

The Privet Hedge

On a Wednesday in June, an orange truck pulls up in front of the corner apartment where we have lived for nearly twenty years. A fellow wearing jeans and an orange vest over an old shirt gets out of the truck. He has a long, narrow hose in one hand and he begins spraying the low privet hedge in front of our place with a clear liquid. This is the same hedge another fellow trimmed two days ago. All along the block, all the hedges were trimmed to a uniform height, and another fellow trailed behind to gather and bag all the cut leaves and branches.

Now, there's a fellow with a spray gun. *Is that water?* I ask. *No*, he says. *It's to keep the hedge from growing. It will stay just like this*, he says. I don't say anything more. I don't ask why—why kill its growth? I don't ask because I think I know the answer. They're doing this because the boss told them to do it. And whoever sends orders down to the boss probably figures this is a way to increase the bottom-line profit. Those two men—the one who trims the hedges and the other one who bags the hedge trimmings—the company won't need them anymore. The company can fire them. More money for the company—for whoever owns the company.

It takes only a few minutes on the internet to learn that there are now “growth regulators” for hedges and shrubs—they block the plant hormones that stimulate growth. They can also prevent “unwanted” flowering. The brand with the most links to its product claims to reduce “...trimming, pruning, and clean-up maintenance by 50% or more.” Fifty percent more for the company's bottom line.

The privet hedge will no longer sprout new leaves and pretty white flowers—those flowers that the bees visit each spring, hovering over the blossoms, sipping nectar and gathering pollen. There will be no more nectar to turn into honey, no more pollen to cling to their tiny beings. Those mighty pollinators will find no welcome here. The natural cycle that has continued all the years we have been here and long before we moved here will be no more.

There will be no privet scent to sweeten the air. No butterflies fluttering over the hedge. No bees sipping nectar.

No more privet blossoms. More profit.