

SCENE 1

DIRTY CITY

Dirty City is if Grand Rapids was entirely Frederik Meijer Gardens. The city is scaled down so that a single block takes a single step. Empty plots of land scatter about. It is between seasons. Any season.

RAU enters. Her hair is unearthly. Her tan gleams. She is expecting a new seed. She tries to plant herself in an empty plot of dirt.

A picket that reads "Curb the Herbs" projects upon that plot.

RAU moves to another empty plot of land. The same message projects. RAU repeats. The message repeats.

The sun sets.

RAU collapses on the concrete with her body facing the sunset. She feels her belly.

RAU

Sun... A leaf is not meant to turn from this light.

MALUS enters, opposite of the sunset. They are barely clothed.

MALUS

Turn over to the night.

RAU turns away from the sunset.

RAU

*Chào. Aren't you an angel?*

MALUS

*Hello. Aren't all Figs?*

RAU

*Hell! Any Fig is a malice!*

MALUS

That's my name: Malus Crabapple. I am a Fig-

RAU

Figment of my imagination.

MALUS

Does ya imagination include a better life for yaself here?

RAU

Any plant can imagine. A Cilantro can dream! This city needs its garnishes. Imagine Dirty City's first-ever beauty salon. I *dream* of a better life for my family here...

MALUS

Ya immigrants got wild dreams. *But imaginations*. Ya cannot imagine people like me living by ya family, let alone amongst yours, wherever ya come from.

RAU

You don't know where I come from.

MALUS

Like a leaf, my kind of people are open to flying all over the world. Ya accent ain't like a brussels sprout.

RAU

*Klootzak (Dutch: An Insult).*

MALUS

Watch ya Dutch.

RAU

Watch what you say. I do not have an accent!

MALUS

Okay, well ya *look* like ya took a leave from Southeast Asia? All ya last names are like... *Weed (re: Nguyen)we?*

RAU

Răm. Rau Răm. There are more family names out there in Vietnam. And no. You don't know the daily life I came from.

MALUS

Well Rau, I won't judge ya days if ya don't judge my nights.

RAU

I don't know where your nightlife comes from.

MALUS

It stems from birth.

RAU

You chose this light. This lifestyle you have, it is not something you are born with.

(MORE)

RAU (CONT'D)

You are not natural. I cannot imagine a life without light.

MALUS

Ya keep this up and ya salon stays an imagination.

RAU

I cannot keep my stems up. No plot of land in Dirty City will ever let me plant myself. I moved this far for what? I move... what?

1. "MOVE THE PLOT FORWARD"

MALUS

(Repeating)

MOVE THE PLOT...

FORWARD...

MALUS steps onto a colorful plot of land. They push aside an adjacent block of concrete to unveil untouched soil.

MALUS (CONT'D)

MAKE YOUR ROOTS AT HOME.

RAU

THIS IS YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD?

MALUS

*ROOT FOR ME...*

RAU

*IM LANG (Vietnamese: "Shut up").*

MALUS

(Puzzledly)

MAKE YA BED.

A tanning bed rolls out.

RAU

*SHUT UP.*

MALUS

I WASN'T BORN WITH LIGHTHEARTEDNESS.  
*I HAVE CHOSEN IT!*

NOW YA CHOOSE:

MOVE THE PLOT FORWARD...

RAU

OR...?



RAU

We Cilantros have good tastes! I meant to say:  
do you have bullshit on you?

MALUS

My business adheres to the capital and makes  
profits. So yes. What's ya worth?

RAU

*That'd be ten bullshits, please...*

MALUS

*That's a start of a plot.*

MALUS hands a manure-laced bill to  
RAU. They lie in the tanning bed  
and close the lid.

RAU

IT'S THE TURN OF AN ERA!  
I WAS DEALT A BAD HAND.  
THIS AREA HAS NO REGARD.  
THEY TREAT ME AS AN ALIEN.  
I HAVE GROWN THESE LEAVES THAT COULDN'T EVER HOLD THIS WATER.  
I WAS GONNA COME APART.  
BUT I GUESS YOU DO HAVE A HEART.  
I HAVE A NEW START.

MALUS gets out of the tanning bed.  
They inspect themselves.

RAU (CONT'D)

TURN AROUND.

NICE TAN.

MALUS

NOT A FAN.

RAU

NOTHING FANCY.

