

POEM

A Time to Embrace

"You shall no longer be spoken of as Jacob, but as Israel, because you have contended with divine and human beings and have prevailed." (Gen 32:29)

I.

As Jacob watched the fingertips of stars
above the Jabbok River on the night
before he saw his brother, faced the scars
of what he had supplanted...the birthright
and blessing owed to Esau, he recalled
his bright dream of God's ladder to the sky,
the way he'd grasped for glory since he'd crawled—
the way he'd reached his mother's birthing thigh
still clinging to his older brother's heel...
As Jacob stood alone before the dawn,
an angel came to wrestle with him, feel
his human arms resisting holy brawn.
Though crippled, Jacob still would not let go
Until the angel promised to bestow...

II.

A blessing. Why was it always this way?

Why did he fight for God's favor like this?

Why couldn't he just fold his hands and pray?

But there was something pleasing as a kiss

in struggling for what he wanted most.

The angel rose and gave consent, and then

renamed him Israel. That's how the ghost

of Jacob's guilt and pride was beaten. (When

he stood and limped away, he knew he'd seen

the hand of God and lived, carried the weight

of what he witnessed in his arms. The scene

of flailing beneath heaven would abate

his longing.) When he'd clutch his old disgrace

in Esau's arms, it would be to embrace.

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