

*Justice Lies Within (or Beauty, Truth and the Philologist)*

Her words came to him as a melody, sweet and honeyed, all truths melted into the swirling melody, the glowing perfume of summer and sun, golden and warm was the spring of her words, her beautiful truth. So James thought to himself as a philologist thinks, one who has read all old words, and loves words as a beautiful thing, a devotion which must be loved. This love of what is most worthy, what is timeless and graceful, is what drew him to Andrea, now his wife of six years, for she was worthy of his timeless standard, she won him with her dancer's grace and the poise that years of ballet had infused into her body, as if beauty was the original thought upon which she was founded. Her years of study and schooling in the classics let her into his heart by the front entrance. She outshone the pearl of all he loved, and so became his truth. A philologist is a rare thing these days and little in demand, but rare enough that a high price was fetched for James's antiquated services, and his hard work in all things academic old and forgotten was justly rewarded with a fine salary and a position of note. It was his just due, and James was a just man.

He loved his wife, his perfect china cup, bone white and pure as verse, and he accepted her friends as well. Jacques was beautiful in his own way, and pleased Andrea immensely. His bearing was a comfort, like a subtle understanding fire, he crackled and purred into James's ear, and warmed James from within. He always needed look but once into James's face, and knew just what to say, and so quickly earned his kind place as James's confidant. "Jacques, I am worried," he confided, "Andrea has not returned my affections for over a month's time and I am growing concerned." Jacques saw the alarm behind James's gentle words, and reproached him with both hearty assurance and gesture, "James, she loves you as the sun wears the dawn, she talks only of you James, and really it is becoming too much. It makes me a bit sick, this poem of hers, sung sunny verse upon stanza, droning on and on, James only James. You are a monster to be afraid, and must never ask again! You soil yourself to question such devotion, she is a song with but one endless verse of James, James, James! It is revolting, really!" And with Jacques'

round reassuring laughter and the sincerity of his words James was again sure and relaxed, he had melted, as always Jacques' truth had found a hidden tender sun lying within him, and he was charmed, soothed and calmed.

James was disappointed when the convention at which he was to speak, some two days travel distant from his home was canceled. He had been traveling too long, and was annoyed, but James swallowed his annoyance and was polite to the secretary whose responsibility it was to answer his questions, and deliver the disappointing news. After all, James was a just man. He always spoke his heart and was just to himself, and always heard the heart of another and was just to others. His lot and his credo were a simple and happy thing.

So James comforted himself to himself with these thoughts as he neared his home. Underneath his placid understanding, a bitter resentment still lurked, his annoyance at having been left empty handed, with his pride unfulfilled before the gallery which would never gather to know his words, and his sweet wife who refused his lips upon her delicate china cup.

For these reasons James did something most peculiar for him, although normal enough for many. He stopped at a pub on the way to his home, to drink and contemplate his lucky, unlucky lot. James rarely drank because he rarely craved drink, but now he found appetite and shook hands with the bartender with a vigor and happiness which hid his discomfort from the eyes of all but himself.

He had but three drinks, and for many that would have been a small thing, but for James it was rare and potent. He found courage for new thoughts, and was warm with a passion, a tender lust which crept within his empty despair and filled him with the nectar of sure desire, certain knowledge of what he needed, and so he crept into his own home, a burglar to steal what he already owned. Giddy with full sure delight, and a pounding heart he feared would betray his stealth, he opened the door to his bed chamber, a thief to steal his wife's heart from her sleeping breast, and know what he might know best to steal! Of course this game was only a game and James would never offer himself over

protest, because James was a just man. But now James was hot and alive within the game, and thought to himself, "Sometimes justice must steal its own happiness." And so he sought the forbidden intoxicating invigoration, of a just thief's pleasure.

Opening so slowly, the door creaks, and James creeps over to his bed and sees a double shadow under the quilt, a double form beneath the covers, and so finds the twin which lies beneath the stretched skin of every just man. James knew his heart as a splitting hammer which mauls life, and fiends upon its own tenderness, to birth malevolence. All kindness doubled up within him, and hated itself, cutting into itself and mocking itself, mocking all love with knowledge. Every just thing in James rose up to destroy him. All he denied for justice became a cruelty unto himself, a deep laceration. One who is just denies much that is within him. All unfair things in himself and the world lie held within his just heart, and so does he suffer to contain all injustice, and is thereby violating of himself. A just man is just to the world, and so unjust to himself. This is his self-cruelty, he denies his inner demon, he silences his injustice.

