

West Norwood Cemetery

2024 Summer Nature Diary



Lambeth
Readers and Writers
Festival 2024

Lambeth

NATURE WRITING FOR BEGINNERS

2pm-3.30pm Sundays

23 June, 7 July, 21 July

3 workshops for adults & children
aged 11+ led by urban nature writer
& naturalist Amanda Tuke in
West Norwood Cemetery

Join us just for 1 or come to all 3
Each has a different theme
FREE, but booking essential

www.westnorwoodcemetery.org/nature-writing-workshop



West Norwood Cemetery 2024 Summer Nature Diary

The vivid and varied nature diary entries in this diary form the output from a series of three nature writing sessions I led in West Norwood Cemetery in June and July 2024.

Participants were encouraged to explore this glorious green space, where wild bees feed and woodpeckers call, swifts shriek overhead and woodlice busy themselves around gravestones.

They recorded what they saw, heard, smelt and felt, to contribute to this nature diary.

Enjoy!

Amanda Tuke

Workshop leader, urban naturalist and nature writer



Caterpillar nest, Kate Wise

JUNE

The Mighty Oak

On the ridge by the border I recognise the deep green beautifully stencilled leaves and sturdy trunk. The mighty English Oak offering a home to more wildlife than any other native tree.

I know this tree but still there are surprises. The leaf longer than it is wide with the six or so deep rounded lobes. It is late June and so the tiniest acorns are attached to their mother twig by a long, steady stalk. Their attachment secure.

Sticky resin often called stardew creates the sheerest silk shroud over the elephantine trunk.

To catch a falling oak leaf means good luck and prosperity but not today. Instead time travel. I am eight again as I discover the tree holds a ghostly nest of caterpillars.

