need to make a hasty getaway for fear of being stopped. Even if they stayed in France for a while the car could remain in Spain awaiting their return. They had decided that it was easier to travel across the coastal border and meet Maddy if it was necessary. Having a plan of action in place allowed them both to relax a little.

He spoke to Maddy, and she put a contingency plan in place at her end, so that at any time it was required, he and Isabella could make their way over with as little fuss as possible. Aunt Sofia had spoken to a local farmer who delivered meat to the hotel. Adolfo had agreed to take the couple to the border if an emergency occurred.

Maddy had made arrangements that, if required, her daughters would stay with friends. She and Jean-Luc would book into a hotel in the small port border town of Cerbere. This way there was no need to give an accurate meeting time, in case their journey was slower than they expected. His sister was flexible with dates, so they all waited nervously, hoping it would not really be necessary.

Will and Isabella had discussed it in full and concluded that by following the coastal road they should be able to avoid any major patrols - making it safer to leave undetected. As Carlos had suggested, they may need to make a slight detour around the border crossing.

Carlos had come across others who, even in possession of the necessary paperwork, had still been arrested at the border on some trumped-up charge or other. The border police may be looking for the mysterious Tom Hook right now and Will's arrival could just trigger warning bells. Obtaining any papers for Isabella could very easily alert the authorities to their plan. Will wished that it was less complicated. He had never realized that his writing could create so many awkward problems.

One day when arriving at Fernando's house to telex Frank, his friend was looking somewhat agitated. Will picked up on his mood immediately and Fernando admitted that he had heard some rumors. "I was talking to my good friend Montse only yesterday. She has a lady-friend whose son is in the Guardia, she was shocked to hear that my name came up in conversation. We may need to be even more careful for a while so that they have no reason at all to suspect anything. I think we will hide the telex away between its uses, in case I receive a sudden visit." Will agreed that this made sense. "Montse is on our side and she did mention that she would dearly like to meet you, I am in no doubt that her story will interest you."

Will was concerned about the news of the Guardia, he certainly didn't want to put Fernando in any danger. But a chat with Montse was another great opportunity, not to be missed, so he agreed to pop back the next day to meet her. He arrived punctually at ten o'clock the next morning and Fernando led him into the parlor where a friendly-looking woman was waiting to meet him. She was

predominantly dark-haired with just one or two gray hairs beginning to show, this was pulled into a loose chignon. She wore a simple cotton dress and sandals. She smiled warmly at Will as he entered and kissed him on both cheeks before sitting down again. Fernando left for a few moments to make some coffee but was soon back to join them.

Montse began to explain. "I have a brother called Diego who is four years younger than me and a sister called Lucia who is two years younger. Diego was a great sportsman, he was a Greco-Roman wrestler and was competing at the highest level. He married a lovely girl called Valentina when she was seventeen and he was twenty. She worshiped him and encouraged his sport. She was so proud of him.

Their first child was born when they had only been married for two years. Violeta was an adorable little girl, then two years later Dionisio was born. They were so happy until tragedy came their way. A year later, another little boy Alvaro was born. The other pregnancies had been straightforward so Valentina expected the third to be as easy. Unfortunately Alvaro was in a breech position, so the delivery was very arduous. Valentina became very weak, hours of labor had taken its toll, but nobody realized that she was suffering from severe internal bleeding until it was too late and she died a day later.

From a very early age Violeta has played a mother role for her two small brothers. They were living close to Barcelona. Diego worked hard for his little family fitting his sport in where he could. Then in 1938, the Italians, led by Mussolini and with the support of the Spanish nationals, bombed Barcelona and surrounding areas. Violeta was only seven years old but she hid with her brothers

under the kitchen table, protecting them with her small body. She was so brave and seemed fearless in her attempts to keep them safe. It was during one of these raids that Diego arrived home one day and seeing his daughter in this dreadful position, he was angered beyond imagination. He knew that Mussolini's close relationship with Franco was well known and he was incensed by this violence against the people of Barcelona. He was well known in the area and spoke out angrily and publicly against the politics that were causing this terror to come about. When he went wrestling he would stand up in front of his audiences and openly express his views.

It wasn't until he had been threatened a number of times by the authorities that he realized that maybe he had shown his strong feelings too openly. To prevent his children losing both parents he would have to flee to France in exile. His hope was to lie-low for a short while and either to discreetly return, or make a new life there for the children and send for them later. He hoped that this would not take too long. Many families went together into exile, but Diego was concerned that without a mother, his children may not be safe, so he asked me to look after them and I took the precaution of legally adopting them so that there was no way they could be taken away from me.

Diego left with a rucksack on his back and, with a large group of other evacuees, trekked over the Pyrenees into France in treacherous conditions. It was terrible, he was cold, wet and hungry. The group he was with were all expecting a warm welcome when they arrived, as the French were highly regarded by local people here. Sadly however, when they eventually found their way into France the welcome was far from the warm embrace which they had expected. Women and children were separated from their men and they were thrown into what can only be described as concentration camps. The French wrongly believed them to have communist loyalties and

segregated them from French society for this reason. Diego was so relieved that he had left his children with me. He missed them terribly, but at least he knew that they were safe. It was a long time before he was in a position to communicate with us.

The women and children were sent to separate camps which had already been constructed, but the men ended up digging holes on the beaches for shelter. They were set to work to build their own shelters with guarded supervision. In 1939 the second world war broke out and in 1940 France fell. The Germans then started to fill the camps with more so-called undesirables. Jews, homosexuals, communist sympathizers and gypsies. By this time they were using the Spanish prisoners to build more camps. My brother ended up at Rivesaltes. Many people arriving there became desperately ill, typhoid and dysentery were common. Fresh water was non-existent so a great many died. I believe my brother survived because of his fitness and strong physical constitution.

Later, believing that they would be safe now, 20,000 refugees returned to Spain. Diego was tempted, but for some reason, his instinct held him back, which proved to be a wise move. He just wanted to be sure that he wouldn't be arrested and he was right to do that. General Franco promised a safe return, but the result was the complete opposite. Those that returned were either killed or imprisoned.

Diego is still in France and was never reunited with his children, they stayed with me. Violeta, who is now married herself, still wishes that he could come back but she is frightened for his safety. She has grown so much like her mother. Diego would be very proud. Maybe if he came back nothing would happen, but he daren't risk it. His family have visited him occasionally since then. He is well,

but we all miss him dreadfully.” Now Montse sat back in her chair, relaxing for the first time, as if the telling of this story was in some way a therapy. She looked at Will with tears in her eyes. “My brother is now free, but still a prisoner of life, unable to see his family and give them the love they deserve from a good father.”

Will thanked her for sharing her story, promising her it would be written without any reference to real names. “For the sake of your niece Violeta and her brothers this account should be heard. My brother in law told me of these camps but your description is far more graphic. To think this all happened a relatively short time ago.” Montse stayed for a while before she bade a warm farewell to the two men and waved again as she reached the bottom of the steps.

William left Fernando soon after, thanking him for the opportunity to meet Montse and gain yet more insight into the life of these people. He was determined to write this story as soon as possible. Frank would be amazed to read an account like this.

The next day he had written the story in the morning and visited Fernando to send it to Frank, who was duly impressed to hear this fresh new account. Will was feeling less anxious as he had heard nothing from Antonio recently. His writing was coming along well and Isabella was happy. He was confident now that if they spent a few weeks in France whether a wedding was possible or not, Antonio and his friends would have moved on and would leave them alone.

He met up with Isabella that evening and relayed the story that he'd been given by Montse, Isabella knew the family well. She knew that Violeta and her brothers missed their father. However, she emphasized what a lovely family they were and how much they loved their aunt. They sat together in silence for a while. Isabella turned to him. "Guillem, I really respect what you are doing. I know I had my doubts, but even though I worry a great deal, I think you are doing an important job, for these stories to go unheard would be so wrong. I'm so proud of you." He leaned forward and kissed her. "Thank you, honey, it means a lot to me that you feel that way. Sometimes I think I must be crazy." She laughed, "I never said you weren't crazy, maybe I just can't resist crazy guys."

That night she needed to stay in Roses as her father had a number of tasks for her the next day. So they went for a walk and had a glass of wine at a café in the town. Taking full advantage of a few more moments together before he had to leave.

Eventually they walked back to El Berganti hand in hand feeling the close harmony they enjoyed so much. He wished that she didn't need to work as he loved these moments together. As they turned the corner towards the restaurant a commotion could be seen in front of them right outside the bar. Carlos and Carmen were there, surrounded by a few locals.

As they drew closer they were confronted by a horrible sight. There, outside the restaurant lay the body of a dog, but as Will came closer he could see that this was not just any dog, he felt uncontrollable nausea in his stomach. It was his beloved little friend Buddy lying there in a pool of blood. To his horror, his tiny body had been cut open and his heart lay next to him on the sidewalk.

Isabella was now sobbing as she explained to Carmen the friendship that Will had formed with this little dog. Her emotions were now a mixture of grief, shock and disgust, combined with hate for the man she knew immediately was responsible for this disgusting act. Will held her tightly, not solely to console her but to gain strength for himself. He was feeling shocked and drained and he too was harboring a deeply rooted anger against Antonio whom he knew immediately was the culprit. He must have seen them playing with the little dog when they were unaware that they're movements were being scrutinized. Antonio knew that this barbaric act would hurt them deeply and removing Buddy's heart would send a forceful message which they could not ignore.

