

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

Dat'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 floating around the world. Ya accent ain't a brussels sprout's.

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)?*

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. Over time, a seedling grows nearby.

RAU

SHUT UP.

MALUS

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

NOW YA CHOOSE:
MOVE THE PLOT FORWARD...

RAU

OR...?

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                                MALUS
LEAVE THE PLOT HOLE...
                                (Repeating)
MOVE THE PLOT FORWARD...
LEAVE THE PLOT HOLE...

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RAU reluctantly plants herself next to MALUS.

WHOLE . . . RAU

RAU & MALUS
MOVE THE PLOT FORWARD...

FORWARD! RAU MALUS YOU'RE WHOLE!

SCENE 2

SALONTRO

The plot grows thick. The tanning salon magically moves forward, lightly transforming the heart of Dirty City. An Open/Closed sign hangs. It faces "Closed."

RAU
Im lang. Im lang. Im lang! Im lang!

MALUS touches the tanning bed.

MALUS
Imagine a better plot device.

RAU
Im lang. The sun is more than anything, but a
 tanning bed will do.

MALUS
(Sarcastically)
*Shut up. I cannot take more of your deep
gratitude, foreigner.*

RAU
We bleed the same eukaryotic cells...

MALUS
Indeed, then treat me like I do.

RAU
Blood does not mean you got poop on you!

MALUS
Ya got a dirty mind dat needs soaping.

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

Dat'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 themself.

RAU (CONT'D)

TURN AROUND.

NICE TAN.

MALUS

NOT A FAN.

RAU

NOTHING FANCY.

MALUS

YA WILL SEE DAT 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
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 greatest maternity gifts a mother could
receive are the turning leaves.

Lights move in and out. Positive
whispers are audible. Lights
positively respond to RAU.

RAU (CONT'D)
My body oil? You like this foreign stuff...?
Well, this is no fertilizer! This oil is not
found here in Dirty City. This oil is from my
dirty ol' village!

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.

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.

RAU (CONT'D)
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 sign to "Closed."
She places the seedling in a lit
tanning bed and closes its lid.
RAU lies in another tanning bed
and closes the lid.

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

PARSLEY turns around.

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

PARSLEY (CONT'D)
(to the AUDIENCE)

Don't worry, loyal customers. We'll open up the salon 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 takes out a pair of scissors, so PARSLEY sits on a tanning bed.

RAU (CONT'D)

But your trichomes getting unnaturally long.
(Cutting PARSLEY's hair and repeating)
I love you... I love you lots...

PARSLEY

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

RAU

How many trims are needed for all the love?

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

Thirty seconds. Square root of a boxwood tree?

PARSLEY

I'll learn square roots when I start middle school in the fall.

RAU has PARSLEY face a mirror.

RAU

Is this 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

You need your root canals checked. Speaking of Apples, how was your last class before the ceremony?

PARSLEY

Fruitful! Ms. Red's partner stopped by.

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, those don't add up. Birds and bees don't go together. It's bird plus bird. Bee plus bee.

Dance music distantly echoes, so
PARSLEY go perches by the window.

PARSLEY

Ugh, math. 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

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.

RAU

Figs are the root cause of identity and social norms' instability.

PARSLEY

I know... But they have society's money—

RAU

Sure, 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 still depends 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. Sons in their lives. My parents had a son once. He once set things straight. Until he no longer isn't and couldn't.

PARSLEY

In America, Malus is like the American uncle that we needed.

RAU

Don't say such nonsense. Back to my point: the sun's 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's 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

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 dat 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 dat 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 dat 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. DISTRESSED. 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.

PARSLEY
Our tanning beds can be set at any level that
is comfortable with you.

MALUS

See, Parsley. Always level-headed.

PYRUS

I'm gonna level with ya Cilantros: ya can spice up my skin, but it ain't ever spice up my life.

(to MALUS)

Don't look at me. I'll meet ya back at FigLeaf.

MALUS

Ya seedlings enjoy yourselves!

MALUS exits.

PYRUS

I ain't no seedling anymore, Malus! Do your thing, little herb.

PARSLEY leads PYRUS around the tanning beds in Salontro.

PARSLEY

High pressure tanning beds?

PYRUS

I ain't letting no middle schooler pressure me.

PARSLEY

No pressure at all, it is then. Where do you go to school?

PYRUS

Tetra High Center of Learning.

PARSLEY

THC, in the U P? The school's rich enough to not have a resource officer.

