Community Garden
Copyright © 2023 Justin Borak. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

Copyright Protection. This play (the "Play") is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan—American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention, and the Berne Convention.

Reservation of Rights. All rights to this Play are strictly reserved, including, without limitation, professional and amateur stage performance rights; motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video, and sound recording rights; rights to all other forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction now known or yet to be invented, such as CD—ROM, CD—I, DVD, photocopying, and information storage and retrieval systems; and the rights of translation into non—English languages.

Performance Licensing and Royalty Payments. Amateur and stock performance rights to this Play are controlled exclusively by Playscripts, Inc. ("Playscripts"). No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this Play without obtaining advance written permission from Playscripts. Required royalty fees for performing this Play are specified online at the Playscripts website (www.playscripts.com). Such royalty fees may be subject to change without notice. Although this book may have been obtained for a particular licensed performance, such performance rights, if any, are not transferable. Required royalties must be paid every time the Play is performed before any audience, whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. All licensing requests and inquiries concerning amateur and stock performance rights should be addressed to Playscripts (see contact information on opposite page).

Inquiries concerning all other rights should be addressed to Playscripts, as well; such inquiries will be communicated to the author and the author's agent, as applicable.

Restriction of Alterations. There shall be no deletions, alterations, or changes of any kind made to the Play, including the changing of character gender, the cutting of dialogue, the cutting of music, or the alteration of objectionable language, unless directly authorized by Playscripts. The title of the Play shall not be altered.

Author Credit. Any individual or group receiving permission to produce this Play is required to give credit to the author as the sole and exclusive author of the Play. This obligation applies to the title page of every program distributed in connection with performances of the Play, and in any instance that the title of the Play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing, or otherwise exploiting the Play and/or a production thereof. The name of the author must appear on a separate line, in which no other name appears, immediately beneath the title and of a font size at least 50% as large as the largest letter used in the title of the Play. No person, firm, or entity may receive credit larger or more prominent than that accorded the author. The name of the author may not be abbreviated or otherwise altered from the form in which it appears in this Play.

Publisher Attribution. All programs, advertisements, and other printed material distributed or published in connection with the amateur or stock production of the Play shall include the following notice:

Produced by special arrangement with Playscripts, Inc.
(www.playscripts.com)

Prohibition of Unauthorized Copying. Any unauthorized copying of this book or excerpts from this book is strictly forbidden by law. Except as otherwise permitted by applicable law, no part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including, without limitation, photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Playscripts.

Statement of Non—affiliation. This Play may include references to brand names and trademarks owned by third parties, and may include references to public figures. Playscripts is not necessarily affiliated with these public figures, or with the owners of such trademarks and brand names. Such references are included solely for parody, political comment, or other permitted purposes.

Permissions for Sound Recordings and Musical Works. This Play may contain directions calling for the performance of a portion, or all, of a musical work not included in the Play's score, or performance of a sound recording of such a musical work. Playscripts has not obtained permissions to perform such works. The producer of this Play is advised to obtain such permissions, if required in the context of the production. The producer is directed to the websites of the U.S. Copyright Office (www.copyright.gov), ASCAP (www.ascap.com), BMI (www.bmi.com), and NMPA (www.nmpa.org) for further information on the need to obtain permissions, and on procedures for obtaining such permissions.

The Rules in Brief

- DO NOT perform this Play without obtaining prior permission from Playscripts, and without paying the required royalty.
- DO NOT photocopy, scan, or otherwise duplicate any part of this book.
- DO NOT alter the text of the Play, change a character's gender, delete any dialogue, cut any music, or alter any objectionable language, unless explicitly authorized by Playscripts.
- DO provide the required credit to the author(s) and the required attribution to Playscripts in all programs and promotional literature associated with any performance of this Play.

Copyright Basics

This Play is protected by United States and international copyright law. These laws ensure that authors are rewarded for creating new and vital dramatic work, and protect them against theft and abuse of their work.

A play is a piece of property, fully owned by the author, just like a house or car. You must obtain permission to use this property, and must pay a royalty fee for the privilege—whether or not you charge an admission fee. Playscripts collects these required payments on behalf of the author.

Anyone who violates an author's copyright is liable as a copyright infringer under United States and international law. Playscripts and the author are entitled to institute legal action for any such infringement, which can subject the infringer to actual damages, statutory damages, and attorneys' fees. A court may impose statutory damages of up to $150,000 for willful copyright infringements. U.S. copyright law also provides for possible criminal sanctions. Visit the website of the U.S. Copyright Office (www.copyright.gov) for more information.

THE BOTTOM LINE: If you break copyright law, you are robbing a playwright and opening yourself to expensive legal action. Follow the rules, and when in doubt, ask us.

To Uptown, Chicago, and the community that makes it bloom

Cast of Characters

RALPH, male, new volunteer to Uptown City Gardens. He sits on a stool reading a book in the background when not involved with a scene, but he never leaves the stage after entering (until the final moments of the play).