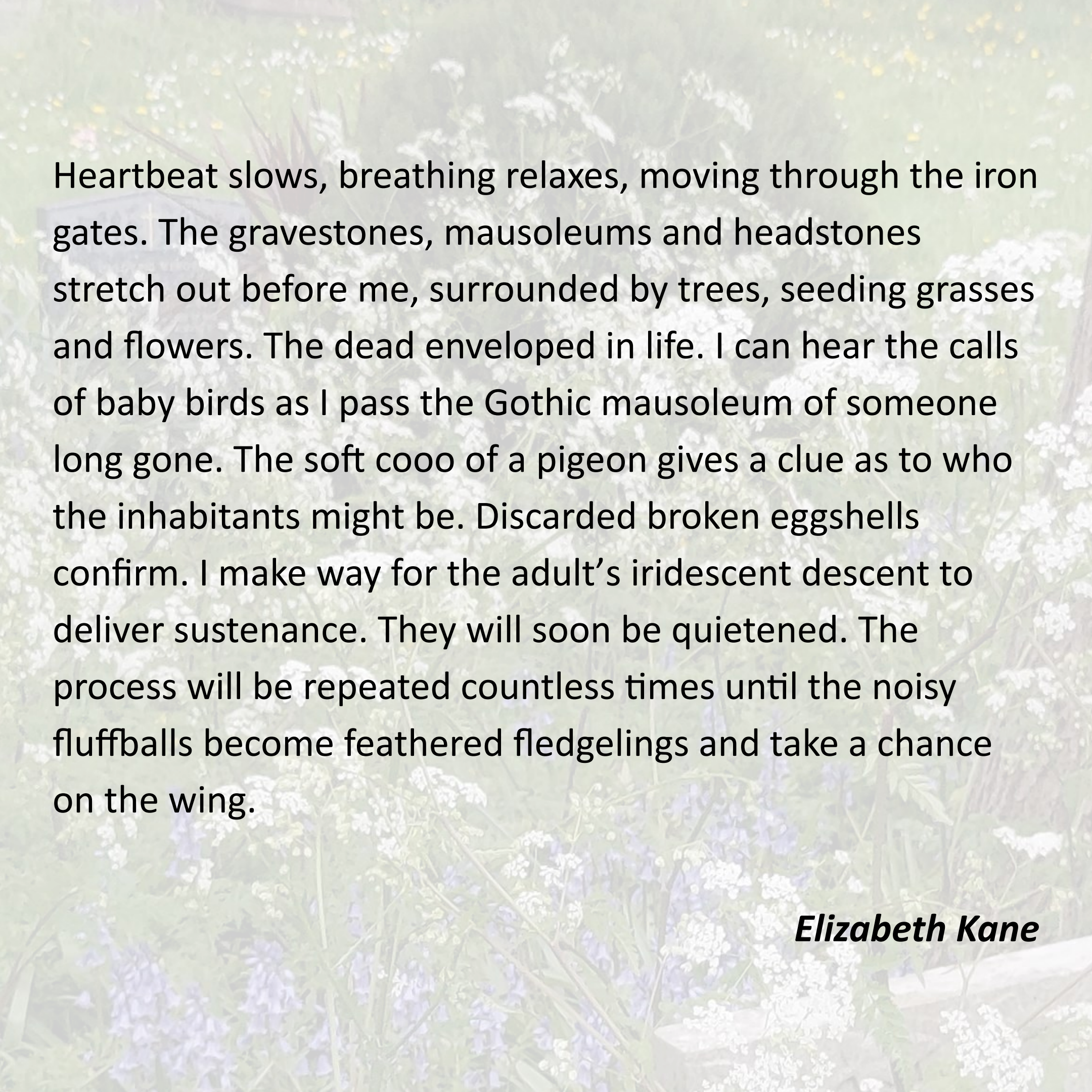
Kay Wise

Still Life

A tree looks like a grave on
end, branches petrified, grey
as the trunk bent from the
ground, except an arm
appears – shoulder-root,
knobbly hands
scrunched with rot,
whole fists of it.

Going close, a shoot
appears to catch the sun
in its green palm, small
sign to look beyond
what might be dead,
to see still life, tiny
leaf aimed at the sky.

Jenny Mitchell

