

## THE TIBETAN TWO-STEPPER WITH DISRAELI GEARS

Throughout the following week, as I gathered my wits and gear for departure, my physical condition deteriorated rapidly. I could barely stay awake, and began to suffer intestinal distress of a most aggravating and recurrent nature. Krishna stayed near for moments of clarity and youthful tales of faraway Hawaii. He was just like me...a timeless rascal on a reckless race through eternity, going nowhere. I would crisscross the world while he would live and die, a simple Sherpa, in bondage to these gigantic mountains which held him fast in an icy embrace.

I saw him last from the cracked window of the rickety bus, tears streaming in dirty streaks down his face as we lurched forward in a plume of smoke on our voyage of discovery. Another soul would come to be his father pro tem and companion, but I ached for my little buddy running behind us for miles as we wound our way out of his isolated valley. Our emotional parting was overwhelming, and I whimpered in a sorrow-filled delirium where faceless souls I'd befriended were veiled in vapors I couldn't penetrate.

Then we were on a dilapidated train, clattering across the northern panhandle of India through Kashmir towards Amritsar, to pay off Abdul as we'd already done Chumpo or whatever his name was at the Nepalese border. Such was the drug route, cheap and uncomfortable, and these were the characters one paid off to keep the Tibetan treasures from Customs Agents, whence they'd probably find their way back to the smiling Chini Lama for resale.

I was totally gonzo now, slumped in a corner of the crowded boxcar on our roll of contraband, while the buzz of humanity mingled with the clickity clack of whirring wheels below. I was sure I'd die if some relief didn't come soon. Still the explosive bowel movements and gas pains wracked my tortured body at irregular intervals, and I'd drag myself to the landing between the cars to defecate and vomit in excruciating tandem dissolution. I thought it was coming out my ears as well.

Between trips to the putrified planks, I tried in vain to sleep on the grime-encrusted floor under my seat, and in brief interludes from the agony, gathered from sounds of the crowd, packed like sardines around us, that something held their common interest. I propped my beaten body up enough to see a rustic old man in tattered robes telling stories at the far end of the car. At Kela's urging, I summoned my strength, and keeping an eye on our treasures, gravitated to him. One of thousands of saddhus roaming India, telling fortunes for their fare, this fellow was truly gifted. He spoke all the dialects, and so kept those from different



sects in tune, selecting English when we approached.

I tried to find him out, disprove his feats of intuition, but there was no way. He read my mind, clean and clear, word for word, until I wanted to escape his knowing gaze. Kela loved it, and wrote thoughts on paper, crumpled and lit them on fire in his hands. Then he blew the ashes into the air and quoted her back verbatim. My strength was leaving me faster than my sanity, and the incident flowed into another fantasy, but we both saw it and I asked her later if it had all been so. I must've swooned when he foretold my future, considering the events he prophesied. They've all come true, thus far, even the caper at the Khyber Pass.

On the border to Afghanistan, mumbling with this Abdul fellow as he looked over my passport at the hundred-dollar bill, I mentioned how sick I was and inquired about a car to Kabul. This sort of trust is a major error, for a crooked Customs Officer is your worst bet for a travel agent. I was just too weak to think clearly, and soon we were whizzing along in a beat-up car through the mountain passes. Fitful reruns of the soothsayer's prophecies churned in my mind, which recoiled to accomodate a sensation of being stabbed in the ribs.

Kela finally woke me, jabbing in panic with her fingernails. "These men are robbers or worse. The fat one keeps putting his hands on me!"

I focused slowly, and sure enough we had some bozos on our hands. I almost threw up just looking at the leers on their faces as they drooled and panted in short, excited burps. The skinny driver's pinstriped moustache quivered in lurid anticipation, his slicked hair sloping off his warped head like a pomaded puptent, and they snickered and licked their greasy lips. I hardly wondered what they had in mind. The fat one played a long knife like a mini-violin while the skinny one's eyes glazed over as they tried to navigate and size up Kela's body and my wallet at the same time. Jeez, these cretins were gonna make my day after all.

We were about halfway through the Pass when I remembered the old Turkish fort up a dusty road ahead. It was a secluded spot, so I signaled Kela to cover her ears and blew a hole in the roof over our dynamic duo. The Colt smoked warmly in my hand. I put the barrel to the back of our now shaking chauffer's head and directed him to take a slow right. I loved the smell of gunpowder and tension in the air. They invariably cleared my mind.

It was a silver sunset in those blue stone mountains. These two were a total riot, nakedly digging their graves in the pebbles while I teased them to make sure they were deep enough to keep out wild dogs. Kela went through their clothes, finding considerable wealth, which made me think they'd pulled this stunt before. I held a mock trial, found 'em guilty without question, and sentenced them to be



executed forthwith. The slithering dregs of humanity grovelled for mercy while a singular urge to drill them for real crept over me...but the show was for her, so I burned their clothes, gave them two cigarettes for the car, and drove into the cold desert laughing.

