

Justin the Giant

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for Jeanne

Attentiveness is the greatest prayer.

Justin the Giant

1

Justin Girard was a true giant, in the medical sense, having been afflicted with the condition called gigantism from a young age. People having this condition often reach a height exceeding eight feet, as did Justin by age 21.

Justin first became aware of his condition at age 13. A growth spurt at that age brought him to a height a full head taller than any of his peers.

Before bringing his son to the specialist he had heard about, however, the boy's father, Jacques Girard, went to see the specialist himself to assess his son's condition, whatever it was, and determine how best to inform Justin about it. Justin, at this time, had apprehensions about his rapid growth, it was clear, though he had not been formally informed of his condition.

The year was 1888. It was an era in France that, after the upheaval of the Revolution and the later Napoleonic reforms, had ushered in an age that many hoped would be dedicated to literary expression and the arts. The Catholic Church had summoned its cardinals and other notable clerics to Rome to discuss and respond to the growing secularism of modern people. The prior decades had brimmed with new ideas. Charles Darwin had published *Origin of Species*, challenging the individual creation, by God, of all creatures. Karl Marx had published *Das Kapital*, attacking the privileged structure of bourgeois society. Frederich Nietzsche had published *Beyond Good and Evil*, questioning the very foundation of human morals. It was a contentious time.

"Doctor, is there any way to slow the growth, or predict it?" Jacques Girard asked as he sat hunched into his habitual humble posture with his unruly, poorly cut hair, dark brown in color, jutting out from each side of his bald head, and his beard of the same color, also jaggedly cut, rounding out his visage below. As he talked, he clasped together his strong-looking and yet elegant hands which were a core part of his identity. Jacques was a worker with his hands, a maker of stained glass windows.

Jacques was old for having a child of 13. He was in his mid-60's with a face marked with the anguish of his artistic doubts and struggles. He had large and luminous gray eyes brimming with intelligence and sympathetic regard.

"No way I know of," the doctor answered, "though this case is intriguing. We need to examine it closely so that we can affect the process if possible."

In contrast to his guest, the doctor was meticulously neat from his carefully combed blond hair to his crisp white shirt and blue tie, and he said "intriguing" in a way that suggested true interest. His name Jean Saban was well-known in medical circles, and this case portended well, he thought, for a published study.

"I want to understand it as best I can, also," Jacques said, "I want to present it to my son so he can, also. I know he will have many questions."

"And do you think he is capable of understanding?" the doctor said. The same tumor that caused the growth hormone in giants to be produced in excess, the doctor was aware, had in most known cases slowed mental growth.

"Oh, yes! He is an intelligent child! That is his most striking characteristic, even more than his size."

"Well, Monsieur Girard, bring him with you next time you come, and I will answer his questions."

Jacques did return, and he and his son sat side by side, making it easy for the doctor to observe the father and son resemblance and interaction. Jacques was hunched again in a pose that made him seem in the midst of bowing, and his son sat in this same pose, peering out with gray eyes much like his father's.

Dr. Saban observed that Justin had the expected physical features of gigantism: overhanging brow, largeness of waist and hands, and spreading out of front teeth with gaps between them in the visible gums.

"There is a great deal happening to you," the doctor said to Justin. "How do you feel about these changes?"

"Well, it is just the idea of being a 'monstrosity'," the boy answered.

The doctor, who was expecting a simple reply, was

impressed by this remark.

“And where do you get this idea of monstrosity?”

“From Darwin.”

“You’ve been reading Darwin?”

“Just a piece in French.”

“Doctor, Justin is always reading books,” the father interjected, “and he has a way of taking a particular word and turning it over in his mind. It is one of the chief things about him.”

“And is monstrosity one of these words?”

“Oh, yes,” the father responded.

“Why this word, Justin?” the doctor asked.

“Just the thought of being out of place,” the boy replied.

“I don’t want to be.” And he went on that, as he understood his reading, there was an elaborate natural design that he would be outside of.

