

SERPENT

The solemn tones of the pretty newsreader's bleak tidings of war's mayhem, then, pontification from some shoulder gilded satrap are still with me as I arrive here. And here, this green haven offers a space open to contemplation, expiation and, perhaps, a coming to terms with flowers, faults and fantasies.

Overlooking all, in blunt relief, a storm-hewn face juts from the cliff above a stream's placid flow. A somewhat persuasive face, as if having an awareness of its precedence and seeming to watch each step of an approach, then outstare the bearer of a curious gaze.

With engines juddering after the rutted climb here, two minibuses spill cargoes of children and their mentors, one of whom, like a snared rabbit runs and leaps on the spot. Children join him, jumping and falling in tangles of laughter. A heartening scene, if only the world could

A small boy peeing into a patch of scrub voices terror, a sound piercing enough to silence bird song. The kids draw together, huddled in puzzled fear as mentors rush, push, scabble and flush, a grass snake. The chase is on: Oh, the joy of it all, whooping, cursing, stamping clubbing and stoneing. Ah, such elation when svelte olive-hued beauty moving like a metre length of rivulet -- is pulped. My protests refuted, frustration unabated, I turn, look up, wait to be outstared.