

Gone Are the Days by Rich Norman

"Gone are the days when the ox fall down, pick up the yolk and plow the fields around." Never has an old song been more true. Today now more than ever, when I look around me, I am sad and sick at what I see. There is sorrow all around us, but it is not this which saddens me, there is want everywhere, but this means little to my hungry soul, there is one thing which is still more pressing, still more painful in its absence: integrity. Who will take it upon themselves to do the work when the ox falters, and place the yolk upon their own shoulders, rather than complain? Who has strength enough for even that? Today, there is one less. It is this which saddens me.

I have been privileged to work with a man strong enough to place that burden upon himself each week, and find enough left to sacrifice and continue, but even strength such as this is but human strength, and must subside. So it is with all our faulty human efforts, so noble and ignoble in our success and our inevitable failure. As an author I have seen the worst of it, the worst of man as he lies to imagine himself. How many publications I have solicited with my truth, and how many hollow things have I heard in return for a truth which never flatters, but looks plainly upon all things ugly and true without blinking! Ah, to have found a place for even what one such as I calls truth, so scathing and relentless, so strange and overly honest is my truth, so glad to have at last found a perch, here as a golden dove with eagle's talons I have sat and noisily pulled all the world apart with my eagle's beak! Here in this place, this place which is soon to be but a vanishing memory... so is integrity, sad and wanting to know the limits of our strength, so selfish am I! Sad and selfish to be sad, for the time is right for your leaving, even as I must find another place lofty enough to hear my words as they echo down and below, against the walls of a lesser world, poorer for my sorrow, if richer for your efforts. How grateful and glad I am to have had this place from which to shine and speak without reserve, free and brazen as a foolish eagle, too proud to ask, but when... sky alone will remain to hear... so selfish to wonder, where, or if, I shall find place and perch right enough to claim rest and sanctuary for my lonely cries, now drifting and rising... ever alone, and right. Now, the ox has fallen, and the yoke remains underfoot. So sad and selfish am I to have lost you, my friend! Ah! Let us rejoice at your freedom and your happiness! Yes, this is best. You who have given must now receive, as is right. So do I say, and so do I mean! Thank you, thank you for having the strength to do, rather than falter, for such things are rare, and now, rarer still. Now the burden is past... the dark but a promise to unwrap, a hollow filled with truth and all things well deserved. This I wish to you, this and no less... your happiness has become, an eagle's prayer, a new day, even more...

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.

Oregon resident Rich Norman, 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. All text in this column is printed with the permission of, and remains the sole property of, the author, Rich Norman. Contact: rich@richnorman.com