Carlos picked up the tiny body and placed him into a bag. Carmen brought out a mop and cleaned the traces of blood from the sidewalk. Will just held Isabella while she struggled to calm herself. Eventually after a brandy which Carlos insisted Will accept, they held each other for a minute and kissed, then he reluctantly walked back to the car. He was feeling a sadness mixed with intense anger, opposing emotions which were too much to bear. He wanted to kill that evil man who was trying so hard to drive a wedge between them. He'd grown to love that little dog and somehow his death felt like the personal loss of a friend. He knew he was maybe being unnecessarily emotional, but when Carlos quite practically put the tiny body in the bag, Will had felt a deep urge that Buddy deserved something better.

He made his way home along the coast road back to Canyelles, wishing this recent trauma hadn't just happened. He couldn't wait for them to be together permanently, it would be so wonderful not to be parted any more. He wished to God that things weren't so complicated, a quick wedding

would be so much simpler. But after this latest bombshell he was well aware that he would need to take even more care to be certain of their safety.

Chapter 35

Will arrived back at his apartment that night feeling far from content. Up to the recent shock he had felt so happy, his recent story had really pleased Frank. He went in, poured himself a glass of water and made his way straight to bed. He knew he would need to be up at a reasonable time in the morning, he still had so many things to do.

Waking early as he hadn't slept well, he took a quick shower, then, throwing on a pair of shorts and a light shirt, he made his way to the bar for coffee and a croissant. This way of life suited him so well, he wanted no other and couldn't wait to be with Isabella forever.

Fernando was in the café talking to Señor Deulofeu the latter welcomed him with his firm handshake, he brought out the coffee for them both and Will was just taking his first sip when two Guardia Civil policemen walked into the café. Will didn't take much notice at first as they were speaking to Señor Deulofeu. However, with a worried expression clouding his normally relaxed face, his landlord walked across to Will and Fernando with the Guardia following close behind him. "William, these gentlemen are here to speak to you!" Will felt his stomach turning inside out while trying desperately to look relaxed. He dared not look at Fernando.

Smiling at the two men, he said, "Take a seat gentleman, how may I help? Do you speak English?"

One of the Guardia spoke, "Si Señor, I speak a little English. We would like you to accompany us to the police station in Roses for questioning?" Will continued to do his best to portray a relaxed

persona. “May I ask what this is about?” The policeman looked agitated, “no Señor, you may not, please follow us now!”

With deep fear in his belly, Will stood up. After all the stories he had heard in recent weeks, he knew what these men were capable of doing to him. Fernando was looking very tense as well and he knew that he was reading his mind.

William spoke: “Do you mind if I pay for my coffee?” Turning to Fernando, he said in a low voice, “Please tell Isabella.”

“Coffee is on me,” replied Fernando. Will thanked him, striding out of the café in front of the policemen.

They ushered him to their car. He climbed in reluctantly. Whatever happened he was determined not to show any sign of fear. He must appear innocent and convincing, but this would be difficult. He wished now that he really was an American actor signing autographs, not an overly enthusiastic ignorant journalist.

They drove in silence along the coast road and into Roses. The police station was set further back in the town. It was an imposing, older style building, with the Spanish flag flying majestically over the front door. Will was led straight past the reception area, down a corridor and ushered into a side room.

For a moment he was alone, but then he heard footsteps approaching and two other policemen walked in. He assumed they were more senior and to his discomfort he recognized one immediately. It was the familiar face of the infamous Sebastian. Now he was sure that Antonio was behind this. Nerves were kicking in! ‘What had António said?’

The two men sat down opposite him at the table then Sebastian spoke in English. “We have reason to believe that you are an enemy of the state. What do you have to say?” His aggressive delivery threw Will off-guard. For a second he was silent, then he leaned forward.

“Sir, I am nobody’s enemy. I am simply a tourist. I arrived here from France where I was visiting my sister who resides there. I just wanted to see a little of Spain before returning to America. I was not planning to stay here for more than a couple of weeks but I met a local girl and enjoyed the romance, so have stayed a little longer. I will be returning to France before I fly back to the United States.”

Sebastian laughed loudly, “We have arrested you following information we received from a very respected and successful local businessman. He was the mayor of Roses in the late 1940s, so what he says cannot be ignored.”

He continued, “You were also seen proposing marriage to a local woman, that does not appear to be a holiday romance.” Will was now very worried, who the hell was the informer? Could it be Fernando or Señor Deulofeu? Somehow he doubted it, but here anything could happen. He realized

that this was not an easy situation to talk himself out of. He decided the only option was to bluff. He would sound like a complete bastard, but if it put them off the scent it was enough. He would tell Isabella so that she didn't hear it from someone else. Will replied, "Yes, I proposed to her and the young lady in question thinks I will stay here." He then sat back in his chair trying to create a nonchalant air, laughing, he replied, "I have had many women, what woman is not prepared to give herself to you if she thinks you will put a ring on her finger. This one is no exception. I have been enjoying myself here, I was even planning to stay a little longer, but if I need to leave I will. The truth is, I was always planning to fly back to America. The lady in question is very beautiful for a holiday romance, but I prefer American girls. I have enjoyed my time with her, but I have a life in America, so I will be leaving soon."

Sebastian repeated this to his companion, then he approached Will, bent over, and moving closer he looked directly into Will's face. "Señor, I look forward to watching the expression on Señorita Isabella's face, when we tell her this news. I shall enjoy it, we believe that you are working undercover, we do not believe you are a mere tourist, you do not behave like a tourist."

Will was feeling a cold sense of fear inside himself. He was now convinced that they were getting far too close. Also the thought of Sebastian or even Antonio telling Isabella what he had just said sent a shiver down his spine, but he knew that he must try not to show it to these men. The tension was mounting and he realized that he could be badly hurt in this place, or worse still that he may never see the outside world again.

Still attempting to adopt an image that they would not expect, Will replied, “Sir, I do not believe I am a typical tourist, most tourists visit a country for the beaches and the beer. Of course, your beaches are excellent, but I consider myself a traveler and I like to get to know the real people. This is why I moved out of my hotel. It is also the reason for getting to know a local family. I wanted to enjoy the place fully and truly understand the real Spain, not the tourist version. I like what I see.” Sebastian walked away deep in thought. Then turning quickly said, “We have seen you writing.” Then coming right up to an inch of Will's face, he shouted, “Señor it is time, to tell us the truth!”

At this point, Will took a sharp intake of breath, they were now so close he could feel the glue. “Yes,” he replied, “I jot down what I see for my diary, nothing more, this is the truth.” Sebastian glared at him, “Señor I can tell that you are a liar, I do not believe what you say, maybe it is time for you to understand that you are in serious trouble!” Suddenly and without warning, he took a cane that he was holding and slammed it down on Will's hands which were resting on the table in front of him, Will cried out in pain, pulling his throbbing hands to his chest. Sebastian continued, “So Señor, you are here, we can arrest you, the time has come to be truthful. You are not in America now, we do things differently here.” Will tried his best to stay calm. “Sir, I am telling you the truth. I am a traveler, I write about the wonderful things that I see here.”

Sebastian looked at him with a venomous glare. “Without hands, you will be unable to write, without a tongue you will be unable to speak.” Then, with no warning, he beckoned the other policeman and together they left the room. Will felt a cold chill around him and was physically shivering, this was becoming more dangerous than he had ever anticipated.

He sat alone, feeling a grinding terror engulfing him. Looking down at his hands he could see the red line of the cane and feel the intense pain throbbing through them. He fought back tears in his eyes - time passed. - The tension was building in him. - How the hell should he handle this? He was sure that they had no concrete evidence against him, so should he continue to bluff? The door had been left fractionally ajar. He heard footsteps and he braced himself, expecting the Guardia to re-enter the room, but they didn't. Instead, he was aware of the sound of raised voices coming from the room opposite.

He heard the impact of a physical blow, followed by a frightened cry. The inquisitive journalist in him could not resist seeing more, so he stood up and crept to the door. Looking directly across the corridor he could see that the door to the opposite room was open and, to his horror, he saw a young man of similar age to himself. Sebastian had been joined by two others. He could see the man's face was badly bruised, clearly he had been punched. But even Will was not prepared for what happened next.

He felt his blood run cold and he turned physically white with the horror that was unfolding in front of him. The prisoner was crying out for them to stop, Sebastian punched the poor man in his face once again to silence him. Will then realized that they had told him to strip and reluctantly the young man removed every item of clothing.

Although he had already been beaten badly, his clothes had to some extent protected his body. Now, as he stood there naked and Will realized the enormity of what was about to take place. To his horror, they took three thin canes and whipped his bare flesh, taking it in turns to beat him front and

back and undoubtedly enjoying the sport. By now the young man was sobbing uncontrollably, and pleading for mercy.

As if this torture wasn't enough, two of the policemen lit up cigarettes. Pushing the man to the ground, Sebastian held one foot at a time, and with great pleasure, they burned the soles of his feet as he cried out in agony. The third man continued to whip him. He lay on the floor obviously completely weak and in such terrible pain whilst they finished their cigarettes, laughing and joking as if nothing had happened. Will realized that they would know that he had heard the screams but they would be unaware that he had actually witnessed this atrocity. Watching this made him well aware of what they were capable of doing to him. He may be a foreigner, but that was almost worse as he had nobody from the US to fight his corner.

Quickly he went back to his chair, they must not know that he had seen them. Time passed by, then the two policemen returned to the room. Sebastian came right up to Will's face and taking hold of his shoulders he shook him. "So you could hear our friend opposite?" Will remained silent, then shaking him more aggressively he shouted,

"I repeat Señor, you hear the man opposite?"

"Yes," replied Will.

"This, my friend, is what happens to those people who make trouble in our country. This man is still alive, he should be grateful! He has a wife and three children, he should have thought about them before he spoke his lies. Liars are not accepted here. - Do you understand me?" He shouted these

words at Will. So close to Will now, but then moving closer still. He smiled a vicious smile and spat in his face. Will tried not to respond, simply wiping his cheek, and purposely saying nothing.

