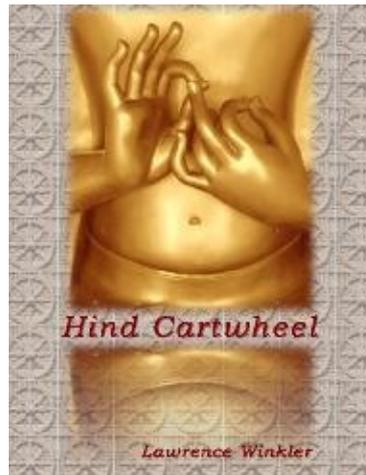


# Hind Cartwheel

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. His vision quest continued around the second cartwheel of the European Grand Tour. In Hind Cartwheel, blessed by the living goddess on his thirtieth birthday, he spins the dharma wheel of the Indian subcontinent.



Published on  
**Booksie**

[booksie.com/drwink](http://booksie.com/drwink)

Copyright © drwink, 2015

**Publish your writing on Booksie.com.**

# Hind Cartwheel

“What was on the other side of the door, Uncle Wink?” asked Millie.

Venus was still burning through the darkening parchment, above the luminescent breakers in the ocean below. The wild boar their cousin David shot, was on the barbeque.

“What door, Mil?”

“The door at the airport.” Sam chimed in.

“Oh, that one.” He said. “Many things were waiting behind that door, Sam. Wild bees and frogs, camels and smoking gorillas, palaces and mountains and caves, and coconut groves and desert kingdoms.”

“I know what else was behind the airport door.” She said.

“What?” asked Sam. Millie squirmed, like Millie squirms.

“Auntie Robbie.” She said, now with her hands on her hips. They both looked at Uncle Wink for affirmation.

He smiled, and closed an eye.

## Hind Cartwheel

### Hind Cartwheel

is an inaccurate name for this story, of course. There are simply too many possible interpretations. Hind can refer to the back of, like one of the rear wheels, a female deer, like the ones in the park where Buddha achieved enlightenment at Sarnath, or the entire Indian subcontinent, as in Hindustan. Or it can mean all three.

The problem is that you can't see a place with a billion people and six thousand years of chaos just by sitting there. Push on through to the other side. *Hind Cartwheel*, it is.

A Rose in Every Cheek

â When you reveal those rose-colored cheeks, you make the  
stones whirl from joy.â

Rumi, *Ghazal 171*

## Hind Cartwheel

The oxygen masks dropped into our laps on takeoff. Our steward, Ahmet, took a roll of electrical tape from his pocket, and fastened them back into their housing.

â No problem.â He said.

â What happens if we need them?â I asked.

â I will come back.â He said.

Destiny told me not to hold my breath, but she had already stolen my oxygen. Blonde curls and green eyes had trapped me, inside the transit lounge door. The sunsetâ s last blood embers had left a smoky night in Cairo.

She was from New Zealand and her traveling friend was an Australian computer operator, named Julie. They were on their way home from the three-year â Big OE,â the essential overseas experience that Antipodeans indulge in, before recolonizing their lives back into the â back of beyondâ . They were sitting with a Pommie bricklayer named Stefan, a Pakistani seaman, a German couple, and an Israeli. We drank free coffee until two am, when the disorganized ticket counter staff began handing out boarding cards and passports, at random. Stefan and I were last on the battered bus to the dilapidated ancient Egypt Air stretch 707. I followed my Destiny and Julie up the gangway, into the long cylinder. The worn seats made it seem like an old movie theatre. I asked if this one was taken. They looked around at the empty aircraft.

â No.â she said. I sat down in the aisle seat, and asked her name. Brazen.

â Polly.â She said. I would have traded my Duty Free Johnny Walker for crackers, but I knew it was a lie.

â Her nameâ s Robyn.â Offered Julie, and asked for mine.

â Wink.â I said, and watched their eyes roll around their heads.

Ahmet reappeared at cruising altitude. It was clear that he liked Robyn too. He offered her a complimentary gin and tonic. She offered to include Julie and I in the offer.

Three rounds later, the efforts of my previous sleep-deprived week, recrossing Turkey and Greece, caught up with me. I slept through Ahmetâ s insistent attempts to lure Robyn off the plane in Abu Dhabi. She woke me with a well-placed elbow.

â Can you take care of this?â She said. It was a bill for nine gin and tonics, about what I would spend in a week. When Ahmet realized that Robyn had no intention of accompanying him into the Emirates, he presented her with the bartab.

I presented the Chief Purser with a handwritten letter, deploring Ahmetâ s lascivious seduction attempt as a poor reflection on more mainstream Moslem manhood manners. They took him away by his ear, and brought us a bottle of champagne for the loss. Such are the complexities of Islam. *Ship me somewheres east of Suez, where the best is like the worst, where there aren't no Ten Commandments, an' a man can raise a thirst.* The stones whirled with joy.

