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THE WEEDS AND THE WILDNESS

Tyler Keevil

“Always this bending process, this landscape gardening to make the mind more attractive.”

—Henry Miller

There are vans driving around the city: large white vans without any markings on the bodywork. I saw the first one last week, can still see it in my mind. The paint was so fresh and bright it hurt my eyes to stare. I was standing in the garden, watering my marigolds, when it drifted by—smooth and silent as a shark. All the windows, including the windscreen, were tinted so the driver appeared as a vague and featureless shadow. It’s hard to say what struck me most—its secretive nature or the predatory efficiency with which it moved. In the week since the first one, I’ve seen more and more of the same. It’s not the same van—it can’t possibly be the same van—but I’m hard-pressed to spot any difference between them. They are all in immaculate, pristine condition: no spots of rust, no dents or grooves or scratches. The face of the driver is always similarly obscured. I never catch them speeding, but neither do they seem unhurried. Rather, they prowl about the streets with identical, mechanical purpose. What that purpose is I can’t possibly say, but their very existence unnerves me. I can’t help but feel as if this is the start of something.

These days, I spend most of my time in the garden—if it can be called a garden. It’s more of a jungle, a thriving tangle of grasses, heathers, evergreens, bulbs, corms, perennials, shrubs, ivies, saplings and flowers. This is the busiest time of year. Bluebells are popping open like tiny firecrackers. A multitude of crocuses, daffodils, tulips, and dog’s tooth violet are coming into blossom—splashing the lawn and beds with paint-box colours. The next phase of perennials is starting to emerge: hot red bleeding hearts and gold-petalled leopard’s bane, alongside the delicate blue and pink wood anemones. My shrubs flower early in the year as well: rhododendrons, magnolias, azaleas—the list goes on and on. Yes, my garden is running rampant. As is the case every spring, complaints come to me in the polite manner of neighbourly concern. They ask me: Would you like to borrow my lawnmower, my trimmer, my pruning shears? Some even offer to do it for me. Since my retirement, I’ve learned that people in suburbia don’t like things to be too different, too wild.

But that’s their problem, not mine. I see my garden as a form of personal expression. Maintaining such disarray is a full-time occupation. I reserve evenings for my business dealings (I make a small profit selling organic fertilizers and lawn supplies over the internet) but my days are entirely devoted to my plants. With the countless hours I spend among them, feeding and watering, tending and trimming, it has been impossible for me not to notice these vans. So far, they seem content to go about their business, as I go about mine.



I would like to make some enquiries on the block. If I weren’t such a coward, that’s exactly what I’d do. But even the thought of it opens a gaping pit in my stomach, brings a sheen of sweat to my back and a hot, allergenic flush to my cheeks. My garden is my refuge. The notion of venturing out, of interacting and engaging with people, unsettles me. It’s nothing serious. I’m simply comfortable in my own space, with my plants. I suppose that makes me an eccentric. I’m sure that’s what they call me, anyway, behind my back. What of it? Every neighbourhood needs one. I give them something to talk about over dinner. The eccentric and his garden: wild, unkempt, madcap, bizarre, unmanageable. Strange how gardens reflect personality. Though I’ve barely exchanged more than a few awkward words with my neighbours in as many years, I feel I know them. I know Mrs. Crenshaw,

with her obsessively trimmed lawn and manically pruned hedges—squat and square as slices of frosted cake. I know, too, the young couple on the corner, who neglect their yard for months and then decide to attack it, apropos of nothing, with ferocious zeal. Grass clippings and leaves are left where they've fallen, covering a lawn devoid of style, care, or character—like a haircut executed by a drunken barber. And what do I know of Mr. Amonte and his brood? I know the first thing he did, upon moving in across the street, was to drown his yard in a sea of cement. The only lawn he has left is a small plot, about two by six feet, that rests in the centre of the patio like an unkempt and overgrown grave.

The thought of approaching these people, or most of the others, horrifies me.

There is only one yard, one person, on the block that I find interesting. Like myself, Jay is something of an anomaly. A weed. A thirty-something divorcee. Her husband was the gardener, studious and conventional. Since their split, she has taken secret pleasure in allowing his carefully tended beds to run rampant. The lawn hasn't been cut for months. It's become a raging meadow, filled with knee-high stalks of grass, dandelion heads, snowdrops, buttercup clusters, and chains of michalmas daisies. Along the perimeter, fierce japonica shrubs vie with smoke bushes and holly trees for dominance. It is a garden to fall in love with.

