

The Egyptian



Roy E Edwards

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By Roy E Edwards

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Acknowledgments

In memory of Norah Edwards who bequeaths a legacy of grace and love, of courage and faith to all who walk this earth: Championing the bright hope of humankind today, tomorrow and on to the last hallelujah.

Amen

Roy E Edwards

In memory of Benjamin Creighton Edwards: A sea going warrior who, in the company of others faced and fought against a rising tide of evil and fell down the throat of hell. He was there when there was need. He answered his country's call. And in his son, his memory and his indomitable spirit live on.

Roy E Edwards

I have gotten a taste for freedom and I will fight to keep it, I will fight and die if need be before I let you take it away.

Rahn

Actions show who and what you are
Words only say what you pretend to be
Sometimes words say nothing at all.
Sometimes it is better to be silent
And let your actions speak for you.

Roy E Edwards

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Rahn The Egyptian



Introduction

*Thou guardest a fool's treasure,
Knowest thou not, Christendom's secret
Be not that there is a secret.
Only spurious promulgation
That secrets exist.*

Bishop St Pauce AD 1483

*----- and like a ghost of beauty passing
knowledge of the ones who came before faded
away into a haunt of memory. Traces of which
linger on in myth and legends of a distant age that
rose and fell before Sep-Tepi, the First Time, from
out the ashes of which history began.*

*Ghost of Beauty Passing
(Hidden histories)*

Richard Coyne - North Africa - Late Summer 1980

Beneath a blue, plate glass sky, dry, enervating winds swirled motes of dust and sand about cracked leather boots. The heat heavy air molten and shimmering, like the devil's own breath from out the mouth of a smelting furnace.

He breathed in and out slowly, rhythmically, knowing only fools breathe deep of searing desert airs that in less than a heartbeat dry the throat to a parched painful rasp; the notion of it difficult to comprehend by those who know not the desert and all its sly, killing ways. And of course no one in his right mind wandered deep into the trackless wastelands alone; except for Richard Coyne that is. But then, as he was sometimes heard to say with a slight mocking smile that never quite reached his eyes, 'I never claimed to be sane don't you know, besides,' he would add, 'if you really want to find something, the only way is to go and look, even though you have no clear idea of what it is you are looking for, or where indeed you might find anything at all.'

Fellow archaeologists thought him quite mad, which was more or less what Coyne wanted his contemporaries to think. It helped do away with tedious explanations concerning some few of his more spectacular, irritatingly mysterious finds in remote locations, where as far as his colleagues were concerned, there was nothing to be found. Only, more often than not, there was. But you would have to be Richard Coyne and possess his peculiar, somewhat unique talent to find it.

Sweat trickled down his face, stinging heat-cracked lips before the furnace air sucked it away. Eyes half closed against the strong light reflecting from the sand, Coyne gazed off towards a distant range of low eroded hills baking beneath the sun. Shimmering heat waves distorted his vision, lending the hills an alien,

surrealistic look as though they were not quite of this world. Not that it mattered; he had long ago developed the knack of looking through heat distortion in the way of the true desert traveler. Oddly, many Europeans never did learn the trick of it, but then most never tried and Coyne was, if nothing else, a somewhat unusual man.

Born into the close-knit fraternity of the Brotherhood of the Book, he neither imagined nor wanted a life devoid of its association. Spiritually and physically he was exactly where he should be and that, he sometimes thought, was enough for him to know, at least for now. Change as he knew full well, had a strange way of making itself known when least expected, offering little in the way of reasons why. An intuitive thing, he sometimes thought. At least he liked to think so.

The surrounding plain gave no hint of secrets buried beneath the hostile terrain, but he knew secrets were there. He could feel them in his bones; sense the very presence of ancient stones with every fibre of his being. Not that he intended to excavate, well, just a little perhaps, enough to verify what he already knew. He smiled at that, and immediately wished he had not as sun blistered lips split painfully. Droplets of blood welled and dried instantly, crusting his lower lip.

He sucked on a small flat pebble, coaxing moisture to form inside a mouth too long dry as he quartered the plain around him. Mentally noting every depression, hump and rock, every heat cracked stone that might or might not have been shaped by the hands of men long and long ago when the world was young, and had not yet begun to weep over its wounds.

