

The Playground

by Anna Maria Murphy.

Inspired by a conversation with Martin Cruse.

Martin dreamt of living over the water. He could see it from the top of Ker Street, the glistening waters of Kingsand and Cawsand. Only a quick trip on the Cremyll ferry, but might as well be Buckingham Palace.

He lived with his Gran opposite Oddfellows Hall on Ker Street with its peeling Egyptian facade, entrance to the hieroglyphics of darts board and the gods of the pool table, and down the road from the once grand pillars of power to the Guildhall and former jail, where a boy could be locked up for stealing an apple.

Martin and the other Ker Street boys played on the bombsite.

Planks across twenty foot holes where you could still hear the echoes of explosions. Barbed wire assault courses that ripped your shins.

Dens in half ruined sitting rooms, the layers of wallpaper peeling like burnt skin. War games played behind the ruined walls.

The playground of war.

Martin remembers the snarl of the police dogs sent in to chase them off.

Sometimes he went to the boxing club. Kept him off the streets he reckoned. He boxed out his grief on the punching bag.

There were some good times. He prefers to look across though, to Devonport. He keeps the silent village of Kingsand clean.

And he brought his children up there, right next to the playground.