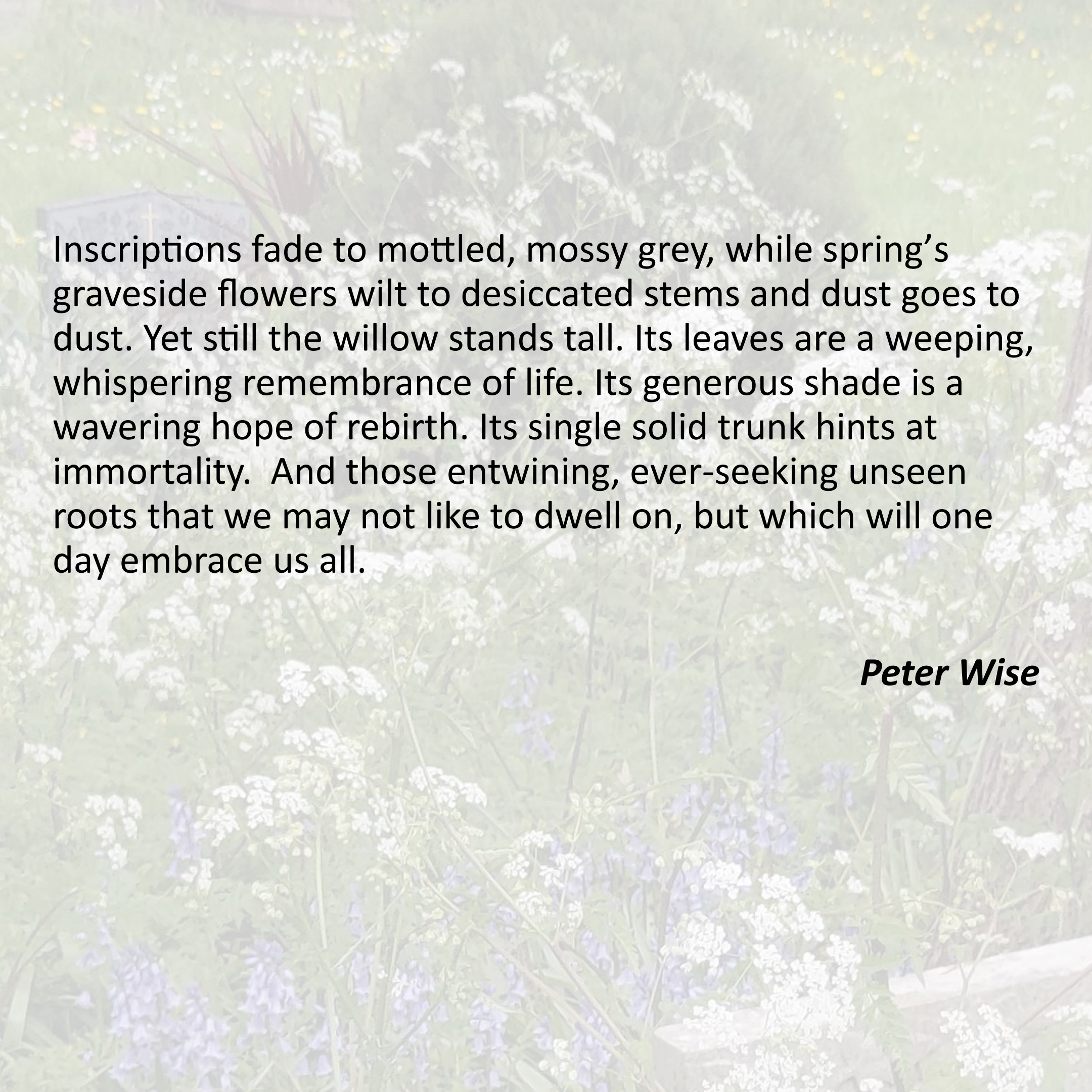
The background of the page is a soft-focus photograph of a cemetery. In the foreground, there are several clusters of small, light-colored flowers, possibly baby's breath, and some purple flowers. In the background, there are several gravestones and mausoleums, some of which are Gothic in style. The overall scene is peaceful and somewhat somber, with a mix of green foliage and stone structures.