Seven hours later, we landed along the Arabian Sea and the Indus delta mangroves, in the Bride of the Cities, the City of Lights, in the madness of the August monsoon. Here was where Alexander the Great had prepared his fleet for Babylonia. Here, the Sindhi inhabitants built a fort in the 18th century, with a â Brackish

## Hind Cartwheel

Gateâ facing the sea, and a â Sweet Gateâ facing the Lyari River. Here, in 1947, during the partition of India and Pakistan, seven million Hindus left their brackishness, and seven million Moslems returned to their sweet. Over a million, on both sides, were massacred along the way. Moslem gangs boarded trains carrying Hindus east, and murdered all the uncircumcised men. Hindu gangs boarded trains carrying Moslems west, and murdered all the circumcised men. Ghost trains entered waiting stations, packed to the overhead racks with thousands of bodies. The carnage was unfathomable.

We passed the empty shell of a Pan Am clipper jumbo, rolled over on its humped cockpit, and emerged into the sauna that had melted the rest of its wreckage. Robyn and Julie took my Duty Free Johnny Walker, as I diverted to help with the CPR being performed on a portly passenger. His pupils were as fixed and dilated as the customs formalities and, like the officials, heâ had been dead for a while. I left them to catch up with my Destiny. Stefan had found Julie and Robyn, and they had already found a van to take us into the city.

We manoeuvred out, through a minefield of monsoon road lakes and open sewers, into an intricate kaleidoscopic color riot of rolling folk art. Every conveyance, every bus and truck and motorized rickshaw, was a mobile free-hand garish gallery of panoramas, portraits, poetry, and patriotism, an enthusiastic motif mixture of East and West, secular and sacred.

The prows above the truck cabs were adorned with depictions of the Faysal Mosque in Islamabad, the Kaâ bah in Mecca, or Arabic verses writ large on the image of an open Koran. Side panels sizzled with dream landscapes of waterfalls, wooded lakes, snow-capped mountains, or alpine chalets and hunting lodges, straight out of a Mughal court painting. Scenes of tigers and grouse and deer and other animals were framed by flowers, and diamond-shaped reflective strips. The Prophetâ s winged horse, Buraq, all trustworthy speed and devotion, was a favorite emblem. For a while we drove beside an iridescent mural of Hercules subduing a lion, rendered in undiluted hues of red and purple and yellow and green.

The backs of the vehicles were emblazoned with single large hero portraits of Pakistani film stars, military heroes, cricket players, or Greek gods or the Mona Lisa, painted with creative aspect ratios, and surrounded by vines or geometric designs. The faux marble Formica-paneled truck doors in Karachi were decorated with camel bone; out west in Baluchistan, they would be trimmed with wood. But I didnâ t know that yet.

The cockpits were dazzling treasure grottos, full of satin and silk marigolds and roses. Tiny faceted mirrors trimmed the windshields, and wall clocks, draped in flashing lights and pompoms, hung from the roofs. Pastel scarves, trailing from colossal heavy-lidded eyes painted on the windows, warded off the evil eye.

The calligraphic themes differed, depending on the type of vehicle. Trucks were all about distance, the journey and spiritual longing. *If your mother prays for you, itâ s like a breeze from heaven.* The messages on buses had to do with unrequited love. *I wish I were the book you are reading, so that when you fall asleep and the book falls on your chest, I would be so close to you.* The lowly rickshaw, with limited space, had to make do with a cryptic word or two. *I wish... Broken pearl.* The Lollywood billboards we passed under made the traffic look monochromatic.

Several accommodation attempts failed the entomology exam. I suspected the â Happy Days Hotelâ had been named by the bed bugs themselves. We eventually checked into the â Estate,â Julie and Robyn in one three-bedframe room with two mattresses, and Stefan and I in another. We napped away the afternoon. Stefan was gone when I awoke. Robyn and Julie and I navigated through the downpour, to find sustenance. Under a battalion of ceiling fans, inside the Al-Farouk, we drank rich white lassis, and ate a chicken curry so lavish, that sweet fat spicy cloves floated on the surface. And so we floated too, out into the torrential deluge, around the growing puddles, and back to our respective rain refuge rooms.

## Hind Cartwheel

When Stefan returned several hours later, he woke me to tell me how pleased he was to be sharing. Humphrey Bogart had said that youâre not a star until they can spell your name in Karachi. I spelled it out for Stefan, grabbed my mattress and Serendipity, and dragged them both down the hallway. At two in the morning in Pakistan, in the madness of the August monsoon, there was only one thing to do.

I knocked at Destinyâs door.

## Hind Cartwheel

Hind Cartwheel

Created from Booksie.com

Generated: 2015-11-26 18:58:13