

Blessings Are Those Who Mourn

By **John Leax**

I saw a wounded deer limping along in the field, one leg incapacitated. I was terribly sad at this and began weeping bitterly. And something quite extraordinary happened. I will never forget standing there weeping and looking at the deer standing still looking at me questioningly for a long time, a minute or so. The deer bounded off without any sign of trouble.

*Thomas Merton
November 13, 1965*

In afternoon heat the old man
Is watching the chestnut doe
At the end of the yard. Small, not much
Larger than the twin fawns lingering
In the shadow behind her, she is browsing shrubs.

She cannot see the old man,
But she knows his presence; they share
A stillness in the noise of engines,
Music, and the shouts of everyday.

The old man starts when she starts,
Cocks her ears and listens.
She is beautiful he thinks, his eyes darkening
As her tense alertness wakens in him fear.
He sees a village of Nigerian girls
Kidnapped from their beds for being girls
And for being beautiful. The doe relaxes.

Watching her ease, the old man remembers
Father Louis weeping for the wounded deer,
And how the deer drank that salt
Of mortal tears and bounded through the field.

If only he could see no sign of trouble!
He weeps. Through his tears he does not see
The spotted fawns emerging
Into the kingdom of Christ's shining sorrow.

John Leax is Emeritus Professor of English at Houghton College. He lives in retirement with his wife near the college equestrian farm and spends his time walking the trails in the close-by woods, reading, and writing. His most recent collections of poems are *Recluse Freedom* and *Remembering Jesus: Sonnets and Songs*.



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