

Romance Set in Paradise Book One

Havana Heat- Four Chapter Preview

Kim Knight

SAMPLE

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Romance Set in Paradise – Havana Heat: Book One

By Kim Knight

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Table of Content

1. [Lonely Hearts](#)
 2. [Girl's Night Out](#)
 3. [Heart Full of Regret](#)
 4. [Destination Cuba](#)
 5. [I Wanna Dance with Somebody](#)
 6. [Havana Heat](#)
 7. [When the Dust Settles](#)
 8. [Sour Grapes](#)
 9. [Runaway Heart](#)
 10. [Damned If You Do, Damned If You Don't](#)
 11. [Fright Night](#)
 12. [Down But Not Broken](#)
 13. [The Truth Will Set You Free](#)
 14. [Second Chances](#)
- [About the Author](#)
[Connect with Kim Knight](#)
[Other books by Kim Knight](#)

Kim's Dedications:

For every romance reader who likes a bit of escapism like me, the Romance Set in Paradise series is for you!

Thank you to every blog, Twitter, Facebook follower and reader of my new romance series. I hope you are swept up in the romance.

Thank you to everyone who has supported me on this venture. I have loved every moment of brainstorming and writing. Thank you for your support.

Other books by Kim Knight:

Romance Set in Paradise series books one and two

Havana Heat

Lover's Retreat

Code Redhead- A Serial Novel

Not Just for Christmas: Romance Novella

A Stranger in France: Romantic Suspense

CHAPTER ONE: LONELY HEARTS

Melinda leans back in her chair and props her red four inch stiletto heels up on her desk, and sips her morning coffee. It's a bright spring morning and the city is buzzing below her. As she gazes out of her office window overlooking Holland Park in west London, her focus shifts from her lengthy list of things to do, meetings to attend and phone calls to return. Melinda's mind boggles as she dreams up her ideal man, and then wonders why it's so hard to find her partner in crime. Yet she's able to play cupid and organise some of the most beautiful weddings for other women, who have found their ideal match. Melinda takes pride in being organised and efficient for her clients, this helps her to keep her successful wedding planning service in demand.

Five years ago aged thirty, after finishing a project management course she pursued a new direction. She set out on a new adventure as an event organiser. She helped two of her close girlfriends pull together their ideal wedding, she fell in love with the romance, love and detail needed to create the perfect wedding day. From there Melinda's Weddings was born.

Every client has a different vision for their perfect wedding day, Melinda loves the thrill of pulling it all together. When she first set out on her entrepreneurial journey she worked from home, her office was the living room of her one bedroom tiny flat in Shepard's Bush west London. As soon as the money came rolling in she leased her very own office space and employed her assistant Roxanne.

As the phone rings Melinda snaps out of her daydream with a jump, spilling her coffee all over her expensive Karen Millen shift dress. Cursing she places her stilettos on the floor and then snatches up the phone. In her most professional telephone voice she greets the caller.

"Good morning Melinda's Weddings, Melinda speaking."

"Oh, hi Melinda my name's Joanne Simpson I need a hand planning my wedding. I have no idea where to start."

Melinda smiles at the familiar frantic call from a bride to be on the other end of the line.

"Of course, Miss Simpson, you've come to the right place. I'd love to assist you with planning your perfect day. Tell me a bit more about the kind of wedding you and your husband to be have in mind?"

"Something simple, and romantic. We're thinking of a destination wedding."

"Fantastic! I love planning these. Do you have any destinations in mind as yet?"

"Havana in Cuba."

Melinda raises an eyebrow exotic locations excite her.

"Lovely, okay sounds perfect."

Ever ready and organised to assist a potential client Melinda picks up her pen and notepad.

"So, simple and romantic is the theme you're going for, do you have a date in mind?"

"Yes the fourteenth of May, a little short notice I know, just two weeks away. This is kind of a last-minute decision, after some research it was clear that London is just too expensive to get married. The cars, churches, bridesmaid dresses, it all adds up. And there is no guarantee we'll have great weather either."

“Hmm yeah, I hear that all the time. Many of my clients decide to go abroad for the same reasons.”

Melinda quickly pulls up her Outlook calendar on her computer and glances at April and May’s bookings.

“The time frame is a little tight, but leave it with me I’ll be able to pull it all together.”

“Great, I’m so happy to hear that, as I sure can’t.”

With a small giggle Melinda swings around in her chair and glances around her small office.

“Why don’t you come in and meet with me, I’d love to speak face to face and fine tune all your requirements. I’d like everything to be just perfect for you Miss Simpson.”

“I’d love to, how about today?”

