



*Photo by Kate King*

# Copper Beeches

By Rogan Wolf

In Memory of Pat Boyden

## If I am already broken

If I am already broken  
then I *can* be infinitely *light*

and need not fear  
the loss of carapace,  
or ties, or mooring rope.

If I am already broken  
I can travel far, untraceable,  
and I'm almost impossible to stop.

If I am already broken  
I am *almost* unbreakable

and like a dandelion seed  
almost impossible to stop.

*Rogan Wolf*  
*May 2011*

## White Owl by Daylight

From gaunt woods I saw  
crows cruising the bare furrows  
stoop on a white owl

The white sky tightens  
holes appear and one by one  
become night all round

Is it these homing  
in crows, or for being caught out,  
the owl I should blame ?

Earth becomes all bare  
black lines offering nothing  
but a broken fall.

Who has stilled the song  
I heard when owl abiding  
ranged his palaces ?

A breast feather falls  
and fades into the landscape -  
the landscape takes flight.

*Rogan Wolf  
December 1990*

## Dorset Tutorials

...I learned the Spring song of the chaffinch –  
which starts on a high note,  
eases downward  
step by step,  
pauses at low bass,  
then swiftly trips out  
on a last high flourish  
(each routine  
subtly unique,  
no small singer quite the same....)  
The song was a shaft of light through storm  
an expression of joy through desolation....

...Each day I'd retreat for lunch  
to the calving house -  
its floor packed deep  
with straw and cow-shit.  
It took up the whole lower side of the old  
farmyard square, long and airy.  
Swallows nesting in the corners  
looped at intervals  
through the broken window panes.  
Hundreds of spiders had grown old here,  
their webs a memorial  
to dire little lives  
long since made complete.  
Old railings. Old bales.  
Great Friesan ladies, dirty black and white,  
paced the straw in early labour  
or licked a young one, trailing  
still their after-birth.  
Rustlings in the silence.  
Plain sandwiches. A hard boiled egg...

...And my Uncle John taught me  
how to dig holes. High on the downs  
a new dairy was on the way.  
There, under the sky-lark  
I spent a morning scooping chalk  
and blistering both my hands  
in the fashioning of a shaft  
cone-shaped. He kept his voice level  
and reminded me the walls had to be sheer  
not sloping  
the area rectangular  
not roundish  
and the floor flat  
not cone-shaped.  
It took two days  
at the end of which we hated each other  
and the shaft was perfect...

...Two copper beeches  
in front of the farmhouse  
auburn monoliths  
a landmark for miles -  
one in particular I often climbed  
and rode like a dragon-master  
swinging easily on the wind  
scanning the fields.  
And do I remember  
a small boy poised on the branch  
beside me, wild and elfin-featured  
an adopted heir of all this complexity  
its beauty, sorrow, brilliance and echoes... ?

*Rogan Wolf*  
October 2005

## The Joy of My Uncle

Nowadays, my uncle  
wears white whiskers -  
and seems actually benign.  
His eyes twinkle in their new pouches  
and he even makes jokes.  
When we said goodbye last time  
we hugged each other, we clung.  
Love was at play. Love newly unashamed.

Perhaps it does get easier  
once you're old. Twenty years ago,  
aghast to be the age where I now flounder,  
he was terrifying, hating  
not being young any more,  
his fine mind slicing at everyone round him  
like a flying razor blade.

He could never rest. Letting go  
meant losing time. He was at odds  
with this pouring away  
of time, coiled against it.  
He was coiled against  
everything. All at war.

But somehow the war is over now  
and my uncle at peace  
is waiting to be de-mobbed.  
I don't understand this joy  
of resignation in him.  
I can't believe some new philosophy  
has dropped answers in his aged lap  
like Christmas presents out of the cold blue.  
He is far too clever for neat answers.

Something has simply given way.  
He has been exhausted into joy.

Let the same exhaustion, please,  
inflict itself, in time, on me.

*Rogan Wolf*  
*January 2001*

## A Roman Engineer surveys the Downs

He stands on a ridge, a few miles inland.  
Lush pasture close-cropped. Laden grey skies.

He throws his mind in a clean line  
across the wide valley, its bunched cattle,

its burial mounds of bright chalk. He will string  
ridge to ridge with his narrow cast of stone.

It will run straight across the green folds,  
the slow undulations,

pressed deep, stone by stone.  
He grips the young land,

its soft arms and shoulders.  
Cities will be born

of this binding of line and curve.

*Rogan Wolf*  
*Spring 2014*



# Homecoming

It's as if the landscape  
gathers you into its arms  
making you  
not just welcome here  
but whole.

It has reached out and found  
you where you alone  
could not. You are never lost  
among these contours.

They map your interior.  
You are discovered here.

*Rogan Wolf*  
*April 20<sup>th</sup> 2016*

## Dorset in View

From above, this region is a quilt  
of all colours, covering a vast  
and restless sleeper ; each week  
the colours have shifted, wrapped  
in season. No pause here. No holding still.  
The tractor driver  
spends all the daylight hours  
and more, lonely in his cab, changing  
a field's colour inch by inch, precisely  
row by row. A young deer, ears up and pointed,  
grazes watchfully nearby, safest  
at centre, sharply in view.

*Rogan Wolf*  
*October 2016*

## Presidential Election Night, November 2016

All night, the great tree raged outside.

It wanted to give way to the wind, but could not.

It wanted to fly over the hill on the wind's crest

lashing our house as it passed,

smashing the roof, bursting each window.

What agony to be pinned like this, bound by the feet,

earth-bound by tendon, tendril, a century

of rooting down. An owl sounded just before dawn,

quavery, tentative. From the far distance

came answer, quietly. Then stillness and first light.

*Rogan Wolf*

## Pat Presiding

She held court in the kitchen  
brandishing that Players cigarette  
and she made the calf house  
(converted from a hen business)  
elegant with her neat wellies  
carelessly pressed on.  
She was fiery and sharp-witted  
and read book after book  
and every morning reached  
for a gin at 11.30 sharp,  
pouring it each time  
with the same wry joke,  
and she feasted the chaffin  
and fought the rook  
and knew all the stories  
of the neighbourhood.  
She flamed and glittered  
among that wonderful furniture  
of dark, old wood.

*Rogan Wolf  
February 2017*

## Copper Beeches

The tree's a harp, plucked  
and pulled by the winds, a music  
fierce and royal. The word "sough"  
does not sing enough. The tree's true  
voice is double bass, a thousand basses  
in celebration ; it is ocean ramping  
through gravel on the shore. Two  
copper beech trees stand proud  
in a Dorset valley I know. Often  
when young I climbed into the saddle  
of one and then higher, to sway  
in its mane. We rode the valley together  
this beech and I, shy squire  
on majestic stallion.

But then for years  
my noble lady would fret  
that, some day, a perfect storm  
would fling the beeches  
onto the Chebbard roof, cleaving  
the house wide open.

At last that storm arrived  
but she climbed upon it  
as if it were a springtime breeze,  
and they glided away, leaving  
the beeches rock solid  
in their places, grieving.

*Rogan Wolf*  
*April 2017*