

The Bearded Kent  
by A.E. Thorimbert

I.

In the middle of a would, behind the beginning of a could  
Mistress Martha ruled the home, with Jack by her side  
in sweet Baneon, Ilion's distant, country-side shadow  
where their family had been known for ages bribed

Jack knew the stories, Mistress Martha had done her work  
of dairy farmers and smiths, of when they had been of land only tenants  
small tales of sickness, sour milk and falling off horses  
tales that left, deft Jack dreaming for glory and independence

For Jack, fate was a door, it would happen, always open  
what was tightly closed was nothing to consider  
what was through a doorway was beautiful, divine  
was not Freedom the bright singer, ever nearer

Freedom would say, she had no call upon Jack's life  
more indebted to those she befriended, she was trust sent  
Truer in presence than any mimicry coined by Janus  
Double-faced divinity, he was Jack's enlightenment

Deft Jack did not care to know what Lady Liberty deemed right  
if the harvest slowed, grew hard, it was by her quill  
if the winter softened, fires grew, it was by her will  
if fate's window opened, twas to escape by windowsill

Worry by another way of chasing a wish in the wind  
such was my young Jack's, hero Jack's, swift Jack's life  
bopping, and coasting, working, and laughing  
always hopping to next joke, away from any strife

But for Mistress Martha, owl-eyed, Jack's mother  
Freedom was a pantry with shelves never fully filled  
Mistress Martha, with her auburn hair and apron shares  
believing death a master whose credit was always billed

the two and three lived together, forest town  
town life, city just off, city dreams just off  
a home without stories, a son longing for tales  
day to day, job by job, year by year, cough by cough

Dreamy Jack had been second born, first born forgotten  
nothing to say of the father, nothing to say  
families like theirs have a lifespan or three  
this Mistress Martha knew, this Jack kept at bay

But second borns have adventures, so too with Jack  
this rarely and often in Mistress Martha's thoughts  
when a stranger swell showed up one day to share their table  
Therein, deft Jack's future with the Bearded Kent became caught

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II.

This was the lore and lament of the Bearded Kent.  
a wildling man, from the barbarian clans, jaded bands  
was said if you could catch him, hear his remnants of a dream  
wisdom could be parsed out like seashore-crawled sands

Born in dawn's time, but blind to her garments and showers  
more kin with dryads and their ivy, horn-crowned kin  
knobbly armed, Cretan brick-wracked strength of knees  
secret temple, stone risen, words few, far and din

Mistress Martha had sworn the Bearded Kent could not be  
so where Jack heard, and where Jack began to believe  
was a riddle in itself, but believe he could, cleave to the Kent he did  
that one day come, the bearded, hairy legend he could retrieve

Though Banion old and proud, twas not a tale told in its pubs  
nor one from the street waifs, nor did the farm hands carry it about  
the Kent had not hold on this land, Kent itself far away on island far  
yet Jack embraced all the lout of Kent could be, he would find him out

Why and for what reason was a meaning Jack did not build  
Mistress Martha said the Bearded Kent did not exist, so must he be  
but cupboards bare, still have air, and boys will always dare  
and a care in the world is still a care to hold, to blindly free

For the Bearded Kent was said and dreamt to be steadfast  
lovingly kind, kindly steadfast, and fast in kindness  
fasting from the weary slumberings of light within the shadows  
one in kind with any who would share in compassion's quests

III

Strangers with stories come without bouquets of roses  
fed were these days that grew only the thorn  
and the days from august were all this guest bore  
was it thus, Mother Martha wondered, that we were born?

past the city crossroads and tawny farm cats  
past all Baneon's quant cares, he came all quite forlorn  
Jack saw him through the window, then came he through the door  
Mistress Martha knew, red is this days to grew such a thorn

But polite she was, his feelings she could see  
said nothing, as stood still, then asked me to mourn  
Jack caught, with him, why here, why now, what for?

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this is danger, tis not for thus that we were born

There was no adventure in sorrow, why follow such lore  
Jack said nothing, not one to be torn  
He waited for something more, stoked the fire nearby  
hunger for change in the days that grew the thorn

As the stranger ate, still unnamed, his false grief changed  
false, for tales of woe are not easily shorn  
they break you, sending out your heart to war  
for in such states, one might ask “was it thus that we’re born?”

The stranger had wolf eyes and a scabbard heart  
Mistress Martha could see that, but he offered a third tale  
so Jack let him, pointed him to the fire and house’s better brew  
simple fare goes down well a pint of dark ale

Deft Jack smiled, he gleamed, his heart galloped on  
“welcome good sir, eat and be well”  
what kept Mistress Martha from turning him away  
ah what careless words we so often sell

He waited, Jack’s anticipation grew, he ate  
“Well,” he paused, “with what joy may I dwell.  
From such pain grief’s hunger must stay  
But “welcome good sir, eat and be well”

“These days of thorn, deserve something new  
Jack tossed a log on the fire, as the man let his sigh tell  
“I’d made my decision, the Bearded Kent will do just fine.”  
Mistress Martha frowned, thinking “that is not one to sell”

Keep that story in your pocket, hide it away from my Jack!  
but before the stranger could speak, there rang Baneon’s bell  
the eagle-eyed traveler shivered, then stood up halfway  
but “welcome good sir, eat and be well.”

