

## **GARDEN PLOT**

by Dan O'Neil

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Synopsis:

*In which a man and a woman meet in an urban garden. She plants a cactus. He works for a hedge fund. She has a girlfriend. He doesn't have anyone. He commissions her to build a sculpture in the garden and hires her to work in his office. She doesn't build the sculpture or show up regularly to work. He fires her. He tells her she needs to tell a better story about herself. She resists this advice. He tells her a story of his dead wife. Later, his dead wife shows up. She's not actually dead. The cactus won't die. The garden is transformed. One hundred years pass.*

## CHARACTERS

**CHARLY**, female, early-to-mid 20's - she's one of those people who makes messy look good, full of energy and anxiety that she can't quite focus, yet entirely compelling as a human being.

**GUS**, male, early 40's, a story zealot who truly believes in what he's selling. Attractive in a general sense, lonely in a private way.

**MADLINE**, female, late 30's, a powerful and confident person - you're probably sat before her in the HR office of some high-end foundation. She's been successful and gets what she wants when she wants it.

**CHUCK** (played by actor who plays GUS), urban adventurer of the future.

**SAMANTHA** (played by the actor who plays CHARLY), future Brooklynite taken the the logical extreme.

## SETTING

An urban garden.

*An urban garden.  
Overhead is an overpass.  
Sounds of ambient traffic.  
Early spring*

*CHARLY, with a backpack, stands near the gate, inspecting the various plots of land. She picks up a stick, pokes at the dirt.*

*She puts the stick down, wipes her hands on her pants, and looks around. There is a small shed nearby, against which leans a gardening shovel.*

*CHARLY puts her pack down, and goes up to the shed. She looks around again, and then picks up the shovel. She heads back to her chosen plot.*

*She tests grips out for the shovel. She's not exactly sure how to proceed and jabs at the dirt.*

*GUS emerges from a small shed, watches for awhile.*

GUS

That's my shovel.

*CHARLY finches at the sound, half-turns, sees GUS, drops the shovel and backs towards the gate.*

CHARLY

I didn't realize  
Sorry

GUS

Wait a minute though -

CHARLY

No, I'm just gonna -

GUS

But, you can *use* it.

*CHARLY looks at GUS blankly, hesitates, like a deer trying to gauge the danger level.*

GUS

You gonna dig with your hands?  
It's too early in the season, ground's still hard,  
plus, it's not particularly, uh, what's the word-

CHARLY

Efficient?

GUS

Not very efficient. Sure.  
What's your name?

CHARLY

Uh...

GUS

Not very efficient to dig with your hands.  
I'm Gus.

CHARLY

Really?!

GUS

Yeah. Why not?

CHARLY

The tie, the shoes, the fancy hair cut, I just, uh.

GUS

Oh, you mean, it doesn't sound like my name would be Gus.

CHARLY

I guess not, yeah.  
Sorry, that was rude though.

GUS

What *would* sound like my name?

CHARLY

Trevor, maybe. Chad.

GUS

Huh. Wow. Well, actually - uh I'm sorry that I didn't actually catch *your* name in all of this,  
but you're right on the money.

Ha!

CHARLY

What's funny about -

GUS

“On the money.”

CHARLY

Do people not say that anymore?

GUS

No, just the word, *money*.

CHARLY

...Okay.

GUS

Trevor August Mays.

My full name is Trevor August Mays.

Gus for short.

CHARLY

But *actually* Trevor.

GUS

According to Mother.

CHARLY

But not you.

GUS

Correct.

CHARLY

I'm Charly.

GUS

So - thank you, Charlie -

CHARLY

Just a Y. No E.

GUS

Did I say it with a...

You said it with an I E.

CHARLY

Oh. Sorry about that.

GUS

It's okay.

CHARLY

So. Charly.

GUS

...What are you planning to do with that shovel?

Dig?

CHARLY

Dig where?

GUS

Right here?

CHARLY

Okay.

GUS

I can use it?

CHARLY

Sure.

GUS

Awesome...thanks...

CHARLY

*CHARLY starts digging awkwardly.  
The ground is very hard.  
GUS watches.  
After a few moments:*

I am sensing disapproval on your part.

CHARLY

...No, not really.

GUS

Okay, so-?

CHARLY

Gloves.

GUS

Yeah?

CHARLY

You'll get blisters without gloves.

GUS

Well I don't have any so-

CHARLY

I've got gloves!

GUS

*GUS goes into the little shed.  
He emerges with gloves.*

Here.

GUS

*CHARLY puts on gloves.*

Big hands, Gus.

CHARLY

Yeah well, you know...

GUS

Difference in species.

CHARLY

Yeah! That's it.

GUS

*CHARLY stands with the shovel for a few seconds.  
GUS waits, watches.*

You're just gonna...?  
I mean-

CHARLY *(escalating wariness)*



GUS

What?

CHARLY

Watch? - I don't know, what are you-  
We're the only ones *here*, it's just...  
You know, the city, people everywhere, but not here.

GUS

Because it's not a typical gardening time.

CHARLY

Yeah, well-

GUS

Too early in the season really to be planting anything.

CHARLY

...yeah...

GUS

Might frost again. It's nice today but it might frost again.  
Most people get their gardening in during the summer hours.  
There's hours, you know. You're only really allowed to be in here during certain hours.

CHARLY

And these are not those hours.

GUS

No.

CHARLY

But *you're* here.

GUS

True.

CHARLY

So, why is that? If the hours be the hours, like, um.

GUS

Maintaining. Fixing a fence. I'm the guy who does that.  
For the general Gardening Alliance. It's a volunteer thing.

CHARLY

Cool.

I like to do it.

GUS

Good.

CHARLY

The General Alliance of Members, I mean.

GUS

Right, yeah, members.

CHARLY

Very exclusive, this particular garden.

GUS

Yeah?

CHARLY

People wait on lists for *years*.

GUS

For this garden?

CHARLY

Yup. This one. Very exclusive.

GUS

What makes it so great?

CHARLY

Oh.

*CHARLY moves a few steps, looking up.*

GUS

Another time one of those trees fell down during a storm. On that other plot, the one that looks like a tornado hit it. I'm not sure who it even belongs to. Which is funny, because, you know, I know everyone. I'm on the board. I know all the members. We vote, you know?

Like a co-op?

CHARLY

Yeah, like a co-op.

GUS

That's neat.

CHARLY

Yeah, neat.

GUS

*Above, squealing tires followed by a long honk.  
CHARLY flinches.  
GUS doesn't.*

What are you doing here, Charly?

GUS

Oh. You gonna kick me out. Okay.

CHARLY

What are you doing?

GUS

I'm *planting* something.

CHARLY

What?

GUS

Well... this.

CHARLY

*CHARLY pulls a small box out of her bag.  
She opens the top.  
Removes a small cactus.*

...A cactus.

GUS

Yeah. I guess so.

CHARLY

I don't think that's allowed.

GUS

No?

CHARLY

For one thing, it'll die.

GUS

I thought cactuses are like invincible.

CHARLY

In the south.

GUS

Oh.

CHARLY

Too much precipitation can kill a cactus.  
Rains too much here.

GUS

Oh.

CHARLY

It's a nice cactus though. You should, uh...  
Put it in a pot. In your living room.  
Or wherever. Just don't overwater it.

GUS

Thanks Gus, for the advice.

CHARLY

You're welcome.

GUS

'Cause it'll *die* if I overwater it.

CHARLY

That's correct.

GUS

What's if that's the *point*.  
Symbolically.

CHARLY

You want to kill your cactus?

GUS

CHARLY

I want it to struggle.  
Witness it struggling.

GUS

You want to witness your cactus as it struggles to live, and then, eventually,  
dies.

*CHARLY nods, slowly.*  
*GUS suddenly grins.*

GUS

Then, okay.  
It's against the rules, but, you know, the hell with 'em.

CHARLY

Yeah? Seriously?

GUS

Yeah, Yeah, go ahead.  
I appreciate a good struggle.

CHARLY

A'right.

*CHARLY adjusts her gloves, digs.*

GUS

You know, people mostly grow flowers.  
Some vegetables.  
Corn, even.  
Tomatoes.  
Ever had fried egg plant?

CHARLY

*No.*

GUS

You are *missing out*.  
I grow whatever I feel like, I guess.  
I'm feeling like egg plants this year. Plus some squash.  
I'm thinking pumpkins too.  
I want to get back to *doing* things.  
I've just been -  
I don't know, waiting, waiting until...

GUS (*cont'd*)

Don't know.  
Halloween, for instance.  
I think I might want to dress up in a costume this year.  
Do you do that? Dress up on Halloween?

*CHARLY stops digging, looks at GUS.*

CHARLY

Sort of? I go to some party usually.  
But Gus?

GUS

Yeah?

CHARLY

You're creeping me out right now.

GUS

Oh, I'm sorry.

CHARLY

It's just-  
People aren't-  
I'm not here obviously to-  
You're a little overly friendly right now?

GUS

Well you know I'm here, you're here, that sort of thing.

CHARLY

You're not... thinking things?

GUS

...things...?

CHARLY

Things that you think about. That older - relatively I mean - guys who are weirdly hanging out at an out-of-season and empty gardening area might think to themselves, about females, especially...

GUS

So, you think that I came here - wait a minute, with the *expectation* that I would run into - I'm not *thinking* anything.

CHARLY (*tries to offer the shovel back*)

I'm just going to go kill my cactus elsewhere.

GUS

Why do you think I'm thinking "things" about you?

CHARLY

I can recognize interest. You get pretty well tuned to it after awhile.

GUS

You got me, I guess. I *am* interested.

