



Then We Were One: Fragments of Two Lives

Fred A. Reed

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Southern California in the late 1950s has the look and feel of a midsummer morning—bright and still. For two young brothers, the wide world is full of promise. Together they set out to explore it as one, ever alert to the sound of their mother's whistle calling them home. But by late afternoon, dark clouds gather on the horizon and the storm soon breaks.

That storm is the war in Vietnam, and its fury sweeps away all the noble lies of the social conservatism their parents endorsed.

Then, in a bookstore on Hollywood Boulevard, the eldest son happens upon a novel by Kazantzakis that entices him to Greece. There, he learns the language, and in that ancient land that has seen it all, heard it all, and done it all, he encounters militant Cretan students and the woman who will become his life partner in exile.

But for the younger brother there will be no escape. Trapped by failed marriages, smothered by parental guidance and an education system exposed as the state's recruiting agent, he is dispatched to Vietnam. Fifteen years later he lies buried on a lonely hillside in New Zealand, dead of the wounds he sustained in that war.

Shocked by the death of his younger brother, Fred Reed sets out on a series of journeys of discovery and understanding. By way of Iran in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution; the Anatolian highlands of the mystic Bediuzzaman Said Nursi; in pursuit of ancient and modern iconoclasts in Syria and Lebanon; he comes under the spell of Islam. In its embrace he finds a renewed brotherhood; in its discipline, liberation.

Then We Were One challenges us with its conclusion that indictment, absolution and redemption, though we must seek them, are not ours to ultimately possess.

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