

Retribution

Now, as all my neighbours will tell you, I am a tree loving man, having several in my garden. As a matter of fact, they are getting a little out of hand, as they are spreading their branches a little too far over the neighbour's garden. I keep saying that I will trim them up, but they are so beautiful that the thought of the saw cutting into them appalls me. Half way down the garden is an old lilac tree which spreads its branches very wide. Next to this is an old plum tree which has born fruit but twice in the last twenty years, although it has masses of blossom in the springtime. At the bottom of the garden is a laburnum guarding the compost heap.

Three weeks ago, I decided to do something about the trees, so I wandered around trying to make up my mind which tree to sacrifice.

"Something will have to go!" I said to myself, "but which one?"

Another couple of turns and I had come to a decision. The lilac tree would be the one to go. It was old and gnarled - its base was green and shredding.

"Right! I will do it tomorrow afternoon." I promised myself, and walked slowly back into the house. Somehow I did not have the heart to go into the garden any more for several days.

But "tomorrow" finally came, so, armed with a saw, hedge cutter and small axe, I walked down the garden and began to lop off the lower branches of the lilac tree. As I cut each branch, I carried it to the bottom of the garden to dry off before being burned. This took me about two hours off and on, for, although my arm was willing, my heart was not in the job.

Another two days passed, after which I tackled the roots. I loosened the earth around them. I dug and scratched at the smaller roots to remove as much as earth as I could before getting down to the bigger roots.

At one point my neighbour put his head over the fence to see what I was doing.....

"I thought I heard someone moaning and groaning." he said, "Are you having a rough time?"

"I have not opened my mouth yet," I answered. "but you will hear some choice language in a minute or two. There is a root here that is only seven inches under the ground, but it won't budge!"

"You want to watch it." he said, "It may come out when you least expect it to come. Carry on with the good work!"

So saying he disappeared into his house. I stopped work to light my pipe and look at the blisters on my hands. Polly, my wife, came out with a cup of tea; she knows I like a little encouragement when I am working in the garden.

"I thought I heard you moaning and groaning just now. Are you having a tough time?"

I swallowed the last mouthful of tea before I answered her with a "look". She interpreted the "look", turned on her heels and went quickly back into the house, saying as she did so,

"Carry on with the good work."

I carried on. Moaning and groaning? I had not uttered a word yet! What on earth did they mean? Determined to keep my "cool" whatever happened, I put my spade under the root, and using it as a lever, I heaved it up and down making some progress. Now the root was arching a little in the middle and seemed looser at the end where it tapered down to about one inch in diameter. It was getting late and I was getting tired, wishing I had not started on a career in forestry that afternoon in March. However, heartened by the fact that the root was now more pliable, I severed it nearly by the old stump. I stood back and looked at it as it rose into the air about four inches at the end.

"Aha," I thought "This is it! Another half hour and I shall be finished, and then it is no more gardening for me for another week."

Polly looked out of the dining room window and smiled at me. My neighbour looked over the fence to wish me "goodnight" and once more vanished into his house. Polly put the lights on in the house so that they shone cheerfully down the garden path, enhancing the gathering gloom. I began to work on the last root half buried in the rather heavy clay soil. As I picked up my small axe to swing above my head to bring it down onto the root I thought I heard a loud sighing from the ground. I paused for a moment, cocking my head on one side to listen, and then shrugging my shoulders, I brought it down onto the root, a tapering tendril-like root. I gave it a couple of swipes and then it was cut right through, although there were still a few hair-like fibres holding it to the ground.

I straightened my back and let out a loud "Aaah!" of relief; then turning to Polly I gave her the "thumbs up" sign. At that precise moment the root sprang out of the ground and gave me such a hearty thwack on my backside that I nearly lost my balance, and I swear I heard the sound of baleful, devilish laughter from behind me at ground level. Polly came out.

"I am so glad you have finished." she said. "I thought I heard you laughing just now, but somehow it was not like your usual laugh".

"It was not." I answered her, "It was that damned lilac tree getting its own back on me!"

Do you know, since that day, nothing I try to plant on that patch of ground thrives or flourishes.

The lilac tree had the last laugh.