CHARLY

Yeah, so that's-

GUS

I'm interested in who you are and what you're doing here and how you got a key, unless you don't have a key in which case you're trespassing.

CHARLY

I have a key!

GUS

Can I see the key?

*CHARLY fumbles in her pocket, drops the key.*

GUS

Oh you dropped it.

*GUS picks it up.*

CHARLY

Give it back.

GUS

In a minute.

CHARLY

Oh my god.  
No I need it.  
I need the fucking key.  
It's not mine.

GUS

No, I knew that.

*CHARLY retreats a few steps with the shovel.*

*She holds it slightly like a weapon, tense.  
GUS looks at her.*

GUS

Hey, okay. Just -  
Here, I'm just going to put it down.

*GUS places the key down on the ground.  
He goes near the shed, gives CHARLY enough room  
to get the key back. He doesn't move towards her.*

GUS

I'm sorry.

CHARLY

For *what?*

GUS

I felt this glow. This nice peaceful feeling. Just seeing you, I felt nice, like a nice person, I felt like I should talk to you, and I also was curious. How did you get here? Who are you? You're not like the people I work with. There's something rough, interesting about you. And let me ask - Just a question, would it have been more creepy or less creepy if I just hid the shed until you left?

CHARLY

Well, I wouldn't have known...  
That you were in the shed.  
More creepy.

GUS

So really, I just wanted to-

CHARLY

Interrogate me?

GUS

No, I-

CHARLY

Yeah, that's what that was.

*CHARLY retrieves her key, relaxes a little.*

CHARLY

But hey that's okay.



No, it's-

GUS

I mean, if you didn't *mean* to.

CHARLY

I just didn't know who you were.

GUS

CHARLY

Maybe I was some crazy kid who broke in to get high or whatever and you just wanted to play around with me a little conversationally before exerting your ownership, yeah?  
You like power, Gus?

GUS

You're messing with me now.

CHARLY

Maybe.

GUS

Sure I like power, who doesn't?

CHARLY

You're sort of like a rooster.  
Actually I don't know, I've never really seen a rooster.  
I don't know why I said that.  
Maybe 'cause we're in a garden?

GUS

Yeah, maybe...  
I'm wondering, now, though, about this cactus experiment, we've sort of established the 'what' but I'm going to be needing the 'why' as well.

CHARLY

Why I'm trying to kill a cactus? You need, like, the *story* of it?

GUS

Yeah, well, I'm in Narratives, it's what I do, in addition to being the guy who takes care of this garden I also run a business, so yes, the story.

CHARLY

*What?*

GUS

Narratives. Stories? I craft them.  
For hedge funds, mostly, investment banks.

CHARLY

You tell stories to banks?

GUS

About banks. On the behalf of banks. And other generally troubled business entities.

CHARLY

Oh so like marketing.

GUS

If that's a helpful word for you, sure.  
Really, just, narrative theory, brand-based storytelling.  
I own the firm.

CHARLY

Oh, so you're like, the 'boss'?

GUS

Yeah. I'm the boss.

CHARLY

Do you make a lot of money?

GUS

A fair amount, yes, but enough about me.  
What do you do?  
Other than kill cactuses?

CHARLY

I don't do *anything*.

GUS

I can't imagine that's entirely accurate-

CHARLY

But do you know what I tell people?

GUS

No.

CHARLY

No, you don't. Sorry, I hate it when people ask me questions like that, rhetorical ones.

GUS

It's good actually, controlling the narrative like that.

CHARLY

Yeah? *That's* good?

Maybe I should become a branding consultant or whatever then.

GUS

Did you go to business school?

CHARLY

HAHA.

Art school.

Followed by, you know...

Long term unemployment.

GUS

That's not a very compelling narrative.

CHARLY

You *think*?

GUS

So what do you tell people, if not that?

CHARLY

...that I'm a sculptor.

GUS

You're a sculptor!

CHARLY

Well *not really*-

GUS

Do you sculpt?

CHARLY

I *have*.

GUS

So-

CHARLY

But I don't make any money-

GUS

Can I see one?

CHARLY

On me? I don't have - they're *sculptures*-

GUS

What do they look like, describe one to me!

CHARLY

Uh - well - they're...  
I made this one out of metal?  
It was like a tree, it looked like a tree.  
But made with clothes hangers, and -  
There were little LED lights, red ones,  
they were supposed to light up but-  
That was my thesis, but I didn't, well, finish it.  
...I dropped out of art school.

GUS

So. I'm going to ask again.  
Are you a sculptor?

CHARLY

...Yes?

GUS

In that case, I'm going to commission you.

CHARLY (*feeling a little behind*)

...What?

GUS

How much do you need?

CHARLY

How much - what?

GUS

Money.

CHARLY

For what, a metal tree, a...?

GUS

Whatever you want. Make a proposal.  
How much?

CHARLY

It really depends on - scale, and -  
I'm sorry, I'm going to need more than...  
Twenty - fifty - one hundred dollars, plus supplies, and-

GUS

So here's my idea. I want you to build a sculpture in that empty lot back there, using found materials. The bumper is in the shed, you should start with the bumper and build around it.

CHARLY

So a big sculpture.

GUS

Let's build the tree, but not with clothes hangers this time.  
Full size. Tree size. Perfect for a garden.  
Very post-modern, right, a fake tree in an actual garden?  
I'm an appreciator of art.  
Let's see what you've got.

CHARLY

Big sculptures are kind of expensive.

GUS

Okay, so, how's ten thousand sound?

*CHARLY just stares at GUS.*

GUS

I'll get some of it appropriated from the member dues and donate the rest - it'll be legit. We've been talking about what to do with that empty plot anyway, it's been in discussion, we're meeting next week, and, well... I can be very persuasive.

CHARLY

*Ten thousand dollars?*

GUS

Is that too much?

CHARLY

No! No, it's just.  
We should... make up a contract.

GUS

We can do that. But for now, shake hands on it?

CHARLY

You pay me ten thousand dollars.  
I build a tree in your garden.

GUS

You *sculpt* a tree.

CHARLY

Right, right, yeah.  
Okay, deal I guess.

*CHARLY still has the gloves on and she tries to figure out whether she should keep them on for the handshake.*

GUS

You can keep the glove on.

CHARLY

*Oh.* It's. Thanks.

*They shake hands from a full arm's distance.*

GUS

Congratulations, you're a sculptor.

CHARLY

Is there a deadline?

GUS

End of the summer?

CHARLY

Do I get an advance?

GUS

Business-minded, good for you. Do you have a card?

CHARLY

*A what?* Oh, a card.  
No.  
I have a cactus.

GUS

Yeah. Well, I'll give you one of mine.

*GUS hands CHARLY a business card.*

CHARLY

Madison Avenue.  
*Ground Floor* Madison Avenue.

GUS

It's a comfortable office. So just send me your contract, let me know how much you want up front, and if it seems fair, I'll get it transferred to you. Just send me what bank you use and the last four digits of your account number.

CHARLY

That might be... a challenge.  
I just moved-  
I'm sorta *between* banks at the moment.

GUS

Where is your money?

CHARLY

That is such a good question, Gus.  
Uh. I should plant this cactus.

*GUS looks back at the cactus, as though he'd forgotten all about it.*

GUS

Right. Let me help.

CHARLY

...Okay.

GUS

So here's how you hold a shovel.

CHARLY

Makes sense.

GUS

You put your foot there.  
And then you just...  
Dig.

CHARLY

Ground's really hard.

GUS

Well, it's still almost frozen.  
Try both feet.

CHARLY

Like a pogo stick?

GUS

No not exactly, you're not supposed to bounce.  
Here, it helps to have some weight on it.

*Together, they plant the cactus.  
GUS starts shoveling dirt back into the little hole.*

CHARLY

You think that's deep enough?

GUS

Should be. Plus you want it to die.

CHARLY

Um. Hey. Along those lines. Or *not at all* along those lines.  
Are there any jobs available at your office?

*GUS dusts his hands off, smiles.*

GUS

Might be. For you?

CHARLY

For my girlfriend.

GUS

Oh, for your...

CHARLY

Nancy. We live together -

GUS

Your roommate - ?

CHARLY (*over*)

Girlfriend.



GUS

...Oh. So, as in - I see.

*They both stare at the cactus.*

CHARLY

It's Nancy's aunt that has the membership here, her name's Evelyn. You know her?

GUS

...No, I don't think so.

CHARLY

Maybe that's her plot, the crazy one you want me to build in - I don't think she leaves her apartment. And so but now she has cancer? Some weird kind. She's very sick, recently. Me & Nancy sleep in her 2nd bedroom. No rent, which is, you know, handy 'cause of the no-money thing. I feel bad about it sometimes but this is what happens to me, you know? People take me in. Give me things I don't deserve. I don't know why. So I try to make up for it, right? I got Nancy's aunt a cactus. For her birthday, which was today actually. *Is* today. Nancy said, when she found out, that I never try hard enough at anything and that a cactus is a totally inappropriate gift for a sick person. Do you think that's true? Don't answer. Um.

So. I want the cactus to die.

I came here to kill a cactus.

GUS

...sure

CHARLY

And somehow the outcome of that is that now I'm a commissioned sculptor.

*GUS nods his head, keeps staring at the cactus.  
After awhile, CHARLY looks up at him.*

CHARLY

Am I...?

Still a sculptor?

*GUS looks up at her.*

GUS

Are you?

*They hold eye contact for a moment.*

GUS

Stop by tomorrow at the office, and I'll get the money.

And helping her get a job, Nancy I mean, you think that'll help?

CHARLY

I don't know.

