

Signs of life

I was tempted to name this '*Oh Deer*', but decided, although apt, that could suggest I am not entirely serious. So, let's have it both ways, make it meta, with an author's explanation. Not get off on entirely the wrong foot. Or indeed, hoof. We'll start again.

Picturing a silhouetted stag, inside a triangle of red.

Because, in little England, deer possess their own signs of warning. Silent screams that say – watch out, wild things may lie ahead. Take care, when driving by. Unnerved creatures, tend to burst here, from the roadside scrub. Nostrils flaring, confused by our hard black tracks. Teeming with heavy-breathing, speeding metal herds. You might catch one on woody Berkshire stretches of the M4, past Heathrow. Or at the edge of A-roads, in rural parts of Essex and further North and South and West. Stuck there to remind us – hot-blooded beasts we've let slip, hold out, in these denuded islands. Solid whispers of our shared, long discarded past.

The hunter and its favoured prey. Once we ran together. (At least, until some King or other decided those lives belonged to him alone). Us and the Red ones. Sika, Roe and Fallow came along much later. Up in Scotland's highlands, they're almost overrun. All their untamed browsing is killing off the trees. Let's put that thought aside.

Think of the excitement, when you see one, in the raw.

A fleeting glimpse raising goose-bumps. Flesh phantoms, conjured in a flash of flank, or head. Point is, this would have been a sight our forebears watched for daily. Perhaps contemporary encounters leave us bewildered, as they jolt home with an atavistic twitch. Instinct curving back a finger to pluck a string, send an arrow flying. Or maybe our old friends trigger another form of stirring – even through car windows. A jealous vision, of others free to roam the land. And as you watch them pass, feel an ancient itch to join them rising in the guts, before recalling that you can't.