



My Dark Angel

Rogan Wolf

The illustration of Jacob wrestling with the angel is from a drawing by Gustave Doré (1832-1883), later engraved by C. Laplante.

Genesis 32 24-31

And Jacob was left alone ; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day.

And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh ; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.

And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.

And he said unto him, What is thy name ? And he said, Jacob.

And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel : for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed.

And Jacob asked him, and said, Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And he said,

Wherefore is it that thou dost ask after my name ? And he blessed him there.

And Jacob called the name of the place Peniel ; for I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved.

And as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh.

(Authorised version)

Although in this passage from Genesis, Jacob is described as having wrestled with "a man," he himself refers to his adversary as God. The same incident is referred to in the Book of Hosea (chapter 12, verse 4). There, Jacob's adversary is described as an angel.

Doing Life

I am a warehouse of faces
weary performances.

They betray me to the dark.
Each new mask

I pick from the store
shatters my mirror.

Who made that face ?
I ask. Whose voice was that

pouring forth just now
from lips surely not mine ?

I am a hole in a mountain.
I am a hidden hoard of gold

deep in a mountain.
I am a lost dream

doing life
under a mountain.

Rogan Wolf
October 2009

Sightings

I can say this with real pride :
no one but I
throws my shadow.

I call it my under-self, my field
of operation. I cannot
call it home.

I glimpse it sometimes, usually at night,
leaping the wet rocks
as the tall seas break and pursue ;

or poised for a moment on a split tree trunk
calm after that stoop for eternity
out of the wind, the clutch of the mist ;

or sidling with gleeful expertise
between the ranks of the juggernauts -
that whole brutal caravan.

There is no holding it
no shaping nor naming of it ;
it is my best hope

the one element
that cannot be harmed
cannot be reduced.

All risk is survivable
and all manner of disaster
so long as my shadow plays.

It holds my true life
and will outlive me.
It will live forever.

Rogan Wolf
July 1993

Coming To

In anger, I climbed
a sheer rock-face without knowing
its particular worn character, or its height,
or my own strength, or whether
the top would give passage to hand and foot,
and suddenly was simply stuck and watched
myself suspended there sixty foot up
my legs beginning to tremble with this exercise
of holding on
and the sharp-edged rock-floor below
waiting to take to itself
the scattered parts of my spine
and the scattered pieces of my skull
and at last I realised – this
is me and here
and now and nothing remains
for me except what I
now make happen and
terror flooding my system
I mounted that final pitch
of the sheer rock face
as if it were a flight of stairs.

Rogan Wolf
August 2006

Song of Perseus

I came to see you
I came alone
I came to free you
from your dark sacrifice
lashed to a stone.

I came to see you
I came alone
I came to grieve with you
and atone.

I came to sing to you
like wind to stone
I came to sing with you
and atone.

I came
and be-came
so much older now
and still the same.

I came to sing to you
like wind to reed
and bring to you
my seed.

I came to see you
I came alone
I came to free you
from your dark sacrifice
lashed to a stone.

Rogan Wolf
August 2006

The dark angel of my dream

The dark angel of my dream
was dreadfully beautiful

lithe and invincible
and faceless

sans eyes sans mouth
his head like a smooth bulb

dark and gleaming.
I knew I could not hope

to escape and, yes,
here he comes pouring

up the stone steps
by the sea-shore, the waves

wild behind him,
straight up at me

outwitting me without effort
in our life-long race

and glorious in his searing energy.
I submit, powerless and rapt

as the lipless angel kisses me
taking my face.

Rogan Wolf
November 2011

Skirmishes with the gods

She told me that storms
had scattered all her boundaries
and events just tore through her
without noticing.

She yearned to act,
to impress herself
on the Furies, to take hold
of something

but her nature, her schooling,
the massed upholders of her time -
they stood against her
and she yielded.

A life in the shadow
of others' needs
leaves nothing to spare
for skirmishes with the gods.

So she didn't know
as she waited to die
if anyone
knew who she was.

Rogan Wolf
October 2002

Where the Rider Sits

(with thanks to the late Ursula LeGuin for the dragon)

I was driving south-west along the motorway
when the downs to my left
suddenly heaved up
and became a dragon
poised to hurl itself into the day.
Smoke drifted from one of its nostrils.
Steely scales glittered
on a tightening flank.

I came successfully to rest
on the tarmac verge and -
avoiding that vast hilarious eye -
rushed into the fields, screaming :
“Wait ! *Wait* !
That place upon your shoulder
where sometimes you let a rider sit -
You, my dragon !? I, your rider !?”

*Rogan Wolf
December 2005*

On the shoulders of the Worm

“I’m proud of you,” the angel said.

“You fought for a hearing

then sang in style from the shoulders

of a creature of fire.

You’re coming on.”

I caught my breath.

I’d been counting bruises – abashed yet again

by cliffs which permit no beaching

by platforms which turn

into pits. But yes, he was right :

at 65 I had bridged a chasm

and breathed from between the wings of making

words of redemptive fire.

Rogan Wolf
November 2012

The Dark Sky

All your life you hid behind walls
or manoeuvred yourself out of the reckoning.
You gazed at the world in horror
under the dark sky.

You hid so well
the light almost missed you
and left you for dead as it blazed its trail
through the dying trees.

But suddenly it turned and you met.
“Hail, stranger !” you cried
to the voracious savage white light.
“I have found you. Consume me.”

Rogan Wolf
November 2009

I Remember how I sat

I even remember how I sat.
I'd not been conscious of my bones before
except when they broke.
Everything in my world
was either in shreds
or seeking to shred me.
And a cold wind whistled through
my veins and around all
my corners. Even my ground
had slipped from me.
I hung and flickered
like a flame without fuel.

And he said, you sit so fraught
in your carapace of skin,
straining for answers
straining with a dark angel for resolution.
Save yourself, my friend. Breathe easy.
Take pleasure in your skin.
The insoluble
will continue on its way.
Be still in perfect readiness
for opportune events.
There's nothing better.
There's nothing else.

Rogan Wolf
May 2017

My way to you

I have forced a path through to your door
with no direction or address.

Had there been a road to this place
I would never have found you.

It has taken a life-time
to make my way to you.
No lesser discharge
would have reached this far.

I never once
knew where I was going.
Now that I've got here
my disorientation is complete.

Here at your door
I find myself at last.
Here at your door
there is nothing left of me.

Rogan Wolf
December 2005