Sebastian then leered a menacing grin, “if you tell us lies we will know, so now we will give you some time to change your statement. Remember Señor, there is nothing we cannot do, our superiors want you gone. We have been watching you. There are people in this town who are in much danger because of you.” With that, Will was taken by an officer along a corridor, down some stone stairs and eventually through a door to a cell, and was roughly pushed inside. The door was firmly shut and bolted from the outside and he heard the man’s footsteps retreating.

There was only a stone bench for him to sit on and a bucket in the corner that he realized was to be his ‘restroom’. What the hell was he going to do? Apart from some water which was brought to him in a jug, he was not offered any food. The day dragged on and it became quite apparent that he would be in custody here for the night. Will was feeling anxious now, he was in serious danger. The threat of cutting off his hands and tongue was gnawing away in his stomach. They could do this he was certain and he could do nothing to stop them.

As soon as the police car had left Canyelles, Fernando had promptly left the café and driven directly to Roses, making his way to El Berganti. Isabella was wiping some tables and was very surprised to see Fernando at this time of day. She welcomed him with a smile, but the expression on his normally relaxed face told her another story and she realized immediately that his visit must be concerning Will.

“What's happened?” she said in Catalan.

“Stay calm, I cannot tell you much, but William has been arrested.” Isabella sat down on a nearby chair in complete shock. She looked up at Fernando, tears welling up in her eyes. “What did they say?”

Fernando sat beside her. “That's the problem, I don't know. William asked but they refused to give him a reason. They put him in a car and took him to the police station here, that is all I know.”

At that moment Carlos came out from the kitchen and she repeated the story to him. “This is what I feared,” he said with earnest, “I'm surprised they've waited this long. If they free him, we need to help him escape, his safety is paramount.”

Isabella turned to him, “But Papa, I know Will sends his stories as soon as they are written. He deliberately keeps no notes. They have no proof, how can they accuse him of anything without proof? Should we go to the station and tell them he's innocent?”

Carlos reacted strongly. “No Isabella, you cannot go near the police station, that would only fuel their suspicions. No, the best thing we can do is stay away and look as if this is not a problem.”

She was sobbing now. “But Papa, we want to be together forever, how can I ignore it?”

Carlos stood up. “Isabella, I forbid it. You are not to go anywhere near the Guardia. If you do, you will be putting William's life in more danger.”

Carmen came from the kitchen to join them. She too agreed with Carlos that the safest option was to ignore what had happened. “They will be expecting you, if you stay away they will have no fuel against you.”

“But Mama, what if they hurt him? What could they do to him? Torture him even, I can't bear to think of him in pain.” Her mother comforted her. She turned to Fernando, thanking him for his consideration. He made it clear that he liked Will and saw him as a friend, promising them all that if he heard anything he would come to them directly to them. He then made his way out of the restaurant.

But Fernando didn't go directly back home, instead he went for coffee in a bar that was located right next to the police station. He was sure that it would be frequented by the Guardia. He had more than one coffee and made them last, sitting behind a newspaper which he had picked up off another table. Eventually he managed to overhear a conversation between two Guardia and heard the words, “send that American back where he came from.”

Fernando paid for his coffees and left. He was now convinced that Will would be released. For sure they were intimidating him, but nothing more than that. He returned briefly to El Berganti to put Isabella's mind at rest, and then went back home for a well-earned brandy.

Sitting in the police cell as the light of the day drew to a close, Will realized that he was going nowhere tonight. The hard surface of the stone slab was not conducive to sleep but then neither

were his fears. He did manage to ask for a blanket which he folded up to give his head some support, but it was a long, uncomfortable night. Cries of pain and desperation could be heard from other cells. Hearing these cries highlighted his own vulnerability, making him feel even more insecure. What would tomorrow bring? What would they do to him? Was Isabella OK? Did she even know? Or had they arrested her? The cell was hot and stuffy. He closed his eyes for a short time, but was so incredibly thirsty, by now the water in the jug had run out, his mouth felt like sandpaper, bone dry, and a feeling of deep desperation was consuming him.

Early in the morning, the key in the lock was turned and the cell door opened. Fresh water was handed to him which he drank with gratitude. Then he was escorted back to the interrogation room where he was confronted yet again. “What are your plans? Do you wish to change your statement?” Demanded the aggressive Sebastian.

“I am innocent, but I will do as you wish. I will return to France as soon as possible, then back to the United States after that, I am just a traveler and wish no harm, I will leave.”

“You are wise to do that,” Sebastian glared and for a moment he looked disappointed. Will then knew that they had no substantial evidence, Sebastian would have loved to have kept him there if he could. “We do not expect you to speak about your time here, so be aware, we will be monitoring you.”

He stood up and ushered Will out of the room, the door opposite was open. There on the floor lay the body of the young man he had witnessed being tortured yesterday. Will could see that he had been dead for sometime. Feeling intense nausea, as if he was going to be physically sick, he tried not to show that he had seen anything - saying nothing and doing nothing, it was wise not to react. If the men were aware that he had seen the young man things may be different, however they said and did nothing. Sebastian pointed to the exit, "Goodbye Señor, I hope for your sake that our paths do not meet again. It is only because you are a foreigner that you are being shown the door, if you were local you would be our guest for a very long time, leave our country with haste, or you may seriously regret it." Will didn't look back, he walked down the corridor and out of the imposing front door. He stepped out into the warm sunshine and could hear the buzz of people going about their normal lives, who knew nothing of what was happening inside this building.

He wasn't sure where he was, so inevitably he took a few wrong turns before he found his way to El Berganti. Totally exhausted and drained, he made his way towards the restaurant. For the first time for many years he was close to tears. Isabella saw him as he stumbled into the bar and she ran to him. Taking his head into her outstretched arms she pulled him towards her, clinging to him. "Oh my God, Guillem, are you alright?"

He could not speak, tears of relief welled up in his eyes. She had never imagined seeing him in such a fragile state. What had happened to her confident man and what had they done to him to have this effect?

Carlos appeared and poured him a brandy; it was clear that Will was in shock. They took him into the inner courtyard and brought him some breakfast, though he could eat little, and still he said nothing. They waited patiently, allowing him to regain his composure. Isabella saw the early stages of bruising on both of his hands, but he seemed almost unaware of them. Eventually, with his energy replenished, he told them the story of the chilling events that had taken place in the police station and Carlos looked sad. He knew the man and his family. “His name was Marc González. He and I had spoken often, his elderly father is a neighbor who eats here regularly. I warned him not to speak out as he did, but he wouldn't listen, God rest his soul. I heard only two days ago that he had been arrested, I will visit his wife Louisa later.”

Isabella now spoke. “What are we going to do now? Even if we managed to get the legal papers a wedding will now be impossible?” Will looked up at her, his face was so different from normal, “Well, honey, I have to leave, so there will be no wedding yet. I don't want to tear you away from your family, but I need to get to France, I will go alone, it's safer.”

Carmen put her arms around Will. She could see that this normally confident man had been devastated by the atrocities he had witnessed. He held her close as if she were his own mother, he was sobbing now in her arms. Carlos put his arm on Will's shoulder, “you are doing the right thing for now, you have no choice.”

It was decided, they would go and see Sofia, Will would pack his possessions, They felt safer in Cadaques, Isabella could return with her aunt's chauffeur.

Isabella joined him in Canyelles that evening, Carlos drove them, he could see that Will needed her there. When they arrived they made their way to the café to see Señor Deulofeu as Will wanted to ask him to call Fernando to thank him for his help. His landlord was ecstatic when they walked in and hugged him, as if he'd been gone for years. He too was shocked by the story of his confinement and the abhorrent treatment of poor Marc. He was sorry Will was leaving, but he completely understood. Will and Isabella returned to the apartment. He needed her so much, he was dreading the possible future without her. He revealed to her the terrible things he'd told the police, she hugged him knowing it meant nothing. This was not a night for passion, just for warmth and love, for the first time since she had known him, she held him in her arms as if he was a young child, stroking his brow, whispering her love for him.

The next morning they loaded up the car with all his possessions, leaving anything that they couldn't pack for the next tenant to use. Isabella, seeing that Will was still in a state of semi shock, offered to drive and he willingly agreed.

Chapter 36

On their journey to Cadaqués, neither of them spoke much. Isabella concentrated on the uneven road as she maneuvered the car carefully over the bumps. Will was lost in his own thoughts, he was feeling nervous and confused. Although he knew the situation had been dangerous, somehow, even he, had never envisaged it turning out like this. Sebastian's words were still ringing in his ears. "We do things differently here!" The menacing undertones continued to bother him.

Normally when they arrived in Cadaques he always felt a sense of well-being, but not today, nothing could lift his spirits. They drew up outside Hotel Vistabella and he was pleased to get out of the car and stretch his legs. The past trauma that he had experienced had left his body feeling weak. Sofia must have been looking out for them, as she arrived at the front door very rapidly and made her way down the steps. She kissed Isabella, then turned to Will, putting her arms around him with a maternal embrace. "Oh my darling boy, how are you feeling?" Yet again Will felt himself crumbling and tears filled his eyes. He tried to brush them away, embarrassed by his own vulnerability. However, still she continued to hold him so tightly and he felt his emotions welling up inside him once again. There was no strength left to resist his innermost feelings, he succumbed to this uncomplicated motherly love.

She led them both into the hotel and quickly to the privacy of her apartment. Here they could all relax, away from prying eyes. Will sunk into an armchair and put his head in his hands. Isabella sat on the arm of the chair with her arm around him.

