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*Colin Covington's
Little White Lies*

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After retiring from the army Bill Covington had taken his family to Colombia for his retirement. They had been to Santa Marta on holidays and the whole family fell in love with the beautiful city on the Caribbean. Colin's mother, Carmen, had been born in the neighbouring city of Barranquilla.

The Covingtons opened a charming little coffee shop on the Esperanza and it became so successful they opened four more shops in the city, one of them in the upmarket area of El Rodadero. Bill fell ill soon after the opening of the fourth Juan Valdez coffee shop and twenty-six year old Colin was obliged to grudgingly step in to fill the void left by his father.

After two years he had given the family business enough of his life and wanted to get back into his chosen field, the IT world. His brother Eduardo was now ready to take over the reins of Juan Valdez and the time was ripe.

While his parents had been building up their business he had been studying at University Co-operative of Colombia in Bogotá and had graduated with honours as a Systems Analyst, but of course the industry was screaming ahead in leaps and bounds and constant study was essential. Two years in the world of computing can see massive technological advancement and changes.

This course was the chance of a lifetime for Colin to gain a good understanding of Ajax. This incredible new language was the way of the future of information technology and programming across the board and would help to bring him back in tune with his work.

He had his eyes firmly set on a position in a nearby city.

He desperately wanted the job offered by Barranquilla Technical Services. If he got it he would be able to commute from Santa Marta and life at home, being waited on hand and foot by his mother, could continue. Jobs like this were hard to come by close to home and the competition was pretty stiff, so coming to the course this week was important and he realised that at least a few other participants would be part of the competition for the highly desirable BTS position.

"Hola!" chirped the doorman as Colin entered the large reception area.

"Hola!" he replied.

"Como esta usted?" enquired the doorman.

Colin replied politely that he was feeling fine today and moved further into the room.

The venue for the course was the fabulous new Hotel Bogota Regency. The ground floor of the hotel was luxuriously appointed and screamed 'class' with heavy chain mail curtains thinly veiling the magnificent vista of the manicured English style gardens outside. It is extremely unusual to find gardens of this type in Bogotá and the hotel became well known with tourists and locals alike because of this unique feature.

Huge modern chandeliers provided ample lumination in the foyer and created a light and airy ambience. There were no curtains in this reception area, just floor to ceiling windows, which allowed uninterrupted views of the garden. The design made you feel that you were actually in the garden and it was easy to imagine the smell of the lavender and sweet roses. The foyer was decorated with large bowls of these flowers, enhancing and reinforcing the impression.

Colin checked in at the massive white marble desk and the attractive receptionist called a bellboy to assist him to his room. Within a few minutes he was sitting on his large comfortable bed with its attractive covering of floral patterned linen, reminiscent of the gardens outside. He was happy to note that the luxury décor had been applied to his room also. He rose and walked over to the large oak dresser and looked in the mirror.

His brown eyes looked a little strained and his dark hair in need of attention so he decided to take a quick shower before checking out the lecture theatre in readiness for the course the next day. Colin took great pride in his appearance, probably because he was quite conceited, and didn't want to be spotted by the competition looking less than his best!

He showered in the beautiful black marble bathroom and dried himself with big fluffy white towels. "This hotel was designed to make you feel good he thought" and it was working its magic on him. He was feeling like a million dollars and well and truly ready for the challenge the course presented.

As he left his room to go in search of the lecture theatre, he glanced in the mirror for one last check on his appearance.

"Yes," he said to himself. "Looking good! I'm glad I got Mum's dark Latin looks and not Dad's pale pinched English features."

Colin knocked lightly on the door of the lecture hall, not really expecting anyone to answer, just out of courtesy. As he thought, no answer, so he pushed the heavy soundproofed door open and entered the semi-darkened cavernous hall. There was just enough light to make out sumptuous red leather chairs with attached swing away tables. Even this room was luxurious. He certainly got his money's worth this time. The \$850,000Col (Colombian Pesos) he had paid for the course was looking like better value all the time.

There was an aisle just to the left of where he stood and Colin took a couple of steps forward to sit in the nearest chair. He liked to get a feel for places before he had to enter them with an audience. It enabled him to make his entrance much more confidently and not have to worry about checking out the "lay of the land". The only thing he would have to think about when he next entered this theatre was how he was being perceived. This was very important to Colin who always kept in mind that you only get one chance to make a first impression. He liked to impress everyone the first time!

Daydreaming was not a common pastime for Colin, but as he felt himself slipping down in the chair, he began thinking about working at Barranquilla Tech Services and didn't hear the faint click of the door closing behind him.