MALUS

YA WILL SEE THAT FANCY GETS THE FANS.

RAU goes out and gets a potted  
herb. She puts it on a shelf then  
turns the "Closed" sign to "Open."

Crickets chirp.

MALUS (CONT'D)

I'll try to get my pals en root. You're on your  
own in this soil. It is all ya turn from here.

MALUS exits.

RAU  
THIS PLACE PLOTS AND LEAVES ERROR...  
I CAN'T EARN MY GREEN CARD  
IF I DO NOT STAY ON MY GUARD.  
MY LEAVES HAVE COME SO FAR.  
YOU CAN'T MAKE ME LEAVE!  
I DO NOT HAVE THE HEART TO BELIEVE...  
I KNOW MY ROOTS, BUT...  
STEM!  
IT DOES NOT KNOW HOW TO PLOT FOR-  
I MISS YOU, BROTHER.

RAU hugs the potted herb. She sits on the tanning bed. She pulls out a bottle of body oil and rubs her belly with it. It gleams with her tan.

**Audience Engagement:** The crew blows in fresh leaves that AUDIENCE MEMBERS wrote on.

RAU reads the fresh leaves aloud.

RAU (CONT'D)  
The best maternity gifts a mother could receive are the turning leaves.

Lights move in and out. Positive whispers are audible.

RAU (CONT'D)  
My body oil? You like this foreign stuff?

Lights are positively responsive.

RAU (CONT'D)  
This is no fertilizer! This oil is not found here in Dirty City. This oil is from my dirty ol' village!

RAU sprays body oil about.

Either animated silhouettes or a colorful light show demonstrate that business is booming with patrons coming in and out. Financial quarters roll by with the rising and setting sun.

RAU (CONT'D)  
TURNOVER!  
THE WORLD IS NOT OVER.  
WHAT GOES AROUND, COMES AROUND.

RAU (CONT'D)

TURN AROUND!

I NOW HAVE A NEW BUSINESS VENTURE.

AFTER GOING THROUGH WHAT I CAN KINDLY PUT: AN ADVENTURE.

I'VE SHED EUKARYOTIC CELLS.

NO ONE CARED WHAT I HAD TO SELL.

I WAS STUCK IN THE GREEN CARD PRISON.

THE ONLY LIGHT THROUGH THE BAR WAS OUR SUN.

I'VE MADE MY BED, BUT NOW I CAN FLIP IT AROUND TO THE COOLER SIDE!

TURNOVER!

TURN AROUND!

Business is booming. Several  
tanning beds roll out. Bullshit  
rains down on RAU.

MALUS steps in. They do not seem  
too happy about RAU's success.

RAU (CONT'D)

(Deceptively)

THIS IS THE START OF A FLORAL  
FRIENDSHIP.

MALUS

(Doubtfully)

THIS IS THE START OF AN  
HERBAL FRIENDSHIP.

MALUS gathers bullshit and leaves  
the rest to RAU. They exit.

RAU turns the "Open" sign to  
"Closed." RAU lies in a tanning  
bed and closes the lid.

A seedlike object transfers from  
RAU's tanning bed to another.

RAU (CONT'D)

BUT THE BEST TURNOVER I'VE EVER HAD...

RAU opens the lid. Her belly is no  
more.

Direct sunlight lands on a  
distinct soiled tanning bed.

PARSLEY leaps out of the lit  
tanning bed.

RAU (CONT'D)

IS MY SUN!

MOVE THE PLOT FORWARD!

End of "MOVE THE PLOT FORWARD"

RAU (CONT'D)

Turn around...

PARSLEY turns around.

RAU (CONT'D)

You missed a spot. But son, do you shine...

PARSLEY

*Me (Vietnamese: "Mom")...* Don't embarrass me in front of the sneezeworts!

(to the AUDIENCE)

Don't you worry, loyal customers. We'll open up the salon again on the first light of dawn. Now, try not to fight over our complimentary moisturizers!

PARSLEY tosses moisturizers into the AUDIENCE. He gets to work sterilizing the place.

RAU

Us Cilantros are all about presentation. Parsley Răm is a natural.

### SCENE 3

It is night.

RAU (CONT'D)

But your trichomes is getting unnaturally long.

PARSLEY sits on a tanning bed.

RAU takes out a pair of scissors.

RAU (CONT'D)

(Trimming away and repeating)

I love you... I love you not...