Melinda glances back to today’s meeting slots to see where she can fit Miss Simpson in.

“Perfect. I have a free spot at 2:00 p.m. if that suits you?”

“Great, I’ll see you then.”

“Excellent. Do you know where to find me Miss Simpson? I’m based just on the corner by Holland Park tube station, number 135.”

“Thanks, I’ll find you.”

Melinda replaces the phone on its receiver with a smile.

“This could be an interesting project.”

She says out loud to herself, as she pulls up Google to start her research on wedding venues in Havana.

“Hey, Mel how are you? Did you pick up my message about Miss Smith?”

Melinda looks up from behind her large computer screen and smiles at Roxanne her assistant, poking her head around her office door.

“Yeah, I did. She’s gone into melt down mode again. I swear sometimes the older they are the more of a diva they can be.”

“Hmm melt down is not the word.”

“Leave it with me Roxanne, I’ll give her a call and set her mind at ease.”

“Great, I was hoping you’d say that. What do you fancy for lunch?”

“You know what I think I’ll pick up lunch myself today, thanks for the offer. It’s a beautiful spring day I’ll take a walk.”

“Cool, okay I’m next door if you need me.”

With that Roxanne disappears into her office next door. Setting her notepad and Google research to one side Melinda snatches up the phone, then braces herself as she dials Miss Smith. Her sixty five year old bride to be.

“Detective Garcia, great to see you this week you look well. Please take a seat.”

“Hi doc, I’m sorry about last week, work’s been a little crazy I have a big investigation I’m overseeing.”

“No problem, great to see you as I said.”

Dr. Black eases his small frame from behind his large chestnut oak desk and makes his way over to the comfortable leather sofas to meet Detective Sebastian Garcia. Detective Garcia is one of his long-term clients, he has a soft spot for him. As intimidating and masculine as he appears to the outside world, Detective Garcia suffers from a terrible case of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Following the death of his long

term girlfriend in a car accident while Detective Garcia was driving. Almost one year later Detective Garcia is still full of grief and blames himself completely.

“So how have things been the last couple of weeks Detective?”

“Please doc call me Sebastian, well Seb. We’ve been seeing each other for long enough now, time to drop the formality. What do you say?”

Dr. Black smiles broadly at his client.

“As you please, Seb.”

Sebastian runs a hand over his low shaven jet black hair and then closes his large brown eyes, as he recalls the last few weeks. After a beat he exhales slowly and meets Dr. Black’s gaze.

“Well, apart from work it’s been pretty rough, with the anniversary of Anna’s death coming I— I.”

Sebastian gazes down at his large hands folded in his lap and then bites his inner lip. Dr. Black encourages him to continue.

“It’s okay Seb. Take your time, I’m listening.”

“Doc I just can’t shake the feeling ya know, that feeling that’s been with me for almost a year now. That it’s all my fault. Her death, our unhappy relationship, the fact that I put work before her all the time.”

“I just wish I could ...”

“Turn back the clock, rewrite history?” Dr. Black cuts in.

“Exactly.”

“Seb, a lot of PTSD sufferers feel the exact same way. They blame themselves and wish they would have done things differently. But all that does is eat away at you.”

“So how do I move forward, how do I shake this shitty feeling inside?”

Sebastian pokes himself in the chest to emphasise his point.

“You need to forgive yourself Seb, forgiveness is the first step to moving forward and shaking the ill feelings you have inside.”

“Right, forgiveness? I’m just supposed to forgive myself for killing the one woman I truly loved, but waited too long to show her that?”

Dr. Black crosses his legs at the knee and adjusts his half moon glasses, he studies the tall handsome Spaniard in detail. His body language shows signs of stress, he looks as though he has not shaven for a few days. A dark line of stubble graces his tanned skin, his large brown eyes are hooded from lack of sleep.

“Well, if you want to put it that way Seb yes. You need to forgive yourself for the accident which took place and claimed Anna’s life. Remember you were not the only driver that night there was another party involved. Second you need to accept that you are not to blame, you were fully sober that night remember.”

Dr. Black watches Sebastian’s thick jet black eyebrows knit together as he frowns and lowers his gaze to the floor.

“Yeah, doc you’re right I know. You always are!”

The two men laugh and the air feels instantly lighter in Dr. Black’s office.

“You need a break Seb. You’re not a machine. I understand that you have a very demanding job but you need some time out.”

“You’re right again it’s just this case—”

“Seb, London’s Drug Squad are going to have to do without you for a while, I’m signing you off on sick leave— with pay from tomorrow. They’ll have to find a replacement for a few weeks. If you don’t take some time out, trust me you’ll burn out then you’ll be no good to anybody.”

