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The Sentinel

Written by Mark Oldfield

Published by Head of Zeus

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THE SENTINEL

MARK OLDFIELD



First published in the UK in 2012 by Head of Zeus, Ltd.

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9 7 5 3 1 2 4 6 8

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN (HB): 9781908800183

ISBN (TPB): 9781908800190

ISBN (E): 9781781850435

Printed in Germany.

Head of Zeus, Ltd
Clerkenwell House
45-47 Clerkenwell Green
London EC1R 0HT

www.headofzeus.com

PLAZA DE TOROS DE BADAJOZ, 15 AUGUST 1936

Subdued by the remorseless violence of their captors, the first group of prisoners trudged across the dusty sand, halting in front of the wooden barrera. The victors had torn open the shirts of many of the captured men and women to expose the right shoulder, seeking the telltale bruising left by the sustained firing of a rifle. Those who bore that mark were rapidly herded into the bullring. Some now stared defiantly at their captors while others wept, cigarettes held in shaking hands, their gaze fixed on a spot so distant it could not possibly be on this earth. They had suffered much, these beaten Republicans, but they had not yet suffered enough. The Moors guarding them slowly drew back, leaving the prisoners standing alone, casting long, stark shadows across the sand as they stared through the shimmering heat at their executioners.

The sound of hooves echoed over the stone patio outside the gates and the victorious soldiers cheered their general as he clattered into the ring on his big white horse, its brasses gleaming, like some knight of the crusades. General Valverde reined in his mount alongside the two heavy machine guns, dark-oiled and glinting with dull menace, the sights adjusted for short-distance fire. A group of staff officers gathered around the general. A tall young teniente took up position a couple of paces from the others, glaring at the ranks of condemned Republicans with sullen malice.

The prisoners shuffled as they waited in the pitiless heat. Some of them exchanged final handshakes, others raised their fists in the Republican salute. Some merely stared, ashen-faced, at the machine guns pointing accusingly towards them. From somewhere behind the stands, there was a burst of screaming and from further away came the sound of muffled gunfire. The town was being sacked.

The men at the guns knelt, ready, the loaders cradling the belts of heavy bullets so they would pass cleanly into the guns without jamming. At the metallic sound of the guns being readied, many of the prisoners crossed themselves. But one woman stepped forward from the front rank, holding her torn blouse together across her chest. Twenty yards away, the troops could not see whether she bore the stigmata of a rifle: the sun was too bright. Little matter: where there was doubt about a prisoner's culpability, it was as well to assume guilt on the grounds of expediency.

The general's voice echoed around the stands as he gave the order to fire. Those standing immediately behind the guns saw the woman's mouth open, her fist rising in a final salute, but none heard her words as the machine guns exploded into their heavy staccato rhythm, scything down the prisoners, sending them tumbling backwards, smashed against the wooden barrera by the heavy bullets, some still trying to stay on their feet even as death tugged them down to the soaking sand. The firing lasted perhaps thirty seconds. Then the Moorish troops went in with their bayonets. It was surprising how many prisoners were still alive.

Once the wounded had been killed, the corpses were cleared away using wagons commandeered from the fallen town. Where the prisoners had stood, there remained only a patch of churned and stained sand. And then a new group shuffled into place along the barrera, its woodwork now riddled with the eccentric geometries of gunfire.

Outside the bullring, long lines of defeated Republicans waited to face the wrath of the victors. The battle was over. The killing had just begun.

CHAPTER ONE

LAS PEÑAS, 2009, SIERRA DE GREDOS

The car turned another bend, climbing higher into a land of sun-scorched scrub, stunted trees and huge overhanging rocks. An arid landscape broken by sheer cliffs and sharp, boulder-strewn ridges. Stupefying heat. Galindez felt sweat soaking her shirt, trickling down her back. This had been the only vehicle left in the car pool, and now it had become an instrument of torture. Why no air conditioning? It was high summer, for God's sake. If she'd been a uniformed officer and not a lowly forensic scientist, they wouldn't have sent her out to the middle of nowhere in a vehicle without air conditioning. There was no point in complaining, she knew. No matter how reasonable the complaint, the same barrier always came up. The same look on their faces: *Women – always complaining. Don't they realise? This is what keeps the pay cheque coming.*

Galindez reached the crest of the hill and crossed a flat promontory leading to yet another steep winding road that curved around the flank of yet another ochre hillside. She slowed, seeing a small improvised shrine at the roadside a hundred metres ahead. Beyond the barrier, the sheer cliff fell into the valley far below. Tyre marks curved crazily from the centre line to the shattered gap in the wooden fence. Galindez drove slowly, taking in the profusion of cheap plastic toys, religious badges, a handmade cross and a portrait of Jesus, executed in luminous colours. Whoever ploughed through that barrier had friends with appalling taste.