He made for the door, Jack could not stop him  
“It ringeth for me, it ringeth to hell”  
He sang, his shiny words now old and grey  
He mumbled to himself, “What hope we do so sell.”

“But the Kent,” cried out deft Jack, “of him what do you know.”  
The man stopped, his cloak about him like a sail

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“What hope is there in myths, went nights like these ail?  
it will not end, and they will not quell over any dale”

But if the wild Kent you find, seek him by night and wisp.  
Now Goodbye good sir, eat, and go well  
Then he put up his hood and went his way  
Whispering into the night “What words I do not know I sell.”

IV

through oak and Cyprus trail, cedar mountain stretch, Jack sought  
foraging for the wisp on every twig and moss encrusted track  
darkling leaves, darkling canopy, darkling way  
Jack ran through any darkness with lightnings crack

Through forest cracks, mushroom tracks, canopy sacks  
axed hope, axed sight, sea of night in sweet mass  
st. elmo’s light in mass, even with ocean depths far-flung  
the boy circled hades in the kingdom’s pass

one minute a glimmer, the next a simmer of fire  
running dire, sweating dire, racing dire  
the willow-in-the-wisp always ahead  
protean form, formless and void, liting pyre

to catch was the answer, to continue Jack’s strength  
but the wisp was thin, the wisp never wholly there  
a star out of place, divinity without grace  
“Do you not care, wisp? Do you not care?”

Jack’s anthem, the one without lyre  
“What do you bear upon this world?  
the Bearded Kent calls, you know the way  
“but you sway, and you trick, you’re unfurled.”

The wisp stopped, sudden, the wind continued  
Jack surprised, tumbled, and fell over forward roots  
looked out upon from grassy head, mossy bed  
eyes stretched wide, wisp with eyes of newts

“Unfurled,” he spoke, lyrical as the ode  
“Yea, that I have been, ever the study and standing of youth  
know me? Know you? Jack, see not yourself here?”  
silence abrupt, his sentence finished, Jack felt uncouth

“Do you know the Bearded Kent, the giver of good dreams?”  
“I know such a man, but he has the mind my late Father had.”  
this was too much for Jack, he answered not the bate  
a foe not a friend, story with sorrow and sad

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“Tell me the way.” “What way is that?  
shall you soar to the sun, I tried upon feathered armed device.”  
Jack knew the tale, Reader, you have heard it blue.  
never climb too far, Jacob’s ladder appeared but once

Jack could ask, Jack could care, Jack could bear  
but a wisp was a riddle, a riddle with no form  
Icarus or not, a piece of some larger matter of light  
Jack would not play the game, high or low, would not give forum

“You won’t ask? You’re not curious?” the wisp-now-man asked  
as if need to be known burnt within all he was, Jack thought  
“There is a time to know, a time to sing, a time to cheer and a time for night  
when all the world in starry current, darkness caught.”

“You would not hear of minotaur and labyrinthine days?  
“I would not care of myths delayed; less dreary myths be democratic  
the banter now quick and full, steady stream ahead, clever heads  
two fools, one adolescent, another eternal boy now static

“See myths before me, myths in front of me, myths with flesh and bone  
become something substantial with far too much weight to carry  
“Like wisps” “Yes! Like wisps you can no longer catch  
I care not for what can be caught, only that which is fairy.”

“Why seek the myth, the Kent by way of wisp – I do not understand.”  
the wisps’ eyes lost focus, brilliant fluid light and swallow  
“For the passion of it all, the thrill of the task”  
Jack stood like a man, but his eyes next to the wisps, fallow

“Just to see if you could, I suppose, tis how our world was built  
but rarely does justice to move it forward, here this song  
‘lantern luck, lantern blitz, lantern skies and lantern wicks  
“No!” Jack’s voice broke out, ending the ballad’s lyrical throng

“That’s not me.” His voice cracked.  
the wisp did not respond, ‘cept in sideways glance  
both understood what few and many could  
that to be known was Jack’s last chance.

Icarus form burnt up, friar’s lantern once more  
Helios could not have envied his beauty and fire  
now but a whisper, yet more than any other will-or wisp  
“They say to lose the Bearded Kent’s indeed is dire

Then dry-eyed Morpheus regained what Jack had sought to steal  
the stars and moon the only night through canopy to break  
leaving Jack lost in wonder, despairing with hope no more asunder  
homebound and journey forward, homebound and heartache.

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V

There were crossroads that not even Hecate was said to control  
stacked ways where one desired there might only one  
a dropping leaf to point the way; a glimmer to hint of some reveal  
making one think the gods had spoken, Liberty's desires won

but humans are fickle, and crossroads are cunning  
making jacks of any trade master of none  
our Jack new his way around highway or three  
but starry crossroads were a story without sun

Jack dealt cards where life created forges  
never again did he see the Bearded Kent, their ways no more cross  
but the tales are many, of wisps waylaying men into swamps  
tales absent of the Icarus of light and moss

Have you met the Bearded Man of Kent  
stepped upon his dreams, moon light, sunbeams  
he's waiting to be chased, with you, at the fork in the road  
between each hope, between each dimension's seems