“But doc I’ve got this one case and—”

Dr. Black cuts Sebastian off.

“No buts.”

Dr. Black observes Sebastian closely to ensure the message has sunk in. Then he eases his old frame from the low leather sofa, and moves over to his desk draw for his paperwork. He does not care how much of a fight Sebastian Garcia puts up about taking time off, he is going to take it. He’ll call his supervisor if he must, to confirm he has two weeks off work due to his PTSD not showing any sign of improvement. Dr. Black hands Sebastian a piece of paper.

“Here, this is your sick note keep a copy for yourself. Call in sick tomorrow and send the original off to your supervisor in the mail.”

Sebastian looks up at the old doctor in his starched black trousers, grey shirt and sensible shoes. Dr. Black stares down at him over the top of his glasses, sitting on the sofa. Sebastian sighs.

“Thanks doc. What do I do for two whole weeks?”

Dr. Black lets out a genuine laugh at Sebastian, as he slowly heads back over to his seat on the sofa.

“Take a vacation Seb! Live it up, go somewhere you’ve never been before. Have a few cocktails, work on your tan, find yourself a holiday romance, anything. Just don’t think about work, Anna, the anniversary of her death or London.”

Sebastian smiles a half genuine smile at the old doctor opposite him, he’s grown fond of him and their weekly sessions.

“I’ll try doc.”

“Okay sounds perfect. Come back and see me when you’re back.”

“Okay, will do.”

Sebastian eases himself out of the sofa and pulls himself up to his full six-foot-three height. Sebastian towers over Dr. Black’s five-foot-eight frame, as he also stands up to offer Sebastian his hand.

“Seb, take care of yourself son, and remember you’re young enough to start over. I’m sure Anna would want that. Happiness not years of grief and upset. You don’t want to get to my age and then think hey maybe I should start living life. You get to my age, it’s almost over!”

Sebastian shakes Dr. Black’s hand and smiles.

“Okay doc.”

“That-a-boy. It’s good to see you smile, I’ll see you soon have fun.”

As Sebastian leaves Dr. Black’s office, Dr. Black snatches up his phone and dials Charing Cross Police Station in central London. He obtains details of the most senior officer in charge above Detective Sebastian Garcia. Once he’s armed with an email address he writes a personal email to the officer in charge, to inform him of his recommendation for young Detective Garcia to take some time off.

Later that evening Sebastian orders a large spicy peperoni pizza, a side of garlic bread and some chicken wings. He winds down for the evening with the TV on mute showing Sky News and Spanish flamenco music in the background. Pulling out his laptop Sebastian settles himself at his dinner table, and then pulls up a Google page to start his research for some sun, sea and sand. He hopes Dr. Black’s recommendation will help him to claim back his sanity, and wash away his feeling of guilt over Anna’s death.

He's torn between a Caribbean island or embracing his Spanish roots in south America or his motherland Spain. He decides not to head to his homeland Madrid, in Spain.

"Let's have the best of both worlds, a Caribbean feel with a Spanish influence."

He says out loud to his empty living room. Smiling to himself Sebastian clicks on the travel agent's link for Cuba.

He moved to London from the Spanish capital Madrid ten years ago, aged twenty seven right after he completed his police training in Spain. He longed for a change of scenery and to improve his English language skills. Sebastian is proud of his Spanish heritage and wants to embrace some of his own culture again. Selecting his flights and hotel for the week, he pulls out his credit card and books his first solo trip abroad to Havana, Cuba's capital.

One week later:

"Hello Miss Simpson, it's Melinda here."

"Oh hi Melinda, how is everything progressing?"

"We're on a roll, I've managed to secure your first choice from the venues I sent you, you will be married on the fourteenth May 2016 at the *Casa De Amor* hotel in Havana."

"Oh wow that is amazing, thank you so much. What do I need to do next?"

"Nothing, leave it all to me, focus on your dress, rings and your husband to be's suit. I've got everything covered, invites, flowers, the works. And don't worry I'm working closely from your list of requirements you gave me."

"My goodness you really do deliver Melinda, thank you."

"Glad you're happy so far ... and you're welcome."

"Melinda, I don't know if this is the norm but I'd really like you as a guest at our wedding. All you have done in such a short space of time is unbelievable, it's eased so much of the stress for me and Brad. What do you say?"

"Oh wow, Miss Simpson that is so sweet of you but honestly you really don't have to. Plus, I have a stack of work waiting—"

Joanne cuts Melinda off mid sentence.

"No excuses Melinda, and stop with this Miss Simpson stuff. Please call me Joanne and as we speak, I'm behind my laptop searching for a flight for you, my treat!"