GUS

You should consider asking her if she *wants* a job. Sometimes, within a relationship, people appreciate when you do something for yourself, not for them, but for you. Essentially it's the difference between coming home today and saying, "Hey I found something for you to apply for," versus, "Hey, I got a job today!"

CHARLY

...Yeah

GUS

Are you experienced in admin?

CHARLY

I don't even know what that means.

GUS

You're right, it doesn't mean anything. Just, doin' stuff.

CHARLY

Yeah I can do stuff.

*Above, a car screeches to a halt and a hub cap comes flying down and lands near the shed.*

## II

*Forty days later. The garden is growing - green things emerge. There is no sculpture where the sculpture is supposed to be. The cactus lives.*

*GUS is standing, hands on hips, listening to the sounds of chanting overhead - there's a protest passing by above on the overpass. Drums, unintelligible chanting lead by someone on a bullhorn. It goes on for awhile, then fades into the distance.*

*CHARLY hustles around the corner, gets to the gate, sees GUS, stops short.*

GUS

So you're feeling better?

*CHARLY opens the gate, enters the garden, apprehensive.*

CHARLY

I called in-

GUS

Three days ago you called in.

CHARLY

There's a protest, the *protest*, Gus -  
I texted you! I get sick days, right?

GUS

So, let me, just so that I'm clear, get this straight:  
You're taking a day off of work -  
Days, the last three, to be exact-  
To protest with this group of people, this...  
Ninety Seven Percent or whatever-

CHARLY

Ninety-Nine.

GUS

Or whatever, yes. And you are protesting - stop me if this is inaccurate in any way -  
You are protesting economic inequality, yes?  
You are taking paid days off to protest economic inequality.

CHARLY

Yeah, so?

GUS

Clarifying. And how's that sculpture coming along?

*They both look at the empty plot.*

CHARLY

I'm focusing on... negative space.

GUS

As in, you haven't built anything.

Yet you've been coming here a lot.

Your cactus is being watered almost daily. Unless you have employed someone else to water your cactus which I doubt. Yet, puzzlingly, your cactus is still alive.

CHARLY

Maybe it's a queer cactus.

Marches to the beat of a different drum.

GUS

Cactus's don't march.

CHARLY

Okay Gus well I can see you're not in a very good mood,

So I'm gonna *go*-

GUS

You can't come back.

CHARLY

...what...?

GUS

The office. Ours for a time but now just mine again.

As of this morning, you're terminated.

Is that what you wanted?

*CHARLY just stares at him.*

GUS

I have the necessary paperwork in my briefcase, which is in the shed.

Please wait here.

*GUS goes into the shed.*

*CHARLY whispers responses she should have responded with to herself until he comes back.*

GUS

I just need you to sign here on this line and what you're saying is, you won't say anything bad about the company and that you understand the terms of termination, which are very fair, if you see here, this number, this is your severance. Which no one wanted to give you, Charly, I fought for that number.

CHARLY

Gus-

GUS

And based on the fact that you've only really been working with the company for just over a month, I'd say it's quite extraordinarily generous.

CHARLY

I quit -

GUS

Too late to quit, Charly, it doesn't work that way.

*GUS holds out the papers to CHARLY, who refuses to move.*

GUS

Did you even *try* to enjoy it?

CHARLY

I didn't mind photocopies.  
The smell was nice.  
Are you *supposed* to enjoy it?

GUS

You're supposed to, at the very least, pretend like you enjoy what you're doing.

CHARLY

Why?!

GUS

It's a delicate balance.  
One very outwardly unhappy person can remind everyone *else* of their potential *unhappiness*.  
You can't just...

CHARLY

What, be myself? You can't fire someone for that!

GUS

Oh *calm down*. On the one hand, yes, you can, it's called 'not a good fit', but that's not why. It's because when you did show up, you made it abundantly clear that you'd rather be someplace else, and then you stopped showing up entirely.

CHARLY

No, I mean why. Do we get up, do these every-day human things like, I don't know, shit, and eat breakfast, and drink coffee, not necessarily in that order, but *then* we get on a train or a bus or in a car and we go away, away from our home, our loved ones mostly, from all the little things that we've collected in that space to make ourselves feel calm and human and normal, and we leave, we *go-*

GUS

To work.

CHARLY

*Why?*

GUS

What else would you be doing?

CHARLY

Drinking, fucking, sleeping?!  
Not necessarily in that order.

GUS

Your job, what you *do*.  
How you operate within the structure -  
What's important to you.  
Why, I don't know,  
but trust me, this process of validation and purpose functions only if and when *you demonstrate it*.  
Clearly, we need to work out your narrative.

CHARLY

Give me the fucking papers.

*CHARLY grabs the paper from GUS,  
signs it in huge letters,  
gives it back to him.*

CHARLY

What about the garden though? Can I come back to the garden?

*GUS stares at her.*

Okay never mind.

CHARLY

*She turns to go.*

Give me a chance to help you.

GUS

*She turns back.*

I already did. You fired me. Good try.

CHARLY

GUS

You're lost in a maze.  
Banging into the same walls over and over.  
What I can do, what I am trying to do really, even though it may not seem that way,  
Is to help show you the way out.

CHARLY

Like I'm a mouse and you're some creepy scientist?

GUS

I'm the other mouse.  
The one who learned how to eat the treats in the right order.  
And to avoid the poison.

CHARLY

I just want to water my cactus, Gus, that's the only reason I'm still here.

GUS

Why are you watering it?

CHARLY

Because I want it to die!!

*CHARLY goes into the shed.  
She comes out with a hose.  
She turns the water nozzle.  
The hose waters the cactus.*

GUS

I don't understand why it's not already dead.

CHARLY

I'm like the boss of it. How much can you drink before you die?  
How far can I push you?  
What will you put up with? *Drink*, fucker!

*GUS turns the water off.*

CHARLY

Gus, I'm not finished watering yet-

GUS

There's heavy rain in the twenty four hour forecast.

CHARLY

Turn the water back on!  
Why won't you leave me alone?

GUS

Because you remind me of someone who I once knew.

CHARLY

What happened, did they die?

GUS

Yes.

CHARLY

*Good for them.* Turn the water back on.

GUS

Tell me your story -

CHARLY

I don't want to tell you a story Gus-

GUS

Tell me your story.

CHARLY

Okay I *don't* have a story.

GUS

Make one up-



CHARLY

I don't need your fucking marketing campaign version of occupational therapy  
JUST LEAVE ME ALONE

GUS

STOP AND LISTEN FOR ONCE, CHARLY.

CHARLY

...what...

GUS

A philosophy of empathy, that's what I'm after, that's why I opened my firm,  
Why I let you use the shovel, listened to you,  
And why you need to work harder because if people lose their empathy for you?  
If they don't, I don't know, *see* something in you worth caring about?  
In our culture, in this country, you're done.

CHARLY

In *product*, not people, it doesn't work the same way.  
And it's not important to most people, just you and the people who pay you.

GUS

That's untrue.

CHARLY

I'm not going to sell myself to you.

GUS

Sell yourself to *yourself*.

CHARLY

Barf. Go to hell.

GUS

Okay but first can we make a deal?

CHARLY

No.

GUS

I'll tell you *my* story.  
If, afterwards, you see me in a different way, then we'll go to work on yours.

CHARLY

What if I don't?

GUS

You can go back to your maze and cactus killing and deadbeat girlfriend and afternoons filled with wondering what you should do to kill the time until you can start drinking.

CHARLY

*Gus.*

GUS

Am I wrong?  
Okay? Deal?  
*Deal?*

CHARLY

I get to come back here and see my cactus whenever I want, those are my terms.

GUS

Fine.

CHARLY

Okay then. Wow me. With your marketing scheme of a life story.

GUS

It's not a scheme, just a story of a life I could have lived versus the one that I chose. I lived in Kansas for awhile. I got married, there. Young. During grad school. So, but, when she died, my wife, unexpectedly, I dropped every aspect of my life that I had worked for up to that point, and I drove for two days straight here, to New York City, and I checked myself into a hotel, took a shower, put on a suit, and then I went out and got a job, at a hedge fund. And I opened my own firm based on those collective experiences. So I know what it's like to be close to the edge, to picture your personal implosion, fantasize about it even. But we keep fighting.

People like to hear *my* story, I think, because it demonstrates a certain conviction, the ability to make something out of a bad situation, and maybe they like to think it's how they'd respond under similar circumstances.

CHARLY

I remind you of your dead wife.  
...?  
So what, you're ruthless? Selfish?

GUS

It's about rebirth, it's about growing from nothing into something-

CHARLY

I'm going now.

GUS

Charly-

CHARLY

You owe me eight thousand dollars by the way.

GUS

You haven't built anything!

CHARLY

I'm not sure that our contract defined what building a sculpture actually refers to, so yeah, I think it's done, I think we're done here.

GUS

There's nothing in the plot! You haven't built anything!

CHARLY

I guess you should have specified what you wanted more specifically. I call it, "Charly and her Barren Misguided Life, OR, the entire ecosystem operating just fine without your help, thank you very much." Put it on a placard with my picture next to it. You owe me eight thousand dollars.

*CHARLY heads towards the gate.*

GUS

I was putting the kettle on. The kettle was orange. It was a wedding present from Madeline's uncle. Her name was Madeline. This is how you want to hear it?

