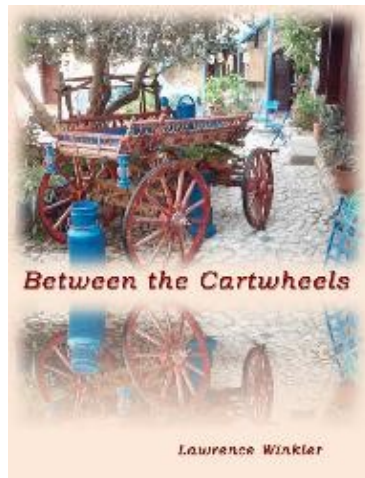


Between the Cartwheels

By : drwink

In the summer of 1980, a maverick young doctor gave it all up, to hitchhike around the world. The first part of his odyssey took him through South America and up through Africa, accompanied by his mythical hunter companion, Orion. Between the Cartwheels is the sequel to that cartwheel, his vision quest continuing now, on the European Grand Tour adventure of a lifetime.



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Sam and Millie were sitting on the picnic table under the Otama night sky.

Clouds rolled across the full moon, platinum floodlight patchdancing on the wide expanse of ocean below.

Orion hung upside down above them.

“Were you the constellation or the myth, Uncle Wink?” Sam asked.

“The myth,” he said.

“What were you in the myth, Uncle Wink?” asked Millie.

“The hero,” he said.

* * *

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is an inaccurate name for this story, of course. I wasn't really between the cartwheels. I was actually on a new one. You can't be between four of anything, if you're on, and one of them. And I was on the Grand Tour, the grand turning clockwise through Europe, spinning the history of Western Civilization forward, and the travels of Benjamin of Tudela in reverse. I was entering the realm of the cartwheel chandelier, the cartwheel ruff, and the cartwheel tuppence. This was the second cartwheel, and hammered between the Fertile Crescent and Eastern Block, it was also the land of Catherine's wheel, my breaking wheel. I needed to keep up the revs. Push on through to the other side. *Between the Cartwheels*, it is.

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If I Forget Thee O Jerusalem

"Can you loosen Orion`s belt?"

Job 38:31

The shopkeepers had awakened. The rolling thunder of metal accordion doors resonated through the stone bowels of the old city. I watched the sunrise on the Western Wall, trying to burn off the tribal memory of a thousand distant atrocities. But the heat and light was unable to penetrate the closed eyelids of the bearded Haredim, bobbing and swaying in front of the giant Jerusalem stone blocks. After all the random twists of fate over the previous three millennia, they were still hooked through their trout gills, spiraling along the remnants of Herod`s temple.

The Rabbi of Lodz, on first seeing the Auschwitz crematoria belching fireballs and smoke, had turned to his flock in dismay. "There is no God." He said. But the bobbing and swaying continued anyway. There is no worse addiction than Rapture.

Extending fingers pushed paper prayers into the cracks of history and limestone. And the prayers that went into and through the crevices, pushed their own fireballs and smoke, into and through the tent that once stood high upon the Temple Mount, into and through the "Holy of Holies," the inner sanctuary of the tabernacle, into and through the Ark of the Covenant, containing the spiritual point from which reality emerges- and the Sinai treasure of Ten Commandments. I pressed my own paper prayer into a fissure, and covered it with my palm so it wouldn`t escape.

My trip across the Sinai had been thirty-eight years shorter than Moses took, but I wasn`t carrying the spiritual point from which reality emerged. I was carrying Serendipity, Diogenes and the Gold Kazoo- my backpack, tent, and sleeping bag- not as much baggage, and far less than I started with. Most of that had baked off above the long hot roads of South America and Africa, in return for clarity. The disasters forecast by the colleagues I left behind had not come to pass, although there had been moments of terror and exhilaration. Eighteen months after I first carved an arc in the air with my thumb, I had arrived in the land of my forefathers. Jacob, the most ancient, had been "a quiet man, a dweller in tents." I was as free then, as I would ever be again.

It was dawn in Jerusalem. Faith hovered over the towers. After being destroyed twice, besieged 23 times, attacked 52 times, and captured and recaptured 44 times, it had no choice. I had yet to wash in the waters of the Gihon Spring, that founded and sounded

S-L-Mâ !Sa-La-eMâ !Salem...Salaamâ !Shalomâ !Yarushalaimâ !

Jerusalem.

Before the Israelites arrived in 1000 BC, the local God of Dusk had been called "Shalim." After they arrived, Shalim left town with the last of the Canaanite light. The men and daggers that David sent up into the city, through the water shaft of the Gihon Spring at night, produced the City of David by morning. With

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Goliath slain and his Psalms recorded, King David was primed for a noble legacy. Until he sent out a Hittite soldier to die in battle, in order to steal his wife. And Bathsheba begat Solomon, and Solomon begat the First Temple. And the daughters of Jerusalem came outside with borrowed white garments, and danced in the vineyards, until the Age of Festivals gave way to the Age of Lamentations.

My own lamentation was for the shower I hadn't been able to access in the last three days. The cheapest place to sleep in Jerusalem was the Muslim Quarter. The thirty shekels I had paid for a bunk upstairs in the *Lemon Tree* hostel, and the thirteenth century Mamluk character of the house it was converted from, also bought me its 13th century water supply. When I asked the two owners if and when I would be able to bathe, their eyebrows rose in unison. *Inshâ Allah*. They were more interested in the plumbing of the female Swedish travelers, lavished with Arab sweetmeats and sweeter nothings. Water magically appeared in their shower stalls, and they reemerged clean and unbaptized, wearing the latest keffiyeh fashion statement. Like their ideology.

The other travelers in the *Lemon Tree* were a diverse lot. Eli was a Bavarian, who wandered into Jerusalem in a random search for drugs. With all the other visions that were possible in that town, it wasn't something he should have been trying to turbocharge. There was Nikki, a shorthaired Aussie pothead, who always dressed in black drapery, and far too much matching mascara. She was unreachable, having come to Jerusalem to find the Messiah, and finding far too many to reckon with. Matt was a Vietnam vet from Pennsylvania, excessively calm for whatever quest he was on. Sam and Lucy were happily Born Again, careening headlong into full-blown Jerusalem Syndrome. There was English Ken, who obviously didn't believe in anything, and was definitely running from something. He was still likeable in a simple way, but with a forced congeniality and shallow smile, which inspired you to push your money belt just that little bit further, into the pillowcase your head lay on.

And then, there was me. I had wound down to neutral. I needed a wash. The Talmud said that there were three gates to purgatory, and one of them was Jerusalem. There I was, in all my aromatic Aramaic glory- waiting for Steve and redemption.

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