ISABELLA GIOVANNA (BELLA), female, 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, male, older than the rest and a staple of 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, female, 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, any gender, recently dumped by their partner and struggling to find that next step in their life. Has spent the last two months desperately trying to make something grow in the garden, started on leeks a few days ago.

ANDI, any gender, 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, any gender, has a whimsical and childlike 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, any gender, Trace's roommate. Some might call them a pessimist; they would call themself 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, male, dating Ken and April's daughter Sadie. Incredibly nervous to ask what Ken and April think of a possible engagement, constantly trying to impress them.

KEN, male, 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, female, mother of Sadie, wife to Ken. More caring toward Adam.

SADIE, female, daughter of Ken and April, dating Adam. Nonspeaking role, but appears onstage during the proposal.

The Shed Steward

AUGUST, male, a guy who grew up here and loves the community. Very excitable and finds joy in the little things. Treats being the shed steward of Uptown City Gardens like being a superhero.

DAPHNE, female, 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, which gets her excited about the future.

Presenting Plants

KAPE, any gender, 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, male, offstage, Kape's poetry professor. Skeptical of Kape's unorthodox performance but willing to take the ride.

Composting

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

JORDAN, any gender, 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. 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 library in the corner. It's the beginning of spring.

The set can be incredibly flexible. It can be as simple or as complicated as the production allows. Be creative with the set, using the entire space and making the audience feel like they are a part 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 theater feel like one big neighborhood.

Notes

Cast the show with as many or as few performers as you would like. The play's premiere production used eight actors (and one swing); you can use the cast list on the next page as an example of one way to double-cast the show to accommodate a smaller ensemble.

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 footprint 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 of the play for the needs of your production.

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.

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

A "—" indicates that a line should be cut off before it's finished.

Production History

Community Garden was first presented at West Virginia Public Theatre (Jerry McGonigle, Artistic Director; Aubrey Sirtautas, Production Manager) in Morgantown, West Virginia, on October 8, 2022. It was directed by Erika Kuhn; the music direction and original orchestrations were by Spencer Hansen; the lighting design was by Maren Taylor; the production stage manager was Seneca Phillips-McGraw; and the stage directions were read by Josey Miller. The original cast was as follows:

RALPH . . . . . Christian Clausnitzer
BELLA . . . . . Liz Gutridge
DONALD/KEN/MR. PUTNAM . . . . . Jamie Froemel
KELLY/APRIL . . . . . Shelby Garrett
CASEY/AUGUST . . . . . Chase Kipps
DAVEY/JORDAN/ADAM . . . . . Paxton Marner
DAPHNE/SADIE/TAYLOR . . . . . Julianna Hazlett
ANDI/KAPE/TRACE . . . . . Bec Hyde
SWING . . . . . Faith King

Author's Note: More Good Air

I never understood how much air meant to me until I was trapped in my stuffy Chicago apartment for over a year. Being a Chicagoan is a wonderful experience (I recommend it to anyone who gets the chance), but you never really think about what living in a city means. It means you immediately become part of a larger carbon footprint in a place where you struggle to find a recycling bin.

For a long time, I let that drift to the back of my mind, like most twenty-two-year-olds trying to be comedians, but after being afraid to leave my apartment for the better part of 2020, I began to find joy in the smallest things. I lost my city but gained the direct community contained within my lifesaving thirty-minute walks. The community of Uptown, Chicago.

On these walks, I developed more of an appreciation for the neighborhood and found things I never knew existed. Gigio's Pizzeria, Kenny Mac's Barbershop, and Uptown Bikes changed from places I had been only once or twice before into hubs of human connection.

The pinnacle of each of those walks was the ten minutes I spent reading in Winthrop Community Garden every day. The garden had been down the street from me for four years, but I never spent any time in it. I walked by the little community garden every week with my groceries from Target, but I never thought to walk in. I finally did walk in, and inside, I breathed in the best air I had ever experienced in Chicago. Good air during a time when the world was nervous about breathing. I felt blessed by something, and after that, all I wanted was to build more good air.

Think about who your "community" is. That might be the cheesiest sentence I've ever written, but try it. Is it your family? Your neighborhood? Afterward, have a conversation with them about what the earth, the world, and the air mean to you and try to help build more good air. You won't regret it.

COMMUNITY GARDEN
by Justin Borak

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 the 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 family's 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, and he gets 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 an eight-foot hole to "prove his worth to the neighborhood."

DONALD. And he only made it seven 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 on his stool.)*

DONALD. How's your plot looking?

BELLA. Eh. The tomato's coming in okay, the basil is looking good, but I can't harvest the garlic 'til the end of spring. I think it's coming along? It's 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 leftover 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 Giovannas! The owners of GiGi's, the best pizza in Uptown—

BELLA. Who is saying that?