"Joanne I—"

"No excuses! You're coming."

"Well ... if you insist."

"I do."

Melinda can sense Joanne's smile on the other end of the phone, she can't help but smile herself. Joanne has been a dream to work with. Melinda reflects on the relationship they have built in such a short space of time, both professionally and as potential girlfriends. Melinda's professional approach and care over the minor details has set Joanne's mind at ease as well as encouraged the two women to bond.

Joanne has not been overly fussy as she knows exactly what kind of wedding day she wants, no diva like behaviour and her personality is easy to get on with. Suddenly Melinda starts to look forward to spending time in Cuba with Joanne as part of her wedding party.

"Okay so the wedding is organised for the fourteenth of May, but you'll need to fly out a few days early for the dress rehearsal."

"We Melinda... we will need to fly out remember."

"Oh, yes. Of course, we will need to fly out."

Melinda smiles to herself.

“No problems, if the hotel can accommodate us from the twelfth of May that would be wonderful. We could have a day to laze around, then the next day hold a rehearsal.”

“That should be fine, let me send a quick email to the *Casa De Amor* to firm up the details.”

“Sounds perfect, keep me posted and I’ll talk to you soon Melinda.”

Melinda replaces the phone on its receiver and kicks her four inch heels up on her desk, she is satisfied with her work done so far. In a week she has pulled together a romantic wedding in an exotic destination, and scored a free holiday. God knows she could do with the break. She can’t remember the last time she relaxed properly and soaked up some sun. Her last holiday was with the girls a few years ago. They all went to Jamaica for some girl time, after her girlfriend Dani had a bitter break up with her boyfriend. For weeks the poor girl was in tears. A girly getaway with herself, Sarah and Hannah was just what the doctor ordered for Dani. The four of them had a blast traveling around the island, drinking fresh coconut milk from its shell and eating endless island delicacies.

In Cuba, Melinda has visions of hot Hispanic men, beautiful white sandy beaches and sunsets, she can’t wait to get on the plane. Filled with excitement Melinda sends a text to Sarah, Dani and Hannah to organise drinks at the local bar after work.

Later that evening Melinda showers and wraps herself up in a fluffy towel, and then pads from the bathroom to her bedroom. With upbeat dance music in the background she selects an outfit for the evening. The girls all agreed to meet for mid week drinks at their local drinking spot in Shepard’s Bush west London. Melinda always likes to make an effort— after all you never know who you may run into. She has been single for far too long. Online dating, Tinder and speed dating all produced little hope of her happy ever after. Just a string of men interested in her for one reason or another, but not to have anything more than just a “casual relationship.”

At thirty five, Melinda wants more. Day in day out she spends pulling together the perfect happy ever after for other women, she feels it’s now her time to find someone to call her own. She believes in love and romance, and lives in hope that there is someone out there made for her.

“This will have to do, what do you think?”

Melinda turns around and shows her outfit of dark denim skinny jeans and a black sparkly flowing off the shoulder top to Lady, her long haired cat and only housemate curled up at the foot of her bed.

“Yeah, I think so too, casual but still well put together.”

Melinda lets out a laugh at herself. Thirty five, single and talking to her cat. What would people think. Her phone rings, glancing at the screen she notices it’s Gavin a guy she met on Match.com.

“Hey, Gavin, how are you?”

“Yeah, I’m good. Where have you been stranger?”

Gavin’s smooth deep voice rings down the phone, Melinda rolls her eyes. Gavin just did not take no for an answer. After two dates she decided he was not her knight in shining armour. He was her usual type tall, dark and handsome, successful in his own way, but she couldn’t help but feel he is after just one thing. Melinda’s days of friends

with benefits were over, she hung up her stilettos a long time ago on this kind of relationship.

“Ah ya know just working, things have picked up a bit so I’ve not really had time to socialise.”

“Not even return calls? I called you twice this week already.”

Melinda bites her lip.

“Really? Gavin I’m so sorry work’s been busy as I said.”

“So what are you up to tonight, you could make it up to me?”

With a sigh, Melinda sits down on the edge of her bed and pouts with a facial expression of pure disgust.

“Gavin, I’m sorry I don’t think I want to date anyone right now. I’ve got a lot on and...”

“And what Melinda? I thought we had a connection, you like me I like you...”

“I would not go that far Gavin we had two dates, it’s just not the right timing.”

“Is there someone else?”

Secretly wishing that there was Melinda pauses before she responds.

“Well? Is there Melinda?”

“No, Gavin like I said dating is not on the cards for me right now. I’ve got to go so take care.”

