

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.

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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.

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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

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& 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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