

Brotherly Love

by Tony Beckwith © 1999

THE FLIGHT WAS DELAYED, and my brother was already settled in at the bar at the *Gran Hotel Catalán*. I only had carry-on luggage so I went straight in to join him. As we shook hands Chris wore his familiar smile: a little lopsided and wary, as usual. We exchanged the ritual words of greeting, then fell silent.

“So, what brings you to the *Gran Catalán*?” he finally asked, drawing out the “*Gran*” for effect. I hesitated, even though I’d been preparing for this moment ever since I found out I was coming to Barcelona.

I was living in London in those days, but I used to live in Madrid, where I worked as an advertising model. One day my ex-agent called to say that there was a job in Barcelona if I wanted it: an overnight stay in a fine old hotel and a shoot in the morning for a cognac commercial. All expenses paid and my fee on top. It all sounded rather glamorous—and was exactly the sort of lucky break that made my brother insanely jealous, fueling the rivalry that had plagued us since childhood.

Chris lived near Barcelona, in Sitges, a small town a little to the south along the Mediterranean coast. He owned a club where tourists danced themselves crazy and miraculous friendships blossomed overnight. It was a good business, and he was perfect for it. He had a loving wife and a delightful daughter. He was a happy man. And fun to be with.

Except when he thought that I was somehow one-upping him, which I had spent so many years trying to do. As a scrawny younger sibling, that was my way of fighting someone bigger and stronger. In response to my gamesmanship, he pouted and sulked and wasn’t very good company at all. This was an old routine.

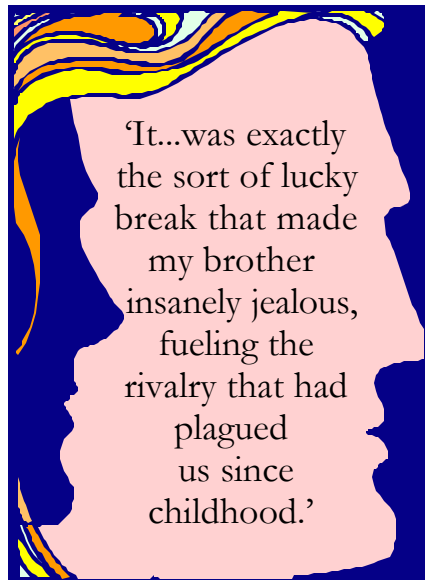
But I was all grown up now: twenty-five years old. I told myself I had outgrown our childish jealousies and was ready to move on. It was simple—I just wouldn’t provoke him anymore. That was so immature and I was over it. And then, this trip to Barcelona! On the phone I told Chris it was a business trip. What could I say?

I answered, “Isasi called. They’re

shooting a commercial here in the morning,” and waited for his expression to change.

But he kept smiling, his brown eyes sparkling. “Great! Good for you,” he said, raising his hand to order another round.

I was dumbfounded. Maybe, I thought, we have both come to



the same conclusion, and he’s tired of the old routine as well. That’s perfect, I thought, and nodded to the bartender.

Then I saw my brother’s smile change to the one that means he has a monstrously powerful card up his sleeve. One that will trump everything on the table and be the clear winner in any game of “mine’s-better-than-yours.” He wasn’t bothered by my news because he had something even better to tell me.

“So, what’s new with you?” I asked.

His smile slid up onto one cheek. “Oh, nothing much. Same old thing.” He took a sip from his tall glass. “Well, just one thing, I suppose.... The Hollies were in town and I went to see them.”

“Excellent,” I said enthusiastically. Chris had been somewhat friendly with the lead singer of The Hollies when he lived in London several years ago. I was beginning to see where we were going.

He shot me a sidelong smirk and said, “They asked me to join them on-stage! I stood beside the drummer and played the tambourine for the entire show. It was incredible!”

He’d obviously had an exceptionally good time, and I really was pleased to see him enjoying the retelling so much. This was good, I thought. Much better when he feels that he’s ahead. We have a better time that way.

In a little while I was ready to go to my room. We walked together into the enormous lobby and started up the grand staircase. It was a magnificently wide one, carved from cream-colored marble in the days when there was time and space to be gracious.

As we rounded the first bend, we saw three people descending on the far side of the staircase. There were two beautiful young women, and between them was Salvador Dali. I looked straight at him and he returned my stare. He suddenly altered his course and came tacking across the stairs towards us. He walked right up to me, extended his hand, and released a torrent of French.

I shook his hand, looking at his marvelous smile and that extraordinary mustache, and managed to stammer “Enchanté.” Then he was gone.

Chris looked at me in amazement. “That was Salvador *Dali*!” he said in an excited whisper. “How do you know *him*?”

I didn’t, of course. The man was an eccentric, and something simply took his fancy. It meant nothing to him. I could have told Chris the truth, and said it was a freak incident, random chance at work, no big deal. But what’s a brother to do? This was so much better than hanging out with a rock band, for heaven’s sake.

“Salvador?” I said casually, stepping ahead of Chris up the staircase. “Oh, I’ve known him for a while. We have mutual friends in Madrid.” ★