By the time the interview had completed, Dr. Saban had formed the conclusion that the boy was an amazing case in that he seemed adversely affected by the disease in all the expected ways of physical appearance while in his intellectual faculties he had seemingly been affected in a positive manner. Then there was his obsession of repeating words, which made the boy seem in need of psychological assistance, but the doctor had already formed the opinion that this father and son would reject such an intrusion into their intense and private bond.

“Well, it is a terrible thing, I know,” Jacques said as he and Justin walked from the doctor’s office that day. “But it is not a death penalty, Justin. It has not affected your mind, and perhaps never will, I trust, because I have prayed and prayed to God! I trust in God, Justin, I must say, though I know you sometimes have your doubts in your earnest searching. As do I also, I admit, but in the final analysis I trust in God, and so I think God will allow you to remain clear-minded for your other tasks.”

Here, immediately, in the configuration this man and boy displayed, as they walked down the road, their unusual closeness was obvious to any intelligent observer. Both were dressed in khaki pants and loosely-fitting work shirts secured

with wide leather belts, like fish mongers in the town square. Their heads,—in shape, as viewed from behind,—looked much like one another, distinguished by their manes of unruly, jaggedly cut hair (though Jacques was bald on top, as earlier described). Their movement was clumsy as they tromped in leather boots, swaying from side to side; and most of the time their heads were inclined towards one another as they exchanged energetic remarks and gestured back and forth. Now and then one of them or both together would gesture with palms upward as though to say, “Well, that is a puzzle! How could anyone know?”

“What tasks?” The boy asked, never losing the thread of his father’s remarks.

“The tasks of your life, your vocation.”

”I just know, Father, that up to now I have been a grand person, at least in my own imagination. But now my life is set out for me! I will be a monstrosity!”

There was that word again. In the doctor’s office, the father’s face had been unchanging and focused on every word the doctor had said. Now the face with its shining eyes came to life with the new challenge Jacques foresaw of how could he protect his vulnerable son in his predicted transformation into giantness.

It was late afternoon when the Girard’s saw the gravel road to their village curving down into a valley where were a roofless bridge spanning the river and a cluster of buildings situated around a church of medieval design. Drawing closer, they could see the red tile roof of the cottage in which they lived, which was so near the church, and of such similar stone construction, that it appeared to be on the church grounds. The church was constructed of immense blocks of granite with central belltower jutting about a third of its height above the highest point of the roof.

On the east side of the church the road led between other stone buildings to the Girard’s own cottage. It was unique in that it was on the side of the hill adjacent to the church with one of its two enclosures higher on the hill than the other, which had been added on later, and yet the roofs of both were at the same level. As might have been expected,

therefore, when the Girard's entered their cottage, they stepped into a split-level space with the upper area reached by an open stairway. The floor of this upper area, where father and son slept in separate beds separated by a curtain hung from the ceiling, was about six feet higher than the lower area, where were a fireplace hearth with a kettle on a hook and other fixtures used for cooking.

From here, the view out the western windows was of the side wall of the church, where were stained glass windows of immense interest to Jacques. Though he not made these windows himself, he had emulated them as examples of the "anonymous and communal" artistic ethic that he subscribed to, and by virtue of which he respected all art sincerely done. The town library, likewise a stone building, was also in view. The total scene could have been that of a medieval college, and such was the desire of this father and his son, because they were scholars that sought learning in the old way, out of a true desire for understanding. This, since the birth of the boy, had animated the great bond between them.

2

Jacques and Justin Girard,—the ever-watchful, tender-hearted father and his inquisitive, wide-eyed son,— lived in their own little world, a world that, as it appeared in their shared understanding, would have been impossible to re-create at any other time.

There was, first of all, the old church at the center of the town, an edifice that at no other moment in history, as seen through this mutual lens, could have been at once so full of meaning and so obsolete.

The roads of the town still radiated out from the old church, the artist and his son were aware, following still the medieval design, but traffic and interest no longer headed so certainly back to the church as in that bygone era. Along the wall of the church, visible from the spired windows of the Girard's cozy home, the hut-like stone cells that had once housed the anchorites looked as austere as in those medieval times, but no saints peered anymore from the slits through which those renunciates had received their frugal meals.

