



Oh, la la
Lanzarote!

Wendy Louise

The flee

‘Pasaporte, pleez...’

Oh dear, here we go.

As I hand over my passport to the Spanish customs guy, I brace myself for what comes next.

‘*Gracias,*’ he smiles at me while he returns the document, ‘*enjoya youra staya.*’

And then it hits me. Here, on the island of Lanzarote, nobody knows me. Shopping, going out for dinner, catching a movie, I could just do it all. Although the movie wouldn’t be such a good idea since my Spanish vocabulary consist of no more than two words; *gracias* and *cerveza*. Great movie those two words would make.

As I walk through the corridor I feel a warm breeze coming in through the open windows. This is paradise! I take another deep breath and notice the specific scent. ‘Lanzarote aroma’, I whisper inaudibly and can’t help but giggle.

It’s a habit I’ve grown to accept. Every single event in my life is related to a scent. My first boyfriend’s aftershave, the way my classroom smelled back at school, I even get all teary-eyed when passing an old lady, inhaling my grandmother’s *Cologne 4711*.

You would think my nose to be gargantuan, like ‘a Nose’ has, the French individuals that create perfumes. Au contraire! Like a little potatoe, my nose is situated in the middle of my face. No biggie, but it sure does what it’s been hired for. And I love it!

Although, as I sit down beside the cabdriver, I’m not so sure anymore. As I take a deep breath, the smell of dried up sweat and tobacco enters my sweet potatoe and I silently curse the evolutionary period in which the nose was invented.

‘Welcome miss Vandekamp, thank you for staying at the Beatrice Hotel,’ the receptionist greets me without looking up from the form I just handed over. ‘You’re welcome’, I answer, which makes her tilt her head back and look at me with huge eyes.

‘OH MY GOD,’ she screams so loud it causes my ears to ring, followed by a whispered ‘it IS you.’

I smile faintly, grab the keycard and start running towards the elevator. Just my luck, a British receptionist!

The elevator reaches the top floor and sweeps its doors open. It is two in the afternoon and all the guests are probably taking care of their tans either at the poolside or on the beach, nevertheless I’m running again.

The mere sight of a hoteldoor displaying the number 425 makes me feel the same way I did when the door leading out of the Big Brother House opened after two and a half months.

I slam the door behind me and fall facedown on the bed. The loud cry that comes out of my mouth is smothered by the -lovely smelling- pillow. As I roll over and lift my head, I notice the luxurious decoration of the room and start grinning. Not bad at all. Spending two and a half months behind closed doors can somehow open a lot of doors.

It happened last winter. I had finished my studies in International Event Management and couldn’t wait to start putting all my ideas into practise. But there was no job whatsoever to be found. Just as I found myself at the verge of a nervous breakdown, the TV drew my attention. There was Brian Dowling, telling me to come over and let the fun and games begin! He had me at ‘fun’... gosh, was I ever in need of some fun.

The rest is history. I came, I saw and I conquered. From the first minute on I was firmly established as the viewers sweetheart. And as I left the House I won £50,000 but lost entirely my privacy. God knows I’ve tried, but in the end it was no more Miss Sweetheart! I mean, how nice can one be when even the tiny bathroom window isn’t sacred anymore? There I laid, buttnaked in a bath of *milk-without-bubbles* -when usually I go for *the bubblier, the better-* on the cover of



Famous Peeps Magazine. ‘What she hid beneath the sheets... no longer for Mike’s eyes only’ screamed the headlines.

Mike. The thought of him makes me smile. He entered the house when one of the guys was sent home after a night of alcohol abuse, resulting in a massive fight.

With his blond hair and blue eyes, he wasn’t the type of guy I usually fall for. It didn’t matter, we connected. Night after night, we sat outside talking, laughing (how he made me laugh!) and finally kissing. You have to have been in the house, to understand how unrealistic it is. Minutes seem like days and hours like years. Before we knew it, we were a steady couple and I was confined that the Big Brother House was actually Cloud Nine.

