

Community Garden

By Justin Borak

Dedicated to Uptown, Chicago and the community that makes it
bloom.

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CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

A note on doubling: Cast the show with as many or as little performers as you would like. In the play's premiere production on the previous page, we created a suggested double casting list that would work for a smaller ensemble (8).

M-Male

F-Female

A-Anyone

Constant Character's:

RALPH(M) - Constant character on stage. New volunteer to Uptown City Gardens and is in the background sitting on a stool reading a book for all of the play (except the opening scene).

BELLA(F) - Isabella Giovanna, the daughter of the owners of the pizzeria (GiGi's) that backs up to the garden. Sweet girl who is trying to figure out how the rest of her life will look.

DONALD(M) - Older than the rest and a staple in the community. Has been a volunteer at Uptown City Gardens for years. A wise man who cares a lot about the growth within the community. All of his "mean jabs" are done with love.

Garden Service Coordinator:

KELLY(F) - Boss of the garden (Garden Service Coordinator). Confident woman who cares a lot about keeping the community as green as possible. Holds Uptown to the highest standard, wants to be Alderman of Uptown one day.

Growth Takes Time:

CASEY(A) - Recently dumped by their partner and is struggling to find that next step in their lives. Has spent the last two months desperately trying to make something grow in the garden, starting on Leeks a few days ago.

ANDI(A) - Casey's Ex, has their stuff a little more together but still cares for Casey obviously. Trying to help their ex figure out how to move on easier.

Take a Book, Leave a Book:

TRACE(A) - Has a whimsical and child-like wonder when they look at the world. Thinks life should feel like a storybook from time to time, and hopes to find a book from their childhood in the Take A Book, Leave a Book, like they did when they were a kid.

DAVEY(A) - Trace's Roommate. Some might call them a pessimist; they would call them self a realist. Doesn't understand Trace's outlook and life and obsession with checking the Take a Book, Leave a Book.

The In-Laws:

ADAM(M) - Dating Ken and April's daughter, Sadie. Incredibly nervous to ask what they think of a possible engagement, constantly trying to impress Ken and April.

KEN(M)- Father of Sadie, Husband to April. A little skeptical of Adam but just cares a lot for his daughter and wants someone who cares for her as much as he does.

APRIL(F) - Mother of Sadie, Wife to Ken. More caring for Adam.

SADIE (F) - Dating Adam, Daughter of Ken and April. Comes in later when we see the proposal. Non-speaking role.

The Shed Steward:

AUGUST(M) - A guy who loves the community and grew up here. Very excitable and finds joy in the little things. Treats being the Shed Steward of Uptown City Gardens like being a superhero.

DAPHNE(F) - Going on her third date with August. At first is disappointed but slowly sees how much joy he has for his community and his people and gets her excited about the future.

Presenting Plants:

KAPE(A) - a college poetry student that is struggling to find growth in themself while in college and isn't seeing a large difference between who they were in high school compared to now. Kinda pissed at the world.

MR. PUTNAM(M-OS) - Kape's poetry professor. Skeptical of Kape's unorthodox performance but willing to take the ride.

Composting:

TAYLOR(A) - Long term partner of Jordan but has recently realized that they can do so little to help the earth especially when living in a city so has decided to do everything, they can shrink their carbon footprint...even if that means bringing a bunch of gross rotting food to a community garden.

JORDAN(A) - Long term partner of Taylor. Not as invigorated to save the planet so is very unwilling to carry smelly bags of rotting fruit around the neighborhood.

SETTING:

A community garden called Uptown City Gardens located in Uptown, Chicago, IL. The garden has multiple plots run by different community members growing different plants and vegetables. The garden is backed up to a brick wall and there is a door that leads directly to the back of GiGi's Pizza. There is a "Take a Book, Leave a Book" stand in the corner. It's the beginning of Spring.

The set can be incredibly flexible. It can be as simple or complicated as the production allows the set to be. Be creative with the use of the set, using the entire space and make the audience feel like they are apart of the community as well. Use things like music, art, sensory devices, and anything else your team believes could help build the community in the space. The priority should be making the theatre feel like one big neighborhood.

NOTES:

This play is meant to be educational as much as entertaining. Not only should the audience learn some things about gardening and being "more green" but there should be dialogue about environmentalism and how to shrink your carbon foot print within the cast. Find a local community garden and work with them. Put them in your program, help people get involved.

Feel free to cut scenes in order to shorten the length for the needs within your production of this play.

Also, this play is meant to be read quickly. The dialogue should feel very organic and real. The acting should be as natural and conversational as possible.

"/" indicates where the next line of dialogue begins.

"-" indicates that a line has been cut off before it's finished

COMMUNITY GARDEN

SCENE 1 - BELLA AND DONALD

BELLA and DONALD walk out of the back door to GiGi's Pizzeria and into *Uptown City Gardens*.

Donald is an older man, he is wearing an old volunteer t-shirt. Bella is wearing street clothes with a dirty white apron over them. The two of them are good friends. Donald is holding a slice of pizza, nervous to eat.

BELLA
Just try it.

DONALD
I want to, I do, BELLA, but-

BELLA
But what?

Quick beat.

DONALD
What did you say is wrong with the bacon?

BELLA
Nothing is WRONG with he bacon. It's candied.

DONALD
(trying to give it back)
I don't want candy on my pizza.

BELLA
It's not CANDY. It's candied.

DONALD
What's the difference?

Bella pauses and thinks carefully about her next words.

BELLA
Uh, think of it as just sweeter bacon!

DONALD
Sweeter?

BELLA
(playing with him)
Yes, sweeter.

DONALD
Alright. Fine. But if I don't like it, I'm never coming back to your families pizzeria again!

BELLA
Come on, Donald, we both know that's not true.

DONALD
You never know-

BELLA
JUST EAT THE PIZZA.

Donald reluctantly takes a bite out of the slice. He chews for a moment as Bella waits for his reaction. He smiles.

DONALD
Ugh, it's good-

BELLA
I KNEW IT.

DONALD
How can pizza be sweet?

BELLA
My mom is gonna love it, my dad's gonna put it on the/ menu-

DONALD
Why does it taste like a Werther's candy?

Donald looks at Bella as she decides to tell him the truth.

BELLA
So, the way I candied it was...well-

DONALD
BELLA...

BELLA
I coat the bacon in caramel-

DONALD
 BELLA!

BELLA
 But it's beyond bacon so it balances/ out.

DONALD
 BELLA?!

BELLA
 WHAT?

DONALD
 You're telling me you fed me REAL candy and
 FAKE meat on pizza?

BELLA
 ...I guess?

DONALD
 Somehow it's better for me and worse for me at
 the same time. I'm hurt and impressed.

He takes another bite, they laugh,
 he get's on his stool in the
 garden. Bella looks at her plot.

BELLA
 How's your day look, Donald?

DONALD
 Oh same old, same old. OH!

BELLA
 What?

DONALD
 Training a new volunteer today, should be fun.

BELLA
 Don't be too mean to him-

DONALD
 I'm not mean to the newbies.

BELLA
 The last volunteer you had said ya told him he
 had to dig a 8 foot hole to "prove his worth
 to the neighborhood".

DONALD
 And he only made it 7 feet so he had to go!

BELLA
 Well not today, or no more pizza.

DONALD

You know my weakness.

Beat. Bella gives some TLC to her Tomato, Basil, and Garlic plants. Donald settles in to his stool.

DONALD

How's your plot looking?

BELLA

Eh. The tomato's coming in okay, the basil is looking good but garlic won't be able to harvest til end of spring. I think it's coming along? My first time with Garlic-

DONALD

When did you plant em'?

BELLA

Back in the autumn so I don't/ get-

DONALD

Oh that's fine, it's a long grow cycle but Garlic will always be worth it.

BELLA

Yeah, yeah, alright.

DONALD

No, really. A few years back someone planted Garlic, took real good care of it through the winter but then gave up right around this time. I took over their plot and a few months later I had the best garlic chicken I ever made. And you know how bad of a chef I am.

BELLA

Yes, I've had your left over lasagna.

DONALD

I thought it tasted *good* crunchy.

BELLA

Lasagna should never be crunchy. My family would have been very offended to be given bad Italian food if it wasn't from you.

DONALD

It's not my fault I'm friends with the Giovanna's! The owner's of GiGi's, the best pizza in uptown-

BELLA

Who is saying that?

DONALD

Me. Everyday to everyone on the street. "Have you tried GiGi's?", "I hear GiGi's is the best", "Are you a young nice boy? The GiGI's daughter, BELLA, is a sweetheart and looking for a good guy too"-

BELLA

DON-

DONALD

What?!

BELLA

You can push our pizza on people but I am very happy to be single right now. I can't imagine bringing someone into my mess!

Bella chuckles and Donald gets a bit more serious.

DONALD

Not a mess. You're Isabella Giovanna. Daughter of the minds behind the best family pizza place in Chicago. That's more than most people, BELLA-

BELLA

I know, I know. I just...

DONALD

What?

BELLA

You ever feel like your life is planned out and you can't do anything about it.

DONALD

I've lived in the same neighborhood my whole life. If I made a "change to my plan" my doctor would kill me.

