

A Haunting

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Every morning, the ghosts of Sheffield's trees flicker on like faulty street lamps. They kept on growing after they were cut; up and up and up.

It's hard to get used to a haunting. Teenagers dare each other to slap the stumps like they're electrified. Birds plummet through the translucent twigs in dismay. But the thing with ghosts is: they want something and if you don't get it, they start demanding. So, the trees tap on shop windows and trip up cars and thwack the bums of passing builders.

The Council called in priests to chop them down again, this time with words. From the prow of open-top buses they glided in like a triumphant football team, gesticulating at where the trees' ears might be. Cassocks plastered to bellies, the priests ended their parade with clumsy karate chops aimed at passing pataphysical branches; still, the trees flickered up like so many middle fingers.

Next came the contractors who'd done the chopping. They doffed their hard hearts – I mean hats – but the trees burned even brighter. Councillors appeared bearing thin wreaths and thick plaques; the wraiths roared over their lowered heads. Exasperated, they ascended the stumps like podiums. The torches softened; their stand-ins stiffened into statues.

The ghosts had got what they wanted.

Six months later, Sheffield has never been so happy. Instead of polling days, we have pollarding weeks; whenever councillors grow too dangerous, threatening to undermine homes and lives, we simply replace them with a newer crop.