More than many of those who lived around them,—more even than the priests and nuns, and other artisans like Jacques aligned with the church,—the Girard's knew these facts because they were lovers of church history, and, ironically, lovers, also, of the brave, new ideas by which that history had been re-cast in a modern light.

Early in his boyhood, Justin had become aware of the irrelevance of the church through observing how devoutly his father had produced the window images that once might have inspired many with religious meaning, but which were now regarded as mere designs. He had noted also how his father had persisted in reading everything that refuted his religious views, while asserting to his son that nonetheless he “believed,” (as his father explained himself in his humble manner, never assuming his ideas had value beyond the place they occupied in his private searching).

The son, also, by temperament and disposition, was inclined to ponder and remark on matters of this kind, and Jacques had listened to his son's remarks and had given them great importance, inclined as he was to see signs and harbingers everywhere and to regard the boy as destined for greatness.

Such has been the case, as the old artist has perceived it, from the birth of the boy and even before. That was another part of their story, father and son. How it had happened,—that he had even had a son, after years of being single,—Jacques often wondered, looking back. He had been already 50 years old, and, with his bald pate on top his crazy hair, and his not so dashing form, he had not been an even match for a woman with the physical allure of the boy's future mother. She had been then almost two decades younger than Jacques, in her early 30's, with exquisite dark features and the shapely form that her training as an aerialist had earned her. Not a match at all, but she had been as much an artist of space and motion as had he of two-dimensional depictions, and she had seen that quality in his window designs and in his expressive face glowing with visions.

Then, just months after the boy's birth, she had left. Heartbroken, Jacques had gone looking for her, leaving the

boy with the priests, and two weeks later he had found her, injured from a fall in an act. He had not seen her fall, but he had heard her say again she loved him.

“I couldn’t live without my old world,” she had told him. “Jacques, forgive me, I meant to return.”

Soon later she had died.

After that Jacques had returned to his home and settled in with his marvelous child in a new situation in which the loss of the mother persisted with epic significance. A portrait of her done by Jacques hung like an icon on the wall between the windows that looked out to the church.

Father and son were at this time both sleeping in the upper room of the two-room house, as earlier described, with a curtain hung from the ceiling creating a small bedroom for the boy and a larger room where were the father’s larger bed, with his black-and-white pen drawings and his oil-painted or chalk-drawn sketches of future works stacked by the bench shared by both father and son. The son, too, even as a child of 3 years of age, had his drawings there, stacked like those of his father,—many, many drawings because Justin was never satisfied with what he had done,— and Justin kept the curtain at the head of his bed pulled back so that he could see the spired windows of the church flickering with candle light.

Father and son often talked from their respective rooms, and then, around the age of 5, Justin started to be afraid of being alone in the dark, and he would come running across to jump on his father’s chest, saying, “You are my father! I love my father!”

To which the old man would reply in his sweet voice: “And you are my son, little Justin! You are my treasure, little Justin! You are my gift from God!”

Here, too, in this setting, the boy, piece by piece, had disclosed his personality with its precocious attentiveness and obsessive questioning about reality. From the start, the boy had been drawn to books that he identified as important in the adult world, and these books he seldom read alone but always with his father and with no one else.

As in his artwork, the boy was never satisfied with his

own reading, an attitude verging on obsession, for he read many sections of books over and over, and such was the case with individual sentences, also. What was reading, he asked himself, how did he know that he had understood what he had read? Gradually this attitude extended to other things such as to signs passed on the road when he and his father were walking. What had that last sign really said, he often inquired as he doubled back to look at the sign a second time.

So it had gone until the year when Justin was 13 when the first signs of giantness had presented. Then, following his visit to Dr. Saban for medical guidance, Justin went with his father to seek spiritual guidance from the rector of the church visible from the Girard's windows.

At once, the boy brought up the idea of monstrosity that he had described to the doctor.

"Well, this book by Charles Darwin is not a book for a child," the priest admonished. "Why do you dwell on this, Justin?"

"Because it brings up the question of whether God's hand is in it at all, and, if not..."