The tabloids were full of Mike and Emma, ex-lovers telling their sobby lovestory on how Mike or I had broken their heart, highschool teachers praising the kind of hardworking students we were, you name it. They even tried to get a story out of my grandmother. But she politely told them to ‘get out of her face’.

Each passing day made us grow closer together and one fine night I did the one thing I swore I would never do... I made love under a sheet. And I didn’t care. At the time.

Believe me, when you’re standing in a crowded TV studio -arms around your mum who you can finally hug again after two and a half months- watching the compilation of your stay in the house and the first thing you see is sheets bumping up and down... you DO care!

Mike and I tried to stay together outside the House. We spent the month of September, looking for our feelings. Only to decide that we probably left them in the House.

Our break-up led to more juicy tabloid stories. The night I saw a copy of Famous Peeps Magazine telling me ‘Mike never really loved Emma’, I decided to show them all a clean pair of heels and booked a flight to Lanzarote.



The rescue

A ray of sunlight peeps through the curtain and I open my eyes. For a split second I don't know where I am but as I swing my legs around the bedside, my mouth effortlessly turns into a smile. It is warm, I can hear the ocean and -I sweep the curtain to the right- yes sir, the sky is blue! It's been a long time since I felt this relaxed. I must have been sleeping for thirteen hours and can't wait to go out there. Just lying in the sun and sipping a cocktail, surrounded by anonymity.

A quick shower later, I catch myself singing as I collect my essentials for the day. Towel, sunscreen, sunglasses, a book and a bottle of water. Lorenzo -as the Spanish lovingly call the sun- and I have a date! 'Buenos días lovely lady', the poolguy greets me as soon as I step out on the terrace. 'Would you like a *hamaca*?' 'No thanks.' Not a clue to what a hamaca is, so I'm not risking anything here. What if it's some kind of traditional Spanish boob-massage? Unfortunately Don Freak is not put off that easily. As he grabs my hand with his sticky fingers and starts pulling at my arm, I raise my beachbag to hamaca him in the face. But as soon as he starts pointing at one of the sunbeds, squeaking *hamaca*, I lower my bag and laugh out loud. Creepy poolguy shows a perfect row of brown teeth as he joins me in laughter and screams: 'Yes, sunlounger! Hamaca! You wanna?'

'Is it really you?' 'Oh. Em. Gee. Look it's Emma Vandekamp!' 'Emma, can you sign my butt?' This cannot be happening! I grab my stuff together, slip into my flipflops and try to make my way through the congregation of tourists which has gathered around me. For one whole hour I was actually convinced that I was anonymous. But then the doors to the breakfastroom opened and out came my fellow holidaymakers. Each one more British than the other. It had only been a matter of seconds before they spotted me. After I push the guy -who is actually now lowering his swimshorts- that asked me for an autograph on his white cheeks aside, I start running towards the reception. 'Miss Vandekamp, over here!' I see the receptionist waving at me. She closes the door behind me and I thankfully crash in a chair. 'Thanks Josie.' I show her what is probably my worst smile ever, while reading the name on her nametag. 'You're welcome miss Vandekamp', she squeals. Something in her voice just doesn't feel right, but for now she's my BFF. 'Please, call me Emma.' 'Ok listen Emma,' she continues. 'What were you thinking coming here? Don't you know that Puerto del Carmen is packed with British tourists... again, what were you thinking?' Ok, enough about dumb Emma and the fact that she was obviously NOT thinking at all. 'I'm sorry, that was a bit rude', she hushes me -I have to stop thinking out loud-. 'But I have the perfect solution! Just wait here for a second.' Josie steps over to the front desk area but returns immediately. 'Look at this brochure,' she urges me, 'Caleta de Famara, heaven on earth! And... not a British tourist around!' 'Where is this place Josie?' I jerk the brochure out of her hands and flip it over for travel instructions. Caleta de Famara is only a half hour drive away and before I can say *hamaca* the deal is sealed. Josie books me into an apartment on the beach, arranges a taxi and even helps me pack my suitcase.



The repose

Hallelujah for Josie!