*CHARLY stops, turns, face blank, suspended.*

GUS

The kettle was full because I was making tea for both of us. Madeline was on an early morning bike ride to pick up some ingredients from the grocery store by the mall and she was going to be cooking for company later in the day. I put the kettle down on the burner and then I suppose I was checking my email or just sitting there, something I like to do sometimes, just sit and think, nothing in the mind but blankness, the alone time that you are granted sometimes in a relationship; but the kettle's whistle snapped me back and as I was going for it to remove it from the heat, the phone rang. And I looked at the number and it was not a number I recognized. Which is when I knew. I don't know how. I just did. I almost didn't answer. There was this rush of adrenaline like my body had become a vacuum and was sucking up all the ozone into itself; I became one with my surroundings. I said, "Hello," and the voice on the other line was an official one, and then I *really* knew and I hung up. The kettle was shrieking. I removed it from the heat. I went into our, now my, room. I looked out the bedroom window, which has an excellent view of the boulevard. I saw the police car. It was two blocks from our house. I saw an ambulance. I saw the cart, the cart they put people on. I saw the dark blanket in the street and I saw the bicycle, pinned half-under one of those little twelve-foot cargo trucks.

GUS (*cont'd*)

I read the words “U Haul” on the side of the truck. I wondered if they were moving in or out. I closed the window. I packed a suitcase. I got in our, now my, car. I started driving. I didn’t know where I was going at first so I just headed out, away, towards the major highways. I followed them, impulsively at first. The feeling of adrenaline started to fade and was replaced by the feeling of the road underneath me, the car at my fingertips, the world right outside my window, a new world, something totally different.

I released. I drove through the night and then the day and then night again. I arrived. I found the hotel, checked in. I looked up the address of one of my former classmates, the only person I knew here. I put on my suit. I felt the fabric under my fingers, rubbing on my knees. I walked out into the daylight. There is no way to do this, I thought, but here’s how I’m going to. This is me. This is me now.

*A really long pause.*

*Then, a fairly close thunder-clap.*

CHARLY

Do you carry an umbrella?

*GUS takes an umbrella out of his briefcase and hands it to CHARLY. She looks down at it for a second, looks up at the sky, and then hits GUS with it, who wasn’t prepared for this and falls half-forward. He looks at her. He sits back up. She hits him again, a little harder this time, but he doesn’t budge.*

*It starts to rain.*

GUS

Okay can I have it back now?

*CHARLY gives GUS the umbrella back. He unfurls it, shares it with CHARLY, who - after consideration, moves in just close enough to gain coverage.*

*It rains harder.*

CHARLY

This’ll probably all be underwater some day.

GUS

That’ll kill your cactus, if nothing else does.

*Thunder. Rain.*

CHARLY

I kinda bounce off everything.  
I don't have a dead wife.  
Where do you even start?

GUS

Tell me what you need. We'll build out from there.

CHARLY

I just want...  
To *live* better.

*It starts to pour.*

## III

*Late at night.*

*Quiet enough that you can hear individual cars pass by overhead, as opposed to the constant flow of traffic otherwise present.*

*The garden seems empty, lit only by a nearby streetlamp and the general glow of the city. The shed's door is a tiny bit ajar.*

*The plants are in midseason form - sunflowers are just starting to open up, holly hocks, tomato plants, crawling vines, flowering zucchini plants. The cactus still stands alone, still lives, but now sports a single unlikely flower of its own.*

*From outside the garden, a red suitcase with wheels is tossed over - it CRASHES down into the midst of the foliage.*

*Then the sound of chain link fence, of climbing, of swearing, and CHARLY, drunk, tumbles on.*

CHARLY

Ow.

*CHARLY inspects herself for bruises or tears. GUS comes out of the shed. He's wearing pajamas.*

GUS

...Charly?

CHARLY

JESUS.  
Gus!  
What-  
Why are you always here?!

GUS

I'm not-

CHARLY

It's like four in the morning.

I like to camp.

GUS

In a shed?

CHARLY

...Is that your suitcase?

GUS

Uh. I guess it is now.  
Sorry it looks like I crushed someone's...something.

CHARLY

Bean plants.

GUS

Sorry!

CHARLY

It's okay, they're Miss Hodgkins's, I don't care for her much.

GUS

*CHARLY pulls the suitcase from amidst the greenery, stands behind it, plays with the expandable handle.*

Okay so-

GUS

So-

CHARLY

We seem to keep running into each other...

GUS

Yes we do.

CHARLY

You climbed the fence?

GUS

No key.

CHARLY

Forgot it?

GUS

More like I don't have it.  
Anymore.  
You're camping in a shed?

CHARLY

Yes.

GUS

Do you do that usually?

CHARLY

No.

GUS

Last night, were you here last night?

CHARLY

Yes.

GUS

The night before?

CHARLY

Yes.

GUS

And before that?

CHARLY

No.

GUS

Okay so you've been camping in a shed in the garden for three nights.

CHARLY

If you count tonight as the third night.

GUS

Great okay so that clears it up then.

CHARLY

...What's in your suitcase?

GUS



Just stuff. All my stuff.

CHARLY

Right.

GUS

I feel like-  
One of us needs to do that-  
Thing you're really into.

CHARLY

Tell a story?

GUS

Yeah.

CHARLY

Provide a narrative!

GUS

Yup, that.

CHARLY

You first?

GUS

Actually I have lots of stories for you.  
You'll be *super* proud of me.  
Which one-  
Which do you want first?  
God Gus I'm...

CHARLY

What?

GUS

I'm sorry I'm just-  
Shaking.

CHARLY

It's warm though.

GUS

I think I'm just really drunk.

CHARLY

*The street lamp flickers and goes out suddenly.  
It's very dark on stage.*

CHARLY

Okay and now it's super fucking dark.  
Gus...? Gus, where are you...  
*What are you-*

*The street lamp flickers back on.  
GUS has his arms awkwardly around Charly.*

GUS

You *are* shaking.

CHARLY

Gus.  
Can you...  
Not?

GUS

Not what?

CHARLY

Do what you're doing?

*GUS removes his arms.*

GUS

I just thought-

CHARLY

It was a nice thought but not now okay?  
Not in the mood to be touched right now.

GUS

Sure.

CHARLY

Sorry.

GUS

Just trying to be helpful.

CHARLY

Thanks.

You know, comforting.

GUS

I'm not really a holdable person.

CHARLY

You felt nice.

GUS

Did I?

CHARLY

I've never actually felt you before.

GUS

What did I feel like?

CHARLY

Um...

GUS

A wife?

CHARLY

...No, not really.  
I don't remember.  
What that felt like.

GUS

...So, I've stayed away.

CHARLY

I noticed.

GUS

From you.

CHARLY

Yes.

GUS

CHARLY

After I knew, after what you said to me about her, and what happened to her, and that I reminded you of... I couldn't, I didn't want to...  
You know.

GUS

I mean I guess I hear you but I'm not totally sure what you're saying.

CHARLY

But I also stayed away from *here* because it's the only place I'm likely to run into you. And I'm really really hoping, like *really* hoping, that you're not camping out just so you'll see me if I happen to...

GUS

Jump over the fence in the middle of the night?

CHARLY

Yeah, that.

GUS

I told you, I like camping.

CHARLY

This really isn't camping. You have tons of money. You could go to the mountains. Or the beach. Or a fancy resort in Mexico.

GUS

How much money do you think I have?

CHARLY

*A lot.*

GUS

Why?

CHARLY

You do, don't you?  
Have a lot of money?

GUS

To exist, to just survive, I have that and then plenty more. Certain rewards for playing the game a certain way. Is that what you mean?

CHARLY

You need to stop putting money in my account.

GUS

I'm just...  
It's only-

CHARLY

I spend it in case you're wondering but just stop.

GUS

Well, okay, if you-

...

I watered your cactus for you, in your absence.

CHARLY

Yeah?

GUS

It's still not dead.

CHARLY

Wow.

GUS

It has a flower on it.

CHARLY

Do cactuses even have flowers?

GUS

I don't know.

CHARLY

Why not?

GUS

I'm not a horticulturist?

*CHARLY finds this hilarious, drunkenly laughs, and almost tips over but catches herself and steadies via the handle on the suitcase.*

CHARLY

...You didn't plant anything in the sculpture space.

GUS

Miss Hodgkins wanted it for something, I don't know, she wants to plant something stupid like garlic and I told her she couldn't. She got pretty upset. Oh, and I never told you this but the community was not as enthusiastic about the sculpture commission idea as I had hoped. There's a big board meeting coming up actually. It's... on the agenda.

CHARLY

I mean, don't protect it on my behalf.

GUS

What you said about it being empty and *that* being the sculpture, was pretty interesting. After I thought about it for awhile. I thought, if I let her put garlic in, what am I doing to the sculpture? What if there *is* a sculpture there and I just can't see it? The emptiness is, I don't know, purposeful. You know?

CHARLY

Yeah I do know.

*They stand silent in a moment of emptiness.*

GUS

...Maybe the two of us should start over a little bit.

CHARLY

You won't tell me how to *weave* my narrative?

GUS

I never said 'weave your narrative.'

CHARLY

Sarcasm, Gus.

GUS

Hyperbole actually but okay.

CHARLY

You want to start over.

GUS

I would like that.

CHARLY

Start *what* over.

GUS

Our friendship.

CHARLY

We're not friends I don't think.  
We're something.  
But it's not friends.

GUS

No, I suppose I'd agree with that assessment.

CHARLY

Friends...want to be together because it gives them some pleasure, the company and the sharing of things, ideas, I don't know, life experiences, it helps sometimes I'd say to have friends just so you don't feel so alone all the time, it gives you a sense of your self and place and provides structure, so and I'm only sort of just coming up with this in the moment but is that what you're after? From me? 'Cause so far you've just tried to tell me what I am and what to do. Which is a really typical older straight white guy thing to do, by the way.

GUS

I don't have any friends.

CHARLY

I know that.  
I worked for you.

GUS

With me.