Minnie, believing she would be alone in the darkened theatre, moved down the aisle toward Colin who suddenly realised he was no longer the only person there. He sat up quickly and as he did so Minnie saw his head appear above the back of the chair. She was startled and let out a strangled cry.

"Oh, I'm so sorry to disturb you, I didn't realise there was anyone here. Please forgive me for disturbing you!"

Colin certainly had made an impression on Minnie, scaring her half out of her wits, but it wasn't the sort of first impression he preferred to make.

Before Colin had chance to reply, all the lights in the lecture hall suddenly turned on and a loud voice enquired in a very irritated tone:

"I am the hotel security officer. What business do you have in this area please?"

Colin and Minnie were blinking to try to accustom their eyes to the sudden brightness and had not actually focussed on each other yet, but were concentrating their attention on the security man who had entered the room by a door on the far side.

“I’m registered to join the course beginning in the morning,” explained Colin. “I am a hotel guest and I’m just familiarising myself with the location of the hall to facilitate my prompt arrival for the first session which begins early in the morning. This young lady is also a hotel guest and a participant of the course. Perhaps you should keep the door locked if guests are not welcome in the area.”

Colin didn’t like to be wrong or be perceived to be wrong.

The Security Officer seemed satisfied with this explanation and feeling a little chastened by this brash young man’s sharp tongue he quickly wished them both, “*buenas noches*” and moved to exit the large room without further comment. He thought, “*I’ll come back later to turn off the lights and lock the doors. I don’t fancy spending any more time than necessary in the same space as this little upstart. Fuck, jobs are hard enough to find in this bloody city, without losing my cool with this asshole and getting the sack over it.*”

Colin’s retort served to unsettle Minnie even more. Most of the men she had contact with were so subservient and she liked the overbearing, masterful style this guy seemed to have and turned to study him, her eyes now fully adjusted to the light in the room.

His profile showed an aquiline nose and heavy brow with eyelashes so long she knew some girls would kill for them!

“*Wow, he’s gorgeous,*” she thought. “*So dark, looks so brooding, so tall, so sexy. There’s nothing at home like him!*”

Now Colin had turned to face her and was struck dumb by her features. She was everything he had ever dreamed his perfect woman to be and for the first time in his adult life he was lost for words. His mother’s romantic notions of love at first sight came as an echo in his head. He had never believed in all that stuff, but something really strange was happening to him right now.

Her pale skin had the luminosity of alabaster and her finely boned face was truly beautiful in a classic way. It was framed by a halo of fine titian curls, which licked at her temples. She had almost a regal air about her he thought. He remembered her voice when she had first encountered him and remembered it was very cultured. “*Maybe I’ve found my very own princess,*” he thought.

He suddenly realised he was staring and mentally shook himself.

Offering his hand he introduced himself. “Forgive me, I’m Colin Covington. What I told the officer is true. I’m here to attend the course tomorrow.”

She took his hand. “I’m Minnie, and yes I *am* a guest at the hotel and yes again, I too will be doing the course”.

“That just about makes us old friends Minnie. May I offer you a nightcap? I spotted a charming little cocktail lounge just near the Phoenicia restaurant downstairs in the hotel. Please be my guest?”

They made their way downstairs and sat chatting animatedly for several hours over some very palatable local white wine and Colin found himself wanting to impress Minnie. He wasn’t normally given to lying, not even little white ones, but just couldn’t stop himself, so enchanted was he by this beautiful girl.

He was becoming more besotted as the moments passed and he was exaggerating his experience dramatically. In his mind he had not only landed the job at Barranquilla Tech but was almost running the company single-handed! All this he let Minnie believe. In fact she seemed quite impressed he thought, which only encouraged him in his endeavours to gain her admiration and, of course, deceive her further.

Eventually, realising it was late; they parted reluctantly and made their way to their respective rooms to rest in readiness for the opening day of their course.

From the outset the pace was fast and the instructors were pushing everyone to their full capacity. They were even setting homework! This meant there was no time to socialise and each night Colin went to bed totally exhausted but dreaming of “his Princess”. Two floors below Minnie was having similar dreams.

Friday signalled the end of the course and in the evening most participants were fare welling new friends they had made during the week. Almost everyone would return home over the weekend. Colin was standing drinking a farewell with a guy called Leon who came from Aracataca, a small town outside Santa Marta and Eva a girl from Fusagasuga, near Bogotá. He had one eye on the door waiting for Minnie to arrive. It was getting late and he was worried, really worried, that he had missed her and that she had already left the hotel.

