



Barcelona Dreaming

Rupert Thomson

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Linked by incisive narrators and chance encounters, Rupert Thomson's alluring novel *Barcelona Dreaming* braids three stories into a lush exploration of love and unmet longings.

In "The Giant of Sarriá," Amy, a British expat, becomes entranced by a Moroccan immigrant who is half her age after she hears him crying in the street. Amy invites him inside. From this kindness, passion blooms, until a prejudiced neighbor threatens the couple. In "The King of Castelldefels," Nacho, the alcoholic ex-husband of Amy's friend, recalls his failed loves, and expresses newfound pride over a connection to a Brazilian footballer; signs of domestic discord hint at Nacho's part in eroding his current relationship.

"The Carpenter of Montjuïc" takes a fable-like turn. Jordi, a translator who works with Nacho's ex-wife, hears a neighbor's tall tales about a chest; these overlap with stories of unrequited love. Throughout, nocturnal enclaves are moody backdrops for characters whose involvement with strangers are both distractions and subtle awakenings. Minute details tie the stories together, as do the characters' siftings of time and the presence of mysterious bystanders, including a tall witness and a craftsman with an angelic name. Together, these elements result in a 2000s version of a city that exists between hard social divides and dreamlike observations.

The book's dense, multistrand accounts encompass characters' self-regard, as well as their unwillingness, at times, to see their situations from afar. Jordi's tale, in particular, stands out. He's a young man who's too absorbed with the lives of others, but who alters his own course in time. His story line includes a fascinating story-within-a-story about psychological intimidation.

Barcelona Dreaming is an astute novel in which adults risk being vulnerable, all while dangerous secrets lead to spontaneous actions.

KAREN RIGBY (May / June 2021)

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