

The Break of Night by Rich Norman

Leslie was alive, a blossom held aloft in life's season. The strange wounded tumult of joy and awkward exaltation which is youth buoyed and savaged her, and she opened her tender unknowing before it, and like a sail welcomed all dangerous winds and seasons to find their breath then within her, and claim their heights as her own. All the world is weather, and gladly fills such a sail.

Likewise all those who sail want nothing more than rope to rig their mast and hold such a sail, so they may invite the wind to test it. Jack was a sailor to be sure, and beheld Leslie with the hunger, hope and daring of youth's highest wisdom. Only one who has yet to find the cross winds of his true seasons is wise enough not to doubt such a truth, and in the sure wisdom of youth they were wed.

The wisdom of youth beholds the future never knowing it is not the present, and so believes itself true. All sorrow and happiness, dull, awesome and terrible, were to fill those precious years with life's full froth, for bitter makes sweet, and life is such a brew as this. In storm and season the mast was sure and the sail was swollen with those winds which blow twice. And so Leslie knew her body, and its season filled her heart with crimson sweetness, and so her body knew her husband filled her and she him, and did forget herself, and choose to know this season's full breath, will and measure, in place of her own. She was full to be pleased and to please him, and was that not happiness? She served him before all things, and so placed her burden down and was virtuous. "After all, who need carry water for two, when to serve one is wet enough? Am I not full to know he is happy, and is this not sacrifice and virtue?" So she whispered the words of her secret soul to herself no more, and found it easier not to hear them. Is it not easier to be silent when the season fills our heart? How can a blossom not deny itself for the wind? What but passion could speak loudly enough to quiet the dead?

Again the wind blew and the sail was swollen before time with its second breath, which her body graciously returned. Her child bore her heart aloft, and she blossomed to his season, and plummeted to his depths, and they were as life loves life, in double draughts of bitter and sweet, and so time's thirst was slaked and its season spent.

So full with time's hungry winds, her days were consumed, and she was alive and floated upon the stream of its passing, born high above her lost words, the season's happiness was within her and cast no shadow. How could she see her hollow shadowless happiness from such height? "Is it not best to sacrifice our words to the season of our children, and find our place happy amongst their streaming clouds and windswept days? Is this not sacrifice, most beautiful?" So did kindness call her disappointment virtue, and name her unwilling emptiness beauty. After all we are kindest to ourselves when we murder ourselves, and most forgiving when our lazy steps find virtue shuffling over our thousand graves. Who but virtue could quiet the dead? Under whose feet does our happiness sleep? Under whose leaden feet is our happiness pressed mute?

So time came as a virtuous thief, to steal the cost of Leslie's virtue. Leslie found her body tire, and an empty place came, where another season once bloomed. Her children left and she cried out to her husband, "I am empty and gray. My children no longer need me, and my sacrifice is unreturned." He said unto her, "You may love me, and I you, and so we might fill each other with time's last drops of life." So they found the shadows of evening fine company in play amongst this Autumn, and Leslie sacrificed to her silence and bore her husband's weather within her as her own, and was happy in her Autumn shadow.

Leslie's husband, at last, could no longer cheat time, but left of her, and knew no more days, and sacrifice claimed the wheat of Leslie's life, and so Autumn melted into icy winter, with the empty field of frost and stubble her sacrifice had born. Leslie cried out, "My husband, my love!" but he was gone. "My children, my reason!" but they were gone. Only the night remained to hold her, only the night remained to hear her, a windless vacant sphere, a silent vacuum which has forgotten the promise of sacrifice, where the pulse of passion has been long silent, where no echo of dawn remains.

Leslie thought of her life with its hundred seasons—red lust, loves glowing shadow, purple anguish bruised and tormented, shy yellow days and golden baskets of wheat, and how these filled all the light of her days with color. Now only palest night remained within her, empty and unshaded, for what is blackest is also what is most absent, empty and pale, in its darkness.

The night held Leslie without touching her, and its silent voice cradled her to listen, for the night loves us by receiving, its absence is its whisper, and so Leslie heard, and knew that a new season had held her in the tenderness of perfect silence. She understood the black pale beauty of night, the shades of its ink which whisper the sacred prayer of our days into an empty ear, a waiting hollow like night itself. Our night soul is a hidden cave filled with still air and the echo of our days. Once the echo fades we are blessed to know what remains. This is the night's silent wisdom. So does the night bestow us to ourselves, as a silver whisper, cradled in ink.

So Leslie unfolded her winter heart, and laid it open before the night, to hear the night whisper into the quiet of her soul. Only the palest diamond leaves light unspoiled. So may our winter heart know the night: as a crystal chalice filled with what the hot sun has spilled into the night, made tender and perfect once poured through the white ice moon, and washed pure. Leslie thought this to herself and knew the night and its rejoicing, listening silence, and found her courage could be heard in the still night air. She decided to cheat the virtuous ghost named Time, and steal the moment of her night happiness back, and so give it Time's breath with these lines of verse:

"The Break of Night"

The break of night, day's under season
Slowly yields its gold to ink.
The folded page, now free from crimson
Finds in blackness freedom's light.
Ever often passions straining, faded as a laurel worn
Now but ink reclaims the heart
In darkness stilled, and still reborn.
What air is drunk in silent folds, the tender ear in rapture slakes
Of heaven's thirst and then in season,
Feels the perfect still of night.
No longer pulled, no longer heated
Spring of fire be gone, and so
I hear no pulse, but know this evening
Only now, my promise hold.

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Oregon resident Rich Norman, editor in chief of *The Black Watch: The Journal of Unconscious Psychology and Self-Psychoanalysis*, is a writer and musician with degrees in philosophy and music. Known as "The Laughing Recluse," he is the author of books spanning philosophy, psychology, and novels, with topics ranging from psychoanalytic theory to existential philosophy, verse and fiction. Rich Norman Contact:

rich@richnorman.com
editor@thejournalofunconsciouspsychology.com