

Native Gardens

By:

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January 27, 2016
NATIVE GARDENS
By Karen Zacarías

A Commission by Cincinnati Playhouse

“I grew up in a time where a woman’s voice was expressed through her décor. I guess now, it’s through her weeds.” Virginia Butley

CHARACTERS

Tania Del Valle- 29 year old

Pablo Del Valle- 31 year old

Virginia Butley- 55-65 year old

Frank Butley- 55-65 year old

The play should also use 2-4 extras to play the silent roles of the surveyor, landscapers, building examiner. There are very short theatrical vignettes between scenes that can help transform the garden. These workers should preferably be Latino.

The alternative is to have the transformation happen in the black out.
But that’s not as fun.

Setting

The back of two houses. Two back gardens. A wire fence with ivy divides them. One garden is a beautiful garden with lush grass and very symmetrical garden beds. The other is unkempt, dying peonies...straggly rose bushes, grass, a large oak tree, leaves, and acorns.

PRO-LOGUE- SPOTLIGHTS

PABLO

It all starts innocently enough

TANIA

Very well intentioned.

VIRGINIA

Very neighborly

FRANK

Neighbors.

TANIA

Not friends.

VIRGINIA

But friendly.

FRANK

Tania and... Pablo are new to the neighborhood.

VIRGINIA

We want them to feel welcome. We bring over wine.

(They look over at TANIA and PABLO.)

FRANK

My guess is they prefer red wine over white.

PABLO

They give us Merlot and dark chocolate.

VIRGINIA

Chocolate is always... safe.

TANIA

I'm allergic, but it's so nice.

FRANK

So happy to get...a young family on the street.

TANIA

An old home.

PABLO
A historic neighborhood!

VIRGINIA
Stately houses and gardens.

PABLO
Ours is a fixer upper.

TANIA
With a fabulous back yard!

(Everyone looks at the backyard)

PABLO
And a tree.

VIRGINIA
A tree.

FRANK
A tree.

TANIA
A tree! Oh! I have big plans for this yard!

VIRGINIA
Old neighborhood.

ALL
New neighbors.

FIRST VIGNETTE- MONDAY AFTERNOON

(MUSIC. PABLO, FRANK and VIRGINIA exit. TANIA, almost 8 months pregnant, is wearing comfortable work –out clothes. She is trying to dig out a wilted plant. She is happy. Singing maybe, as she plays with the dirt. Her husband PABLO enters in to the back yard . He is meticulously dressed and wearing a nice suit.)

SCENE 1- MONDAY AFTERNOON

PABLO

Tania! Be careful! What are you doing?

TANIA

Pablo- I'm so sick of unpacking. I hate being inside on such a beautiful day...

PABLO

You should take it easy.

TANIA

Gardening relaxes me. You're the one that's been working so hard.

PABLO

I have to. This firm is so intense...So intensely...

TANIA

Competitive?

PABLO

-American.

TANIA

American...

PABLO

American.

TANIA

You're just the new guy.

PABLO

No...I'm the foreign guy. And that's different.

TANIA

That's why they want you, because you are different.

PABLO

Tania, I think I've done something I might regret.

TANIA

Really? What?

PABLO

I invited the entire firm to our house.

TANIA

(Beat) You did what?

PABLO

The senior partners were joking about me being the “new guy”. And Mr. Krause, as in SMITH, KRAUSE and WILSON, said he barely thinks you exist—

TANIA

But, you told him I’m finishing my dissertation...and the baby...Right?

PABLO

Before I knew it, I channeled my father and invited all of them over to our house.

TANIA

You didn’t.

PABLO

It gets better: the party is this weekend.

TANIA

Put a madre.

PABLO

Breathe. Breathe. Remember the la maze...

TANIA

Maldita Sea. Are you crazy!? How did that happen?

PABLO

I’ll tell you how: The Letter head-Partner. Mr. Krause, said “Pablo! That’s a generous offer. When would you like us ALL over?” And I say, “Sir, mi casa es su casa” And we all laugh. And he says, “I’d love to see where you live. Tell you what, I’m free this Saturday.

TANIA

Saturday!-

PABLO

-Does that work for you?” It was a test. A Total Test. He was watching me with this gleam in his eye.

TANIA

This is where you say NO...it doesn’t work for me or my beloved pregnant wife!

PABLO

I didn't skip a beat. Looked him straight in the eye and said: YES. Mr. Krause, this Saturday is perfect. And he said: "I like that. You have cojones, son."

TANIA

Mr. Krause actually said "cojones?"

PABLO

He even did the quotation marks.

TANIA

Oh God.

PABLO

I see it as his form of cultural outreach. Which could be a good partner sign for me.

TANIA

No! Nothing about this ballsy, machista Law firm party-planning is good!

PABLO

I know. But Tania, This could be bigger than Steven Johnsons' Martini Happy Hour. Because the only living, letter-head boss said he would come. I could become the first Latino to make partner in this place. Maybe one day, they'll add DEL VALLE to the letter head. That would be a first, huh?

TANIA

Pablo!

PABLO

It was fight or flight, Tania. And you've taught me to never run away from a fight.

TANIA

Sixty strangers in six days. We don't have enough furniture. Our walls are half painted. Our plaster is cracked. And I have my own research to do before the baby comes. It's just too much. You are trying too hard.

PABLO

I know! I know. It's too much. I don't want to let you down. I don't want to let the baby down. I want to fix up the house for us. I need to make partner-

TANIA

So an impromptu party for the whole firm?

