



## BEAT THE DUST

January 2008

Steve Finbow interviews himself



Q: What have you forgotten?

A: The name of the woman who wrote whatsitcalled.

Q: What was the date of your last act of violence?

A: January 7<sup>th</sup> 2008.

Q: Where is home?

A: Where the art is.

Q: Name a part of the body where you have a physical scar from childhood.

A: The right side of my skull.

Q: Name a part of your body that you rarely touch.

A: My pancreatic notch

**the yellow springs of north london** by Steve Finbow

Most mornings, Billy makes it home. Dragging himself onto the Tube, if the Tube is running. Or slumping disheveled on the back seat of a bus, a bendy bus smelling of burned rubber, greasy kebabs, overripe humans. Sometimes Billy walks – along King's Cross Road, up Penton Rise, on towards the Angel. Most mornings, Billy makes it home. But this morning isn't one of them.

Billy unfurls his long legs. His jeans are dirty, torn, the cuffs ragged and black with London dreck. His mouth, wide open to the elements, catches rain, a few flies, the plughole smells of stale tobacco. With the squalid plectrums of his fingernails, Billy scratches his neck, inspects the grubby boodle, and uses his right lower canine to extract the treasures. He swallows.

Etsuko Inugai steps from the confines of St Pancras station, bewildered by the roads, lots of them like cables behind a television set, different colours, entangled, and you're never sure which one leads to what and whether where it comes from is important to where it leads or doesn't, just a muddle, a puzzle, a headache. She looks at the traffic, the people, the crossings.

Her suitcase, pulled behind her, like some refractory beetle, matt black and – according to its label – named Alexander McQueen, holds her underwear, her PSP Slim & Lite, fourteen pairs of shoes, twenty-eight pairs of stockings and tights, seven skirts, twelve tops, five pairs of glasses, her retainer, and countless pens and pencils. Tucked inside safely, securely, is a box of green-tea cookies. With almonds.

Billy has never understood the meaning of the words "no" and "moderation". Nor has he come to terms with the concepts of "water" and "vegetables" – occasionally, when undergoing the intermittent hell that is self-awareness, he visits the Hari Krishna food van on York Way and discusses with the grinning inmates the philosophy of soup – but this is yet another day of yes and intemperance.

Last night, staff at The Flying Scotsman refused to serve him. It was 1:30am and Billy had been mixing take-out Special Brew with pub-bought cider, combining Super with spirits filched from tables, pairing his Gold Label with dregs and spitbacks. The last stripper – an emaciated Romanian with breasts like polluted oysters – booed off stage, offered five-quid blowjobs in the gents.

Looking for the Albion House Hotel, Etsuko crosses the road. She is too far north and east of her destination. Her high-heel shoes are making her calves ache, and she is tired and a little hungry. She stands on the corner, near to the King's Cross Snooker and Pool Club, and takes out her A-Z of London and opens it to the marked page – she smiles to herself and her belly grumbles, the page looks like a plate of Teppanyaki.

It has started to rain. Etsuko takes out an umbrella, opens it, and juggles Alexander McQueen onto her left hand. Alexander kicks and digs in his heels. Etsuko gains control and, holding the map the wrong way up, walks south along Gray's Inn Road and east along Britannia Street. She stops and through a window sees a giant neon-blue guitar with electric-red shadows and glowing yellow entrails.

Billy looks up the Rise. Too steep. He looks down towards the Cross. The whale-coloured spires of St Pancras Chambers jut toward the low clouds, the cinnamon bricks turned caramel by the rain, the rain soaking Billy's hoody, his hoody stained with spilled beer, holed by dropped embers, the holes that Billy fingers, make larger. Home? Money? He heads north. Trains. Tourists.

Billy lives in a one-room flat on the City Road. Its carpet is made from newspaper and patterned with cigarette butts and crushed cans – purple and scarlet, gold and white. The walls drip with a mould and the extractor fan's metal-machine music is the soundtrack to his dozings – when he's there. When he's not. Well, when he's not, he's someplace else. Someplace other.

Her islets of Langerhans, her fifth phalange, her tarsal plates. Her zygomatic bone, her palmate folds, her samosa-shaped adrenal glands. All of these ache. She is lost. The map, a swarming

golden spiderweb in her hands. And whichever way she holds it, the words worm and twist. She lowers Alexander McQueen's neck into his midriff and squats on his broad shoulders.