I know Jay has gone back to school recently. I see her coming and going, head down, a load of books clutched to her chest. She would be worth talking to, and I've had the opportunity on occasion when she's ordered supplies from me (I offer her a discount). But whenever I deliver she is as reticent and tonguetied as me. She's like a furtive jungle animal hiding out amongst all that foliage. Our very similarities make communication between us difficult.

It is impossible to say if she'd understand about the vans.



I've developed a system. It is not enough to observe. I must also record, analyze, and assess the nature of the threat posed by these vans. Already I've had several breakthroughs. I've discovered they come only during the day, during which they pass by no less than two and (so far) no more than five times. There can be no doubt they wish to avoid drawing attention to themselves. Their ultra-quiet engines and alarmingly inconspicuous exteriors are proof enough of that, but today I noticed something far more menacing: the vans have no license plates. Or rather, the plates have been deliberately obscured. They seem to have been coated with some sort of reflective material, which catches the sunlight and cunningly foils any attempt to discern the lettering. There really is no way to differentiate between them. The only reason I can assume I'm seeing numerous vans, rather than the same one over and over, is the sheer number of sightings. They seem to be increasing by the day. Surely it can't go on like this? Surely—the authorities or somebody—will put a stop to it? We can't just have these anonymous, impossibly efficient vans cruising up and down the block, the neighbourhood, the city, unchecked. Yet, that's precisely what seems to be happening.

I jumped just now, at the sound of a distant car. They have me on edge, you see. But night is falling as I write, and with it comes the safety of darkness. At twilight, the grass whispers and the leaves mutter to one another. And the smells! It's impossible to describe the smells—a perfume of cherry blossom, honeysuckle, and magnolia. I know if I put down my pen and stepped off the porch, if I placed a palm on the dew-wet grass, I'd be able to feel the vibrant hum of nature, flowing like a current. This time belongs to things natural and pure. The thought of one of the vans suddenly appearing is not only abhorrent, but unthinkable.



Disturbing. That is the only word I can think of to describe what I saw today. I was in my garden—carefully pruning my clematis—when I heard the unmistakable purr of an approaching van. I reached for my notebook (which I always keep at the ready) and jotted down the time, as per my custom. But I was to witness something new. Instead of cruising past, the van began slowing down. I watched in horror as it pulled to a stop in front of Mrs. Crenshaw’s place, and two figures (I hesitate to call them men) clamboured out. They wore white jumpsuits, like painter’s coveralls, along with white hats, white gloves, and white boots. Surgeons’ masks muzzled their mouths, and clear plastic safety goggles obscured their eyes. These goggles, like the license plates of their vans, seemed to constantly reflect sunlight, making it impossible to see anything behind the lenses. Petrified, I watched these men open the rear doors of the van and unload a large supply of everyday gardening tools. I found that more alarming than if they had pulled out an arsenal of weapons: machine guns, bazookas, crates of grenades. For they acted as soldiers, and it was this incongruity—between their military manner and the banal nature of their task, which unsettled me most.

The first one slipped a pesticide pack on his back and immediately set to dosing Mrs. Crenshaw’s entire yard, like a marine spraying a flamethrower. Meanwhile, the other turned his motorized trimmer on her privet hedges, shearing the tops and sides with mercenary precision. Last, they attacked the lawn, which was cropped until it resembled a monstrous putting green. The whole incident seemed to occur in fast-motion, as if I were watching a film being played back at twice the normal speed. Before I could make a single note, the tools were disappearing back into the van. One worker slipped behind the wheel while the other deposited something in Mrs. Crenshaw’s mailbox. Then the engine purred to life. Both doors swung shut, scarcely audible. Wheels turned silently on silky-smooth tarmac.

They were gone.

The world slipped back into real-time. The street was quiet, dead, save for the chirruping of a lone blackbird overhead. Nobody else had witnessed the travesty. I was shaken and stunned, almost shell-shocked, but I walked—as casually as possible—over to Mrs. Crenshaw’s, and checked in her mailbox. Within was a quarter sheet of white paper. Plain black letters in a nondescript font read: Your lawn has been serviced. That was all. It was so shockingly absolute I dropped the paper as if it were infected, diseased, contagious. I rushed home, slamming the door and snapping the deadbolt behind me.