Turning to Isabella Sofia said, “Your mother just called. The Guardia have been to the house of Fernando.” Isabella looked at her with a horrified expression. “Oh my God! Is he OK?” Sofia lifted her hand to signal to relax. “They were aggressive, they barged in, asking many questions. As you know there was no proof of what you had been doing. He told them that he had arranged your accommodation and that you had become friends, nothing more. They tried to intimidate him, but Fernando is a wise man and there was very little that they could do, so they left.” Will sighed with relief. If anything had happened to Fernando he would never have forgiven himself. Then he remembered the comments at the police station, regarding the informer, he wanted to broach this with Sofia.

Isabella excused herself and went to the bathroom and Will continued to talk to Sofia. “When I was being questioned by the police, they mentioned an informer. Was Fernando ever a mayor of Roses?” Sofia looked intrigued. “No why do you ask?” she replied with interest. “Well apparently the informer was a mayor of Roses in the late 1940’s.” He watched in shocked surprise, as the color drained from Sofia’s face. She was stunned and she could hardly speak. “You know him?” continued Will. She looked him straight in the eye, with tears in hers, “My God! Carlos, my brother!” Will let out a breath “Carlos? But why? I thought he liked me, he treated me as a son.” She replied, “Yes, but he adores his only daughter with a passion. He could not risk losing her. Although he liked you, you were taking her away. Perhaps he thought he might never see her again and that was something he could never allow!” They heard Isabella’s returning steps. “Say nothing for now,” she whispered. Isabella returned and they continued to talk, but Will could see the worried frown etched on Sofia’s face.

She ordered coffee and led them out to the terrace, she wanted to try to help to bring William back to his normal self. He was clearly still suffering from shock. Isabella relaid the story of the horror that Will had witnessed while he was in custody. Her aunt could then understand why Will was still so vulnerable. She knew that this latest bombshell would have added to it. As they sat there in the peaceful surroundings, Will began to regain a little of his normal composure. In this environment he could almost imagine that what he had seen and experienced had just been a dream. It was inconceivable that only yesterday he had felt so badly threatened, now, the two worlds were poles apart. He desperately wanted to continue the conversation with Sofia regarding Carlos but didn't dare broach it in front of Isabella.

“I think you need time to collect yourself William, I have arranged a room for you. I know that you are expected to leave shortly, but one more day is unlikely to make a difference. You need to regain your strength and contact your sister, which you can do from here.”

She then continued speaking to them both. “Now of course this has ruined your wedding plans, but you both need time to discuss a new strategy together. Isabella, I know that this is not a normal suggestion from an aunt, but under the circumstances you may stay with William. I can see that he needs you. I have nightclothes that you can borrow.” Isabella kissed her, thanking her. She had been hoping that her Aunt may offer this, she so wanted to hang on to her man for as long as she possibly could.

William was feeling more relaxed now. “I still want to marry you Isabella, nothing can stop that, it's a question of where, how and when? Maybe it would be possible in France, but I imagine that as

neither of us are French citizens, that too may also pose a problem. Maybe a captain on a ship, I gather this sometimes takes place. Or we may need to fly to the United States. We could then return here for the reception. I will not rest until we have found a way, I can't live without you honey." He looked straight into her eyes as he said this, with such an earnest expression that she understood how strongly he was feeling. He knew her father would not agree with this. How was he ever going to tell her that it was Carlos who had informed on him?

During the afternoon they both walked in the garden and Will started to gradually feel more relaxed. Isabella could see this too and was very relieved. She had never imagined Will being in such a painfully fragile state, it was so completely out of character. She knew that when he began to plan again and talk about the future, he was regaining his familiar self-confidence. They had both accepted now that he would go alone to France and lie-low, then she could decide how she could leave here for a while to be with him. She knew her parents were going to find it hard if they were forced to live over the border, but maybe, in time, they could return. Will was trying to pluck up the courage to tell her that her father would never let her leave. He just couldn't find the right moment to broach the subject, she adored him, it would break her heart.

Will made a call to Maddy, she was naturally horrified and very upset. She and Jean-Luc needed to confirm the care for the children so that they could make the journey to the border. She suggested that they would arrive the day after tomorrow. Will was quite pleased that he and Isabella could grab at least one more day together.

Sofia left the room suddenly. Returning, she mentioned that her meat delivery had not yet arrived. The farmer who supplied it had agreed to keep Will's car. "I have left a note for him in the kitchen to explain that you will be there the day after tomorrow. I will draw you a map now, I hope that you will be able to find it. He will store your car and then take you on to the border."

Isabella asked Sofia if she would mind calling Carmen on her behalf, she was sure that the suggestion of her staying for two nights would come far better from her. In fact her aunt explained that she had already called and Carmen was sympathetic and had made no objection. Dinner that night was a quiet affair. None of them had very much to say, they were all deep in thought. Will had regained much of his composure, so when he did speak he was sounding far more like his normal self, even managing to crack the odd joke to make the ladies smile.

That night they were both so grateful for the elegant room that Sofia had arranged. Isabella was pretty certain it was the bridal suite. It had its own bathroom and the opulent drapes around the head of the bed and covering the windows, offered a luxury that neither had seen for a while. Isabella ran a bath which they decided to share together. A bottle of wine and two glasses had been considerably left for them. Will handed her a glass, then joined her in the warm water. They toasted each other, now able to relax for the first time. Isabella continued, "to us, our love and many happy years to come." They were suddenly so much happier than they had been for days. The warm water relaxed them and they both lay back and let out deep and relieved breaths, in unison.

"Why did it all have to go so wrong? Why did I ever start all this? I should have stopped the minute we met, or at least the minute I knew how I felt for you. Why did I think I was infallible?" Will

questioned. She leant forward and kissed him. “You could never have known. If it had not been for Antonio you would have gone unnoticed, so it is as much my fault as yours.” They both enjoyed the moment of tranquility, knowing it may be some time before they could do this again. Will climbed out first. He quickly dried himself, then held out a towel for her. She lifted herself out of the water and stepped into the warmth of the towel which he wrapped tightly around her, then he hugged and kissed her with such deep passion. Maybe this night should have been about softness and romance, but a strong animal magnetism had taken him over, the knowledge that this may be the last time for many weeks. They fell on the bed as one and rolling over, Isabella sat above him and she kissed him with such urgency that yet again the moment felt like a whole new and wonderful experience. He lay on his back looking up at her. “I love you William Hale,” she said as she kissed him again. He rolled her back over and returned the kiss. “And I love you too Isabella, more than you'll ever know. You are my life now and I won't let you go.”

He rolled her over and caressed her upper body with more passion than ever before, her breasts were alluring, inviting his kisses. She wrapped her legs around his waist and kissed him back, with an equally devouring love. Then, as he touched her gently, his desire for her grew in strength and intensity as he felt her warm invitation. He was at a pitch that he had never before felt, with her or with anyone else, it was almost to the point of pain, the desire for her was so powerful. He wished that this moment would last forever, he was not ready for it to end. He had never thought passion like this existed. They lay back on the bed, looking lovingly into each other's eyes. This was so special, unlike any love-making either had known before. Each time it seemed to exceed the time before as they became ever closer.

That was not the first time they made love that night. Both knew their time together was ending for a while and neither wanted to let the other go. They chose to savor every minute moment, to store it in the diary of their minds. Isabella laughed and cried with him that night as he held her close.

His sleep was occasionally disturbed as every time he awoke, he turned to check that his wonderful woman was still by his side. He could not help watching her sleep, she looked so peaceful. He could not quite believe that in one more day he would be forced to leave her. It filled him with sadness, the sense of emptiness he felt was all consuming. This was not what he had hoped for, or planned.

They awoke as the first morning light filtered through the shutters. Isabella had an arm around him and the peace was so perfect that for a while they didn't want to move. She then suggested that as it was their last day together they should go into the village of Cadaques. It would be a while before they would be there together again.

They dressed quickly and luckily she had taken one change of clothes which she had left previously at Will's apartment, hoping even then that she would be allowed to stay. Will put on his most casual attire, as he wanted to completely relax today, then they made their way downstairs for breakfast.

Sofia met them in the breakfast room and joined them for a coffee. Will had not been interested in food for the last 48 hours and now he was suddenly ravenous. The tension he had experienced during the last couple of days was dropping away and now he felt relatively normal. Sofia could see the difference in him and said as much, they smiled at her and thanked her for making them so welcome and giving them the chance to say goodbye in such a peaceful setting.

Driving into Cadaques their recent problems seemed like a distant memory and, just for now, they were determined to live for the moment. They found a small seafront café and ordered coffee. A voice called from across the road, it was Anna Maria. She came over and joined them. Isabella trusted Anna Maria and explained to her that Will was leaving the next day. Anna Maria hadn't heard anything about his arrest and sympathized with his predicament but was sad for Isabella that there would be no wedding in the near future. To Will's surprise, she admitted that she had once been arrested and how she would never forget the fear. She told them that she was sure a way could eventually be found for them to be together. She was genuinely sorry to hear that they would be parted. "You both deserve to be together, you make a perfect couple, it's so unfair. While Will is in France please come and visit me Isabella, we can have lunch together." Then she looked up. Oh there is Gala, my brother's wife, their wedding is so soon now, but we still have so much work to do."

Gala was talking to a shopkeeper, choosing vegetables and picking out fruit from the baskets outside the shop. She glanced across the road and caught a glimpse of Anna Maria, and waved. Anna Maria turned to them again, "I am doing my best to stay amicable at the moment, with the wedding so soon, we all need to be friendly. My brother is painting much of the time and I can't say I am overwhelmed by his choices this year, he has undertaken a few portraits but currently is painting a floating red rose in a blue sky. He is trying to finish it before the wedding." She left them, kissing Will goodbye and telling him to have a safe journey to France.

