



Opening Note

“*Dear Reader (and accidental confidante):*

If you’ve picked up this book, it means you’re either curious, bored, or have recently typed “moving to Spain midlife crisis” into Google. In all three cases, welcome. You’re among friends.

Let me start with a small warning:

This is not a guide.

This is not a success story.

This is the sequel to an ongoing series of questionable decisions that began the day I swapped rain for rebujito.

Since you last saw me, I’ve learned a few things. For instance, that joining a town committee in Spain is legally binding, that my dog Tito has more followers than I do, and that one must never say “sí” in Andalucía before understanding what one is agreeing to.

(Once it was a fiesta. Another time, a tax audit. Same energy.)

I’ve also started writing online—mostly to vent—but it turns out oversharing about Spanish bureaucracy and dating is a niche people enjoy. Apparently, I’m now “a voice for expats.” Which is ironic, considering I still get nervous ordering toast.

It's a tale of love.

Of loss (of patience, mostly).

Spain continues to surprise me, confuse me, and occasionally set me on fire (sometimes literally, don't leave your olive oil too close to the stove). But

through the noise, I've found something like peace, disguised as chaos.

So, if you're ready for stories involving ferias, abuelas, missing paperwork, too many WhatsApp groups, and one extremely persistent man named Elías...

pour yourself a glass and settle in.

These are not lessons.

They're love letters.

Unfiltered, messy, and occasionally covered in olive oil.

With cariño and chaos,

Lucía



Lucía Unfiltered

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The Blog That Should've Stayed Private

Dear Reader (and fellow survivor of bureaucracy):

I didn't mean to start a blog.

Honestly, I just needed somewhere to scream without frightening the neighbors.

But here we are.

Lucía Unfiltered. A title chosen after two glasses of wine and a conversation with Carmen, who thought "filtered" meant I was talking about Instagram.

The first post was supposed to be private.

A little therapy. A digital diary no one would ever read.

Except... apparently everyone in southern Spain has Google alerts for "angry foreign woman with Wi-Fi."

It all began the day I tried to activate my certificado digital, the golden key to every Spanish online portal, and ended up at the Ayuntamiento twice, the ferretería once, and somehow in line for a marriage license.

By the time I got home, sweaty, hungry, and emotionally bankrupt, I opened my laptop and typed what I thought would be a tiny rant:

"Spain doesn't run on logic. It runs on coffee, gossip, and whatever Carmen says."

I clicked publish, poured myself a glass of wine, and forgot about it.

Big mistake.

The Next Morning

I woke up to 87 notifications, two missed calls from Carmen, and a WhatsApp from Elías that said,

"Eres famosa, vecina."

You're famous, neighbor.

For one thrilling second, I thought Netflix had finally found me.

Then I opened my phone.

The town's local paper had published an article titled:

"British Woman Declares Andalusian Wisdom the Secret to Life."

The quote?

"Spain doesn't run on logic. It runs on coffee, gossip, and whatever Carmen says."

Attribution: "Lucía M., author of the viral blog *Lucía Unfiltered*."

Accompanying photo: me, blurry, from the feria, wearing the red dress that made me look like a festive ham.

The article even described me as "una escritora local con visión fresca," which sounds nice until you realize it basically means nosy foreigner with opinions.

Carmen called immediately.

"¡Lucía! ¿Qué has hecho?"

"Nothing!"

"You're in the paper, mi vida!"

"I know."

"You mentioned me by name!"

"But I said good things!"

"That's worse. Now everyone will expect advice."

By noon, the café owner called me "la inglesa que escribe cosas."

The pharmacy gave me a discount "because famous people bring luck."

And a stranger handed me a coffee saying, "To the writer of truths."

Which sounds flattering until you realize everyone in town now wants to know what you're writing next.

The Radio Call

By 5 p.m., I received an email titled:

"Invitation: Interview en directo en Radio Almendralejo Viva!"

Carmen screamed like I'd been nominated for an Oscar.

Elías laughed so hard he almost dropped a tray of lemons.

I, naturally, said yes, because saying no in Spain is a myth.

I didn't even know what I'd agreed to.

The next morning, I showed up at a small radio studio that looked like someone's cousin's garage, holding Tito in my lap because he refused to be left behind.

The host, an older man with the world's most confident moustache, smiled and said,

"Buenos días, Lucía. Díganos, ¿qué quiso decir con eso de que España no funciona con lógica?"

I froze.

I had prepared zero answers and exactly one coffee.

Tito barked into the microphone.

The host laughed.

The sound engineer clapped.

And I, with the confidence of a woman too far gone to save, said:

"Exactamente eso."

The Group Chat

By the afternoon, there was a new WhatsApp group titled "Lucía y la Verdad" with 43 members.

Nobody added me.

Carmen sent screenshots.

Half the town was debating whether I was funny, brave, or ungrateful.

Someone even wrote:

"She speaks Spanish like my parrot, but she has a point."

My son texted from Scotland:

"Mum, why are people in Spain tweeting about you?"

I sent him a photo of Tito eating jamón.

"Long story. Send help."

Then someone painted LUCÍA UNFILTERED on the café's chalkboard wall, right under the menú del día.

Carmen said it was embarrassing.

Elías said it was marketing.

I said nothing. I was too busy refreshing my blog to see if I'd gone accidentally international.

I hadn't.

I was just very famous within a three-kilometer radius.

The Aftermath

Elías stopped by that evening. He was holding a bottle of wine and smiling that smile that always makes me nervous.

"You've caused quite the revolution, vecina."

"I didn't mean to!"

"That's what all revolutionaries say."

He poured two glasses. Tito snored under the table.

Outside, someone shouted "¡Lucía, escribe sobre mí!"

I buried my face in my hands.

Elías laughed softly.

"Spain runs on gossip," he said.

"And whatever Carmen says," I added.

He raised his glass.

"Then you fit right in."

Excerpt from Lucía's next blog post:

"If you ever think no one reads your blog, don't worry.

In Spain, they do.

And they'll correct your grammar in the comments."