BELLA

No, but like, seriously. My parents are talking about retiring. I'm an only child and have people like you running around making us even more of a staple in Uptown.

DONALD

GiGI's has been around for 50 years. I don't have to do anything to make it a staple.

BELLA

That's the issue-

DONALD

I remember when your grandpa found that place. Everyone said, "New York Style Pizza? In Chicago? That's like trying to sell sushi in the ocean. We don't want it here!"

BELLA

I know the/ story, Don.

DONALD

But your grandpa said "Nope, we're gonna do it." And he made the best pizza with the best ingredients in that little store from this little garden and here we are now. If it wasn't for you guys getting so big, you're pops wouldn't have transferred over to getting shipments from Italy and we would have never started the garden!

BELLA

I know-

DONALD

But I will be the first to say, I liked it better with the tomatoes from right here.

DONALD/BELLA

(BELLA says it with him because she has heard it before)

Nothing is better than Uptown Grown.

Donald is happy with his story.

BELLA

I know Don, I just kinda didn't get a say in what I get to do!

DONALD

Well, they aren't *making* you.

BELLA

No, and I wanna run GiGi's one day, I just wish I could've made that decision on my own. You know?

DONALD

I know. But hey, your parents are the best people I've ever met. They helped me through it all, and I am with them in believing there is no one on this planet more suited to run the greatest Pizzeria in the world than (said grandly) *Isabella /Giovanna-*

BELLA

I KNOW MY NAME-

Just as she says that, a young man starts to call from off stage.

RALPH (OS)
I'M SORRY I'M LATE! MY BAD-

BELLA
Sounds like the new guy-

DONALD (To Bella)
Hey, you gonna be okay kid?

BELLA
Yeah, my brain is just running a mile a minute. Don't be too mean to the "newbie".

DONALD
Oh I won't be.

BELLA
I'm working on another new slice, I'll bring it for ya later!

DONALD
Thanks, Belle.

Bella starts to walkout, just while Ralph runs in.

RALPH
(Out of breath)
I'm so sorry I'm late, sir-

DONALD
DROP AND GIVE ME 20!

RALPH, a young nervous man in a brand new volunteer shirt immediately drops. Bella laughs and calls out as she exits.

BELLA
HE'S MESSING WITH YOU!

Bella exits, Ralph gets up, confused. Donald is laughing.

2 - RALPH AND DONALD

RALPH
Are you really goofing with me?

DONALD
 (through his laughter)
 This is a community garden, not the marines.

RALPH
 Well, that's not very funny-

DONALD
 At ease soldier, what's your name?

RALPH
 Ralph. Was /that-

DONALD
 The name's Donald and the ruiner of fun was
 (loudly to the door) BELLA of GiGi's fame.

RALPH
 (collecting himself)
 Oh, cool. Well, Donald, I'm excited to help/
 out-

DONALD
 So, why are you here?

RALPH
 ...uh, to volunteer, I thought we went over
 this?

DONALD
 No, why do you want to volunteer?

RALPH
 Oh, well, I've only been in Uptown for like
 three or four months. I was just in
 Wrigleyville and Ravenswood before that.

DONALD
 So, you're a neighborhood hopper? Not a good
 sign,

Donald pretends to check a list on
 his clipboard.

RALPH
 Not a good sign? Am I being tested-

DONALD
 Kind of.

RALPH
 I thought I already got the volunteer spot.

DONALD
 Nope, it's very competitive.

Ralph looks over at a sign on the wall of the garden that say's "VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!"

RALPH

Really?

DONALD

Uh, no. You're lucky I'm not allowed to be mean today or I would have continued the bullying.

RALPH

(relieved)

Well, thank you for going easy on me.

DONALD

You're welcome.

Beat.

RALPH

So, how do we start?

DONALD

I'm not sure. I'm usually still messing with the newbies at this point.

RALPH

Okay-

DONALD

OH, we have an intro speech now!

Donald sorts through his papers on his clipboard and finds the page he is looking for. He reads the script in a grand fashion.

DONALD

"Hello there, Uptownian-"

RALPH

Uptownian?

DONALD

They are trying to start it but I'm not sure why. "Thank you for agreeing to volunteer at *Uptown City Gardens*. I'm lead volunteer, *insert name here*"- OH, Donald. "As a volunteer, you are helping your community and that means the world to us"-

RALPH

Can we skip all this stuff? I totally get-

DONALD

Hold on, we are just getting to the good stuff, "At the *Uptown City Gardens*, your primary responsibilities is to assist anyone when necessary, watch over the garden to make sure no damage is done" and fight off the raccoons when they get angry.

RALPH

WHAT?

DONALD

(laughing)

Alright, alright. I made up the last one.

RALPH

Oh, good.

DONALD

But if vermin do come you have to shoe them away. You can softly sway a broom towards them OR do what I do and treat them like they're your kids who got outta line.

Donald takes the stance of an angry parent.

DONALD

"DAMIAN, DAMIAN. I will not say it again but those carrots are not yours. Now you go BACK to your dumpster and THINK about what you did!"

RALPH

Wow, very impressive.

DONALD

I'm assuming you don't have any children-

RALPH

Nope, very much single. You?

DONALD

My wife and I had 4 beautiful kids. 2 are out working in New York, 1 is on the West Coast and 1 is up in Milwaukee. A bit closer but not close enough.

RALPH

At least you have the raccoons to remind you of those fond childhood memories.

DONALD

(chuckles)

Oh yes, my boys were always stealing vegetables.

They laugh. While they talk CASEY comes in, checks-in, and works on their plot.

RALPH

So, what makes you "lead volunteer"?

DONALD

I've been volunteering here for 7 years, but have been living in the community for my whole life. Just wanted to give back and, you know, this garden is magic.

RALPH

Alright, alright-

DONALD

No, really. I met my wife working back here for the original Santino Giovanna. She was walking by and saw me picking basil. Love at first sight.

RALPH

Oh, that's sweet. How's she doing-

Donald averts the question and goes to his stool.

DONALD

Casey, how you doing?

CASEY

(frustrated)

FINE. Gardening is dumb.

DONALD

Sorry bout that, my friend.

RALPH

So, what do I do exactly?

DONALD

Let me show you.

Donald makes a show of it to sit on his stool and do nothing.

RALPH

That's it?

DONALD

Yup, try it.

Donald gets off the stool and Ralph takes a seat.

DONALD

Wow, a natural... bye.

RALPH

WAIT, where are you going?

DONALD

I'm gonna go get the paper. Relax, when new people come, check-in with them. The equipment shed is right there, and the "all-knowing" binder is on that wooden desk over there. It has contact information, the layout, basically everything you don't know, which will probably be a lot.

RALPH

It can't be this easy.

DONALD

It is. Make sure the raccoons don't attack.

RALPH

Donald, please don't go-

DONALD

Just sit down and read a book, you brought one right?

RALPH

Yeah, but I-

DONALD

Good, I'll be back in 30 mins. 40 max. 2 hours tops!

RALPH

(very nervous)

DONALD!

Donald starts to walk out.

DONALD

(turns)

Ralph!

RALPH

What?

DONALD

Welcome to Uptown.

Donald chuckles and walk off, Ralph sits awkwardly and tries to just read his book on the stool.

KELLY, dressed in dirty clothes like she gardens for a living, comes in and immediately takes down a sign off the wall. Kelly should be moving for the entire scene.

3 - GARDEN SERVICE COORDINATOR

RALPH
(nervous)
Uh, ah, hey! Stop!

KELLY
...what?

RALPH
You know...stop...taking down the sign.

KELLY
Who are you?

RALPH
I'm...(gets some confidence) I'm Ralph, a volunteer here and you can't just take our property.

Kelly chuckles and puts the sign down, walks over to Ralph. Ralph gets nervous like he thinks he's gonna get punched

KELLY
I'm Kelly.

Awkward beat.

KELLY
I'm the boss.

RALPH
OH.

KELLY
Where's Don?

RALPH
He kinda bullied me and then went to get a paper. He told me to sit here, read a book and fight raccoons if need be.

Kelly laughs it off and keeps working on putting up new Spring signage (Plants that survive in the

spring, a cleaner sign on the tool shed, etc...) around the garden as she talks to Ralph.

KELLY

The raccoons haven't been a problem for weeks. Well, week.

RALPH

(forced laughter)

Ha.

KELLY

I'm glad he gave you a bit of a rundown, having a good first day?

RALPH

It started like a minute ago.

KELLY

Oh, yeah.

RALPH

I'm sorry, you're the boss of a community garden? How's that work?

KELLY

I'm the Garden Service Coordinator. I do all the logistics behind plots, make sure all the volunteers and other positions are making their rounds, and that everyone is staying on top of taking care of the green.

RALPH

Dang, so you are the boss-

KELLY

I am. For here, Rainbow Valley Gardens, Diamond Crest Gardens over in Ravenswood, and the greenhouse behind the Montrose Point Bird Sanctuary.

RALPH

Wow, ya got a real green thumb-

KELLY

We live in a city. The 'L', cabs, all the skyscrapers and people in the loop. We gotta do our part to reduce the carbon footprint.

RALPH

(understanding her a bit more)

Oh, I get it. You're like a tree-hugger person.