PABLO

I don't know what I was thinking. We can't fix-up a fixer-upper in 6 days...

TANIA

So we are upfront, confident. Show them we are do-it-yourselfers in the best way: We have the party outside.

PABLO

Outside.

TANIA

In this beautiful yard. With our gorgeous tree.

PABLO

Tania, our yard is not beautiful.

TANIA

Not yet. But it can be.

PABLO

Your Native Garden.

TANIA

I've had the design in my head since we bought the place. If we pull away some of that patched grass...get rid of those plants and allow those there to get some light. Plant some bushes and wildflowers. And the oak looks so majestic. Oh my God, this could be very exciting. Maybe some ferns over there.

PABLO

But we agreed to fix the house first and then you could start thinking of the garden.

TANIA

Pablo, do you want your party or not?

PABLO

I was thinking BBQ. Americans love BBQ. It puts everyone at ease. Cool and casual. Show them we comfortably fit in the landscape that they know. We can do American Wasp Success...or at least imitate it...

TANIA

Effortless looking effort.

PABLO

They will love my scholarly and vibrant wife. They will see this fine historic neighborhood and the potential of this unfinished place and say "Here is a man that understands smart risk. He is the American Dream- incarnate."

TANIA

And maybe we can get someone to pull out that ugly sagging chain link fence...It's horrible.

PABLO

And put up the kind of wood fence a law firm would appreciate.

TANIA

We make sure people relax and open up. We win them over.

PABLO

You are incredible. Thank you.

TANIA

Don't thank me yet. We only have six days.

PABLO

Can we pull this off?

TANIA

First, we need to talk to the neighbors. Frank and Virginia need to be OK with us changing the fence.

PABLO

Who would fight us for changing this fence?

TANIA

Their English Ivy is draping the fence. And believe it or not....people can get very weird about their plants.

SECOND VIGNETTE- MONDAY EVENING

(MUSIC. We see FRANK come out the back of his house with a bottle of insecticide. He sprays sections of the garden before VIRGINIA comes out and beckons him. ALL enter out to the deck, with TANIA and PABLO gifting VIRGINIA and FRANK a bottle of wine in a gift bag. FRANK goes inside to prepare it. TANIA and PABLO and VIRGINIA start the scene.)

SCENE 2- MONDAY EVENING

(TANIA and PABLO sit in VIRGINIA and FRANK's gorgeous garden. FRANK is offstage)

VIRGINIA

Well, we are so happy to finally have real homeowners living next door. It used to be such a beautiful place until Mr. Whitefield died and then then Mrs. Whitefield died and her stupid step-son took over and rented it to a bunch of AU students ...But now. A fresh start. And a baby! We love babies. Maybe we can babysit! Frank's bringing out wine glasses. Frank! Bring out some iced tea. For the little pregnant lady!

TANIA

We don't mean to bother you on a work night.

VIRGINIA

Nonsense, Frank does his consulting from home now. And I've been an Engineer at Lockheed so long, I have my own bathroom.

PABLO

At Lockheed!

VIRGINIA

Yes, Shocking huh?

PABLO

Oh no, not at all.

VIRGINIA

I bet some of your best friends are old female Defense Contractors. Right? (Laughs)

(FRANK emerges with a tray carrying iced tea, wine glasses and the wine PABLO and TANIA brought over in a granite container.)

FRANK

So did you know that all the houses on this street were built in 1908?

PABLO and TANIA

Really-

VIRGINIA

As were most of the residents! (Laughs) I'm joshing. But it is an old neighborhood. Mr. and Mrs. Jenkins across the street were part of the Bush JR. and Sr. administrations. And Phillip Saxon- in the blue house...The one with the great ornate front yard?

FRANK
It's not that great.

VIRGINIA
I meant great as in big. Frank and Phillip have a gardening rivalry.

FRANK
Very friendly and neighborly, I assure you.

VIRGINIA
Every year awards are given by the Garden club-

FRANK
Potomac Horticultural Society.

VIRGINIA
And Frank's garden always wins honorable mention!

PABLO
It's beautiful. It reminds me of my parents' garden.

TANIA
Very European.

FRANK
Thank you. But Phillip Saxon has won Best Garden for the last three years.

VIRGINIA
Maybe not this year. I think you've outdone yourself.

FRANK
The Horticultural Society judges comes by this Sunday.

TANIA
This Sunday?

PABLO
Oh no.

TANIA
We were coming over to talk about replacing the fence.

FRANK
Replacing that fence?

TANIA
By Saturday...for an event we are having.

FRANK
Are you serious?

VIRGINIA
You want to replace the fence this week?

TANIA
I'm sorry. Pablo, this isn't going to work-

FRANK
Sorry? This is the best news I've heard in awhile.

PABLO
It is?

FRANK
One day that stupid Whitefield step-son just put up that cheap garish thing.

TANIA
Oh, so it's our fence?

VIRGINIA
It certainly isn't ours. Frank sicced the English Ivy on it...so we would see green instead of chain link.

FRANK
English Ivy is potent if used de-fens-ively. (Laughter) But no matter what I do, Phillip Saxon doesn't have to contend with a disheveled wire fence.

TANIA
Well if you are OK about us cutting away your ivy, we could get rid of the wire fence.

PABLO
And replace it with a tall, stately wood one.

FRANK
A Christmas miracle in September.

PABLO
I'm so relieved you are "on board" with this. (Laughter)

FRANK
I'm surprised how elated I am. I hate that fence.

PABLO
So do we.

FRANK
I hate losing to Phillip Saxon too!

