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CHRIS STEWART

1950–

Chris Stewart was born in Sussex, England. He was the drummer in a pop group, *The Garden Wall*, which was formed by some of his school friends. This group did not last long, however, and soon Chris was invited by his friend Peter Gabriel to join another group, called *Genesis*. After *Genesis* had released two singles, *Silent Sun* and *A Winter's Tale*, Chris had to leave when the band became professional, because his parents refused to let him leave school. *Genesis* went on to become very successful. Chris left school a year later, and played drums for a circus. Soon he became interested in farming; he worked on a farm for a while, and then started a career as a travelling sheep-shearer. He also contributed to several travel books, *The Rough Guide to Andalusia* and *The Rough Guide to China*. In 1988 he bought a run-down old farm in the Alpujarras, the foothills to the south of the Sierra Nevada mountain range in Spain. He still lives there with his wife Ana and their daughter Chloë. *Driving Over Lemons* was published in 1999.

Other works by Chris Stewart: *A Parrot in a Pepper Tree*.



Driving Over Lemons

Chris Stewart has come to southern Spain to look at houses for sale in the mountains. He and his wife Ana want to live and farm there. An estate agent takes him to see a small farm, and they have lunch there with the Spanish owner. Chris has enthusiastically agreed to buy the farm and has even paid a deposit! Now he hopes that Ana won't think he has made a mistake. She is flying out from England to join him.

Before you read

- Why do you think the book has this title? Choose **a**, **b**, or **c**. Driving over lemons ...
 - is a well-known sport in this part of Spain.
 - is hard to avoid on some Spanish roads.
 - is the best way of producing lemon juice.
- Why do you think Chris and Ana want to move from England to Spain? Tick (✓) as many as you like.
 - They want to enjoy better weather.
 - They want to experience a different lifestyle.
 - They want to farm in the traditional Spanish way.
 - Farms are cheaper to buy in Spain than in England.

Now read to the end of the text.

Think about these questions as you read. Is the text ...

... exciting? ... funny? ... difficult? ... scary? ... sad? ... interesting?

Driving Over Lemons

I collected Ana from the airport, skimming back towards Granada in the biscuit tin of a car that I had hired. We watched as the snowy peaks of the Sierra Nevada appeared from a blue haze above the city and the winter sun set the tops glowing rose pink with the last rays of the day. Ana was enchanted and I too felt a bit dazed by the beauty of it all. What a place to come and live! We left Granada behind and climbed over the pass of Suspiro del Moro. ●●● 5

Pedro and Maria had invited us to stay the night and late in the evening we turned into the valley for Ana's first view of our new home. In the light of the setting sun the fields along the road seemed even more beautiful than I had imagined. Ana seemed pleased with it all and I pointed things out to her proudly as we passed. Olives, oranges, lemons ... cabbages ... potatoes ... 10

We climbed up over the cliffs of the gorge and into the valley.

'There it is!'

You get a brief glimpse of El Valero just as you enter the valley, before it disappears again behind a great curtain of rock. 15

'Where?'

'Over there, you see? Up on the rock over the other side of the river.'

'That?'

'What do you mean "that"?' 20

'Precisely that – that.'

'Well "that" is it. El Valero. What do you think?'

'I don't think at all from this distance. I'll reserve judgement till we get a little nearer.'

We drove on into the valley and stopped at a nearer vantage point. 'Well, I think it really looks rather nice.' 25

I looked at Ana in amazement and delight. She is not generally given to such outbursts of enthusiasm.

We drove on a bit and parked the car where the road ran out. ●●●●●

The light was failing and I knew there was a long and rather tricky walk across the valley to get to the farm. We set off along the path down the hill, navigating a patch of bog where the way forded a stream, and then through a thicket of huge eucalyptus, sweet-smelling and whispering in the evening breeze, and ringing with birdsong. We emerged on the bank of the river. It tumbled full and clear down a steep bed of stones, crashing and roaring over the falls of smooth rocks and gliding in and out of the stiller pools. 30
35

I smiled and squeezed Ana's hand as we set out eagerly across the pack-bridge, excited at the prospect of our first view together of our new home.

Notes [Some of the words and expressions are dealt with in *Working with the text*.]

skimming (line 1): (here) driving quickly

Granada (line 1): the capital city of the province

peaks (line 2): tops of the mountains

haze (line 3): mist, not a clear sky

pass (line 6): a way through the mountains

Pedro and Maria (line 7): the previous farmer and his wife

gorge (line 12): deep river valley with high sides

El Valero (line 14): the name of the farm

vantage point (line 24): a place which offers a good view

The light was failing (line 29): it was becoming dark

a patch of bog (line 30): some very wet land, unsafe to walk on

the way forded a stream (line 31): you had to walk through a stream

thicket (line 31): group of trees

eucalyptus (line 31): attractive tree, originally found in

Australia

breeze (line 32): light wind

pack-bridge (line 36): narrow stone bridge, not suitable for cars

Working with the text

Do you like the text? Why or why not?