In my notebook I wrote: *They have stepped up operations.*



The rest of the week has proved me right.

Just as the sight of cruising vans became familiar, so too have the sightings of men in white suits. A day doesn’t pass when I fail to spot them, on our block or those nearby, wielding their vast array of weapons: lawnmowers, trimmers, clippers, hedgers, saws, power rakes, edgers, rollers. From daybreak until twilight they are busy, like swarms of ravenous white ants scrambling over the city. They fill clear plastic bags with grass clippings, weeds, twigs, moss, flowers, leaves—anything. Anything that stands in the way of their generic, pristine lawns.

This afternoon I had a harrowing encounter with Mrs. Crenshaw. In the middle of loading sacks of fertilizer on my flatbed for the weekly deliveries, I stood up to find her hovering nearby. Rake-thin, long-limbed, and hook-nosed, she had the look of a wingless, featherless bird. I forced myself to smile, even asked after her health. Perfectly familiar, perfectly friendly, even though all our previous conversations (or altercations) had been based around my unruly lawn encroaching on her pruned paradise.

Yet she had a smile for me, as well. Quite dazed. It matched the look in her eyes: as if she were gazing through me rather than at me. Encouraged by this congeniality, I asked her about the vans, and the men I'd seen. "Oh yes," she said, her smile broadening. "Them. I hired them, you see? I am weary of my lawn. It is so much easier to let them take care of it." I pressed her further, asking who 'they' were and how she had contacted them. To these queries, she merely waved her hand airily. She's not quite sure, she told me. Perhaps on the internet, or in the phone book. Perhaps through a friend. It's even possible, it seemed to her, that she hadn't hired them at all. But what troubled me most was the dull, glazed expression on her face—like a lobotomy patient. As if she herself, like her lawn, had undergone some kind of treatment. She, oblivious to my suspicions, began to wax enthusiastic about 'them,' telling me I should consider hiring them to take care of my own 'yard problems.' She said 'them' like their service was some kind of a miracle cure, a new drug her doctor had prescribed. Soon it will be the talk of the town, she promised me.

Them.



This week I have recorded other incidents that confirm my fears. The jottings in my journal are no longer concerned with which lawn seed to use in spring, or the best way to cultivate wisteria. No, it reads now like a military log for what I am beginning to think of as 'The Resistance.' The Resistance of one. In this way I have kept track of their activities. They are at the university, tearing up boulevards, yanking out shrubs, hacking down trees. They are down in the city's parks, laying generic strips of turf, slashing back hedges, gutting flower beds. They are on every corner, every street, shameless now, gaining momentum. Even as I write this I can hear them working on our boulevard. The harsh whine of their machinery rises in the air, like the buzz of swarming locusts. There is no foreseeable end to it. They won't stop until they've slashed every tree, lawn and hedge into submission, until they've eradicated all the dandelions, nettles, ragwort and thistle from the entire city. The vision comes to me now, like something out of Revelations. The lawns are perfectly flat and groomed: squares on a massive green checkerboard. Row after row of identical trees, stiff and monotonous as cardboard cutouts, stretch down each and every boulevard. There is no sense of disorder, no sense of life and chaos. It is a man-made apocalypse, Judgement Day welcomed with open arms. And this unnatural vision will come to pass unless we wake up from our general slumber, unless somebody—anybody—stands up and shouts, "Enough!" Out of unlikely necessity, it looks like that person may have to be me. If I truly am the lone Resistance, I may as well resist.



I waited until early evening, when their activities typically ceased for the day. Cool, waning sunshine fell like honey over lawns, sidewalks, lampposts. Armed with spade and shovel, I marched out to the boulevard. A fitting no man's land. A suitable place to begin. While the neighbourhood slept, 'they' had changed it into a perfectly groomed strip of grass, smooth and flat and straight as green ribbon. Gripping the spade firmly by both hands, I raised it over my head. .

I struck a blow.

The turf was still fresh, and hadn't settled. Easy enough to peel back entire sections, roll them up like carpets. These were cast aside. Next came the planting. Using buds and bulbs and shoots and cuttings from my own stock, my own garden and flower beds, I dug and planted, sowed and covered. First, I laid down a fierce and aggressive vanguard: grenades of golden canopied achillea, each one an explosion of yellow, dropped in next to brigades of halberdleaf hibiscus, and battalions of kniphofias—their flowers jutting straight up like the bloody spears of a phalanx. I worked myself into a sweating, panting frenzy.