Beat. Kelly stops for a second.

KELLY
You're a volunteer at a community garden.

RALPH
...yes?

KELLY
Are you NOT a "tree-hugger person"?

RALPH
(nervous)
Uh, no. I mean, I am. I enjoy...trees. And plants and /stuff.

KELLY
Because I pride myself on primarily bringing in volunteers who are "tree-hugger people"-

RALPH
I am! I am. Sorry. I feel like I'm ruining this first impression.

Kelly gets past it, forgives him with a nod, and gets back to work.

KELLY
So, Ralph, you new to Uptown?

RALPH
Yup. Before this I was in Wrigleyville, Anderson, Ravenswood-

KELLY
Ah, neighborhood hopper.

RALPH
(under his breath)
Is that like a well-known term?

KELLY
How'd you like Ravenswood?

RALPH
It was nice, lots of coffee shops run by guys with ponytails.

KELLY
I love Groundswell Roasters, they make a great maple latte in the fall.

RALPH
Yeah, I know that place.
(MORE)

RALPH (CONT'D)

Man, you know so much about these neighborhoods.

KELLY

You gotta if you wanna be alderman.

RALPH

Alderman? Is that like a church thing? Like a deacon?

KELLY

(laughs)

No, it's like the mayor of a neighborhood.

RALPH

Oh, /cool.

KELLY

And Uptown resides in the 46th ward of Chicago, I'm running next year.

RALPH

Wow! That's exciting.

KELLY

Yeah, I would've run earlier but it took a while to get people to back a Chicago alderman campaign with a primarily environmentalist platform.

RALPH

But you did?

Kelly slows down from her tasks for this monologue.

KELLY

I didn't. About three years ago, during the last alderman race, I tried to get some backing and no one wanted to support. So decided to do my own thing. I set up speeches, got a float at a local parade, and all by myself. Well, and using a local high school kid as an intern. In the beginning, the "Donald's" of Uptown would show up in groups of 5, maybe 10? But then, Micah, the kid working for me, had the idea to start posting some videos of what I actually want to do for the community. So, we started filming me right here, in Uptown City Gardens. Talking about how to improve your green thumb in a city, which in turn will improve the quality of life in Uptown.

(MORE)

KELLY (CONT'D)

It did really well, people started coming to speeches in droves and in the last election I got 31% of the vote...as a write-in candidate. Now, my team has opened 4 new community gardens in this *and* neighboring neighborhoods and we are currently the front runners for next year's candidacy.

RAPLH

That's amazing.

KELLY

(earnestly)

That's Uptown. I'm just a far too passionate "tree-hugger". This neighborhood is impressive. The people, like Casey (references Casey), are impressive. Even grumpy ones like Donald.

Kelly starts to collect her things and run off.

RALPH

You're already off?

KELLY

Have to hit a few other gardens, make sure things are in order, and then have a meeting with the current alderman at 2:00.

RALPH

You're meeting with the current alderman?

KELLY

(confident)

Yeah, I hear he is quaking in his boots. I just wanna make sure. It was good to meet you Ralph and welcome to the Garden.

They shake hands.

RALPH

Thank you, it's an honor to talk to someone with confidence and, like... pizazz.

Kelly laughs.

RALPH (CONT'D)

Sorry, I'm bad at talking to people who aren't also incredibly self-conscious.

KELLY

It's fine, your time will come.

Kelly starts to run off.

RALPH

OH! And not like it will probably matter, but you have my vote.

Kelly stops, turns and confidently walks over to Ralph. Extends her hand for one more shake.

KELLY

It completely matters. I won't let you down. Have a great first day.

Kelly runs off, Ralph goes back to his stool and continues to read.

4 - GROWTH TAKES TIME

Over the last minute Casey has been getting more and more frustrated with their Leeks not growing. After a few beats of silence, Casey lets out a controlled but frustrated scream.

RALPH

Is everything okay-

CASEY

Yes! No. I... I don't know. How do you grow Leeks?

RALPH

First day. Sorry.

CASEY

It's fine. It's fine.

Beat. Ralph goes back to reading, Casey is seething.

CASEY

It's just... I tried carrots. You know, and like cabbage and stuff. A few months ago I tried to plant sunflowers but Kelly said, "You can't plant sunflowers in December." Which is fair. Isabella tried to help me with basil and Donald gave me some stuff for lettuce. Nothing works. SO, I think I want to move plots. Or, maybe file an ordinance or complaint or something against this soil. Or the water. Have we checked into the water?

(MORE)

CASEY (CONT'D)

Because I really think something could be wrong with it and that might be why my stuff isn't growing, even though other people are growing and we all use the same water so maybe it actually isn't, but it might be some form of sabotage-

ANDI is walking by and sees Casey.

ANDI

Hey, Casey-

CASEY

ANDI.

ANDI

CASEY!

CASEY

Oh, ah, uh. Hello there.

ANDI

It's been a while-

CASEY

Three months last Thursday.

Awkward beat.

CASEY

Or something like that.

ANDI

You look...dirty.

CASEY

Just working hard or hard at working...

ANDI

I don't think that's the saying, Case.

CASEY

Yeah, no, no. I'm just...overwhelmed.

ANDI

(caring)

You've been taking care of yourself?

CASEY

Me? Taking care of myself? Of course, I've been...like, killing it. Like...absolutely killing it. People see me on the street, at work, or in the garden and they are like...man, they are killing it.

Beat. Casey looks to Ralph for help. Ralph reluctantly looks up from his book for a moment.

RALPH
Casey's killing it.

CASEY
(To Andi)
See?

ANDI
Well, good stuff. Nice to see you, Case.

Andi starts to walk away.

CASEY
Andi!

ANDI
(stops)
Yes?

CASEY
Uh, I have something I need to ask you.

ANDI
Okay?

Beat.

CASEY
...you've been taking care of yourself?

ANDI
...that's what you need to ask me?

CASEY
Yes.

ANDI
That's it?

CASEY
That's all.

Casey goes back to gardening in embarrassment.

ANDI
Well, I'm fine. Just fine.

Beat.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Been doing some self-care, and growing, I think in a good way. Getting to a better place.

CASEY

A better place?

ANDI

A different place.

Beat.

ANDI (CONT'D)

Casey, I just wanna/ say-

CASEY

There's no need-

ANDI

No, I want to. I just... I wish things didn't end the way they did. When things really started to break down at the end, neither of us knew how to get out-

CASEY

It wasn't *that* bad.

ANDI

It was-

CASEY

It wasn't-

ANDI

IT WAS. We weren't talking anymore, you were being cold and I didn't know why and I just couldn't stand it. Casey, you weren't the person I met in college and that's fine but neither of us wanted to say it and you suck at making decisions so what was I supposed to do?

CASEY

Not cheat on me-

ANDI

Casey-

CASEY

Not cheat on me and blow everything up. Talk / to me!

ANDI

You weren't talking! You were just sitting. Mindless, it felt like you would come home from work and not even see me. You had tunnel vision and I didn't know why!

CASEY

ME EITHER.

They get too loud and Ralph looks up. There is a quiet, uncomfortable moment.

ANDI

So maybe it was a good thing? Maybe you lost interest and after 4 years that's hard to say.

CASEY

And then you cheated-

ANDI

I found a way out. I found us both a way out.

CASEY

Well great. And I'm glad you found "self-worth" or practicing "self-care" or whatever.

ANDI

Wow, thanks. Seems like you really care.

CASEY

Am I not allowed to hate /you?

ANDI

Hate me?

CASEY

No, I didn't mean /it-

ANDI

You literally said it. What did you mean? What could you possibly mean? Nothing rhymes with hate!

CASEY

Bait, late, date-

RALPH

The name "Kate".

They give him eyes. He goes back to his book.

ANDI

(sarcastically)

Ok, so you "bait" /me.

CASEY

No, I..I just, I'm not moving on like you are.

ANDI

Casey-

CASEY

I'm not. I'm not and I don't know how to grow. Like at all. I want to, but I can't and it's just not working.

ANDI

Well, for one...Leeks take 110 days to harvest.

CASEY

What?

ANDI

It takes like a really long time to harvest, Leeks.

CASEY

(falling face down in their plot)

I suck at everything.

Andi sees a sunken down Casey, goes and sits next to them.

ANDI

Growth doesn't happen over night. It takes a lot of work to grow...a leek. Water, sunlight, good foundation, and maybe the most important, the realization that even if you do all that, it still won't happen tomorrow, or the next day, or maybe even the next day. But if you understand that and still give...the leek, everything it needs to grow, one day it will.

CASEY

And if it doesn't?

ANDI

Then try cabbage.

Andi chuckles as Casey sinks a bit more.

ANDI (CONT'D)

But it will. Give it some love and it will.

CASEY

Thanks Andi, my, uh, plants are grateful for your wisdom.

ANDI

Anytime. Take care of yourself.

CASEY
You too.

Andi starts to walk away.

ANDI
Case-

CASEY
Andi?

ANDI
I'm gonna grab a bit of coffee, you wanna
come?

Anxious beat.

CASEY
Uh, no, thats alright.

ANDI
(confused)
You sure?

