

The Jumper by Darren Neave

You will find me down a placid, mossy-tinged single-track lane, away from the raucous cross-county thoroughfare.

There are places to pass and tyre-crimped godcakes that mark quarter miles, steering to strewn hamlets and misfitted patches of verdant and squaddy enclaves.

Hemmed in by wooded bridleways, bulwarked with rusty-wrapped, lacy barbed fence entangled amongst ebonised hawthorns. Sporadic ash and birch spattered in thickly plated golden and silvery lichens.

This is rural treasure!

Clear skies and flat cinematic panoramas swathe my bucolic home, scuffed by vapour trails on bright cloudless days.

I will spin you a yarn about my young recklin' jumper, now a sciatic septuagenarian who shleps around a noisy cathedral city, away from the sticks and far from the piping blackbirds busied at dusk.

They once skipped and leapt dykes, like the Easter-born lambs I rubberneck at, in nearby spinneys.

The jumper cavorted and sprang, gobbled fresh air in pastoral bliss. Clothing hued by chlorophylls and muckied with clayish dirt and asinine tufts.

Their jumping was reckless and thoughtless but fun. Their jumping turned to me, an ex-Christmas tree, planted outside early January.

Youth leapt over my crown, bending my bole and knocking new growth. Scuffed haunches and knees, marked limbs without pain, yellowed by iodine. My heartwood responded to cutaneous over-grazing; these skirmishes felt amorous and strangely consensual. Fleeting, fimbriated false hemlock touches. I have missed these brushes. This vaulting affected me, a haptic memory that cannot be unfelt.

I know their gaze too, as they looked across from the downstairs windows and down from the upstairs window, to spy at me on wet grey days when it kelched down, or I was swayed and shaken by howling gales from across the fields.

The solid, red-brick homestead, earnestly and lovingly built is persistently contracting beneath me. Shrinking and shrivelling at a constant rate, I can caress the cracks in its cornerstones, fondle the fissures within the foundations, yet nothing is returned - the ancestral home is no longer theirs, a family tree no more.

I drooped with dendritic disdain as I watched them ride pillion away down the lane, back to the city of concrete and plastic, away from this place of animism and lament.

Years later, I am bound by preservation orders, immobile and not to be disturbed, like my neighbours marked by cross-hatched areas on diagrams, digitally gawped at by people in stale, unsoled offices, a long way from here. These maps do not highlight the desire-lines and cut-throughs marked by paw and boot or feature pheromone marked territories, bristled on grass.

Now, when they visit, they come chauffeured, un-leathered and dry, they lurk in the lane and creep on the verges. I listen avidly to recollections, through whispers and giggles. They are enchanted about my majestic presence and loft, enthralled by arboreal memories. I will remain here, steadfast, protected, with untouched resin-blistered bark.

Let me lie horizontally for you to saltate me, step over me, one more time. I played a long game. Gulp down non-city air and commemorate youth