Halfway through my operation, I heard footsteps.

Imagine my surprise, in looking up, to see a Jay approaching, heavy textbooks clutched to her chest. She smiled at me, and told me my display was beautiful. I thanked her, too spent to be properly nervous or tongue-tied. Moments passed. Then, in a quiet, hesitant tone, she asked me if, maybe, she might be able to help, possibly? In answer I gestured at the remaining bulbs, stalks, seedlings and stacks of stones. Of course I could use her help. Blushing slightly (she has plaster-pale cheeks, so the red stands out like circles of paint) she dropped her books and set to work. Without changing her clothes, without gloves or proper shoes, she dove straight in like a vole.

We worked together, in comfortable silence. What I remember most are her hands—her pale, bony hands, dipping into the earth, and the way the dirt stained her palms, gathered under her nails, smeared her forearms. Behind my fiery frontline, Jay selected calmer colours: some cream-flavoured marigolds, the soft, sundial shapes of osteospermum, and a sprinkling of white petunias. The stepping stones went in last, laid out flat, cool and grey as puddles.

We finished as the sun died. Shattered and sweating, we stood side by side in the spreading dark and gazed at our creation: the paler colours hovering like strange and beautiful ghosts, the darker shades playing shadow-tricks on our eyes. With the work done, my reticence returned. It had been so easy and comfortable while we were united by purpose. Now silence clung to us like spider webs. Jay reached for her books, muttered excuses about dinner, reading, working on her thesis. I stood and nodded like a bobble-headed doll. I said I had things to do as well: orders to fill, bills to process. But before she went, she seized me in a swift, impulsive hug—squeezing her bony figure against me, her arms tight on my neck.

And in my ear I heard: "I really appreciate what you're doing."

At that she withdrew, scuttling across the street. She seemed to know what I was up to—with my observation and my recording, my vigilance and my resistance—though I didn't know how. I wondered about that while I watched her scurry up her steps and slip inside her door, as silent and soundless as a mouse retreating to its den.



There has followed a frenzy of activity, a veritable revolution. Across the city, wherever I can, I am fighting them. I perform spontaneous acts of creation on a daily basis, off-setting Their meticulous devastation. In the cooling dusk, with whatever tools are on hand, I (the Resistance!) am taking to the streets, riotous and seditious. An oasis of pink-belled digitalis appears here, bursting clusters of fuchsias ignite there. The wildest, fiercest plants make the most effective allies: Russian vine, silver ivy, holly, rhododendron hedges. These and countless others push belligerently into Their artificial wasteland, recovering lost ground. And weeds: my secret weapons. Proliferate, burgeoning weeds. Patches of buttercup bloom overnight, occupying manicured lawns. Bindweed creeps up on

flowerbeds, overpowering them. Dandelions, sorrel, leafy sponge, dock, tansy, pokeweed—they are able soldiers all.

My workroom has become a place to plot, to draw up battle plans and manoeuvres. Which fertilizer can create the most havoc? Which seeds to scatter where? Those answers I don't know, I research on the internet. I do not have their numbers or their supplies, but I have nature on my side and the benefit of surprise. They never know where I will strike because I act at random. Disorder is my ally; chaos is my friend. I take inspiration from a blog I've stumbled upon in my searches; it is run by somebody called Narcissus, who posts messages and well-known quotations at least once a day. They are always uplifting and seditious One of my favourites was Michael Pollen: A lawn is nature under totalitarian rule. Today it was a W.H. Hudson quote: *Rather I would see daisies in their thousands, ground ivy, hawkweed, and even the hated plantain with tall stems, and dandelions with splendid flowers and fairy down, than the too-well-tended lawn.*

The knowledge that there are others like me keeps me going, in this war of attrition..What I do today may be undone tomorrow. Squadrons of marching ivy, platoons of toeflax, armies of bullthistle: all can vanish in a single morning. For I have not stopped Them. I am only keeping Them at bay. But the idea that this is even possible, that I can slow Them down, has given me hope



Hope, too, I've found in our own, local struggle. During the evenings, Jay and I persevere. Following our initial efforts on my boulevard, imagine my delight to have her join me again, and again, always during those same hours. What began with that initial chance encounter has blossomed into a nightly ritual; she has joined my Resistance. This week we targeted the boulevard in front of her house. Now it looks like an extension of her garden: unchecked, unmanageable, unyielding. Stretches of geranium grope their way around segonia shrubs and pink-flowered azalea. And in finishing, what could be more sensible than to continue? Up and down the block, spreading nature's anarchic vitality, gaining ground in inches and feet, ignoring our neighbours who now seem too dumb and dull to protest. From behind their windows they peer out, blinking myopically like bunnies trapped in glass cages.

