

The Hedge

The forsythia was taking over the lawn.

“Dig it out before the birds build their nests,” her husband instructed.

When she’d cut back the bushes last year, it had been late, June. A catbird heckled around her head, screaming. She’d snapped off the branches that held the bird’s nest.

Each Spring, the new growth of forsythia extended toward the earth. It touched the ground and formed a new plant. Insidious, she thought. It’s garish yellow flowers. The regurgitation of Spring, a friend once said. Yet, it made a great hedge.

She hacked back the leafed limbs until the plant was white nubs, hollow stems jutting in the air. She scraped back the dirt, exposed the roots. Long tentacles clawed the earth, anchored umbilical cords. She jammed the point of her shovel down on each line, stamped the blade with her boot. The stem snapped. She levered the shovel under the loosened shrub and popped it up. A tangled root ball in a mound of yellow dirt.

Each plant she excavated, she laid by the stone wall by the edge of the property. At dusk, when the light dimmed and she thought the neighbors couldn’t see, she climbed the wall, root balls in hand. Quickly, she scraped the earth with her foot, loosened the topsoil. She set the root down, feathered out the thin, naked tendrils, hoped they’d stick. The stumps formed a staggered row. They rested on top, not properly dug in, yet she knew, the plant wanted to live.

“In a year or so, it will create a hedge and block out the neighbors.” She told her husband. “With forsythia, it doesn’t take much, you’ll see.”

They’d moved to the country along a stretch of a busy road. No neighbors except those over the wall and across the field. City people who visited on weekends. You could see their

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lights, on all night, hear the pop of their guns shot for practice, the roar of the bikes they rode, around and around the field.

Her friend Tim once told her how Linda's country house was ruined when the neighbors threw stones in her pond as it froze. When she came for the weekend to skate, it was nothing but bumps. In the summer, they dumped in packages of Miracle Grow. The water festered with algae.

"That was the end of using it as a place to swim." Tim laughed. He too had a country house too, but he didn't like Linda.

"What's a few forsythia bushes?" She thought. "Besides, they're city people, they won't know any better."