

## The Song of Ryebank Fields

By Ali Davenport

It's a small plot in the scheme of things.  
Unremarkable on old maps; unnamed.  
Ordinary history; field, claypit, recreational ground,  
then left for nature to reclaim.

Ryebank Fields.

Shadowed by city towers; new born,  
gleaming wealth. Cranes pointing arms to sky,  
proclaiming growth. This is prosperity, they cry.  
Raze that shabby scrub.

What counts is how things look.  
Wildness tamed, nature contained  
in municipal squares. What serves  
is how things seem. Fake grass preferred.  
Developers dipping plans in green;  
washing them through to rinse out the heart.

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The city chokes  
under brick; reaches, dazed; tries  
to remember a time when it breathed  
before mill & factory,  
before its forging as an altar to industry,  
its story of souls yoked in smoke.

The memory of soil jolts its bones.

\*

It starts here. This scruffy grass.

Lay down your hands.

Listen  
to the Aspen Grove;  
one tree, all clones. Baby to Pando  
but see its shape, a shield like its name in Greek.  
It has diamonds on its bark.

Look, The Fairy Tree!  
Magical hawthorn, rooted in folklore;  
spinning a glittery yarn or three.  
Can you see the glimmering?

The flickering in the brambles?  
Those tangles hide gems; small birds  
seeking treasure in the brush, a bounty  
of insects in the mud, unfurling worms  
in this flood-absorbing ground.  
Old willow's mossy limbs divine the gift.

You too can mine this land;  
tap the acorn trove & tell a tale of potential.

These fields hold so much.

Give to their embrace. Look up,  
where crows cross wide above the Nico Ditch.  
There's history in this place.

This earth.

Breathe

this blessing of being  
away from rooves.

Remember how it was.

\*

It starts here.  
Each patch in the city round  
from north to south: verges left,  
lawns mown less, weeds welcomed  
in the beds. It's not the look that counts,

it's the wilder-ness

& the tending,  
oh, the tending,  
not with manufactured love  
but the care of re-connected hands  
feeling their way through leaf & stem  
through root  
unearthing ancient hymns  
awakening the quickening  
the rush  
through every road & street  
a honey kiss  
from north to south  
the city round  
lit up

with hum  
the shimmering hive  
the Manchester Bee reborn  
in new abundance

& where Manchester leads,  
the Chorus re-sounds

\*

& when we're done  
- & that time will come -  
when nature reclaims the land,  
cracks the city's concrete into crumbs,

when we're long gone,

what song will Ryebank Fields sing?  
It was a small plot in the scheme of things

but worth a city,  
worth the world,

these fields of gold  
                  that shone  
                          & shone  
                                  & shone

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