

The Proud Poplar

I duck under the plastic tape as it flutters a warning in red and white. Barricades surround the tree, as if it's in a crime scene.

I remember when the big poplar stood proud, next to the pub, in the little park. Now, too close, a construction site sprouts upwards and cranes cast shadows over its highest branches.

Leaves, unfastened by the breeze, float to the floor in surrender. I look up. A shaggy nest, empty now, sits on a branch.

My arms encircle the tree's rough, comforting trunk. I don't care about the passers-by and the people waiting at the bus stop. The oldest poplar in the area, this tree is not yet halfway through its magnificent life, but condemned to die. Its misfortune is to stand in the way of progress. When it's gone, it will be replaced by five younger trees, a developer's trade off.

This tree has stood here since I was a teenager. During its life and mine, millions of birds have vanished from the sky, unnoticed.

One less tree to perch on, one less tree to nest in, one by one by one by one. Gone.

But this tree has its saviours. Passionate people who won't let their poplar go without a fight. The makeshift platform shifts above me as a face grins down. 'Am I glad to see you! It's been a cold night.'

Before I climb the wooden ladder I hug the tree tighter, and try to feel hopeful for the future.