The couple walked the full length of the seafront and breathed in the magnetic atmosphere. It was so good to feel relaxed once again, he drew her to him. They stopped again to have tapas, as they

were planning to eat with Sofia later. Will just didn't want this day to end. He was dreading the forthcoming day and doing his best not to think about it.

When they arrived back at the hotel, they dropped into the apartment to say hello to Sofia. Then made their way to their room, where they lay together on the bed just talking. Isabella jumped up. "Stay there a minute, I need to check something with my aunt," he grabbed her, pulling her back to him and laughing. "Hey, what are you up to?" She giggled, "I wanted it to be a surprise, the chef is making you a farewell cake for tonight, well, actually, he doesn't know its a farewell cake, I told him it was your birthday." Will kissed her again and let her go. "You never stop surprising me, I hope it's chocolate." She put on her shoes and went out of the room and he lay there feeling so much happier than he had felt for days.

There was a knock at the door, he half expected to see Isabella returning. He jumped off the bed and opened the door but, to his amazement, Pilar was standing there. With her was Pedro the chef, still in his kitchen uniform. Will and Pedro had not been formally introduced before, but he had seen Sebastian's brother at the funeral and recognized him.

"I am sorry to disturb you Señor, but may we come in?" Will beckoned them into the room. Pedro continued, "Pilar has just driven from Roses, the police have been to El Berganti, I have just spoken on the telephone to a trusted friend in Roses and he confirmed this. They want to punish you Señor and are coming to arrest Isabella. My brother will stop at nothing to enhance his career. He is saying that she is a traitor. Antonio is behind this. He was there when they went to El Berganti, looking very pleased with himself." Will was so angry, "Will he stop at nothing! He says that he loved her,

where is the love in this. Why does he never give up?” Pedro continued, “The problem is that they do not need a good reason to arrest her. Anything which will affect you will do. They could be on their way here now or, if they think you have gone, they may set up a roadblock to apprehend you. Either way, there is little time to lose.”

Will was stunned by all of this, but he too could see that they needed to act fast. He started to put on his shoes, then grabbed his jacket, he needed to find Isabella. Pilar spoke now, “I hated what Antonio did to our grandparents, and now he does the same to the woman whom he professed to love. Is there no end to his wickedness?”

One thing was clear, Will believed Pedro was right, they were in serious danger. He was now in an intense state of panic, he needed to find Isabella fast.

The three of them took the main staircase and hurriedly made their way down to the terrace. Sofia was just saying goodbye to a guest and saw them coming. She read the expression on their faces before they spoke and realized that something was very wrong.

Will spoke quickly. “There’s no time to explain everything in detail Sofia, where is Isabella?”

“I believe she went to the kitchen to find Pedro. What’s happening?” Sofia looked anxious.

Pilar explained, “Pedro’s brother is coming to arrest her, we have to get her out of here, they went to El Berganti first and now they’re on their way here.” Just then a maid came up to her with a

message on a plate, Sofia opened it, “Carmen is asking me to call her. I’ll call her later, she won’t know that you are here Pilar.” Turning to Will, “do you have the address of the farmer?” Delving into his pocket, he pulled out the piece of paper on which he had written the telephone number and address of the farmer and where in France Maddy would be. Sofia read his mind and beckoned a waiter for a pen and then wrote on the other side of it, adding a simple map indicating where to turn off the road. Will exclaimed, “Get a message to Maddy, tell her to wait. We are one day ahead so we should be alright, but ask her to stay in touch with you.” She promised him that she would do this. “Good, then go quickly, we need to find Isabella,” she said with urgency in her voice, with her hand guiding him in the direction of the garden.

Chapter 37

Will saw Isabella making her way through the garden, looking for her aunt. Although she was shocked to see Pilar and Pedro, he could see that something else was troubling her, she certainly wasn't looking herself, tears were streaming down her face. "Are you alright honey?" Will ran to her. She started to speak through her tears.

"I just received a telephone call from my father. He told me the guardia have been to the restaurant and were looking for me. He sounded like a broken man and was sobbing uncontrollably. You will never believe what he told me! It was him! He suggested to Sebastian that he should bring you in for questioning. How could he do this? I thought he loved you like a son!"

Then she looked directly at Will and Sofia and the expression on their faces gave them away. "You knew? You knew? How did you know?" Will explained what Sebastian had said in the police station. He tried to explain to her that her father loved her so much and was terrified to lose her. But continued that he was certain her father never expected them to come to arrest her.

Pedro commented angrily that Antonio and his brother had now gone too far. Before she had a chance to speak, Will broke in. "Honey we need to leave now, there's no time to spare. They may be closer than we think." She turned to her aunt in a state of panic, "But what about Mama? I need to say goodbye to her, I cannot just leave!" Sofia held her tight, "she already knows that you are in danger, your mother telephoned here a short time ago. She left a message for me to call her, I assume to warn us. She obviously didn't realize that your father would call. I promise you that I will

call her back when you have left, you cannot go back to Roses Isabella or you will surely be taken into custody. They want to punish you and Will and that is how they will do it. You will have to go to France with William, it is your only option, you can contact your mother from there.”

By now Isabella was crying uncontrollably. Will ran back to their room and grabbed everything they'd brought with them, cramming their possessions unceremoniously into his suitcase. He arrived back on the terrace where Isabella was still distraught by the shock of the whole scenario.

Sofia, Pedro and Pilar stood at the steps of the hotel as they drew away from the hotel to make their way out of Cadaques. As he looked back at them through his mirror, he saw the distress on Sofia's face which she'd managed to hide so convincingly from Isabella.

As they made their way in the direction of El Port de la Selva. The terrain was rough and Will was forced to take the road slowly. Although they were close to the town, the road veered left and took them along the coast. Will realized that this was the town Renata had told him about when sharing Miguel's story. He made a mental note to return one day to explore. Apparently the farm was situated just before Llanca. They would leave the car there and make their way closer to the border with the help of the farmer.

Isabella sat in silence as they drove. He could see she was deep in thought. Her tear-stained face such a marked contrast to her earlier mood. He felt angry with himself for putting her in such danger, even if it had been unintentional. Why hadn't he listened to her? This was all so alien to

him, he had thought he was infallible. The problem was that he'd never in a million years imagined that a scenario like this could ever happen to him. The road was rough, so he expected it would take about an hour maybe less to reach the farm. He kept on checking his rear view mirror but was relieved to see nothing behind them. On the other hand, there were so many twists and turns in the road that it was hard to know for sure that they weren't being followed.

The spectacular green hilly landscape with its craggy rock formations would normally have taken his breath away. However, right now, all he could do was concentrate on the drive and reaching their destination as fast and as safely as he could.

Isabella spoke emotionally, "I feel so betrayed. It was bad enough when it was Antonio trying to ruin my life, but my own father? I can never look at him again. I will never forgive him!"

Will replied with a calmness in his voice that even surprised him. "I know this may be hard to understand, but I really believe your father never meant to hurt you. In his own way he was trying to protect you. The fact that we're both in danger now probably never entered his head. Your father loves you, Antonio went the extra mile to hurt you, but I'm pretty sure that your father just wanted me out of the way and I understand that. But you're my world, my darling, I can't let anything happen to you."

He slowed the car down for a moment. "Honey, I know we are not married yet, but the vows I would have made are the same. I love you and I will cherish you for the rest of my life. There will

never be anyone else but you.” She looked at him and, though she still had tears in her eyes, she smiled, “I love you too Guillem, I just can't quite believe that this is happening to us.” Suddenly there was a loud explosion from the back of the car and to his horror Will realized that a rear tyre had burst. He stopped and climbed out to look. Sure enough, they had a flat tire, something sharp on the road had sliced it.

“Blast! Just when we don't need it,” he exclaimed. Opening the trunk, then to his annoyance, he realized that the spare tyre was also flat. He knew he should have checked it when he bought the car. It was obvious that they would have to abandon it and continue on foot.

Trying to sound unfazed, he went round to Isabella, who was still sitting in the front seat. “The spare is flat too, we're going to have to walk. I'll leave the case, we'll just take anything important or things which identify us, but we will need to push it off the road. Luckily the slope will help us.” With difficulty they managed to push the car through a gate, where a hedge partly concealed it from the road. “I'll ask the farmer to go back for the car after we leave” he suggested.

There was still some daylight left, maybe an hour. He crammed any documents into his jacket, Isabella took a wrap in case it became cooler during the night and they started to walk. He decided to stay on the road so that they'd eventually find the farm. They needed to make sure that nobody spotted them, so he kept checking behind him. When they heard a car approaching they dove into the nearest ditch to hide. Isabella was now feeling agitated by the whole situation and commented that she should have changed into her slacks, she was wearing a skirt and it was totally impractical.

The tension was building between them and Will could feel himself becoming more irritable. “So why didn’t you change, it was pretty obvious?” She looked at him sideways, with a hurt expression on her face. “If it was so obvious why did you not say anything?” He was still feeling agitated, “Haven’t I got enough to worry about, for Gods sake I’m trying to protect you.” Isabella started to storm off with her head high in the air. “Mierda! I do not need your protection, what do you think I did before you came along?” He purposely didn't try to catch her up, he knew he shouldn't argue with her, but the day's revelations were catching up with both of them. So she disappeared around the next corner. When she came into sight, she had made more headway and was even further in front. Well he thought, at least she was walking faster than normal, so maybe anger had it's advantages.