Tonight, just now, as Jay and I stood surveying our latest masterpiece—a stunning display of ornamental grasses, ranging from Liriope to Little Bluestem, planted in front of the Amonte's home—something unexpected occurred. She asked me if I'd like to come in for a drink. A lemonade, perhaps, or something stronger?

I accepted, of course, and found myself following her across her lawn and into what I could only describe as a cave of books. Books carpeted the floor and leaned against the walls in precarious towers. Others lay across chairs, desks and tables, the pages spread open like the wings of exotic and dormant moths. She ushered me into her living room, wading through textbooks, fiction anthologies, poetry chapbooks, paperback novels, volumes of critical essays, collections of plays. She cleared a seat on the sofa for me before vanishing into the kitchen. I heard cupboards opening, bottles capping, liquid pouring. She returned with two glasses of vodka lemonade and sat next to me. The low-slung sun was shooting its last, blazing rays through her window, making our glasses glow like lanterns.

That kind of intimacy did not come easy to me; a familiar nervousness filled me like a fever. I cleared my throat, explained that I'd never been much of a reader. She glanced around, blushing, as if surprised to see all those books scattered about her living room. She explained about her studies, about her Master's degree. When pressed, she elaborated on her thesis: a project combining her

twin loves of literature and horticulture. It must have been obvious to her that I didn't understand everything she said, but her patience allowed some of the concepts to filter through—like the relationship she perceived between plants and words, mother nature and human nature. Thoughts are like seeds, growing in the darkness of our consciousness. Cultured and nurtured, they sprout into ideas, grow into finished and complete structures. A poem, say. Or a story. But in hostile environments, smothered and suppressed, they die at the backs of our skulls, the stillborn babies of infertile imaginations.

And I, fascinated, listened to her as she opened up, a night flower unfolding in the dusk, her words evoking a heady, almost dizzying effect in me. Later, we took our drinks and chairs to her front window, there looking out upon our own creation: the wild, rambling boulevard. Stalks and stems stood out in stark silhouette, and flower heads seemed to float in the dark like will-o'-the-wisps. Jay swirled her drink, causing the ice to tinkle pleasantly.

Then she said, "Abram Urban said 'My garden of flowers is also my garden of thoughts and dreams. The thoughts grow as freely as flowers, and the dreams are as beautiful.'" She recited this in a low, mournful tone, as if reading at a funeral. I looked at her, wondering why I hadn't realized before. Narcissus. She was my Narcissus. And as if in confirmation, she brushed my forearm with her fingertips, her nails searing my skin. The sudden gesture—so natural yet so shockingly intimate—left my skin throbbing hotly, as if I'd been burned, or marked.



They have struck back, as I knew they would.

We are dusk-mites, operating under the cover of darkness. Jay and I feel much safer doing our work during the evenings rather than exposed, in the daytime. For in the day they are strong, and in the day we are vulnerable. Legions of vans swarmed the city this week, more than I have ever seen, redoubling their efforts. Battles are won in increments, in inches, and they're taking back the ground we've gained. Our beautiful grass collage? Gone. The rock and stone garden we arranged in front of Mrs. Crenshaw's? Vanished. For days on end the air in the neighbourhood has been thick with the reek of oil fumes, cut grass, pesticides, moss killer. This retribution, of course, is not unexpected. Yet they are pursuing other avenues—far more shocking and, I fear, ultimately far more dangerous to our well-being.

This morning there came a knock at my door. When I opened it, I saw Jay standing there, looking perplexed. She had her book bag slung over one-shoulder, and in her hands was a slip of white paper. She held it out to me, asked me if I'd had a similar notice. I took it from her, my insides going numb, as if I'd swallowed ice water. It was easily recognizable, with its plain black lettering, its obtrusive font, its single declarative sentence, so minimalist and so menacing: Your lawn is due for servicing. I told her, no, I hadn't received anything like this. Not yet. She frowned and took it back from me, studied it while nibbling her lip.

