

G. C. Waldrep

The Deer in Long Melford Church

Somehow the deer have gotten into the great church whose west-facing tower seems to warn like a proctor *Begin*. They pause, then startle, then pause again. Their hoofs clack against the encaustic tile, the ledger stones of black marble. They are caught between panic & boredom. They knock against the pews, the shrouded piano. There are six or eight of them. Their tails flick in consternation, this is not a problem they expected on the examination. Leaflets by the church box cascade to the floor. This is a poem about terror, although the deer make all but no sound, now in the nave, now in the chancel, now in the south aisle. Light passing through the stained glass strikes them, light passing through the plain glass strikes them, they don't respond to any of that, only to their predicament. In the half-dusk of the church, their pelts blend with the biscuit-coloured ancient stone. One knocks over a vase containing withered flowers; it shatters, they scatter in every direction, their bodies beating against the pews, the sculpted piers, one another. Eventually they calm. They have no memories & so it seems, to them, that they have always been here, however erroneously, however wrong 'here' is. Are they being filmed on CCTV? One would think they must be, one would think by now some alarm must have been tripped. Why has no one come? The church either is or isn't locked but this is imponderable to the deer, now trying to nibble the cards in the church shop, for they are hungry. Very hungry, & getting hungrier. A small crucifix falls from its place on a pillar behind the Victorian pulpit, its Caen panels of saints—a clatter, they startle again, one is limping now, it has injured itself. They believe in what is happening to them *now*, absolutely. Day passes into night passes into day. They begin to die, a little. No one interrupts them.