

Jacob's Last Rite

Jacob was right. Those who knew him found out soon enough, they may be wise enough to agree, or they found out: Jacob was right. He could be affable and sincere, a friend who knew what you knew, an assuring hand to hold you steady and a fine friend so long as you remembered, who was right. Those who forgot, those who argue and have their own silly wind, their own dull dribbling truth found out what comes to those who forget who is right.

Jacob had friends in school and understood the game first. He saw what the grown-ups saw and did what they did, not what they said. He saw his daddy do it best. Now you agree and laugh, now we are friends, and then you make the move, tell 'em who to blame real sudden, like a stick, his daddy could use words to hurt like a stick, so he gets 'em real close and settled to change to the stick and, "What the hell are you tryin' to pull on me! You tellin' me I'm a liar?! Now see here you best make good after that crack, make good fast and proper or..." and then all the other hard words like they did somethin' wrong, until they cracked and crumbled like dirt, and paid up. His daddy never had want of cash or friends, so Jacob understood how to be right.

Now the years put a fist full of money in Jacob's hand, and a wife in his bed as is likely to follow. One hand clasps and one strikes to teach best. That's how how he raised his boys. Jacob's boys did for themselves and learned early. Most of all they learned who was right and damn well remembered every bit of it. Who pays for 'em, who raises 'em, who deserves to be right? So Jacob's boys were beneath him, the sun below him in the sky, and why not? Who owned the sun?

As he knew to help, he helped his sons, and so never helped them. As he knew to love, he loved them, and so shamed them, and said to his heart, "I have made my boys strong and tough, proud, too proud to take no favor from me!" So he told his heart he helped his sons to have them hate him, and made them strong to rage in them. So each son carries a splinter of his rage and hate, a dirty flame, a filthy cut which leaves you cringing, turning around inside of you like a splinter of dirty glass.

At night Jacob slept easy, a tumbler of whiskey, Scotch or Irish and he slept like a baby. Today he was feeling fine, it's football day for his boy and Jacob raised his 280 pound body up onto the bleachers with a curse and a puff of cigar breath. The bleacher creaked under his weight, and his son having seen his dad, sagged a bit himself to know the old man was watching. Oh God his dad had a mouth, and he sagged a little more to hear the familiar bellow, "Put my boy in now, coach! Now, or we gonna talk!" Jacob knew how to work a coach like a coke machine, and his boy was up! That coach might need a kick or another quarter shoved in his cement head and Jacob lit up red in the face and opened up for real, "Coach-- My Boy-- NOW!" Suddenly Jacob felt a pain in his head, a burning hot needle of a pain behind his eye, and man he was sick! Jacob fell off the bleachers, and all heard the slap of 280 pounds of meat hit the cement.

Jacob awoke in the hospital and saw his boy there, and his wife. He looked at his son and he thought, "Look at that no good wiggling little nothing of a boy. Scared stiff of me even here layin' sick." He went to tell him, "Snap up and look at me!" but the words wouldn't come. Jacob could feel it, he knew he was dying.

The doctor came in and gave him a shot and off he went. He liked that doctor plenty. He smiled at his stupid kid, and his worn out wife, and knew he was dying but didn't care much. What did it matter? Now Jacob felt a long strange quiet come over him, settle into him like a stiff starch on a shirt, he froze up inside and felt it was happening, he was dying. The moment stretched to contain every corner of his being, like a cloud curling up around him time grew and slowed, spilling itself almost back into the glass, and so slowly, he remembered who he was, and where he was, and the moment was beyond time, curling around him forever, but not, and the pain came to his chest and he was gone.

Jacob was shocked, kind of sick and relieved all at once, but mostly surprised to wake up again, see his son and wife again, and then he understood: when the body stops, really stops, we are not conscious, we stop, not black or white but zero. Heaven and hell are but a myth for kids, only the last moment, the longest moment, welcomes us before we die. The door at the end of life leads nowhere, it is the silence in the doorway which is our reward.

Jacob felt it again, the stiff arms of pain squeezed his chest, and stiffened his body one last time and again the moment stretched before him and curled around his life as an endless cloud spilling back into time before oblivion, the last moment where time is a cat taking one last lick of the mouse, now so docile and sweet, before consuming it. As Jacob felt time stretch out and languish before him, and within him, he sighed to his heart that he was right, and lived well. Time heard his thoughts and welcomed him into its last timeless moment, the longest moment. Slowly Jacob began to see a strange shadow open up in the floor of the mist and his father rose from it. A terrible stink of hate and leather, shit and heat, shamed and fouled his soul. He could not breathe. He could not weep. Now his friends who he had suffered and made suffer were suspended before him as hollow sacks of skin he had gutted, they could not breathe. They too, could not weep. Now his boys who he had made "proud," but had not made proud; they were broken and sick as he had wanted them, too weak to rise above him, "No son should rise above me!" he thought, and now knew he was right. Hell may be but a moment, but it is a moment where you know it is you alone who has extinguished the sun. So Jacob knew himself in the longest last moment and passed from life, and so passed from hell.

His boy sighed in deep relief to know his dad was dead. "He sure looks peaceful Mom, I guess even the Devil wouldn't have him." She answered, "If He did put up with him, I'll bet it wasn't for long."

The Last Moment

All who know the seasons fall
The days of amber grain and flax
The autumn sun, the winter day
Crisply snaps the winter branch.
The Spring of youth, so turning searching,
Worming stretching to a time
Found spring and strength, summer's season
Fall before our watered eyes.
Now the candle, now the taper
Burning bronze and gold before
Some who leave, gone before us
Leaves so tender time has shorn.
What is after southern knowing
Northern shores and poles of ice?
This world conceals but a shadow telling
Us of never seen delights
And pleasures hidden in heavens lifted,
High above the riddle here?
Is there Hell, or Heaven better,
What lies behind the final door?

I asked an angel sick and knowing
Asked him twice and he replied
"Repose is but another knowing"
And so I've learned that he has lied.
As sickness claims the mind and spirit
Stopping now the balanced world,
Halting all unfurled and swirled
Never known and never knowing
Ceaseless ceasing stopped and sure.
All not black but gone and nothing
Greets us from no foreign shore
Or bank or ferry or Eden lying
Never but a fairies' farce,
For children and the ever glowing
Whom in lies, does joy impart.

What is sure, and I have seen it
No spirit or no world is next
But our final moment stretches,
 ever never glowing,

...knowing not again; so slowing all the more.
As melt glass pulled, time re-filled
A moment stretches, watches, knowing
Nothing but eternal looking,
 back and over, ever forward
See the whole of every vision,
 lie and truth shown plain before us.
The moment stretches past comprehension
Visions lost in timeless curls,
The sea's caress soon unseen
Forever now...soon always gone.
So our last and longest moments
But twice do lick and cup, our only ending world.
And find us still and ever seeing
Life before the moment lasts, we know all pasts
We find ourselves, judge height and hell,
Before the moment, never more torment
Never more ferment, joy and mirth,
 deserve and love, reward and kiss,
Time's last and longest true embrace,
 to hate, to love, to have then leave.

Time surrenders us as ashes
Burnt and blown, before again
The riddle gone, the melody sung
So slow and sweet, our hells and heavens,
 sung complete
So slow... so sweet until it's gone,
So sweet... until it's done.

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