

MARIA FERNANDEZ

(Age: 14. Born: 1978)

Two years after the birth of Javier, Maribel had a miscarriage. She and Roberto didn't try for another child for three years, which is why there's a five-year gap between Javier and his sister, Maria. Of course, being the 'baby' and the 'kid-sister' she was spoiled rotten. Maribel had had a hard time giving birth to Maria and because of this she was always thought of as a 'miracle' and believed to be more delicate than she actually was. Up to school-age she was protected, cocooned and watched like a hawk. (The only member of the family who seemed to treat her as a normal child was Abeulla - her grandmother - who believed everyone else was slowly turning the child into a china doll.) Maria's first year at school was a major revelation. Suddenly removed from the safe protection of her family (and thrown into a melting-pot of different types and nationalities) she was, at first, frightened and withdrawn-hiding at the back of the class, and hardly uttering a single word. As her confidence grew she turned into something of a rebel. She was the little tom-boy - always in trouble: it was as if she was making up for lost time, trying to experience all the normal childhood things that she's been sheltered from that her new-found friends told her about. But it was a brief phase... Although there were lots of: "I told you so..." from Abeulla, there was also plenty of loving support from the rest of the family. Maria grew out of her difficulties and quickly settled down to being a normal girl. She made friends easily and was soon anxious to be identified as part of a group. Anxious to conform to the current trends. To FOLLOW the trends. (Maria never was, and probably never will be, one to START trends. Her confidence wasn't THAT total ...) She's attractive, lively sporty and has a natural 'Spanish' elegance and sense of colour/fashion. Also, she's doing well at school and - unlike

a lot of her friends - gravitating away from 'arts' subjects, to 'science'. Nessa Lockhead and Trine Svendsen are in her 'group' (or, rather, she's in THEIR'S) - but she feels closer to Nessa, who's more of a natural leader. Roberto and Maribel still spoil her (when given the opportunity) and it's left to her grandmother to keep her on the strict straight and narrow. (Including getting her to church certainly every Sunday and probably during the week as well.) She's expected to help out with domestic chores (something Javiar has always been excused from) and to participate in both family-businesses when needed. (Maybe sometimes she's slightly envious of how the other nationalities allow their children such freedom ...?) Compared to her mother's childhood, Maria gets a pretty good time: she's allowed out with her friends and also allowed to dress how she wishes. (Maybe Maria doesn't realise it, but the other - non-Spanish - girls are quite jealous of her seemingly easy confidence and natural sexiness and elegance ...). Of course, she adores her good-looking brother. Javiar still spoils her but still watches her like a hawk. He may be on the road to becoming a 'new-man', but where his little sister is concerned he's as old-fashioned as hell ...

ABEULLA

(Age: 65. Born: 1927)

Maribel's mother. Heavily into black, but short on words ...