James's injustice to himself leapt away, as if a black stroke of lightning split his eyes open, and but a burnt coal remained. He reached into the nightstand and pulled out his revolver. He and Andrea had enjoyed target shooting that summer afternoon some five years ago when he extolled the virtues of hollow point ammunition, and plugged a water filled milk jug twice, once with a round nosed lead bullet, and then after the jug sprang the resultant leak, a second shot with a hollow point, which spent the jug, now knocked into pieces, as the water plumed high in the air, a mist of tender dew suspended before the sun, his Andrea, a vision behind a prism of mist... Now the memory found the strength of annihilation, and he burned his happiness into rage. James was no longer a just man. He was now, just a man. James had gone insane.

He snapped the light on to reveal the two lovers, Andrea and Jacques, intertwined, blissfully, innocently asleep. He found a sadist's pleasure within his just a man's heart, and pressed the .357 into Jacques' temple, leaning his 175 pounds fully into the butt of the gun, so the barrel might crush the eye socket. Jacques awoke with a shout, pulling his head away in a reflex jerk, he looked at the man before him, a vicious ghost he had

raised and gutted now leered at him, saw him holding her waist, holding the remains of James's mortal soul, now corrupted for her surrender, his wife awoke to see herself reflected in his eyes, a black mirror for a necrotic dream, a dead black rose, a fallen rose which calls for the flame to cleanse us of its memory.

"James." No sooner had Jacques said his name than James began to speak brightly, teasingly in a strange unknown Scottish cadence, "Jacques me lad be sure 'tis me, 'tis I the cock whose hen you lay! Ha! I am the owner of the roost, be sure my claw into your eye did feast, and I will snap you oft and dead, but first little man, you poor little man, you shall tell me of what tale you can, so bring your last moments be they long or short, till you bore me and at last are here no more!" Now James lost his cheerful Scottish accent, and his bearing shifted without warning as a loving broad smile of great charm and falseness stretched over him, a broad horizonless sunrise like a golden stench, reaching out from his vile, hateful, just soul, and James began again as if for the first time, "Dear Jacques, I must demand you tell me a tale to occupy my pleasure, so I may fully enjoy, and compass your death. If you tell me a short tale, I will kill you quickly. If you tell me a long one, I shoot later. But do be sure dear one, be sure that you make it to my liking, or I will delight myself, and shoot you dead!"

At this, Jacques knew that he betrayed his friend who had now, clearly, been driven entirely mad. In an effort to prolong his life, Jacques began to tell a story to please his executioner, one which would mirror his thoughts, and so delay his own fate. After all, reading the truth which fits best in the ear, a natural empathy from the sight of a face, to see the thought it held forth and voice it, was Jacques' greatest and most natural gift. Jacques spoke, "There was a man named Michael, and he was a good man. He was good to his wife and his friends. He gave them a thousand unrequited gifts, and caring was chief among them. He never answered the messenger to account for his message, and the fault was his alone but too often to bear. His wife and friends were quick to use his just nature against him. She beset him with subtle nagging doubt, to teach him as to belittle himself, to mistrust himself, and his friends saw fit to gladly aid her, for this is but one of many ways a just man can be made soft easy prey, if his friends prefer profit to friendship." Jacques looked up and judged James to be pleased. He felt the black eyes

press into him, just as the gun barrel did they sink into him, and bruise him to knowing, so did they also leave a mark. "So Michael's wife and friends turned against him and poured their scorn upon Michael, and in time his ear held their words for his own and his ear turned against him, and his eye saw the ugly things they saw for him, and he mistook them for himself and so his own eye did turn against him, and beheld his soul as an untrue thing. As a true man he was fooled, and thought he knew himself, a belittled and self forsaken disgrace and disappointment to be struck from the sight of all worthy things, and so he climbed the highest cliff, and bade the world farewell. He said goodbye to the fragrant grasses and the carpeted hills, goodbye to all he loved and treated with love, and jumped. As he fell towards the earth, the seconds embraced him, each as a year, and he languished in the memories of his life. He remembered a story which his father had often told him, but which he never understood.

Michael's father had oft told of an old stoic Indian named Red Blood. Red Blood's family had raised him to hide his feelings and his tears. "Speak not, for that which is better known, is better known in silence." In turn, as a father himself, the dignity of Red Blood's silence graced his family, who flourished to find his kind heart always beat with them in deed and kindness, if but unspoken in word. His life was in those he loved because he had placed it there, and it had to be so, because he cared too much to speak it. He could but show it in deeds. So is truth made plainest to be seen, rather than spoken. He found himself often to struggle in his thoughts, unable to say what he was, and so he doubted himself. Deep down Red Blood wondered, "Do I truly feel that which I can not speak?" That thought was his secret doubt, Red Blood's secret trial by doubt.