Paris had been easy – meringuey buildings, macaroon skies, subway stops named after authors. Berlin – stretched out like a murdered bear – tidied time, regimented space. London belches and roars, emits low grumbles, screams in her ear – her roseate pinna, her tympanic membrane, her vestibular nerve. Her malleus, her incus, her snail-like cochlea.

Shielding his eyes from the glare of the Golden Lion's windows, Billy turns left. His mouth is dry, his eyes sore, his pockets empty. Traffic noise accompanies him – but beneath the percussion, he can hear a tickle, a triangle, a teardrop, and there in front of him, sitting on the black thorax of an alien-insect is a small girl, a small Asian girl, and she is crying.

Looking up, Etsuko sees a tall dirty man. He is staring at her map. She points and smiles. He nods and holds out his hand. She refuses but extracts Alexander McQueen's neck and follows as the man gestures with a flick of his head. His jeans are filthy but she can just make out that their name is George. Her glasses are misted and greasy with rain. She teeters and topples.

He lopes and limps. They cross the road and walk up a hill and turn left, then right down an alley running alongside a long wall, and they enter a door in the wall and walk along a tunnel and into a cave and the walls are covered with stars and suns, spirals and knots, and there is an old man with a long beard and a staff and a woman in the shadows dressed in red.

#### The late John Lennon interviews Luis Cuauhtemoc Berriozabal



JL: Luis, good to meet you mate. Now let me see, Paul or John?

LCB: John, of course. You're the best.

JL: What the hell is wrong with your eye, mate?

LCB: I think I got the pink eye, John. I'm not a doctor, but that's what my family says it is. So don't get too close. I'll see the eye doctor in the morning.

JL: I heard that happens when someone farts directly into your eye or on your pillow?

LCB: John, that's from Knocked Up. I don't know if that's how it happens, but I'm certain no one farted directly into my eye. I did fall asleep sitting down on my pillow last night, but I'm not sure if I let loose. I did eat some amazing Peruvian beans yesterday.

JL: What's this rubbish, Lola And Victoria? It looks like you combined two Kinks songs and threw in some words.

LCB: John, that's why you're the best. I mean, what are you, clairvoyant? I was listening to some Kinks songs, Lola and Victoria, and was also listening to The Kinks' the Village Green Preservation Society album. That's where "The Village Green Tavern" came from.

JL: If you could go back in time in The Flux Capacitor, what would you do, where would you go?

LCB: John, I would probably find my way to New York when you were still alive and beat the dust out of that bastard, Chapman, and save your life. I can only imagine what incredible music you would have created. Like I said before, you're the best.

**lola and victoria** by Luis Cuauhtemoc Berriozabal

Lola and Victoria,  
Cross-dressers,  
Fell for each other  
At the Village Green  
Tavern one night.

Lola kissed Victoria  
And knew right  
Away she was had.  
Victoria was a woman  
And not a man.

Victoria knifed Lola  
In the dark  
Alley behind the  
Bar after Lola  
Slapped her around.

As Lola bled out  
In the dark,  
Victoria left  
Running with Lola's  
Heart in her hands.

**knock your teeth out** by Luis Cuauhtemoc Berriozabal

I will knock  
your teeth out  
if you insist  
on pushing  
your beliefs  
upon me.

Are you sick?  
Are you on

medicine?  
Do you see  
a doctor?  
When did you  
get out of

prison? Do  
you live on  
the streets? Will  
you take a  
urine test?  
I'm pregnant  
with rage and

the child is  
going to  
knock your teeth  
right out of  
your lying  
mouth. Do you  
understand?

Aleathia Drehmer interviews herself



Q: What is the meaning of superkalifragilisticexpealidocious?

A: I don't know but it might be something quite atrocious.

Q: What is the smallest town you have ever lived in?

A: Sahuarita, AZ. We had a general store, post office and tortilla factory/bar as our center of town.

Q: Which writers do you think will sneak up on you by surprise and dash you with their words?

A: Ed Churchouse, Barton Smock, and Iris Appelquist.

Q: What does one do in Painted Post, NY?

A: Watch clouds, listen to wind, and wait for Colonial Days to happen.

Q: What is the one thing you look forward to most this year?

A: Going to England.

**drowning** by Aleathia Drehmer

Mikela watches Jonah blow smoke rings around his pallid face in the half darkness. The wisps trail from his lips along the bridge of his straight, long nose before dissolving in front of his eyes. Light from the television screen reflects in his glasses as he sits motionless. Jonah's long legs fold up in front of him like stilts as he leans his back into the ratty brown couch. It is stained from late night parties and laziness, the fabric worn in places until the padding is evident.