It was not so much the buried city the Brotherhood were interested in, as the contents of a 12,000 year old library, that according to ancient documents remained intact when the City of Origins fell. True, the invaders had reduced the library and great

Hall of Learning to rubble, but failed to destroy the vast accumulation of written knowledge stored beneath the complex in a separate underground library painstakingly cut out of the living bedrock. The ancients were, if nothing else, thorough thought Coyne grimly.

Indeed not so very long ago, once such a significant site had been identified, the Brotherhood would immediately set in motion a swift series of events culminating in the removal of the entire contents of such an ancient find. That the contents would never be seen again was a mere by the way, as no proof, written or otherwise remained to even hint that such a library existed in the first place, and most certainly not one replete with contents. However, during the month of June 1975 the Brotherhood began to start implementing various changes in keeping with the approach of a new era of tolerance and enlightenment (regarding ancient wisdom and truths pertinent to humankind) said era thought to be that of the water bearer (Aquarius) somewhere around 2006AD or 2060AD. The millennium was known; the exact date was not. However the new era would not begin on any one specific date. The Brotherhood being more than aware that such an age must needs begin slowly, gathering momentum as the years rolled by.

Now it was that Coyne tended to locate and verify the existence of hitherto completely unknown and incredibly ancient sites, containing records and information crucial to the furtherance and continuance of humankind's evolution. In terms that is, of expanding knowledge relating to what was known, and what as yet remained unknown, be it science, theology or much of anything in between.

As the predicted age drew near many such sites would be suddenly discovered, and hopefully revealed to the world. Thereby neatly sidestepping a great many vested interests who might very well misuse power, position and wealth to suppress

many a breathtakingly stunning revelation that just might help change the mind set of millions for the betterment of self and thereby, ultimately the betterment of humankind.

Of course it wasn't that simple, (nothing ever is) such discoveries would however herald a beginning of sorts, and as the Brotherhood released original bits and pieces of so called lost, legendary works from their 12,000 year accumulation of such precious works, well of course that too would help, if not completely overwhelm the academic world, Coyne thought bleakly. But that was far in the future and of little concern to him as he stood beneath the hammer of the sun, sucking a small pebble for whatever moisture it might induce, his one pack camel, oblivious to the heat, waiting patiently for him to move. With a sigh Coyne coaxed the animal to its knees and began to unload. Easing precious water containers down on the sands he began to set up camp in the scanty shade afforded by a nearby block of eroded stone that once upon a time formed part of a massive outer defensive wall sixty feet high, and in places more than thirty feet thick. But then the Brotherhood knew all about the City of Origins, it was after all the birthplace of their founder.

Cold was the night, and growing colder. The heat of the day no more than a memory of might have been as he gazed up at a night sky, brilliant with stars all frosty bright, like splinters of ice beneath moonlight. A small night wind sighed across the sands. The soft breath of it shifting grains from around the base of the weathered stone with an eerie rustling sound, that reminded him of dry autumn leaves piled up in some forgotten corner shifting restlessly with every vagrant air.

Over the past few months his thoughts had begun to turn more and more towards home. Why, he had no idea? He loved the desert, the aching silence and mystery of it all, the brutal heat and cold, and the ever-seductive attraction of solitude. Desert tribes

knew of him and left him alone. He was, they said, a wandering child of God not right in the head and therefore beloved of Allah who holds such ones in his care. Indeed, Coyne was looked upon with more than just a little awe, and when now and again he approached desert tents to buy food or water he was always greeted with respect; his host invariably offering what he stood in need of as a gift. Some few of the tent people thought him to be a holy man seeking out ancient places in search of words carved in stone that spoke of secrets, and where other such mysteries might be found. Why, no one could say, but then the mind of such a strange one was not for them to know.

Allah watched over him, Allah protected him. Indeed, Coyne's miraculous deliverance from the desert some nine years ago was proof enough that Allah did indeed watch over him. There could be no other explanation; at least none the tent people cared to know.