The Feria Committee (a.k.a. Dante's Eighth Circle)

Dear Reader,

If hell has nine circles, the eighth one definitely holds the Comisión de Fiestas. It began, as most of my Spanish crises do, with Carmen.

The Trap (Set by Carmen)

It was an ordinary Tuesday.

I was at Carmen's kitchen table, minding my own business, eating a dangerously sweet pionono, when she said the most terrifying words in the Spanish language:

"Lucía, necesito un favor pequeño."

A favor pequeño in Carmen-speak can mean anything from lending her olive oil to helping organize a national parade. I should have known.

"They need help in the Comisión de Fiestas," she said, stirring her coffee with purpose.

"You'd be perfect—creative, organized, guapa."

I blinked. "Wait, the Feria Committee?"

"Sí, mujer. Just a few meetings. You can help make posters."

"Posters," I repeated, naively imagining glitter, Canva, maybe a little tape.

What she didn't say was that I was about to enter a bureaucratic battlefield disguised as civic pride.

By Thursday, I was somehow voted in, without attending the meeting, and given the title "responsable de eventos artísticos."

I didn't even know what that meant.

Carmen said, "You'll figure it out."

I said, "I'll Google it."

She said, "No, no. Don't. Just smile."

The First Meeting

The committee met in the Salón de Actos, a large, echoing room that smelled faintly of bleach and politics.

There were folding tables, lukewarm coffee, and twelve people—ten abuelas, one man named Paco who took minutes by hand, and me.

The president, Señora Amparo, opened the meeting with military energy.

“Tenemos que decidir las luces, el presupuesto del escenario, y si el cura nuevo puede bailar sevillanas.”

I nodded gravely, pretending to understand half of it.

Two women were already arguing about the bunting color (“azul feria” vs. “azul cielo”), another was shouting about the sausage supplier, and Carmen, of course, was whispering to me, “Don’t volunteer for anything. Just listen.”

Ten minutes later, I had accidentally volunteered for three things.

Apparently, saying “vale” in the wrong tone means “yes, I’ll organize that entire event myself.”

When the meeting ended, Paco smiled and said, “Felicidades, Lucía. Eres la encargada del concurso de flamenco.”

I laughed nervously.

No one else did.

It wasn’t a joke.

The Flamenco Fiasco

Here’s a confession: I can’t dance.

At least, not in any way that wouldn’t alarm a medical professional.

Yet here I was, responsible for a flamenco competition in a town where even toddlers clap in compás and abuelas critique posture for sport.

I tried to delegate.

“Maybe Carmen can”

“No,” said Carmen. “I’m judging the jam contest.”

Of course she was.

So I did what any modern, sensible woman would do: I made a spreadsheet.

Categories: Junior, Adult, Couples, Dramatic Flair Points.

I even suggested recycling bins near the stage “for sustainability.”
The room went silent.
Señora Amparo blinked twice.
Someone whispered “¿Reciclar? ¿En feria?” like I’d just proposed a satanic ritual.
To recover, I suggested a feminist poster theme: “Las mujeres también bailan por libertad.”
Half the committee clutched their pearls.
The other half applauded.
Paco fainted.
Carmen muttered, “Ay, Lucía... siempre con tus ideas modernas.”

The Mutiny

The next meeting was chaos.
One of the abuelas brought churros “to soften the discussion.”
It didn’t help.
By the time I arrived, everyone was already mid-shout.
Apparently, my recycling-bin idea had made the rounds on WhatsApp.
There was now a rumor that I wanted to ban plastic cups at the feria.
Someone had even printed my photo (from the Lucía Unfiltered blog article, of course) and drawn a recycling logo over my head like I was leading a revolution.
When I tried to explain, Señora Amparo slammed her hand on the table.
“Lucía, cariño, we respect your... enthusiasm. But here, we recycle... mañana.”
Everyone nodded like this was profound.
At that point, I considered quitting.
Then I looked around, Carmen fanning herself, Paco sharpening his pencil, the churros steaming and thought: No, this is my circus now.

The Day of the Contest

By the time the feria arrived, I had aged five years and gained three new gray hairs named Amparo, Paco, and Recycling.
The contest took place under a tent that smelled like sunscreen and ambition.
I was in charge of the microphone, which is dangerous because I panic-talk.

"Buenas noches a todos... y bienvenidos al primer concurso de flamenco... organizado por una escocesa con una lista de Spotify."

Laughter. Applause. Relief.

The dancers were breathtaking—every swirl, every stomp, every smoldering glare like a movie scene.

Even Tito sat in the front row wearing a tiny red bow Carmen had insisted on. It was magical.

Until I accidentally pressed the "play" button on my phone during a performance, blasting ABBA's Dancing Queen across the plaza.

Silence.

Then, laughter so loud the stage lights shook.

Elías (who'd been "helping" by selling tickets) was crying from laughter behind the lemonade stand.

Even Amparo smiled, which I'm told hasn't happened since 1998.

The Aftermath

When it was all over, Carmen hugged me.

"You caused a scandal and a standing ovation. That's talent."

Paco handed me a leftover churro.

"Next year, you're in charge of everything," he said.

I smiled weakly. "Next year, I'll be abroad."

Elías walked me home, still laughing.

"You realize you've become part of the folklore, right?"

"What do you mean?"

"They'll be telling stories for years—'the foreigner who tried to recycle the feria.'"

I groaned.

He grinned.

"You're Andalusian now, Lucía. You've survived bureaucracy and the Comisión de Fiestas. Everything else is easy."

Excerpt from Lucía's blog:

"If you think you understand community, join a Feria Committee.

There's no better way to test your patience, your Spanish, or your faith in plastic cups."

Tito the Influencer

Dear Reader,

If someone had told me my dog would become more famous than me, I would have laughed.

Now I live with a four-legged celebrity who gets recognized at the bakery.

Scene 1: The Churro Incident

It began, as most Spanish scandals do, at a café.

Carmen and I were having our usual midmorning coffee, gossiping about the Feria postmortem ("Too many sequins," "Not enough sausage," "Lucía's playlist was too international").