CHARLY

Yeah well whatever it was.

GUS

They don't like me there.

CHARLY

No one likes anyone there.  
I wouldn't feel too bad about that.  
Maybe you just need to find somewhere else to work.

GUS

I'm not sure that exists.  
A place were people are friends and also are at work, at the same time I mean.

*The lights overhead flicker out.*

CHARLY

It's so weird when they do that, street lights blinking out? Why do they do it? I always think it's somehow personal, like, "Oh shit, *that* freak again, let's make her environment significantly less safe."

GUS

I doubt the street lamps are personally aware of your existence.

CHARLY

I don't think you give me enough credit, Gus.  
Although you know according to you no one gives a shit about my existence  
'cause I can't make it compelling enough for them to care.  
Ha! One for the street lamps!

GUS

What are you keeping *score* of?

CHARLY

Oh. Hey.  
Maybe we can see stars.

*They look up.*

GUS

Nope, cloudy.

CHARLY

Is that the sun coming up?

GUS

Just the city, I think.

CHARLY

The light's different though.

*The lights flicker back on.*

CHARLY

Uh-oh, I think I might be...  
Can you close your eyes, or-

*CHARLY staggers, sort of half kneels in the dirt.  
GUS rushes to her.*

CHARLY

I'll throw up on you if you stand there.

GUS

I'll just. Stand here. Nearby.

CHARLY

Got really dizzy all of a sudden.



Breathe?  
GUS

Thanks for the reminder, Gus.  
Oh.  
*Oh.*  
Shit.  
CHARLY

GUS  
I'm going to just put one hand on your shoulder.

*GUS does.*  
*They remain for some time.*

Thanks.  
CHARLY

*CHARLY rocks back on her heels.*  
*She exhales.*

CHARLY  
You know the thing when you get tunnel vision?  
Everything echoes. Gets all echoey.  
I don't know if I've ever said that *word* before,  
Echoey.

GUS  
Do you want some water?

CHARLY  
Yes.

*GUS goes to the shed, gets the hose.*

GUS  
Wait, I'll turn it on for you.

*GUS goes to the side of the shed, turns on the hose.*  
*CHARLY drinks.*  
*GUS watches.*

GUS  
Good? More?

*CHARLY nods, keeps drinking*

*After another few seconds, she raises the hose over her head, lets the water pour over her.*

GUS

Oh no don't do *that*-

*GUS turns the water off.  
CHARLY sits there, dripping.*

GUS

Better?

CHARLY

I am the cactus.

GUS

You're what now?

CHARLY

The cactus, I am the cactus.

GUS

No, you're Charly.

CHARLY

I'm all wet.

GUS

I wish I had a towel but I don't have a towel, I go to the gym before work and shower there. That's how I wash up.

CHARLY

It's okay.

*CHARLY peels off her outer layer and half-dries her hair with it. She's got a tank top underneath.*

CHARLY

This is gonna be one of those nights when you wake up and can't figure out how the hell you ended up drenched, half naked, and sleeping in a garden. Ever had one of those nights, Gus?

GUS

Not with those specific circumstances.

## CHARLY

Yeah but so tonight, *story time*, there was a bar... Shots of many colors. A whirlwind of shots. A spectrum. A daisy chain, I don't know, you know, many, lots. There was a woman there. I feel like she followed me? Or, I don't know. She might have bought me the shots. I didn't pay for them. I probably shouldn't go back to that bar just in case no one did. But, before that, there was this big scene, Gus, this is a *narrative* aren't you proud, there was this big thing with Nancy where she packed all my clothes up for me? In this suitcase which wasn't mine but I guess is now mine? And then she said, "Get out." And so I kind of got out. That's how *that* happened. But before that, if you need to track back far enough to understand this whole ordeal, there was a funeral. For Evelyn. Nancy's aunt. Oh yeah, she died. Three days ago? Today was a funeral. At which I tried to... I guess, well, to make out with Nancy at the funeral because I thought maybe that's what she wanted or needed but it wasn't, not what was wanted. This is interesting. It turns out that Nancy hadn't told? A number of people? In her life. That she was gay. And so sticking my tongue down her throat, in front of them was...Not. Great. For her. I thought it was fine, at the time.

But so then, Gus, seriously, I thought about what you said, that I should just pick something up, and I don't know, what you meant by that, but I was like, sure, whatever, pick something, anything, and so I...

...Had sex with someone. It was actually with this manager of this catering company. We had just had a work slash job interview kind of thing and just met literally this morning, of the funeral, and I was like, "Hey I want to work for you," and he was like, "Great we'll call you when and if we need someone to cater an event, but what are you doing this afternoon," and I was like, "Going to my girlfriend's aunt's funeral." Which then pretty much cemented my not getting the job, I think. It wasn't the right answer somehow. Aren't you proud of me for going on job interviews though? So I called him back, later. We met up. It wasn't very hard. Fucking up your entire life isn't hard at *all*.

*GUS suddenly paces a few steps, back and forth, in agitation.*

GUS

Describe it.

CHARLY

What?

GUS

Describe what you *did*.

CHARLY

...No, Gus. I'm not going to do that. I don't remember.

GUS

You could have called *me*.

You.

CHARLY

I thought-  
But you said *he*.  
*Him*.  
You should have called *me*.

GUS

...Oh, Gus.  
No.

CHARLY

*Overhead, a semi passes in the early morning, shaking the overpass, loud enough that they can't talk until the sound of its passing diminishes. The sound of birds.*

*CHARLY brushes the hair out of her face. She tries to stand, unsteadily.*

*GUS rushes to offer his hand, and she takes it. She looks at his hand for awhile, in hers.*

No glove this time.

CHARLY

No.

GUS

I thought, what would Gus do?  
This occurred somewhere between the apartment and the bar.  
I was pulling the stupid suitcase behind me with my stuff in it.  
Maybe I could walk, just walk.  
'Cause I don't have a car.  
Your story wouldn't have been as good if you didn't have a car.  
But still, it's like, your life is in a bunch of pieces.

CHARLY

And they are scattered around you. In places, some you can't reach, others, maybe.  
Pieces of I guess variable value, and... You know, like some broken beyond repair, others.

I don't know, maybe they could fixed?  
Maybe I could be fixed?  
Or maybe. I could just walk away. Out and up and on.  
Some new thing. Something totally vastly random and just start over.

CHARLY (cont'd)

A brand new thing to tell.  
Like you did, I can't believe you did that.  
But where do you go from here?

GUS

We can go anywhere.

CHARLY

All the stories, they don't...  
*Work.*

GUS

What do you mean, they don't work?

CHARLY

Don't apply.  
To me. Maybe they never did.  
What am I doing in a *garden*?  
I have to lie down.

GUS

Oh.

CHARLY

I'm gonna lie down in the shed.  
Is there a mattress?

GUS

Blankets.  
Sleeping bag.  
A pillow.

CHARLY

Okay that's well just...  
Goodnight Gus.

*CHARLY stumbles into the shed.  
GUS stands, looking at his hand.  
He walks over to the shed.  
He puts his hand on the door.*

*The street lamp flickers out, leaving the garden in darkness that is broken by the first rays of sun, shining just so as to catch Gus in silhouette as he stands in front of the open door, looking in.*

## IV

*Same Morning - maybe an hour has passed.*

*GUS is gone.*

*The sun shines on the shed.*

*MADELINE, enters, stands, looks at the garden for a long time.*

*The door opens.*

*CHARLY comes out of the shed, looking disheveled.*

*The two women stare at each other.*

*The sound of a hit-and-run car accident from the overpass - a crash, followed by screeching tires, a male voice yelling something unintelligible, a car zooming off, honking horns.*

## MADELINE

How are you feeling?  
You met me at the bar.  
The bar last night.  
You don't remember?

*CHARLY shakes her head, winces.*

## MADELINE

I brought you an apple.  
Do you eat breakfast?  
You should, breakfast is a very important meal.

*MADELINE holds out an apple.*

*CHARLY slowly approaches, takes it.*

## MADELINE

I love this city. Fruit stands are open before the sun even comes up.  
Isn't that something?  
Eat it.  
It's okay, I bought two.  
Let's eat together and watch the sun rise.

*Above, on the overpass, the sound of sirens as the police respond to the accident.*

*MADELINE digs into her apple.*

*After a little pause, CHARLY takes a bite of hers.*

## MADELINE

Mine's great.  
 Like, perfect.  
 Just enough crunch and just enough sour.  
 You know?

*CHARLY* nods, takes another bite.

## MADELINE

And cool too, but not refrigerated.  
 Just, natural.  
 Naturally cold from the morning.  
 I bet it's going to be hot today though.  
 It has that feeling, doesn't it?  
 . . . (*crunch*) . . .  
 Hey, what's a cactus like that doing in a garden like this?  
 . . . (*crunch*) . . .  
 Your name is Charly, right?  
 You told me your name last night.  
 "What?!" I said, it was loud.  
 "Charly," you said. You slurred it. Charmingly though.  
 Charmingly Charly. With a Y.  
 How *is* your apple?

## CHARLY

...Good.

## MADELINE

How about your head?

## CHARLY

Not so good.

## MADELINE

I figured.  
 I'm Maddie. We met last night but I don't think I told you my name.  
 Not that you'd have remembered it anyway, state you were in.  
 You told me yours.  
 Whole lot of other things, too.  
 The universe finds ways for two people to collide in what seems to be an accident but can't be,  
 can't be an accident because it's too... Perfect coincidence.  
 Or maybe it's just us, making sense out of random connections.  
 Overwhelmed by stimulus, we create an order that we're able to comprehend, to understand.  
 But the odds, in this city, of finding you?  
 Okay but it wasn't *all* coincidence, I took some action too.  
 I followed you here last night.