Before he managed to catch her up he saw her leave the road and walk into a field, “Isabella, come back!” he shouted angrily. Leaving the road would be madness, it would slow them right down. However, she continued to ignore him. Now he was quickening his pace, he couldn't let her go far. He began to sprint, gradually gaining on her, finally in the middle of the field, he lunged at her and she screamed as he pushed her to the ground. “For God's sake Isabella what on earth are you playing at?” he exclaimed.

Just then, on the road, they saw a police car gliding slowly past, Will was pretty certain he could see Sebastian was in the passenger seat. As they were hidden in the grass, they hoped that they wouldn't be seen. They lay there in silence for a second, holding their breath. To their relief the car had driven past and they hadn't been spotted.

A sense of relief washed over him. It dawned on him that if she hadn't moved off the road they may have been caught. The anger left him and holding her arms above her head, he kissed her and she couldn't help but respond. "How did you know? Are you telepathic." She smiled up at him. "Stupid man of course I am, when are you ever going to learn?" Now all the tension had vanished and they were united once again. He kissed her again, as the tension between them depleted. His urge to make love to her was strong, but he knew that they must continue. At that moment he just wanted to hold her and feel the familiar warmth of her body.

The walk was a long one and the light was fading fast and they needed to reach the farm before nightfall. They walked hand in hand now, their earlier tension was now in the past. Will realized how special she was and how much he needed her, secretly he was thankful to Carlos that she'd been forced to join him. Her father had unknowingly done him a favor. A few hours ago he would have left leaving alone, although the next few weeks may be tough, at least they could be together.

He carefully led her along the rugged road and as they looked down into the valley they could see the lights of a town, which he concluded must be Llança, so the farm may be closer than they'd anticipated. He started to look for entrances and the name of the farm, which, to his relief, he soon spotted, painted on a rough wooden board on the edge of the road.

They made their way up the lane which led to the farm and could see that there were lights on inside the house. Knocking at the door, footsteps could be heard in the hallway, then a friendly face opened it. It was Yolanda the farmer's wife, who took one look at them and realized who it was.

Hurriedly she invited them in and they were joined by her husband Adolfo. Yolanda made them a hot drink and went into the kitchen to prepare food for them. To relax for the first time that day was wonderful and Isabella explained to Adolfo the reason for her unexpected presence. The farmer showed her a great deal of sympathy. Will gave Adolfo the keys for his car and money for a tire and Adolfo told them that he would fetch it back once a new tire could be arranged. He had an old barn where he would hide it until they needed it again. Yolanda returned with a simple but delicious stew and the couple both realized how hungry they were. They ate with relish and the farmer's wife smiled warmly. After they'd eaten Yolanda could see how tired they were, so she led them upstairs to a spare bedroom. They undressed and gratefully fell into the soft, inviting embrace of a comfortable bed and were both asleep almost immediately.

When they awoke the covers on the bed had hardly moved. They had needed this rest more than ever before. Lying there together, they were not quite ready to face the day ahead. Neither spoke but both knew what the other was thinking. Looking at his watch Will realized that it was later than planned. He said the same to Isabella who tried to curl back up, though she knew that he was right.

Chapter 38

The aroma of freshly baked bread and coffee was making its way up the stairs when Will and Isabella finally made their way down to the kitchen. Adolfo was in the yard grooming the horse that was to drive them to the border and Yolanda was preparing breakfast. They all waited for Adolfo to join them, then tucked in to a hearty breakfast knowing that this may be the last good meal they would have for a while.

The conversation was of course in Catalan which Will was unable to follow. He could see that, in comparison to yesterday, Isabella seemed more relaxed. He, on another hand was still very nervous. The threat had not diminished, if anything it was troubling him more. He knew full well that Sebastian was on a mission and would refuse to be beaten without a fight. On the other hand, Isabella would cope far better if she was relaxed and happy. Today was likely to be challenging and eventful and he for one, wasn't looking forward to it. Yesterday had highlighted to him how frail every tenuous moment was. He knew for sure, that when they finally came out of all this, neither would ever be quite the same again.

After breakfast they collected their few possessions from the bedroom. Yolanda handed them a cloth shoulder bag containing an old wine bottle filled with water and two home-cooked ham baguettes. They would be arriving in France with little more than the clothes they were wearing. Isabella was very grateful when Yolanda, who was similar in size, offered her a pair of slacks which would protect her legs from any rough terrain that they may walk through.

Just at that moment the farm guard dog which was chained up by the barn started barking loudly. A car came into view as it slowly made its way up the drive. Yolanda instinctively pulled Isabella away from the window as she had noticed that it was the police. Adolfo who was standing by the horse looked up, as the car ground to a halt beside him.

Without any hesitation Yolanda hurried the couple along the corridor, into the main sitting room. She then surprised them as she asked Will to help her to move the table which stood over a rug in the centre of the room, pulling this to one side she revealed a wooden hatch set in the floor. Quickly opening it, she ushered them both inside, and they made their way down steep stone steps into a dark cellar. Yolanda kept it open until they had reached the bottom, then she closed it quickly. They heard the table being pulled back into place, this time with some difficulty. The couple now found themselves in complete darkness.

They crouched in a corner on the hard stone floor, the cellar felt cold, damp and airless, sitting in the dark added to the tension. Isabella was trembling and Will held her close as they crouched in a corner on the hard floor. They listened but could hear no noise coming from inside the house. Then they heard the sound of heavy steps entering the house but couldn't pick out conversations. They realized that the police must have searched the outhouses first. Now they were going to search the farmhouse.

As they sat together in the cellar holding their breath and listening, they were both secretly praying that they would be safe. All Will could think about was that this may be the end of the journey before it had begun. His heart raced, he needed to try and stay calm as he knew that if Isabella

sensed his fear she would be affected by it. She buried herself against him trembling and her own terror was clear even in the darkness. Voices above appeared to be coming from the kitchen. There were several sets of footsteps making their way around the house. Eventually they heard voices in the room above. Isabella, picking up on the conversation, held on to Will tighter terrified that they may still be discovered. At one point a chair moved above them and for a terrible moment they were expecting the table to be pushed away as well, but to their relief, the footsteps retreated and the room above was silent once more.

They waited in the dark for what seemed like an eternity. Were they still searching? Then they heard the rattle of the lock above and Yolanda opened the hatch to the cellar and as light flooded in they stumbled up the steps, the relief on their faces was clear to see.

Yolanda led them into the kitchen and put on a fresh pot of coffee. Isabella asked her what had been said and Yolanda related the story. First, the police had arrived, four in the car. They had asked Adolfo if he had seen a young couple and when he was given the names, he admitted that he was familiar with Isabella's family. He told the police that if they arrived at the farm he would notify them. The Guardia had insisted on a thorough search inside and out. Luckily their hiding place had remained undetected. Yolanda had been nervous when they had looked into cupboards that were large enough for people to hide inside. They had even searched the attic, though she was sure that if nobody was found there it would take them off the scent, they would assume that this was an ideal hiding place.

They quickly realized that they must delay their departure. The police would be searching all the surrounding farms and there may be others looking out for them as well. Will was frustrated by this as he had originally planned to cross the French border before nightfall and now they would only have the afternoon to travel. They had to be sure that there was nobody on the road. Adolfo arrived again in the kitchen, explaining that this recent visit had put him and Yolanda in a dangerous position. He had planned to take them in his horse and cart rather than a vehicle, to draw less attention. However now, if he was seen again by the same police, they may become suspicious. Will had expected this but was certainly disappointed that the journey was now becoming much more lengthy and would take them considerably longer on foot.

Adolfo suggested that if he drew a map, Will and Isabella could circle around Llança and Portbou. They could continue on foot fairly safely. He knew the old farm tracks which were seldom used much except by local farmers. It would take them longer as it was rougher, hilly terrain. In the original route close to the road they would be over the border by nightfall. Now he was certain that the journey would take one more day. Adolfo promised to notify Sofia, who could at least warn Maddy.

Adolfo's original plan to collect Will's car and keep it in a barn, was now out of the question. Will realized to his disappointment that when he returned he would be forced to invest in a new vehicle. But he could not risk putting this generous couple at any risk.

They packed up the last few items, putting them into the cloth bag and then accompanied by Yolanda and Adolfo they made their way out into the barnyard. The horse which would have drawn

the cart, stood by the old barn munching hay. He was a handsome creature, but was restless now, still expecting to be taken out, so an occasional frustrated snort could be heard. Routine normally indicated that he would not be there tied up here unless some sort of outing was in order.

Isabella kissed Yolanda and gratefully thanked her for her kindness. Will embraced Adolfo warmly then he held out his hand to Isabella. The farmer pointed the direction to the first leg of their new route and they waved to them until they were out of sight. They needed to make good headway before nightfall, so they walked at a brisk pace. Even though their original tension had not dissipated completely, the spectacular sea view below them offered some sense of wellbeing, and the warm sun shone down on the glistening waters in the bays. It was now mid afternoon and they wanted to cover as much distance as they could before dark. Although the terrain was rugged, the path was surprisingly well worn, so they concluded that it was regularly used by the local farmers. Much of the time Isabella held onto Will's hand so that she could keep up with his longer strides. Occasionally he stopped to check the map that Adolfo had so carefully drawn and they could see that they were making reasonable progress. The evening was drawing in now and they knew that they would need to find somewhere to rest for the night, as there was no way they could reach the border this evening. So having successfully skirted the town of Llançà the path led into some fairly remote locations and here they hoped to find shelter.

Although they knew that they wouldn't reach the border tonight, they were feeling a sense of optimism and it was good. If they could just avoid the border-control they'd be safe. Soon he would see Madelaine and he and Isabella could relax and begin to enjoy their new life together. He was determined to research the possibility of a legal marriage in France, he didn't dare say it to her but

the sudden arrival of Pilar and Pedro had, he felt, done him a favor. Now they could be together for good, whereas yesterday morning he hadn't believed that could ever be possible.