CASEY
Yeah, I think in my anger I kinda ruined my
veggies home. I should fix it up before I head
out.

ANDI
Okay, Case-

CASEY
Like you said, give it the time and effort it
needs.

ANDI
Yeah, see ya dummy.

Andi walks off, Casey is quiet at
their plot for a moment. Ralph
breaks the silence.

RALPH
You good?

CASEY
Yeah. Maybe?

RALPH
You wanna run after em'?

CASEY
No. I don't think so.
(MORE)

CASEY (CONT'D)

I think I need to work on my Leeks and...and start to grow on my own.

RALPH

Cool. Well, let me know if you /need-

5 - TAKE A BOOK, LEAVE A BOOK

TRACE runs in, cutting off Ralph, and goes straight to the Take a Book, Leave a Book Library in the garden. Casey fiddles with their plants for a moment and organically leaves in the next couple minutes. Trace rummages through the stand and doesn't find what they were hoping for.

TRACE

(to someone offstage)

Nothing! Not here today!

DAVEY reluctantly walks on from the same direction, embarrassed and annoyed at their roommate.

DAVEY

Yes, of course it's not there.

TRACE

Dang, I had a good feeling about today.

DAVEY

Really?

TRACE

Hey, Casey, you see anyone leave a book here today?

CASEY

Nope, not today.

TRACE

(to Ralph)

How about you, newbie?

RALPH

It's Ralph. And no.

TRACE

Wow. I really had a feeling /today.

DAVEY

You have a "feeling" everyday. Can we please just go to /Target?

TRACE

It's not just a "feeling, Davey-

DAVEY

Trace.

TRACE

It's not! It's a...knowledge- an *enlightened* knowledge that fate will intercept life and bring you what you most desire.

Beat.

DAVEY

You sound like someone from a Netflix cult documentary.

TRACE

I do /not.

DAVEY

And you "most desire", *The Tempest*?

TRACE

Yup!

DAVEY

It's in the public domain. Google it and you will find a million copies-

TRACE

I know but I want-

TRACE/DAVEY

(Davey says with Trace, mocking them)

"Hold the book in my hand".

DAVEY

Ugh, I know.

TRACE

Then why ask?

DAVEY

It's just...everyday? Everyday we get groceries, head to the "L", go grab coffee, or catch a show at the Green Mill and we *always* need to stop by. It's not gonna be here, just let me buy it /for you.

TRACE

That's not fate! That's just you, Davey, being a good-

DAVEY

And annoyed-

TRACE

..and annoyed roommate. And while I do appreciate the support, it's not fate.

DAVEY

Isn't fate just random accidents that turn out positive?

TRACE

No. Well, I don't think so.

DAVEY

Think about it. Guy is walking across the street, he trips and bumps into some teen on a skate board and knocks him off. The skateboard rolls away, down a hill, through traffic and lands at the feet of someone else who is currently making a major life decision on whether to go into finance or a professional skateboarding career. That's-

TRACE

FATE!

DAVEY

NO. It's just a clumsy dude who is probably gonna get sued by some rich teen's parents.

TRACE

...well I choose to not look at it in a pessimistic way. And I choose to not buy *The Tempest* because when I find it, it'll make it just that much more special.

DAVEY

Why *The Tempest*?

TRACE

Why not?

DAVEY

You're not like a Shakespeare actor or something? Why not like a comic, or a *Star Wars* book, or one of those "For Dummies" books?

TRACE

"For Dummies"?

DAVEY

You know like, *Gardening for Dummies*, *French Press for Dummies*, *Not Believing in Fate* and *Getting your Head Out of The Clouds...for Dummies*.

TRACE

I don't think that last one is real.

DAVEY

Come on, why Shakespeare? Arguably one of the most accessible writers in existence.

TRACE

I heard it was good.

DAVEY

That's all?

TRACE

What?! I heard it's a good play-

Davey starts to walk out-

TRACE

My dad liked it and I-

Davey realizes what's going on and starts to walk back.

TRACE (CONT'D)

...I just thought it would be cool to find it.

DAVEY

Trace, I didn't know that was-

TRACE

He actually directed it, last summer, out in Highland Park. It was good, he had someone from Chicago Shakespeare Theatre in it. I didn't get to see it. Thought I'd be able to catch the next one but, you /know-

DAVEY

Yeah, I know. You didn't do anything /wrong.

TRACE

I know, I know. Nobody saw it coming and I'm fine. I just, I feel bad, you know. But he wanted me to see it and he always said, "If you can't see it, read it", so I just thought maybe he might help me out with...um, finding the play-

DAVEY

Yeah, yeah, I'm...I'm sorry. I shouldn't have been so hard about your want of a..."fateful intervention".

TRACE

(hiding their emotion)

It's fine! I'm fine, seriously-

Trace starts to walk off.

DAVEY

You don't have to be-

TRACE

I am. I swear.

DAVEY

Trace, it's okay to want a sign or gift or something. You don't need to-

Trace immediately runs back to Davey and gives them an intense hug.

DAVEY

(surprised)

Oh, Okay. Okay.

The hug continues.

DAVEY

(earnestly)

What can I do for you, T?

TRACE

(obviously emotional)

Will you buy me those fancy veggie chips?

DAVEY

(laughs to break the tension)

Yeah, only if you share.

They start to walk off.

TRACE

For sure. Can we get the Parmesan cheddar ones? Or those new spicy ones or...

Trace trails off as they walk off with Davey.

6 - THE IN-LAWS

For a moment, Ralph is on his own in the garden. He gets up, explores the garden for a moment, and goes to peer through the screen door at GiGi's. After a while he hears ADAM enter, leading KEN and APRIL, it scares him back to his stool.

ADAM

And this is Uptown City Gardens!

APRIL

Sadie has told us so much about this place.

KEN

It's a lot of dirt-

ADAM

Soil.

KEN

Huh?

ADAM

It's...uh, soil. I mean, same thing, we just call it soil. Well, it's not the same thing. Actually, technically speaking-

KEN

Looks like dirt to me-

APRIL

Probably *really nice* dirt, Adam. Good dirt, Adam.

ADAM

Thanks, Ms. Williams-

APRIL

Adam, how many times do I have to say this, you've dated our daughter for years. Call me, April.

ADAM

Yeah, ah, sorry...April. Ken-

KEN

Call me, Mr. Williams.

ADAM

Yes, sir.

APRIL
(To Ken)

Will you please-

KEN

Alright, alright. (Slight beat) Do we think Sadie will be ready soon?

ADAM

Well, she usually takes a while to shower and get ready, but she loves Gold Coast Kitchen's lunch so it shouldn't be too long.

KEN

Great.

Awkward beat. April nudges Ken to attempt to connect.

KEN

(reluctantly)

Adam, how about you show us your dirt.

ADAM

Oh, yeah? Cool!

Adam leads them through the garden to his and SADIE's plot, it's one of the most thriving in the garden. Herbs and Greenery galore.

ADAM (CONT'D)

So technically, again, not called dirt. These are all plots and, honestly, it took Sadie and I a year to get off the waitlist to get one but it's so worth it.

KEN

(sarcastic)

That's great.

APRIL

What made the two of you get into this?

ADAM

Well, my parents thought it /would be-

KEN

The ones that live in the trailer?

ADAM

Not a trailer. A silver airstream custom fit with appliances and internet and stuff. Basically a tiny home-

KEN

You know, when Sadie told us your dad was retiring and your parents were selling their home to move into a trailer-

ADAM

(under his breath)

Airstream.

KEN

-we were just shocked.

APRIL

To each their own, right Ken?

KEN

Right, I guess.

ADAM

They've always been minimalist. Never big into tech or anything like that. Always wanted to get their carbon footprint down to a minimum so, I totally expected it. You know growing up, we would have wilderness Wednesdays.

APRIL

Oh, wilderness Wednesdays? That sounds fun.

ADAM

It WAS. My parents would let me go in the woods and anything I found would be the ingredients for dinner!

April and Ken look at each other slightly concerned.

ADAM (CONT'D)

Oh, it was never anything like poisonous.

APRIL

Well, that's good-

ADAM

It was like leaves and berries and stuff though. Real fun.

KEN

Leaves and berries?

The air is *everything* to Adam.

ADAM

Yeah, and after Sadie talked me into Chicago, I told her I needed some type of outlet to the earth and she found this place. I've been teaching her some basic gardening, and I mean... just breath this place in. You will not get any air like this anywhere else in the city.

April takes a big breath in, Ken does not.

APRIL

(actually impressed)

Wow, that is good air!

ADAM

See?

KEN

Good air?

ADAM

Here, try this.

Adam pulls some mint leaves he has grown over the winter.

ADAM

I grew some mint over the winter, give it a whiff.

Ken steps away but April comes up and smells.

APRIL

My god, that smells like a yankee candle.

ADAM

RIGHT?

KEN

Really?

ADAM

(To April)

Take a bite.

KEN

Can she? What if it's poisonous?

ADAM

Mint isn't poisonous?

KEN

Mint is a smell, or a flavor ice cream. That looks like lettuce-

APRIL

I think I'll be fine.

April takes a bite. Silent, anxious beat as Ken and Adam both wait for April's reaction.

APRIL

That taste like my gum!