After dropping of my luggage at the apartment, round number two in ‘The search for total peace and quiet’ starts. I couldn’t have picked a better place to do so.

In front of me lies Caleta de Famara, a beach that is actually as long as it is wide. On the right side huge volcanic mountains adjoin the beach. I watch how a little cloud places its shadow on one of the mountains, changing the warm red colour of the mountainside into an impressive dark black.

Kicking off my flipflops I restrain the urge to dance around as I feel the warm, dark sand caressing my feet. It’s pretty windy and the waves are enormous. I can’t wait to get in the ocean and wash all my sorrows away. Smiling because of my remarkable sense of drama, I look straight into the eyes of a very well-built Spaniard.

‘*Hola*’, he greets me, meanwhile rubbing some sand off his tanned stomach, which shows signs of a sixpack in the making.

‘Well *hola* to you too...’ I return, ‘and your yummy biceps.’

Don Juan nods and widens his grin. My face warms, I’m blushing for sure. But I couldn’t care less. With a cheerful ‘*Adios!*’ I bid him goodbye.

After reaching the ocean and walking through the surf for a while, I decide it’s time for some serious tanning. But as I look around the beach I feel desperation creeping up on me. No *hamacas* on this beach. Not that I’m complaining, no *hamacas* equals no tourists, equals happy Emma but still, this wind...

All over the beach, locals have built little stone walls. On the plane over, I read an article about Lanzarote’s winemakers doing this around their vines in order to keep them safe from strong winds. No grapes behind these walls however, just locals in swimwear. Unfortunately a quick scan tells me there’s no wall left to protect me, so I spread my towel facing the wind.

After five horrible minutes I’m covered in sand and feel like a German veal escalope.

‘Is it just not possible to find some peace?’, I grumble, standing up to free the towel of a miniature Sahara.

‘Why don’t you come and lie behind the little wall?’

Out of nowhere, Don Juan appears to my right, asking me to join him behind his stone wall. IN PERFECT ENGLISH!

‘You’re... euhm...’ O holy shi...shish kebab, he is British!

‘Yes, excuse me for being so rude,’ he smiles, ‘I completely forgot to thank you earlier... for the compliment on my biceps.’

Ok, now would be the perfect moment for the earth to open up and swallow me.

He sticks out his hand and continues: ‘I’m Roberto. Come over, lying on the beach without protection from the wind is no joke around here!’

‘Emma,’ I smile wobbly and shake his hand. ‘Thanks.’

Half an hour later, awkwardness is nowhere left to be found. Roberto is as lovely as he looks and I’m having a great time listening to his stories, laughing at his jokes and looking into his eyes.

Roberto’s dark hair is tied together in a thick little tail at the back of his head. I spot some stubborn curls at both sides of his head, and restrain myself from touching them. Everything about him is so incredibly touchable, or is it just me? As Roberto walks away to get us some cold drinks from his fridge, I notice his perfect bum and heave a little sigh.

Roberto’s half Spanish and half British; a London mum and a Lanzarote dad. He grew up in London but spent every summer on this island. He used to work as a chef in one of London’s finest restaurants but took a sabbatical summer to plan his future. That’s probably the reason he doesn’t know me. Who watches Big Brother on TV whilst living on this island?



His Spanish uncle has a restaurant on the island. Roberto's staying in one of the bungalows at Caleta de Famara, which is actually his uncle's weekend-house.

'You have to come in before we leave the beach,' he exclaimed with excitement. 'Betcha you've never seen anything like it!'

'Wake up Em, I've made hot sandwiches. It's best to eat them while they're still warm', Roberto suggests when he gets back. I did doze off a little, but couldn't be more awake right now. Did he just call me 'Em'? And was it my heart that did that little leap? Blimey, I'm falling for this guy. While a warm sensation takes over my complete body, I look at him. I want to kiss him. Right now. After he sits down next to me, I lean towards him. What the bleep, I'm gonna do it! I open my mouth a bit, shift a little closer, look into his eyes and prepare myself for a smoking hot kiss. Roberto lowers his head, I feel the tension in my stomach becoming almost unbearable, just before... he shoves the sandwich in my mouth. 'Now doesn't that taste great?' he beams euphorically.

