

## **The deer**

### **Wayne Connolly**

Every morning we walk the same path  
under the viaduct, past the old lodge  
and along the fields by Pontburn Wood.  
We're both men of steady habits;  
we know exactly where we're going and how far.

Gusto lifts his leg to mark the trees,  
following the trail of other dogs  
and leaving his scent for them.  
It's a daily canine message board,  
refreshed every hour like the news.

We often see deer at the edge of the wood,  
small family groups - does and young fawns.  
Gusto tried to chase them once or twice.  
Now he watches as they glide away  
over the fences that line the fields.

Last week he stopped suddenly, nostrils twitching:  
A young deer was trapped in a fence,  
its rear hoof caught between the top rail  
and the barbed wire strung above it.  
Its lean body stretched to the ground,  
And blood dripped from its nose and mouth.

We looked at it for a while then walked away.

Next day Gusto ran to the same place, sniffing keenly.  
But the deer had gone.  
If you hadn't seen it, you wouldn't have known  
that a young creature had died there.  
But I could see marks of blood on the grass,  
and he could smell the whole shape of it in the air.

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Biography: Wayne Connolly is a retired librarian, constant reader and occasional writer.  
Published in *The Middle of a Sentence: a short prose anthology* by *The Common Breath* in  
2020. Having started writing late in life, he is now making up for lost time.

Favourite poem: *Beneath my hands* by Leonard Cohen