Tito was lying under the table, pretending to nap but secretly eyeing the plate of churros on the next table.

Two British tourists were taking photos of their breakfast, as tourists do—carefully arranging the churros next to their cappuccinos, adjusting the light like they were shooting a Vogue spread.

Then, without warning, Tito struck.

It was silent. Elegant. Professional.

One swift movement—like a furry ninja—and the churro was gone.

The woman gasped.

Her husband shouted, "Oi! Your dog!"

Carmen spit her coffee.

And I... I apologized in three languages, none of which sounded sincere.

But the damage was done.

Tito trotted off, churro hanging proudly from his mouth like a trophy.

The café roared with laughter.

And, unbeknownst to me, someone filmed the whole thing.

Scene 2: The Viral Sensation

That evening, I was brushing Tito while listening to the sweet hum of my broken washing machine when my phone exploded with notifications.

The video had made it to Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook.

Title:

"Spanish Dog Steals British Snack: The Circle Is Complete."

By morning, it had over 40,000 views.

People were tagging me in comments like "This is Carmen's friend's dog!" and "Isn't that the woman who said Spain runs on gossip?"

Carmen called at 8 a.m.

"Lucía, Tito is on the internet!"

"I know."

"You need to capitalize on this."

"Carmen, he's a dog."

"So was Lassie, and she had a career."

By noon, the café owner had printed a photo of Tito and taped it to the counter with the words "Aquí robó el churro."

Someone else created an Instagram account: @TitoElChurrero.

Bio: Local celebrity. Carb enthusiast. No regrets.

It already had 2,000 followers.

Scene 3: The Entrepreneurial Spirit of Carmen

Within days, Carmen had turned Tito's fame into a side hustle.

She began organizing "Tito Walks" around town.

Tourists could take selfies with him "for luck" (and for two euros).

She claimed it was for charity, but I never saw where the coins went.

I begged her to stop.

"Carmen, this is absurd."

"Absurd? No, cariño. This is branding."

"He's a dog!"

"A famous dog."

"He ate someone's breakfast!"

"A British breakfast. It's cultural exchange."

At that point, I gave up. Tito had a better publicist than I did.

Scene 4: The Invitation

Then came the email.

Subject: *Invitación especial – Evento benéfico "Patitas por la Paz" – Cádiz.*

Apparently, Tito had been invited to a charity event for “animals of influence.” They wanted him to walk the red carpet (or green astroturf) with other Insta-famous pets.

Carmen insisted we go.

“It’s Cádiz! Tito will love the sea!”

“He hates water.”

“We’ll bring towels.”

So we went.

Me, Carmen, Tito, and my dignity—packed into Elías’s van because mine refused to start that morning (Spain’s way of testing commitment).

Scene 5: Cádiz – The Disaster

The event was held in a plaza overlooking the port—sun, banners, stalls, a priest blessing the animals (“so they don’t bite tourists,” he said).

Dozens of dogs sat politely in bow ties and flower crowns.

Tito arrived wearing a bandana that said “Carbs Before Cats.”

It started well enough. Cameras. Smiles. Carmen networking like a politician.

But halfway through, Tito spotted a churro stand.

He lunged.

The leash snapped.

Chaos.

Churros flying.

Children screaming.

A reporter chasing him with a microphone shouting, “¡El perro del vídeo! ¡Otra vez!”

And then—God help us—the priest tried to calm him with holy water.

Tito barked.

The priest slipped.

Someone screamed “¡Milagro!”

By the time we caught him, he was covered in sugar and pride.

Scene 6: The Aftermath

The next morning, a headline appeared:

"Tito the Dog: From Churro Thief to Miracle Worker."

Carmen framed it.

Elías laughed until he cried.

I poured wine at 11 a.m. and whispered, "This is my life now."

Tito, meanwhile, was asleep on the sofa, dreaming of pastries and fame.

He didn't care that I'd spent the entire night answering interview requests from local radio.

Or that the priest had invited us to mass "para dar gracias al Señor por el animalito famoso."

All he cared about was breakfast.

So, I made toast.

He stole it.

Full circle again.

Excerpt from Lucía's blog:

"Spain teaches you that fame is fleeting, but carbs are forever.

Tito remains humble—unless you have churros."

Love, Interrupted

There are moments when Elías says “vecina” and it sounds like “Lucía.”

He never means anything by it, of course.

He’s just being friendly, helpful, warm — the Spanish trifecta of confusion for emotionally unstable foreigners.

Still, there’s a tone sometimes.

A slow smile when he drops off lemons. A glance that lasts half a second longer than necessary.

It’s nothing. It’s definitely nothing.

I tell myself this every day.

He has that Andalusian calm — the kind that should be bottled and sold in pharmacies. He never rushes, never overreacts. Even when Carmen bursts into his workshop shouting that someone’s curtains have caught fire again (long story), he just looks up, sighs, and says, “Tranquila, mujer. Se arregla.” It’s infuriating.

And a little intoxicating.

One evening, I invited him to dinner. Accidentally.

We were standing by the lemon tree, my lemon tree, now finally thriving after months of near-death experiences, and I mentioned I was cooking.

He said, “Qué suerte, yo también tengo hambre.”

And just like that, he was inside my kitchen, chopping peppers like he’d always belonged there.

He cooked like he fixed things: confidently, without instructions, and using twice as much olive oil as any cardiologist would recommend.

We opened wine, put music on, and somehow ended up talking about everything — his childhood summers in Cádiz, my disastrous attempt to do yoga in Spanish (“respira” sounded too much like “suspira”), the way time stretches differently here.

He told me I spoke better Spanish when I stopped trying.

I told him his guitar playing sounded like emotional plumbing.

He laughed, a deep, slow sound that made me forget how words worked.

At one point, he brushed flour off my shoulder — a tiny, innocent gesture — and my brain short-circuited.

I thought, This is it. This is how people fall in love in European films.

Then Tito sneezed in the corner, and the spell broke.

Later, after he left (with leftovers and, I think, half my heart), I texted Rachel.

Or meant to.