Adam and April laugh, Ken seems annoyed.

ADAM

Actually, your gum taste like it, but same thing.

Ken grabs some from Adam

KEN

Let me taste. There is no way some lettuce from a garden can last like gum.

ADAM

(under his breath)

Seriously not lettuce but-

Ken takes a bite and has an immediate face of surprise that April notices.

APRIL

OH! He likes it!

KEN

How does he get this lettuce taste like our gum, I don't get it.

APRIL

I know, right?

ADAM

(giving up)

It's just gum flavored lettuce, you know, very easy to grow!

KEN

Well, I'm impressed.

APRIL

Good stuff, Adam-

ADAM
 (scared and out of nowhere)
 I wanna marry your daughter-

KEN
 WHAT?

ADAM
 I wanna marry your daughter?

APRIL
 Oh, Adam, I don't know about-

ADAM
 I'm sorry, I really don't know how to ask this
 kinda thing. And also, I don't feel like I
 have to ask but-

KEN
 Excuse me?

ADAM
 Well, just, it feels like its more about her
 than anything so I am less asking and more
 starting a dialogue about the concept of me
 marrying your daughter....

Beat. Adam takes a moment to
 breathe his beloved air. It calms
 him down slightly.

ADAM (CONT'D)
 Do you want some thyme?

KEN
 Yes.

Adam goes and pulls some thyme from
 the garden.

APRIL
 That would probably be good, I think maybe
 lets talk in a few weeks-

KEN
 Or months, years even-

Adam hands them both some thyme.

KEN
 Adam, what is this?

ADAM
 It's thyme? OH, you meant like..."clock-time".
 My bad.

April eats it, Ken does not.

KEN

Look, bud, we...think you're great but we really think it's bit early for all that. You know? You and Sadie are 24, you've only been dating for-

ADAM

Seven years. Did you guys really not see this coming?

APRIL

(finishes the thyme)

Is this the stuff we put on Ken's steak?

Ken takes a bite of the thyme.

ADAM

Probably. People love thyme on steak. The woody flavor pairs super well with-

KEN

(shocked)

How do you have steak-flavored lettuce?!

ADAM

(again...giving up)

I just...I don't know.

Ken and April have calmed down a bit.

KEN

Look bud, this is all very cute but I just don't think-

APRIL

I'm cool with it.

KEN

Honey?!

APRIL

What?

KEN

You're supposed to be on my side, here! Weren't you just against this?

APRIL

I was thrown off for sure, Adam, for future reference, give us more of a heads-up, please, but I love Adam and he loves Sadie and is it really our choice?

KEN

Well, maybe we should talk to Sadie and see if she is ready-

ADAM

She is!

KEN

What? How do you know?

ADAM

She helped me pick out the ring?

Beat.

KEN

You have a ring?

Adam pulls out an engagement ring, shows it to the parents.

APRIL

That is just gorgeous.

KEN

What happened to giving us some time?

ADAM

I was talking about the herb.

KEN

Oh. So, this is happening...

ADAM

Tonight.

APRIL

TONIGHT? Like tonight tonight or tomorrow...tonight?

ADAM

I understand, it's a lot and we might still seem like kids to you guys but I love your daughter. I do, and I wanna be with her forever.

KEN

How do you know she's the one?

Adam takes a moment. Breathes in the air again.

ADAM

I know I grew up in a different home than most. I love weird things most people don't. The dirt, worms, finding a bird nest in your A/C unit. Most people don't wanna listen when I drone on about the woods, the sunflowers, the air. Sadie doesn't just listen, she loves it... because she loves me. And I love her. And when you feel that way, you just know.

Ken thinks for a beat. Looks at the thyme in his hand and takes another bite.

KEN

Are you gonna make my daughter live in a trailer?

ADAM

No. Well, not right now. But again, it's an airstream and they are really cool-

KEN

Are you gonna keep her safe?

ADAM

Yes. Yes, Sir. And she'll do the same for me, Mr. Williams.

KEN

You can call me, Ken, bud. If you're good enough for Sadie, then you're good with me.

April gives Adam a big hug.

APRIL

WOW. This is happening.

KEN

It is. It really is!

APRIL

Well, let's make a plan. When are you doing it?

Adam gets a text notification, and checks his phone.

ADAM

Well, she's ready to go. So, about 30 minutes.

KEN

WHAT?

APRIL
 (so excited)
 Let's go get her!

Adam leads them out of the garden excited, April grabs Ken's hand and they walk out with him to get Sadie.

7 - BELLA AND RALPH

Ralph just witnessed a love story and takes another moment alone in the garden, to his surprise, Bella comes out with a slice of pizza.

BELLA
 Ok, Donald, you're not gonna like this one but- Oh, you're...not Don-

RALPH
 Uh, no. No, I'm new volunteer being *trained* by Donald.

Beat. Bella looks around.

BELLA
 Where is he?

RALPH
 He left after talking to me for like two minutes.

BELLA
 Very *Donald* of him.

RALPH
 Yeah.

BELLA
 Well, do you wanna try a weird slice of pizza (searching for his name)...

RALPH
 Ralph!

BELLA
Ralph, would you like to try a weird slice of pizza?

RALPH
 (pretending to not know)
 Uh, sure...and your name?

BELLA

Tell me you like it and I'll tell ya.

Ralph takes a bite of the slice. At first it's normal, and then, BOOM, sweetness hits him.

RALPH

WHOA. That was weird.

BELLA

(incredibly pumped)

YES. It worked. Oh, that's amazing.

RALPH

What did I just eat?

BELLA

A slice of cheese pizza with grilled pineapple hidden under the cheese.

RALPH

Oh, that's actually pretty good-

BELLA

Right? People have this weird thing against pineapple pizza so I made this! So people can secretly force their friends to trying it. I'm calling it...*BOOM, SURPRISE PINEAPPLE.*

RALPH

Well, Bella, you have succeeded.

BELLA

Thanks... wait, I never told you my name-

RALPH

(nervous)

Oh, uh, yeah, yeah I thought I recognized you! You're the girl at the counter of GiGi's?

BELLA

(skeptical)

Yeah, I don't recognize you.

RALPH

New to the neighborhood. Before here I was in Andersonville, Ravenswood, Wrigleyville. I believe I'm what they call-

RALPH/BELLA

(at the same time)

A neighborhood hopper.

RALPH

Okay, is that a legit term? Donald called me that right when I came here, and Kelly too.

BELLA

Not really, you have just been introduced to very... community invested people. Kinda intense but two very good people to know.

Beat. Ralph is trying to keep the conversation going.

RALPH

Hey, can I ask you. Why is Donald, like, kinda a bully? I never felt like he was gonna give me a swirly or something but-

BELLA

Yeah, Kelly doesn't let him do that anymore.

RALPH

Really?

BELLA

I'm messing with you, he's not a bully from some Disney movie.

RALPH

Oh.

BELLA

Don cares a lot about Uptown and the Gardens and stuff, he just wants to make sure you're cool enough to work here. He is kinda like a bouncer to the neighborhood.

RALPH

Yeah, an old bouncer.

BELLA

Yeah. Did Kelly tell you anything about him?

RALPH

No, just that bullying is his love language.

BELLA

He's only that way because he cares. He cares a lot.

RALPH

About a garden?

Beat. Bella decides to tell Ralph something big.

BELLA

Look, I'm gonna tell you something but if you ever let Don know I did... I'll kill you.

RALPH

Fair.

BELLA

Don lost his wife, Kayla, about seven years ago. He had been here his whole life but before she passed he got a little more secluded from the neighborhood. My parents knew him and when we showed up at the church, Don was sitting in the front row...all by himself. The church was basically empty. So, my dad made a few calls and in about 10 minutes half of the neighborhood was there and you could tell it meant so much to him. I started to talking to him at the wake, I was like 16, and he told me that his kids wanted to come but they were so busy with school or work or whatever so they didn't make it. I wanted to do something for him, so I brought him a cheese pizza and he responded to it by saying one word, "boring". So, that's when I started making weirder pizzas and he was my taste tester. He started working in the garden and I think Uptown started looking like the neighborhood he grew up in again. My dad told me he used to be a massive part of Uptown and then went away but now, this place matters more than ever to him. So, if he lets you in, then you're in.

RALPH

He really is a bouncer.

BELLA

Yes, and you should be proud.

RALPH

Proud why? He ditched me?

BELLA

He left you in charge of the garden your first day, that's kinda big deal.

Bella goes to grab some plants from her plot.

RALPH

Or he just wanted his paper.

BELLA

Maybe.

RALPH

What are you growing?

BELLA

Nothing to crazy, some basil, oregano, garlic, some tomatoes-

RALPH

Did you know tomatoes and basil help each other grow?

BELLA

What?

RALPH

They help each other grow. Like if you plant them next to each other they use similar nutrients and will help each other thrive.

BELLA

Hm. I did not know that. Maybe I'll do some replanting. My tomatoes aren't coming through anyway. So, are you like like a garden wizard or something?

Ralph shows her the book he is reading, *Gardening for Dummies*.

BELLA

Ah, you're in *study*.

RALPH

I feel like I should know something, especially if I'm gonna be around cool, fancy people like Kelly, Don, or yourself.