As a matter of fact the sandwich is delicious. And as the hours pass I'm happy I didn't kiss him. Roberto's definitely more than kissing-on-the-beach material.

In between the refreshing plunges and ditto drinks, we talk and laugh and then talk some more. We're so wrapped up in each other that we don't even notice the thick clouds gathering over the mountains. It's only when a big one covers the sun completely, that I look up and shiver. 'Looks like it's going to rain,' Roberto determines, 'fancy a glass of Lanzarote wine on my terrace?' Before he finishes the sentence, huge drops of rain fall down on us and we run for the bungalow.

The bungalow is everything Roberto said it was and then some. The furniture shouts luxury with a massive wooden couch as centerpiece in the middle of the livingroom. Situated -of course- in front of a huge fireplace. The walls are painted in champagne shades, but the biggest wall is the color of dark chocolate. The couch is covered with a bazillion cushions in all kind of sizes and fabrics. I stand in the middle of the room, a bit uncomfortable, dying to throw myself on the couch and twirl around in the softness of the cushions. Naturally this wouldn't be a good idea, still being all salty and sandy.

'Why don't you grab a shower? Bathroom's up there', Roberto offers, reading my mind. 'Wait, I'll give you some sweatpants and a t-shirt.'

I don't know what excites me more, the fact that I'll be wearing his clothes in a minute or the fact that this bungalow has a floating bathroom. As I climb the stairs, I begin to think this might all be a dream. This incredible guy, this amazing bungalow...

The bathroom is built in a half open loft just beneath the ceiling of the bungalow. For a second I find myself wondering how this is possible, where are the water pipes and stuff? One glance at the bathtub makes me forget the issue, who cares where the pipes are when you've got twenty different kinds of bath foam to choose from?!

'This place is outrageous!', I laugh, as I -finally- sink into the enormous couch. Oh God, I think I'm having a couch-gasme!

'Wait until you see the bedroom,' Roberto blurts. 'I mean... euhm...', he continues wimpishly, but is just then saved by a knock on the door.

It's a security guy, informing us that we have to stay inside until further notice. A giant storm is heading our way. 'Seems like I'm going to see that bedroom after all,' I can't help but tease Roberto after he shuts the door.

'Want some more wine?' Without waiting for an answer, Roberto fills up my glass. Outside the wind is howling and rain whips against the windows. But in here things are just warming up. Roberto lit the fireplace and we decided to have dinner in front of it. And so here we are, cuddled together on a bear rug, sipping wine in front of a fireplace. Things can't get any cheesier,



but we couldn't care less.

'Dinner was lovely,' I beam while I look up to him. The way he looks at me makes me nervous and a little giggle escapes me. Roberto lifts an eyebrow while he strokes back a whisp of hair from my face. 'I'm a chef...', he whispers, 'it's my duty to make you enjoy food...'. He shifts a little closer until our legs touch, his hand still resting on my neck. 'Em, you are so beautiful', he sighs, before his mouth finds mine.

At first his kisses are soft and sweet. But as I start kissing him back, moving closer to him, his kisses become fiercer. My head is spinning and I can no longer think of anything else but kissing this wonderful man and holding him close to me. He emits a little groan of desire, while he lifts me up and places himself underneath me. As I sit on his lap, I nibble at his earlobe, smelling his freshly shampooed hair. 'Emma,' he mumbles, but I silence him with another passionate kiss. I haven't felt this happy in a long time, Roberto is all I need right now.



The escape (a.k.a. the flee-the sequel)

Please, please, pretty please, don't let this be a dream.

I open one eye cautiously... only to discover that I'm really here. In this incredibly comfy bed after a night of incredibly steamy sex. An unfamiliar squeaky sound escapes from my throat and I chuckle as I turn to my left side. The feeling of joy, guilty for making me release that funny sound, disappears as soon as I notice that the rest of the bed is empty. Roberto is gone.