He took the map from his pocket once again, trying to figure out exactly where the location was for the official French border. That would certainly be manned, so they would have to find their way around it via an alternative route. They quickened their steps in the hope that they could make up some of the lost time. It was hard to be sure how much further they still had to go.

Making their way through some more woodland, which offered them shelter and little chance of being seen, they were able to relax and talk more openly. There were even moments when they joked and laughed, which broke up their journey and took their minds off the danger they were in. As they came to the edge of that woodland they saw open space in front of them where a farmhouse came into view. To the right on another hill and close to another coppice of trees, they could see what appeared to be an old barn. Will suggested that they aim in that direction in the hope that it was suitable for the night.

Sure enough as they came closer, it looked pretty deserted and looking inside they saw dry bales of hay stacked up and storage bins of animal feed which were arranged against the wooden walls. Yes, this was perfect and during the night they were unlikely to be disturbed and would be safe. Isabella arranged some hay to make a comfortable bed and found two old sacks to use as covers. The light was fading fast and as they had no means of added light so they decided that this was a good time to eat. Although the food didn't completely satisfy their hunger it certainly helped. Breakfast seemed like a lifetime away.

They lay together in the soft hay and began to talk about the day. It had been a stressful time, but as they moved closer together embracing the darkness they felt their worries fall away. Will knew how important this wonderful woman was to him and he pulled her firmly towards him. Isabella needed him as much as he wanted her. She moved closer to him and their lips met. He felt the familiar deep yearning for her becoming stronger. The last twenty four hours had been so stressful and now the chance to be close to her and to hold her was overwhelming. He could sense that she was feeling the same. Neither wanted this safe warm sensation to stop. Locked in each other's arms the desire for tenderness and one another, was overwhelming.

In the darkness they caressed and felt the power of touch over sight. They hadn't fully undressed, but felt the warmth and scent of each other's bodies as they delved deeper. Without the benefit of vision they experienced a deep discovery of the senses. A strange, unnatural environment opened up a world as yet unknown to them both, as if they'd entered into another time and space. Centuries earlier this darkness would have been a normal environment, now it felt mystical and sensual. Their love making built in crescendo. It was as if this was their first time all over again. Neither wanted it to end, as they urged each other to continue but they both knew that rest was a precious commodity too. So eventually, locked in each other's arms they closed their eyes and fell into a deep sleep.

They stirred, still entwined and rested, as the early light squeezed its way cheekily through the cracks of the old wooden barn. Neither of them wanted to face a new day, both wished that this undisturbed solitude could continue longer. Will was first to rise to his feet, he put his shoes on and went to the door, pushing it open and looking out, he breathed in the fresh scents of the morning air.

Isabella joined him and he put his arms around her and they surveyed the views which were laid out before them, green fields, woodland and mountains, so beautiful but at the same time so daunting. They were both hungry but had no way of finding any food. He suggested that they may come across fruit trees as they continued the journey.

As he gathered up their few possessions, Isabella caught his attention from the door. “Guillem, I can see someone.” He followed her gaze in the direction she was pointing and sure enough he could see the figure of a man making his way closer. “We need to get out of here.” Will responded. “I think it’s the farmer, we can’t risk being seen.” They both kept low as they opened the door enough to edge outside. Then they made their way towards some bushes to the right of the building, from here they knew that they would be safe and would be able to see the farmer while remaining unobserved themselves. They were far enough away to watch his arrival and as he entered the barn they made their move. It was imperative that they should not be followed. They heard a shout, so knew that he had seen the hay bed and must have realized that he’d had visitors. But by the time he came back out they were far enough away to escape undetected.

Chapter 39

By taking this back route they had managed to bypass Portbou and they were sure that the border was not too far now. Walking downhill they had a good view further into the distance, but suddenly they became aware of movement ahead. Sure enough, they could see a roadblock in front of them. Will realized that it couldn't be the French border, he knew that would be further on, so he could only assume that the Guardia had set up a checkpoint to intercept them.

“Is that the border?” Isabella asked, looking worried. Will shook his head, by now he had put Adolfo’s map to one-side and was viewing the map which he had originally brought for the journey, he passed it to her. “No, I’m pretty sure it’s a fair way further on.

“Are they looking for us?” Will put his arm around her, trying to alleviate her fear. “Maybe it's not for us at all, they could be waiting for anyone, though I don't think we can take the risk of finding out.” Beginning the slow descent down the hill, they skirted the roadblock, keeping as much distance from the police as they could.

Even from such a distance they were fairly sure that they could see which of these men was Sebastian. He was strutting between the other men, shouting orders and very much in charge of the operation. “Stupid fool!” she whispered. “Does he think we're mad enough to drive right up to a roadblock?” They took a wide detour across a vineyard and then began the fairly steep ascent up the next hill on the other side, heading towards a heavily wooded area that could be seen in front of them. They were hiding as much as possible behind bushes, trees, and rocks on the craggy path which led its way up the hill. It was harder for Will to stoop low as he was taller, and in some areas,

they were forced to crawl on hands and knees so that they wouldn't be noticed. Soon they were able to stand and walk normally and were just turning a corner well out of sight of the men, when Isabella lost her footing and fell down hard, twisting her ankle. Unintentionally, she screamed out in sudden pain and inevitably the sound of her voice echoed down the mountainside.

Uncertain whether they had heard her, Will took her arm and helped her to regain her balance once again encouraging her to carry on. She was limping now, her ankle had been badly sprained. He almost dragged her up the rest of the slope until they reached the top. To their dismay on looking back, they could see in the distance several men in hot-pursuit, one was definitely Sebastian - the Guardia had seen them or, more likely her scream had caught their attention, then a gun was fired in their direction.

They tried to run faster but Isabella was now in a great deal of pain, her foot which was already beginning to swell and was really burning, so she was quite unable to run as fast as normal. Turning a bend they came to a fork in the path and decided to choose the direction which would take them away from the sea. They both hoped that the police would be uncertain which way to go when deciding to follow them.

They were being very careful to take cover whenever possible. In front of them they saw a shepherd with his sheep, realizing that if they could maneuver around him, he would be positioned between them and the police following their tracks. They moved slowly around the flock of sheep, trying their best to avoid the shepherd. It was unlikely that he would raise the alarm but they couldn't take that risk. The sheep started to scatter, as if avoiding them and they were aware that this movement

could alert the shepherd. They tried to take each step more slowly, but suddenly the sheepdog saw them and barked and they were forced to run faster. They could hear the voices of the Guardia, now so much closer and the police were definitely closing the gap. Even Isabella, whose ankle was swelling even more, almost forgot her pain and focused on gaining space between them.

Directly in front of them was a coppice of bushes and trees. It looked like the best place to find safety but they also knew that until they reached the trees they would be far more visible. Managing to run into the bushes they attempted to cover themselves in some loose foliage and waited, hardly daring to breathe.

There was silence now, no footsteps were behind. The police may have taken the other path. They stayed still for about fifteen minutes until they felt safer. Then came out of hiding. They could still just glimpse the sea to their right, but they needed to go a little more in that direction, it was a risk as they would be closer to the coast and therefore the police but they had no choice.

Making their way on a downward slope, Isabella was wincing in pain, her ankle was now turning blue and she could hardly walk at all. Will offered to carry her on his back, but she knew this would make it almost impossible for him to walk in this unsympathetic terrain. The risk of them both being hurt may be greater and he needed to stay strong for her. He acted like a crutch on her weak side and this helped a little. As they came over a ridge they realized that they were rather too conspicuous, but before they had time to take cover they heard a shout and further below them Sebastian and his men were in clear view yet again. Luckily there was some extra distance between them now and Will pointed out a further wooded hiding place a little further on. As he turned to

follow Isabella there was another shot and she heard him cry out. Looking round she could see that he was holding his side. “Keep running,” he shouted, with a sharp, intake of breath, “I’m coming.”

She limped into the shelter of the woodland and looked back, Will was following her, but it was clear now that he was in a great deal of pain. He stumbled in behind her clutching his body and fell next to her gasping for breath. She helped him to move a little closer, then they edged their way into some heavy bracken.

The police were some distance away which gave them just enough time to make sure they were well hidden. Voices were coming closer, far too close for comfort... they held their breath.... not daring to move..... the wait seemed like an eternity. Isabella heard one man say, “I’m sure I hit him, I wish we had dogs.” She was very relieved that they didn’t, if there had been dogs involved, she and Will wouldn’t have stood a chance, especially with the smell of fresh blood so close by. They continued to lie still, but now Isabella could see the police from their hiding place who were gradually heading away from them.

No sound could be heard, only the rustle of leaves in the trees. Not daring to move yet as Isabella clung to Will she waited still further! Although she was pretty sure the Guardia had left, she was still terrified in case they were preparing to ambush them, but to her relief there was still silence. Once she could see that the coast was clear, she sat up and looked in the bag for the bottle of water which Yolanda had given them, there was only a little remaining. She lifted Will’s head encouraging him to take a sip, then she did the same, looking once again into the bag she pulled out Will’s clean shirt and ripped it into lengths of cloth, then pouring water on the wound she dabbed it so that she

could properly see the damage. The wound was deep, blood was streaming from it. She made a pad with another piece of the shirt and used the rest to tie around him to try to reduce his loss of blood.

“Guillem cariño, estoy aquí.”

Will lay there saying very little, his face was quite white and his breathing was strained. Clearing the branches away from him, she was now conscious of his noticeably shallow breathing - but at least he was alive. Thank God! She needed to get help. She tried to lift him into a sitting position, then, to her horror, she saw the red pool beneath him. He had lost so much.