She looks at him as if he were a building whose architecture she might want to scale and measure. The shape of his limbs perfectly angular as they connect to the center of his body, beams jutting from a steel frame, his exterior slick and fragile, as if coated in a fine layer of glass.

Images from the television make shapes on his face, the same as on her face as she sits directly behind him silently stroking the fine, dark brown hairs at the base of his neck. He blows a perfect ring of smoke into the silence. Mikela stares through the center at the black and white movie that has been playing for the last hour. She can see Tom Waits' mouth moving, face contorting, arms flailing about, but she is relegated to imagining the gravel of his voice as Jonah likes to watch movies without sound. He tells her he would rather study the language of the body in conversation than the language of voice with so many of its words wrapped in double meanings.

"The body does not lie the way words can," he says to her.

Mikela tilts her head to the right towards the curtain-less windows; the squares of glass dirty from smoking. She looks at the field to the side of the house; the raspberry brambles build a fortress around the edges in the moonlight. She notices the fish swimming in the tank that is sandwiched between two low-slung sills. The off-white paint slowly chipping reminds her of paper birch trees, and it makes her want to get up and start peeling it away. But the filter bubbles into the tiny ecosystem distracting her, the light catching on the iridescent scales of her tetras.

She is captured here for a minute, contemplating her arrival at this very place in time; how after all these years she would find herself alone, but not alone, watching silenced movies in the dark. She can't touch him without the fear of drowning in his sorrow, without extinguishing her own joyfulness, and she realizes right then that he is something she cannot fix.

Smoke dissipates above the crown of his head again hanging there like a soft mist and Mikela suddenly feels like an apparition. He is lost in himself in these moments and she is nothing to him. She could pass through him unnoticed except for the sudden chilling in the air that would make him shiver, but not notice her. And when the feeling of an invisible hand lightly brushing the hairs of his arm alarms him, only then will he remember she was once there.

Ken Head interviews himself



Q: Where do you live?

A: Does it matter?

Q: Is everything you write this serious?

A: Pretty much. I don't do poetry-lite.

Q: Do you ever get published, online or in print?

A: Yes, both. A couple of dozen pieces a year or thereabouts.

Q: Do you do readings?

A: Since December I've read with Mimi Khalvati, Pascale Petit and Matthew Hollis.

Q: Any other good news lately?

A: Well, the sun's shining and I have some ideas for a new haibun. Lucky enough?

Q: Do you blog?

A: I ran a poetry blog called **DarkSparks** but it took over my life, so I closed it.

Q: Have you ever written a novel?

A: Two, both unpublished. I've had better luck with reviews and short stories, though.

Q: How do you see your future as a writer?

A: I don't, although, for a while at least, I hope to have a continuing present. Who knows?

**Sus**, a haibun by Ken Head

*Beyond the window  
speed reduces landscape  
to an afterthought*

Soldiers deployed beside the track, tanks slewed in an armoured chicane across a narrow road in the middle of nowhere. More than enough, you'd think, to warn us something wasn't right before our **tgV** throttled back to a resentful stop alongside a deserted forest halt too small to have a name. But nobody reacted until teams of men with scanners and laptops clambered aboard to check passports, slowly, carefully, giving out those small-hours, Cold War frontier vibes that make you wonder, if your memory stretches back that far, what it is they've already decided you've done.

Knowing the doors are locked doesn't help either, not if you're already as jumpy as he was, the man in the single window seat, traveling alone without much luggage. They barely glanced at his passport, dark green, elegant gold lettering on the cover, before they led him away, one of them carrying his bag and looking worried. There'd been no security check at Lausanne station where we'd all got on, so nervous questions floated in the air.

After what seemed an age, they brought him back, watched as he struggled to stow his bag, then left him, humiliated, too shattered to face his own reflection in the window and as close as most men get to tears, to stew over whatever might've been said or done while they'd held him somewhere none of us could see.

For the rest of the journey, he seemed asleep, arms folded across his table, head down, barely moving until we arrived in Paris, where he disappeared, as we all did, quickly, onto the busy concourse. Looking for cover inside the crowd? Trying to blend in, as if he thought he must still be wanted for something?

*In suspicious times  
mistrust and fear  
find everybody guilty*

#### Noah Cicero interviews himself



Q: What are your politics this voting year?

A: Sarcastic-Communist.

Q: What's that mean?

A: One believes in good pay but not taking their job seriously.

Q: Do you believe you have a chance.

A: I eat two bananas a day to soften my poop.