A thousand thoughts run through my mind as I pick up his shirt from the floor and make my way to the living room.

'I'm getting us breakfast. Get your hot ass back in bed, be right back x'

The little note on the door melts my heart.

Looking through the window, I see the storm has passed. The mere sight of the beach makes me want to put on my trainers and go for a morning run.

Since Roberto will probably be back before I am, I decide to write him a seductive note and open the drawer of his desk.

I browse through a giant pile of papers, hoping to find an empty one for me to write on.

And then I stop. As does my heart.

There's a print of an e-mail, addressed to Roberto. I recognise the logo on top of the paper instantly. As I feel tears welling up, I start to read:

To: Roberto Perez

Subject: Exclusive on Emma Vandekamp

Dear Roberto,

This morning we were tipped off by a British receptionist on the Island of Lanzarote. She claims Big Brother Winner Emma Vandekamp is staying at her hotel.

Two questions:

- 1. Are you still on the Island?*
- 2. Can you deliver an exclusive within a week?*

Please give me a ring to discuss further details.

Regards,

Lisa Jackson

Chief entertainment editor The Scuttlebutt

The Scuttlebutt! Roberto's an entertainment editor for that tabloid?! This can't be happening. But as I read the scratched lines on the back of the paper, I realize I've been played.

In blue ink and Roberto's handwriting, I read:

Phonenumber Beatrice Hotel The hotel I was staying at in Puerto del Carmen!

Receptionist Josie Hughes My 'guardian Angel', the scheming cow!

There's more, but I know enough. I run into the bedroom, take off his shirt and put on the beachclothes I wore yesterday. From the corner of my eye, I see the messy sheets on the bed and tears start rolling down my face. How could he?

I run for the door, but before I get there I turn around and run back into the bedroom. His shirt is lying on the floor, just where I left it. I take a deep breath and then jump on the shirt as if it's a cockroach. Like a madwoman I jump up and down.

Satisfied, I make my way out of the bungalow of sin and out into the fresh air. I know it's silly, but after the frantic jumping session I actually feel a lot better.

An hour later I'm at the airport, scanning the departure board for flights.

Madrid, Barcelona, Frankfurt... Where shall I go?



Amsterdam! That's it. The city where Madonna and Brad Pitt go to relax and be anonymous. If they can, so can I!

'Good morning and welcome.' A friendly receptionist greets me as I step into the lobby of the hotel. After I landed at Schiphol Airport, I booked a room in the centre of Amsterdam, *De Jordaan* district, supposedly the nicest part of Amsterdam.

'Your room is the *Cupido* room and is situated on the third floor', the receptionist informs me.

'I'm sorry, Cupido? Is that Dutch for Cupid?'

'Yes, it is,' she replies politely, 'this hotel has a love theme. The name of the hotel, Hoteldebotel, is Dutch for 'head over heels'... Didn't they tell you this at the airport?'

Without waiting for my answer, she sighs and continues: 'I'm so sorry, did someone just broke your heart?' And then it happens. A flood of tears begins and it feels like I won't be able to stop it for the next two years. I break down in front of a complete stranger.

She rushes around the desk and brings me to a little office. After she lets me shake and sniff some more, I blow my nose a few times and look up at her. As she sits down next to me, she rests her hands on her belly.

'I don't know what happened to you, but as you can see I'm pregnant.' She looks at me, tears welling up in her eyes too. 'I'm having my best friend's baby but he will never speak to me again. He can't even look at me anymore... By the way, I'm Sara.'

After our 'bonding' ceremony in the hotel's backoffice, I decide to stay. After all, it looks like both Sara and I can use an ally.

It turns out that Sara is the owner of this hotel, living in the penthouse on the top floor of the building. When we casually ran into each other on my way out the next day, she invites me to come up for a drink in the evening.

We spend the night on the terrace overlooking the canals, telling each other our lifestories.