CHARLY

You followed me?

MADELINE

I paid for your drinks, by the way.

CHARLY

Oh...Thanks.  
Why did you...  
Follow me?

MADELINE

To make sure you got home okay!  
I was like, what the fuck is this girl doing, where is she going?  
I knew the river was down this way and I got a little nervous for you.  
But then, I came around the corner and you were half-way up the fence of this here garden and I thought, well, hmm...

This is, to me, a very specific garden, a garden which has in fact a direct correlation to why I am here in the city in the first place, and I also put a few other things together, like, you're the *girl*. *You're* the girl he's been on about. Not to me of course, but to people, mutual people, and they tell me what he's up to. I get reports.

CHARLY

...reports.  
About, me?

MADELINE

About Trevor.  
The caretaker of this garden.  
He's about yay tall, carries himself with a certain, I don't know, *certainly*-

CHARLY

Oh you mean Gus.

MADELINE

I mean, Trevor.

CHARLY

Yeah it's the same I think, he goes by his middle name.

MADELINE

Does he now?  
That's interesting.  
He was interesting, to me, for awhile.



*CHARLY finishes her apple, tosses the core into the empty (sculpture-commissioned) plot.*

MADELINE

Nice toss. Why's that one empty?

CHARLY

I supposed to build a sculpture there but I didn't.

MADELINE

Ah yes, the would-be sculptress.

CHARLY

How *much* did I tell you last night?

MADELINE

Why didn't you build anything?

*CHARLY doesn't move, so MADELINE walks right up to her, takes CHARLY'S head in her hands. CHARLY doesn't seem to mind.*

CHARLY

It was more interesting empty.

MADELINE

Hm! Tell me more.

CHARLY

This is actually related to a, sort of, side project in which we'd like 'fix my narrative', but I started applying it to the sculpture too. I'd walk by something in the street, like a garbage can, one of those metal mesh ones, or one of the yellow plastic flyer boxes, or even just a shoe, one shoe in the street, why is there *one shoe* - but I'd stop walking and almost pick them up in order to drag them back here, to maybe just place one item there and hope that it led to others, you know, but then I'd just start walking again, and the feeling of me picking the thing up would recede and eventually I just felt like I'd filled it with my ideas. To put an actual thing there would explode the idea. Destroy it. Me. I don't know.

MADELINE

I think I like your sculpture, Charly.

The only thing is -

I'm not really sure how you'd bring it to market.

CHARLY

Maybe you'd just take the whole plot? Empty? You could, like, dig it up and put it in a gallery somewhere.

MADELINE

Would that be the same? Then you'd be saying that the surroundings were the sculpture. Whereas now, it's just this space of absence that you've filled with both hope and despair.

CHARLY

Mostly despair. I have *lots* of that. Despair to spare. You?

MADELINE

Not as much... probably because I'm not an artist.

CHARLY

So - what are you? Which garden is yours?

MADELINE

Oh, no, I'm not -  
This isn't my garden, I'm not a member here.  
I'm actually in from out of town, just for a few days.  
Can you keep a secret?

CHARLY

From who?

MADELINE

From Trevor - *Gus*.

CHARLY

Oh. Well, sure, yeah.

MADELINE

This garden?  
Isn't going to be a garden for all that much longer.

CHARLY

Okay...?

MADELINE

I work for a land management organization, you know, architects and landscapers and urban planners, out of Chicago, blah blah boring right? But this particular location is public land and at this particular moment in time the city seems willing to sell it to private interests, and so that's why I'm here. Accessing. As it were.

CHARLY

What's your assessment?

MADELINE

Oh yeah. They're gonna buy. Build something huge. It's so close to the water!

CHARLY

What about the sculpture then?

MADELINE

Yeah, that's something to consider, isn't it.  
Maybe it'll be in the lobby and no one will even know it's there.

CHARLY

And what about my cactus?

MADELINE

What... oh that's yours too? Right, the cactus. I remember. That you want to kill.

CHARLY

Yeah.

MADELINE

You could set it on fire.

CHARLY

....ha...

MADELINE

I mean there are myriad ways to kill a plant.

CHARLY

Yeah I know but -

MADELINE

Something tells me you don't actually want it dead, though.  
I think you're keeping it alive.

CHARLY

Me?

MADELINE

You're *willing* it.

CHARLY

Is that even possible?

MADELINE

What's 'possible?'  
I don't know.  
Seems like it is.

CHARLY

I *wanted* it to die.  
Now I'm not sure.  
About literally everything.  
I'm homeless I think.

MADELINE

Hm.  
Well, we should get you something for breakfast,  
and then maybe we can go back to where I'm staying.  
Get you a shower, washed up, take a nap in a bed?  
Actually - and maybe it's none of my business - you haven't been to his place, right?  
Your relationship - faux mentorship - whatever you want to call it,  
hasn't crossed over into, I don't know, territories?

CHARLY

Who's place?

MADELINE

Trevor's place. Which is where *I'm* staying, by the way.

CHARLY

Oh! Then why's he staying here?

MADELINE

What do you mean, here,  
like...*here*?

CHARLY

Camping, sort of, in the shed, yeah.

MADELINE (*unsettled for the first time*)

Where is he now?

CHARLY

He went to the gym and then to work I think.

MADELINE

Okay good.  
Sorry.  
That didn't occur to me, that possibility.

CHARLY

So you're staying at his place but you don't want to see him?

MADELINE

I think it's more accurate to say *he* doesn't like coming into contact with *me*.  
I try to do him that courtesy.

CHARLY

But you're staying at his place.

MADELINE

It's huge. I hate hotels. He offers it.

CHARLY

So okay are you like his-  
Sister?

MADELINE

Oh *God no*, he's an only child, can't you tell that about him?  
I'm his ex.  
Wife, ex-wife.

*CHARLY backs away really suddenly.*

CHARLY

No, you're -  
No you -  
You're not.

MADELINE

I'm pretty certain that I am.

CHARLY

No.

MADELINE

...Yes.

CHARLY

*No.*

MADELINE

Yes? Is this a game? What are we-

CHARLY

Did you live in Kansas?

MADELINE

I used to, yes.

CHARLY

...But you died in a bike crash.

MADELINE

Oh. Oh!

No, that's probably someone else.

No, I cheated on him.

Then I left him.

I'm not a very good person but I'm certainly not dead.

Maybe to him I am.

But to you? I'm standing right here.

You kissed me last night.

Remember?

CHARLY

...I'm sorry.

*CHARLY, spinning, plops down into the dirt.*

CHARLY

I'm just a little-

No this isn't right, I have to-

Go.

*CHARLY gets up too fast, holds her head in her hands, and moves towards the gate. MADELINE doesn't get out of her way.*

MADELINE

Where are you going?

CHARLY

I have to find someone.

MADELINE

I wouldn't do that.

Charly, stay with me for awhile.

CHARLY

Was there -

Like, some one else?

That he was married to,

or that died that he knew,

or...?

No. A bike crash? No.

MADELINE

He *lied*.

CHARLY

So what?

MADELINE

No, *not so what*, he's been pushing me and pushing me and -

CHARLY

So what are you going to do about it,  
go to his office, make a scene, demand...  
What exactly?  
You kissed me last night.  
I kissed you back.  
You don't remember?

MADELINE

*CHARLY, confused, shakes her head, which hurts her head. She plops back down on the ground for stability's sake.*

I left him for someone more like you.

MADELINE (*reassuringly*)

Like me?

CHARLY

Yeah, very much like you.

MADELINE

What am I "like"?

CHARLY

You're a 'she,' for starters.  
You *do* identify that way, I assume.

MADELINE

...Yeah.

CHARLY

MADLINE.

This particular 'she' was very young. I was young too I guess, but she was younger.  
Not even your age probably.  
I thought I had this thing with Trevor but it just sort of...

Stopped growing.

Like we were supposed to live at the top of a tree in this life we built  
but the tree didn't grow up, it just stopped, like a weird dead bush.  
I really couldn't imagine living at the top of a bush.  
The thing would eventually fall down, right?  
So I started trying other things.

The question I started asking was, will this *keep* growing?  
And, you know, in which direction?  
What's more important, the root structure or the flower?  
What do I feed off? Sun or rain?  
Who fertilizes whom?  
And how?  
What fruit will we bear?  
Who will eat it?

What happens *next*, you know?  
I'm always on to the next.  
Growing season, or, you know, person.  
I'm okay with it.

CHARLY

Geez.

MADLINE

What is he saying exactly?  
I died in a bike crash?  
So dramatic!

CHARLY

He said that you died. And that he left.  
Like, immediately.  
And then he came here to New York and started his life over again.

MADLINE

Most of that is true in a general sort of way.

CHARLY

Except for the you dying part!



MADELINE

Right.

CHARLY

He was so *detailed*. There was this part about a U-Haul truck.

MADELINE

A U-Haul? He's probably just borrowing from me leaving.  
I came in and took all my stuff. He carried boxes for me. Couldn't look me in the eye.  
I think it's interesting that he killed me on a *bike*. I hate bikes.

CHARLY

You're not upset?

MADELINE

Good for him, right?  
What difference does it make, ultimately?

CHARLY

A lot!

MADELINE

Why? How?

CHARLY

Dishonesty is bad.

MADELINE

Why?

CHARLY

Uh. Well, if you can't trust someone...

MADELINE

It's all constructed anyway, isn't it?  
What does trust have to do with it?

CHARLY

It's like -  
Well, trust, it's -  
People have to be honest or else you can't trust them.