"Justin, my son," the priest pronounced, "God paints the markings on every sparrow's wings, and thereby He displays His amazing complexity and loving attention to detail. God has made your giantness. But why, I don't know."

Later the boy expressed his turbulent thoughts about this same matter at great length to his father, as the two of them sat in the living room of their home with the fire burning in the fireplace. The father would recall for many years this interaction because it was the first time he really saw how the emerging giantness was affecting his son's physical appearance. Justin sat on the double bench required for his growing mid-section, clenching his hands into enormous fists. His face had become larger. His eyebrows seemed to never stop scowling along the protruding line of his brow, and yet the good will and idealism still shone in his bright boyish eyes,

"The way I understand it, Father," Justin ventured, "a "monstrosity is an aberration. It is something not meant to

be. Life is replicating in order to produce new, good creatures, but, in this case, it has gone wrong...”

Then came the boy’s 14th birthday, celebrated by a little group of clergy and artists in the courtyard behind the church, and there the father saw a white pigeon, a pure white pigeon, on the tile roof of the apse. Like the white dove that had appeared above John the Bapstist and Jesus Christ by the Jordan River, Jacques thought, though he reassured himself that certainly he did not place his son on that level; still the white bird was a good omen.

On this occasion, the father took his son into a side aisle of the church where he had just completed his window depicting the boy David and the giant Goliath. Against a mosaic of dark and light blue pieces of glass, beside which, in purple, the mountains were depicted that Goliath had descended from for the fight, a bearded face of God was shown,—a face notably kind in appearance, and looking concerned,— behind the main scene depicting David, sling in hand, alongside the fallen Goliath, only not in a sinister posture, either, as if about to slay him, but bent forward with compassion, a yellow tear on his cheek, as he offered the giant some kind of drink in a gourd.

The boy said nothing as he gazed at this and listened to his father’s remarks: “You are now 14, my son, and I am so proud of you! I feel in my heart that next year will be a great year for you, Justin, a year in which you come into your greatness!”

As for the old artist himself, as he was falling asleep that night, he recalled how important his son had been to him throughout these formative years and how he had said to him: “You are my little Justin, my gift from God.”

3

For “Justin the Giant,” as he was being called by those who knew him, (and by an ever increasing number who had merely heard of him,) that year when he was 14 was a year of prodigious growth and the year of his first shaming.

In that year, also, when he was 14, and so observant of his own condition, Justin Girard presented with another

astounding departure from the usual clinical picture for giants: he had a normal interest in girls and sex, or maybe even an exaggerated interest,—an interest highly unusual for a giant, since, in all other known cases, the tumor-caused changes in the brain had suppressed sexual development. Related to this, apparently, based on his own reports, Justin was experiencing a magnified perception of everything he encountered through his senses.

“It is a condition of acute sensibility,” the eminent Dr. Jean Saban observed in his dry, exact manner, “‘Giant sensibility,’ to put it in context, and maybe it is brought on and magnified by self-containment, Justin, since you are alone in your uniqueness.”

“Giant sensibility”—it was a new term that Justin took into his mind and began to turn around as he had done with the term “monstrosity.” He knew at once exactly what the doctor was referring to, as he had lately been increasingly aware of this faculty of sensual perception gaining power within him, with the result that his experience of the people and places in his life had become ever more disturbing and sometimes even painful, due to feeling more aware of reality while at the same time more detached from it because of its increasing strangeness.

Justin’s body was changing, also, in consort with these perceptual changes. His boyish face was larger because his entire body was larger, but it was also proportionately larger with respect to his shoulders and the rest of his body. His hands, compared to the proportionate size of normal hands on a normal body, were also larger, lacking the elegance of his father’s artistic hands. His hands were as thick and broad across as hams. His flat, wide feet required shoes twice as big as normal shoes. Despite his efforts to move at a normal gait, he clunked along with a comical motion.