#### **the italian princess** by Noah Cicero

In the low-income apartment in Liberty, Maria lay in bed.

The bedroom was small.

A single lamp was on.

It sat on the end table next to the bed.

Maria had it on so she could see the ten small bags of coke, two packs of smokes with an ashtray overfilled, and the booze on the end table.

Cockroaches crawled through the room. Maria yelled at them, "You motherfuckers, get the fuck out of here!"

Maria had been sitting in her room for three hours.

In the living room were Monica and her son.

Monica left her boyfriend two days earlier because he beat her.

She was forced to stay with Maria because no one else was there to take her in.

Monica and her son lay on the living room floor together watching a movie.

Maria remained in the bedroom.

It was July and hot.

The apartment had no air-conditioning.

Maria sweated.

In the light of the lamp a person could see her greasy, pimple-covered face.

Her eyes were bloodshot.

Snot dripped out of her nose but she didn't even notice.

She sniffed two lines off of a state ID card.

Then she pulled two oxies out of her pocket, put them on the end table and crushed them with her state ID card.

She sniffed those also.

Maria's face had no look.

Her head just wobbled a little.

Maria grabbed the booze off the end table; it was Absolut Vodka in a small plastic bottle.

She took a big gulp.

Leaned her head back on the pillows and stared very seriously into nothing.

Her thoughts went like this, "Did I do that!

"Was it done by me!

"Father!

"Who am I?

"Do I exist!

"What's happening!

"I knew he was cheating on me!

"That's why he hit me in the face!

"Little birds sing!

"Yes!

"For me!

"I'm so beautiful!

"My daddy told me I was a princess.

"A little Italian princess!

"Yes!

"I'm a little Italian princess!

"Oh!

"If they only knew how much couth I have!

"How princess-like I am!

"I'm a little princess!

"Wait!

"What's happening!

"I'm a princess!

"Yes!

"I'm a princess!

"Monica isn't a princess!

"She's white trash!

"I'm a princess!

"An Italian princess!  
 "People like me!  
 "I know they treat me horrible!  
 "But they love me because I'm a princess!  
 "I have parents, they have my kid!  
 "What happened to my kid!  
 "Was it taken away?!  
 "Yes, I almost let him starve to death!  
 "Fuck!  
 "I'm a princess!  
 "Princesses don't let babies starve!  
 "Oh Mother Mary help me now, help me regain my couth!  
 "I'm a princess Mother Mary!  
 "Do you believe me Mother Mary?!  
 "I'm not stupid Mother Mary!  
 "I have couth!"  
 Maria continued to stare into space.  
 Her face was covered with sweat.  
 She suddenly became very angry.  
 Jumped up in the bed.  
 Took her shirt, pants, and underwear off violently and threw them on the floor!  
 She stood there naked on top of the bed.  
 Fell back down.  
 Grabbed another bag of coke.  
 Poured some on the ID card and sniffed two more lines.  
 Grabbed the bottle of booze and took another huge gulp.  
 While lying there, sniffing sporadically with snot running out of her left nostril a  
 cockroach crawled up onto the bed, then onto her naked leg.  
 Her eyes were closed and she did not see it.  
 It stopped moving on her thigh.  
 When Maria opened her eyes she looked down at the cockroach and said, "You like me  
 don't you, you think I'm a princess.  
 "Don't you?  
 "I'm a princess Mr. Cockroach.  
 "I'm a princess.  
 "I have more couth than this Mr. Cockroach.  
 "Sniffing coke, taking oxies, drinking Vodka, and smoking cigarettes is just for recreation.  
 "I'm actually an Italian princess, my father told me that.  
 "I'm a princess Mr. Cockroach.  
 "I was so beautiful in high school; everybody wanted to have sex with me. I'm serious  
 Mr. Cockroach.  
 "I was the most beautiful girl in my graduating class.  
 "I have a son Mr. Cockroach.  
 "I'm not allowed to see him.  
 "I don't know, I'm a princess."  
 Maria reached out and petted the cockroach and said, "You like me, don't you Mr.  
 Cockroach.  
 "You wanna be my friend.  
 "I got lots of coke, ever sniff coke with an Italian princess before Mr. Cockroach?"

Pandora Blake interviews herself



Wanda: What do you love the most?

Pandora: Inventing worlds.

Wanda: What do you hate the most?

Pandora: Cowards.

Wanda: What do you dream of?

Pandora: A lake in the middle of the forest. All is still and I know I'm not alone.

Wanda: What is your favourite line of poetry?