BELLA

Oh, you think I'm fancy.

RALPH

Well, fancy at making weird pizza.

BELLA

(starts thinking about her life)

That's basically all I can do so glad you think it's cool.

RALPH

What do you mean?

BELLA

I just...maybe you'll get this better than Donald. Have you ever felt like you were trapped in a life you didn't pick? Not a life you hate! But you just didn't get to pick it.

Ralph thinks for a moment.

RALPH

My dad played college football. So, was his twin. And his three other brothers. And all of their sons. So, when I got into high school I was expected to play, and I did! It was fine and I like, had an okay time. I've never been a violent person or anything. I was the long snapper so I kinda felt like I was playing a weird carnival game. After a few years though, football started getting in the way of something I really loved.

BELLA

What was that?

RALPH

Speech and Debate.

BELLA

Wow, so you were very cool!

RALPH

No, I was! There was like 100 people in our club and I went to nationals my senior year.

BELLA

So, you quit football?

RALPH

Yeah, but it wasn't for me. I don't know you super well but I can tell this is something you actually care about-

BELLA

I do! I do, and I don't wanna quit. I just want something to make my days feel different. Something to mix-it-up.

RALPH

(making a jump)

Or someone.

BELLA

Someone? Oh! Yeah, if you know a super-hot guy who likes weird food please send him my way.

Bella starts to walk inside.

RALPH (CONT'D)

-wait, where ya going?

BELLA

Back to work. Unless you have something to say that's more interesting than dough and an oven.

Beat. Ralph wants to ask her out but he can't do it. He looks at his pizza.

RALPH

Uh, you should put this on the menu.

BELLA

Yeah, it's not that easy. My dad-

RALPH

Maybe that's the "mix-em-up"? I mean..."BOOM, SURPRISE PINEAPPLE" is great. I'd buy it.

BELLA

Yeah, maybe I'll talk to my dad.

Beat of quiet. She is waiting for him to talk.

BELLA

Anything else, Garden Wizard?

Ralph tries to get the confidence to ask her out. He can't.

BELLA

Well, you think on that. I'll see ya soon, Ralphie.

RALPH

People don't really call me, Ralphie.

BELLA

Well, someone does now.

Bella walks out and Ralph smiles as he starts to go back to his book. He is alone for a moment and decides to go to the shed to get a shovel to replant her tomato plant himself.

8 - SHED STEWARD

AUGUST (O.S.)

NOT SO FAST!

Ralph doesn't touch the shed and is confused and nervous, AUGUST, holding a brand-new shovel, runs on and goes straight to a scared Ralph.

AUGUST

Who are you?

RALPH

I'm Ralph. I'm a volunteer here!

AUGUST

I'm a volunteer here and I don't know who you are. Prove it.

Ralph references the volunteer shirt he is currently wearing. August, like a superhero, pulls up his nice sweater and shows he is wearing a dirty volunteer t-shirt underneath.

AUGUST

Oh. Cool! I'm August, the Shed Steward.

Ralph still looks nervous while August is holding the shovel and acting *almost* like a superhero.

AUGUST

Oh. Oh, no, sorry. I was just dropping off this new shovel in the shed and thought you were trying to steal a tool so I ran over-

DAPHNE (O.S.)

AUGUST?! WHERE DID YOU GO?

AUGUST

Oh shoot, I forgot I'm on a date.

RALPH

What is going on?!

AUGUST

Just play it cool, and make me seem important.

RALPH

I don't even know who you are-

AUGUST

I'm August, the Shed Steward, just, quiet!

DAPHNE runs on in a nice dress with a messenger bag.

DAPHNE

August, what is going on?!

AUGUST

I'm sorry, Daphne, I thought this nice fella was stealing from the Shed but he's just a new volunteer. Ralph, this is Daphne, my...uh, date companion.

DAPHNE

Nice to meet you.

RALPH

You too, look I just needed a small shovel.

AUGUST

What are you trying to do?

RALPH

Replant a tomato plant for Bella-

AUGUST

Does she know?

RALPH

Well, no, it's like a-

AUGUST

Romantic. Cute, I love it. Bella needs some spice in her life.

August opens the shed, puts the shovel in and gives Ralph a shovel and a large pot.

AUGUST

Dig out the tomato plant, make sure your loosen up the roots, and then use the extra soil in the pot to plant it where you want it. Go get em' tiger.

RALPH

(trying to hype him up)

Uh, thanks, Shed Steward. This guy is great!

AUGUST

No problem!

Ralph goes over to replant Bella's tomato plant.

DAPHNE

I'm sorry, Shed Steward?

AUGUST

It's my name around these here parts.

DAPHNE

Like...literally?

AUGUST

Kinda. Well my name is August-

DAPHNE

Yes, I remember-

AUGUST

But my title is the Shed Steward, so I basically keep the shed in order or as I like to call it The Fortress of Tomato-tude.

DAPHNE

Oh, well, that's... nice.

AUGUST

Oh, you think that's nice? Check this out.

August opens a door to the shed and we see the inside is a photo of him wearing a superhero-like mask looking strong with the caption "SIGN OUT THE SHOVELS BEFORE YOU GARDEN. -THE SHED STEWARD"

DAPHNE

Wow, that's...intense.

AUGUST

In a good way?

DAPHNE

In an intense way.

AUGUST

Well, thanks?

DAPHNE

Yeah. August, let's-

AUGUST

OH. WAIT, I know something you'll think is cool-

August goes and looks through his shed and pulls out a broken, rake.

DAPHNE

Wow, a broken rake. Very cool-

AUGUST

Not just any broken rake, the first rake ever used at Uptown City Gardens.

DAPHNE

I guess that's cool-

AUGUST

At least I think it is, Kelly and Don say that it can't be cause that would be like so many years but I think it probably is.

DAPHNE

What makes you think that?

AUGUST

It just seems like it should be.

DAPHNE

Okay...

Beat.

AUGUST

This is a weird start to a third date.

RALPH

(under his breath)

Third date?

DAPHNE

Yes, it is.

AUGUST

I'm sorry, I wasn't even gonna show ya this place yet, I was just gonna stop by and drop off the shovel but I got overwhelmed. I'm just really into it.

DAPHNE

Really into it.

AUGUST

It's just...haven't you ever wanted to be a superhero?

DAPHNE

I guess, but you just look over shovels and rakes.

August takes this as a hit. He's hurt.

AUGUST

Yeah, yeah, I guess your right.

DAPHNE

August, I'm sorry.

AUGUST

It's fine, let's just go grab lunch.

DAPHNE

We all are weirdly into some hobbies, I shouldn't have judged you so harshly.

AUGUST

It's fine, I'm weird. I just really enjoy helping my friends here and I am so bad at growing stuff. You shoulda saw my first basil plant. Don just about punched me.

DAPHNE

Who's Don?

RALPH

An old cranky guy who works here.

AUGUST

The point is, instead of kicking me out, he introduced to the lady who runs the place, Kelly, and she gave me this position, and now I have a hand in helping a bunch of stuff grow. It's just like, my safe space. Just a weird hobby I'm overly into. This is probably like an 8th date thing but I don't know if you'll want to get to that point now so maybe we just grab some food and I can walk ya home-

DAPHNE

(like a confession)

I READ.

Beat.

AUGUST

What?

DAPHNE

That's my thing. I read...books.

AUGUST

Daphne, everyone reads books. That's not like something you can obsess over.

Daphne takes off her messenger bag and dumps a bunch of books on the ground. Like way too many books.

AUGUST

I thought you said you had your laptop and phone in there-

DAPHNE

I literally can't stop. If I have even 30 seconds of free time I'll start reading. If you were to go to the bathroom at lunch, I'd read. If it was quiet on the train, I'd read. I would have read when I wasn't up to bowl on our last date but my friends said you would have thought I was weird-

They start getting closer as they get more excited.

AUGUST

My friends said you would have thought I was weird if I brought you to the garden!

DAPHNE

Which isn't fair! Why can't everyone just understand that we all have things we nerd out over?!

AUGUST

EXACTLY. Like shovels!

DAPHNE

Or Hemingway-

AUGUST

Garden sheers-

DAPHNE

Stephen King-

AUGUST

Watering Cans-

DAPHNE

Shakespeare-

AUGUST

Fertilizer-

Daphne kisses August.

DAPHNE

(nervous)

I'm sorry-

AUGUST

Don't be! That was...intense.

DAPHNE

Good intense? Bad Intense-

AUGUST

Good intense. Very good intense.

DAPHNE

Wanna go get lunch?

AUGUST

Please.

They start on walk off.

RALPH

Don't you want your books?!

DAPHNE

No. I don't think I'll need them today.

She holds onto the arm of August, they walk out happily. Ralph has finished replanting the tomato plant and now puts the books into the *Take a Book, Leave a Book*.

9 - PRESENTING PLANTS

KAPE, walks into the garden with a large tripod for their phone and a journal under their arm. Starts to set up near a dead-looking lot.

RALPH

I'm sorry, can I help you?

KAPE

Yup, I'm about to zoom into my class so you could be quiet as you pick up your books, nerd.

RALPH

Wow, that was mean.

KAPE

I'm not mean, I'm in the zone.