She had told him she lived in El Rodadero, and he couldn't wait to make an arrangement to see her again when they both returned to Santa Marta. Finally she came into the room, her eyes scanning the faces in the groups of new friends, and Colin approached her immediately, before she had spotted him.

“Minnie, hi, I'm so pleased to see you. I thought you'd already checked out maybe. Hasn't this week been crazy? There's been hardly a spare minute.”

“Yes, I'm totally exhausted. I can't wait to get home to rest up a little. But you didn't really think I'd leave without seeing you, did you?”

This made Colin feel a little better and he invited her to meet him the following Friday at Taganga, at 7pm. Minnie agreed happily and they parted with a fond embrace.

A uniformed driver approached Minnie and she left the cocktail lounge abruptly. Colin thought this behaviour was a little odd, but put it down to the fact that she was polite and didn't want to keep the taxi waiting.

The 18 hour bus ride back to Santa Marta took its toll and combined with the hectic week and the brain overload from the intensive course, Colin was so tired he thought he would fall asleep walking up the stairs to his bedroom. His family was attending a concert recital and the house was empty, so he was spared the ordeal of relating the week's events to his mother. He fell into his bed, closed his eyes and prepared for sleep. Sleep did not come.

He sat bolt upright. He suddenly realised what a tangled web he had woven with his lies and exaggerations to Minnie. Because he had been so engrossed in the course, he hadn't given this much thought, but now he remembered, he realised what an absolute mess he had made for himself. He was besotted with Minnie and if she knew him to be a liar, she surely would reject him. She stood on high moral ground; that had been obvious throughout their conversations.

All through the following week Colin was in turmoil wondering how he could put right his lies, but as time went on he realised that this time he had gone a little too far. Normally this would not have been a problem for him, but he had not banked on falling in love with Minnie and this exacerbated his problem.

By Thursday he realised that he had really blown this relationship before it had even got off the ground and there was no way out but to bow out as graciously as

possible. He decided he would take the cowardly approach and not turn up for their date on Friday.

During the day on Friday his conscience pricked a little at the thought of Minnie waiting alone in the restaurant that night. He decided to buy flowers and write a note (probably more lies to compound his problem) for her to find on arrival at Taganga. He delivered the flowers to the restaurant and into the waitress Maria's charge.

That Friday night Colin spent a very restless night indeed and Saturday morning saw him rise in a very poor frame of mind. He realised he needed to change his egotistical ways and how selfish he had been on many occasions in the past.

Taganga was owned by his cousin's friend, Alex, and he decided to drop in to find out if Minnie had left any message for him, though he doubted this would be the case. As he entered the restaurant, he spotted Alex polishing wine glasses behind the bar. Alex glanced up as he entered.

"Hey Colin, what's the big idea? You call me, you ask for the best table in the house and you don't turn up. And not even a phone call to apologise. Not good behaviour my friend. I'll think twice next time about reserving my best table if you ask me!"

"*Oh my God,*" Colin thought. "*I was so wrapped up in my problems again, I forgot to call Alex to explain. I can't seem to get anything right lately.*"

Alex gestured towards a table in the corner of the restaurant where Colin's flowers sat, complete with the envelope containing his note attached to the plastic holder positioned centrally between the two perfect orchids which formed the focus of the beautiful arrangement.

Next to the vase was another envelope. Colin approached the table and picked up this envelope. It was constructed from fine ivory coloured vellum and bore delicate gold printing *Colin Covington Esquire*. In the top right hand corner where you would normally find the postage stamp, there was a coat of arms not recognisable to Colin.

He carefully opened the beautiful envelope which contained an equally beautiful sheet of notepaper. As he unfolded it he noticed the same coat of arms repeated in the centre of the top of the page. The same delicate gold printing which inscribed his name on the envelope was also repeated on this letter.

It read...

Dear Mr Covington

It has been brought to our attention that while she was visiting your country, the very honourable Princess Minette Charlotte de Crespigny made an arrangement to join you to take repast at this establishment, Taganga Restaurant.

It is my duty to inform you that this arrangement was not sanctioned by, and is frowned upon by the King of Rondelleau and that the Very Honourable Princess Minette Charlotte de Crespigny will not be joining you this evening.

Nor will there take place any further meetings between yourself and the Very Honourable Princess Minette Charlotte de Crespigny.

Signature

Pierre LaTrec

Private Secretary

To Her Majesty Queen Margarete Anna Louise Elizabeth of the Kingdom of Rondelleau