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A New Hedge

by Sho Botham

Charlie strode meaningfully down the lane with Roger pulling on his lead. Passing Gerard and Mina's house was her purpose. She slowed her pace much to Roger's annoyance turning her head to look over the shoulder-height hedge. It was right what she'd been told, they'd planted a whole row of small laurels right next to the fence of the livestock field. 'That's not on,' she thought. Roger forced her to pick up their pace. He was sure there were rabbits to chase just around the corner.

Not wanting to cause trouble, unnecessarily, Charlie checked her facts with a couple of local farmers and also with the livestock association online. All confirmed her fears. Laurel is poisonous for livestock if they eat the leaves. It is also poisonous for humans although there were no humans living in the livestock field. She discovered that bay laurel, *Laurus nobilis* to give it its proper name, is the one exception. Bay leaves are used in cooking but the whole or broken up leaves should be removed from the dish before eating. Charlie had to decide what to do. Simply ignoring the new hedging planted right next to the boundary, could be fatal for some or all of the herd of Alpacas in the field. But she suspected, telling her neighbours that the long line of laurels they had just planted should be replaced with something livestock friendly, would go down like a lead balloon.

Choosing her moment carefully, she saw both of them tying their new plants to Charlie's livestock fence. She couldn't believe it. Not only had they planted a poisonous hedge but they were using Charlie's fence to support their lethal plants. She walked over towards them and in a friendly voice, asked if they realised that their hedge was poisonous to livestock. their response knocked Charlie for six.

The alpacas weren't their problem and the animals shouldn't lean over to eat their hedge. Charlie tried to explain that their hedge would grow and fill out to a much bigger size than their current size, which means it would end up pushing through her fence where the animals could eat it.

"We don't care," chortled the two looking at each other smugly.

Worried for the animals, Charlie took advice and had a solicitor's letter sent to the pair. They laughed at it and told Charlie they would file it in the 'we're not going to do anything about it' file.

As the weeks and months went by, Gerard and Mina's lethal hedge got taller and broader and in high winds, lethal leaves blew onto the field. Charlie's sleep began to be affected. She found herself worrying about the animals and getting increasingly annoyed about the attitude of Gerard and Mina. She began to spend her sleepless night lying awake plotting what she might do to Gerard and Mina. She wondered if cooking them a delicious big curry full of the fatal bay leaves would work. She liked the irony of the pair being bumped off by their own poisonous hedge. But she wasn't stupid, she knew her solicitor and everyone locally would view her the prime suspect. She thought it was a shame that she'd spoken out about the hedge, now. Her sleepless nights gave Charlie plenty of time to plan and plot her next move.

It was a sleepless night between a Tuesday and Wednesday when Charlie came up with the perfect solution. She was totally convinced it would work - getting rid of the hedge and her neighbours all at one time. Feeling a huge weight fall off her shoulders, she fell into a deep sleep. For the first time in a long time her sleeping face look relaxed as she looked forward to getting up in the morning.