Heartbeat slows, breathing relaxes, moving through the iron gates. The gravestones, mausoleums and headstones stretch out before me, surrounded by trees, seeding grasses and flowers. The dead enveloped in life. I can hear the calls of baby birds as I pass the Gothic mausoleum of someone long gone. The soft coo of a pigeon gives a clue as to who the inhabitants might be. Discarded broken eggshells confirm. I make way for the adult's iridescent descent to deliver sustenance. They will soon be quietened. The process will be repeated countless times until the noisy fluffballs become feathered fledgelings and take a chance on the wing.

Elizabeth Kane



View from the Weeping Willow, Peter Wise



Inscriptions fade to mottled, mossy grey, while spring's graveside flowers wilt to desiccated stems and dust goes to dust. Yet still the willow stands tall. Its leaves are a weeping, whispering remembrance of life. Its generous shade is a wavering hope of rebirth. Its single solid trunk hints at immortality. And those entwining, ever-seeking unseen roots that we may not like to dwell on, but which will one day embrace us all.

Peter Wise

June 23rd West Northwood
'24 Cemetery Robson
Road

Convolvulus

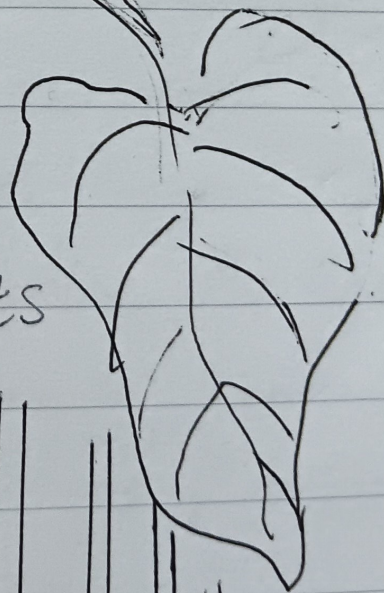
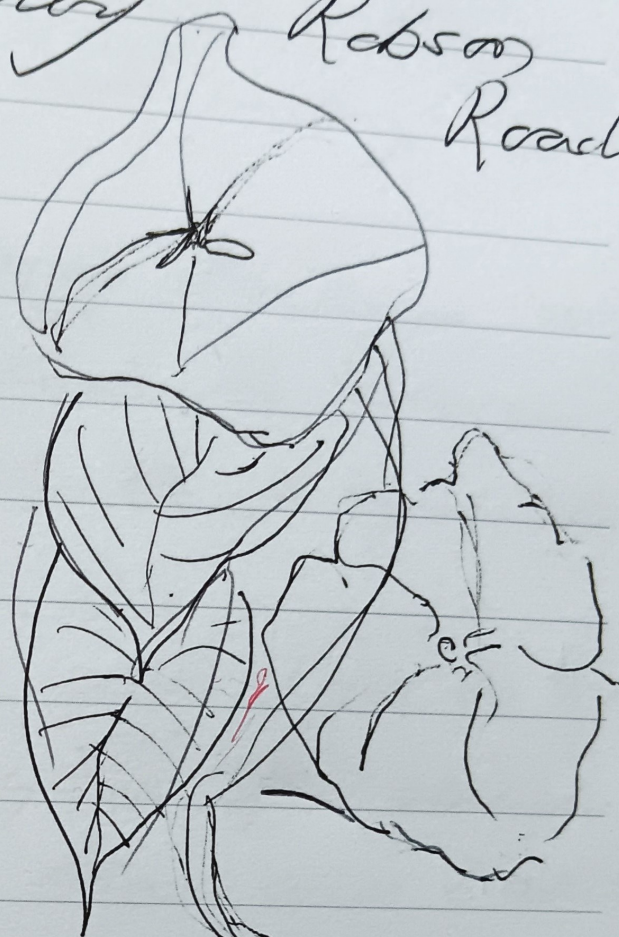
Brambles

Laurel

Sycamore

dandelion

Voices grandparents
& children
abus, the 322



Beyond the nutmeg-painted railings, a grandparent shepherds his charges, chancing the angry staccato wasp stutter of passing bikers. Fossils uncovered from before the Ice Age, many thousands of years ago, include oak, yew, elm, beech and bindweed. Within the shelter of the cemetery boundary, a blackberry, another ancient indigenous resident, throws out long crimsoned stems, fighting for light. Its heavily textured, pinkish-sheared leaves, amid lines of regimented thorns, contrast with the shining, pristine, heart-shaped bindweed. Twisting a poisoned stem rope towards the blackberry, the luminous white, bindweed flowers compete with the budding cluster, the blackberry fruit, for sunlight, nutrients and water. Sunny Sunday afternoon strollers saunter the slopes, lost in conversation.

Back at the boundary, laurel and blackberry, bindweed and sycamore weave a verdant, decorated screen against the cemetery railings, shot with the innocent looking, treacherous bindweed flower.

Perhaps when the gates first opened, in 1837, another Convolvulus cousin, the magical, heavenly blue morning glory was planted here?

