

THE FIRST CHAPTER

BEFORE THE SILENCE

Before A Moment of Quiet



Before the forms, the building sites and the pain, there was music.



One more?

Please. I love hearing you play.



His lover. His friends. The people he called family. In Spain, he had a life.



Rehearsal. Work. Coffee with friends. Several languages, moving easily between them. A daily rhythm that belonged to him.



Music was his craft, his career and a way to belong. He wanted to keep building that life.



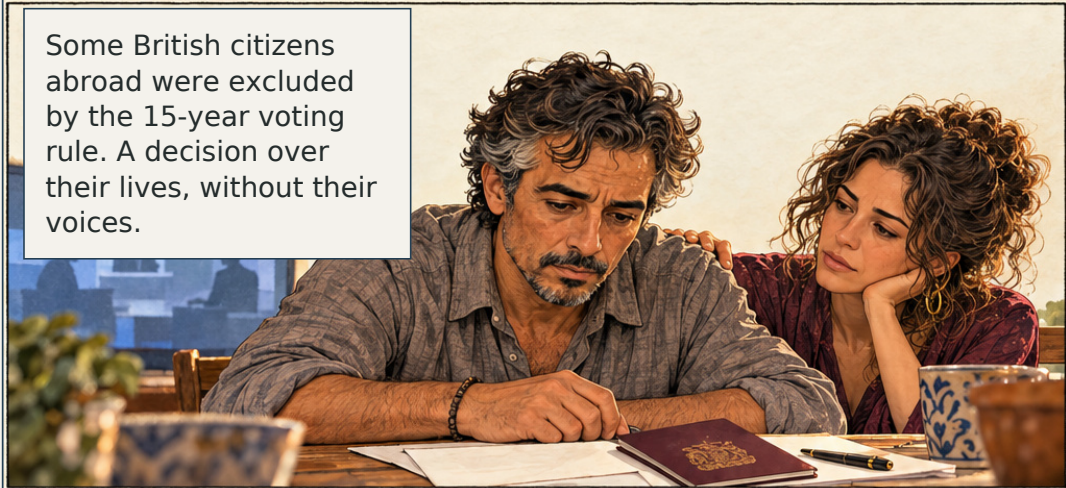
From the UK, he heard far-right nationalism: borders, blame, promises to take something back.



23 June 2016: the UK votes to leave the EU. He had wanted to remain part of it.



Some British citizens abroad were excluded by the 15-year voting rule. A decision over their lives, without their voices.



I fear they see me as the hatred I reject.

I know you. You are still my friend.



The money. The manipulation. Russia. Who is answering these questions?



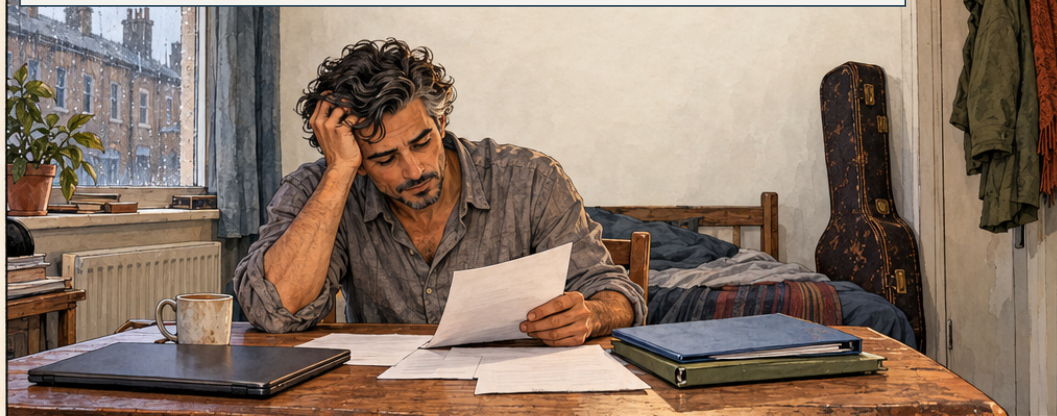
His work. His band. His relationship. The daily rhythm of home. To him, Brexit had taken his freedom.



He returned to the UK against his will. The life he wanted was behind him.