PARSLEY

I love you... I love you more...

RAU

What numbers of trims is needed for me to love you?

PARSLEY

Odd... Mom... For once, please no math-

RAU

What is the airspeed velocity of an unladen dandelion seed?

PARSLEY

Thirty centimeters per second. Last math probl-



RAU

We've got thirty seconds left. What is the square root of a boxwood tree?

PARSLEY

I'm learning square roots when I start middle school in the fall.

RAU has PARSLEY facing a mirror.

RAU

Is this cut worthy of a Flores Elementary graduate?

PARSLEY

Gym class would have a good laugh.

RAU

With this cut, they'd actually pick you before the Cherries.

PARSLEY

Dodgeball is an Apple's sport anyways.

RAU

Speaking of Apples, how was your last class before the ceremony?

PARSLEY

Fruitful! Ms. Red's partner visited.

RAU

That's delightful. Who is he?

PARSLEY

Her name is Golden Delicious. She is an archaeologist.

RAU

Oh, she is... *She...*

PARSLEY

Ms. Red's last lesson was that Fig weddings are more fabulous than any other kind.

RAU

Schools should not be teaching minors that! Schools should be teaching kids major subjects, like math and science.

PARSLEY

History!

RAU

Here's a story: seedlings exist only because stamens and pistils love one another.

PARSLEY

A kid at recess once told me that is like the legendary tale of the bird and the bee.

RAU

Kids fall for so many rumors these days. Plus, that's does not add up. Birds and bees don't go together. It's bird plus bird. Bees and bees.

PARSLEY senses the irony.

Dance music distantly echoes from FigLeaf next door.

PARSLEY

Something's buzzing at FigLeaf.

RAU

The Figs are hosting another party. You can always count on that.

RAU uses a tanning bed as a desk to do taxes and count bullshit.

PARSLEY perches by the window.

PARSLEY

Mom... Who goes out at night?

RAU

A light with no sense of direction, son.

PARSLEY

But the sound sure likes going our way.

RAU

Sounds don't feed us.

PARSLEY

A light with no sense of direction... So, there is light. They are just lost.

RAU

Their light is artificial. They chose not to follow what is natural.

PARSLEY

But our tanning beds... Its light don't come from the sun?

RAU

They paint skins with UV. It is like if you split the spectrums of sunlight onto a palette.

PARSLEY

What is a spectrum?

RAU

I don't know... But don't ask Malus. Malus...

PARSLEY & RAU

Has malice intent.

PARSLEY

I know... But they—

RAU

He and his customers paid our rent for a while.  
But we paid off our plot of land. Salontro is  
independent of FigLeaf.

PARSLEY

Yet, Salontro is still dependent on FigLeaf.

RAU

Depends on the years to come.

PARSLEY

We would go under without them.

RAU

We will never overturn our views for them.

PARSLEY

You see new business models everyday.

RAU

Well, their bullshits are unnatural.

PARSLEY

*Yeah, the money's unreal.* What's natural to you?

RAU

Biodiversity like your class of plants. It  
makes for a healthy garden.

PARSLEY

What makes more diversity?

RAU

Less homogeneity.

PARSLEY

Homo—

RAU

Figs need more sun on their skins. A son in  
their lives.

RAU (CONT'D)

The sun is what grooms all things nature.

2. "A NATURAL"

RAU

NATURE...

NURTURED FROM THE LIGHT OF OUR SUN.

IT'S NATURAL.

PLANTING THEIR HOT FEET ON OUR GROUND.

THEY'RE NATURAL.

BUT IT'S NOT AS WARM AS A MOM'S HUG.

RAU hugs PARSLEY.

RAU (CONT'D)

COMES NATURAL.

WHAT'S NOT? THAT WOULD BE THE TICKLES!

RAU tickles PARSLEY.

RAU (CONT'D)

(Repeatedly)

A NATURAL.

SON. YOU ARE A... NATURAL!

End of "A NATURAL"

PARSLEY

Will the sun always be around?

RAU

The sun will never turn over to the dark side.

PARSLEY

What about during an eclipse?

RAU

What?

PARSLEY

Ms. Red taught us that the moon can sometimes  
get in the sun's way.

RAU

The moon sounds unnatural... Anywho like you,  
even the sun has a bedtime.

PARSLEY

Ugh.

RAU opens a tanning bed and plants  
a blanket in it.