The boy giant observed evidence each day of the “giant sensibility” that the doctor had announced. Human faces and facial expressions loomed up with added meaning, as he passed through the village, seeming to express contempt or ridicule, while common objects like weeds on the side of the road, or even trash,—for example, a discarded bottle he

came upon,—throbbed with the immanence of a sculpture and shone with silent beauty he had not noticed before.

“The reason for this, Justin,” the father explained in his humble, fervent manner after listening to his son’s account, “is ‘the godhead in every object’. In the discarded bottle, as much as in a church, God is present. Not alongside the bottle, but in it. All of God is in the bottle, no less than in the Sacrament. For myself, I can only say I sense this presence in every object I look at with full attention. And I think that is why they say,—I heard this once,—‘attentiveness is the greatest prayer.’ You will see this presence, Justin, when you create your own art. I know that you will! You will express this attentiveness! But, for now, you must make yourself a part of life, Justin, whatever may be the pain of that! You must have courage, Justin!”

“The godhead in every object. Attentiveness is the greatest prayer,” the boy giant repeated as he walked through the village alone, and often he went out into the public areas, interacting clumsily with anyone who would engage with him at all, because it seemed now that the more of a giant he became, the more lonely and cut off from others he became, also, despite all of his efforts to just be normal.

Sometimes, also, father and son talked about the boy’s mother, on the rare times when they talked at all about the feminine world,—and it was always on an elevated level, never disrespected with crudity or even with any practical or common sense comprehension,—“Your mother and I, we shared our sense of the artistic world. Though her art was motion, sketched out in space, while my art was drawing, sketched on a flat surface. You, when you reach your maturity, will absorb that, also.

“Oh, I believe that you will, Justin! There is something in you, something grand, my son, waiting to come out when your time has come!”

Then came the village spring dance, attended by all, and Justin Girard, with trepidation, determined to act like a normal person, entered the square alone to the notice of all, thinking that this was an occasion such as he needed to endure to break out of his loneliness.

For much of the time he sat hardly speaking to anyone and watching the girls dancing until a particular girl who made him nearly speechless came over to him. She was a bright-faced, healthy-looking girl 14 years of age, same as he, with brown hair and brown eyes, and, most strikingly, long slender, shapely legs and arms, and high, perky breasts upon which the nipples stuck out beneath her blouse. All the boys were after her, from her own age up to the age of young men, and she smiled at everyone, never seemed vain, and was nice to everyone, as she was to Justin also, in her democratic way.

This girl, too, had a further powerful effect on Justin because her dark eyes and hair, though not matching exactly the dark hair and eyes shown in the portrait of his mother that hung in the Girard home on the wall looking out to the church, were close enough in resemblance for Justin to think that this girl was of the type of his mother's people. He didn't know that for sure; he just suspected it, but that was still enough to establish a connection going back in his mind to these people who had been his people, also.

He saw her bouncing across to him; she often seemed at the point of skipping or whirling, though not in show, it appeared, but from her delight in life.

"I know your name is Justin," she said.

"Yes," was all he could answer as he bowed, his head bent low with the bushy, frowning almost eyebrows seeming pushed lower still in anger, though everyone knew that he was seldom angry. His feet felt wide and flat against the brick of the courtyard as in fact they were.

Then the call for a dance came around, and there he was directly in front of her. She took his hands and guided him toward the center of the plaza, while he surveyed around him at the faces and eyes, amidst which were bodies rising up to join the dance. Not knowing how to escape, he let himself be drawn into the circle, as she said, "My name is Renee."

Of course, the boy giant was aware of that. He had long before noticed the beauty of her lean, energetic form. It was a joyous dance, exuberant and intoxicating. He swayed into it on his flat feet and allowed Renee to turn him around,

never mocking him, so far as he could determine. She was wearing a full-skirted dress and, when she whirled, the arc of its travel revealed her shapely legs right up to the area so mysterious to his boy's mind, the area that he had never seen.

Renee's hips were swaying. He felt overwhelmed. He could hardly believe how he was stomping his clunky shoes on the brick surface of the plaza, making a clunk-clunk noise in time with the music as he spun around. "How absurd I must look," he told himself as he held his immense hands out to both sides, while scrutinizing the faces around him, once the faces of friends, but now the inscrutable faces of former friends who seemed amused by him or contemptuous of his giantness.