Nine years ago, having worked on three successful digs as an assistant to other archaeologists, Coyne had decided to strike out on his own. Already considered to be something of a loner by his colleagues, with ideas and notions concerning the past that, as far as they were concerned; were positively ludicrous, if not outright bizarre. His decision then, to go it alone, occasioned no real surprise to anyone. Indeed, regretfully, some few seasoned archaeologists in overall charge of the digs heaved silent sighs of relief. His propensity for asking searching questions for which they had no ready answer was an annoyance they were more than happy to be rid of. The odd thing was, they often had the uneasy feeling that he possessed a great deal of knowledge they did not, and that his questions were part of some kind of quirky test to gauge their reactions rather than to seek answers. But then, they were also unaware that he had been born and raised within the Brotherhood. Indeed, to such academics the very notion that such

a fraternity might exist, and had done so for more than 12,000 years was an absurdity not worth considering. Not surprisingly they were most pleased to be rid of him.

So it was that Coyne ventured into the wilderness alone and almost died. That he did not, as all the tribes knew, was a gift from God, who gave back a life that otherwise, was easily taken. Against all odds he somehow survived, gaining from his terrible ordeal, fortitude to endure and survive conditions of extreme heat and cold, hunger and thirst that his colleagues could not, or at best were unwilling to face. Where they used mechanised transport, Coyne used camels, stating quietly, ‘you must walk the land if you would know its secrets. How else can you hear the voice of memories bones calling out from beneath the sands?’

Before that however, beneath a vast empty sky three days south, south east of the Nile Valley, disaster struck like the sudden lunge of an angry cobra.

Late afternoon, the camel’s shadow long before him as he trudged wearily on towards an ever distant horizon hazy with heat; suddenly, a gust of wind whipped particles of sand painfully against his face. Startled, he cursed softly, brushed sand from his face and walked on.

The sudden gust of wind was a warning, but he didn’t know that. He was young and had much to learn, if’n the desert didn’t kill him first.

The sky remained clear and as the air began to cool, a range of distant tawny hills stood out with startling clarity. He decided to make camp when he reached the hills, only he never did; reach the hills that is. Now was his time of growing. Survive or die his only options in a land that rarely afforded any options at all. And then, between one heartbeat and the next what coolness caressed his baking flesh like a lover’s languorous kiss vanished.

Wearied and footsore, Coyne failed to recognise the danger imminent in a sudden blast of super heated air that had him gagging for breath in an instant. His camel halted as though it had walked into an invisible brick wall. Venting a coughing bray of panic, the frightened animal whipped its head away from Coyne. The sudden move wrenching the lead rope out of Coyne's hand as the terrified animal turned and raced back down the trail, leaving Coyne cursing loudly in shocked dismay, helpless to prevent food, camping gear and precious life sustaining water from disappearing in a cloud of rising dust. And then there was no more time for Richard Coyne, as the world about him suddenly, dramatically dissolved into a howling, roaring nightmare of furnace winds driving sheets of abrasive sand that flayed his exposed skin, clogging eyes, ears and nose as fists of air bowled him over, arms wrapped protectively around his head, silent screams of terror locked in his throat as a falling thunder of sand buried his crouching form.

Suffocating beneath a golden sea pouring over him like storm driven waves. Something gibbered inside his head as he frantically tried to push up against a terrible weight that in the space of a few heartbeats had all but buried him alive. He didn't think of life or death as he slowly drowned, he simply struggled to rise above the engulfing tide. His heart hammered, crazy swirling lights spun inside his head. He tried to draw breath, screaming in silent agony as superheated air and sand scorched his throat, howling wind whipped grains inexorably flaying his flesh.

And then — silence: shocking, stupefying silence so complete and utter, the very absence of sound stunned the senses. It wasn't possible for such a moment of pure dead silence to exist, the very presence of air occupying space radiated sound. Only, to Coyne's battered senses the sudden falling away of the terrible shrieking wind left behind a single, indescribable moment of silence, like a

benediction, he thought irrationally, a falling gift of grace from out God's hand.

Bewildered, voicing a barely audible prayer of thanks to whatever god might be listening, he struggled slowly to his feet, legs trembling, arms all a quiver, air fluting through his dust clogged nose, throat like sandpaper, rasping and dry.