“He’s too charming for my mental health. I need professional supervision.”

Except I didn’t send it to Rachel.

I sent it to Elías.

The moment I saw his name above the message, I dropped my phone like it was radioactive.

I considered fleeing the country. Again.

He replied three minutes later.

Three minutes of hell.

“Depende de la salud, Lucía.”

That was it. No emoji. No punctuation. Just enough ambiguity to ruin me for the week.

Carmen, naturally, found out within hours.

She burst into my kitchen the next morning holding a basket of oranges like a matchmaking goddess.

“So... Elías.”

“What about him?”

“You blushed.”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Pepi says she’ll bet ten euros you’re together by feria.”

“Pepi needs a hobby.”

“You are Pepi’s hobby.”

The entire plaza knew before lunch. Someone even winked at me at the bakery and said, “Vecinaaa.”

I nearly moved to Portugal.

So I did what any emotionally mature woman would do: I ignored my feelings and redecorated.

The living room had been beige for too long. Beige was safe. Beige was dull. Beige was Scotland in emotional paint form.

I wanted color. Life. Andalusian madness.

I bought a bucket of turquoise paint — azul alegría, the label said — and started rolling it on the walls like I was erasing my own restraint. Music on. Windows open. Hope high. Two hours later, I had successfully painted myself, the floor, and, somehow, Tito. He sat there, spotted turquoise like a tragic art project, looking at me with betrayal. I panicked and tried to wash him in the courtyard, which only made things worse. By the time Carmen arrived (“You sounded stressed on WhatsApp, cariño”), Tito looked like a depressed mermaid.

She took one look at the room and gasped.
“Madre mía... you’ve turned your house into a Caribbean prison.”
“It’s temporary!”
“Love makes people do strange things.”
“Carmen, it’s paint.”
“Ay sí, azul esperanza. Everyone sees what they need to see.”
Later that night, I sat on the sofa, surrounded by chaos and wet paw prints, wondering if turquoise could cure longing. Elías sent a message at 10:14 p.m.
“The color suits you, vecina.”
I stared at it for a long time, smiling and swearing softly at my phone. Spain, once again, refused to give me clarity — only stories. And somehow, that was enough.

Excerpt from Lucía’s blog:

“There’s a thin line between friendship and flirting. In Spain, that line is usually crossed during dinner, blurred with wine, and painted turquoise the next morning.”

The Audit (and the Goat)

Dear Reader,

If there's one universal truth I've learned in Spain, it's this:

If an envelope arrives marked "Hacienda," you sit down before opening it.

Because even if it's good news (it never is), you'll still need a drink.

It happened on a Monday. Always a Monday.

The letter was pale yellow, thick, and official in that smug way only government stationery can be.

The return address said Agencia Tributaria—the tax office—and my blood pressure said goodbye.

Carmen found me standing in the courtyard, envelope in hand, eyes wide.

"What's wrong, cariño?"

"It's from Hacienda."

"Ahhh." (Pause.) "Maybe it's a love letter."

"Carmen, no one sends romantic letters on government paper."

"You'd be surprised. I once dated a customs officer."

I opened it with the same caution one uses to defuse a bomb.

The letter, naturally, was in advanced Spanish legalese.

From what I could decipher, I had been "selected for a review" of my "declared economic activities."

I had no declared economic activities.

I barely had declared emotions.

Carmen gasped.

"An audit! ¡Qué emoción!"

"Emoción is not the word I'd use."

"Don't worry. I'll come with you. You need moral support. And snacks."

The next day, I arrived at the address printed on the letter: Camino de los Olivos, 47.

Except... it wasn't an office.

It was a barn.

A literal barn.

There were chickens, a tractor, and a very suspicious goat staring at me like it knew my credit history.

Carmen whispered, "Maybe it's a rural outreach program."

I said, "Maybe it's a prank."

Then a man appeared wearing overalls, holding a folder, and said,

"¿Eres la señora McCallister?"

"Yes?" I squeaked.

"Ah. We've been expecting you. Follow me."

I followed him—into the barn.

My brain whispered, You're going to die surrounded by hay and regret.

Inside was a makeshift desk, a laptop, and a fan that looked older than democracy.

And behind it sat her.

Isabel.

The same Isabel from the NIE office—the one with the calm of a saint and the soul of an executioner.

"Lucía," she said, without surprise.

"Isabel," I said, with trauma.

She adjusted her glasses.

"It seems there's been a small mix-up. Your accountant used the wrong NIF number."

"Oh thank God."

"The number belongs to a farmer."

"Okay."

"Who declared six goats, three tons of olives, and a tractor subsidy under your name."

I blinked.

"I don't have a tractor."

"Yes, we noticed."

Carmen whispered, "Yet."

Isabel sighed, in the way only civil servants can sigh—a sound that could curdle milk.

"We need to verify the assets in person, so we're doing the review here."

And that's how I ended up sitting at a folding table in a barn while a goat chewed on my handbag.

Half an hour later, I was somehow part of a full-blown inspection. Isabel checked numbers on a clipboard while the farmer—an apologetic man named Paco (of course)—insisted that the accountant “must have been distracted by love.”

Carmen nodded wisely. “It happens.”

Meanwhile, the goat had taken a strong interest in me.

She kept nudging my leg, sniffing my folder, and bleating every time Isabel asked a question.

It was like having a chaotic emotional support animal.

I named her Lola.

At some point, I got tired of apologizing for not owning any livestock and decided to... make a speech.

I don’t know why. Maybe the heat. Maybe the panic. Maybe the fumes from the goat.

I stood up.

“Listen,” I said, “I might not understand Spanish tax law—or, frankly, any tax law—but I do believe in honesty. And maybe that’s enough.”

Isabel stared at me like I’d lost consciousness mid-sentence.

Carmen clapped.

Paco clapped.

Even the goat bleated approvingly.

I continued, because clearly I’d lost control of my own mouth.

“Spain runs on trust! And gossip! And coffee! But mostly, trust!”

There was silence.

Then Isabel said, “You should be on television.”

