

THE WOLF IS BACK



ROBERT PRIEST

ILLUSTRATED BY JOAN KRYGSMAN

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WOLSAK
& WYNN

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FOR FRITH, MY LITTLE WOLFDRAAGON
- JOAN KRYGSMAN

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EMPATHY

In a mirror
In my brain
I can feel it
When you feel pain
That's empathy

The binding force
Of humanity
We share
Each other's sorrows
And our joys of course

In a mirror
Piece of me
I feel when you feel

Empathy

For friend and family
For all humanity
And animals too
And the land and the sea

Empathy

CLOUD CANOPY

Come climb with me
To the top of the tree
We'll walk through the mist
Of the cloud canopy
There's a million-voiced chorus
Squawks, chitters and cheeps
From the myriad creatures
Who slither and leap
In the heat and the rustle
Of the green-leaved sea
Where the clouds meet the forest
In the cloud canopy

There are myna birds, beetles
Little mammals and moths
Look – down-hanging fruit
Or maybe they're sloths
Hear tweeters and leapers
As butterflies glide
Past webs full of insects
Little chicks side by side
All peeping and shrieking
Full of natural glee
In the ten thousand treetops
Of the cloud canopy

Who could decipher
These songs and these cries
Are they signal vibrations
Or breeze lullabies
Such buzzing and honking
Such ripples and creaks
As the nuts fall so easy
In long toucan beaks
There's parrots and quetzals
In the high greenery
Where the clouds meet the treetops
In the cloud canopy

Carbon dioxide –
The leaves breathe it in
They breathe out and change it
It's now oxygen
They're the lungs of the planet
Some beasts don't come down
Like most of the sunlight
They never touch ground
The monkeys keep swinging
Through the humidity
Where the clouds meet the forest
In the cloud canopy

And the rain when it falls
Doesn't just spill free
The roots drink it in
It goes back up the tree
Where the leaves hold it out
To the sky again
Till it fills up the clouds
And down comes the rain
The trees feed the clouds
And the clouds feed the trees
Where the clouds meet the forest
In the cloud canopy

Round go the cycles
Perpetually
Soil, cloud and creatures
In strange harmony
It's a system it's a circle
It's an ecology
Where the treetops meet the treetops
In the cloud canopy

THE CANOPY BELOW

The darker canopy is the one down below
Under the soil where the tree roots go

More beings live here in a spoonful of ground
Than creatures in branches the whole forest round

Fungi and termites; bugs, ants and toads
Microbial larvae, worms, nematodes

Aerating, shifting, wriggling in runnels
So water can flow underground in the tunnels

Bacterial trillions and viruses toil
Symbiote nations transforming the soil

With catacombs spongelike so water expelled
From the clouds in the treetops is gathered and held

In mineral splendour, in alchemy strange
From waste to nutrition this kingdom of change

Keeps feeding the trees so the bark and the stem
And the leaves of the tree drop down to feed them

Under ground, over ground nutrients flow
A canopy high and a canopy low

A dark under-earth and a bright under-sky
Roots reaching downward as branches reach high

Rich with creation, teeming and rife
Reflecting each other in the mirror of life

WHERE ARE THE WOLVES

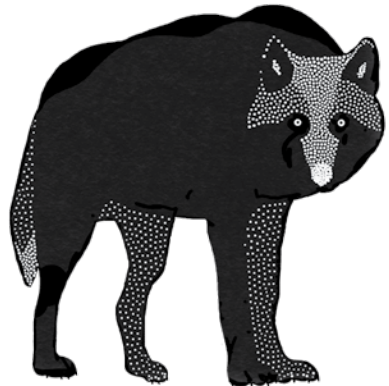
(Yellowstone National Park, 1994)

*O where are the wolves
The wolves of this place
Where are the wolves black and grey
No wolf's been here
For seventy years
They were killed or driven away*

*But where are the willows
The seedling willows
The old willows age and fall
No new willows grow
When the shoots start to show
The elk and the deer eat them all*

The elk and the deer
Who have no fear
They graze in the valley all day
They strip the ground bare
With no wolves there
No wolves to scare them away

*But what of the swamp
The dragonfly swamp
Where otter and muskrat play
There is no swamp
Beavers make swamps
From willow their lodges are made*



And the willows are few
For the deer eat the shoots
The deer who are unafraid
Who fear no wolf
For there are no wolves
No wolves to drive them away

*O show me the mice
And the rabbits now
The creatures who run in the shade
The mice and the rabbits
And the grass are gone
With the soil that is washing away*

The soil that was held by the roots
Of the willow and its shoots
The shoots the deer people ate
The deer, the deer who have no fear
Who multiply unafraid
There's no wolves here
To scare off the deer
For the wolves were driven away

*Oh where is the magpie
The raven and hawk
Where is the eagle I say
The eagles, ravens
And hawks are gone
With the mice who were their prey*

