

## Under a Tilting Sky

Four magpies bar my way. What does the rhyme say? Four for a boy? Well, it's a boy's world that I have come in search of, in this place where once, as Dylan Thomas penned in his *Return Journey*, 'a very young man I knew had mucked about as chippy as a sparrow after the sips and tidbits and small change of the town'.

A pristine green metal fence guards the perimeter but peering through I can make out the rusting relic of the old boundary. Gardens bottom out here and in one sit King and Queen Cat. King Cat, muffled in his white and tabby, turns his Egyptian head, smoky quartz eyes slanting me out. The tips of his ears twitch but he remains on his vantage point, throned atop a wooden fence post. To his left is Queen Cat on her red brick wall, a snoozing rippled wide-whiskered beauty of a ginger girl, sure in her sleep, the swollen bowl of her belly rising and falling.

A group of special needs youngsters and their teachers are using the playground. Their voices gather and gabble while limbs run wild on swing and frame until it is time to be tucked in once again, in to the wheelchairs waiting to ferry them home. Over by the Dylan Thomas Shelter a lather of young men preen themselves before practising football skills, their blue words looping out over the green. As I trek on to the top of the park, there is more of a wildness where it is easy to imagine a boy, 'up to no good but the beat of his blood', running over grass past the Keep Off sign, pulling up moss from the rockery, carving his letters on benches. The bench I stop at is unblemished and serves up the sweep of Mumbles Bay. Below me stretch rooftops with their wide solar panel eyes blinking. Above me a helicopter thrums up and away. How different this noise is from Dylan's day; his was a clanking kingdom that resonated with the clitter clatter of cobblestones; the plink clink of milk-cans and the clip clop of hooves.

I am far above Oystermouth Road's White Van Land where every night Dai Jones or Mick the Brick return to boarding houses with mooning names like Oyster, Camelot and Leonardo's – there to unfasten the night's dreams: a night with the woman from number eleven; six numbers and the lucky ball; seven goals for the Swans against Man U and six tries for the Welsh to score. My ticking clock slows and the beeches and scyamores green me, grasp me, hammock me as I stare out past the shore.

It was here on this 'eternal hill' that Dylan drew his hunchback. I meet none such today but know well enough that there are still some who seek for solace in the parks. Close beside my home in Swansea, a heron-backed loner has pitched his tent beneath God's canopy – far enough from the crowd so that on a canvas morning there on the dew drip, dawn sip grass a blackbird can flute him awake. So many pages have been turned since Dylan once stood where 'the sun springs down on the rough and tumbling town'. The places may have changed but the people are as alive, alive, alive as ever. Here are the children and the grand children and the great grand children still rising up the hill, home to where a hearth waits or a dog lies or a cat coils or a son watches at the window. Here all ebbs and flows, just like the same sea lapping beneath a tilting sky.

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