And then the harsh reality of what was now a death-dealing situation came crashing in as he cleared his mouth and nose, carefully wiping his eyes free of grit and dust. He could not yet take in what had happened, the ferocious power of the storm, coming from out of nowhere, and then suddenly dying away so completely. If it were not for the loss of his pack camel he wasn't at all sure the nightmare was no more than a product of heat stressed imagination. But then the desert has many a way to kill unwaries, and he not yet wise to the least of them.

Desert nomads familiar with such winds can often sense the sudden build up of invisible energies that create the killing wind. Westerners all too often scoff at such notions, and die with their throats torn out by grains of wind driven sand, hot as molten glass. Even today science has no answer for the sudden rise and fall of the localised killing wind, nor do they know how such heat is created independent of the sun's burning rays and confined to one small area, like a burning spot of heat from a magnifying glass when it is turned this or that way to catch the sun's rays. Like the great oceans, the desert is a harsh mistress. Beautiful is she, full of mystery and seductive wonder. Beguiling is she, only sometimes her beauty is no more than a mirror reflecting a mask of death.

Coyne's stomach fluttered with fear as his aching eyes swept over the empty plain. From horizon to horizon nothing moved, absolutely nothing at all. Eerie was the moment, eerie and frightening. He stood alone, in a vast emptiness of aching silence

and heat. He would live or die alone. Thought of it shivered his bones. Fighting down a rising tide of panic, he tried to think his precarious situation through. I can die where I stand or die trying to walk out. Choice, he thought bleakly, and isn't there always a choice, when all you own is yourself and one choice seemingly has little to offer over another. Maybe that's what it is, he thought sourly, when death comes knocking and stares you in the face, there's damn all luxury afforded to any choice but the obvious, even if that too proves to be the death of you.

With a resigned sigh he turned north, heading back down his now obliterated trail towards a distant legendary river, giver of life. If he could reach it that is, and of that he wasn't too sure. In the desert, without water, a man could die in hours. The life of him sucked out by the enervating heat. As he stumbled along he vowed he would not die, and in that vow, in that vow alone, lay his key to life as the very obstinacy of his soul asserted itself.

The air remained incredibly still and clear, the deepening sky luminous with fading light. Like polished enamel, rich and deep and glowing, stars gleaming through like haunted lamps.

Coyne trudged on; the now rapidly cooling air blissfully soothing the flayed blistered flesh of his face. Locking away his fears of heat and cold induced agonies to come, he placed one foot in front of the other and stumbled on through curtains of gathering shadows.

His mind reeled; he still could not quite believe what had happened. 'So fast,' he moaned softly, 'it all happened so fast and then, nothing: As though it were all no more than some kind of weird dream.' Only he knew it was not, and for all that the killing wind had lasted no more than two or three minutes, those few minutes might very well prove to be the death of him. I will not die, he vowed silently, I WILL NOT DIE. MY NAME IS RICHARD COYNE AND I WILL NOT DIE.

His body ached for water and rest. Of water he had none and as for rest, he dare not, not yet. Though still somewhat mind numb from shock, if he slept now he knew there was more than an even chance he might never awaken. And so he suffered and endured racking agonies that all but fragmented spirit within.

Even so, for all his inexperience, Coyne was not a fool, aware that he could not survive if he attempted to walk the desert during the furnace heat of the day. Venting a muttered curse he wisely decided to walk through the night and on into the morning; resting as best he could during the molten hours, walking on through evening's charcoal drift. Easy to say, he thought grimly, but can I do it, can I endure, and knew that he must, or perish.

The desert lay black and white, eerie mosaic of moonlight and shadow. He shuffled on. The eyes of him sunk in deep pits of swollen flesh that all but obscured his now wavering vision. Sometimes he fell to his knees and crawled, head hanging low, panting like a dog, and then he would be on his feet with no remembrance of how he came to be upright, as he staggered north, heading towards a single bright star, glowing like white fire above the horizon's rim. So long as he headed towards the star, he knew, in a dim, hazy sort of way that he was traveling in a rough northerly direction, more than that he could not say, or even think beyond its acceptance.