A road sign: *Las Peñas*. Even the villages were named after rocks in this arid terrain. A two-hour drive in thirty degrees of

heat. And waiting for her would be another heap of ancient bones. Another war grave. *Joder*. Why did they always send her? *No one else available in Forensics, Ana María. Good practice for you, Dr Galindez. Do me a favour with this one, Ana? It's not far, just outside Madrid.* She gripped the wheel, feeling a surge of resentment at what she was sure would be another wasted journey. In the mirror she saw beads of sweat on her face, the glint of her eyes behind the dark sunglasses. Her *guardia* ID swung gently on its chain from the sun visor, the small laminated photograph taken only a year ago: a picture of quiet confidence, her dark hair tied back, deep brown eyes bright with anticipation. Her name printed beneath the photo: *Galindez, Ana María, Forensic Investigator*. An image of her ideal self, calm and collected, just out of university with her doctorate, eager to start her career in the *guardia civil*. And this was how it had turned out. Collecting the remains of people killed in a war seventy-five years ago. *Good going, Ana María.*

It felt such a waste of time. All the years spent studying forensic science, developing skills of analysis and interpretation, peering at photographs of murders and suicides, learning the beguiling similarities between self-inflicted death and murder. Ways of avoiding the myriad opportunities to reach a wrong conclusion. All those skills focused on assembling a deeper truth. A truth no detective could ever piece together by observation alone. Time spent patiently gathering data. The hours of assiduous analysis devoted to identifying the logical sequence that would give up the secrets of a case. All the skills she'd acquired and yet so much of her time spent on these fruitless trips to recover the remains of people killed so long ago. Worse, Galindez knew she got these jobs because she was still the new girl. Last one in gets the shit jobs, they told her. Like that would make it better. *Life's unfair – and then you die.* *Papá's* colleagues said he'd had that phrase painted on his locker. He thought it was funny. But then he died and it really was unfair. She took a deep breath, reminding herself it was all good experience, that it would look good on her CV one day. One day.

She glanced at the map lying on the passenger seat next to the pieces of her satnav. Almost there. A faded road sign confirmed she'd reached her destination. A bleached and faded sign: *Compañía Española de Minas, fundada 1898*. The remains of an old stone wall hinted at what once might have been an entrance. Behind the wall, an ancient wire fence wound through the scorched grass. Several sections of fencing had collapsed, the folded strands of wire intertwined with the dry scrub swarming over the rusted fence posts. Near the wall were several old buildings. Two of the buildings were in ruins, walls folded crazily inward over their fallen roofs. The remaining buildings were clearly entering the final stages of disintegration. The entire place was steadily decomposing, sinking sullenly into the harsh terrain.

Cautiously, Galindez eased the car up a rough track running through the parched scrub and seared rocks of the hillside. Five hundred metres of uncomfortable driving ended at a wire fence where several cars huddled in the steaming heat. One, a green and white Lexus with the insignia of the *guardia civil*, its windows closed. Galindez was willing to bet they'd got air con in that. The dry ground crunched under the wheels as she pulled to a halt in a cloud of arid dust. Slipping her ID around her neck, Galindez collected her case and the canvas equipment bag and stepped out into the leaden heat of the sun.

It was worse than she'd expected. Heat prickled her scalp and she felt it begin to scorch her neck and arms – short sleeves didn't help but then she'd dressed for the office today, not knowing she would be packed off to an abandoned mine. Everything about this place was unpleasant: the sharp desiccated soil working its way into her shoes; the clammy feel of the damp shirt plastered to her back; the dazzling white light bleaching the surroundings, painful even through sunglasses. An uncomfortable but familiar start to her working day.

The gate in the fence creaked loudly. Ahead was the disused quarry, a semicircular gash carved sharply into the hillside. A careless array of abandoned, rusty mechanical equipment littered

the quarry floor. On the steep hillside overlooking the quarry she saw an arched area of brickwork that must be sealing the entrance to the mine. A group of people were standing by it. The hot air shimmered, making it hard to see them clearly. As Galindez approached, she saw a man wearing the olive green uniform of the *guardia civil*. Closer now, Galindez saw a ragged opening had been smashed in the bricks. An opening so small it obliged those entering or leaving the mine to bend almost double. The man in uniform came towards her. Typical officer of the *Benemérita*: middle-aged, belly straining over the top of a thick belt, eyes obscured by large round sunglasses.

