

## ASH TO ASHES

The aging Canadian woodman views the seasoned ash tree, doubt in his eyes. Why must such a fine tree fall? He knows the answer is *chalara dieback* whose bugs are biting beneath the bark, destroying the growth.

The woodman too is tall, thin and diseased. He is weighted down with safety wear, his high-glow jacket torn and dirty, the rigger boots scuffed at the toes with folds at the ankles.

The Stihl saw sits silently on the sodden ground. The woodman spits on his hands, he will defy the law and not wear protective gloves. He lifts the saw, pulls the cord and it screams into life. With the care of a craftsman he presents the spinning blade to the bark. It bites, then leaps and there is a squeal as it finally breaks through the bark. Unlike the woodman who takes medication, there is no anaesthetic for the tree. It must suffer pain.

Too many enemies are attacking trees; the latest is the emerald ash borer. Not a lot is yet known about it but like dieback it is fatal to trees. Just as his cancer will one day be fatal to him. The woodman consoles himself that by destroying this majestic ash he will help to save thousands more. Yet it is small consolation. Ironically for a woodman, he hates felling trees.

A breeze blows through the woodland and the tree is crying, its leaves falling like tears onto the woodman and his powerful saw. Other trees also drop tears. Heaven too is showing its affinity and a blatter of rain briefly wets the woodman's face.

The bright blade of the saw is toiling – it is the final moment. The tree screams out as the last sinews snap and she topples, like a hopeless drunk, outwards and downwards to the ground.

As the tree crashes, branches break and jump in the air; a final death throw. In the distance there is a fire where all dead trees are cremated. *Chalara Dieback* demands this; it is the trees unchallenged fate. The woodman switches off the Stihl saw and pushes back his hard hat.

Ash to ashes, dust to dust...

ENDS 370 wds.