

Urban Tree Festival 2023

Writing Competition

Secrets of The Trees

Kin-keeper

Carla-Leanne Scott Washbourne

This giant oak, more ancient than any of its neighbours, was revered enough by our ancestors to build their whole park around it.

We drape ourselves in its branches; as lionesses, bathed by early evening sun. Not the shimmering, buttery light of the equatorial savannah, but the thin, high latitude light of a northern city. We lay close, but apart, facing out from the great bole; bodies pressed to the broad, horizontal boughs, arms and legs hanging in space. Observing the world. Digesting the events of the day. Fierce friends and friends to be.

It is a place of gathering. Conspicuous. Known. The worst kept 'hiding place' in the woods. It entices climbers, with its grown-in footholds, rough, hardy bark and sprawling lower limbs. Its stature and stoic presence spark a deep, arboreal longing. A memory of home before home. We go up, bare hand over barefoot, clumsy at first from our day-to-day bipedal march. Then stronger, finding a more visceral confidence as we ascend.

How many before us have spent time confiding in its canopy? Keeper of kin and keeper of secrets. Leaves whispering with conversations long past. Some say we are more emotional at altitude. A lowly 2-metres is likely not what they had in mind, but the fears, hopes and dreams shared in those branches are by more than sheer chance. We are kindred, we and the tree. Trusted confidantes. As it cradles in strong arms the lives of our small pride.
