

## The Gardens

I have two neighbors. They each have a garden.

The neighbor on one side always keeps his neatly trimmed and weeded. He has a hedge. As long as I can remember it has always looked exactly the same. It's cut razor-straight from top to bottom, with perfectly angled corners. Of course now and then a branch might stick up, but just as soon as it does my neighbor is out there with his shears to whack it off. This keeps him very busy. He's constantly thinking about his hedge. And sometimes he's very frustrated. A twig might shoot out at any moment with him not knowing about it. Look how it spoils the otherwise uninterrupted lines he's worked so hard to draw! And (though I've never told him this to his face) no matter how careful he is in his trimming, I can always notice slight curves and dips where his scissors have lost their bearings.

My other neighbor doesn't spend much time with his garden. The weeds and flowers sprout up together, and he neglects his hedge. He lets it grow wild or—as he says—“naturally.” Every once in a while he'll get out his shears, scrape off the rust and oil them, then give his hedge a good pruning. But this is only to keep the branches from growing out into the street and getting in somebody's way. If a sprig or two protrudes out a bit, you'd never even notice it—all the shoots more or less stick out that way.

The other day I overheard these two neighbors talking. The first was upbraiding the second for not paying more attention to his hedge.

“Don't you care about it?” he asked in disgust. “Look at my hedge. It's *perfect*.”

“Of course I care about my hedge,” the other man said. “But isn't mine perfect just as it is?”