Louise Prince

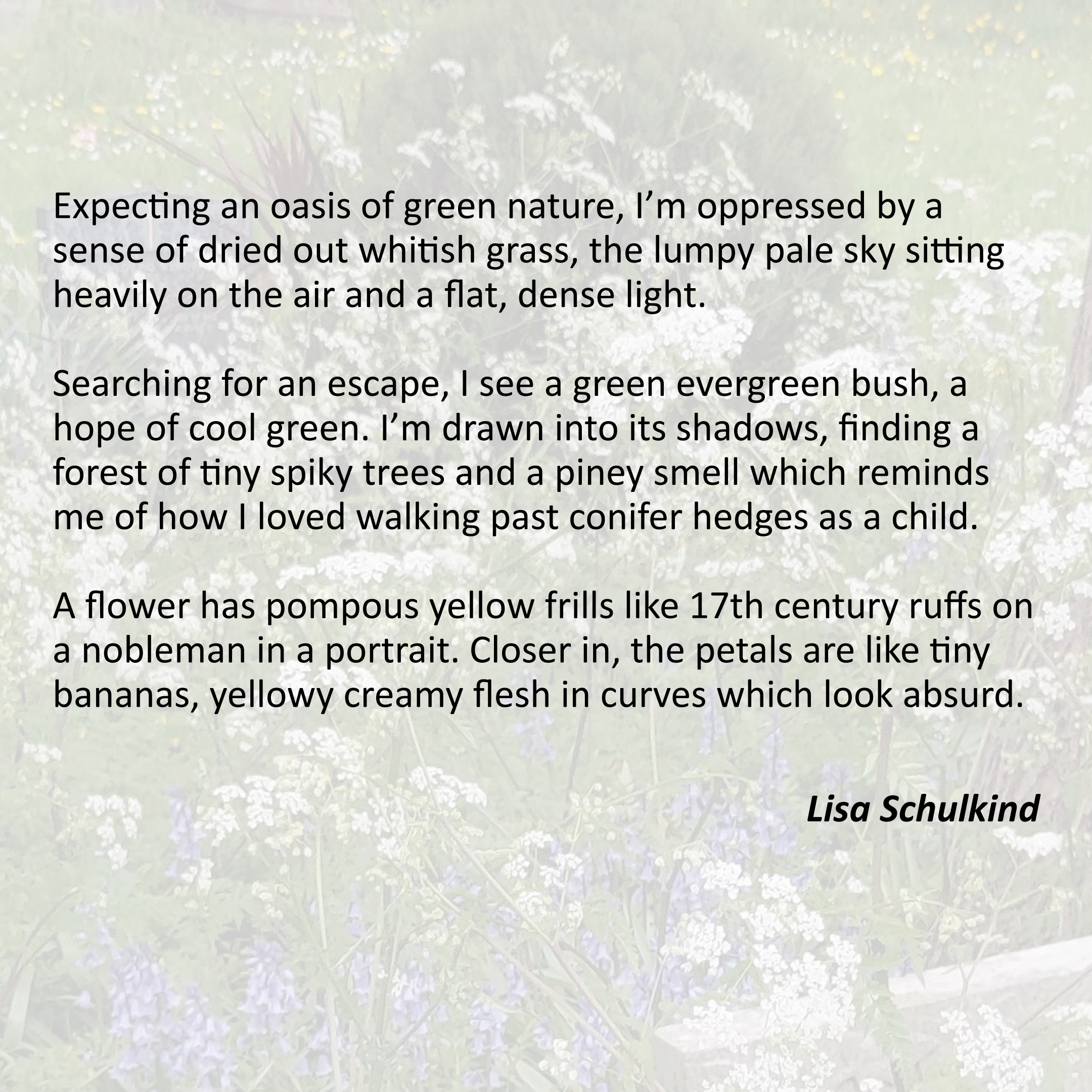
Bursting Into Life

Nature is not new to me, but
gravestones leaning towards grass
reflect in contrast as pure light.

Strange, where rosebuds bloom,
they're fisted, petals bruised,
a world still growing bright.

Textured stalks born green,
turn brown, pushing through
each crack, death bursting into life.

Jenny Mitchell



Expecting an oasis of green nature, I'm oppressed by a sense of dried out whitish grass, the lumpy pale sky sitting heavily on the air and a flat, dense light.

Searching for an escape, I see a green evergreen bush, a hope of cool green. I'm drawn into its shadows, finding a forest of tiny spiky trees and a piney smell which reminds me of how I loved walking past conifer hedges as a child.

A flower has pompous yellow frills like 17th century ruffs on a nobleman in a portrait. Closer in, the petals are like tiny bananas, yellowy creamy flesh in curves which look absurd.

Lisa Schulkind



Honeybee on Japanese Spindle, Peter Wise

JULY

A little Japanese Spindle Tree here in West Norwood Cemetery is abuzz – but with what? As I peer closer, flies flee and fleas fly but nothing interesting hesitates long enough to identify. Spindles suggest webs, but I spy no spider. At last – could those be Asian honey bees? That Japanese tree must feel like home. Yet the adjacent China rose is colourful, fragrant – and deserted. So maybe just *very particular* Asian honey bees.

Peter Wise

Wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*)

The wren is a tidgy little bird, but its song is much louder than it has any right to be. I call it the Tiny Shouter.