The mice who ran in the grass
The grass that grew in the soil
The soil that is washing away
Because there are no roots
For the elk people eat the shoots
The elk and the deer who have no fear
Who graze in the full light of day
From the valley on down to the riverside
With no wolf to scare them away

*Oh where is the river
So straight and deep
It's shallow and crooked today*
The soil grew so thin
The banks caved in
Now the banks are washing away

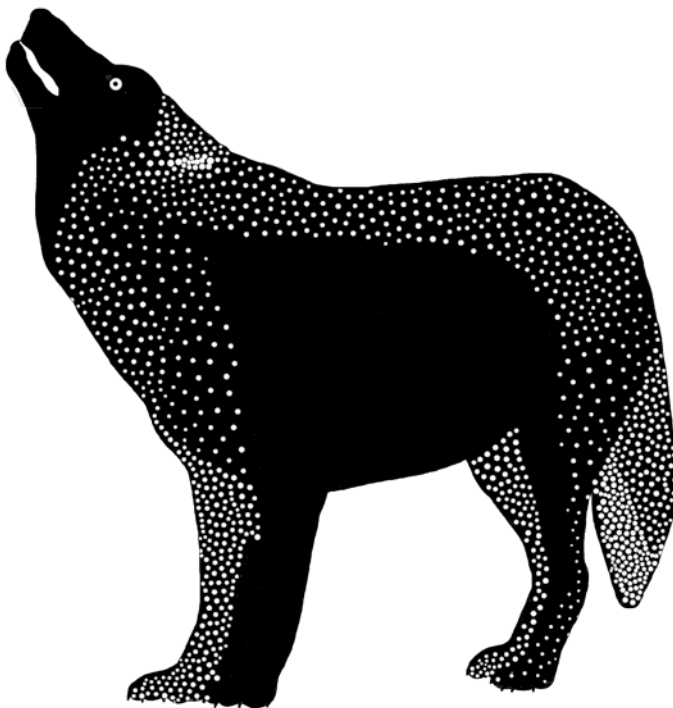
The banks that were held by the roots
Of the willows that grew from the shoots
The shoots that were eaten by deer
By elk and deer who have no fear
For the wolves have been driven away
They haven't been here
For seventy years
But I wish they'd come back today

RETURN OF THE WOLVES

(Yellowstone National Park, 1995–)

When the wolves came back
Fear came back
Fear came back to the deer
And the deer stopped grazing
In the valley so low
So the shoots of the willows started to grow
And berries on bushes began to show
The berries brought the bears to the gorges to gorge
And the bears scared the deer from the valleys even more
The willows grew higher year by year
They grew their shoots and spread their roots
So the ground was gripped
And less and less of the rich soil slipped
Into the river to be washed away
So the banks held firm. They are firm today
So the river is deeper and the otters play
In the pools by the dams that the beavers made
For now that the willows are growing high
And the willow roots hold the riverside
The beavers build lodges – they build lodges again
And the swamp is restored to the sun and the rain
The birds are nesting once more in the trees
The soil brings the flowers and the flowers bring bees
The bees bring the pollen that's nature's way
It's a great cascade of predator and prey

Now some nights when the moon's full round
You hear arise an ancient sound
Over bear and insect, fish and fowl
An awesome almost mystic howl
A lone wolf sings – or a whole pack
A-oooo! A-ooooooooooooh!
The wolf is back



DOGKIND

I

Through narrowing
glacial canyons
in bitter
ice age weather
We tracked
the same prey

Slowly

it

brought

us

t

o

g

e

t h

er

II

Wolves and people
Dogs and people
We both howl
We both growl
And for whatever
Purpose or ends
Our two species
Have long been friends

Many's the time
Our kind would've died
Frozen to death
While the cold wind cried
If the dogs hadn't let us
As night grew black
Sleep in a heap
In the warmth of the pack
And as the ice ended
As the great earth revolved
We changed them, they changed us
We co-evolved

They tracked down our prey
Over unfreezing ground
Together we brought
The great mammoths down
Our peoples grew many

Our flames grew higher
Dogs sat at the edge
Of the ring of our fire

We feasted on flesh
And they gnawed on bones
Now they wait on our doorsteps
Guarding our homes
They find us in rubble
They pull our sleds
They guide the blind
And sleep in our beds
They play with our children
You can see it in them
This strange urge we have
To be a dog's best friend

It's a deep time friendship
Millennia long
We grieve them like family
Long after they're gone
No a dog's not forever
But the friendship proceeds
It predates and outlasts us
In dogs yet to be
In dogs and in children
In women and men
This strange urge we have
To be a dog's best friend

DOGS GET THE POINT

A dog gets the point when you point
As very few animals do
They get the idea of direction
They alter their point of view

A dog gets the point when you point
A wolf just stares at your hand
A dog turns and looks where you point
Somehow a dog understands

They get the whole point of pointing
That a finger's a kind of sign
A dog gets the point when you point
A singular marker of mind

