

# Chapter 1



Alice-Miranda Highton-Smith-Kennington-Jones turned towards the driver as the limousine weaved its way through the streets from the airport.

‘Excuse me, Mr Fernandez, are we nearly there?’ she asked through the opening that separated the driver from his passengers.

The man smiled to himself and kept his eyes firmly on the road ahead. ‘Soon, miss. Very soon. In fact just around this corner you will see the sea.’

Alice-Miranda clasped her hands together in

delight. She nudged Millie and Jacinta, who were sitting either side of her. Millie was fiddling with her camera and Jacinta was staring wide-eyed out of the window.

‘Look, over there!’ Jacinta pointed at the sparkling harbour spread out in front of them.

Millie looked up and craned her neck to get a better view. ‘Oh, wow! I have to get a photo of that.’

‘It’s a pity we’re leaving straight away,’ Alice-Miranda told her friends. ‘Barcelona has some very interesting buildings.’

‘Well, that sounds boring,’ Jacinta said and wrinkled her nose.

‘No, not at all. Mummy and Daddy once took me to visit an enormous cathedral called the Sagrada Família. It sort of looks like it was made by a giant out of plasticine and soft cheese,’ Alice-Miranda replied.

Hugh Kennington-Jones glanced up from his newspaper. ‘Not everyone’s cup of tea. But Mr Gaudí’s constructions are certainly, um, unique.’

‘Sounds weird.’ Jacinta’s eyes were fixed on the coastline. ‘Look! There’s a ship. I wonder if that’s the *Octavia*.’

Cecelia Highton-Smith turned to look out the window. ‘Oh yes, I think it could be. Aunty Gee is

so kind allowing Charlotte and Lawrence to have their wedding on board. It's very clever of them to get married at sea.'

Millie lowered the window and snapped away with her camera as the limousine headed towards the dock.

'And hopefully, since we've come all the way to Spain, we might be able to shake off those jolly pesky photographers who don't seem to leave Lawrence and Charlotte alone at the moment,' Hugh frowned.

'They're called paparazzi, Daddy, and they're only doing their job,' Alice-Miranda informed him.

'Well, it's a stupid job.' Millie laid her camera back in her lap. 'I really don't understand why people would want to see photographs of Lawrence eating a banana or getting his morning coffee or buying groceries – I mean, he is handsome and everything, but that's just ridiculous.'

'Aunt Charlotte will have to get used to it too, I suppose,' Alice-Miranda nodded.

'My mother loves them,' Jacinta said.

'Who?' Millie asked.

'The paparazzi, of course,' Jacinta replied.

Jacinta's mother, Ambrosia Headlington-Bear, spent her life travelling the world looking glamorous,

with a trail of hangers-on longer than most red carpets. The last time she had seen her daughter was over ten months ago and their most recent conversation had consisted of a terse exchange about the school play.

The limousine suddenly seemed very small – as though an elephant had hopped on board and no one was willing to acknowledge its presence. Cecelia pursed her lips and wondered if her decision had been the right one.

Millie hastily changed the subject. ‘I can’t believe that we’re going on Queen Georgiana’s ship. And do you remember when I first met her; I thought she was Mrs Oliver’s sister. She must think I’m completely thick.’

‘Of course not,’ Cecelia laughed. ‘Aunty Gee would have taken it as a compliment. She adores Mrs Oliver. And there is more than a passing resemblance – everyone says so.’

The car rolled to a halt at a set of security gates, where Mr Fernandez hopped out of the driver’s seat to open the boot for inspection. Hugh lowered the darkly tinted windows and handed over a wad of passports to a young Spanish policeman who looked in at the group.

‘*Hola.*’ Alice-Miranda waved. The man grinned. He disappeared into the small sentry building and returned a few minutes later.

‘Enjoy your *vacaciones,*’ the policeman called as he handed the passports back through the window to Alice-Miranda’s father.

The car proceeded past the checkpoint towards the ship moored at the end of the dock. No one inside the vehicle noticed the fair-haired boy, with a kit bag slung over his right shoulder and a worn leather trumpet case clutched in his left hand, approach the security checkpoint behind them. The lad put his bags down and reached inside his jacket pocket. His outstretched hand trembled as he gave his passport to the dark-eyed officer.

‘*Billete?*’

Neville chewed nervously at his left thumbnail. He wished he’d paid more attention in class since moving to Barcelona. His Spanish was terrible.

‘S-s-sorry?’ Neville squeaked.

‘Your ticket, young man,’ said the officer, this time in English. ‘Where are you going?’

‘Oh.’ Neville fumbled around in his jacket pocket and produced another official-looking document.

The officer smiled. ‘Your bags?’

Neville's stomach flipped. Why did they want his bags? Beads of perspiration formed along his brow.

The officer reached out and was just about to pick up Neville's case when a police motorcycle, siren blaring, turned onto the road. Behind it Neville could see a motorcade of at least six vehicles, adorned with flags on either side of the bonnets and speeding towards the checkpoint.

'Antonio, *rapidamente*,' another man called from inside the security booth.

The officer handed Neville his passport and ticket and gestured for him to move on.

'*Ir, Ir*,' he ordered, flicking his hand. 'Go!'

'Which ship?' Neville wheezed. But the policeman had already turned to greet the incoming fleet.

Neville had no idea who was in that motorcade, but clearly they were much more important than a nervous kid with a battered trumpet case and a ticket to New York.