In the Kabul restaurant, I prayed to keep my meal down, then ran to the bathroom to explode from every orifice anyway. I hobbled back to the table for strawberries, fresh cream, and a cup of soothing tea...barely getting back to the john in time. This was getting old. Too weak to travel, I sold the car to some Austrian smugglers and flew directly to Jordan for medical help.

Cloistered deep in the catacombs of the old, walled city of Jerusalem, I awoke to find myself in clean sheets, secure at the Sisters of Mercy Hospital. Kela filled in the missing pieces, explaining I had amoebic dysentary and had lost twenty pounds, adding we'd be here a while so I should get used to reading and resting. She was off to a tour of the Via Delarosa, all excited about reaching the western world again.

It seemed I'd been comatose for eight days. I figured it out about then...it was that thousand year-old sausage I'd had with Omar. Mostly I wondered if I was curable and whether I'd missed anything important. A nurse came in, encouraging me to rest and Kela to go. I drifted backwards into the ninth day of dreaming amidst sounds and smells from a routine battlefield.

Bullets were flying all around us. I was trying to get Lu Duc or Krishna down when fragmented splinters cut into me and I yelled to Meers I was hit. The smell of gunpowder, stinging rips in my face, and taste of blood in my mouth were awfully real. The chatter of machine guns and stench of cordite grew, and I remarked to myself how exceptional this was, opening an eye to check the swinging bottle of dextrose above hooked to my arm. A bullet was zipping around the room like a blind pissed-off wasp. What a way to wake up! There was blood in my mouth! The dextrose bottle blew into a thousand pieces just then, raining shards of glass all over me.

I tried to sit up and look out my tiny, barred window, but the mad wasp's frenzy continued as another projectile dinked off the bars and skipped frantically around the room, its circuitous trajectory seeking a soft spot like me for a home. Outside, a muezzin's cries to prayer ceased, and I watched him crouch in his parapet, silhouetted against a backdrop right out of 'Nam. Mortors whumpfed, rockets whooshed, and cries of agony grew in ever-increasing intensity amidst the burp of street fighting below.

I pinched myself, groped around for my Colt, then gave up and laid back hoping it was just another flashback to a war I'd left behind. I pulled my covers up like any good invalid and peered through dilated pupils, helpless as a



newborn, waiting for a homeless projectile to find me. One spent of its venom plinked harmlessly into my bedpan, where it curled like a tiny, constipated turd. Boy, this was quite realistic fare for a change!

The day went by with more of the same. I dozed off when there were no bullets trying to get under the covers with me. The bleeding on my face coagulated, and evening fell as the intensity outside grew, lighting up the old city's panorama like something from the Arabian Nights. I was beginning to wonder if anyone cared to tell me what was up, when suddenly a sea of faces surrounded the bed. My reassuring nurse smiled as she handed some papers to a swarthy, young soldier who mumbled something about Americans. Frowning at me, he barked pugnaciously at his men with turbulent gestures in a language I'd never heard before...whereupon we sailed through the labyrinthian corridors and cobbled streets of Jerusalem, looking like a mummified Lazarus and some overzealous grave robbers.

Slipping in and out of reality, I deduced by their uniforms, Uzis, and crisp demeanor, that these efficient creatures were Israelis. I was still quietly curious why they'd taken me prisoner, what we were headed for, and where Kela, my Colt, and our treasures were. They'd open up flare-lit streets with their weapons, which made us all feel more secure. Then we'd haul ass for a hundred yards to wait for fire support to leapfrog ahead.

It was very exciting after being asleep for ten days, and I particularly appreciated their precision. These guys made the Viet Cong look like Boy Scouts. House-to-house combat raged around us as we neared the familiar arch of the Mandelbaum Gate. It swung open, showering me with ulcerated rust, and I was whisked into Jerusalem's Israeli side, where the fighting abruptly ceased.

Troops were everywhere, yet somehow in the confusion I was strapped into an armored personnel carrier and driven off. Then they loaded me on a C-130 transport with American markings and some all too obvious CIA guides for company. Saluting my Jewish saviors in a fustian charade of military honor, I slid into its cavernous belly to find Kela, all our belongings, including my gun, and a bunch of frightened secretaries from the embassy to care for me.

That's how much of the Six Day War I got to see. I awoke at an Air Force hospital in Wiesbaden, Germany. It specialized in intestinal disorders, so I started getting better real quickly. Kela stayed with her mother's relatives who lived nearby, picking grapes in the summer sun while I convalesced like a brain damaged veteran in my wheelchair. She bought this wonderful kite in a toy shop, which kept me engrossed for days. It was a little plastic plane with wings that spun, and I mastered flying it as I sat, insulated against intrusion in my shell-shocked reverie. Her relatives thought I was retarded...just fine with me.