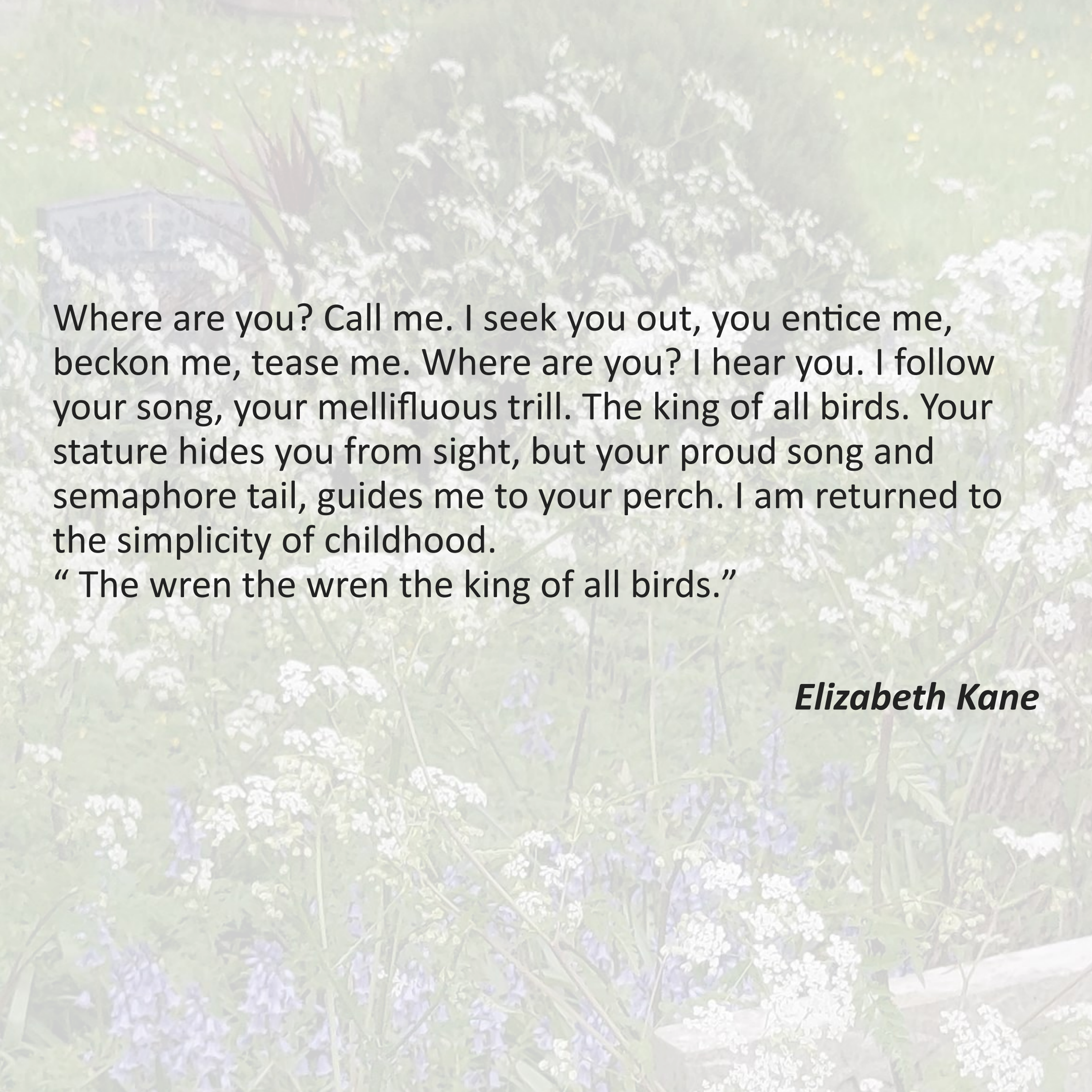
It sounds something like this: tsib-a-tsab-a-tsoo-diddy-dabble-iddy-wodda-tsipp-a-brrrrr-tsip-tsip-tsip-tsip-tsip-tsip—tjop-tsrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr—ts'tjupp-tjupp-tjupp-tjupp

Listen out for the key elements: – volume – assorted jumble of tsib-a-tsabs and dibble-woddles (of varying length) – the tsip-tsip-tsip thing, followed by: the machine-gun trill and the repeated tjupp-tjupp-tjupps after the trill.

