

BARCELONA ONE MORE TIME
An 'autobiofictional' book by Richard Lewis

CHAPTER 1

The Story Begun

It was mid-September. The long, hot summer of 1976 was drawing to a close and Moni and I were preparing to leave the Somerset seaside town that, after west London, had in stark contrast been our home for the last three years. Our world needed broadening again. My job as a teacher in a local language school, fun and so delightful as it was after the horrors of teaching French to school children in Surrey, was going nowhere. I needed more. More than a garden to wander around in. More than a Victorian seafront to walk along. More money, certainly. I had decided to advance my career by doing a prestigious university diploma. But acceptance hinged on first teaching abroad full-time for a year.

So we would say goodbye to the dinky thirties semi loaned to us by my mother, who had remarried and moved to Yorkshire. She couldn't understand my need to uproot constantly, and never did till the day she died. Neither, for that matter, did I, nor do I still. I loved our elegant little town. I wrote local history articles for 'Somerset Life', revelled in Coleridge's 'kirk, below the hill' on Poet's Walk, right out of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', enjoyed the Turner sunsets. I have always hated separation. And yet I had to leave. Staying was a claustrophobia and I needed the air of freedom and achievement.

In her own way, Moni needed the oxygen of movement just like me. Staying in one place filled her with anxiety and a host of mystery ailments. She was as much a gypsy as any real 'gitano', and, being Flemish, displayed those dark atavistic traits that had echoed on in the Low Countries ever since the Spanish occupation. Yet she was a born homemaker. No matter where we found ourselves, she would arrange things, clean, tidy, cook, paint and decorate. Then, at the drop of a hat, she would tear it all up and move on.

On our last day we climbed the zigzag path that linked the lower and upper parts of the town. Half way up we sat on a bench and, in the golden evening light, looked down on the rows of houses, the 'picture house' cinema that I had celebrated in print, the antique shops, the carpentry works and the fields beyond where cows, Cuyp-like, grazed and luxuriated in the powdery air. The last of England! It was a strange moment, but we had already banished all our doubts. Our elderly Citroen was sold and a variety of possessions had gone in a house sale – all except the incongruous chest expander that seemed to follow me everywhere and had never added one centimetre to my slender physique. All that remained was to take the train to London the next day and catch a coach called the European Express from Victoria. Not particularly express, in fact, as it included a pleasant-sounding overnight stay in France.

And where exactly were we going?

'How do you feel about Barcelona?' I had asked Moni earlier in the summer.