

Day 32 - Thursday 4th May

Today looks like an ideal day to wander around one of Spain's hottest cities. It's still overcast and quite cold standing at the bus stop waiting for the number sixty-three. Surprisingly the eight thirty bus arrives on time, but the supposed thirty minute journey takes just over an hour in the morning rush hour traffic.

The bus terminates at the Plaza de Armas bus station, which doesn't look very close to the centre. Yes, once more we've forgotten to prepare with a map or even a map study. I only have a vague idea of the right way to the centre, so follow everybody else out of the bus station instead, hoping it's where they are headed. It sort of works and with just one change of direction we stumble upon a tourist office in the Plaza Nueva. Equipped with a map we sit at a table outside a bar and order coffee and hot chocolate while we decide on a plan of action for the day.

Stamps and money are the first priority. Walking along the Avenida de la Constitución towards the post office we try a couple of banks. It's still the wrong type of money. In the post office I buy stamps from the friendliest government employee I've come across in any country. It's still the wrong type of money in the fourth bank, but the teller points us towards another one, further along the road that will definitely accept our cheques. We have to queue for half an hour first, he was right though, they do accept the wrong type of money. It's also the first time that the transaction has been completed in near UK bank time, with only a minor commission charge. I'll have to remember the name of this bank for future reference.

"We've wasted two hours on stamps and banks, again. Where shall we start then?" I ask Debbie.

"The Plaza de España is not far, we could start there? Then get a tourist bus?" She says hopefully, I'm not a big tourist bus fan, although they are a calf

saving way of seeing the major sites. Debbie loves them. We've wasted all that time and the early morning clouds have been replaced by bright sunshine. Bright, hot sunshine. It was an absolute great idea to bring jumpers out today. Oh, why not? We're in Andalucía, the sun is out and it feels like holidays. Lets go tourist bus.

The Plaza de España was built in 1829 for the Iberoamerican Exhibition, a celebration of Spain's association with the Americas. A strange celebration when in the twenty years preceding this, Spain had all but lost every one of its American colonies in bloody battles for independence. Rather than a square, the *Plaza de España* is a semi-circular shape, two hundred metres in diameter, bordered on the curved edge by a continuous building in a Mudéjar style. Leaflet. If that means Moorish, then Mudéjar is going to be a lot easier to spot without the aid of a leaflet than Gothic, Romanesque or Baroque put together. For our visit however, part of the building, which is now used by the Andalusian Junta (parliament), happens to be draped in scaffolding for major renovations. Builders are hanging off it in various states of undress paying more attention to the female tourists than the job in hand. The moat has also been drained, although we could still go for a paddle in six inches of fetid rubbish, if we really wanted to.

We grab a bottle of water each from a street vendor and start a search for a tourist bus. Buying the tickets proves easier than finding the bus. On the Avenida de Portugal we find a ticket tout trying his best to sell the ten Euro per person tour to a Dutch family. They listen patiently until he's finished his spiel, shake their heads and walk off.

"*Two tickets, por favor.*" I get in quickly, before he has time to grab another passer by or launch into his spiel with us.

"*Errr, sí. Sí.*" He's lost for words, almost dumbstruck. It's the easiest sale he's ever made.

Unfortunately, he's that dumbstruck he forgets to tell us where the nearest bus stop is. I, relieved that we didn't have to go through the whole sales

pitch, forget to ask. The three dimensional map we get with the tickets is not easy to follow. The nearest bus stop could be on any one of four streets. My TRP flares up, oh no, whichever one I choose will be the wrong one. Yes. We finally find the bus stop forty minutes later after a long walk around all the four streets it could've been on. Crossing over to the last possible place for the bus stop, a tyre screeching, horn blaring taxi driver almost takes Debbie out on a pedestrian crossing. Several other sweaty couples are waiting at the stop, having done exactly the same as us.

When the bus arrives it's packed. We divide our resources, Debbie waits in the queue with the tickets to get the complimentary headphones; I, charge straight upstairs to get one of the last remaining seats. Debbie arrives a few minutes later with some very poor quality headphones. I have to keep twisting at mine to make a connection to be able to hear the commentary. Five minutes later I give up and watch Seville unfold around us, non-the wiser as to whether I'm looking at Romanesque, Baroque or Gothic architecture, I think I have spotted some Mudéjar though. I should've picked a leaflet up; I'll have to read the guidebook later.

Debbie's headphones must be working okay. She's sitting listening attentively, her head turning from left to right at the commentators prompting. I ask her if there is anywhere she wants to get off. She doesn't seem that bothered, to be honest after all we've seen, Seville has come as a bit of a disappointment. We'd probably built it up too much, much more; after all it is another city that boasts to be the most beautiful in Spain. This continual Spanish boasting has clouded our expectations. We complete a full circuit on the bus and alight to find somewhere for lunch, before taking in the Giralda in the afternoon.