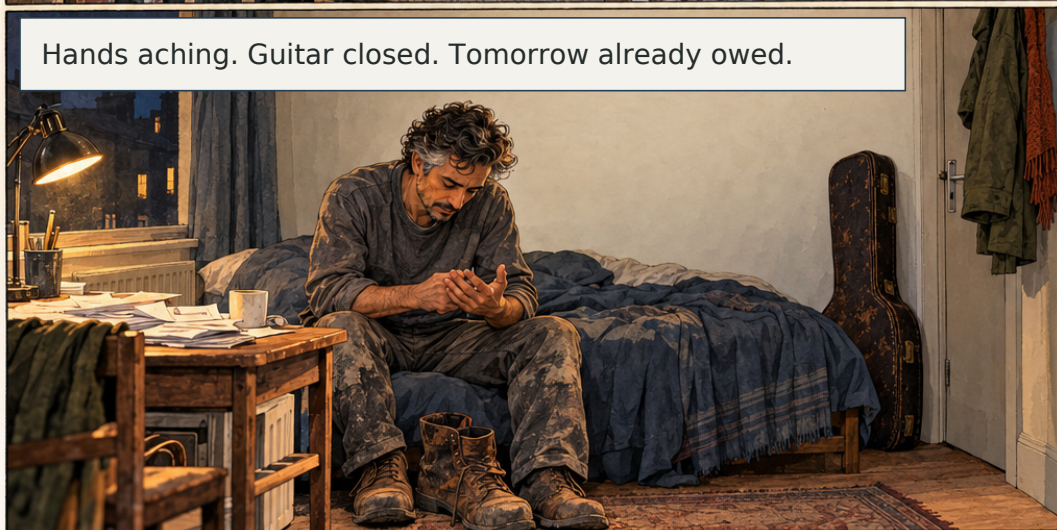
He spoke several languages. He had multiple degrees. The work he could actually get was on building sites.



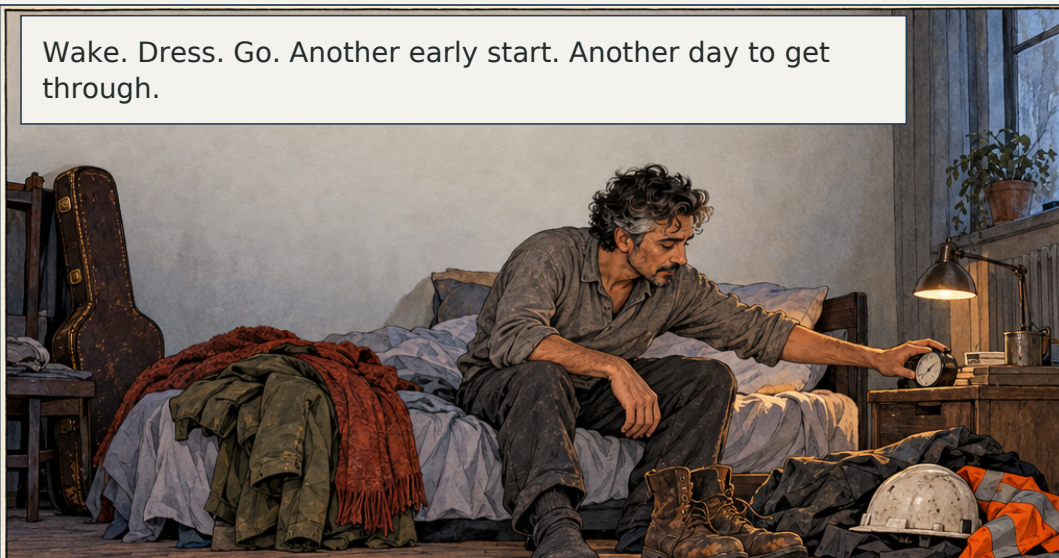
Lift. Carry. Keep going. Work he never wanted, because he could not find an affordable way out.