The government sent a cringing hateful white man, a veteran from the civil war, empty and sour to himself he came to the Indians as a poison wind drunk and reeling with his hate. The man ordered the village burned, and the white people broke the bones of the women and raped them as rag dolls to be tossed in a ditch. Red Blood was gut-shot, and bled out on the dirt floor before the white colonel, a proud devil who wanted his morsel of shame. The colonel seemed to need something from Red Blood, he seemed only to enjoy himself in the suffering of another and asked, "Ain't ya got nothin' to say fir yourself, for ya die, injun?" Red Blood thought through his life in his last few moments,

where each second is as thick as a lazy year. He knew his family loved him and he gave of himself to them. He knew he, as all of us, must die, and found it easy to bear having met his challenge with strength and deeds, rather than hollow words. Red Blood knew himself in death and answered his secret doubt with his whole life, and knew his sure heart which never doubts. With some annoyance the colonel heard Red Blood speak his final utterance, an utterance of gratitude, as the last of his blood was swallowed into the hungry earth which never returns us to ourselves, and so makes us precious. Finally the colonel leaned over Red Blood to listen for the last of his triumph, but instead of what he wanted, he heard only these few words, "Thank you for showing me."

As he plummeted to earth, for the first time Michael understood the meaning of this cruel parable, and also knew himself in death, and beheld his deeds of caring for those he loved, and his honesty before himself and saw the ugliness of his tormentors was not his to own, for he had looked into his heart as it stretched back over his days and found its shadow was bright, and just as Red Blood's deeds were his own deeds, each true to himself and those he loved, so he found the approach of the hungry earth as a a hopeful thing, and laughed lovingly to know himself before himself. He too found himself a promise fulfilled, a hope made real, and so welcomed the hungry earth which never returns us to ourselves, and so makes us precious.

James's soul had written the tale, and now his eyes passed through Jacques again, and he asked the betrayer, "How does the hungry earth find you, my brother? How precious are you to have it know the taste of your salt soul, the last of your oily red tide will soon be drunk into its thirsty sands. Will they be the cleaner or the dirtier for knowing you?"

James's words fell into Jacques' soul as a bolt of the blackest lightening, the most terrible knowledge born through his friend's eyes, now spoken from his own lips, the knowledge of his deeds clawed back out through him, raking his soul, rending it with the black truthful claws of self-knowledge. So the bolt fell from James's madness into Jacques, the lightning which knows what twin lies beneath. Every black corner of Jacques soul glowed, alive with a thousand ugly eyes. Every false truth spent to comfort, every slippery opinion which made the hearer warm and sleepy for the lie, so Jacques could

move closer to his prey. All the lies he had stolen from his wife and children, and now the terrible truth that the friend he deceives, knows him better than he does himself...until now. The true vision of his vain ugly soul claimed him, Jacques shook with a gasp of recognition and he trembled, but not of his fear to die, as he knew he soon would, but of disgust and nausea, loathing and the vile scent which knows itself, and is appalled. So Jacques shook, but with hope. Only the bullet, only the end could cleanse and cure. Jacques wished only for hope to claim him, and so James saw and knew what black magic, what forbidden sight and knowledge he had cast into his friend, a black magic mixed of both the highest vision and lowest order of man. A truth like Jacques' soul born to daylight, is a darkness made naked in sight, a shaming of the truth, a beholding of the unholy cloaked truth in the plain unblinking white of daylight, a black vision of the magician's hollow pandering soul, a magical rape. So had Truth found Jacques' hidden soul, and bestowed Hope.

James found that his throat was dry, his hand shook and his madness had vanished. He understood his broken friend, and his ugly wife. He put the pistol back on the nightstand and left the pair in each others arms, Jacques weeping and begging, his eyes pinched shut, each like a dry fisted prune, below them his mouth opening, and the black hopeful words crawling, lurching, naked, exposed and shivering words, pushed out into the cold morning air, "Shoot! Shoot! Shoot damn you-- DO IT!"

James walked into the empty street. It was 5:30 am, the dawn was leaking its first rays, hued in rose, so shy, as if bashful, embarrassed at its own beauty, gradually emerging, so slowly that it might forget itself. So James thought as a philologist in whom hope has taught the future new verse, and found ancient beauty, lives in the greenest of hope's new leaves. What is ancient beauty and knowledge, but youth and thought which time has refused to plunder? So deeply was James captivated by the beauty of his new musings, and so engrossed in their new truth, that he hardly noticed the pistol shot, but his wife's scream was unique, it tugged at his ear and caught him to pull him from his thoughts. He turned toward the sound in amazement. He had never heard a more honest, less practiced or less beautiful utterance come from her lips. Had he only now, for the first time heard the note of her true soul? He felt sure that he would never again mistake hollow beautiful

things like words for truth, and he knew he had found in this truth the most beautiful thought, and the most hopeful. Jacques and he both knew hope. James thought, "Hope is only beautiful if you can bear its truth." With this thought his weary watery eyes awakened and his heart opened itself to the dawn, which had never seemed so radiant, its cheeks flush with rouge and quiet, blushing warm and red, beneath one of hope's tears.

This work is the sole property of the author, Rich Norman © 2010, and is used by this forum with both permission and gratitude.