A The words and phrases on the left (1–10) are from the text. Find them, then match them with their approximate meanings (a–j).

- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 enchanted | a exactly |
| 2 dazed | b becomes impossible to see |
| 3 glimpse | c finding a way through |
| 4 disappears | d make my mind up later |
| 5 precisely | e difficult |
| 6 reserve judgement | f a quick look |
| 7 amazement | g unable to think clearly |
| 8 tricky | h delighted |
| 9 navigating | i came out |
| 10 emerged | j great surprise |

B Answer the questions.

- Where are Chris and Ana going to spend the night?
- What do Chris and Ana find so beautiful about the views (lines 8–11)?
- Who says, 'There it is!' and what does 'it' refer to?
- Why do Chris and Ana have to walk some of the way to the farmhouse?
- What is Chris a little worried about, as it is getting dark?
- How do Chris and Ana feel, as they come closer to their new home?

C True or false? Tick (✓) any true sentences and rewrite the false ones.

- The Sierra Nevada mountains are near Granada.
- Ana has seen the farm before.
- The cabbages and potatoes belong to Chris.
- The farm can be seen all the way along the road.
- Ana is generally an enthusiastic person.
- Chris and Ana arrive at their new home in the evening.

D Reading between the lines

- What does Chris mean by 'the biscuit tin of a car' (line 1)? How do you think he feels about the car?
- Why is Chris proud of the things he points out to Ana on the way?
- How does Chris feel about showing the farm to Ana? How do you know?
- Why does Chris call Ana's comment 'Well, I think it really looks rather nice' (line 24) an outburst of enthusiasm?

E Match the adjectives in the first line to the nouns in the second line, to make pairs of words from the last two paragraphs. Try to do it from memory, then check with the text.

- tricky, huge, evening, steep, new
- eucalyptus, bed, home, walk, breeze

Driving Over Lemons

F Chris and Ana have to walk part of the way to El Valero. Put these sentences describing their walk in the correct order. Try to do it from memory, then check with the text.

- a** They crossed a narrow bridge.
- b** They passed through a group of large trees.
- c** They walked through a stream.
- d** They took a path going downhill.
- e** They saw a fast-flowing river.

G Discussion

- 1** Do you think Chris was wrong to buy the farm, when Ana hadn't seen it? How would *you* feel in her situation?
- 2** Do you think Chris and Ana are crazy to make such a change in their lifestyle, or do you admire them for being so adventurous? What problems will they face, when living in a foreign country?

H Prediction

What do you think happens when they move permanently to El Valero? Tick (✓) as many as you like.

- a** They stay there, and their farm brings in a lot of money.
- b** They miss their friends and family and decide to return to England.
- c** They just manage to make enough money to stay on their farm.
- d** Chris writes a book which becomes a best-seller!
- e** They have a child, and are very happy there.
- f** Ana doesn't like the farm as much as Chris does.

Language work

A 'We ... stopped at a nearer vantage point' (line 24). *Nearer* is the comparative form of the adjective *near*. We add *-er* to most short adjectives, but with longer ones, we use *more*. Complete the sentences about the text with the correct form of the adjective in brackets.

- 1** The countryside looked _____ than Chris had imagined. (beautiful)
- 2** Ana seemed _____ than usual. (enthusiastic)
- 3** Perhaps she thought El Valero was _____ than she had expected. (nice)
- 4** But the distance from the road to El Valero was _____ than Chris had told her. (long)

Make three of your own comparative sentences, comparing television programmes, books, films, CDs or DVDs.

B 'Where?' 'Over there, you see?' (lines 16–17). *Where* is a question-word. Complete the questions about the text with the correct question-word from the box, and then answer the questions.

Who	Where	What
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- 1** _____ colour are the mountain peaks?
- 2** _____ is Suspiro del Moro?
- 3** _____ are the farm's previous owners?
- 4** _____ kinds of fruit are growing along the road?
- 5** _____ do Chris and Ana park the car?
- 6** _____ exactly are the birds singing?

Now think of three questions you would like to ask Chris Stewart about his move from England to El Valero.

Writing

Imagine you are Ana. Write a postcard (35–45 words) to a friend in England, a few days after your arrival in Spain. In your card, you should:

- say what you like about the farm
- say what you don't like about the farm
- invite your friend to come and stay.