I wasn’t sure if that was a compliment or a warning.

In the end, it turned out fine.

The accountant apologized.

Paco got his goats back.

And Isabel, after muttering “esto solo pasa contigo”, handed me a small package.

“Compensation,” she said.

Inside was cheese.

Made from Lola’s milk.

Carmen was thrilled.

"You see? Everything in Spain ends with food."

We left the barn laughing, carrying cheese and our dignity (barely).

But as we reached the car, I heard a sound behind me.

Soft hooves.

Lola was following.

Trotting happily after us, tail wagging like a dog who'd found her purpose.

I turned. "No, Lola. Stay."

She bleated.

Carmen opened the car door. "She's coming."

And that's how I drove home with a goat in the back seat, Carmen singing sevillanas, and Tito barking furiously from the window.

When we arrived, Lola walked straight into the courtyard, sniffed the lemon tree, and sat down like she paid rent.

Carmen nodded.

"Every house in Spain needs a protector."

I looked at Tito, who looked betrayed.

I looked at Lola, who looked smug.

And I thought, Maybe Hacienda knows what I need better than I do.

Excerpt from Lucía's blog:

"Spain's tax system is complicated, but the moral is simple: file honestly, be polite, and never underestimate a goat's ability to change your life."

The Olive Oil Heist

Dear Reader,

If you've never been to an olive oil fair in rural Spain, imagine a farmers' market, a family reunion, and a talent show had a very shiny baby.

There are olives in bowls, olive oil in bottles, olive-wood spoons for sale, and people arguing passionately about acidity levels as if it's politics.

This year's Feria del Aceite de la Sierra was the social event of the season.

Banners everywhere. Stalls polished. Local bands tuning up. The mayor practicing his annual speech about "heritage, sustainability, and flavor."

And Elías?

He had a stand.

A beautiful, rustic, handmade wooden stall where he sold small bottles of his family's olive oil.

He'd asked me to help.

Just help. Pour samples, smile, wear the apron.

That was all.

Naturally, disaster followed.

It started beautifully.

The sun was golden, the air smelled of rosemary and fried anchovies, and the square was buzzing with life.

Carmen arrived first, with her hair freshly curled and an attitude that could only be described as co-director of the event, even though she wasn't.

Pepi followed, wearing sequins ("for the light reflections, cariño — it's all about ambiance").

We set up Elías's stand: wooden crates, sample cups, a little sign that said Aceite de la Sierra – Extra Virgen, Extra Orgullo.

I had designed it on Canva. Elías called it "too modern."

He still used it.

By noon, the first customers came. They dipped bread. They nodded seriously.

They said "fruity" and "intense" like professional sommeliers.

Elías looked proud. I looked competent. Carmen looked like she owned the place.

Then, around two o'clock, he said the most dangerous words in Spain: "It's siesta time. Let's grab lunch."

We left the stand for what felt like twenty minutes — tapas, wine, laughter, gossip.

When we returned, everything was gone.

Not the table or the crates — no, those were still there. But every single bottle of olive oil had vanished. Forty of them.

Gone. Evaporated.

Even the display bottle Carmen had tied a ribbon around.

Elías froze.

Carmen screamed.

Pepi gasped like she was on a soap opera.

And I? I laughed.

The kind of laugh that sounds a little too close to a breakdown.

"They stole olive oil," I said. "Only in Spain could theft be this... healthy."

Elías didn't find it funny.

He ran a hand through his hair. "That's my entire stock, Lucía."

Carmen crossed herself. "¡Dios mío! ¡Nos han robado el oro líquido!"

We called the police. They didn't come.

We called the security guard. He was on siesta.

We called Pepi. She was already there but insisted on calling me from five meters away to say, "I told you, aliens. They love shiny things."

So I did what any self-respecting foreigner with mild delusions of competence would do: I turned detective.

Clue one: no footprints, just one half-eaten sandwich behind the stand.

Clue two: a trail of tiny golden drips leading toward the municipal storage shed.

Clue three: a faint smell of anise and guilt.

Carmen put on sunglasses. "We're going in."
Pepi followed, whispering, "If we die, tell my grandchildren I loved them."
We reached the shed and pushed open the door.
And there he was.
Paco.
The feria one, not the baker.
Sitting on a crate, surrounded by every single bottle of Elías's olive oil.
He looked up, chewing thoughtfully on a breadstick.
"Hola."
Elías's voice was a growl. "¿Qué haces?"
Paco shrugged.
"Guardándolos."
"Guardándolos?"
"Sí. The energy around your stand felt... off. I thought it best to protect them."
Carmen threw her hands in the air.
"The energy? Paco, this isn't yoga! It's agriculture!"
He pointed to one bottle. "This one was trembling."
At that point, I gave up. Logic had clearly left town.

We carried the bottles back.
By then, the sun was setting and most of the crowd had moved to the bar tent.
Elías looked defeated.
"Too late to sell now."
"Then we drink," Carmen declared.
So we did.
We opened one bottle, poured it into little cups, and toasted to survival.
Pepi brought cheese.
Someone started playing guitar.
Within minutes, our stall had turned into a party.
People drifted over, drawn by the music and the laughter.
Someone shouted, "Viva el aceite de Lucía!" even though it wasn't mine.
And Elías, who had started the day stressed and serious, was now laughing, genuinely laughing, as Carmen danced with a man dressed as an olive tree.

When the mayor announced the awards, we didn't even look up.

But then he said:

"Best Stand for Community Spirit — Aceite de la Sierra."

Applause.

Cheers.

Carmen screamed like we'd won Eurovision.

Elías lifted his glass toward me.

"We didn't sell a drop."

"No," I said. "But apparently, we sold the vibe."

Later, as we walked home through the quiet streets, Tito trotting beside us and Carmen humming a victory song, Elías looked over and smiled.

"You know, Lucía... only you could turn a robbery into a fiesta."

"I didn't do anything."

"Exactly."

I smiled back, a little dizzy from the wine and the absurdity of it all.

Because maybe that's the secret to Spain:

When everything goes wrong, everyone just pours another glass, puts on music, and calls it community spirit.