PYRUS

Eat poop, *inferior lower peninsula*... Yeah, it ain't stop other flowers from being fashion polices.

PARSLEY

And I'm here to just police your membrane. And weed out the troubles in your brain.

PYRUS

They police me. They get under my membrane.

PARSLEY

What did they do?

PYRUS

They reacted.

PARSLEY

To...?

PYRUS

Me shutting down the school's power grid... So they ain't look at me no more.

PARSLEY

My classmates would think you're loads of fun!

PYRUS

What do middle schoolers even do for fun?

PARSLEY

Mudwrestling and singing in the rain!

PYRUS

I'm not sure what to make of it. Fun or not, in the end, I'm the one who shuts the party down.

PARSLEY

A rose and thorn for you.

PYRUS

Don't get me started on the roses. They are mean and the brighter fashion police.

PARSLEY

How?

PYRUS

They go beyond outer body shaming. Their thorns reach my core. My nucleus.

PARSLEY

Your nucleus needs to toughen up.

PYRUS

My nucleus needs to grow thorns, like them.

PARSLEY

You pears need to stop comparing yourself to others.

PYRUS

Easy for you to say. You haven't gone through puberty yet, little herb.

PARSLEY

You'll grow out of anything.

PYRUS

Wow, rich coming from a middle school poop head.

4. "GROW A PAIR"

PYRUS
YA NEED TO GROW UP.

PARSLEY
TWO CAN PLAY AT THAT GAME!

PYRUS
YA AIN'T SHIT.

PARSLEY
I AM THE SHIT.

PYRUS
YA ARE

PARSLEY & PYRUS
A NUMBER TWO.

PYRUS
GROW UP, HERB.

PARSLEY
GROW UP, PEAR!

PYRUS
I NEED TO GROW ONE?

PARSLEY
YOU GOT SKIN IN THEIR GAMES.

PYRUS
I AIN'T THICK.

PARSLEY
HIGH SCHOOL AIN'T SHIT.

PYRUS
I NEED

PARSLEY & PYRUS
TO FACE THE HEAT.

PYRUS
STOP COMPARING...

PARSLEY
GROW A PAIR.

PYRUS chooses a tanning bed, gets
in it, and closes it. After it
does its magic, they get out.

PYRUS
HERB... THIS AIN'T NATURAL.

PARSLEY
DUDE... I FEEL POWERFUL.

PARSLEY (CONT'D)
YOU PEARS.

PYRUS
I AM STILL GROWING.

PARSLEY
WE *BOTH* NEED TO GROW UP.

CILANTROS. PYRUS

PARSLEY
AND CRABAPPLES.

PARSLEY & PYRUS
WE DO MAKE A GREAT

TEAM.	PARSLEY	SMOOTHIE.	PYRUS
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NOT SO SMOOTH... PYRUS (CONT'D)

PARSLEY
LET'S GET SOME FOOD!

PARSLEY shares fertilizer
popsicles with PYRUS.

PARSLEY (CONT'D)
HERE'S TO GROWING UP!

PYRUS
FERTILIZER NEVER...?

PARSLEY
GETS TOO OLD!

PYRUS
DEFINITELY!

PARSLEY
YOU KNOW WHAT IS COOL IS THAT

PARSLEY & PYRUS
WE'D MAKE A GREAT PAIR.

End of "GROW A PAIR"

PYRUS pulls out a glass bottle.

PYRUS

Let's test our water.
(Scaring PARSLEY)
It's only fifteen percent...

PARSLEY

I can't drink that.

PYRUS

Why not?

PARSLEY

I'm not old enough.

PYRUS

I ain't either. But I'm fine. *I feel old enough.* And I'm like only a few years older than you. Besides, this is worth 72 bullshits. You're old enough to count dat high?

PARSLEY

You don't need to spew much. Look, it's on me. If you feel bad about it, I'll take a few bull.

PYRUS

Nah, I need to save every bullshit I can, so I can finally cut off my carbon-dated parents.
You heard my life with the flowers at school. Now imagine dat but 72 times dat at home.
Just a sip. You'll feel right at home.

PYRUS opens the bottle.

PARSLEY takes a sip. He spits some of it out.

PARSLEY

It's a miracle I got any taste of osmosis.

PYRUS

Dat's the name of the liqueur: Miracle! Well, I'll let ya and one of ya new friends be.

PARSLEY

Friends?

PYRUS

Miracle and I, silly herb! And now dat we're friends, friends go shoppin' together!

PARSLEY

Can Miracle tag along?