And so it went. A single dance, and then Renee with her flushed face and her ever pleasant smile, directed to anyone who looked at her, was swept away, though in withdrawing she called out in her sweet voice, "That was real nice, Justin. We can dance again some other time."

After the dance and festivities were over, with memories of his movement reverberating in his mind, Justin walked down a nearby street to a depot where he picked up art supplies sent to his father. From the dark alley there by the depot, he overheard a conversation then seized his complete attention,

"Well, Renee, now is Justin your sweetheart?"

"He is a nice boy. And he is only a boy," she said. "But how could Justin be my sweetheart? I would be looking way up in the sky!"

"Big as he is," he heard someone say, a playful feminine voice, amidst laughter, "think of you know what!"

"Don't make fun of him," he heard the reply from Renee in a soft, concerned tone.

"There is a point where big becomes ugly," another voice said,

Justin grasped in a flash the implication of this not truly mean, but still inconsiderate, banter. Renee had stated clearly that she could never accept him as a romantic partner, and she had said just as clearly that her reason for regarding him

as unacceptable was his size. True, in her admonishment of the girl who had made fun of him, there had been regard for his feelings. Yet, as Justin had feared, he had been shoved aside for being a monstrosity.

4

“There is a point where big becomes ugly,” Justin kept repeating in his mind in the days and weeks after his public dance.

The truth was he had fondled himself sometimes, Justin acknowledged, and thereby had gotten pleasure from his own body. The truth was he had done so while imagining himself with Renee. Now he understood that, as she had implied, when forced into stating how impossible he would be as a partner because of his size, his sex was a monstrosity like the rest of him. It was the result of a natural design gone awry, as he had averred to the doctor and priest. To think he had hidden away to demean himself like that! He felt such shame!

Yet was it not true that the dance itself had been good? He had never felt such joy as in those moments of whirling around, with Renee looking at him as if she had liked being with him. The dance in itself had been good! What had been bad, he decided, was that people had recognized that he was a monstrosity and had made fun of him because of a condition he could not escape.

His loyal father, finding him in such an enduring mood and not knowing the exact reason for it, sought his son out, wherever he was, in an effort to break the spell of whatever was afflicting him. Then, finally, he asked one of his son’s former friends and heard about the dance and how Justin had danced in such a manner that the others had laughed at him. This was how the other boy had described it, that Justin had played the fool.

Often in the evening, down through the years, the father and son had gone on walks on a path that followed the river just across from the town. From that path, where it began near the town bridge, the central bell tower of the church could be seen, but, further along the path, the trees were

thicker on both sides and the town could no longer be seen.

Here often lately the father found Justin walking with his head bent down, and he would join in with Justin on the path, trying with all his might to find some hope that he could present to his son. But he felt as if he and his son were in a tunnel of darkness that pressed down upon them.

Wherever they turned, the gloom of the boy's disconsolate mood was there, and it seemed to the father at such moments that there was no route of escape as he sought in a high, plaintive tone to present to his son some consideration that he had seized from mid-air to dispel the dark mood.

"Do you remember the face of God that I showed in my window of David and Goliath?" the father asked in such an effort to point to a cause of hope.

"Yes, of course," Justin replied.

"It is not the face of God of the Old Testament, Justin. God never showed His face in that time. Even Moses was told to look away when God passed by. This face in the window is the face of Jesus Christ. In Christ, we see the loving face of God."

"Father, you are such a good man," the son answered. "You are a saint maybe. But the face of God? That He even has a face is an antique notion."

"Oh, yes, I know that, Justin! It is an antique notion! A vision of reality rooted in the past! And, literally, it does not make sense, this or any such vision. But, somehow, in my intellect and in my heart,—in my whole being, Justin!—I know that, because of our visions, reality makes sense. This is our vocation, our human task, to make it make sense! Even God, I suspect, is struggling to get it right. That is why God sent Jesus,— I humbly believe this, Lord, forgive me if I speak in pride!—to correct the error of His former severity."