‘Dr Galindez? *Buenos dias. Teniente* Molina. We spoke on the phone.’

‘*Holá*. What have we got in there, *Teniente*?’ She held out her hand. Molina ignored it.

‘As far as I can tell, fifteen corpses. Skeletons, I should say. Very little left of them.’

‘A killing from *la Guerra Civil*?’

‘You tell me, that’s your job. I just need cause and approximate date of death to finish the paperwork and put this to bed. You’ve done this sort of thing before, *verdad*?’

‘I’ve done lots of cases like these, *Teniente*. They get monotonous after a while.’

He shrugged. ‘*Claro*. That’s police work, fifty-nine minutes of boredom and one of excitement an hour – if you’re lucky.’

‘Even so, I wonder why we bother. We catalogue them and then what? *Nada*. Usually there’s no suspect and often no witnesses. *Dios mio*, it was seventy years ago. We aren’t going to make arrests. God knows there’s enough to keep us busy without digging up war graves three-quarters of a century old.’

‘Maybe so, Dr Galindez. But in the *guardia*, orders are orders. Even for *forenses* like you. That’s what keeps the pay cheque coming, no?’

‘That’s what they say,’ she agreed. *All the fucking time. We should have it on the badge.*

Molina followed Galindez towards the mine entrance. A second *guardia* emerged, struggling from the hole in the brickwork. He saw Galindez and she felt the familiar sensation of being measured against that invisible benchmark her male colleagues carried around alongside their gun and their nightstick. Maybe it wouldn't be so annoying if they'd hide it a little. Especially since it was wasted on her anyway.

'This is *Sargento* Hernandez. Hernandez, Dr Galindez.'

The *sargento* gave her a cursory nod and stared at her chest. Clearly she met some of his criteria since he didn't even bother looking at her face. She folded her arms.

'You get back to the *comisaría*, *sargento*, I'll be along later,' Molina said. Hernandez took a last look at Galindez's breasts and walked back up to the cars parked by the fence.

Galindez looked at the ragged hole in the brickwork. 'Is it safe to go in?'

'*Absolutamente*. We've put up a couple of lights. You know, I think it shook the *sargento* when he saw what's in there.'

'I could tell he was the sensitive type.' Galindez took off her sunglasses, squinting against the white glare. She forced her way into the narrow gap, the broken bricks sharp against her back. Inside it was dark and the air smelled of earth. Molina followed, crawling awkwardly through the gap, panting from the exertion.

An electric lamp hung from a hook in the narrow passageway, throwing dull light along rough stone walls punctuated by the columns of bricks bearing the weight of the hillside above. Galindez's flashlight played over the dusty surfaces, a probing line of white light picking out rusty lanterns, heaps of broken tools and large coils of wire covered in lichen. Twenty metres in the passageway widened, ending in a brick wall with a heavy door fitted with a large rusty lock. There were storage spaces hacked from the rock on either side of the brickwork, most of the space occupied by piles of ancient equipment and tools, their form and function long erased by dust and cobwebs.

'That's the entrance to the mine,' Molina said, pointing to the

door. 'But there's no key for the door and I don't fancy trying to force it open if we don't need to.'

Galindez nodded, her flashlight moving across upturned buckets, oil drums and wire netting. Dust flickered in the sharp beam. And there they were.

The killers must have piled the bodies on top of each other but time had changed the order of things. With the decomposition of the bodies, the skeletons had collapsed like a heap of firewood. Galindez knelt alongside them. She'd seen plenty of skulls in her short career yet she still felt there was a certain pathos looking into a face so denuded of its essential humanity. All that remained was this last unrecognisable vestige of its owner, the jaws open in the impossibly wide, astonished surprise of the long dead. Those where the jaw was still attached.

'From the look of it, none of these people died naturally, *Teniente*.'

Molina looked at the skull. 'That's a gunshot wound, isn't it?'

'Definitely. This is the entry point,' she pointed out a neatly drilled hole in the back of the head, 'and you can see the result here.' Turning the skull, she indicated the massive exit hole, a gaping expanse of the forehead missing. 'The bullet entered at the base of the skull, exiting through the forehead.'

'So what does that tell us?'

'*Hombre*,' Galindez smiled, 'someone shot him.'