Excerpt from Lucía's blog:

"In Spain, if you lose something, don't panic. Wait two hours, and someone will either return it, dance with it, or give you an award for it."

The Blog That Bit Back

Dear Reader,

I have learned two things since becoming a “writer”:

1. Never underestimate the Spanish ability to take everything personally.
2. Never publish anything before your second coffee.

It all began with a post I wrote on a sleepy Sunday afternoon titled “Why Spain Is Like Dating a Beautiful, Unreliable Man.”

It wasn't serious — just a silly comparison that came to me after my Wi-Fi died mid-recipe and the electricity company told me they'd “see what they could do mañana.”

I wrote:

“Spain will make you feel alive, adored, desired. Then it forgets to call you back for two days and shows up with a bottle of wine like nothing happened.”

I compared the siesta to emotional withdrawal, the bureaucracy to commitment issues, and tapas culture to love bombing.

It was meant to be funny.

Playful.

A little wink at the madness we all survive here.

I pressed publish and went on with my day — hanging laundry, talking to Carmen, losing a battle with the mop.

By the next morning, the post had been republished by an expat magazine called Sunny South Living.

They titled it, without permission:

“Spain: The Toxic Boyfriend You'll Never Leave.”

And that's when it all went downhill.

At first, it was flattering.

Hundreds of likes, dozens of comments: “So true!” “Brilliant!” “This woman gets it!”

Someone even tagged it #LucíaSaysSo, which Carmen immediately started using as if it were scripture.

But then came the locals.

And oh, dear God, the locals.
The article made it to the town's Facebook page, where nuance goes to die.
Half the people laughed.
The other half started drafting their resignation from civilization.

Someone commented:

"This woman hates Spain."

Another replied:

"No, she loves Spain, she just has trust issues."

Then a man named Manolo (not that one, the other one) wrote:

"If she doesn't like it here, she can go back to Scotland."

I haven't been to Scotland in years. But thank you, Manolo.

The worst moment came at the supermarket.

I was in the cheese aisle, innocently comparing *manchego curado* with *semicurado*, when I heard a voice behind me say,

"So. You think Spain is unreliable?"

It was the mayor's wife.

Perfect hair. Pearls. That smile women reserve for war.

I blinked. "Ah, well—it was a joke."

"A joke?" she said. "You called the country emotionally unavailable."

"It was a metaphor."

"We prefer ham to metaphors."

She dropped her yogurt into the cart like a grenade and walked away.

I stood there holding cheese, questioning my life choices and briefly considering witness protection.

Later, Elías found me at the plaza, sulking over a cortado.

He sat down, calm as ever, sunlight catching in his hair in a way that made my brain forget grammar.

"I read your post," he said.

I braced for criticism.

"And?"

He smiled. "You're *valiente*."

I blinked. "Or reckless."

"It's a fine line."

He sipped his coffee.

"Spain needs people who tell the truth, even if it makes us uncomfortable. We laugh, we get offended, and then we invite you to dinner anyway."

I wanted to argue, but then Carmen walked by yelling, "¡Lucía! They're talking about you on the radio again!"

So I just sighed and ordered another coffee.

That night, I checked my email — something I rarely do unless guilt or curiosity wins.

There it was:

Subject line — "From a Reader: Help, Señora Lucía."

The email began:

"Dear Señora Lucía,

I moved to Spain last year, and I'm struggling. Everything is slow, everyone talks too much, and I feel like I'm losing myself. But then I read your blog, and I think... maybe that's okay.

Can you tell me how you stay so brave?"

Brave.

That word again.

I read it twice. Three times.

I stared at the word Señora like it was a personal attack.

When did that happen?

When did I become old enough to be a "Señora"?

When did "brave" become code for "stubborn woman who cries at the post office but refuses to move home"?

Tito sighed from the couch.

Carmen's voice echoed faintly through the patio wall — something about a lost shoe and divine punishment.

And I thought: maybe this is it. Maybe bravery isn't loud. Maybe it's just staying. Laughing when the Wi-Fi dies. Buying the cheese anyway.

So I wrote back.

"Dear reader,

Spain will confuse you, exhaust you, and teach you patience through humiliation. But one day, you'll laugh at yourself and realize you've stopped checking flight prices home. That's how you know you've made it.

Also, carry snacks. Bureaucracy is long."

I hit send.

Then poured a glass of wine.

Because if Spain is an unreliable man, I suppose I'm the woman who fell for him and stayed anyway.

Excerpt from Lucía's blog:

"Bravery isn't loud. Sometimes it's just ordering another cortado after you've embarrassed yourself in public again."

The Great Romería Disaster

Dear Reader,

If Spain has taught me anything, it's that no one does faith, fashion, or food quite like a romería.

It's part pilgrimage, part parade, part picnic — and, if you're me, part near-death experience involving a horse named Valentina and an overexcited terrier.

It all began the week Carmen decided that I, Lucía the foreigner, should have “the full Andalusian experience.”

“This year, you come on the romería, cariño.”

“The what?”

“La romería! We walk, or ride, with the Virgin up to the campo. Singing, dancing, praying, drinking. It's beautiful.”

“Sounds holy.”

“It starts holy. Then it gets festive.”

By festive, she meant feral.

The morning of the romería, the whole town looked like a flamenco fashion show on horseback.

Women in vibrant dresses and flowers, men in short jackets and wide hats, children trailing behind in mini carts filled with beer and tortilla.

Even Tito had a red scarf.

Carmen introduced me to my ride: Valentina.

A tall, dignified mare with glossy brown eyes and an expression that said,

“I've met your type before, and I'm not impressed.”

“Be gentle,” Carmen said.

“I don't know how to ride!” I protested.

“Perfect. She does.”

The procession began with tambourines, clapping, and a sea of color moving up the dirt path toward the fields.

The Virgin's statue — crowned with flowers and escorted by proud men in straw hats — glimmered in the sunlight.

People sang sevillanas about hope, faith, and ham.

Someone handed me a cup of wine before 10 a.m.