He thought not of food or water. His battered mind no more than a dim cavern of constant pain, his only reminder of life, as he doggedly placed one foot in front of the other. Somewhere along the way he picked up a small pebble and pushed it under his tongue. He knew there was a reason for doing this, but his foggy mind couldn't quite remember what it was.

His second night of travel was terrible beyond nightmare dreaming come true. Heat blistered flesh split as though slashed with a razor, bleeding, weeping pale watery fluid. Questing

fingers of cold night air caressed his wounds with talons of bitter edged steel.

Sometimes, when agony can no longer be endured some do find refuge in madness. And then there are others, who go away somewhere deep inside their heads, spiritually retreating until pain is a far horizon, a sullen, pulsing sunset hot and red like the bloody wounds of a crucified man. Only sometimes endurance is not enough. He should have died, but he did not. Sometimes vows can be like that, more enduring than flesh when the soul begins to weep and something whispers — ‘Where is God?’

Dawn of the third day found him wandering dazed and confused. Almost blind, the inside of his throat a torment of broken glass, the tongue of him thick and rough and swollen, seemed to fill the whole of his mouth.

Even so, way back inside his head Coyne refused to lie down and die. ‘Dying is easy,’ whispered a small voice, ‘it be life and the living of it that is hard. Have a little faith in me,’ something sighed behind his eyes, ‘have a little faith in me, faith in me, faith in me, faith in me.’

And then there are times when even the strongest of vows begins to weaken, to shiver and shake beneath the onslaught of agonised stress, fracturing like ice beneath impossible weight. It is then the soul screams silently for the want and need of a friend. ‘Have a little faith in me,’ fluted round and round inside his head.

Coyne sensed in a dim far off way that his body was failing, shutting down as it drew close to death. Not that he cared any more as he drifted in and out of a faint trace of blue, swirling behind his eyes like frosted mist. Pain and thirst were distant things his body suffered, and had little to do with the failing thing inside that wavered and sparked unevenly.

His body began to die. His soul gibbered. Thoughts meshed together. ‘Have a little faith in me. Why don’t you have a little

faith in me and I will be your friend,' siren song of sweet oblivion, calling, reaching out, leading him on to nowhere.

Whickering thoughts pushed through his mind fog, allowing pain to seep in. 'And if I go away, and if I go away.' Suddenly, agony flared through the whole of his body, tearing screams out of his tortured throat as the brutal reality of now smashed dazed senses aside. Gasping for air, tears of pain in his eyes, he lurched towards a dim wavering blob of black, the scorched flesh of him weeping tears of blood and anguish.

He didn't know what it was he stumbled towards, only the voice inside his head shouted, 'salvation,' and a lesser voice fluted, 'have a little faith in me, why don't you, have a little faith in me.'

He reeled on, unheeding of shapes swarming towards him, ears deaf to strident voices crying out in dismay at the sight of his ruined face, nor did he feel gentle hands lift and carry him towards the Black Tents as he sank down into a cool, mist blue ocean far and away behind his eyes. 'And if I let go,' a small voice whispered, 'if I let go, will I return or be lost forever?' God smiled at that, as he anointed the seared flesh of his child with healing tears and unguents of fascination and love. 'Have a little faith in me,' something fluted over the calm blue ocean within, 'have a little faith in me and I will be your friend.'

The Black Tent People cared for him with exceptional warmth, tenderness and humility. Had not the ravaged stranger come to them from out a terrible place where sane men fear to go. Blind was the stranger, the face of him ruined. 'Allah led him by the hand,' men whispered with almost superstitious awe, 'we can do no less than care for this strange child beloved of God,' and so they did, the deed itself a paean of praise, faith and trust.

Sadly, years later the Black Tent People all but ceased to exist. Victims of the politics and policies of an ever changing world that

has no place for freedom's children, no place at all for anything that cannot be controlled. Even so, for a brief flicker shift of time the Black Tent People were exactly where they should be else the stranger child would surely have died, and all that he had yet to do would have remained undone.

In the name of Allah, the compassionate, the merciful, the wise, they cared for him. It was, the tribe knew, Allah's ordained will, the concept itself later used to destroy them.

