

DARK HABITS

Sarah Perks

THE CALL OF THE FLESHPart One (*present day*)

- 1 Alba woke in the evening to the cheers of the neighbouring families, *El Gordo, El Gordo!!* they screamed round the streets of Acacias, Madrid. She wondered sleepily outside, hazy from the late siesta, an attempt to cure the headache caused by her monstrous *resaca*. Sebastián yelled in her face.

I've won!

Won what?

EL GORRRRRDO!! Did you buy a ticket? Tell me you at least bought a *décimo*...

I did, I did, of course, I... actually no, I never do

Well, I got lots of money and so did half the hood, let's celebrate!

Every ticket was worth like half a million!

Wow, but my head hurts... it was Luis' Christmas party last night... you know I drank too much

This year, after losing the club and, well, this is the best thing, so we're going out and your head's gonna hurt even more *manaña!!*

Later that drunken evening, when the entire neighbourhood had drunk the entire neighbourhood dry with their Christmas lottery celebrations, Alba had a revelation. Or a moment of clarity anyway, and a moment in spite of the fact that she was in bed underneath a sweaty and heavy Sebastián, with his surprisingly large penis grinding aimlessly inside her. She realised that she had to return home and now she had a way to get the money to do so.

- 2 The backstreets of Agaete were not the easiest to walk down. In fact there was little difference to back streets or front streets, the picturesque town on the North West coast of Gran Canaria has many things, but not pavements. Every house was painted white,

and the tourist action relegated to the port, where a strip of restaurants met the over-expensive car ferry from Tenerife. Alba was back only an hour when she enquired if anyone was selling a car, any type, any colour. She pretended that she had done her driving test in Madrid, and the family seemed to believe her.

She knocked on the green door and a familiar face feigned surprise.

Alba! Feliz navidad! No one expected you to return this year!

Is this your new house?

Yes, for six months now

I'd like to see Iván

Really? I don't think...

Now please

Well, he's not here

Where is he?

He's with Michael, and they went over to San Pedro

Tell them to be outside the *Iglesia de la Concepción* at 7pm

That's late for Iván, I don't think...

They have to be there!

Alba stormed off down the hill, heels clicking as she walked in what she knew to be unsuitable shoes and feeling the glare of Marina burn through her wool jumper. It wasn't the reunion she had hoped for, but she really hadn't known what to say.

- 3 The square filled with the festive spirit of the night before Christmas, the slowly dimming light enhanced the glow of the candle that Alba used to light her cigarette. The second glass of red wine already beginning to stain her lips, she glanced around carefully, avoiding contact whilst anticipating the arrival of Michael and Iván. Her chest deflated as she discovered Michael had arrived alone.

Alba, we didn't expect you back so soon, I thought...

What did you think?

I thought you had found success in Madrid and...
 You know I didn't, plus you thought I didn't care and couldn't
 wait to be out of here
 I never said that
 Whatever, I want to see Iván
 I don't think that's a good idea, you've not been here and
 he probably doesn't remember, and well, it's just going to
 confuse him...
 You promised this would not happen and that I could come
 home at any point and that it would not be awkward
 He's not yours, you know...

Michael hesitated as the waiter interrupted their conversation with
a caña.

Why did you come back?
 You know why
 Okay, why right this moment, why now?
 I felt I had to, it's time to fix what happened, and I want to
 start again...
 It's Marina you need to...
 I know, I can't, I tried

- 4 The car was not exactly a lottery winner's first choice but it worked
 and had an usual sunroof on top of its red body. It purred along
 narrow, curvy roads and the stereo seemed to reach an impossibly
 loud volume. Alba smoked out of the window and pulled up outside
 of the apartment she had rented on the hill. Inside she discovered
 a scrawled note that asked her to meet Marina in a hotel restau-
 rant nearby for dinner the next night. She sighed heavily and
 checked her hair in the unfamiliar mirror.
- 5 You look fantastic by the way
 Why did you choose here?

I know that no one from the town comes here and no one will
see us
I'm sure everyone knows everything now anyway
Even I don't know what happened

Alba squinted her eyes, brows and nose simultaneously at Marina
and shook out her hair from its clasp.

Well I'm the one that had to stay here
Does Iván think you are his mother?
No, why would he?
Does Michael think you love him?
No, no
Then come away with me, just to another island maybe...
I bought a car
Why should I?
I have lots of money and right now, I'm really turned on

- 6 The hotel room was long and thin, a little disappointing though
Alba had requested the best suite and had paid cash. Marina
flicked the lamp on and the main light off, then started to move
the overly large pile of cushions taking up most of the space. Alba
stepped out of her heels and began to remove clothing one piece
at a time starting from her skirt and G-strings. In a suddenly jolted
movement, Marina threw her on the bed and buried her mouth
deep inside before Alba could finish. She moved up to Alba's
mouth with wet lips, and held her arms back above her head as
they kissed passionately.