Sara's story is heartbreaking. She turned thirty last February and decided that she didn't want to wait for Mister Right any longer. She left her sister in charge of the hotel and went to Mallorca, the Spanish island where her best friend lives. The plan was to get pregnant with his baby, go home and raise the baby on her own. Once on Mallorca, she fell in love with him and wanted to tell him about her plan. But some jealous guy, who accidentally found out her secret, beat her to it and told him. Sara's friend was furious and told her he never wanted to see her again. After she and her broken heart returned to Holland, she found out she was pregnant. Her Spanish friend doesn't even know!

Although our stories are completely different, we connect. Sadness is so much more bearable if it's shared. Sara takes me out to dinner in the loveliest restaurants. We stroll along the flower market, eating french fries buried in mayonnaise out of little paper cones. She even takes me to a Karaoke Bar in the Redlight District, where we sing 'Girls just wanna have fun' like it's the last thing we'll ever do.

During my stay in Amsterdam, I've phoned my mum a few times. Other than that I didn't contact anyone at home. I'm afraid one of my friends will tell me about the article in *The Scuttlebutt*. I'm sure Roberto's exclusive on me has been published by now, but I don't want to know about it, let alone read it. Whilst channel-zapping on my hotel telly, I skip BBC and I increase my speed when I walk past the newsstand where they sell English magazines.

Sara urges me to open my e-mail or listen to my voicemail, but I keep my phone turned off and refuse to log on to Hotmail. I don't want to hear his sorry excuses or read his meaningless apologies. To be honest, I'm even more afraid that there's no message from Roberto at all. Not knowing is better.

I'm just about to call it a night, when the hotelphone rings.



'Emma, you have to come up.' It's Sara, totally frenzied. 'I'm sorry if I woke you up, but this cannot wait! Are you coming?' After I slam the phone down, I rush out of the room.

I fly up the stairs, two steps at a time and knock frantically on the penthouse-door.

'Well, well, where's the fire?' She greets me with a big smile.

'Oh come on,' I spit, 'I thought something was wrong with you!' Her laughter makes me forget my worries.

'Sit down,' Sara urges me, tapping next to her on the sofa, 'I have to show you something.'

Curiosity gets the better of me, but when I see her picking up an English magazine, I stand up.

Ready to take a run.

'Emma, sit down!'

Wow, there really is no arguing with pregnant ladies. I do as I'm told, still feeling the urge to run but I don't dare.

'This Cosmo features an interview with Roberto', Sara begins and I feel a little pang at my heart.

'Don't worry,' she assures me, 'you'll like it.'

'As it turns out, he refused to write the exclusive for 'The Scuttlebutt,' she smiles, 'Emma, he got fired from The Scuttlebutt because of this. He decided to tell his story to Cosmopolitan, and then he will leave the country. He goes back to Lanzarote. Turns out he's worked as a chef in his uncle's restaurant a few years ago and he's going to work there again.'

Well, at least not everything he told me was a lie.

'He says writing has always been his passion. But his second passion is cooking. So for now, he'll work in that restaurant to save up money. In a couple of years, he hopes to open his own restaurant on, I quote 'his beloved island'. Emma, let me quote you some more, please...'

As soon as I nod, she continues: *'I haven't heard anything from Emma, and I don't blame her. All the odds are against me. It is just such a shame she didn't give me a chance to explain myself.'*

Now, I will never get to tell her how special I think she is. After half an hour of talking to her I knew I wasn't going to write the exclusive.

Coming back from getting breakfast, I wanted to tell her that I had fallen in love with her. I wanted to tell her everything, the whole ugly story. But she was gone.'

'He's in love with me...'

It's all I can say. Tears are streaming down my face as I reach for Sara's hands.

'Thank you Sara, thank you so much for this... for everything.'

After she takes me in her arms for a hug, she pushes me away a little and looks straight at me.

'What are you going to do?'

And although my head is spinning, my blood is racing and my heart almost pumps out of my chest, I know exactly what I'm going to do.

'You know,' I almost whisper, while I rub the tears from my cheeks, 'I think it's time I flew back to Lanzarote. I really want to get to know a certain man over there a little bit better. And finally do something useful with all this money I won... Like, maybe invest in a restaurant?'

