

LORD OF LOVE

Egypt was on the way to Europe in our original plan, but nothing seemed more urgent now than a prompt return home, and we agreed to a whirlwind finale, hitting only high spots and raising our food and lodging with blackmarket money. There were rumors in Beirut of upcoming war, so we slipped into Jordan and the heart of western religion, Jerusalem. After confounding mysteries of the East, I hoped Christianity's entreaties would not undo me more. With veneration of sex, insects, turtles, holy cows and the rest behind me, Christ seemed to offer a simpler message.

Down ancient pathways through a maze-like labyrinth of the old walled city, smells of antiquity wafted from honeycombed cells in a manmade beehive. Time stood still. Donkeys hauled clay jugs of palm oil and wine through tiny archways, old women cackled over date and olive prices, children cried, and bearded patriarchs chanted in lamentation at the Wailing Wall.

The occasional stacatto of automatic weapons broke my reverie as I peered, hidden in my two-thousand-year-old bunker, at Israeli soldiers on the other side of the politically divided city. My, my, we'd only really advanced in our weaponry. Returning to the time of Christ, I imagined the bloodbaths these stones had absorbed over the centuries.

I walked in His footsteps, from the Mount of Olives through the Garden of Gethsemane, images of His struggle with the cross flooding my mind at each station where He fell on the Via Delarosa. I sensed His blood on the cobblestones, heard jeering Philistine throngs, and felt Him fall on the steps to His appointed destiny. Through the Golden Gate, hiding in Golgotha, I prayed for Him as the sun set in a fiery glow of desert dust.

Below, life went on the same as it had for thousands of years: sounds of daily banter changed to evening ablutions; muezzins cried from minarets; great bells rang in cathedrals; and the many religions beckoned their flocks. Lamps lit, fires flickered, and the aroma of a thousand meals rose to my nostrils. Guards clanged the gates shut as I loaded my chillom and smoked, hidden in His Garden. An hour passed in the darkness of anxiety and solitude. Praying for Him and then for me, as humbly as I could, I entered His Tomb.

"Have pity on me, Lord, for I'm lost and need your comfort. I come not to disturb Your Son's Tomb, only to find some meaning in life. I seek nothing more. I'm full of doubt, traversing the world, looking in wise men's eyes seeing only my own blinking back. Please show me a sign. I'm willing to do Your bidding, and wonder if it's OK to spend the night...."

No lightning bolts struck me down, yet I kept looking around as if an observer was present. My skateboard against the round stone at the cave's entrance, I knelt by the slab where Jesus lay before Resurrection. A glow from the old city filtered into the cavern, and after an initial silence, there seemed an almost homey warmth. I awaited His presense, a sign, or answer...knowing full well He wasn't gonna come back for me or any of us, as far as that goes. I sure wouldn't. Eternity sped by. Flickering angels hovered in silvery circles above His bed where I lay, and a message formed, "Do what thou will," on the ceiling.

Was that the answer, or was my mind playing tricks on me again? Had Christ died to put an end to yesterday, to give us hope in the now with a clean slate? I'd never bought the story of His death paying for our sins, more concerned with where we came from and were going. That was my problem. I wanted to know why, holding utterly no beliefs against this enigma. I'd worked myself into such a mental snit, hope was all I had left, and it was in short supply.

My mind filled alternately with bits of it and then despair, each running to extremes. What was becoming of me? Had I seen and touched too much? Like Saint Francis, would I be relegated to years of wandering and testing alone? Why couldn't I just "be" like other kids my age? The same old crap held me firmly in its grip. I was a very confused puppy, chasing my tail around the world.

I lay back on His deathbed. My youth, past, and present loomed before me. I tried for the future, but couldn't reach it. Slipping out to the garden, I consorted with the "goddess of smoke dreams," having been initiated into the Cult of Hashashins, in an attempt to gather power from the drug and the old man of the mountain, the vizier of Persia and poet, Omar Khayyam. No one came forward. No one would come. If I was going mad, I'd be alone for sure.

Zander strolled through it all like any other tourist, taking photos to put in a scrapbook. I was as deep in as I was gonna get. The fleeting face of Jesus changed to mine, reflecting all the confusion he'd been through. Real fear began to mess with my concentration. This wasn't how I wanted it to be...but some of us seemed cut from such cloth beyond our choosing.

A calm of sorts settled over me like a soft shroud, as I lay on the stone where He'd waited to be reborn. He held hopes too high for this life as well. I wondered if He, like me, drank the deliria deeper than His friends. Would I be tortured for questioning the universe, for sampling its essence too much, testing its powers too often? It was certain I couldn't change much. This dusty sideshow would go on with or without me, and there was no single explanation to make things right or turn it around.

Like Jesus, I would drag my cross the proscribed distance before I was done. With tears in my eyes for Him,

myself, and endless others who hoped to make some sense of life, I shivered in silence...another hapless candidate resigned to crucifixion of one sort or another. Looking back, I think I missed his simple message of love while my mind weighed his moves and what they cost him. Something kept telling me he should've found a girlfriend and started a commune in the country.