LOST IN THE BIG CITYPart Two (*six months before*)

- 1 Michael sensed the laughter was aimed at him as he left the bar. He knew his accent was strange and small town, fair enough, he was only visiting Madrid from his home in Gran Canaria. He had never been one to travel and preferred to spend any spare time fishing and diving off the hidden beaches away from tourists. He had only agreed to this trip to take his mother, Claudia, to the Prado to keep her quiet, or rather, she had blackmailed him into it. She had found out the dark secret to do with Iván and Marina and had seen her opportunity.

The façade of the Hotel Gran Atlanta belied its ageing décor and disappointing breakfast buffet, or so his mother thought as she ate alone. Michael had returned home in the early hours of the morning for the second of two nights, and had clearly not been ready for an early start and a new wing of the museum to explore. The most exciting thing about Claudia's life was the fact she had worked in one of the few offices in the small town and saw her role as both important and slightly glamorous. She had only acquired the position after Michael was born and this was partly the reason she never had another child.

- 2 The club pulsed generic European house music as Michael left its doors alone and blurry eyed. He was reminiscing on his teenage years driving to Las Palmas on Friday night only to return on a Sunday having not slept, and earlier that evening, in honour of the memories, purchased a couple of pills. Despite the effects of the mild hallucinogens, he felt very straight, and walked past his hotel façade, continuing instead five blocks down the road and into a small underground bar he had visited the night before. The clientele was older than him, and he moved to a corner to watch the women from a safe distance. If both were shocked at the sight

of the other, they still held a vacant gaze tightly, and both stretched out a hesitant approach for several seconds too long.

What are you doing here?

I could ask the same of you? And you can see that I work here

I thought you worked in theatre?

I sort of do

How are you?

I'm great, I work all night, the club owner Sebastián is my boyfriend so it is safe and I have my own place now, just a studio, but it's quiet and in the south of the city, a bit out, I like it. What about you? I can't imagine you moved here and left home for no reason?

No, I'm just here for a couple of days, I'm heading back soon, I just wanted... well, a few days away and... well also I was going to...

Look, forget this small talk, it's strange. I want to find out about Marina?

She's doing great, just great, erm, can I get you a drink?

No, thank you, I have to get back to work, let's meet tomorrow?

- 3 The park seemed like a convenient place, there was a bar in the middle of it, and plenty of space to walk in, a sort of neutral environment. Alba looked younger than the night before, and much healthier than he had thought she would.

Alba, do you want me to give the stuff you left to your father?

What, sure, okay, please do that. Sorry I forgot I left some things

I also wanted to tell you, Marina moved in with me

What? My Marina?

After you left, she sort of cried on my shoulder and then

Really? You're making this up?

And then, we had time, spent time together and sort of just ended up together

Romantic!

Do you want details?
 No, not really... what about Iván?
 He's with us too

- 4 Claudia had no real intention of going to the Prado, she just knew that Michael would not look for her there, nor would he want to come. She did like art, but he did not, and she had a bigger purpose than culture for this trip. She spent the previous two days meeting a man she had hired to check out the details of the contract she had faxed for her employee six months earlier. So much of the dealings of her boss had seemed shady to her, and after a time when he was slightly seduced by his charms, she now suspected he was laundering money. Possibly dealing drugs.

The man she hired proved her suspicions and, in retaining the all-important contract for the nightclub he owned, she had enough evidence to report him to the police. But that would only leave her unemployed and she was less interested in any kind of community or social justice than she was blackmail.

- 5 Sebastián opened the door and immediately looked confused. Claudia insisted the man in the grey suit stand in the doorway, with the door open, whilst she explained what she was doing here and what she wanted. It took about ten minutes and Claudia left with the deeds to several properties. It seemed a little too easy, but perhaps Sebastián was just really afraid of prison. Some people are.

- 6 Are you ready for the flight tomorrow?
 Yes
 Did you enjoy the museum today?
 Oh yes
 That's great, I'm ready to go home too
 Your auntie Nuria phoned early this morning, it's about your

second cousin, José

Who?

I mean great uncle, anyway, you probably don't remember him as he moved away when you were young, but he died lonely and rich, left us a house or two in the village, how about that?

For real?

Yes! Good news, isn't it?



SECRETARIES CRY, TOO

Part Three (*one year before*)

- 1 Marina sat upstairs listening to the phone ring over and over again below. With all the indignance she could muster, she went downstairs and lifted the receiver.