Pandora: 'I cannot make it cohere'.

**wanda** by Pandora Blake

*'Cause I'm a Fujiyama Mama and I'm just about to blow my top!*

Mom shouts to turn the music down, but I need it loud, I need it to scream and holler and wail and shriek. I can see Billy's house across the street. I can see Billy's got a pretty girl on his arm. There's a storm gathering, angry waves swelling big and black and ready to break through. Oh Billy, I've been watching you for so long, surely that makes you mine. Billy the nice boy, Billy the pretty boy, carries my books and helps me on my bike but Billy is nice to the cripple, can't see the girl. Why don't you beat me up and call me names and push me face down in the mud, I'd like that better than your toxic kindness. One day you'll see how big I am, one day I'll show you how angry you make me. Watch out, Billy boy, the waves are rising now and soon they'll break through the levees.

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Mom says I look pretty as a flower. Says I'll have boys queuing up for a dance. I punch the mirror, it shatters into a thousand tiny diamonds. It's like a magic spell, turns me into a car-crash Cinderella. Wide-eyed, one-handed princess, lizard skin shining in the broken glass. Mom starts

crying. She says, oh darling, I wish you'd see how pretty you really are. She says, so you don't look like a film star, nice boys don't care about looks, they care about personality. Oh Momma, personality means nothing when you're 15.

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Mom goes out, I drink her medicine. Works for her, see if it cures what I've got. I keep the bitter taste in my mouth, 1,2,3, swallow. I dance around the room with the swampy, sticky air. My dress feels cool and heavy. I shut my eyes real tight, I let my raging stomach lead me through the moves. I bump into the coffee table, I hit the record deck. I go all black and blue and I wish it was you who'd given me the bruises. I open my eyes, see myself in the window pane. Before I break that too I turn to show my good side. Look at my hand, so slender, so slick, so pretty, shame I only got one. I hide my stump behind my back and dance like a gentleman fencer. Such a little thing missing, such a big thing, makes me all wrong, keeps us apart.

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I don't need to be a good girl, don't have to toe the line, 'cause who would marry me? You'll never take me to the ball but I have sweet poisoned love for you, the kind that burns your tongue and licks your fire and blows your guts up. I've been waiting for so long, I tell you boy, you've never tasted anything like me. The swamp is coming up through the floor, wood going bad, pus seeping through its veins, the stench of filthy pond life clogging every pore, filling me up. Friction in the air, just a spark now and woosh we'll all be gone. This was never ours, the dirty water will take it back. You were never hers and I'm sure making you mine if that's the last thing I do.

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Who cares about the storm? Who cares if we all die? Don't think that I would mind if the town was wiped out. The air is thick and putrid, can't breathe for the gardenias rotting on the trees. Firewater in me, pressure on my brain, pushes on my temples, electricity under my skin. It won't be long before the waters burst now. You'd better take me as your girl before the levees break, boy, or I don't know what I can do. Be mine, I warn you boy, or get ready to be washed out.

### Justin Hyde interviews himself



Q: What remuneration have you received for your poetry?

A: A Starbucks' card from Jack Micheline's son and complete ostracization from my wife's family.

Q: Why don't you have a Myspace or blog or website?

A: Unresolved ambivalence relative to your throats and my cock.

Q: Is it true you were involved in a bar fight around 12:17am on Xmas morning.

A: Yes.

Q: General thoughts?

A: Being an existentialist doesn't give you the right to piss on herd creatures, but it's a good reason to drink.

### **my wife and her best friend**

are inside  
with the babies  
trying to talk each other  
into believing  
this is what they want  
from life.

her husband and i  
are in the backyard  
sitting on lopsided chairs  
he made  
in his wood-shop.

he's telling me  
about his new  
circular saw

how many rpms  
it turns  
under various  
torque  
loads

multiple blade  
patterns  
for different  
types of  
wood

the motor  
manufactured in  
switzerland has  
a lifetime warranty  
for everything but  
flood  
and lightning.

this man's nullity  
could drive a hummingbird

to suicide

but back in college  
 he saw me  
 with a blond  
 on a park-bench  
 after bar close  
 and never slid  
 sliver whisper  
 to my future wife  
 or her roommate,  
 his now wife.

he's got that  
 over me

so i speed-play  
 more of his flat  
 home-brew  
 trying to deaden the  
 unmitigated  
 verbal sodomy.