RAU

Your planter is made. Now go lie in it.

PARSLEY points at the outlet.

RAU plugs in a nightlight.

PARSLEY lies in bed.

PARSLEY

*I am a natural at lying.*

RAU

You speak the truth, my son.

PARSLEY

Mom. I wonder who'll be my moon...

RAU

*Ngu ngon (Vietnamese: sleep well), my son.*

RAU exits.

#### **SCENE 4**

The morning light returns.

MALUS, fully clothed, steps into the sunrise this time.

PARSLEY leaps out of bed. He turns the "Closed" sign to "Open."

MALUS

Where is ya mom?

PARSLEY

Morning! Our latest shipment was delivered to the wrong address. So, she's out getting it.

MALUS

Strange. She's usually out to get me. I kid, ya Cilantro. Nevertheless... Cow, Parsley.

PARSLEY

*Chào.* You Crabapples are always sweet, but you can never sweeten your pronunciations?

PYRUS (OFFSTAGE)

No malice.

MALUS

Yes, Pyrus!

PARSLEY

Pyrus?

MALUS

My nibbling.

PARSLEY  
Another Crabapple?

MALUS (CONT'D)  
Another pear in town.

PYRUS (OFFSTAGE)  
And I wanna get outta this Dirty City.

PARSLEY  
Doing our city dirty? You'll fit in real well.

MALUS  
Tanning beds come in all shapes and sizes. And there will be one that matches your body.

PYRUS (OFFSTAGE)  
I don't want nobody to see me around ya. Let's go back to FigLeaf!

PARSLEY  
I always wanna visit FigLeaf.

MALUS  
Now, ya may have the spirit of a Fig. But only adult plants are allowed at nightclubs. And, *ya mother would lose her freakin' aldehyde.*

PYRUS (OFFSTAGE)  
Ya said ya'd take me to Cantaloupe Outlets, not make this salon my outlet...

MALUS  
Ya will never find me among those hipsters. How about a trip to Celery Mall?

PYRUS (OFFSTAGE)  
But ya said we could go where I wanted! You're more of an Apple Blossom than a Crabapple. Celery Mall only sells to old houseplants.

MALUS  
Take that back!

PYRUS (OFFSTAGE)  
Per FigLeaf's policy: No returns. No, Malus.

MALUS  
You're digging a deeper hole for ya-self.

PYRUS (OFFSTAGE)  
Ain't that what we're supposed to do as plants?!

MALUS  
Even plants can get overheated.

PARSLEY  
You're all making a mountain out of a molehill.

PYRUS (OFFSTAGE)

*Shadeeee.* Ya all add to my sunburns.

3. "AMOUNT TO ANYTHING"

PYRUS walks in, with sunburns.  
Their entrance intersects a rocker  
and an acned teenager's presence.

PYRUS

MOUNTAINS OUTTA MOLE HILLS.  
NO REST. DISTRESS. A MESS. CARELESS.

PYRUS knocks over the potted herb.

PYRUS (CONT'D)

I DELIVERED BRUISES AND I GOT INTO TROUBLE AT SCHOOL.  
SO, I'LL SPEND THIS SEASON WITH MY ONE WEIRD UNCLE.  
I WON'T KNOW MALUS...

ALL BECAUSE REALLY

I WILL NEVER AMOUNT TO ANYTHING.  
I WILL NEVER AMOUNT TO ANYTHING.  
I WILL NEVER AMOUNT TO ANYTHING.  
ANYTHING!

SUNBURNS. PIMPLES. ACNE. BIG DEAL.

I AIN'T ALWAYS THIN-SKINNED, BUT MY THICK SKIN HAS NOT LOOKED  
REAL COOL.  
SO, I'LL WASTE MY SUMMER NEXT TO A CILANTRO.  
I CAN'T GIVE A MORSAL...

ALL BECAUSE IN LIFE,

I CARE NOT TO AMOUNT TO ANYTHING.  
I CARE NOT TO AMOUNT TO ANYTHING.  
I CARE NOT TO AMOUNT TO ANYTHING.  
I DON'T CARE!

ANYTHING!

End of "AMOUNT TO ANYTHING"

PYRUS (CONT'D)

I just wanted a good tan...

MALUS

And ya can get it here.

PYRUS

But I wanted it naturally.

MALUS

We're not the only families susceptible to  
sunburns. The Cherrys and Maples are, too.