Molina grunted humourlessly. He looked again at the dusty skeletons, so diminished in death, their essence long since drained away, the remains now crumbling slowly. 'There are no signs of identity.' He sounded disappointed. Galindez knew the feeling well.

She took latex gloves from her case and began to pull them on. 'I think it's best if I establish how many there are. Then we can get them bagged up.'

'There's no *we*,' Molina snorted. '*You* get them bagged up. That's what you do, *señorita*.' He got to his feet and headed back along the tunnel to the entrance.

Galindez felt the cold starting to seep into her damp clothes. It wasn't unpleasant now, but after a while it would be. And she was going to be here quite a while, she was certain of that. She pulled off the gloves. There were things in her car she needed and it was pretty clear she wasn't going to get any help.

Galindez climbed back through the ragged hole in the bricks into the simmering white heat. The light was painful after the half light of the tunnel. Two people were standing outside the entrance. An old man holding a sheaf of papers, and a woman: middle-aged, short dark hair. Quite attractive, Galindez noticed. She wondered if they were relatives of the victims. That would be good: she could try for a DNA match. The thought cheered her.

Molina introduced them. 'Dr Galindez, may I present *Profesora* Ordoñez, professor of contemporary history at the University Complutense in Madrid and *Señor* Teodoro Byass, former manager at the Spanish Mining Company. *Señor* Byass tells me a large part of the mine and the neighbouring quarries closed after the Civil War.'

Señor Byass was clearly pleased to have had his retirement interrupted to give the history of this godforsaken hole carved into the barren hillside. 'As you say, *Teniente*, although we carried on some operations in the area until about 1970 – the year the company shut down. But the mine was sealed off long before that.'

'Before the war?' the professor asked.

'No, *señora*. It closed in 1953. I've got the papers here. I kept the files when the company folded. Here you are, *señora*.'

'It's *señorita*,' Ordoñez said, glancing at Galindez. 'But if we're being formal, I prefer *profesora*.'

Byass mumbled an apology as he handed *Profesora* Ordoñez the yellowed papers with their faded official stamps.

She examined them carefully. 'Had the seam run out?'

The old man shook his head. 'Orders from above. As you'll see in that letter.'

Profesora Ordoñez turned towards Galindez to read the letter. Her finger moved down the faded typewritten sheet. 'Orders from

the General Directorate of Security, January fifteenth, 1953. For reasons of public safety...’ the *Profesora* skimmed the page, ‘danger to passers-by, children and domestic animals... immediate closure of the mine entrance...’

‘An order like that couldn’t be ignored. Not back then,’ Byass said. ‘They sealed up the entrance within a few days.’

Profesora Ordoñez turned to put the papers in her bag and caught Galindez lightly with her elbow. ‘I’m so sorry. Did I hurt you?’ She squeezed Galindez’s arm in gentle apology.

‘*No ha pasado nada*, professor, my fault,’ Galindez said, thinking it less of an accident and more an opening gambit.

Profesora Ordonez looked at the letter again. ‘The letter is signed by the Military Governor of Madrid, General Antonio Valverde,’ she read. ‘As you say, *Señor* Byass, an order from the *Capitán-General* of Madrid wasn’t something to be argued with.’

Molina sighed impatiently. ‘None of that’s important. As far as I’m concerned it’s an open and shut case of a wartime killing. I’ll leave you to do your job, Dr Galindez. I’m going to drive *Señor* Byass back to the village.’

‘I may need some help,’ Galindez protested. ‘Those skeletons are going to fall apart once they’re moved. If we could get a couple of officers in to assist, at least I could keep some of them intact. It would make the forensic investigation much easier.’

‘A quick word,’ Molina said, taking a couple of paces away from the *profesora* and *Señor* Byass.

Galindez followed him, knowing what was coming.

‘Don’t give me orders, Galindez,’ Molina said in loud voice. ‘You’re just the cleaning woman here, as far as I’m concerned. You may have all day to spend on this but I don’t. All I want is your report signed and dated and sent to the *comisaría* at Las Peñas by tomorrow morning. Get those bodies out of here and take them wherever the fuck it is you take them. And I want the hole in the bricks sealed up. I think I can trust you to arrange that, can’t I?’

Galindez glowered at Molina, her cheeks burning with anger.

‘That’s settled then,’ Molina said. ‘I’ll leave you to get on with it, Dr Galindez.’

‘Just a minute,’ Galindez said.

Molina stopped in his tracks and turned to glare at her.

‘You registered the mine as a crime scene when you arrived, didn’t you?’ Galindez asked. ‘And I presume you gave it a crime number?’