VIRGINIA
Frank, calm down. The point of gardening is for you to relieve your chronic stress.

FRANK
It's not that bad.

VIRGINIA
Yeah, right. (Beat) Anyway, it's so much better since he discovered he has a green thumb.

FRANK
It started with a bulb. I put it in the ground, and a tulip came up. And I was amazed by what I had done! It was like...childbirth.

VIRGINIA
(To TANIA) Tulips are nothing like childbirth.

FRANK
Everything you see here, I planted with my own hands-

VIRGINIA
On his knees. Meticulously.

TANIA
Wow. Is it me...or does your yard looks much bigger than our yard?

VIRGINIA
Bigger? No. More organized, perhaps.

PABLO
It's so neat. So pristine...

FRANK
(Laughs) Every day, I rake. I trim. I mow. I fertilize. I mulch. I de-grub. I spray for bugs.

TANIA
You use insecticide?

FRANK
Constantly!

VIRGINIA

And he constantly weeds. He see's something that's out of place and he grabs it from the roots and pulls it out. Immediately. It's a little OCD, but the results are impressive.

PABLO

Tania is an avid gardener too!

TANIA

My grandparents owned a farm and I've always loved playing in the dirt. I'm so excited about owning a yard.

FRANK

I'm happy to help you become a serious garden contender.

TANIA

Oh, thank you, but your gardening might be too... ambitious for me.

VIRGINIA

She has a job and a little baby on the way.

FRANK

Well, gardener to gardener, the one thing you should get rid of is that tree...

PABLO

You mean, our Oak?

VIRGINIA

You mean your future disaster! (Laughs)

TANIA

Disaster?

FRANK

It's so dangerous.

TANIA

But. We. Love. The tree.

PABLO

We do.

VIRGINIA

Really?

FRANK

We used to have the sister oak in our back yard too...but we decided to get rid of it. To safe guard our roof and give us a canvas on which to plant. One life for so many.

PABLO

You had an Oak tree like ours here?

FRANK

And it completely overwhelmed our yard. Just like yours. Those heavy craggy branches, need to be cut back which is expensive. I suggest just chopping the whole thing down.

VIRGINIA

We have a chain saw. And an axe!

FRANK

Oh Ginny. But you will need a professional tree guy.

TANIA

It's a healthy tree. We had that inspected before we bought the house.

FRANK

But the tree is why your lawn looks so messy. All the leaves and acorns. Everywhere.

VIRGINIA

And we get your leaves. All over our lot.

TANIA

The tree is the center piece of our plan for a Native Garden.

FRANK

Native Garden? That sounds very exotic.

TANIA

Actually, it's very traditional. We want to go back to the basics, get rid of foreign plants like Bermuda grass, and English Ivy, and nurture a native Mid-Atlantic forest bed.

PABLO

Which is better for the environment.

TANIA

Native plants feed the right bees and bugs, the right bugs feed the birds, and so on. We, the Individual Gardeners of America have the opportunity, or dare I say, the responsibility in helping ensure biodiversity in our gardens. We can help save the planet.

VIRGINIA

My. That's a patriotic call to action.

TANIA

I have some books. Written by brilliant entomologists. I can bring them to you.

FRANK

So...you are suggesting: No tulips? No Magnolias. No Hydrangeas?

TANIA

No Japanese honeysuckle, no Asian azalea, no kudzu, no Bradford pear, no autumn olive.

FRANK

Blasphemy!

TANIA

But there are beautiful Ferns, Mulberry, Virginia Creeper, Carolina Silverbell. Low maintenance greenery that's high output and low impact.

FRANK

You mean, weeds? You are planting weeds, on purpose?

TANIA

A lot of plants we think of as weeds are actually native plants and they have a purpose.

VIRGINIA

Isn't it their purpose to be ugly?

(Everyone Laughs)

TANIA

That's a misconception. Native plants can be quite arresting.

FRANK

So, you are going to plant a bunch of weeds-

VIRGINIA

-So that your yard will attract more bees and bugs?

TANIA

Do you listen to NPR?

VIRGINIA

Of course we listen to NPR.

FRANK

We're old, not dead.

TANIA

NPR had a great segment on Native Gardening. You should listen to it.

VIRGINIA

Are you all vegetarian?

TANIA

No-

PABLO

We love Barbeque.

FRANK

Is this Native Garden something that springs from your rich Mexican culture?

TANIA

It's a gardening philosophy developed by entomologists.

FRANK

It seems so rooted to a Mexican connection to the Earth. There must be something there.

TANIA

Except, we're not Mexican.

PABLO

I'm from Chile. I did Boarding school here.

TANIA

And, I'm from New Mexico.

FRANK

Funny. I was sure I detected a little Spanish accent from you.

VIRGINIA

That's why we thought you were Mexican.

TANIA

That's so interesting because I'm American. I don't speak very much Spanish.

PABLO

She can swear in Spanish.

TANIA
Maybe you imagined the accent?

VIRGINIA
Maybe, it's just that you look so Mexican.

TANIA and PABLO
(Smiling. Good natured) That's what people tell us.

VIRGINIA
Doesn't he look just like that Mexican actor, Rico? Chico?

(PABLO looks at TANIA, mouths "Who?")

FRANK
Chico and the Man! We loved that show. So tragic how he ended.

VIRGINIA
We love Mexico. Love it.

FRANK
Saw the Pyramid of The Sun in Mexico City.

VIRGINIA
We saw Warren Beatty at a Disco in Acapulco.