Dessert arrives. Debbie who has been a bit quiet all morning just plays with hers. That's unusual, dessert is normally her favourite part of any meal. Come to think of it, that's very unusual.

"You okay? You're a bit quiet." I ask.

"It was a bit disappointing, wasn't it? I was expecting Seville to be really special." She replies.

"I thought that too. We've still got the cathedral to see though, that's supposed to be something special. And, we could always come back in tonight to sample the night life." I try and inject some enthusiasm. Come to think of it, Debbie's enthusiasm has been on the wain for a week or so now. I'd just put it down to ladies troubles.

"I suppose so." She says uninterestedly and continues playing with her dessert. I order a coffee.

"Actually," she says looking up, "I'm not sure I love you anymore, I want a divorce." Bit of a shocker, to say the least. I'm lost for words, well almost, but not quite.

"I let you beat me at pool last night." If they ever write a list of the all time greatest retorts to "I want a divorce," "I let you beat me at pool last night" is not going to make it. I'm in shock, I don't know what to say, to do or think.

"Shall we go and see the cathedral?" Yes, that's it. Pretend I didn't hear it.

"Didn't you hear what I said?" My plan worked for all of two seconds.

"Do you want to go to the cathedral or not?" I say making like an ostrich.

"Matt, I'm going to fly back to England, you keep the car and carry on. I just don't want to be with you anymore. It's not you, it's me." Ah, that old chestnut, eh?

"You're coming back to the hotel to get your stuff though?"

"No, I'll go now, do whatever you want with it. Here is your half of the travellers cheques." Bloody hell, she's been planning this. She's well prepared, even got her passport with her. She must've been waiting for a city with an international airport to come up. Come to think of it she has been spending a lot of time on the internet the last couple of days. Female perception has never been a strong trait of mine, but then again I am a geezer, will we ever be able to unravel that devious female mind?

We walk round to the cathedral. I'm in a daze, an unqualified daze. An unqualified sober daze, to boot. I could do with a large helping of *vino tinto*. Not the ideal solution I know, but it might help induce some sort of assuaging numbness.

"Haven't you got anything to say?" She asks. Yes, I do have actually.

"How the fuck am I going to put the tent up on my own?"

"Matt, I'm being serious."

"So am I," I pause. "Sorry, that was a bit frivolous, valid, but frivolous. You've given me a bit of a shock you know. Look, just come back to the hotel, at least you can get your stuff and book a flight. I could even take you to the airport." Idiot. Offering to take her to the airport?

"I don't think that would be wise, do you?" I haven't the vaguest idea, being wise is also a not so strong trait of mine, in fact being wise is not even a trait of mine. We sit outside the cathedral in silence for what seems like an age. A million thoughts race through my mind; most prominent, where is the nearest bar?

"Look, I'm really sorry, but we need to go our separate ways," Debbie finally breaks the silence. "I'm going into the cathedral are you coming?" Separate ways, jointly? At this moment in time I'd rather have my pubic hairs pulled out very slowly with a pair of rusty pliers.

"No, I'm going to go back to the hotel. Will you come back later?"

"No."

"You really want a divorce?"

"Yes. I'm sorry, I've changed."

"Over fucking lunch?" Not a bad come back, even though I say so myself. Then I spoil it. "In that case, have a nice life." I get up and walk away. Once again, failing appallingly in the best things to say in difficult circumstances.

And that was it. I walked off into the burning sun. My, almost seven year, marriage over. Feeling devastated, confused, angry, betrayed, a whole Alton Towers of emotions. I float around the streets of Seville. I never did get to see

the cathedral or much more of Seville for that matter. I wonder where that nearest bar is?

Somehow, on an emotional autopilot, I manage to find my way back to the bus station, quite surprisingly without going into a single bar. I think it was the thought that I might burst into tears over an ice-cold beer that kept me heading for the station. I get on the bus and stare out of the window for the journey back, a million more thoughts racing through my head. The majority irrational; What if the hotel calls the Police? The Englishman has got rid of his wife, he must have disposed of her body; Will the hotel bar be open?; Should I torch *El Astronave* and fly home too?; Where's home?; Shit, who gets the cats?; And, how on earth do you chat girls up?

The rest of the day was a blur, a *vino tinto* fuelled blur filled with questions that I can't find any answers for. Was our marriage that one dimensional to warrant such a one-dimensional reason for termination? I'd never thought it as so, yes, Debbie could be a right moody cow when she joined the communists once a month, but other than that? We enjoyed each others company, we never argued, we both enjoyed similar things; particularly, food and travel, which we've just spent a month indulging in. In my search for the answer I may or may not have gone down to the hotel bar. I know I rang my folks and my best mate, actually that must've been from the bar, so yes, I did go down to the bar. Hopefully I paid and didn't make a spectacle of myself.