The combination and order of the various elements vary according to whim, but it's the machine-gun bit that is constant. 99 times out of 100 you'll hear the machine-gun trill, and it always comes at or near the end.

*With special thanks to Lev Parikian
To find out more about his Birdsong project:
<https://levparikian.com/index.php/twitter-birdsong-project/>*





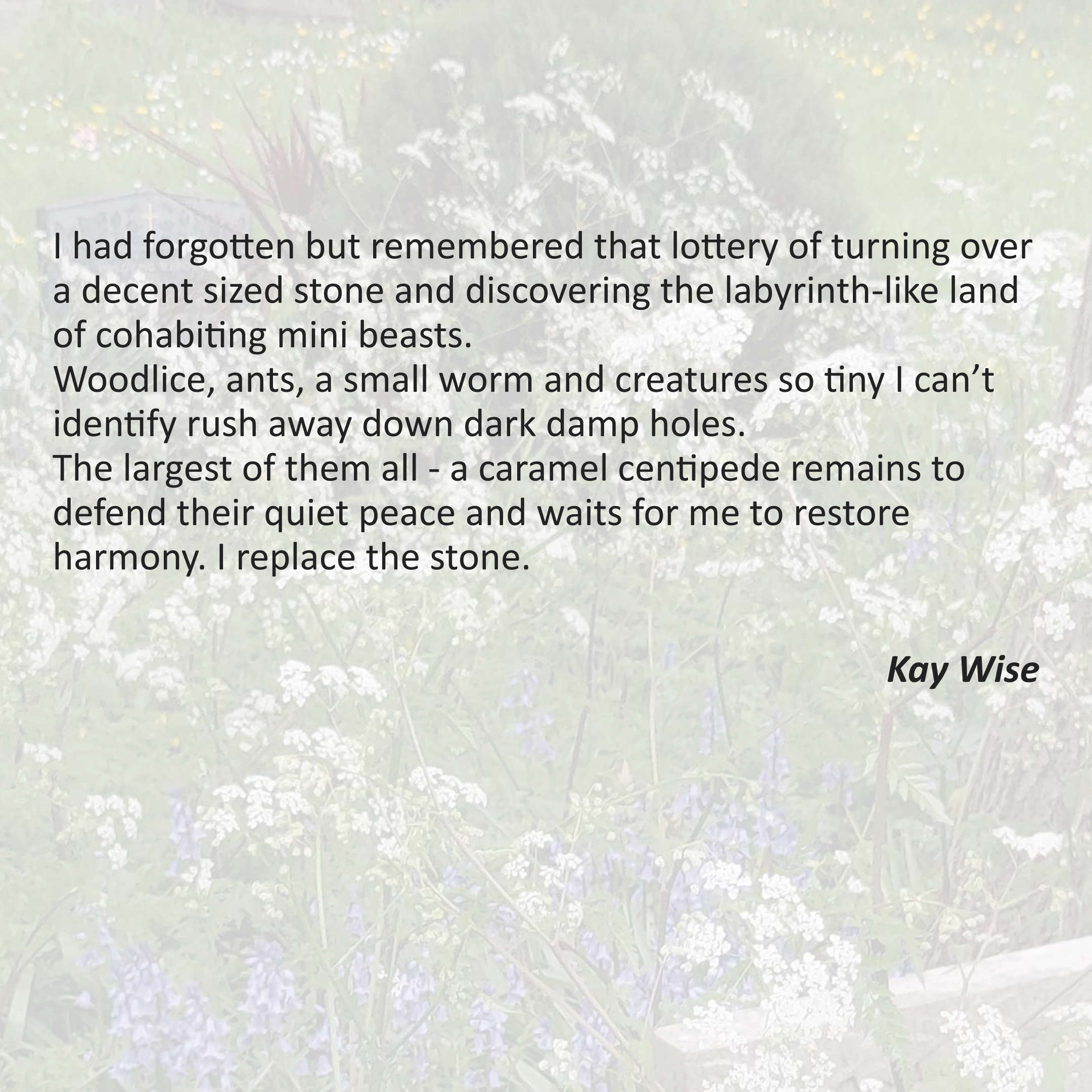
Where are you? Call me. I seek you out, you entice me, beckon me, tease me. Where are you? I hear you. I follow your song, your mellifluous trill. The king of all birds. Your stature hides you from sight, but your proud song and semaphore tail, guides me to your perch. I am returned to the simplicity of childhood.