FRANK
No one talks about Acapulco anymore.

VIRGINIA
Mexico now is all Cancun, Cancun!

FRANK
And drug trafficking. And Immigration-

TANIA
I don't know Mexico very well.

FRANK
But you are Mexican-American aren't you?

TANIA
In a sense, yes... but ...Frank, where are your ancestors from?

FRANK
England. Mostly.

TANIA

Do you introduce yourself as English-American?

FRANK

Of course not. I'm a New Englander. From the North East

TANIA

See? I'm New Mexican. From the South West. But people think of me as much more foreign than you.

VIRGINIA

I on the other hand, am Polish American. I like claiming the old country.

TANIA

My family has been in the same region for over two hundred years. Where I am from was originally part of Mexico, then it became part of the United States. We never immigrated. Yet because of how I look, my nationality is always in question.

PABLO

She is conducting some identity experiments. For her Doctoral thesis in anthropology.

TANIA

I am interested in origins and when we claim them and when we stop. The power of language and place. Native vs. foreign. Especially in a country as complicated as the US.

PABLO

It's interesting and it's controversial.

FRANK

Hey! Our marriage was controversial in our day.

VIRGINIA

A wealthy New England Blue blood and a blue collar Polish girl from Buffalo.

TANIA

This complexity is what makes us all....American.

PABLO

Actually, If we nitpick: You are Estado Unidense: United Statesean.

TANIA

True.

PABLO

Everyone in Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean is American.

FRANK

Oh c'mon, everyone refers to us as the Americans.

TANIA

That's true too!

PABLO

The English are Europeans. The Australians are Australian. And all of us here are Americans. Except I'm Chilean. And you three are United Statesean.

FRANK

Ah, so can I introduce your wife as a gringa? (beat)

PABLO

I certainly do. (Everyone Laughs)

TANIA

Yes. So Pablo is the only foreigner here-

PABLO

Here and at my law firm.

VIRGINIA

My poor boy. Are you the token? And don't let anyone use that term. Because it's demeaning. I know. For twenty years I was the only female engineer in my division. I was smarter than many of my colleagues, but because I didn't have a schlong to go along with my brain, or a really good baseball card collection, I had to fight to get to where I am now. Are you fighting for that too?

PABLO

Well...um...yes. But.

TANIA

No. he's fine.

VIRGINIA

Be fearless. Do everything you say you will and then, do more.

PABLO

Thank you.

VIRGINIA

And don't let those bastards get you down.

PABLO

That's good advice.

VIRGINIA

Funny. Your English is so good. If I closed my eyes, I would swear I was just speaking to two regular Americans.

TANIA

More wine?

VIRGINIA

More tea?

TANIA

I think I've had enough caffeine and sugar for one day, Thank you.

VIRGINIA

You kids today are so cautious. When I was young, while other women were burning bras, I was wearing full support, working overtime. I couldn't let a thing like a child-birth slow me down. Drank coffee all night until my water broke. And our Scott is fine.

FRANK

He's a little quiet.

VIRGINIA

He's a lovely boy.

FRANK

He's almost 40.

VIRGINIA

I hope he marries in this garden one day.

FRANK

I don't think so.

(Beat)

PABLO

Oh my, look at the time. We have kept you out here...and the mosquitos.

VIRGINIA

Those darn bugs! And more to come...

TANIA

Spiders will help with the mosquitos. You'll see.

VIRGINIA

We will! Thank you for the wine.

FRANK

A pleasure talking with you.

TANIA

And thank you for allowing us to trim your ivy.

FRANK

Thank you for our new wood fence!

PABLO

What is that American saying: Good fences make good friends?

VIRGINIA

Good neighbors. Good fences make good neighbors.

FRANK

Amen.

VIGNETTE 3- TUESDAY MORNING

(VIRGINIA crosses to FRANK and takes his wine glass. She goes to the tray and places them on it, picks it up. FRANK goes to the door and holds it open for VIRGINIA to exit. FRANK crosses to the fence to grab his insecticide and finds an acorn. He looks around, then throws it in to the DEL VALLE yard- he exits. Lights shift; Tuesday morning. PABLO enters from his house, clothes not quite put together. He has a cup of coffee and the plat. He crosses to the fence, looking at the flowers on the other side.)

SCENE 3- TUESDAY MORNING

(TANIA enters with a pen and pad of paper.)

TANIA

BBQ Jacks says they can bring 18 pounds of BBQ for Saturday. And the linens and tables and chairs well be set up that late morning.

PABLO

That's good. The first fence guy said it was impossible...but then I found one that spoke Spanish...

TANIA

Viva la Raza.

PABLO

And he lowered the price, of course, for us.

TANIA

Membership has its' privileges...

PABLO

If we just give him a perimeter of the yard. He can get all the wood delivered by tomorrow, and installed by Friday.

TANIA

Friday! Perfect. Let me check it. Do you have the plans? (TANIA crosses to PABLO and takes the plat.)

PABLO

The office is buzzing about our BBQ! Since Mr. Krause is coming...everyone is cancelling their plans to make sure they can come. Crazy as it sounds, this party might be one of the best impulse moves I've ever done.

TANIA

I'm just relieved about how happy the Butleys are about the new fence!

(TANIA starts to study the perimeter.)

PABLO

The Butleys are awesome.

TANIA

You just love looking like a 1970's Puerto Rican TV star!

PABLO

It was like we entered another time and place. Another galaxy...right next door.

TANIA

And they offered to babysit.

PABLO

I love them! They are a total trip.