And somehow, despite my total lack of experience, Valentina and I were... surviving.

Until we weren't.

Halfway up the hill, Tito — who had been riding in Carmen's cart — saw a rabbit.

He jumped. The cart jolted. Carmen screamed.

Valentina reared, indignant.

I clung on like a woman reconsidering every decision since 2015.

"¡Tranquila, Valentina!" I shouted. "Por favor! Soy buena persona!"

A man galloped by, laughing. "¡La inglesa tiene arte!"

I was too terrified to be flattered.

By noon, we reached the meadow.

Blankets everywhere. Coolers opened. Bottles popped.

The Virgin rested in the shade like the calmest one of us all.

I dismounted (badly) and landed in a bush.

Carmen handed me food. Pepi had brought *ensaladilla rusa*, *empanadas*, and enough *rebujito* to baptize the entire province.

People danced barefoot in the grass. Someone pulled out a guitar. Someone else grilled chorizo on what might've been a repurposed tractor part.

For a glorious hour, it was perfect: sun, laughter, wine, Tito happily eating someone's leftover *croquetas*.

Then came the wind.

A strong gust swept across the field, toppling plates, blowing skirts, and sending Carmen's fan spinning straight into the Virgin's flower arrangements.

People gasped like we'd witnessed a biblical crime.

Pepi shouted, "It's a sign!"
Carmen yelled, "It's IKEA quality!"
And I, because I can never help myself, tried to fix it.
I climbed onto a hay bale, grabbed my megaphone (why did I even bring it?), and shouted,
"¡No pasa nada! ¡Seguimos la romería a la antigua!"
Which, translated, means: I have no idea what's happening, but let's make it worse.
Someone started clapping.
Someone else started singing.
And just like that, chaos turned into celebration again.

Elías appeared — as he somehow always does — guitar slung over his back, calm as ever.
"Electricity's overrated," he said, strumming.
"So are plans," I answered.
He smiled. "Then we're in the right country."
He played softly, people gathered, and suddenly everyone was singing — half drunk, half divine.
Pepi lost her shoe.
Carmen danced barefoot.
Tito barked to the rhythm like he'd rehearsed.
And for a moment, between laughter and music, everything made sense.

When the sun began to set, the Virgin was carried back down the hill.
The crowd followed — tired, dusty, glowing.
Carmen leaned on my arm, sighing happily.
"Lucía, that was a disaster."
"I know."
She smiled.
"It was perfect."
Elías walked beside Valentina, his hand resting on her reins.

He looked at me, then at the sky, and said,

"You rode well, vecina."

"You mean I survived."

"Same thing."

And I thought, maybe he was right.

Because surviving Spain isn't about doing it right — it's about showing up, laughing when it all goes wrong, and holding on just long enough to call it beautiful.

Excerpt from Lucía's blog:

"In Spain, faith is noisy, joy is sacred, and the path to enlightenment definitely includes tortilla."

Lucía's Note (Postscript)

For the record, Valentina and Tito are no longer on speaking terms.

On the ride back, Tito decided to assert dominance by barking directly at her tail for forty-five uninterrupted minutes.

Valentina, being a queen, ignored him — until the final kilometer, when she "accidentally" flicked him with her tail and sent him tumbling into Carmen's picnic basket.

Carmen swore it was divine justice. Pepi said it was karma.

I just said, "At least we brought extra jamón."

That's Spain for you: a little bit sacred, a little bit slapstick, and always worth the mess.

Elías and the Lemon Tree

Dear Reader,

If the *romería* was all noise and chaos, the night that followed was pure stillness, the kind of silence you can only find after everyone has finally danced themselves into peace.

The lights were off in the plaza, but I couldn't sleep.

Too much adrenaline, too much *rebuji*to, too many images stuck in my head, Carmen singing off-key, Pepi's wig sliding down during her twirl, and Elías, laughing under those string lights like the world was just slightly better because of it.

So I wandered out into the courtyard.

The air was warm, still humming faintly with leftover music.

Tito was asleep under the chair, snoring softly, a tiny guardian of bad decisions.

And there it was: my lemon tree.

It had survived the heat, the wind, and that tragic week when I watered it with tonic instead of tap water because the labels were in Spanish.

But lately, it looked... tired. Droopy. Like it had seen things.

Much like me.

I crouched down beside it and sighed. "We're both hanging on, huh?"

"Talking to plants again?"

His voice came from the gate.

Low, amused, too familiar.

Elías leaned against the wall, that same easy grin, a smudge of paint on his forearm.

He looked unfairly good in the half-light — like a man you'd accidentally write poetry about and regret immediately after.

"I was just... checking on it," I said.

"You've been checking on it for ten minutes."

"I'm emotionally invested."

He chuckled and stepped closer, crouching beside me.

"It's the pot. Too small."

"Aren't we all."

He smiled. "I have a bigger one. I'll bring it tomorrow."

"Tomorrow" in Spain usually means "never," but Elías was not like everyone else.

He left and came back ten minutes later — carrying a large clay pot, a small shovel, and the exact level of confidence I lack even when ordering coffee.

"You were serious?"

"Always, about lemon trees."

We started working side by side, loosening the soil, careful not to break the roots.

It was slow, messy work. My hands got dirty, his shirt stuck to his back, and the night air was thick with the smell of earth and citrus.

When we lifted the tree together, our hands brushed — light, fleeting, electric.

I didn't move. Neither did he.

For a moment, there was only the sound of our breathing and the tiny, ridiculous squeak of Tito's toy underfoot.

"Everything grows if you let it," he said softly.

I looked at him, then at the tree, then at him again — and for the first time in a long time, I forgot how to be ironic.

It wasn't a grand moment.

No swelling violins, no perfect lighting, just two people standing in a courtyard at midnight, covered in dirt, trying to save a lemon tree.

And still — it felt like something had quietly shifted in the universe.

He smiled, slow and warm.

"Vecina..."

But before anything else could happen, before the space between us could become whatever it was about to become, Tito exploded into a barking fit so dramatic it could have summoned the Guardia Civil.