“Melinda I—”

Before Gavin can continue Melinda presses end on the call, and casually chucks her phone to one side on her bed.

“Men, right Lady what is it with them?”

Lady let’s out a low meow, Melinda cracks up laughing, piles her long braids on top of her head and sets about applying her makeup.

CHAPTER TWO: GIRLS' NIGHT OUT

"Hey Mel over here."

Melinda smiles at her friends as she enters the crowded bar in Shepard's Bush. The DJ is playing upbeat dance songs, and the atmosphere is friendly and welcoming. Melinda makes her way over to the corner table surrounded by her girlfriends lit up with candles, and crowded with cocktail glasses.

"Look at you, don't you look gorgeous." Sarah's Trinidadian accent chimes.

"Thank you Sarah. How are we ladies?"

"Great now that we're all here, finally. What took you so long?" Dani enquires.

"Oh, I had Gavin on the phone again."

"No way! Has he not got the message yet?"

"Dani, I don't think he has."

The four girls cackle around the table.

"Listen, what can I get you all? This is my round as I'm late."

"The usual."

Dani, Sarah and Hannah all respond back at the same time. The four of them cackle again.

"Okay I'll be right back girls."

Melinda removes her pride and joy well fitted Vivian Westwood black blazer and makes her way to the bar. Her mood has lifted again at the sight of her three girlfriends. Dani thirty four, an interior designer of Italian descent, she's now fully over her ex and happy in a new relationship. Hannah thirty four, a PA, London born and bred, married but unhappily to a man ten years her senior. Hannah has been contemplating a divorce for almost a year. Sarah is a nurse and the mother of the group at thirty nine years old. She arrived in the UK just five years ago from Trinidad and is still single.

The four women met at a female empowerment networking event four years ago. Following the networking event they met up for drinks and dinner a few times. A friendship grew within the group, over the years their friendship has grown stronger each year. All her girlfriends have their own quirks and personalities, but Melinda could not live without them.

"Here we go girls, one round of cocktails."

All four of the women raise their glasses and toast.

"So what's tonight in honour of then Mel? It's Wednesday an' we are 'aving mid week cocktails, instead of a civilised dinner an' a movie."

Hannah's broad east-end cockney accent brings a smile to Melinda's face.

"Well, I felt like seeing you all for one, and I just pulled off a major wedding in just under two weeks in Havana!"

"Wow go Mel, Havana Cuba?"

Hannah cheers on her girlfriend.

"Yep, the one and only. But that's not the best bit, the bride has asked me to come along as a guest and she's paying. Can you believe it?"

"No way!" Dani cuts in.

"She is actually paying?"

"Yep, she sure is. We leave hopefully on the twelfth I'm just waiting for the hotel to confirm they can accommodate everyone from this date."

"Amazing, I am so jealous, I'd love to come to Cuba." Sarah responds.

“All those gorgeous Hispanic men.”

“Umm that’s what I’m talking about.” Hannah adds her excitement to the conversation.

“Hannah, you’re married girlfriend no Hispanics for you.”

Hannah raises her eyebrows.

“Ha! That’s what you think.”

The four women giggle around the table at Hannah’s response. Then the table goes quiet as if everyone is thinking the same thing.

“You know ladies, that might not be a bad idea if we all go. Separately from the wedding party of course. I could explain to the bride that I don’t know any of her wedding party, and will travel with a few girlfriends for company.”

“Won’t she mind us gate crashing her wedding?”

Dani queries draining the last of her Mojito cocktail.

“Well, you guys can relax and enjoy the beach if she does I’ll only be gone a few hours. And if she does not mind then even better. If you’re all game, I’ll put the feelers out and see what she says?”

The four women look at each other and burst out laughing. Hannah pipes up.

“Let’s do this! I’m game, our holiday to Jamaica was so long ago. I think this will be a blast.”

The three other women look at Hannah and smile. Hannah raises her glass.

“To Cuba.”

After a beat of hesitation, the other three join her with a toast.

“To Cuba.”

The foursome gossip, eat and enjoy their girls’ night out. Cocktail after cocktail flows, and they take to the dance floor when popular songs come on dancing the night away.

Tipsy and high on excitement for Cuba, at 1:00 a.m. the foursome fall into a classic black London taxi and make their way home.

CHAPTER THREE: HEART FULL OF REGRET

“Hello Joanne, it’s me Melinda.”

“Hi Melinda, how are you?”

“I’m well thanks, *Casa De Amor* have come back to me about the early arrival, all is well. They can accommodate your party of twenty guests from the twelfth of May.”

“Excellent, oh I knew you’d come through on this Melinda thanks so much.”

