

### **Here I Pray**

I rise at dawn and cross the road that's not yet busy. An early autumn mist hangs low, and the spiders' webs lacing the blackthorn hedges are laden with dew. Long ago, when I was a child, this was a park, its saplings trimmed and trained, its beds replanted every season, until council cuts abandoned it to nature's care. My favourite copper beech was already old before the park was new, and I press my cheek to the cool of its trunk, under leaves as rich as beetroot. After slashing my stick at sniper nettles and barbed-wire briars, and slipping on mud that's mouse-paw soft, I stand as quiet as my eighty years and wheezy breathing will allow. Like a grunty gnome, I bend to the pig-fodder acorns to find one that's green, to rub it shiny against my lambswool scarf. As the sun blushes the skies, I lie and stretch amongst last year's leaves, beneath a lone arthritic ash, its disjointed limbs as gnarled as mine. Here I pray that one day I can stay, earthing up in an unmarked grave while quivering aspens whisper blessings over play-group outings that shout and tumble above me. Here I pray that elves and fairies will dance once more; that the oaks and elms will smile as modern-day dairymaids kiss their hipster swains; that these ancient giants will continue to regard everything but reveal nothing, holding our secrets safe forever within their tangled roots.