A neighborhood cat, smug and orange, darted across the wall.

Elías laughed.

I groaned.

“Your dog has terrible timing.”

“My dog has strong moral boundaries.”

The moment was gone.

He helped me settle the tree into its new home, patted the soil down, wiped his hands on his jeans, and said,

“It’ll do well now.”

“You sure?”

“Everything grows if you let it.”

He left soon after, with a small wave and that infuriating calm smile that makes women question their entire emotional architecture.

I stood there, looking at the lemon tree — new pot, new roots, new chance — and thought maybe he wasn’t talking about the plant at all.

Excerpt from Lucía’s blog:

“Sometimes growth doesn’t look like progress. Sometimes it’s just staying in the soil long enough to bloom, even if the dog ruins the moment.”

Unfiltered and Unapologetic

Dear Reader,

I used to think moving to Spain was an act of bravery.

Now I know it was an act of madness.

But sometimes, those two things look exactly the same.

The morning started with a bang. Literally.

Carmen was outside my door at 8:03 a.m., banging a saucepan and shouting, “Lucía, despierta, it’s your saint’s day!”

It was not. But in Spain, any excuse will do.

I stumbled out in my robe, hair resembling an angry dandelion, to find Carmen, Pepi, and even Paco (the goat guardian, not the baker) standing there with a tray of tostadas and a bottle of cava.

“We’re celebrating!” Carmen announced.

“What exactly?”

“You. Your blog. The fame. The chaos. The essence of Lucía.”

Pepi nodded solemnly. “And the lemon tree. It’s blooming.”

I looked over. She was right. The lemon tree had finally sprouted tiny white flowers, stubborn and fragrant. It looked — dare I say — happy.

I felt a ridiculous lump in my throat.

Carmen poured three glasses of cava and one for Tito. “To fresh starts,” she said.

“Again?” I asked.

“Always.”

Later that day, I sat at my desk — which was technically the kitchen table, shared with bills, olive oil stains, and the occasional goat hair — and opened my laptop.

My inbox was full.

Someone from Sunny South Living wanted to “discuss a potential book deal.”

Someone else wanted to interview “Spain’s favorite accidental expat.”

And one terrifying message simply read, “Please advise: how do I become you?”

(Short answer: bad decisions and Wi-Fi.)

I clicked open a blank document.

For the first time, I didn’t overthink it.

No drafts. No filters. No disclaimers.

Just me.

I started typing:

“Spain didn’t change me. It revealed me.

I was always this ridiculous. Just colder.”

And once I started, I couldn’t stop.

I wrote about Carmen and her unshakable optimism, about Pepi’s sequins, about Tito’s crime spree and the goat that wouldn’t leave.

I wrote about the bureaucracy, the laughter, the endless waiting that somehow still gets you somewhere.

I wrote about falling in love with a country that never promised to love me back and finding that it did anyway, in its own disorganized, beautiful way.

I wrote about Elías.

But not too much.

Just enough.

When I finished, I read it aloud — badly, in two accents and three emotional registers.

Then I hit publish.

For once, I didn’t check the stats, or the comments, or whether my punctuation was correct.

I just sat there.
The lemon tree outside rustled softly in the afternoon breeze.
Its blossoms glowed like tiny suns.
Tito was asleep under the chair.
Somewhere down the street, Carmen was arguing with a delivery man
about destiny.
My phone buzzed.
It was Elías.
Two messages.
“He leído tu post.”
“Tengo algo que enseñarte otra vez.”
I stared at the screen, heart doing gymnastics.
A smile crept up.
Then I typed back — just one word.
“Vale.”

That night, I poured a glass of wine, sat on the patio, and watched the stars
emerge over the rooftops of Almendralejo de la Sierra.
I thought about how this place — this maddening, glorious, sunburned
corner of Spain — had slowly, quietly turned me into someone I actually
liked.
Someone who didn't run.
Someone who stayed.
Someone who, against all logic, was happy.
Tito snored. The goat bleated from somewhere near the gate.
I laughed into the night and whispered,
“I think we might finally belong here.”

Excerpt from Lucía's blog:

*“You'll know you're finally part of Spain when you stop translating yourself
— and start clapping when the plane lands.”*

Lucy's phone lit up.
Welcome back, Lucía.
Instagram notifications.
Her friend group asking if she was alive.
A message from someone named "Paco de la Feria":
"¿Quieres salir esta noche, guapa?"
She closed the phone.
Smiled.

Ángel packed up his things.
Carmen arrived with jamón and a bottle of homemade wine "just in case."
Lucy sat with them on the patio, all three of them sipping slowly, watching the sun set behind the lemon tree that always looked tired but never gave up.
"Gracias, Ángel," she said. "Por todo."
He tipped his hat, which she hadn't noticed until that exact moment.
"A ti. Eres valiente, Lucía."

And that night, with working Wi-Fi, warm water, and a fully-functioning oven, Lucy made roasted peppers.
She sat on the couch.
Watched bad Spanish TV.
Ate from a real plate.
And whispered to herself:
"I did it. I survived the Spanish Homeowner Apocalypse.
I'm basically qualified to run the town now."

Epilogue

The next morning, I woke to the smell of lemons.
Real ones. Blooming.

Carmen says it's a sign of abundance. Pepi says it's menopause.
I say it's both.

Whatever it means, I'm ready.

Because for the first time since moving here, I'm not waiting for Spain to make sense.

I'm just living it. Loudly.
Unfiltered.
Unapologetic.
And maybe, finally, Lucía.

Hint for Book Three: I Came for the Sun, Stayed for the Croquetas

That afternoon, Elías knocked on my door.

He was holding a paper bag behind his back — and smiling in that calm, ruinous way that usually ends with me agreeing to something I don't fully understand.

“¿Lista?” he asked.

“For what?”

“For cooking.”

And just like that, Spain let me into the kitchen.



At BE Spain Savvy, we're more than just a service; think of us as your amigos, guiding you through every aspect of Spanish life. From tapas to sunsets, we make your adventure smooth and memorable.

BRENDA AND ELLIE



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