RALPH

In the zone for what?

Kape has set up their phone and is logging in to the class.

KAPE
Just shut up, please.

RALPH
Alright, jeez.

KAPE
Hello? Can you guys hear me?

You can hear Mr. Putnam through the phone during this scene (either V.O. or O.S.).

MR. PUTNAM
Yup, we can hear you Kape. Could you really not just perform your piece in class like your peers?

KAPE
With all due respect, Mr. Putnam, this poem has a visual element that makes the entire piece work so-

MR. PUTNAM
Fine. Kape's poetry midterm, whenever you're ready.

KAPE
Thank you. This is called, *Growth Won't Come So Give Up, Loser*.

Kape takes out their journal and begins to perform a poem for their virtual class.

KAPE
When you wanna grow, you won't.
When you *need* to grow, you won't.
When everything is up against you, you'll fail...
And nothing will ever work.

MR. PUTNAM
(under his breath)
Jeez, Kape.

KAPE
WHAT WAS THAT?

MR. PUTNAM
Nothing, please continue.

KAPE
They will give you everything to do it.
(MORE)

KAPE (CONT'D)

They will give you support, love and it won't matter.
You don't get to grow, cause growing sucks and is stupid.
You're like a stupid radish.

Kape goes down to the radish plants, you can only see the leaves. Kape yells at the radish.

KAPE (CONT'D)

A stupid radish that has everything it needs.
Has gotten it every day for weeks.
But still won't grow.
Sun, water, food, and still nothing.
Nothing. But. Dead!

Kape pulls out a radish by the leaves, it looks perfect. They are shocked and quiet.

RALPH

Wow, that looks really good!

KAPE

Shut up!

MR. PUTNAM

Kape, is everything alright?

KAPE

Yup, just give me a second.

Kape turns off their video and audio on the zoom.

KAPE

Frick, frick, frick, frick!

RALPH

What's wrong? That looks like a great radish!

KAPE

IT'S SUPPOSED TO BE DEAD.

RALPH

Well, it's not. It grew great.

KAPE

How did this happen?!

Ralph looks through his book.

RALPH

Well it looks like Radishes can grow in harsh weather, AND grow primarily underground so sometimes people will think they aren't growing when they are.

KAPE

Let me see that.

Kape snatches the book and looks over it.

KAPE

Ah. THIS SUCKS. What am I supposed to do?

RALPH

I don't know, can you improvise a poem?

KAPE

Maybe. FRICK.

Kape goes and turns on the the camera again.

MR. PUTNAM

-Kape, you there- There you are, what is going on?

KAPE

Sorry, uh, technical difficulties. I'll keep going.

MR. PUTNAM

Alright, then.

KAPE

(obviously improvising)

This, uh, living radish.
This grew...in the ground.
It grew because...it got everything it needed.
It got love and care, but I'm not a radish.
We aren't radishes, we are people. And people don't get to grow like that.

Adam, Ken, April, and Sadie walk in on the other side of the stage.

KAPE

People don't just grow.
We don't get the love we need, the support we want.
We don't get the care like a radish or a carrot.
We are stuck alone, never to grow like a vegetable-

Kape watches as Adam proposes to Sadie, she says yes, and the family celebrates. They walk out, Kape is wide-eyed.

KAPE
(dumbfounded)
You have to be kidding me-

MR. PUTNAM
Kape, is that all?

KAPE
So, people grow-
And people find love-
And anything can happen-
But how does it happen to you-
How can you force it to happen to you?

Beat.

KAPE (CONT'D)
You can't. You never can. But maybe you can. I don't know.
Uh. End of poem. I guess.

MR. PUTNAM
Very vague ending, but interesting. An F for not rhyming, but heartfelt. Come back to class, Kape.

The sound of the video stream ending. Kape groans.

RALPH
You okay?

KAPE
I guess, I don't know. I, uh-

Casey runs back into the garden.

CASEY
Sorry, Ralph, I think I forgot my-

Casey sees Kape holding radishes.

CASEY
(To Kape)
HOW DID YOU DO THAT?

KAPE
WHAT?

CASEY

GROW RADISHES. I've been trying to grow something in my plot forever and it won't work.

KAPE

Well, I grew them by accident.

CASEY

Oh.

KAPE

You can just have my plot. Congrats on growing radishes.

Kape starts to walk out.

CASEY

Wait! I'm trying to be better at growing, like *as a person*, you know?

KAPE

(taken aback)

Yeah, I do. I, uh-

CASEY

Is there anyway you could, maybe, show me real quick some tips of what you did?

KAPE

Really?

CASEY

Yeah, I'm Casey.

KAPE

Kape. Let's grab a few things from the shed. First rule, never sign them out. It makes August so mad which is very funny to me.

CASEY

Cool.

Kape and Casey proceed to look over Kape's plot, play with the plants and Kape shows them how they take care of things.

10 - COMPOSTING

TAYLOR enters the garden with a wooden crate full of rotting food and other compostable trash.

She walks directly up to Ralph who gags at the smell of their trash.

TAYLOR
Excuse me, where is your compost bin?

RALPH
(gagging)
Our what?

TAYLOR
Your compost bin? I saw on your website that you take compostable trash here!

RALPH
(still gagging)
It's my first day, I don't know what-

TAYLOR
Composting? Like taking your recyclable organic trash and tossing it into a box to make natural fertilizer that helps the garden grow better-

RALPH
Oh, let me check the binder.

Ralph runs over to the binder to look for where the compost bin is, Taylor yells off stage to JORDAN.

TAYLOR
Jordan! Come on!

JORDAN (O.S.)
I'M TRYING. THE SMELL SLOWS ME DOWN.

Jordan comes on, holding their wooden crate as far away from them as possible. They have something closing their nose, like a clothespin.

TAYLOR
Come on, it's not that /bad.

JORDAN
It is, it really is, Taylor. It's the worst smell I have ever experienced.

TAYLOR
That is not true, remember the Port-a-potty's at Lollapalooza last year?

Jordan visibly shivers with disgust.

TAYLOR
Exactly. (To Ralph) You find it?

RALPH
Not yet!

KAPE
The compost bin is behind the shed.

TAYLOR
Cool, thanks!

CASEY
How'd you know that?

KAPE
The compost bin has really good nutrients, it helps your plot grow better- DANG IT, no wonder my garden grew so well-

CASEY
No wonder mine didn't!

Kape and Casey go back to their garden and organically exit together over the next few minutes. Taylor tosses their trash in the compost bin and comes back out from behind the shed.

JORDAN
TAKE MINE, PLEASE.

TAYLOR
You can do it yourself, Jordan-

JORDAN
This is your thing, not mine. Take it!

TAYLOR
This isn't my thing, this is our thing! We chose to live here so we need to do our part.

JORDAN
I am perfectly fine slowly killing the environment in my own small ways, thank you very much.

TAYLOR
Ugh, you don't mean that.

JORDAN

I do, I really do. Now take it!

Taylor takes the trash tosses it in
the compost bin.

RALPH

I'm sorry, but what is so bad about living in
a city?

JORDAN

Don't start this up-

RALPH

I've just heard that a bunch today and I
didn't realize it was such a bad thing-

TAYLOR

It's not "bad" but it's just...a lot of people
in a small amount of space. There are 9
million people who live in the metro area of
Chicago, you know who else has a population of
9 million? New Jersey! Austria! We have double
the population of Kentucky and we are .5% of
the size. But it's not just us! Rural areas
have issues with pollution from industrial
plants, only 10% of our country's energy comes
from renewable sources, and my aunt still
refuses to use a metal straw. If we are gonna
choose to live in this world, we need to do
our part to keep it up and running, right?

RALPH

(inspired)

Right! Wow, you know so much, how long have
you been an environmental activist?

TAYLOR

Like a week.

RALPH

A week?

JORDAN

More like two days. Taylor here read an
article on twitter over the weekend and now
has me collecting all of the rotting fruit we
can find as if it's gonna save the polar bears
and stop the salons from using hairspray.

TAYLOR

It might! I mean it's not about that, it's
about making as much of a difference on your
own because if you take the burden of the
world on your shoulders...

JORDAN/TAYLOR

(Jordan mocking)

...you'll never truly be satisfied.

JORDAN

I KNOW. I saw the instagram account you sent me. Look, we did it. We gave some random people our trash. Can I be done caring about this?

TAYLOR

You can be but I'm not, (To Ralph) where can I sign up to volunteer?

JORDAN

You have to be kidding me.

TAYLOR

No, I'm not! Don't you wanna leave this place better than you found it?

JORDAN

What place?!

TAYLOR

Uptown?! Chicago? I don't know, the freaking world!

JORDAN

I guess, but-

TAYLOR

(getting inspiration-y again)

Then do it. Let's get off the couch, once a week. Once a week let's step out into the sunlight and grab people shovels-

RALPH

You shouldn't touch August's shovel.

TAYLOR

Or something else! Let's get down and dirty and really sink our hands into the earth. Give back to the world that has given everything to us-

Jordan almost gets inspired but stops themself. Taylor starts playing with them.

JORDAN

NO, NO. You're not gonna inspire me like you do. I will not be inspired!