"It must be some mistake, then. I'll call and explain I don't need it."

I tried to tell her. I babbled inarticulately about the seriousness of the situation, the effects of the treatment on Mrs. Crenshaw and Amonte; I stammered on about Them. But she didn't seem to understand, or want to understand. She laughed at my worries, kissed me on the cheek, said my concern for her was touching. "It's fine," she told me, adjusting her bag. "I'll be fine. You'll see." She wouldn't quite look me in the eye, though. I wanted to grab her, shake her, tell her she was fooling

herself. Instead I stood there, silent and frozen, my tongue stuck like a fishhook in my mouth, as she trotted down my steps and hurried away from me, away from the truth.



They came for her the next day. Or maybe the day after. It's hard to say, given what occurred. One thing I know for sure: she was at school, and helpless to stop them. Two vans pulled up and out sprang a handful of white minions. I stood at my window, paralysed. Impossible to describe what the sight of those vans did to me, glaring so whitely.

It was a massacre.

Through the glass I heard the scree of gas engines firing up, the helicopter thop of mower blades, the buzz of trimmers, the moan of hedge clippers. They came well-armed, well-prepared. Those sounds were awful enough, but far worse was what I saw: sunlight flashing off metal blades, black fumes spewing into the air. Stems hacked like tendons, branches hewn like bone. Petals scattering like chunks of flesh. Green froth spit and splattered across their pristine suits, the gory lifeblood painting dying patterns. I was safe, behind closed doors. But Jay. Jay. I knew that nothing would be spared. Nothing.

As I watched, I heard something else: a strange, keening cry. It was coming from my own throat. Then I was outside, acting without thinking. Grabbing a spade from my garden, I charged towards them—shouting over the roar of equipment, brandishing the tool like a sword. Engrossed in their work, eyes obscured by goggles and mouths hidden by masks, they ignored me until I stormed amongst them, threatening and shouting and cursing. Then, one by one, the engines died. My breath coming raw and ragged, I turned on their vehicles, swinging the spade like a hatchet against headlamps, windscreens, doors, and hoods.

“She doesn't want it! Leave her alone!”

They stared at me, impassive and inscrutable. Inhuman, alien creatures! I was vaguely aware of doors opening up and down the block, of a crowd gathering. I continued my tirade, screaming and bashing, my words and blows growing weaker and weaker, until I had nothing left but blind spots in my vision and a cutting pain in my chest. My knees bent; I went down. I fell in the field of butchered plants, the scent of death ripe in my nostrils. Quivering, twitching, nauseous and fearful, I lay there in a semi-conscious state.

Feet and voices surrounded me. “That's enough now,” one said. “We'll take you home,” came another. They were not Them (for They do not speak) but my own neighbours. Gentle and firm. The spade was wrested from my grip. Hands lifted me, supported me. Faces hovered on all sides. I recognized Mrs. Crenshaw and Amonte and the young couple and still others. Every one of them smiling sickly, emboldened by daylight and the proximity of the vans. En masse they guided me away from the scene towards my house, all the while keeping up their sinister murmurs: Everything will be okay, now. Soon you'll see. It doesn't even hurt. I was led (or forced) through my open door, stretched out on the sofa, my protests drowned out by the chorus of soothing, cooing voices. That's the way... Just lie down. Stay put. And I obeyed, helpless to resist—as the world went black before my eyes. I heard fading voices, retreating footsteps, the gentle click of the door swinging shut behind them.

I remember the throb of motors coming to life.



I am now lying in bed. Pale, lugubrious light is oozing through my bedroom blinds, leaking across the floor, and pooling in puddles on my bed. The sweat of troubled dreams has soaked through my sheets. It's been this way for days: days in which I've heard the constant passage of vans, the permanent haze of noise created by their machines. I have never felt so alone.

Jay, my Narcissus, is gone.

As soon as I recovered, I went to see her. But once I stepped out of my house, even in the darkness of evening, I knew all hope was lost. I could see the totality of their job. Where once there grew evening primrose, foxhollow, pink hyacinths and purple forgetme-nots – a wondrous jumble of greenery and colours—there is now only the same empty vacuum as in every other yard on the block. Flat, rectangular, soulless, expressionless. Lifeless.

