

Wild Horses

by Lesley Dawson

It was the middle of the night, and I couldn't believe what I thought I was seeing. Was I asleep? Was it a dream or a nightmare? I wasn't sure. Didn't this only happen in books or in movies?

My friend, Jan, and were I driving back from the hospital student accommodation where we had just dropped off a Norwegian student after a party. We were not looking forward to the drive across country, to the other side of Bradford, where we were staying.

Of course, we had stayed coffee and I had fallen asleep in the armchair, despite the scintillating conversation. Fortunately, I was not driving. This was about 2am and we were driving through Bierley village on a country road. Jan was concentrating on the winding road with no street lights and only a sliver of moon light to guide us. I was trying desperately not to fall asleep again and not being entirely successful. I was in that world between waking and sleeping where everything was possible, but nothing was real.

Opening both eyes as wide as I could and wishing I had matchsticks to keep my eyes open, I thought I saw shapes coming towards us on the road. They were not car shaped and progressed in a very odd way. As we got closer, I began to think they were horses. This couldn't possibly be true. Why would they be loose and galloping down this road?

I did suspect I was hallucinating. I shouldn't have drunk that brandy with my coffee. Should I keep my thoughts to myself and fall asleep again, assuming that it wasn't real? Or should I check if Jan could see them too?

At this point she turned to me and said,

"Am I seeing things? Are there really horses galloping down the road towards us?"

I breathed a sigh of relief, that I wasn't hallucinating,

"Oh good, I thought I was dreaming. It isn't just me then. They really are horses, and they are galloping towards us down the road."

"What should I do?" my wide-awake, sensible friend asked.

“I think we ought to stop and let them gallop past. I hope they don’t damage your paintwork.”

We did just that and sat there in the dark listening to the sounds of hooves clattering on the road and the swishing of grass and bushes as they fought with each other to get round this unexpected obstruction. They were remarkably gentle with the metal object they found in their way, with only the occasional bump to tell us we had impeded their progress. It felt surreal, as if we had unexpectedly strayed onto a film set, but finally they disappeared, and in the silence, we started to move again.

I was incensed that someone else thought they had the right to be on this road at this time. This was our road. We were on our way home in a perfectly civilized manner, driving at a very appropriate speed, with main beam headlights shining brightly.

Of course, few people believed our story the next day. We must have imagined it. It was a post-alcoholic haze we had experienced. The fact that my sensible friend, Jan, had also had this experience gave me some credibility. If it had only been me, nobody would have believed it was true at all.

We found out later from a local resident that a circus company had arrived earlier that evening and camped where they always camped, on the village green, hobbling their horses nearby. They were known to release their horses for an early morning gallop along the road on which we had travelled when all sensible people were out of their way.

I felt like an extra in the old TV series “Champion the Wonder Horse” but was told my American accent wasn’t good enough and that I should be myself as everyone else was taken.