TANIA

Although, I didn't sense they approved of our approach to the garden.

PABLO

Maybe they thought we were being ...judgmental?

TANIA

Me? I'm not being judgmental. Just informed,

PABLO

OK. You have to agree...what they have is beautiful.

TANIA

You can't mean that.

PABLO

OK. But it's pretty.

TANIA

Pretty evil! These "lovely" plant: Bugs don't feed on them. Bees avoid them, causing crisis and chaos. Bees start to die. Birds move away. Butterflies fade. How is that beautiful?

PABLO

Is this a rally?

TANIA

The invasive Japanese Honeysuckle is like the crack cocaine of the plant world. It should be illegal for nurseries to sell it.

PABLO

Operation Crack Down.

TANIA

This beautiful OAK tree is a banquet of nutrition and life. And I will not chop it down.

PABLO

Nobody said we would. Calm down.

TANIA

Don't tell me to calm down. It implies I'm being irrational...when I'm being passionately rational. Don't you like beautiful wildflowers?

PABLO

Sure. I guess. I just also- like those purple ones, and those white ones...those look -

TANIA

Whoa. Wait a second.

PABLO

What's the matter?

TANIA

Something here is not right.

PABLO

What?

TANIA

Well, it says here in the plan that our yard goes over to...No.

PABLO

Is there something wrong with the plan?

TANIA

Or something wrong with our yard. Look.

(They both look at the plat and TANIA's notes.)

PABLO

That is strange.

TANIA

I mean we would have to measure it correctly.

PABLO

Let's do it. (He crosses upstage and grabs a measuring tape. Hands one end to TANIA.)

TANIA

But...still, even loosely...

(PABLO pulls out the tape and hands one end to TANIA. They measure the DS side of the yard- and come up short. They look over the fence, then at each other. TANIA shakes her head. PABLO steps over to Frank's garden and looks at the tape measure.)

PABLO
To here.

TANIA
No!!!!

PABLO
Yes! We own more than we think. Wow! Oh Wow!

TANIA
Get back over here. That can't be right.

PABLO
A que si! It's what's filed at the City. This plan is what is attached to our mortgage. This is what we bought. This is the lot the Whitefield step son sold to us!

TANIA
But we didn't know that. We assumed our property went to the chain link fence.

PABLO
It's more: Two feet beyond: the flowerbeds, the ivy, the walkway. All the way to the street. It all belongs to us. To us! Coño!!! We need to get a surveyor here as soon as possible. We may legally own 10% more yard than we thought. (PABLO comes back to their yard)

TANIA
Oh no.

PABLO
You know what this means?

TANIA
Trouble?

PABLO
No! A win!

VIGNETTE 4- WEDNESDAY MORNING

(The SURVEYOR comes in, with his measuring wheel and plat. He looks at the documents as FRANK enters from the SR alley, with his gardening caddy. They wave at each other. FRANK exits in to the house. The SURVEYOR goes about his business, measuring along the edge of the yard...running right over FRANK'S plants. He flags the flowerbed along the actual property line. TANIA enters. The SURVEYOR hands her a bill and they exit. FRANK comes on, and dances up a storm with his clippers as he crosses to the fence. He sits, and begins to clip away at the ivy. TANIA enters.)

SCENE 4- WEDNESDAY MORNING

(FRANK is cutting the English Ivy. TANIA walks out.)

TANIA

Oh, Frank, that is so kind. I can clip the ivy. It's so much work.

FRANK

Only four more days until the judges. I can't rest now. Besides. I like work. I need it. Working with the Earth "grounds me."

TANIA

Me too. And God knows when the little one comes, if I'll have the luxury to mess around back here.

FRANK

Babies and plants both love... nurseries!

TANIA

You are so punny! (He laughs.) I have those books for you.

FRANK

"Bringing Nature Home." "Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast." "Insects are Essential." How titillating! I can't wait.

TANIA

Not only is it great gardening; it's good reading.

FRANK

Thank you. So when are they coming to tear out the chain link fence?

TANIA

Tomorrow!

FRANK

And you ordered the wood fence?

TANIA

If all goes well, the entire fence will be in by Friday. I'll be digging out here too.

FRANK

Maybe this year, with your new fence... I might win the Potomac Horticultural Society Best Garden Award...A man can dream, can't he?

TANIA

Of course.

FRANK

Like Ginny...dreaming of a garden wedding for Scott...who I think is homosexual.

TANIA

Oh.

FRANK

Gay. I accept it. But Ginny doesn't want to see it. I wish he would come out and just tell us.

TANIA

It's hard to open up to parents sometimes. Give him time.

FRANK

We so want grandkids. If we did, I think Ginny might consider retiring.

TANIA

Gay couples have kids all the time now.

FRANK

I hope he does. We don't want him to be alone.

TANIA

Scott is lucky. Pablo got disowned for marrying me.

FRANK

That's shocking

TANIA

His father, who is a very wealthy man in Chile, calls me the "peasant!"

FRANK

You practically have a PhD!!!

TANIA

Because of me, Pablo went from being an insanely rich kid, to having to deliver pizzas to try to pay for his last semester of college.

FRANK

All for love. We would be so thrilled if Scott brought home a lovely señorita ... or señorito like you.

TANIA

Thank you.

FRANK

So was the fence man the guy measuring? He was in my yard, wasn't he? Those little flag s...are his?

TANIA

That was the surveyor.

FRANK

Oh. It's so wise! Call before you dig!