Spurned on by perversity, or desperation, I went to see her anyways. The only sign of the morning's massacre was the faint, sickly sweet smell of freshly killed vegetation lingering in the air. I mounted her porch, knocked twice, stood standing and waiting like a salesman. And imagine my horror, my agony, as the door swung open, to reveal Jay, smiling blandly, her expression as fixed as a doll's: eyes dim, mouth slack, features blank. Behind her, in perfect order against the walls, like hundreds of soldiers lined up to be shot, were her books. It was too much. I began to weep, clutch at her. I tried to hold her. She didn't have the presence of mind to be scared, or angry. Rather, she seemed only confused and bewildered. She patted me affectionately, still smiling. "There, there. Everything is okay. What's all this fuss about? Come, now." I extricated myself, backed away, unable to take my eyes off her, still searching until the end for some semblance of the woman I knew. She stood still in the doorway, her body oddly limp: a cropped flower wilting in its vase.

So now I lie here, stuck among sweaty sheets with my painful memories. The heady stench of her sweat as we worked. A bead of blood glistening on her thorn-pricked fingertip. The tentative, breathy whisper of her voice. The touch of her fingers on my arm, like fire.

And outside, all the while, I hear Them working...



I am up, now. Out of bed. Spurned on by the sound of something sliding through my mail-slot, something that brushed the carpet with a soft, serpent's hiss. I'd been expecting it, of course. Still, it was enough to rouse me. Throwing on a bathrobe, stumbling to the entrance hall, I saw one of their quarter-sized sheets of paper, nestled by my doormat. I refused to pick it up, fearful of its terrible, hypnotic power, fearful of being immobilized.

In writing this now, the utter hilarity of my position occurs to me. My lawn's disorder is like a last vestige of individualism amongst this utterly generic wasteland. My neighbours walk by it, refusing to look, avoiding it as if, through denial alone, they can will it (and me) out of existence. And who's to say they're not right? Soon my lawn will no longer exist. Soon I will no longer exist. Having taken the kingdom, They are ready to storm the tower.

And I've been as compliant, as submissive as the others: lying here, waiting for Them to come, waiting for the end. I've neglected my duties, stewing in my mire of depression, despair, and selfpity. But just now, for the first time in weeks, I've looked at Jay's blog. There, to my heartache and delight, I found a final message from Narcissus—posted just before the end, quoting Thoreau: Gardening is civil and social, but it wants the vigour and freedom of the forest and the outlaw. Until now my resistance has been pacifistic, while around me I have seen landscapes changed and minds reshaped. No longer. Jay has shown me the way.

The passive, civil resistance of gardening is no longer adequate.



I am in a unique position. My storehouse is already filled with chemicals, with fertilizer, with everything I need. There are internet sites that offer simple instructions. A fool could follow them. All week I have been mixing ingredients, and loading my van with innocuous-looking packages. I've been going over my maps, and drawing up lists of possible targets. But I also plan to improvise. As ever, chaos will be an ally, and I can make deliveries wherever I see Them working, or at any address where They have already done Their damage, and the people are beyond saving. I know there are others out there who will understand, who may be waging their own battles and resisting this in their own way.

I know I am not alone.

Tonight, the night before the exodus, I am filled with a dream of tomorrow. No, it is more than a dream. It is a premonition. As I drive out of the city, I hear explosions and see towers of flame, like lances thrusting up from the earth. And the terrible aftermath! Vans torn and shredded. Billowing black columns of smoke. Helicopters circling overhead. Sirens wailing in agony. These sounds will create the swansong of the Resistance as we beat our final retreat. You cannot save people who do not wish to be saved. I head into the wilderness, for the wild. Far from this place we will meet again, those of us who still believe in natural chaos; who still believe there is beauty in the tangled snarl of vines around tree trunks, in the way weeds can crack apart pavement, in the riotous nature of blossoms and buds. There we will meet and find others like ourselves, others who abhor the sight of cropped grass, square hedges, symmetrical trees—precision and perfection. We will cultivate our beliefs, drawing strength from the land, waiting for the time when the city turns stagnant, when every lawn is uniform and every mind is unanimous, and the light of humanity begins to slowly go out like a gas lamp dimming in the dark. Only then will we return.