“Guillem,” she whispered, “Guillem can you hear me?” “He opened his eyes and smiled his familiar cheeky grin at her, in a breathless voice he answered. “Of course I can hear you, you're the only one making any noise!”

Isabella took his head in her arms, “I need to get you help,” she said, so pleased that his humor hadn't left him. Then continuing, “There is sure to be a farm nearby, these fields are cultivated. If I can bring someone here and we stop the bleeding, we will still make it over the border to France.” Will looked weakly up at her, his face now bore a gray pallor. “You know I love you Isabella. Trust me, stay for now, I need you here.”

He gasped for breath, could his lung be punctured? A feeling of intense fear flowed through her. He continued to speak, finding it more difficult with every breath - every word was an enormous effort. “Isabella, my time with you has been the best in my life, I never felt true love until we met. Every second with you is a bonus, even now.”

She pulled him even closer and hugged him. “Guillem, I feel the same, you are all I have ever wanted. We will get out of here, be brave, I’m here.”

He was looking far weaker now and all color had completely drained from his face. “Guill, please let me find help, I believe we can make it.” He said nothing, his eyes were shut but he was still breathing. She felt him leaning against her, as if he was trying to suck her energy, to provide him the much-needed strength to continue on their journey.

She made him as comfortable as she could and looked around, if she didn't get help he would surely die. She made a mental note of their hiding place, noting a small disused shepherds hut close to a large oak tree and promised him that she would return for him, telling him to hold on while she found help.

She wasted no time, trying to ignore the intense pain in her ankle, which was now so swollen that every step was torture. She was limping slowly, climbing was a huge effort. Now and again she couldn't help crying out. As she reached the top of the next hill she could see the sea to her right. The only way she could find help was to try to keep the road in sight. She slowly made her way downward, then up another steep enclave. She could now easily see what appeared to be the border and the movement which was border control. She struggled again up a craggy path, knowing that her only way out was to avoid the official border, she was still desperately trying to find a farmhouse. she knew that she couldn't cross the border without Will, she must find help.

The rocky terrain would have been hard to cover, even for a serious walker with the right footwear. For Isabella in thin shoes, with a swollen ankle and now without water for a long period, it was unbearable, but the thought of Will lying there alone drove her forward.

She limped, frustrated that no farmhouse had come into sight, surely there was a farm somewhere? It was mid-afternoon now and she was concerned, if she didn't find help soon she would have to go back, she knew that she couldn't leave Will in that state for long on his own, not in the dark. She also knew that he would never get through the night unless help was found urgently.

Trying to stay focused, she clambered through more undergrowth taking a footpath which indicated that people must walk here regularly. There was a loud rustle in front of her, which made her jump, then a gun was fired so close to her that she couldn't help crying out in fear. She fell to the ground, frightened and exhausted, fearing that the Guardia would arrest her now for sure.

She lay there waiting for the police to descend on her, trembling with fear, but accepting her fate. She could go no further. If they killed her now, she could never return for her beloved Guillem.

To her surprise, she heard a gentle voice above her, speaking in Catalan, "Senyorida are you alright? I am sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you." She turned and looked up, into the kind eyes of a young man, a country-man, carrying a gun. "I was hunting a wild boar, wrong time of year I know, I didn't see you until after I had fired my gun, I am so sorry if you were frightened." Isabella broke down into uncontrollable sobbing, feeling a deep overwhelming relief. He sat beside her and introduced himself. "Please do not cry senyorida. My name is Josep. Do you need help?" She turned her tear-

stained face towards him and told him what had happened, how she had been forced to leave her beloved Guillem, explaining how they needed to return to him.

Josep could see how badly injured her ankle was. "Wait here, I will be back." She was happy to do as he asked, feeling as if she had little choice. He was only gone for about ten minutes and then he returned leading a donkey, which was pulling a small cart. He handed Isabella a bottle of water from which she drank greedily.

She described to him the spot where Will lay and he immediately recognized its location, he knew every centimeter of this terrain. He promised her that they could go back and find him. Then he gently lifted her onto the docile animal and, throwing his gun over his shoulder, started to lead the small gray donkey back from where she had come, down the trail.

They arrived back to the spot where Will lay and to her relief he was still breathing.

Suddenly, and without warning, he coughed and a trickle of blood appeared at the corner of his mouth. He drew a long intake of breath once again, "You have to go," he said, "Maddy is waiting for you, tell her I love her too." Isabella felt the tears she had been suppressing start to run down her cheeks. "Stop talking in that way cariño we will both escape together, hold on. He spoke once more, still trying to smile, "You must go honey." Then he closed his eyes for a minute trying to preserve his strength. Isabella was overcome with panic that was welling up in her, she felt sick with fear. He lay there silent. "Cariño, speak to me!" He opened his eyes once again and tried to speak. "Go!" he whispered.

“No, I can't leave you. This is Josep, he will help us, he will take you to safety.” He looked at her and just managed to choke out the words “I love” The final word “you” had been lost.

Then his eyes closed, his head fell limply to one side and, to her horror, she realized that he had left her forever. He was gone!

Her tears began to flow uncontrollably, she was in an intense state of shock. “No,” she cried out in panic, “No, cariño. NO! Please do not leave me!” She fell on top of him trying to brush away the unstoppable flood, while Josep stood by. Isabella continued to cling to her beloved Will, sobbing as if her grief may magically revive him. As she clung to him, his familiar smell provided a sense that he hadn't quite left her.

Josep put his arms around her and, at last, she allowed her grief to tumble out like a cascading waterfall streaming off a high cliff. The overwhelming comfort of being with someone whom she felt that she could trust, allowed her to give way to her grief and the tears began to flow fast. She felt the emotion running like bolts of lightning through her body and was in an intense state of shock. Thank God she was no longer alone with Will.

Josep let her cry until there seemed to be no more tears left. Then he carried Will's lifeless body to the cart and after he had laid him down, he turned to her and gently helped her to climb into the cart, where she clung to her beloved man. Then he walked to the small gray donkey who stood patiently nibbling grass and throwing his gun over his shoulder he started to lead it up the trail.

“Nobody knows this route, I am able to go in and out of France this way and I am never stopped.”

Isabella was so relieved, with the pressure off her foot, she was able to relax a little. If she hadn't been so distraught with grief she may have actually enjoyed the breathtaking scenery around her. The familiar red sky of the early evening was upon them, mixed in were blues and lavender, just so many colors all fighting to become the centre of attention. On any other night she would have savored this beauty but now, as she held Will's head in her arms, it was wasted on her.

Twenty minutes later, Josep stopped unexpectedly and announced, "Now we are in France!" She could just see the town of Cerbère in the distance, not that far away. She was in France! The moment of deliverance she felt running through her veins was overwhelming.

She asked him if he would stop the donkey and help her to climb from the cart. Ignoring the presence of Josep she leaned over and lovingly kissed Will's lifeless face, then climbing from the cart, she knelt down and reverently kissed the ground as if it was sacred. Once again she cried uncontrollably for her love, her darling William and for the life with him that she would never have. Her grief was all-encompassing. She cried out louder now, not caring that she was not alone, now she could feel and express her deep overwhelming loss. "Guillem! Mare de Déu! el meu Guillem, el meu amor!" Josep knelt beside her, tears in his eyes, sharing her deep loss. He allowed her to let the grief flow until she had cried herself dry. Then, once again, he gently lifted her back into the cart and they continued to make their way down the mountainside towards the town.

Isabella looked up into the blue sky and felt William's arms around her once again. He was there with her and she knew he would never leave her.

Epilogue

One year later On a warm summer evening in France, Isabella is sitting on a cushion-covered bench, in the garden with Madelaine. She is wearing a mid-calf pale blue skirt with a cream blouse. She is cradling her young baby son, who gurgles happily in her arms.

In her other hand she holds a letter, from a woman she has never met, but who has such wonderful things to say about her adorable Guillem. It reads

Dear Mrs. Hale,

“You won’t know me but I read your tragic story in the American press and I recognized the picture of your William. I only met him once on his flight to France. I do hope this letter will eventually reach you.

I took a while tracing you through the newspaper he worked for, his friend Frank Dexter gave me your details. I was devastated when I read the news, I just had to contact you, I hope that you don’t mind. I was relieved when Mr Dexter told me that they were taking care of you and your son.

William was one of the kindest men I have ever met. He made such an impact on me that I changed my own life forever. My husband, at the time, was a dominating bully. I had accepted that this was all I deserved and had put up with it for many years until I met your William. His kindness and

genuine caring rekindled my faith in human nature and gave me the strength to leave my husband, a move which I have never regretted.

I just want to say that you may have only been blessed with this adorable man for a short time, but believe me, you are still a very lucky woman. You have known happiness that some women spend eternity never knowing, so for that, be grateful for your darling Will, And cherish the gift of your son whom, I am certain, will bring you joy and happiness for many years to come.

Go forward in your life, with the knowledge that you were lucky enough to be close to a wonderful and charming man who would surely have continued to make an impact on the world around him. I cannot thank him personally now, but I want you to know that I do thank him from the bottom of my heart.

Maybe one day you can read this to your little boy and tell him what a wonderful man his father was.

My warmest love and best wishes

Sadie Jordanek

Tears began to run down Isabella's cheeks. She handed the letter to Maddy and fell against her for comfort. Maddy held her close as she too read these beautiful words. They clung to each other, feeling the warm air and gentle breeze as it softly engulfed them.

They both felt Will's presence in the silence of that evening as if his arms were wrapped around them for comfort. Yes, they felt blessed - one for a wonderful brother and one for a man who had changed her life forever.

THE END