TANIA

Frank... Pablo wants to throw a big garden party this Saturday for his firm-

FRANK

Oh! That's ambitious.

(PABLO enters ready for work, cellphone and leather file folder in hand.)

TANIA

Pablo! There you are.

PABLO

Frank, how are you? Can we talk for a moment? Is Virginia up?

FRANK

She's at a chapter meeting for the fraternity of Women Engineers...but whatever it is. You can tell me.

TANIA

Well, in costing out the price of the fence...we went back to the plans...and well...Oh how do I say this...um

PABLO

Frank, did you know that our property line is wider than this?

FRANK

Excuse me?

TANIA

Apparently, our property line is almost 2 feet wider than we thought.

PABLO

That's what the surveyor confirmed with Tania.

FRANK

He did?

TANIA

Yes. Do you have the papers?

(PABLO pulls out the plat from the file folder and hands it to FRANK.)

PABLO

Yes. See Frank...it makes sense...see the line.

FRANK

I see it.

PABLO

That's where our property actually ends.

FRANK

Not here?

PABLO

Not here with the fence.

TANIA

That's why your yard looks bigger.

PABLO

Because it really is ...bigger. It's backed up by the plat and the surveyors report.

FRANK

(Beat) Oh. What does that mean?

PABLO

It means that these flowerbeds...

TANIA

Your flowerbeds-

PABLO

-are actually on our land.

FRANK

(Beat) I don't think so.

TANIA

I know. I couldn't believe it at first.

FRANK

So that's what those flags in my flowerbed are?

PABLO

Those mark the property line of our property. See how it lines up there and then...Further and further?

FRANK

That silly fence has been up for years. And there's never been a problem before.

TANIA

We don't mean to make problems.

PABLO

We just wanted to point out that this stretch actually,

TANIA

Ironically.

PABLO

Belongs to us.

(Pause. FRANK just looks and listens.)

PABLO (continued)

And since we are about to invest into building this new fence...and for re-sale purposes and what not...we thought it would be best for everyone ...if we could line up our fence with the correct property line as soon as possible.

FRANK

I'm so sorry. I'm surprised. And deeply embarrassed.

TANIA

Oh Frank, don't be embarrassed.

PABLO

We were surprised too.

FRANK

I'm flabbergasted.

TANIA

We know you didn't do this on purpose!

FRANK

(Pause) On Purpose? Why would you say such a thing? You think that I...I...that I would stoop so low as to??? You can't just come here and accuse me of things.

TANIA
No one is accusing anyone of anything!

FRANK
I did not put up that fence.

PABLO
Someone did.

FRANK
That is not my business.

PABLO
Actually, it is your business since it affects your property. Had you NO idea it was in the wrong place?

FRANK
No.

PABLO
Really?

FRANK
Am I on trial?

PABLO
No, of course not.

FRANK
Because I feel I am the victim, here. You come and tell me I have to give you something I have thought of as mine...and then treat me like this?

TANIA
I'm sorry. I know this is very awkward. I know how much your garden means to you. I've been loath to bring it up.

FRANK
But you did.

PABLO
We brought it up because something you think is yours is actually... ours. And we need to be adults about this and resolve it.

(Silence.)

FRANK

I don't know what to say. (Silence.)

PABLO

I know everybody is very sorry and uncomfortable about this. But the fact remains, if we are going to build a fence, it needs to outline the physical line of our actual property.

FRANK

The judges come this Sunday.

PABLO

I'm sorry. But-

FRANK

BE QUIET! DO NOT SAY ANOTHER WORD!

PABLO

I didn't...mean to-

FRANK

What did I say, son? We will talk later. Excuse me.

(FRANK runs back to his house.)

TANIA

Frank, be careful!

(PABLO and TANIA are alone.)

TANIA

I can't believe how you handled that!

PABLO

Me? Did you hear him? He's not my father. He told me to shut up.

TANIA

I would too! This is not a courtroom. They are our friendly neighbors.

PABLO

That's why I also wanted to be very, very clear.

TANIA

Oh you were clearly a jerk! You were also disrespectful.

PABLO

What?

TANIA

He is our elder. That the garden means a lot to him.

PABLO

I know. But take it from me, when things are sensitive it's exactly when clarity and reason need to prevail.

TANIA

But is it worth it? I mean, we bought the place assuming that our yard ended here and their flower bed was theirs! We were grateful for that.

PABLO

But this is good news for us!

TANIA

This does not feel like good news.

PABLO

So what do you want to do?

TANIA

Forget what the contract says. Keep everything like this. Let's not be greedy! And be happy with that. We go and apologize to them and move on.

PABLO

Apologize? For pointing out they are stealing from us?

TANIA

Pablo, get out of your shark mentality. These are our neighbors.

PABLO

Fine!

TANIA

Fine! Good. So we go and apologize.

PABLO

And thank them for taking \$15,000 out of our pocket.

TANIA

What are you talking about?

PABLO

That stretch is about 80 square feet. Which in this neighborhood is the equivalent of \$15,000. Today. And who knows how much more it will be worth in the future. You feel we can just give that away?

TANIA

That much? My Dad used to make \$15,000 a year.

PABLO

You want to forfeit part of the land that rightfully belongs to us? Give people we barely know something for nothing?

TANIA

That doesn't feel right either.

PABLO

I know this is emotional, but we have to be smart about this.

TANIA

And kind...we have to be kind. It can't be just about the money.

PABLO

Listen, they are upset. It's natural. But this competition comes every year. And the wood fence will help no matter what we do. We need to carry on and right this wrong. They will adjust.