MADELINE

Where does it say you have to say what actually happened?  
That's just based another story, the 'don't lie' one.  
"Don't lie" because...? Because you deserve punishment?

MADELINE (*cont'd*)

This country is *based* on lies, Charly. Our whole economy?  
 One thing I'll say for Trevor is that he's always understood that part.  
 Powerful people lie all the time. And I mean it's not like he's all that powerful,  
 but he works for power, his work is to deliver more power to the powerful by,  
 essentially,  
 Lying.

So why not apply it to his personal life?  
 It's his version of what happened, he's entitled to it.  
 Makes him seem less pathetic, more heroic, right?  
 Otherwise he has to tell people that his wife left him for another woman.  
 People are *really* gonna love *that* story.

CHARLY

I guess.

MADELINE

What's amazing to me is that more people *don't*.  
 So many things that we could do, but we don't.  
 Because why, unwritten rules, some dictum of how to live?  
 Where does it come from?  
 Do this, don't do that.

Someone sat you down, at some impressionable age, pretty girl on a porch, or in a kitchen, or in a classroom, and they told you some story about someone who did a bad thing and the bad things that happened to that person as a result, right? And so you learn, in that way. Don't do that. Yet, maybe that's all just made up too.

CHARLY

Well they're *all* made up right?

MADELINE

Exactly! And they're *old* stories. I mean, for example, look at this corn plant here. Does this corn plant get to decide where it grows? Does it get to decide what its flowers look like? Does it get to determine what it will produce, what the kernels of its labour will taste like?

CHARLY

...No.

MADELINE

Because why?

CHARLY

Because... it can't talk?

MADELINE

Well, that's one reason.  
But I'm going in the direction of...

So, not all that long ago, less than a hundred years even, we didn't have choices either. By we, I mean you and me and women like us. We were, for all intensive purposes, the corn plants. So let's say you're lucky enough to be born into a middle class family. Grow up, you go to school, learn all the stories telling you just exactly what kind of a life you're supposed to lead, religion probably plays a big part in the formation of those stories, the 'value based' ones anyway— I mean, that's where we get most of them, isn't it? Find a man, marry that man, he has a job, you do the cooking and cleaning, and that's life, right? That's the story. And I want you to ask yourself, who specifically told you that story?

CHARLY

No one?

MADELINE

Well society. The patriarchal homo-normative society implanted that doozie. You know that story, right? And you act in accordance, even if you're not really trying to? It's *the* story. But it doesn't work, right? For you. For me.

CHARLY

No!

MADELINE

So this is something Trevor and I used to argue over a lot actually, he thinks that everything's fine so long as you can redefine the structure of the narrative to fit your specifics, but *I* think, inherently, that these stories are woefully inadequate, are not at all based on our current reality. Am I right?

CHARLY

I kept trying to figure out what he means by like, tell your story, 'cause it was like he wanted me to choose one of the pre-existing versions but none of them fit, like bad clothes from the 80's...

MADELINE

Polyester narratives, huh? I like that. Remember that. But so hey this is fun let's keep going. The work thing. You told me last night how you can't figure out how to work, how make work *work*.

CHARLY

I said that?

MADELINE

I thought it was well-put, actually.  
But what's 'work'? What does it get you?

CHARLY

Uh... Money?

MADELINE

A house, a kid, right? Two kids. Some money. A little power, the power to be remembered. *That's* a big one, isn't it? That's what everyone wants now. Make a difference. Have an impact. This is the story that your cell phone tells you every time you check it, you see all these people desperate to have some sort of impact on other people's lives, so desperate to get and keep your attention, to document their lives, in some hope that it will actually matter to someone other than themselves, but even that feels incomplete, doesn't it? There's something missing?

CHARLY

Yeah.

MADELINE

But in reality, if we're suddenly no longer story-bound?  
We step outside the popular narrative.  
Into the garden of, I don't know, maybe I'm going too far for a metaphor here, but-  
Your choices can lead you anywhere.  
Literally anywhere.  
You're not bound here!  
Done growing, you don't have roots, you have shoes. Cute shoes, by the way.  
You're not a corn plant.

CHARLY

Or a cactus. Hah.

MADELINE

So - you're looking for your story? Something unique, specific, that actually fits?  
Here's what you do.  
Go to a garden shop or a green house.  
You say, I have an uncommon ability to plant things and keep them alive.

CHARLY

I like plants.

MADELINE

Who doesn't? But here's the other thing I'm going to say.  
Come with me.  
I know it's a rather big thing to ask, but you seem like you're ready.  
Live with me, love with me if you want, or not, if you don't.  
I think we'd be good for each other.

CHARLY

...You want me to...

MADELINE

Live with me.

CHARLY

...where? At Gus's house?

MADELINE

No, we should probably let him have his place back.  
I mean, he's worked for it, pretty hard, right?  
He invented a marketable reality, who are we to take it away from him.  
We'll find somewhere.

CHARLY

...What about the greenhouse thing?

MADELINE

Or hey, do that!  
But, so.  
What do you think?

CHARLY

Come live with you.

MADELINE

Really in whichever way you want to take that, yes.

CHARLY

Because, why, because I'm homeless at the moment?

MADELINE

Well, Charly. I find it refreshing that you don't think have a story.  
It's appealing. It makes me believe you might be prone to just the right kind of impulsive behavior that I'm looking for in a partner.  
But I can be more specific.  
I want to write a new story all over you.  
To take out a Sharpie and just compose on your naked body in the early morning.

CHARLY (*impressed*)

Oh!

MADELINE

Only if you let me of course.  
...So?

CHARLY

...So...

MADELINE

Would it help if I said please?

CHARLY

This is crazy.

MADELINE

No. It's not. There's some story that tells you that it *is*, but that's just another fiction. You can do whatever you want, every moment of your entire life.

CHARLY

What if tomorrow if I want to live in a different story, and I just get up and leave.

MADELINE

I'm going to try and keep you from doing that, but yeah. Sure. You could.

CHARLY

Okay. Let's...  
I gotta get my stuff.  
Oh, it's... right here.

*CHARLY finds her suitcase, propped by the shed.*

CHARLY

So, this is my stuff.

MADELINE

What about your cactus?

CHARLY

Yeah I guess we're not coming back here probably.

MADELINE

Probably not.

CHARLY

How do we take it with?

MADELINE

Buy a wheelbarrow!  
We'll put it in a cab.  
Find a new place to plant it.  
The Arctic Circle maybe.  
See how powerful a green thumb you really have.  
Test your powers?

CHARLY

Like I'm a superhero?

MADELINE

A new, modern, garden variety superhero.  
Ask yourself this, Charly.  
Why don't people behave like this more often?  
Are you scared?

CHARLY

Somewhat.

MADELINE

Good.

CHARLY

But also glad, actually.

MADELINE

Glad, how?

CHARLY

That Gus made it up. I couldn't stop thinking about - well, it was real to me, I thought it was true, you being dead I mean, and I kept imagining what happened after he left? I kept seeing the other people who would have to pick up the pieces that he abandoned. You, for instance. Your body, in the morgue or wherever. Burial arrangements. Like, your mother, your father? That they would have had to do the things that he was too scared to do, in his story he ran away, and how they would have felt his absence and maybe hated him, I don't know... It just seemed so weak. Not what he intended, I know, it was supposed to read as strong or determined or risk-taking or whatever, but...

I mean, there's probably a story that says, if someone dies you have to mourn them. Right? That you have to, like, be there for their parents or friends or kids. Responsibility. If everything we ever do is dictated by stories perpetuated by society, I mean. But maybe that's okay? Some of them, anyway. Maybe some of them are good stories.

MADELINE

That's beautiful.  
I don't know if I agree.  
Go buy a wheelbarrow and call a cab.  
I'll dig up your cactus.

CHARLY

There's a shovel in the shed I think.

*CHARLY exits with suitcase.*

*MADÉLINE takes the shovel.  
She starts to dig, expertly.*

*Behind her, things start to change.  
Behind and around the garden, a building grows up  
around it, encompassing it, blocking off the overpass.*

*As the building grows, it blocks out most of the sun,  
except for a constant beam that remains on the empty  
bit of land upon which the sculpture was to be built.*

*A tree starts to grow.*

*Lights go out and almost immediately the traffic and  
construction sounds cut out completely and are  
replaced by a howling winter wind.*



## V

*Same garden, one century later.  
Most of the overpass is gone, replaced by part of a  
building, incomplete, as though the construction  
company suddenly stopped mid-project.*

*It's winter, gusty, snow and ice in the air.*

*Most of the stage is in darkness, but there's enough  
of a glow to be able to make out CHUCK (same  
actor as GUS but obviously now a different person),  
who stands on what's left of the overpass and looks  
out over the water, his back turned to us.*

*Then he looks up, shines his flashlight up into the  
half-completed structure.*

## CHUCK

Samantha! Come check it out.

*SAMANTHA (same actor as CHARLY but  
obviously no longer CHARLY) limps on, shivering,  
also stands on the remains of the overpass.*

## SAMANTHA

We really shouldn't be here.

## CHUCK

Just let me get some pictures of this.

## SAMANTHA

It's freezing, I'm freezing, let's go.

## CHUCK

No we can't go-

## SAMANTHA

I wanna go.  
Chuck, can we just-

## CHUCK

NO.  
Lens.  
Give it please.

*SAMANTHA pulls out a camera, hands it to CHUCK.*

SAMANTHA

You gonna be able to get it with that?

CHUCK

I love this camera.

SAMANTHA

Sure you don't want to use something manufactured in, I don't know, *this* century?

CHUCK

This is a Canon Rebel. This is a classic.

SAMANTHA

Yeah okay.