“There’s one more thing.”

“Sure what’s up?”

“Well, I really appreciate your invite to the wedding, and I’d love to come and to see Cuba, but I don’t know any of the wedding party. Three of my girlfriends are up for traveling with me. Not as part of the wedding of course, just to spend time with in the run up to the day and after.”

“Melinda is that all? My heart skipped a beat for a moment thinking there was a major problem. I have no problems with this at all, if that would make you feel more comfortable and make sure your arse is on that plane bring them along— as part of the party let them attend on the day too.”

“Oh no that’s fine, I don’t want to gate crash, it’s just so I have company while I’m there on my own.”

“No I insist the more the merrier.”

“Joanne why can’t all my clients be as easy going as you?”

The two women chuckle down the phone.

“And I’ll pay for my own ticket also, thanks for the offer but I can’t allow you to do that for me.”

“Whatever you want Melinda, just be there!”

“We will.”

Melinda hangs up the phone beaming from ear to ear. She feels maybe she’s made a new friend with Joanne. She quickly types out a text to the girls to share the good news.

From: Melinda

To: Hannah, Sarah, Dani

Girls, guess what? We’re on our way to Cuba! The bride Joanne has no problems with you coming along, and has invited you to the ceremony. This Saturday we’re going shopping whatever plans you have drop them. I’m going to look for our flights now we leave on the twelfth just four days to go.

Melinda’s phone buzzes with responses from the other three women, all as excited as she is to board the plane to Cuba.

That night Melinda curls up on her sofa with Lady and mulls over her love life. It has been non-existent for almost a year and a half. She parted ways with her ex-boyfriend Jermaine amicably, as it became clear he was not ready to settle down, or think about marriage. He was six years younger than her and at the age of twenty eight when they finally broke up, he felt he was just coming into his prime. He was not ready to make such a big commitment.

They all warned her, her mother, sister and even the girls that Jermaine would only bring her disappointment. Yet she spent three years with him. At thirty five she is done

with toy boys. What she needs is a man, who is fully grown and ready to make a commitment. Melinda was heartbroken over the breakup. She held on for so long hoping that things would change, or Jermaine would suddenly see how great a future together with plans, a wedding and maybe even children could be. She felt like a fool for secretly wishing that time would change things or change him.

Toward the end of their relationship she became fed up with dropping hints about what kind of wedding she'd like, the kind of engagement rings that would appeal to her or how many children she could see herself being a mother to. Jermaine would just change the subject and sweep all her romantic hopes under the carpet.

One evening she sat him down on the sofa for "*the talk*," she knew she had to have with him. Her attitude changed and she point blank put him on the spot about his romantic intentions for the two of them. To her disappointment he held no promise of a happy ever after anytime soon. By this point she had distanced herself mentally from him, and just needed the confirmation from him of what she already suspected about their future together.

She threw herself into work and other projects to expand her already successful wedding planning service. It helped to take her mind off the break up and loss of a meaningful relationship, even if the meaningful feelings appeared to be one sided following their talk about the future. She didn't allow herself time to grieve the loss or even allow herself to shed a tear. She refused to. She put the whole three year relationship down to a learning curve about men, and how to read the difference between lip service and true intentions.

After her break up with Jermaine she decided she will not waste any more years waiting for a man to be ready to commit. If he shows no signs of this intention in the early dating stage, or if she senses he's not the right type for her, as he has other ideas about what kind of relationship he wants she'd firmly close the door on that type of man. This is the case with Gavin.

As much as Gavin ticks a number of her many boxes, call it women's intuition, somehow from two dates she sensed there will be no happy ever after with him.

Conflicted with a heavy heart but full of excitement over Cuba, she reaches for her laptop and starts to research flights, time is ticking.

For the first week off work Sebastian missed the hustle and bustle of the detective world. He stayed at home watching daytime TV, talk shows, reading crime novels and counting down the days until he'd be boarding the plane on his way to Cuba. Even though he spent the week morning the quietness of his day to day life, he must admit it has done him a world of good. His sleep pattern returned to normal with eight or more full hours of sleep a night, he ate wholesome home cooked Spanish paella and enjoyed the free feeling of spending his day exactly how he pleased.

Anna's death has played on his mind throughout the week. Usually in the quiet still hours of the morning, as he stood by the window of his bachelor pad overlooking the river Thames. There he would stand gazing out at the bridge, the still waters, and the cars whizzing past in the direction of Victoria and south London. He misses Anna, deeply with all his heart and regrets the day he crossed paths with the driver driving under the heavy influence of alcohol last summer. As much as he tries to convince himself he was not to blame he can't help but think, if he had not been in the middle of

a full-blown argument with the love of his life while driving, maybe he would have slowed down faster or been more alert.