TANIA

How can you be sure?

PABLO

They are good and decent people, aren't they?

VIGNETTE 5- WEDNESDAY

(PABLO exits. TANIA greets the crowd of GOMEZ LANDSCAPE TECHNICIANS as they enter. They discuss the work that needs to be done, then she exits. The workers have brought a boom box, playing reggaeton. The TECHNICIANS get to work, swapping the flags for 12 inch stakes, clearing the garbage and junk US and pulling out the hydrangeas. Once all of this is finished, the LANDSCAPE TECHNICIANS exit. Lights shift.)

SCENE 5- WEDNESDAY NIGHT

(FRANK and VIRGINIA enter their yard through the alley. It's late. They have a flashlight. There are now four 12 inch stakes instead of flags.)

VIRGINIA

Frank, you need to calm down.

FRANK

I am calm. I'm just upset.

VIRGINIA

This is silly. They might see us.

FRANK

They are asleep. And I want to see the damage. I want you to see it. They seemed so kind and so civilized. But who rips out Hydrangeas? They could have been saved. Those poor plants are being murdered!

VIRGINIA

It's not good for you to get so worked up about it.

FRANK

These are living things that were planted with purpose and care. Now look at this. It used to be flags...now it's-

VIRGINIA

Stakes! Why are they out so far?

FRANK

Ginny! That's where the new fence is going to go. They say their property is two feet further than the old fence.

VIRGINIA

What? This far? That's crazy. When did they tell you?

FRANK

While I was clipping the ivy. As a favor to them. I'm taking a picture.

VIRGINIA

They want to take our land?

FRANK

The dandy Esquire nonchalantly told me that they own this much of our property.

VIRGINIA

Where did they get that idea?

FRANK

From the documents attached to their mortgage. And then the survey they did...showed the same thing. They have documents. Do we?

VIRGINIA

It's been decades. God know where ours are.

FRANK

Did you ever think we were taking land that wasn't ours?

VIRGINIA

No! What did you say?

FRANK

I told him to "Hold his Tongue and Shut his BIG Mouth" and I shook my fist and told him I'd see him in Court.

VIRGINIA

Really? You did? To a lawyer?

FRANK

Basically! And then I walked away.

VIRGINIA

You walked away? Please don't tell me you rolled over like a circus dog.

FRANK

No -I was vicious. And intimidating.

VIRGINIA

You cannot cede an inch with this. You hear? An inch becomes a foot becomes a yard.

FRANK

I assure you. Walking away wasn't a retreat.

VIRGINIA

Chamberlain looked the other way when it came to Poland. Nothing appeases greed.

FRANK

I've been documenting the destruction all evening.

VIRGINIA

But we need more than photos. We need to find those documents. This is our property!

FRANK

You know how I worked on the flowerbeds. Just to have a fence slam into them. Sever them. Days before the garden judgment. I'll never win "Best Garden.". Thank to them, I might not even be in the running ever. Phillip Saxon will gloat all year.

VIRGINIA

Frank, don't get all lathered up about this. Tomorrow we'll give those ambitious kids a gentle lesson in maturity. I'll do the talking. OK? You get too upset.

FRANK

Fine.

VIRGINIA

Believe me, I will put a stop to this whole travesty.

VIGNETTE 6- THURSDAY

(The Gomez Gardeners arrive again with wood panels and posts to make the fence while TANIA rakes. They set the poles SR and lean the wood panels up against the house, by the trash can. They tidy up the yard as TANIA rakes onstage. FRANK and VIRGINIA peer through the window, then enter.)

SCENE 6- THURSDAY

(Out in TANIA and PABLO's Yard. She is raking.)

VIRGINIA

Good morning. Tania.

TANIA

Good morning, Virginia. Frank.

VIRGINIA

Where's Pablo?

TANIA

Pablo is at work. I so wanted to apologize for what happened yesterday.

VIRGINIA

I should say so.

TANIA

We wanted to all talk together...but then we got ahead of ourselves...and we didn't handle the situation as... adroitly as we should have.

FRANK

Uh-huh.

VIRGINIA

Thank you. I appreciate it.

TANIA

You have been so gracious and kind. We didn't mean for this to get tense.

VIRGINIA

Good. So why don't we all take a big, deep breath. And Pause. It would be great if you could give us a chance to find our documents ...and study the survey...and let us slowly digest everything. Let Frank go through the competition this Sunday...and then he can re-plan his garden.

TANIA

But the fence people are here. I thought you wanted a nice wood fence to help you win? Because I think a fence-

VIRGINIA

I think a fence is...imperative. But Tania, there needs to be a compromise about where.

TANIA

OK. So where do you think we should put the new fence?

FRANK

Right where the old fence is.

TANIA

(Beat.) That's not much of a compromise.

VIRGINIA

A temporary compromise...until we come up with a better one. When all the facts are in.

TANIA

But I think all the facts are in.

VIRGINIA

We need more time!

TANIA

I don't have it! We have a lot of other pressures and we need this fence in the right place as soon as possible. Frank can use all year to re-plan his garden for next year. I'm sorry.

FRANK

It's the pesticides isn't it? They get a bad reputation. But I need them. I'm telling you: Organic gardens get eaten alive.

TANIA

I know! That's the point of organic gardens!!!! (Beat.) I realize no one wants to be in this situation.

FRANK

Then don't be in this situation.

VIRGINIA

All we are asking for is a little more time...

TANIA

And we don't have that. We have this BBQ to throw on Saturday.

FRANK

Oh.