CHUCK

I hate G-Def. I hate Wi-Field. I hate, most of all, in a situation such as this, Location Tracking. So yeah, Canon Rebel.

SAMANTHA

Even though it doesn't have a zero-ray filter?

CHUCK

Yeah. Well, that's just virtual fill-in anyway.

Look at this! It's like they just gave up. Can you picture it? All the workers, I don't know, what do you think this construction style is anyway, circa two thousand something, maybe 2015, I don't know, whattya think?

SAMANTHA

Why you asking me?

CHUCK

Isn't this your-

Isn't this your level of expertise, I thought you were-

Eh. You said that you were some sort of pre-CC expert.

SAMANTHA

I thought we were on a date, actually.

I was showing off.

Now we're trespassing.

And it's fucking cold.

I thought we were going to trespass somewhere romantic at least.

CHUCK

This *is* romantic.

SAMANTHA

Uh, no, this is just wreckage.

I mean, this whole part of the island, does anyone even live here anymore?

It's creepy here.

CHUCK

Might be some squatters. I've heard a few things, actually.

A few people wouldn't leave even after the water rose, so...

Yeah, I think maybe on the island somewhere.

Not here though.

SAMANTHA

Yeah how'd you tell that, by the extensive barbed wire fences and huge electric signs flashing 'Keep Out,' 'Extreme Danger,' maybe that's what clued you in?

CHUCK

I've really wanted to photograph here for a long time.

This is *very* romantic for me.

SAMANTHA

Okay so do it and let's get out already.

We're like sixty blocks inside the perimeter.

*CHUCK takes a few photographs.*

CHUCK

Oh these are gonna be so good.

SAMANTHA

Yeah?

CHUCK

I love desolation. Squalor.

SAMANTHA

Yeah you and everyone else I guess.

Lotta dead space if you're into that sort of thing.

CHUCK

You're not? What are you into?

SAMANTHA

The living! You know. Like, green things. Things that grow.  
I mean I told you I come from a Farm Com, that's what we do, we grow stuff.

CHUCK

I mean it's hard though right?

SAMANTHA

Well yeah, the temp reg is tricky, and but that's just how it is. Sometimes we lose all the crops. Sometimes we don't. But, you know, it's better than the bio-engineered shit.

*CHUCK takes a few more photos.*

CHUCK

I can't feel my fingers.  
Here.  
Hold the camera for a sec.

*CHUCK hands the camera blindly back towards where he thinks SAMANTHA is standing, but she isn't - she's sat down and is trying to keep warm. CHUCK realizes a second too late and drops the camera over the overpass and into the darkness below.*

CHUCK

*Fuck.*  
Samantha, what the FUCK.

SAMANTHA

What?

CHUCK

I dropped it I dropped the fucking Canon *that's* what, I handed it to you!

SAMANTHA

I was sitting down.

CHUCK

Well I wasn't looking, I was just handing-

SAMANTHA

I'm sorry but *you* dropped it yourself-

CHUCK

Okay who cares who dropped what, I'm going to get it.

SAMANTHA

No, you are not.

CHUCK

Do you know how much one of those costs these days?  
Not even on the market anymore.  
It's like a one-hundred year old camera, do you get that?  
I'm going to find it.

SAMANTHA

What if the ground isn't good?

CHUCK

Ground is fine, this stuff's all standing-

SAMANTHA

But Chuck when the waters came up and they built all the levies up and, I don't know, this is restricted, condemned, they don't want us here because it's dangerous, actually dangerous, don't go down there, just leave it! Let's go back!

CHUCK

What, do you think there's going to be mutant rats or something?  
Giant dinosaur like cockroaches?  
I think it's fine.

SAMANTHA

Chuck *please*-

CHUCK

Oh see, you do like me.  
I knew it.  
I knew it!  
Back in a sec.

*CHUCK goes to the upstage side of the overpass, climbs over, drops into darkness. We hear a crash and half-splashy sound.*

CHUCK (off)

Oh, *shit*-

SAMANTHA

What, what is it?

Shine the flashlight.  
It's pretty muddy.  
Thought it'd be frozen but it's not.  
I'm stuck I think.

CHUCK (off)

That's just great.

SAMANTHA (flatly)

*SAMANTHA shines the flashlight.*

Can you see it?  
Anything?

SAMANTHA

Yeah okay I'm half out now.  
Okay, my feet are free.  
Shine it farther, in front, I'll just...  
Camera's gotta be here somewhere, right?

CHUCK (off)

It probably sank if it's muddy.

SAMANTHA

*CHUCK comes into view, ground level, near where  
the shed used to stand in previous scenes.*

Hey, actually no this is real ground.  
True dirt.  
Seriously.

CHUCK

Really?

SAMANTHA

Yeah no I can tell, it's not filler - that's just near the base of the construction project, they must have poured it to try and keep the water down. No, this is like...

CHUCK

*A motion-sensor light flashes on and illuminates  
CHUCK in the middle of the space.*

OH SHIT-

SAMANTHA

AH!!

CHUCK

*They both freeze for a second.  
The light goes back out.*

CHUCK

It's automatic.  
I think it was automatic.

SAMANTHA

IS THERE ANYONE ELSE HERE?

CHUCK

Shh, quiet, it's I think motion sensor lights.  
They used to use those a lot.

SAMANTHA

Well *why do they still work-*

CHUCK

I don't know, LED's, I don't know, but this is great actually maybe I can find the camera now.

*CHUCK jumps, waves, triggers a new motion sensor light that clicks on and illuminates the former sculpture space and we see for the first time that an apple tree has grown there - and bizarrely, as it's the middle of winter, it's covered in green leaves, with apples and apple blooms everywhere. In the light of the motion sensor, ice and snow glistens and swirls, and the apple tree grows as though it's midsummer.*

CHUCK

I still can't see the camera-

SAMANTHA

Oh my God.  
Chuck  
Turn around.

*CHUCK turns around.  
They both stare at the tree.*

CHUCK

Whoa...

You see it too, right?

SAMANTHA

What the hell *is* that?

CHUCK

It's an apple tree.

SAMANTHA

In the wild?

CHUCK

Yeah.

SAMANTHA

In New York State.

CHUCK

Sure looks like it.

SAMANTHA

In the middle of the winter.

CHUCK

Unless it's, like, a model or something. Go touch it. See if it's real.  
I'm coming down.

SAMANTHA

Oh, *now* you're coming down.  
Not for a camera, but for a *tree*...

CHUCK

*SAMANTHA goes off the same way as CHUCK, splashes down, and makes her way to where CHUCK is standing. The motion sensor light flickers out again.*

Uh-make it go on again.

SAMANTHA

I'm waving it's not-

CHUCK

How did you do it the first time-

SAMANTHA



CHUCK

Jump!

*The light comes back on.  
CHUCK has fallen on his ass, sits there in wonder.  
SAMANTHA takes small tentative steps towards  
the tree, like it might fall on her or something. She  
reaches up. She picks an apple. Snow, heavier now,  
swirls and falls around them.*

SAMANTHA

Oh My God it's real.  
This is insane.

CHUCK

You gonna eat it?  
Oh hey, my camera!

*CHUCK scrambles to where his camera has fallen,  
picks it up, dusts it off.*

SAMANTHA

No, don't do that.

CHUCK

What?

SAMANTHA

Please. Don't document this.  
In any way.

CHUCK

What? Why the fuck not, this is ridiculous like mythical shit!  
An apple tree, of which the likes humankind has not seen in what, like, seventy five years outside  
of the bio-houses, and it's the middle of the winter in a wash-out zone and here it is?  
No I'm taking a picture-

SAMANTHA

We can't tell anybody about this.

CHUCK

Why not?

SAMANTHA

It'll get ruined.  
They'll destroy it.  
Can't it just be here, impossible, like this?  
We Can't Tell.  
ANYONE.

CHUCK

...okay.

SAMANTHA

Promise?

CHUCK

Yeah. Sure, yeah. I get it. I promise.  
Can I just take a picture, though, just for us?

SAMANTHA

You're not going to share it?

CHUCK

No. I won't *share* it.  
You wanna be in it?  
Just keep standing there, I can get you in frame.

*CHUCK kneels, snaps, snaps, snaps.*

CHUCK

No one would believe it, anyway, they'd say we faked it.

SAMANTHA (suddenly grins)

Want an apple?

CHUCK

*God* yes.

*SAMANTHA picks another apple.  
They both hold them, looking up at the tree.*

CHUCK

What if it's poison?

SAMANTHA

Why would you think that?

CHUCK

I feel like there's a lot of poison apple references during a certain part of history.

SAMANTHA

Yeah?

CHUCK

I wonder why that is?

SAMANTHA

This used to be a garden I think.

CHUCK

That doesn't make me feel better.

SAMANTHA

No?

CHUCK

There's this other one, quite a bit more historical, about two people in a garden and there's a snake - and they're not supposed to eat the apples. You haven't heard this one?

SAMANTHA

It sounds vaguely familiar I guess but I was raised on a Farm Com, remember?

We didn't have a lot of exposure.

What happens? In the garden with the apples and the snake?

CHUCK

They eat the apples.

SAMANTHA

What happens then?

CHUCK

Everything changes.

SAMANTHA

And that's bad?

CHUCK

I think, yeah, it's positioned, in the story, as being a bad thing.

SAMANTHA

Yeah but have you ever tasted a fresh apple right off the tree in the dead of winter?

CHUCK

Well...

SAMANTHA

Everything's *already* changed.

*CHUCK bites his apple.*

*SAMANTHA bites hers.*

*They look at each other.*

*The motion sensor light goes out.*

*END OF PLAY.*