

Deidre

He could see the tree from the window of his prison cell.

“*Betula pendula*,” the teacher said when he drew it in art class. “Silver birch. It’s associated with love and new beginnings.”

He called the tree Deidre after his grandmother. At night, her white bark glowed in the security lights that shone down on barbed wire and metal gates, softening their daytime retributions. There had only been one tree on the Council Estate where he grew up and no one had cared about it. It had been set fire to, urinated on and ignored. It wasn’t important. Drugs and cars and girls were important, not trees.

Now trees were important. Now when the perimeters of his world were reduced to a prison cell, the silver birch had something he no longer had: freedom to bend with the wind, freedom to feel the warmth of the sun, freedom to stretch roots deep into the earth. He thought about the birds that sheltered inside her leafy canopy and the bats and owls who visited at night. He thought about all the men she had seen come and go whilst growing quietly in the grey grim grounds of Her Majesty’s Prison.

Every time he looked at the tree he felt the sap of hope rise inside him. Every night he said goodnight to her before he went to sleep. And as he slept, she watched over him, whispering her secrets into the dark: love and new beginnings, love and new beginnings.