

Out of the Ordinary

Every day there's this rutted place on the path, an eroded bank that smells of badger; an earthy niff with a sour note of decay, less sexy than the sharp stink of fox. I secretly savour it, inhaling a sense of other world under cover of woodland.

Something makes me look up. The flit of a wren, maybe, on the flank of the hill below, or the involuntary twitch of fir tree, but there's no wind. Still as a millstone: the only sound, water finding its own level, in search of some disused leaf.

Perhaps the light is flatter than this time yesterday, or overnight rain has parted the greenery a particular way, or I'm off my head on a cascade of sensations – but there's no mistaking. Barred off by barbed-wire brambles, minded by uniform ash trees, there's a doorway.

No door, you understand. Just a dead-end brick wall, crumbling gently to itself, chaffinch pink – how could it have escaped me? - a modesty of ivy, the odd sapling sprouting from a mortar nostril. At its heart, two wooden uprights. *Cheeks*, as the local carpenter (who doubles as undertaker) would say, although there's nothing rounded or gargoyle-like about this pair with the wind taken out of their sails.

Jambs, we called them. As a child, I assumed they *jammed up* the crossbeam, and I accepted the silent *b* like an obedient lamb. Now I know better – they are French legs that will never dance the can-can. Dead tree parts paralysed into slavery and forced to frame an entrance.

Or an exit. The grass in the clearing on the other side is the same sere yellow in the same almost-dusk, but the river isn't where it should be.

There's an overwhelming grist of violets.

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