

GOOD MEN DO NOTHING

Jon McRae

All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.

Edmund Burke

Sick. I'm sick. I felt it today, lying in the park. The sky was so blue and deep. Even the stain over the city didn't look too bad, but it was what made me realize I'm sick. I'm just like that yellow stain, sulking at the edges of all that's good and pure. The world is bright around me and I have every comfort at my disposal. But I don't feel comfort.

What is it about nature that lets us know we don't quite belong? It's just some sky and trees and animals, no mind or anything, but it tells us. It's some big paradox, I bet. Something Dr. Who would explain with big words the staff writers found in the manuals for the studio cameras. Or is it simple, but we just don't speak the language anymore? Maybe we left it in the jungle with our tails and hairy knuckles. But then, maybe nature's not telling us anything different than it was back then. *Grow.*

Poor nature. Here she sent us out into the realms of sentience and we've come back to the jungle with pavement. Her fruits fed us, her caves and trees gave us shelter. Her horses bore us for centuries. Now we turn them into glue so our kids can make popsicle-stick houses. We dehydrate them so they'll piss hormone-rich paste we sell to post-menopausal madams who don't want moustaches. These horses we then paint in sunset oils, proud and noble, charging and raging as they must in their unconscious hearts rage at us.

What if nature gifted sentience to someone else? Say, to tigers. Wouldn't the jungle come to drag us back, then. Imagine it, right now: a tiger is in your room. A tiger. No, not that little decal on your truck, not that silk-screened portrait on your thrift-store sweatshirt. A tiger. It's in your room. It's in your room

and so is death. So is cold, dark, lonely fear. But only for a second, then you're just something we'd laugh at on TV. Some ragdoll on a funniest home video. We do so much to forget what's animal about us. Especially fear. Fear, more than anything else, we bury. We bury it deep by caging predators for our entertainment. We put metal bars around death because we think that makes it less real. Then it gets out. Of course it gets out, it's death. Only the universe can contain it and maybe not even that. Some kid makes the headlines in pieces and who do we blame? The animal. And for what? Being an animal.

We've failed the test. Nature's experiment in consciousness, or conscience. We're more animal now than ever. We the experiment, the scout into intelligent regions whose Adam and Eve were sent ahead to test the waters of knowledge, what did we do? We drowned. No, we didn't just drowned. We drowned each other.

Look at that sky. What's it saying? Nothing. What's it asking? Nothing. What's it worth? Nothing. Why can't that be me? Why can't I be so perfect and clear and open and beautiful? Why is everything beautiful except us? I thought nature was saying *Grow, go ahead my love, my child*. But no, not ahead. She was saying *Grow, come along my love, my child*. She was saying catch up. Catch up!

I am not *sick*, I *am* sick. We are the disease. On the scale of evolution that leaves us a lot of catching up to do. But will we do it? Can we?

All this I thought in the park, stretched out on broad, brown, perfect dead leaves. Now I'm home. Sara's coming over soon. I'll tell her all these things. We might talk about it for a while, but that's all. Then we'll watch TV to sharpen our sarcasm, which we'll then use to make fun of more TV. By the time we eat dinner I'll be back to littering my unused napkin.

You won't die, I'll be protecting you, she says. Nature. She won't let me forget, now that I've heard her. I think she screamed so loud in the sky today that the language didn't matter. I am the flu in a perfect body. The pea beneath a humble princess.

I have to listen. If I don't listen she'll remind me. She spoke to me with this sickness, maybe she'll remind me with death. I have to die sometime. I don't have to forget.

The tiger comes to every room. Mom told me just last week that Sara's dad has cancer. Mr. McCulloch next door died from a stroke just last year. Then there was that kid a few months ago who fell off a tire-swing and broke his neck, died in the ambulance on the way to the hospital. I know a guy whose great-grandpa got shot in World War One and lived, but then in the hospital he bumped his head and the plate they'd put in it poked his brain and he died of a haemorrhage. Some people the tiger stalks and takes without a hint of warning. Other people it moseys right up to, sniffing here and there like cats do. It takes them so slowly, in such small increments, you'd think it was a chore or a mortgage.

I thought a long time about this in the park. It sounds funny, I know. A tiger. It's only funny because we see tigers in cages and on TV, where we keep death to hide its power. We think, 'What's real if it's in a cage or on TV?' But think about it again, carefully. No cage, no TV. A tiger is in the room with you now. Think about it. It growls, paces, stalks right up to you, all in the few seconds it takes you to piss yourself and blurt 'Oh God please don't hurt me.' It would be like a dream, where you can't understand what's happening so you just watch. Maybe you punch it when it comes to sniff you, and it does that cat thing where it looks like it's sneezing, ears turned back and nose wrinkled. Then you see stars and your neck throbs with whiplash and your eyes won't open and your body turns to a big distant mess of pain and adrenaline. Then, well, the rest doesn't matter. Just think about the tiger. See it. Convince yourself it's real. A tiger is in the room with you now. A tiger is in your room. A tiger.

Ok, so it wasn't the sky that made me feel sick. It wasn't even death. It was catching up. How do we catch up? What can we do so that when the tiger comes we may stand proud and welcome it, not plead and whimper because we know we've squandered our lives?

Do something is what. I don't mean just giving the cost of a cup of coffee a day to some guy on TV who says he's doing what Jesus would do. Jesus wouldn't ask for money on TV. Do something hard, something that scares you, something you'd snicker at if you watched someone else do it on TV.

Something that would make your idiot friends say ‘Think you’re Gandhi or what?’ or your stuck up friends say ‘Well we can’t all give up our cup of coffee a day,’ or your sarcastic friends say ‘Good job Captain Planet, I’d have helped but my care-mobile broke down at Shining Time Station.’ Those people are like tigers for your heart, gnawing at it until nothing real is left. Just like everything else we’ve built. Like every other lie we invent to convince ourselves it’s okay to pave another rainforest.

Do something. Let the tiger scare you out of bed. Let the sky call you outside. Pick up garbage in the park. Ask your grandparents how they feel about dying, because everyone else is afraid. Afraid to ask them and afraid to die, both. Don’t say you’re doing fine if you aren’t. Take a hobo to lunch to remind him that some people care, and to remind yourself that most people don’t. Do you?

Now I’m really feeling sick. Sara’s going to think she made me angry. No Sara, it’s not you. It’s being back here, in this house, away from the park and sky. Away from all that’s good and pure, as we’ve all been for so long. No Sara, it’s not you. It’s all of us.