

Swire Ridgeway Arts Prize 2021  
Written entries 2021

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**Chalk Path**

Alone upon the empty path  
no signal, call or message  
boxed in by slopes and fenced by bush  
I'm isolated, will anybody miss me?

Listen, a faint mew, then red kite flies low,  
ducks between trees, planes over hedge harassed  
by cawing crows fearful for their nestlings  
shadowed by raucous jackdaws, then they are gone.  
Quietness broken by mechanical chatter  
as the wren flickers like a dead leaf  
blown through the hedge bottom. The twigs resolve  
into dry seedheads of bed straw, wild carrot,  
knapweed among the prickly hawthorn and  
twining travellers joy and wayfaring tree.  
Abruptly the clump of long grass at my feet  
explodes as fear-fuelled pheasants rocket  
out of sight leaving hint of nest in the air.  
Something else among the dank rotten leaves  
a touch of toadstool, something rank, fox?  
I start to wonder who the people were  
who made this way, this hollowed track  
banks on either side, it must have taken  
years to wear it down and polish smooth.  
I spot something moving down the path  
it vanishes then I see fallow deer  
flow across the field beyond the hedge.  
A hare runs towards me eyes  
watching the sides not seeing me at first  
then stops, turns, leads me up the track .  
A blackbird sings his boundaries  
as we move together down the path.

*Patsy Jones*

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