

JUST SAY IT – OUT-TAKE!

After turning forty, Lisa Grant, who has been down on her luck recently, decides to leave the UK to live in Portugal. But, after her fully-laden car gasps and dies at the ferry terminal at Portsmouth, she has a *Take My Breath Away* moment when an unreliable old flame, Rory, pulls up in a sleek campervan.

Fortuitously they are heading in the same direction, and Rory nobly offers to take damsel in distress, Lisa and her goods and chattels to her father's vineyard in the Algarve.

Paparazzi photographer, Rory, is as irresistible as ever, but Lisa needs to be wary. Despite his effervescent charm, he dumped her several years previously. He went to work one morning and never came back.

While they catch up over a few glasses of wine during the overnight crossing, the weather blows up a hoolie around the Bay of Biscay and Lisa spends most of the night throwing up.

Twenty-four hours later, just as the sun begins to fade, they reach Santander.

The Basque Country

Lisa was sitting slumped in the passenger seat of the Mercedes Sprinter campervan with her eyes closed.

'Feeling better?' Rory asked, placing a concerned hand on her knee, which she put back on the steering wheel.

'Keep your hands on the wheel, Rory. I'm not sure I am feeling any better at the moment. The swaying motion of the campervan isn't exactly helping.'

'Don't worry, Li. You'll be soaking in a nice, hot bath at the B and B La Balbina before you know it,' but an hour later, they were still driving around in the dark.

'Rory, stop. I cannot believe you didn't bring a map. I've got one somewhere. If you pull over, I'll dig it out. Hang on, someone's coming towards us.'

A man with a flashlight was stumbling around in the middle of the road.

'Ask him!' Lisa suggested.

'Well, I'm not sure.'

'What do you mean you're not sure? What is it about men and asking for directions? I'll sort this out.'

The smiling stranger was dressed in a check shirt, a large beret, hanging at a kilter, which Lisa assumed was the Basque tradition. He staggered and almost fell, clasping her forearms to steady himself.

'Oh shit, he's drunk. Boa noite, senhor. Estou procurando o B and B La Balbina!'

'Zer esan zenuen?' came the slurred response.

'Li! I think he's talking Basque, and it sounds like you are talking Portuguese.'

'I know I am talking bloody Portuguese. I've been practising for weeks. The Spanish and the Portuguese are neighbours, so he might speak it unless you happen to have picked up a bit of Basque on your travels.'

At least she was trying to sort out the mess they were in.

'B and B... La Balbina. La... Balbina!' Lisa enunciated the words slowly and loudly.

'Shouting won't help!'

'Shut up, Rory! He's about to say something.'

'Bai... han up,' came the response as he pointed up a track, and taking Lisa by the hand, he led her back to the campervan, climbed in the back and passed out.

'And then there were three,' Rory scoffed, 'but anything's worth a try. Come on, Li, in you get. He was pointing up there, I think.'

They stopped outside an unlit Basque farmhouse as several unseen dogs started barking aggressively. There was one dimly lit window downstairs, and Lisa, having assumed the role of leader, went to have a look inside. An elderly lady was stirring from her sleep in an armchair. A couple of sheep lying at her feet got unsteadily to theirs.

'I really don't think this place is in Alistair Sawday's book, Rory. This can't be La Balbina. They're very animal friendly here, but it doesn't look like a B and B to me.'

There was a thud as their passenger fell out of the van, letting rip a selection of Basque expletives as he got up, which silenced the dogs and swaggered towards the door singing with gusto,

'Abestu gora Euskadi'

Sing up Basque country

'aintza ta aintza'

glory and glory to its

'bere goiko Jaun Onari'

Good Lord from above

The heavy wooden front door groaned open, and the sheep came thundering out, followed by the old lady, who let rip more colourful Basque expletives from the female perspective.

'It must be her husband...' muttered Rory.

'No shit, Sherlock!'

Wielding the shepherd's crook above her head, she brought it down with a fair amount of force across the man's shoulders.

'Ouch!' said Rory. 'That's not very nice!' And with one last chorus of *Abestu gora Euskadi*, he turned to flash Lisa and Rory a beaming smile, tipped his beret, and disappeared inside.

The old lady nodded her approval.

'La Balbina?' Lisa asked hopefully.

In broken but perfectly understandable English, the old lady replied.

'Go back down there, turn left, then right. La Balbina is the first place you see, and I thank you for bringing home my old *mozkortuta*.'

She looked at the blank expressions on Lisa and Rory's faces and added, 'My old drunk.' She turned and went back inside, the door creaking as it slammed shut behind her.

Twenty minutes later, Lisa was languishing in her promised hot bath.

The following morning, Lisa woke up to the soft pattering of Rory's snoring in the bed next to hers. She opened her eyes, and the sun streaming through the flimsy floral curtains made her feel good to be alive. For the first time in her adult life, she had no deadlines to meet and no people to please.

There was a knock at the door and the words, 'come in' slipped out of her mouth. Then, instinctively, she pulled the covers up to her chin as two cheerful women came in carrying trays of coffee, bread, crêpes, omelettes, saying something about breakfast being over.

Lisa thanked them, and they left, giggling at the snoring Rory.

Getting out of bed, Lisa poured two cups of coffee, then looked at her watch. It was noon. Breakfast officially finished an hour ago.

Rory stirred and rolled onto his back.

'Mm... I smell coffee. I'm parched.'

'They've kindly brought us a huge breakfast buffet. Do you realize we've been asleep for twelve hours? I don't think I have ever slept for so long uninterrupted.'

Lisa put the two cups of coffee on the table between the beds and hopped back into hers.
'It's such a beautiful day. Where are we aiming for?'

She watched Rory sit up, scratch his head and yawn before taking a sip of coffee.

'No, on second thoughts, I'll have a look at my map and plan us a route.'

'That sounds like a plan, Lisa Grant... Always happy to be in your hands.'