‘Of course.’ Molina was furious. Galindez could imagine what he was thinking: *who does she think she’s talking to?*

‘In that case,’ Galindez continued, ‘securing the scene is your responsibility. The regulations about crime-scene management are quite specific. You logged the crime – it’s down to you to find a bricklayer.’

For a moment, Molina seemed on the verge of apoplexy. Realising the others were watching, he nodded curtly and walked sullenly towards his car where *Señor* Byass was waiting. They climbed into the green and white Lexus and drove off.

‘What a charmer.’ It was the *profesora*.

‘He loves me really,’ Galindez laughed, ‘he’s just playing hard to get.’

‘Do you have to put up with that sort of thing often?’

‘That?’ Galindez shrugged. ‘That was nothing, believe me.’

‘You could complain, surely? Isn’t there some sort of policy about these things?’

‘Oh yes. We have anti-sexism policies, anti-bullying policies – all sorts of policies, *profesora*. But do you know what the most important policy of all is? I’ll tell you: never – as in never even-in-your-fucking-dreams-ever – complain. Complain and you’re a whinger. And that’s not a good thing. You just take the shit and collect the pay cheque. That’s what they expect and that’s what you do.’

‘What a depressing thought.’

‘Believe me, the alternative’s worse. You have to show you can take it. Otherwise they won’t respect you. And then you can’t do your job at all.’

‘Don’t you ever wonder if maybe you’re in the wrong job?’

‘I’ve only been in the *guardia* a year. I need to build up experience before I can get a transfer,’ Galindez said, speculatively prodding a stone with her shoe. ‘The trouble is, it’s a family thing. My dad and my uncle were both *guardia*. My uncle still is. I need to show I can hack it. In time it’ll get better.’

‘I hope so. For your sake.’ *Profesora* Ordonez knelt and opened the chill bag lying at her feet. She took out a plastic bottle of water and offered it to Galindez. The water was cold, the condensation on the plastic felt pleasant in her hand. She raised the bottle to her mouth, aware of the *profesora* watching as she drank.

‘So it was you who located this place, *profesora*?’ Galindez asked, wiping her mouth.

‘Me and my research group.’

‘How did you find out about it?’ The intensity of the *profesora*’s look was almost embarrassing, Galindez thought. Almost.

‘Well, there’s a diary.’

‘Whose diary?’ Galindez asked, suddenly interested.

‘Oh, someone who was a key player back then,’ *Profesora* Ordoñez said. ‘The diary of a man in charge of organising much of Franco’s dirty work.’

‘He documented it?’ Galindez automatically began thinking fingerprints, DNA, handwriting analysis. Evidence. Even if it wasn’t a smoking gun, she thought, at least it was some form of evidence for once.

‘Some of the diary is autobiographical,’ *Profesora* Ordoñez continued. ‘There are also details of arrests and executions, although the locations aren’t given in great detail. We’ve identified some of the places he refers to. This was one of them.’

‘And he admits the killings?’

The *profesora* smiled. ‘No. There’s nothing to connect him to them directly. Besides, I don’t think you’d be able to arrest him now, it’s likely he’s been dead for years.’

‘So this is your speciality – tracking down Franco’s hit men?’

Ordoñez laughed. ‘Haven’t you read my work? I would have thought someone working in this field would be familiar with it.’

‘I don’t specialise in war graves,’ Galindez said. ‘They’re allocated to me. Frequently. There’s a lot of political pressure to investigate them. But they don’t put any real resources into it: I have a look, do a report and then it’s on to the next one.’

‘Make the most of them. They’re fascinating,’ the *profesora* said. ‘Could I have a look at this one, do you think?’ She nodded towards the hole in the bricks. ‘Maybe a few photos for our records?’

‘No problem.’ Galindez picked up her latex gloves. ‘I’ll come in with you.’

‘I hoped you would.’

Galindez took the lead, crouching to scramble through the hole. She felt the *profesora* watching as she struggled through the hole, wrestling her bag past the broken bricks.

The pile of bones intrigued *Profesora* Ordoñez and she listened carefully as Galindez outlined her view of how the bodies came to be in the mine: that it was likely they were killed somewhere else and then brought here and dumped in a heap before the entrance was sealed up permanently.

‘How long would you say they’ve been here, Ana María?’ The *profesora* asked.

‘Right now, I’d date the killing sometime between 1952 and 1970, probably earlier rather than later.’

‘And why do you say that?’ The professor moved nearer, placing a hand on Galindez’s shoulder to steady herself. Once she was comfortable, her hand remained in place.