No, I'm sorry Claudia isn't here and I can't help you
I don't know where, or what time for that matter
I'm sorry you are inconvenienced and upset but I'm just visiting
and I can't help you
Okay, okay, I promise to leave a note
Yes will do, urgent, okay, bye

That didn't sound like an ordinary house buyer she thought. More like some kind of mafia boss. The villagers were careful not to sell to outsiders so Marina shrugged the incident off.

- 2 Claudia returned later that afternoon, and stared for a while at the note, then marched upstairs and knocked loudly.

Marina, why did you answer my phone? You should not be in the office?

It kept ringing, and Iván was trying to sleep and...
 Iván is a dog and you should not treat him like a baby!
 I was only trying to help and he was tired, we had a long walk
 over to the other *playa*, he got wet

Marina listened as she stomped down each stair, talked unnecessarily loudly on the phone and then slammed the office door shut. It was unbelievable to her that the estate agent below stayed open, the owner Sebastián was always abroad and Claudia, his secretary, seemed to close no deals at all. She had only seen him twice, and he seemed like a shady character.

- 3 Marina worked long shifts at the restaurant and met Alba by the ferry dock each night, where they drank cans of beer and talked about their plans to leave. They only met after Alba offered to walk Iván regularly, she had found him one day outside the church, escaped and lost. Alba had got married too young, and now dreamt of running away to Madrid, to Barcelona, to anywhere really. Marina had moved to Gran Canaria to find work, times were so hard on the mainland. She hadn't meant to end up in a small village but the south of the island was a disgusting mix of small-minded British tourists in concrete resorts. She had meant to head over to Tenerife but stalled for a little while after finding the ferry so expensive.

Their friendship continued on Marina's days off and, with Michael mostly on his boat or at work, they became close friends and their fantasy-sharing turned more graphic.

Have you ever met Sebastián, well I know you have, but really met him? Or you know, spent any time with him?
 No, ugh, he's weird
 I think he's dark and handsome
 He does shady things in Madrid I hear
 I bet he's amazing in bed...

SHUT UP! He would not have a clue, all porn star moves
and holding your neck, ugh ugh ugh
I think you are just jealous
As if!
You look jealous
It's not that, in fact, not what you think...
Do you think about kissing Sebastián?
No, I think about kissing you

- 4 At around 9pm, Claudia realised she had left the office in a hurry and forgotten to fax the final contract. She would have waited until the next day, except she slightly feared Sebastián and his slightly shady ways. This deal to buy a Madrid nightclub seemed important, so instead of heading to her son Michael's house, she headed back to the office instead. She called Michael from her mobile, he said Alba had not come home anyway and so he did not feel like going for dinner. Claudia was surprised to see the light on above the office, Marina would normally have been at work at this time of an evening.

As she hit the fax numbers, a groaning noise drifted down from upstairs, and Claudia frowned for a minute, until she recognised the noise. Marina has a man! She felt a little jealous and sent the fax. She returned to desk to file the contract, but was distracted by the even louder groaning (or were they moaning?) noises above. She glanced briefly at the closed blinds, turned the desktop off, closed her eyes and began to touch herself. She imagined Sebastián catching her, and forcing her to finish whilst he watched. She began to grow bolder, performing for him (in her head) and stretching out her legs across the desk. He demanded (in her head) that she use the phone receiver between her legs.

- 5 A cold scream broke the silence, followed then by a set of successive barks.

Claudia!
Alba! Marina!
Woof woof woof woof woof!

Eyes fell on each of their state of undress.

- 6 Alba looked at the floor constantly. At least Michael would never have to face the town over her infidelity, she promised him.

Michael, I'm going, tomorrow, I have a job as a dancer, just tell everyone I went for a job, that's why I left.

Do you really have a job?

Well... Sebastián said he would help me, he has some contacts, in a theatre there

Are you crying?

I'm so sorry Michael, I'm so sorry, it didn't work and I don't love you anymore so it's right that I go, I just wanted... I just wanted, you know, I meant to...

It doesn't matter, I'm not angry anymore, I just wish I hadn't found out from my mother, she was very upset you know

- 7 Michael was sorting through a large fishing net on his boat, absent-mindedly tugging whilst humming to himself. Sebastián beeped the horn of his large black 4×4 from the road, and Michael dropped the net. They met on the jetty.

Do you have the nightclub?

Yes, I've done the deal, I just need to get the rest of the money back to the island. We need to be really careful too, it will take some time

Do you think my mother will really do this?

If you help push her towards it, I'm sure, plant ideas through watching crime shows, carefully selected, of course

I will, it's worth it, she'll sign them right over to me I know

Great, I'll see you later, and oh, has Alba gone?

Yes, she has

Sebastián leaned over and grabbed Michael's *culo* tightly but affectionately. With their hands they drew each other faces close but hesitated as the Las Palmas bus rumbled past. From the back seat of the bus, and unseen by either, Alba saw everything.



