

A Different Perspective

by Abigail Ellis-Lowe

I am cold. Really cold. Life-threateningly cold. My feet are like the proverbial blocks of ice. Probably because my shoes don't fit. They're two sizes too small to fit and I don't have socks. I found them in a bin in Cae Glas Park. Not sure why someone puts shoes in a bin, but I'm grateful. I need to find somewhere to sleep tonight, because my usual spot has already been taken. I had to move to wake my bones and search for food, and before I knew it, there's another bloke in there. It was a good spot too. Out of the wind.

So I hobble the streets like a lame donkey, keeping my eyes down. People don't want you looking them in the eyes, makes them think you're staring at them. Makes them feel uncomfortable. Makes you uncomfortable because you know they're judging you. Like they know you. But they don't. My story is my own.

The daily challenge begins: food. How can I find enough to stave off the cold and prepare for another night when the cold feels like a mortal enemy coming for my soul? The answer is a humiliating one: I scour the bins in hope of finding something thrown away. A half-eaten sandwich, some energy drink left in a can, part of an apple that someone threw away before they'd even eaten a third of it. Those are the lucky finds. If I'm unlucky then food will be rotting already.

I see the kids from the local school in their grey and red jumpers. They seem happy enough, yet I know they feel outdone by the kids in the green blazers, the private school kids. They walk past me like I don't exist. I once asked one of the older ones for some spare change. I won't repeat what they said.

My other challenge is to avoid the Law. They like me even less than the shopkeepers who get angry with me for sleeping in their doorways. The Law doesn't understand I have nowhere else to go and no choice but to live like this. Do you think I chose this way? Again, you don't know me. So I know the routes to take to get around unseen.

I sometimes sit and watch the world go by and think of committing a crime to get arrested and put in a nice warm prison with three meals a day. But my parents brought me up better than that.

By the end of the day, I try to sleep up on the Maes y Llan fields. Those kids from the private school will have gone by now. What a chance they have - a lifetime's glory, yet they probably don't know how easily it could all disappear.

I sneak in to where the cricket scores are shown, lay down my cardboard and settle for the night. No one will come, and if I'm lucky, I might see a starry night, or maybe even a fox.