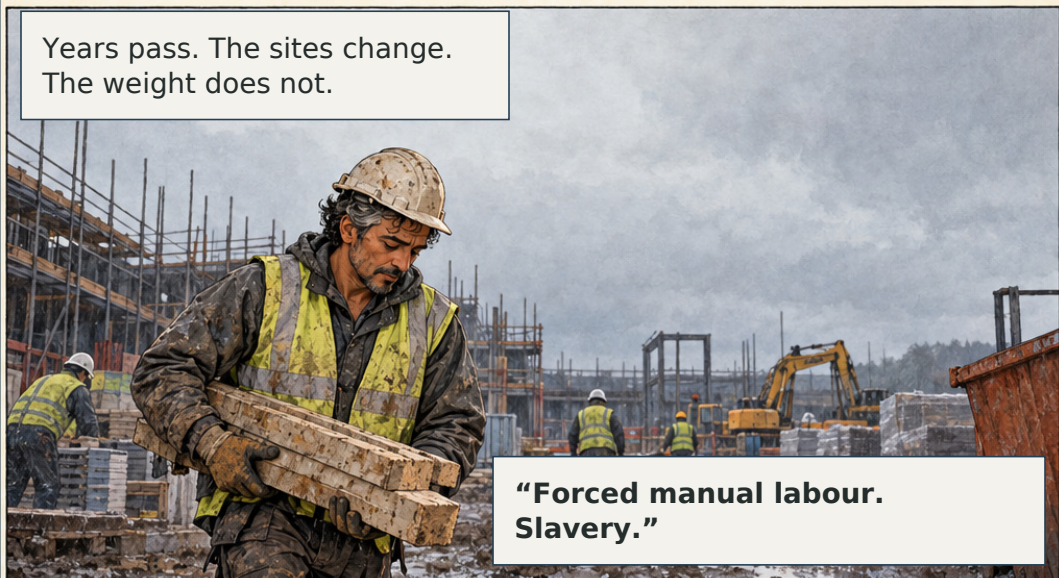
Hands aching. Guitar closed. Tomorrow already owed.



Wake. Dress. Go. Another early start. Another day to get through.

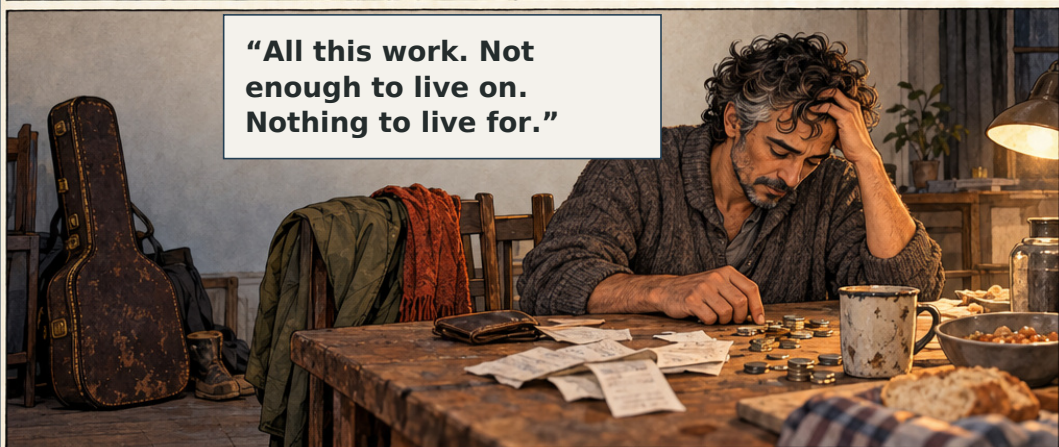


Years pass. The sites change.
The weight does not.



**"Forced manual labour.
Slavery."**

**"All this work. Not
enough to live on.
Nothing to live for."**



The racist jokes. The drinking. The casual cruelty. He heard contempt for people he loved.



He wanted a wage without hatred. A conversation without humiliation. Somewhere his mind could breathe.



A different site. For a little while, he thought he had escaped it.



At the new site, a familiar visitor appeared: gun photographs, talk of violence. To him, a fascist fantasy.



"I came here to work. Why must I keep living inside someone else's hatred?"



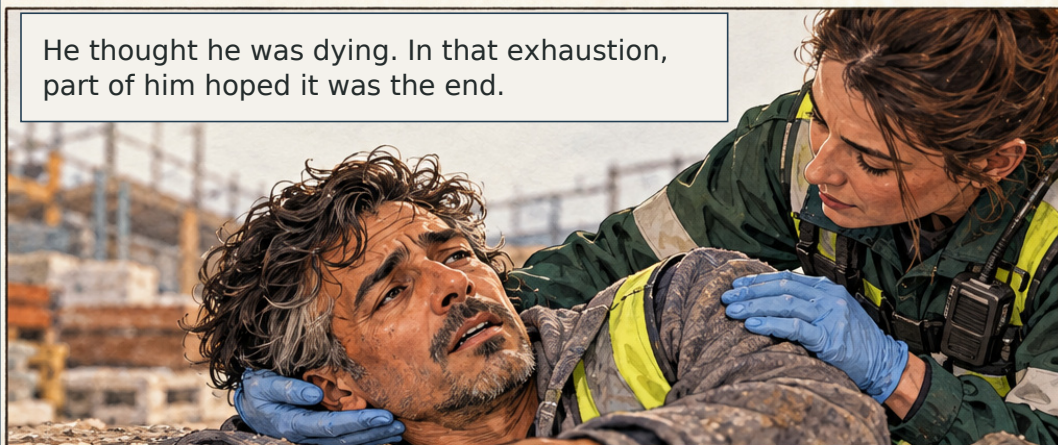
He kept going. Until one day, he could not.