That night he and Anna were arguing yet again over his work pattern, and lack of time spent nurturing his relationship with her. She was growing bored he could sense it. For months she had begged and pleaded with him to make more time for them as a couple, and stop working all the hours God sent at Charring Cross Police station.

He wished he had listened, he wished he had shown her the love and attention she needed and what was only fair.

Anna had a promising career ahead of her also, she was a criminal psychologist. Her job was just as demanding and came with long hours also. The only difference was she was prepared to prioritise their relationship.

As the leaving date for Cuba approaches, Sebastian starts to prepare himself mentally and practically for his trip. While carrying out everyday tasks such as changing currency, packing his shorts and T-shirts his feelings jump between excitement and nerves. He is filled with excitement to experience a lively part of the Caribbean, on the other hand he has never travelled solo the thought fills him with nerves.

CHAPTER FOUR: DESTINATION CUBA

12th May, Havana, Cuba.

Sebastian lowers his sunglasses as he walks out of José Martí International Airport, he is greeted with the heavenly thirty one degree temperature, the sounds of his mother tongue Spanish spoken in a distinctly different accent, brightly coloured tropical plants and palm trees. He smiles and takes a long sip of his cool mineral water, and then wipes the perspiration from his face. From what he researched before leaving London, during the month of May the temperature starts to heat up. May is also a quieter time for tourism in Havana. Sebastian looks forward to the mellow retreat as Dr. Black had instructed. He has visions of himself lounging on a sun kissed white sandy beach, under a palm tree, with a good crime novel and a cool beer. He makes his way over to the taxi rank and then places his suitcase down on the scorching hot pavement. As he pulls up the details of the hotel *Casa De Amor* on his phone a stranger calls out to him.

“Hola señor, ¿puedo llevarte?”

Sebastian looks up from his phone as the distinct Spanish dialect meets his ear. A local taxi driver stops in front of him to enquire where he can take him.

“Hola, la Casa Del Amor, ¿conoces este hotel?”

“Sí, salta y déjame llevarte.”

Satisfied that the taxi driver knows where to find the *Casa De Amor* hotel, Sebastian walks over to the driver with his car boot open for his case. He jumps into the back of the taxi and immediately lowers the window as low as it will go. As they exit the airport Sebastian starts to relax in his seat, and enjoy the view whizzing by with a cool breeze against his face. In broken English the taxi driver starts up a conversation.

“Sir, I’m Filipe where you from? You speak very fast with a different accent.”

“I’m Sebastian from Madrid.”

“Oh, you’re a Spaniard not a Caribbean Hispanic.”

Sebastian laughs at the statement.

“Yes, I but I live in London in the UK now, but originally I was born and bred in Spain.”

“I see, and today you have travelled to Cuba for a holiday?”

Sebastian looks the friendly driver in the eye as he studies him in his rear view mirror.

“Yes, a holiday, a well deserved break is what I am after. London is very busy and my work has taken up so much of my time.”

“What is your work over in London?”

“I’m a detective for one of London’s drug investigation teams.”

“Oh wow! Hello Mr. Detective... welcome to the Caribbean enjoy your stay in Cuba.”

The pair continue their conversation on the way to *Casa De Amor* in Spanish. Filipe speaking his Caribbean colonialised Spanish, and Sebastian in his rapid, strong Spanish dialect.

Melinda, Hannah, Sarah and Dani unfold themselves from the cramped taxi outside the *Casa De Amor* hotel in a fit of girly giggles.

“We are here ladies, I can’t wait to hit the beach.” Hannah announces pleased to get away from her bore of a husband back in London.

“Yep we sure are, it looks beautiful.”

Dani chimes in as the foursome stand facing the *Casa De Amor* hotel. They all lower their shades from the harsh midday sun. The foursome glance up at the hotel’s tall six floor whitewashed building, with tall palm trees and exotic red and freesia pink flowers surrounding the entrance of the revolving doors. A gardener is tending to the exotic flowers at the entrance, as he sings along in Spanish to the traditional Cuban music coming from inside the hotel. Outside the hotel is a vintage Cadillac car that catches Melinda’s attention.

“Wow check out the car, I’d love to drive down the coast in that baby with the wind in my hair and a handsome stranger to boot!”

The foursome breakout into another fit of giggles.

“Senoritas are you ready?”

The women turn around, they forgot about the taxi driver unloading their luggage from the taxi.

“Oh sorry of course, let us give you a hand.”