"You speak always of religion, and I know it is because you are so devout, Father," Justin said. "But I ask myself a question, and I can no longer find an answer."

"What is this question?"

"Do I even have a soul?"

"Do you have a soul? Justin, my son, don't throw away the grandness inside you! Let me try again to make myself

clear! The way I look upon it, all I am good for is my art, and I know my art is flawed, but I believe that my soul is in my flawed art and in my flawed thinking. Because I am always trying, Justin. Yes, in some strange way, my son, it is the act of trying that gives me a soul! It is my attitude that I accept reality as it is because I see the beauty everywhere I have told you about. Have you ever thought about that, Justin? To accept life as it is,—beyond our control, regardless of who or what has made it,—just to accept it, is somehow a noble act! It is a noble act!” the old man cried, taken up with the hope of this idea. “And by doing this noble act, we become noble ourselves! I see this as true, my son, and I want you to see it! With or without God,—and for myself I do believe in God, I must tell you, to set the case right!—but, with or without God, to accept and keep trying is a noble act! And if God is a person, and a good person, and a good artist,—the best of artists, as He must be,—then He sees the nobility even as we see it! It is a matter of acceptance! We must accept. Accept that we doubt, accept that we err, and God,—if He exists!—can accept,—like an artist, too,—that sometimes even He has not been perfect... Have you ever thought of that?”

“God is by definition perfect,” the son replied.

“Yes, I know! But why then are you and I not perfect, whom He made, and who want so much to act correctly? Maybe God wants to be noble enough to accept his own imperfection.”

“God wants to be noble?”

“Maybe God looked out one day and realized that, like a good artist,—like the best of artists!—He has fallen short.”

“God has fallen short?”

“Did Christ not say, ‘My Father works even until now and I work’? He says, in other words, that His and His Father’s work is not done... But, as for us, Justin, all we can do is accept! Accept! And accept what may come as we keep trying, sometimes without encouragement, or without others beside us, and maybe, also, while alone and unloved.

“I hope to God it will not be the case for you, Justin, but I cannot remain with you forever. You must accept and keep trying!”

The boy shuffled forward, seldom looking around. They were walking through a scene of glittering river, sunlit trees, and light-dappled flowers. But for Justin the sun never broke through, and Jacques remained in the same mood in his determination to lead his son out of it.

The next day Justin went off alone and the father was consumed with worry that his son had given up and had done himself harm. But where could he be? Where could a giant hide and be undetected? It turned out Justin was in the middle of the church below the highest arches, In mid-week, it was the most isolated place in the village, as no one ever went there.

Jacques attempted to converse with his son, but Justin would not reply. For more than two months, he remained seated in the middle of the church, and remained there even when the usual scattering of people attended Sunday mass. Everyone was soon aware of his silent hulking form in the middle of the church, with the stained glass window visible that his father had created depicting David and Goliath.

Justin grew every day like the fabled corn that squeaks as it inches up in plain view. His stomach had increased in size, though he looked more like a balloon than a fat person. His bushy brow ridge jutted forward more, above his still boyish but more troubled eyes.

He appeared to never stop glowering. His upper teeth had swung outward in his puffy gums, buck tooth fashion, overlapping his lower teeth. His upper lip had been pushed by that into an upward curl.

Then one day toward evening Jacques saw the boy giant emerging from the front door of the church and he watched him as he lumbered down the path like a circus bear into the front door of the Girard cottage where the father was sitting in the upper level on the top of the stairs between the two levels of the building.

Justin came in and stood in the lower room, so large by this time that his head touched the beams that supported the roof. "I have decided to accept, Father, though I don't know if anyone hears me but you," he declared, and then he hung down his immense head, clasped together his great hands,

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and wept, with his enormous shoulders shaking, as he felt, as never before, the weight of his giantness.

“I accept!”

Brought down then by the burden of his massive frame, Justin Girard crumbled into his father’s harboring arms while the old man said again and again in his soft, plaintive, sweet voice: “You are a true giant, little Justin! You are my giant, little Justin! You are a giant in your soul!”