TAYLOR
Please, JoJo, do it for me-

JORDAN
Don't call me that.

TAYLOR
What? JoJo?

JORDAN
Yes, it's cute and annoying and I hate it *and* you-

TAYLOR
You do? Oh, JoJo, that's too bad-

Taylor get's closer to them.

JORDAN
Stop it, Taylor-

TAYLOR
Ok, fine, JoJo, I'll stop-

JORDAN
I'm serious!

TAYLOR
JoJo, JoJo, JoJo-

JORDAN
TayTay, stop!

TAYLOR
Fine!

Taylor kisses Jordan.

RALPH
(during kiss)
Why do people keep kissing?

Don walks back into the garden with a paper and coffee in hand, sees the kiss happening.

DONALD
(To Ralph)
SEE! I told you this place is magic!

The two of them stop kissing.

JORDAN/TAYLOR
I'm sorry.

JORDAN

What are you sorry for?

TAYLOR

For roping you into something you clearly don't wanna do-

JORDAN

No, I should have just accepted it. I should wanna get involved. I mean, Hulu isn't going anywhere.

TAYLOR

Wait for real?

JORDAN

(To Ralph)

Where can we sign up?

TAYLOR

YES. We are gonna be such a cute gardening couple. WE CAN GET MATCHING OVERALLS.

Taylor kisses Jordan again.

JORDAN

As long as it's not gonna be like gross stuff.

DONALD

Well, one time I had to dig a rat out of the compost bin. It was bad. But, welcome to the team.

RALPH

Here, I'll show ya-

DONALD

I got it, right this way you two love birds.

Donald leads them over to the binder, has them sign their names and emails on a sheet. While they sign he leans over to Ralph.

DONALD

For every person you sign up as a new volunteer, Kelly gives you a sticker. I want more stickers.

Jordan and Taylor finish signing.

JORDAN

Alright, what now?

DONALD

We'll send you an email for your first training shift soon.

TAYLOR

Is training hard?

RALPH

It's wildly confusing and full of a lot of cute romantic garden nerds.

DONALD

Oh and be wearing these.

Donald grabs two volunteer t-shirts from the shed and tosses them to the couple.

TAYLOR

These are adorable.

JORDAN

Thanks guys. We're excited to help out, even if it'll be a little gross.

DONALD

It will be.

Jordan looks concerned but Taylor grabs their arm.

TAYLOR

See ya, soon!

Taylor and Jordan run off.

11 GROWTH TOOK TIME

Donald notices Ralph's shirt, now dirtier like his.

DONALD

The garden really rubbed off on ya.

RALPH

Literally. I smell so bad.

Donald takes a whiff.

DONALD

That'll happen, but you made it.

RALPH

Yeah I did, and I kinda liked it.

DONALD

I knew you would-

RALPH

A wild group of characters out here.

DONALD

And I wouldn't have it any other way-

Trace and Davey walk back on, just crossing by. Trace is eating veggie chips.

RALPH

Like these two, Davey, Trace! How ya doing?

DAVEY

Good! Thanks Ralph!

DONALD

Wow, a classic "neighborhood call and greet". That's a high level move.

Trace can't stop looking at the *Take a Book, Leave a Book*. Trace stops in their tracks and Davey turns around.

DAVEY

Do you wanna-

TRACE

Yes, please.

DAVEY

(Chuckles)

Fine.

TRACE

You can go ahead, I'll catch up.

Davey walks off and Trace walks back to the *Take a Book, Leave a Book*. They take a big breath in and open the stand, and to their surprise, they see a copy of William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. They freak out.

TRACE

DAVEY! DAVEY! DAVEY IT'S HERE, DAVEY!

Trace runs off screaming for Davey, happier than ever. Donald looks confused at Ralph who is smiling.

RALPH

What? You said the garden was magic! OH. Adam and Sadie got engaged-

DONALD

WHAT-

12 BELLA, RALPH, AND DONALD

Bella comes into the garden.

BELLA

Ok, Ralphie, we are celebrating- DON! You're back!

DONALD

Ralphie? I've missed so much-

BELLA

It's the new guy's nickname. It's his name...with an "ie" at the end.

DONALD

Genius.

BELLA

You two can split this.

Bella breaks a fresh cannoli in half. The two of them grab it from her and eat far too fast.

DONALD

A GiGi's Cannoli is a gift from the heavens.

RALPH

Right? It's like someone said hey let's take a great dessert, and make it better, and than only sell it at this one place in Uptown!

DONALD

(to Bella)

What are we celebrating?

BELLA

I talked to my dad and I told him if he wants me to take this place over I need to give it a little more... me!

RALPH

What did he say?!

BELLA

(so proud)

We chatted for a while and he said... "I'LL THINK ABOUT IT"!

DONALD

That's big. (To Ralph) Her dad hates change more than I hate the White Sox.

RALPH

Well, that's great!

Bella and Ralph almost hug but don't. They awkwardly high-five. Don notices something. Bella looks at her plot and sees that the tomato plant has been replanted. Looks over at Ralph.

BELLA

Well, look at that! Seems my plant has been tampered with.

DONALD

WHO DID IT? I'LL KILL EM'!

BELLA

I don't know who! Any ideas, Ralphie?

Ralph can't hold it in. Bella is now standing right next to him.

RALPH

I'M SORRY! I was trying to be nice and thought it was a nice thing to do for a very...fancy girl!

DONALD

Fancy? Bella fancy?

BELLA

I'm kidding. Thanks, maybe now we can see if tomatoes and basil can really help each other grow.

Tension-filled beat. Donald is confused.

DONALD

What's happening here? Is there something going on that I /don't-

BELLA

(kinda embarrassed)

Nope, no, I'll, I'll see y'all later!

Bella rushes into the pizza shop and Ralph looks sad.

DONALD

It really feels like I missed something.

RALPH

You didn't, that's my shift right? I'll see ya next time.

Ralph starts to leave and it hits Donald.

DONALD

OH. YOU LIKE BELLA.

Ralph runs back to him.

RALPH

WILL YOU KEEP IT DOWN?

DONALD

Absolutely not! Do you?!

RALPH

NO. Well, no. Well, kinda. I saw her at GiGi's the other day and just wanted to meet her. And she is very cool. And I move a lot, like always. I can't settle down and for some reason I really want to settle down here.

DONALD

Whoa, easy tiger-

RALPH

Not like that. I barely know her! But I like the people, and the neighborhood, and the garden. You were right, this community is magic and I have seen some weirdly wonderful moments in just my first day. I want to grow, and to trust fate, and all that but...but maybe it's not for me. Maybe I'm just not there yet. I'm just gonna go, Don.

Ralph starts to head out.

DONALD

You sound like me when I was a kid. You know how I said it was love at first sight with my wife?

RALPH

Yeah?

DONALD

That was slightly one-sided. She didn't know who I was for years. And when she did, it was magical. But you know what I always wanted?

RALPH

What?

DONALD

Someone to tell me to make my move sooner.
(Calls into Pizzeria) BELLA! New guy has
something he needs to ask you!

RALPH

(SCARED)

WHY DO THIS TO ME?

DONALD

Because you can't fail! She says yes, you fall
in love, she says no, I don't know you well
enough to be emotionally attached when you
don't come back!

RALPH

DON.

DONALD

Just go for it! Remember, the garden is magic.

Bella walks out.

BELLA

Never good when I'm called out by Don! Whatcha
need Ralphie?

RALPH

(So nervous)

I, uh, was, uh wondering..if you...could...

Ralph turns too Donald.

RALPH (CONT'D)

I can't do this.

DONALD

You can!

BELLA

And I can hear you! Do what? Come on, whatcha
need-

RALPH

Will you go out on a date with me?

Beat.

BELLA

Don-

DONALD

Not my idea! Just my encouragement.

BELLA

Really? Then why-

RALPH

I just think you're cool, and weird- IN LIKE A GOOD WAY. And, I don't know, Tomato and Basil?

DONALD

Tomato and basil? He's losing it-

BELLA

No. No, he's not.

Beat. Bella walks up to Ralph.

RALPH

You said you wanted to "mix-it-up"?

BELLA

This is quite a big "mix-em-up", Mr. Garden Wizard.

RALPH

Maybe? But maybe it's what we both need.

Bella thinks for a moment.

BELLA

Tonight. After close. I'm gonna make the weirdest pizza I can think of. You can come and be my taste tester for the evening.

She kisses him on the cheek and walks back in.

BELLA

10PM. Don't be late.

Bella exits.

RALPH

(To Bella)

Ok! Yes ma'am!

Ralph freaks out too Donald.

RALPH (CONT'D)

OH MY GOSH- IT WORKED.

DONALD

Now you better treat her well, or I'll put you on the Tuesday morning shift-

RALPH

I will! I will! Oh, I need to get ready. I only have-

DONALD

(looks at his watch)

9 hours?

Ralph hugs Donald tight and starts to run off.

RALPH

Thanks so much, Don! I'll see ya next week! Or tomorrow, or sooner! THANK YOU, UPTOWN!

Ralph exits overjoyed. Donald takes a moment, sinks into his stool and reads. After a beat, he takes a big breath in and smiles.

DONALD

Ah, that's good air.

END OF PLAY