“ The wren the wren the king of all birds.”

Elizabeth Kane



Centipede, Kate Wise

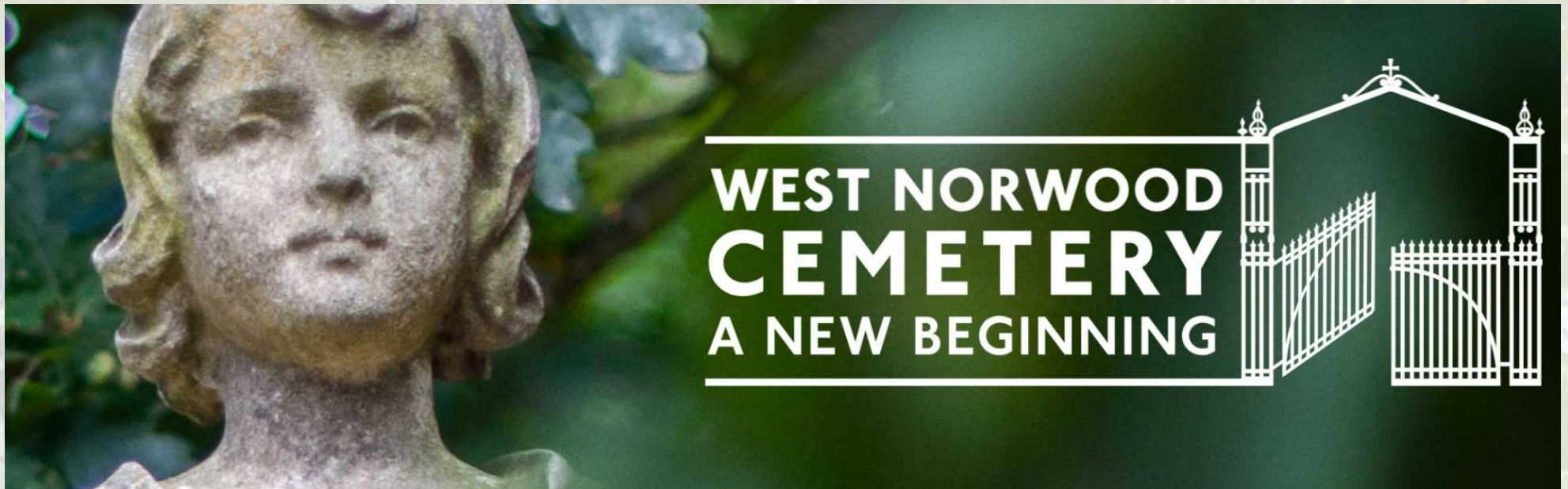


I had forgotten but remembered that lottery of turning over a decent sized stone and discovering the labyrinth-like land of cohabiting mini beasts.

Woodlice, ants, a small worm and creatures so tiny I can't identify rush away down dark damp holes.

The largest of them all - a caramel centipede remains to defend their quiet peace and waits for me to restore harmony. I replace the stone.

Kay Wise



This project was part of the National Heritage Lottery Funded: **West Norwood Cemetery, A New Beginning**, a £6.7m project that seeks to conserve the Cemetery's magnificent landscape and built structures, as well as offer new experiences and facilities to increase community use.

For more information on the project and the free events and activities that are being run for the community, please visit the project website: www.westnorwoodcemetery.org

And please follow us on Facebook and X: @WNCemetery

Any queries, please contact:

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