Melinda glances at her girlfriends and makes her way over to the driver. Once their taxi fare is settled they roll their cases loudly up the gravel driveway to the hotel’s revolving doors, and then enter the *Casa Del Amor*.

“Hola, Senoritas, how can I help you today?”

The four women crowd around the reception desk, drooling over the male receptionist in his fitted crisp white shirt and tanned olive skin. They check themselves in and then make their way noisily to the lift area, eager to check out their rooms. They agree on the way up its time for a shower and then a late lunch.

Melinda is ready in no time, she piles her long braids up on her head in a top knot, and puts on a flowing floral red and white maxi dress for comfort and to keep cool. Settling herself on her balcony overlooking the pool area Melinda waits for her girlfriends to freshen up. Opposite her the other side of the hotel is busy with guests on their balconies relaxing with drinks. Below her she can hear upbeat Cuban rumba from the pool side DJ, guests dance and sing along in Spanish to the words of the song. She smiles happy with her decision to come to Joanne’s wedding and experience some of the Hispanic Caribbean.

She scans the pool area from behind her large dark sunglasses, and notices a handsome stranger lounging on a sun lounger opposite her on the other side of the large Olympic size pool. He has a great body stretched out on the lounger, Melinda drools over his long toned limbs and a rippled six pack, along his left shoulder and all the way down to his wrist is covered in what looks like a tribal tattoo. He doesn’t look like a local but his skin is tanned and olive, to Melinda he looks more Mediterranean or European than Hispanic or Cuban. She observes him closely lifting her sunglasses for a better look. Her fantasy is interrupted by the sound of the girls knocking wildly on her door.

“Mel, c’mon let’s hit the pool.”

Hannah’s voice comes through the door. Slowly she lifts herself from her chair and her feet take on a mind of their own. They lead her over to the edge of the balcony for a closer inspection of the mystery man lounging by the pool. He looks up at her on the balcony staring down at him. As quickly as she can she disappears inside her hotel room from the balcony, giggling as he catches her checking him out.

“Mel, what are you doing in there?” Hannah’s voice shouts out again.

“Coming, sorry I’m on my way.”

Grabbing her small clutch bag and phone Melinda runs to the door.

Down by the pool the four women settle themselves around a pool side table with a large umbrella for shade. A warm breeze washes over them as they scan the drinks and food menu. The sounds of Cuban rumba excite the crowd by the pool.

“I’m starving this whole menu looks delicious.” Dani pipes up.

“I can’t decide on what to try.”

“I can see something else that looks delicious from here.”

“Umm hmm, now that’s what I call tasty!”

Three pairs of eyes look up from their menus at Hannah, the three women follow her gaze across the pool. Melinda’s eyes widen as she warns off her friend in a playful way.

“Hannah, you are a man eater will you stop, you’re married remember.”

“Yeah, don’t remind me.”

All four of the women cackle with laughter.

“So, what’s the plan Melinda, when do the bride and groom arrive?” Hannah queries.

“They should be here anytime now, she’s organised dinner for tomorrow night for the whole wedding party. Which should be fun.”

“Cool, sounds good.” Dani chimes in.

The four women enjoy a light lunch by the pool and people watch as the mid afternoon sun heats up. Melinda has a prime spot facing Mr. Handsome by the pool and she can’t take her eyes off him. Every now and then he catches her looking his way, and she quickly lowers her gaze.

Just as their second round of rum cocktails arrive Melinda watches Mr. Handsome remove his shades, and then pull himself up to his full six-foot-three height. He stretches out his long olive tanned limbs and then makes his way over to the edge of the pool. Melinda tries not to melt in her seat at the sight of his exposed toned six pack and rock solid thighs. Expertly, he dives into the deep end of the pool and surfaces for air. She can tell he’s a strong swimmer as he moves through the water with ease, doing a well controlled breast stroke. His athletic ability impresses Melinda as he makes easy laps of the pool. Tearing her gaze away from the pool, Melinda looks around the table at her friends fanning themselves.

“How about after lunch we spend some time at the hotel casino, while we wait for the wedding party to arrive. What do you ladies think?”

The three women around the table smile at each other and turn to Melinda. Dani breaks the silence.

“I’m game, let’s do it Melinda.”

I hope you enjoyed the sample! 12th May 2017 will be the release date on Amazon, Barnes and Noble, ibooks and Smashwords. Pre-sale copies have a 15% discount on Smashwords until the 14th May. Full cover price pre-sale copies can be bought from Amazon. Havana Heat is just £2.32 GBP or £2.99 USD in e-book version, before any pre-sale discounts. Links below to pre -order. If you’d love your e-book version personalised check out this link [here](#).

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