‘I’m not Sherlock Holmes,’ Galindez said. ‘The mine was sealed in fifty-three and the company closed down in the seventies. These people have been dead a long time and of course it’s unlikely a pile of bodies was lying around while the miners came here to work the seams. So...’

‘*Elementario, mi querido Watson?*’ A hint of a smile in the professor’s voice.

'It is when you know how.' Galindez tensed, sensing condescension.

'It's unlikely you'll find anything of much interest.'

'Over a dozen people shot dead and hidden in a mine? If it took place in the early fifties that was well after the war ended. We're talking about murder rather than a war crime surely?'

'This may not be a shooting carried out *during* the war. But that doesn't mean it wasn't connected to the war,' *Profesora* Ordoñez said.

'But why here? Why not just kill them in prison?'

'Things weren't so neat and tidy in those days.' The professor's flashlight wandered over the skeletons. 'Perhaps the killings needed to be covered up so they dumped them here. They knew one thing for certain: no one would come looking for these people. Not in Franco's lifetime anyway.'

'So the killers weren't worried about the law?'

Profesora Ordoñez smiled. 'It's quite possible they were the law.'

Five o'clock and the sun was remorseless. Galindez worked steadily and methodically, piling the skeletons on top of black plastic sacks outside the mine entrance. So many bones. Skulls, the strange curves of spines and ribcages, thigh bones, shins, the smaller pieces: toes, fingers – even a few teeth found in the dirt beneath the pile of bodies. Fifteen scrambled skeletons. Back at the lab Galindez could reassemble these bodies – given time. Whether the *guardia* would sanction the expense was unlikely, she knew. What good would it do anyway, she explained to the *profesora*. Apart from keeping the pay cheque coming, of course.

'You mean they won't investigate further?' *Profesora Ordoñez* asked, surprised.

'What difference would it make? That world has gone. Those people have been dead so long, who can possibly care now?'

'That's rather harsh, Dr Galindez,' Ordoñez said, 'Don't you have any interest in the past?'

'No, not really,' Galindez said, a little too quickly.

'None at all? Don't you care about how the past constantly

seeps into the present? How it nuances and shapes contemporary choices and options?’

Galindez laughed. ‘You really do sound like a professor.’

‘I’m in the right job then.’

‘You mentioned something earlier about a diary, *profesora*?’

Ordoñez opened her bag and brought out a book bound in faded, scuffed leather. She opened it gently, almost tenderly. The writing was in a broad script written with a large-nibbed pen. The ink faint but still legible.

‘We found this three years ago,’ she said. ‘Hidden under the floorboards in a house in the centre of Madrid.’

Galindez looked at the page. Strong, even pen strokes, the writing an exemplar of geometrical rigidity, yet with a bold, angry sweep to it. She saw dated entries, barely a hint of any correction.

‘This diary is extremely important,’ *Profesora* Ordoñez said, closing it. ‘But I can tell you about him later. Look at you, you’re filthy. You need to get out of those clothes and have a shower.’ She smiled. ‘And a cold drink or two. Tell you what, I’m buying when we get back to Madrid. In fact, we could go to my place. You can get showered while I fix us a drink.’

Galindez saw the look in the *profesora*’s eyes. The day might end better than it had begun. But she wouldn’t be going anywhere until the truck arrived to take away the remains. And then there were photographs to be taken. ‘That would be nice, *profesora*, but I’ve still a fair bit of work left to do.’

‘I’ll wait. And it’s Luisa, by the way.’

‘OK. Pro— Luisa. Listen, you’ve got me hooked, this man we’ve been talking about – the one who wrote this diary. Just who was he?’

Profesora Ordoñez smiled. ‘So you’re getting more interested in the past now? That can happen. He was very special, Ana María. This is him.’ She opened the diary again.

Inside the cover was a pressed, yellowed newspaper clipping from the right-wing daily, *ABC*. The contrast between light and shade was so sharp the photograph seemed almost a sketch. In the

picture, a tall, heavy-set young man in combat gear was having a medal pinned on his chest by a short man in a uniform with big epaulettes, his spindly legs clad in gleaming riding boots. Behind them, neat ranks of troops were drawn up at attention. And beyond the lines of soldiers, the wooden *barrera* of a bullring.

Despite the blazing sun, Galindez felt a sudden chill, her skin prickled against her sweat-soaked clothes. She read the headline: *Hero of Badajoz decorated by Generalísimo Franco*. It was her first glimpse of *Comandante* Guzmán.