A collapse. He would later describe a seizure, spinal compression and loss of motor control.



He thought he was dying. In that exhaustion, part of him hoped it was the end.



Stay with me. Help is here.



He needed care. Safety. A chance to live.

A personal account can show what political change feels like inside one life. These notes distinguish the historical record from the character's judgments and the fictional staging.

A lawful referendum, with an advisory legal effect

The 23 June 2016 referendum was authorised by the European Union Referendum Act 2015: a real ballot, not an illegal opinion poll. Leave received 51.9% of valid votes; Remain 48.1%. The Act did not itself change the law after the result. Parliament subsequently authorised Article 50 notification in 2017 and passed withdrawal legislation. An advisory effect did not create an automatic right to a second referendum. [1, 2, 3]

Whose voices were missing?

The 2016 franchise excluded some British citizens abroad under the then 15-year overseas-voting limit. Most other EU citizens living in the UK were also excluded, with specified exceptions. It is accurate to question those exclusions; it is not accurate to say everyone who favoured Remain was denied a vote. The story does not invent the character's registration history. [1]

Money, law-breaking and Russian interference

The Electoral Commission found Vote Leave had exceeded its spending limit and breached reporting rules. It paid fines totalling GBP 61,000 in March 2019 and withdrew its appeal. A separate sanction on another campaigner was overturned on appeal. These distinctions matter. [4]

The ISC's 2020 Russia report criticised the absence of a post-referendum assessment. In a ministerial answer on 15 October 2026, the Government acknowledged a serious Russian attempt to interfere, while stating it believed the attempts had not materially changed the outcome. That is an attributed official position, not proof of Russian control, vote-rigging or a particular politician's criminal motive. [5, 6]

[1] UK Parliament: 2016 result, franchise and background

[2] UK Supreme Court: [2017] UKSC 5, paragraphs 116-125

[3] European Union (Notification of Withdrawal) Act 2017

[4] Electoral Commission: investigation and appeal updates

[5] Intelligence and Security Committee: 2020 press notice

[6] Hansard: ministerial answer, 15 October 2026 (uncorrected)

He had a life. He still deserves one.

This fictional chapter draws on an anonymous personal account. The dialogue, cast, locations and visual scenes are dramatic reconstructions. No real private person is identified. The racism and the visitor with gun photographs are presented as part of that account, not as findings against a named person or a claim about all construction workers.

An unwanted return is an individual story

The UK left the EU on 31 January 2020; the transition ended on 31 December 2020. The Withdrawal Agreement protects qualifying British residents in Spain. Brexit did not automatically expel every British person or remove all existing residence rights. This character feels compelled to return amid a life unravelling; the comic does not assert a deportation order or decide his legal status. Nor does his fear of being judged speak for everyone in Europe. [7]

UKIP belongs to the referendum-era background; Reform UK is a later name. The Electoral Commission approved the change from The Brexit Party to Reform UK in January 2021. The story compresses time and does not place the later party name in the 2016 campaign. [8]

Work, injury and dignity

“Forced manual labour” and “slavery” preserve his description of economic coercion and the loss of a workable choice. A legal finding of slavery or forced labour would require further evidence. The collapse, seizure, spinal compression and loss of motor control are reported experiences; their sequence does not establish a medical diagnosis or a cause. His wish for the suffering to end shows the depth of his distress. His need is for care, safety and a future.

He deserves dignity whether or not he has qualifications, speaks several languages, earns wages or can play again. That is the human centre of this book.

[7] Spanish Government: residence and Withdrawal Agreement

[8] Electoral Commission: 2021 party-registration decisions

Read in order: **Before the Silence → A Moment of Quiet → A Place to Begin**. The wider proposal is Population, Permission and Sustainability.

Concept: The Green Tank. AI-assisted adaptation and lettering; AI-generated ink-and-watercolour illustrations. Fictional cast and likenesses. First edition, 15 October 2026. Sources checked on that date.

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