DONALD. Me. Every day, to everyone on the street. "Have you tried GiGi's?" "I hear GiGi's is the best" "Are you a young, nice boy? The Gi-Gi'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 people like you are running around making us even more of a staple in Uptown.

DONALD. GiGi's has been around for fifty 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, your 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.

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

DONALD/BELLA. 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 offstage:)

RALPH. *(Offstage:)* 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, Bella.

*(*BELLA *starts to walk out just as* RALPH *runs in.)*

RALPH. *(Out of breath:)* I'm so sorry I'm late, sir—

DONALD. DROP AND GIVE ME TWENTY!

*(*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.)*

Scene 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, solider, 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 says "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.)*

"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 are 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 shoo them away. You can softly sway a broom toward them *or* do what I do and treat them like they're your kids who got outta line. *(He takes the stance of an angry parent.)* "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 four beautiful kids. Two are out working in New York, one is on the West Coast, and one 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 seven 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 sitting on his stool and doing nothing.)*

RALPH. That's it?

DONALD. Yup, try it.

*(*DONALD *gets off the stool and* RALPH *takes a seat.)*

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 thirty minutes. Forty max. Two 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.)*

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, puts the sign down, and walks over to* RALPH. RALPH *gets nervous, like he thinks he's gonna get punched.)*

KELLY. I'm Kelly.

(Awkward beat.)

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 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, Andersonville, 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. 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 forty-sixth 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 I 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 "Donalds" of Uptown would show up in groups of five, maybe ten? 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. It did really well, people started coming to speeches in droves and in the last election, I got thirty-one percent of the vote

. . . as a write-in candidate. Now, my team has opened four new community gardens in this and neighboring neighborhoods and we are currently the front-runners for next year's candidacy.

RALPH. 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 *(Motions to* 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 two.

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.)*

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.)*

Scene 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.)*

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? Because I really think something could be wrong with it and that might be why my stuff isn't growing, even though other people's plots 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.)

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.)

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.)

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 four 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 one hundred and ten days to harvest.

CASEY. What?

ANDI. It takes like a really long time to harvest leeks.

CASEY. *(Falling facedown in their plot:)* I suck at everything.

*(*ANDI *sees how dejected* CASEY *is and sits next to them.)*

ANDI. Growth doesn't happen overnight. It takes a lot of work to grow . . . a leek. Water, sunlight, good foundation, and maybe 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.)*

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, that's 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. 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—

Scene 5—Take a Book, Leave a Book

*(*TRACE *runs in, cutting off* RALPH *and going 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" every day. 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 to—

TRACE/DAVEY. *(*DAVEY *is mocking* TRACE*:)* "Hold the book in my hand."

DAVEY. Ugh, I know.

TRACE. Then why ask?

DAVEY. It's just . . . every day? Every day 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 skateboard 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—)*

My dad liked it and I—

*(*DAVEY *realizes what's going on and starts to walk back.)*

. . . 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 Theater 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.)*

(Surprised:) Oh, okay. Okay.

(The hug continues.)

(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.*)*

Scene 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.)*

(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.)*

So technically, again, not called dirt. These are all plots, and honestly, it took Sadie and I a year to get off the wait list 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.)*

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?

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 . . . *(The air is everything to him:)* 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.)*

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 of 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.)*

That tastes like my gum!

*(*ADAM *and* APRIL *laugh;* KEN *seems annoyed.)*

ADAM. Actually, your gum tastes like it, but same thing.

*(*KEN *grabs some from* ADAM.*)*

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

ADAM. *(Under his breath:)* Seriously not lettuce but—

*(*KEN *takes a bite and makes an immediate face of surprise that* APRIL *notices.)*

APRIL. *Oh!* He likes it!

KEN. How does he get this lettuce to 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.)*

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 let's talk in a few weeks—

KEN. Or months, years even—

*(*ADAM *hands them both some thyme.)*

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 a bit early for all that. You know? You and Sadie are twenty-four, 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* KEN *and* APRIL.*)*

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 thirty 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.*)*

Scene 7—Bella and Ralph

*(*RALPH *just witnessed a love story. He 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 the 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 try 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. 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 ten minutes, half of the neighborhood was there and you could tell it meant so much to him. I started talking to him at the wake, I was like sixteen, 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 a 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 too 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 a garden wizard or something?

*(*RALPH *shows her the book he is reading,* Gardening for Dummies.*)*

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 did 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 one hundred 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. —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 silence. She is waiting for him to talk.)

Anything else, Garden Wizard?

*(*RALPH *tries to get the confidence to ask her out. He can't.)*

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.)*

Scene 8—Shed Steward

AUGUST. *(Offstage:)* 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.*)*

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.)*

Oh. Cool! I'm August, the shed steward.

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

In order to protect our associated authors against copyright infringement, this free sample is not complete.

TO PURCHASE THE FULL TEXT, AND TO OBTAIN PERFORMANCE RIGHTS, GO TO

www.playscripts.com