During the days and weeks that followed, his seared flesh healed. Sight slowly returning as the swelling about his eyes subsided. He was no longer the same; he would never be the same again. When spirit is forged in the crucible there is no going back, something is lost, something is gained, something enters, something remains. Of that you can be sure. Perhaps it is the very revenant communion of god, who can say?

Later, when he was able to speak above a rasping whisper, he told his tale of the deadly killing wind, and his trek across the wastelands with neither food nor water. Coyne said that in his delirium he tried to speak with God and that his wandering mind soared with angels. He spoke of a mystic trace of blue that seemingly haunted his sun dazed senses, hurriedly adding, he had no explanation to offer, and no, he admitted shyly, I did not see Izra'il the black winged angel of death.

Coyne's story was greeted with hushed silence, the Black Tent People dispersing quietly as they left him to rest and heal in peace. He had seen the colour of god, and had walked in grace with the angels.

From that moment on, although Coyne did not then realise it, his story gave birth to a small legend that spread swiftly amongst the tribes. He walked with Allah, who in his mercy led him by the hand and delivered him from the terrible place. He had, so the tale was told, walked in paradise and returned.

Coyne stayed with the Black Tent People for almost six months. Doing what he could to help when they moved from one location to another. He became desert wise, conditioning his body to endure long periods without food or water. Whilst ever remaining silent, as to where he came from or for what he searched, saying only that he was interested in what others had not yet found.

Eventually Coyne left the Black Tents never to return. Even so, he was not forgotten. For all the years the stranger son traveled ancient desert trails, he was not forgotten. Nothing ever is, we only think it might be.

~~~~~

**D**awn. Strengthening light fractured across the land as though cast from out the heart of a broken prism. Fists of heat struck down from out a curdled sky of milk and brass, stirring a solitary sleeping figure to wakefulness.

Coyne brewed up, hunkering down on his heels as he drank strong, sweet tea, black as midnight, staring out across the desert plain mentally categorising the scanty evidence of his dig.

The desert sun had burnt away his youth, leaving behind a short, stocky man with good shoulders and gray, penetrating eyes that sometimes flared with light when an odd foolish person pushed him too far. He would explode then, with little thought given to personal safety. Not that he was quick tempered. Only, as he grew older he found he had little patience for the blinkered vision and often fixed ideas of so many he rubbed shoulders with. Indeed of those primarily concerned with the past, many were decidedly disinterested in anything to do with humankind's history that was at odds with preconceived notions of what the past should or should not be. After all, it was not so long ago that Neanderthal Man was thought to be nothing more than a club swinging savage and yet despite vast accumulations of evidence

to the contrary, many of his contemporaries continued to cling stubbornly to the old notion. Of them all, Coyne found Egyptologists to be the most irritatingly hide bound bunch who invariably viewed his finds with outright horror. But then, nothing much, he sometimes thought, had changed over the years where humankind's antiquity was concerned.

Standing, he drank the last of his tea, thinking not for the first time, how difficult it was to imagine trees growing midst such a waterless waste. And yet he knew trees once flourished where now there was only desert. 'Once upon a long time ago there were lakes here,' he whispered softly. 'Lakes and rain, pure life giving rain falling from out cloudy skies like God's own tears.' Now he did not think God cried any more, at least not here, not in this haunted place of whispering ghosts and hot, dry winds.

He looked out across the plain as the strengthening light chased away the last of night's shadows. True, there was little enough to see, and certainly nothing to stir the imagination with dreams of ancient glories falling down into ashes of smoldering sunsets. Not that it mattered. He had long ceased to care what others might think about him, and the odd way he had of finding what was not supposed to be there to be found.

As for his excavations of the past few days, what he had uncovered simply confirmed what he already knew, that he, Richard Coyne had found the ruins of the more than 12,000-year-old legendary City of Origins. Indeed, he stood upon the very sands that covered its ancient bones.

The weary face of him creased in a slight smile of satisfaction. Involuntarily, he thought of home and with a sigh pushed such thoughts away. Not yet, he thought tiredly, not yet. Although he cared not to admit it, he was weary, bone deep weary. He loved the desert and yet in a vague, don't really want to admit it sort of way, he sensed that his life in the desert was almost over. Only it could not be, he thought with a vague sense of unease, not yet,