**right now** by Justin Hyde

a rat  
 in alexandria virginia  
 tasting human flesh  
 for the first time

a cruise ship  
 full steam ahead  
 for barbados

a twelve year old  
 in wayzata minnesota  
 spreading her legs  
 for a coked up  
 uncle

a ten month old  
 in kalona iowa  
 declared  
 tumor free

while a man  
 in bellvue nebraska  
 holds his  
 stillborn son

and the dew-drop

in sukagawa japan  
dangling off an apple  
just went  
clear.

Ben Myers interviews himself



How old are you?  
31.

Where do you live?  
Peckham, London, UK.

Tell me about your new novel.  
It's called *The Missing Kidney* and it's published in 2008 by Social Disease. It's about tarmac, Latino bongo players and grilled fish, but not exclusively.

Tell me about *The Brutalists*.  
The *Brutalists* are myself, Tony O'Neill and Adelle Stripe. Our debut collection is *Nowhere Fast* and it's out now through **Captains Of Industry Books**. [www.captainsof.com](http://www.captainsof.com).

Didn't you write a novel called *The Book Of Fuck*?  
Yes. It's a masterpiece.

What is your greatest extravagance?  
Shoes. I've acquired five pairs of them in the past month. The latest were today, which I lifted from a pile of clothes dumped outside a charity shop. Brown leather ankle boot brogues. Then I felt guilty, so I posted a £5 note through the letterbox as payment.

Have you ever been arrested?  
Yes.

Do you believe in God?  
Yes. No. Or maybe... 'Yo'?

I bet you have a blog.  
Yip: [www.benmyersmanofletters.blogspot.com](http://www.benmyersmanofletters.blogspot.com).

What was the last thing you put in your mouth?  
Welsh rarebit.

**sad tree surgeon story** by Ben Myers

Modern attitudes towards mental health being what they are, those blessed with an over-fertile imagination find themselves with limited viable options when it comes to choosing a career. Me, I've never really bothered to waste much time on such matters.

But every now and again the topic does crop up like a seed that was planted many seasons ago in the bed of my imagination. After much consideration it has become glaringly apparent that the only occupation I would feel particularly inclined to pursue would be that of a tree surgeon. There just seems something romantic about the juxtaposition of the deftness of a qualified medicine man working against a clinical theatre of pain disguised as nature. Plus, I imagine there would be less e-mails to reply to.

So when I envisage alternative futures, tree surgery often features in there somewhere.

It's a subject I broached with my sister who knows more about the world than I do because she actually lives in it, whereas I just observe it from the standpoint of detached confusion.

As it happened, she knew of someone who had been a tree surgeon. But, alas, he wasn't any more. Here's why:

One day the young tree surgeon was conducting a delicate pruning operation deep in a pine forest somewhere in the north-west of England. Or maybe it was Scotland. The geographical location matters little when you hear how it went down.

The tree surgeon enjoyed his work and was whistling as he traversed the trunks of great pungent pines planted as seedlings some thirty years before, snipping and cutting in a perfectly contented state of isolation.

There were a lot of branches to prune and he worked with surgeon-like speed and precision, steadily clutching shears instead of a scalpel and wearing a bobble hat instead of a surgical mask.

All those useless branches had to go somewhere, so they went straight down to the ground where a nice bonfire was burning them onwards into the afterlife.

I suppose you know what happened next.

Correct.

Its master lost in a reverie of pruning, the unattended fire grew in size, stature and confidence. This was a fire with ideas above its station, as fires so often are. It was an arrogant fire, the great destructor.

Naturally, as more branches fell on it with a crackle and pop, it grew out of control. Soon its flames were licking the nearby tree trunks like they were great wooden lollipops, or the stick of lollies that had melted away throughout the summer leaving behind only a straight true stick with a bad joke written on it.

And the joke was a sick one whose punch-line involved the entire tree, in which the poor surgeon worked away obliviously, being entirely engulfed by the arrogant fire. Trapped up the tree on his complicated system of ropes, calipers, crampons, harnesses and pulleys, the surgeon was exposed. It wasn't long before he was taken by the fire and there was nothing he or anyone could do about it. He was no more.

My sister told me all this in response to my declaration of tree surgery as a possible career option.

"That's the saddest story I've ever heard," I said when it was all over.

"I know," she said. "Awful. Just awful."

Then we fell into silence as we each considered the awfulness of it all.

The moral of the story?

There is no moral.

It's just one more example of the indiscriminate cruelty of nature.

One more reason why you should only ever take a job as the very last resort.

(Taken from Ben Myers' novel *The Missing Kidney*, out 2008 through Social Disease)