VIRGINIA

A BBQ?

TANIA

It's a very important line-in-the-sand BBQ.

VIRGINIA

You're telling me you are going to destroy Frank's flowers, his vision, and art, for a hamburger party!

TANIA

It's BBQ Jacks and it's catered. This party is much more complicated than that...

VIRGINIA

This can't be happening.

TANIA

I know this is very upsetting. But it seems that for years, for one reason or another, you have ended up taking -

VIRGINIA

-We have taken nothing.-

TANIA

-Obtaining part of the Whitefield lawn which belongs to us.

FRANK

Obtaining?

TANIA

I'm sorry, but we can't let you... borrow... this land anymore. We need it.

FRANK

And what are you going to do? Butcher it? Ruin my chances this year with the garden competition.

TANIA

Frank, you have many years to win with that garden. I only have this one chance to help my husband impress his partners. And the sooner we get this done. The sooner we can all get on with the healing process.

VIRGINIA

Healing process. What kind of mumbo jumbo is that?

TANIA

It's the process you go through when things don't go your way.

VIRGINIA

Things will go our way.

TANIA

Maybe not this time. My husband says the law is on our side.

FRANK

Well, possession is nine tenths of the law!

TANIA

Really? Then every thief would use that as an argument.

FRANK

Did you just call us thieves?

TANIA

NO! NO. Not at all. I was just poking holes in your argument.

VIRGINIA

You are poking holes in Frank's heart.

TANIA

I feel caught in the middle. And I feel you are ganging up on me. Pablo feels strongly-

FRANK

It's barbaric!

TANIA

Barbaric? You think reclaiming what is ours...is barbaric?

(FRANK starts to pull the small stakes out and throw them into TANIA's yard)

VIRGINIA

Listen Missy, I'm not sure that it is yours.

TANIA

You can have a surveyor come out. He'll just tell you what he told us.

VIRGINIA

If you gave us some time, but that's seems impossible!

TANIA

I'm sorry...it is pandemonium. We have people here right now to help make this into something presentable. In a matter of two days it will all be over. And it will look good. And we can move on.

FRANK

We have had you in our home. I thought we were going to be friends.

TANIA

I'm so sorry, Frank.
(FRANK runs off.)

VIRGINIA

Frank! You are stressing him out!

TANIA

Virginia I don't want to upset him...but I assure you, this fence...will make us better neighbors in the long run.

VIRGINIA

You can't just move in and take over. I won't let you bully us with your native ideas, and workers, and BBQ! You! Stop!

TANIA

You aren't their boss. I am.

VIRGINIA

STOP You. Stop! Put that down! STOP! Don't you understand English???? How do I say STOP in Spanish?

TANIA

You say "Alto! Soy una pinche vieja"

(LANDSCAPE TECHNICIANS all react.)

VIRGINIA

What did you say?

TANIA

Nothing. Oh God.

VIRGINIA

Jesus, Mary and Joseph! I could be your mother!

TANIA

I should not use language like that.

VIRGINIA

I may not understand what you said but I hootin' well know what you meant.

TANIA

But you weren't being kind either. You pushed all my buttons.

VIRGINIA

I've got your number, missy. Don't mess with Virginia ---Butley.
(VIRGINIA walks off. TANIA bursts into tears).

VIGNETTE 7- THURSDAY EVENING

(The GOMEZ LANDSCAPE TECHNICIANS begin to pull out the wire fence as FRANK enters. He crosses to the fence and throws a fit, moving the SR chair to the deck and clearing the kneeler and clippers. He takes his clippers and gardening caddy and exits in to his house. The LANDSCAPE TECHNICIANS place the fence up against the house and exit. VIRGINIA comes outside holding a coffee cup and smoking, surveying the damage aka progress. It's clear that she's not a chain smoker, but that she smokes when she is stressed. FRANK comes out and joins her.)

SCENE 7- THURSDAY EVENING

FRANK
She insulted you?

VIRGINIA
Called me names. Horrible words in Spanish. (Beat) So I talked to an attorney.

FRANK
And what did he say?

VIRGINIA
She said that we don't have much recourse. That legally, it appears that they own our land...and they have the right to claim it.

FRANK
Surely that can't be all we can do. We didn't knowingly steal the land.

VIRGINIA
I know. I know.

FRANK
We didn't even put the fence up. That was the stupid Whitefield step-son that made that mistake. I never noticed our yard was bigger...did you?

VIRGINIA
Frank, these are not our sins. We did nothing. We are innocent victims.

FRANK
God, I miss smoking.

VIRGINIA
Now everything we love is now bad.

FRANK
Like margarine, and white rice, and...Cat Stevens.

VIRGINIA
Jesus. What have we done to deserve this?

FRANK
All we did was take something ugly and make it beautiful.

VIRGINIA
And now we are being treated like criminals.

FRANK

They must be Democrats, don't you think?

VIRGINIA

With that level of sanctimony- Of course they're Democrats.

FRANK

And for \$250 an hour, the attorney said there was nothing he could do?

VIRGINIA

Well, towards the end...she did bring up one thing.

FRANK

What was that?

VIRGINIA

Well, we've worked the flower garden in a purposeful and public way for many years.

FRANK

Yes.

VIRGINIA

And she says there are certain provisions that "allow ownership for someone that has lived on and tended neglected land."

FRANK

Are you talking about invoking Squatters Rights????

VIRGINIA

Oddly enough, it might be a legal recourse.

FRANK

Squatters Rights?

VIRGINIA

Adverse possession is the legal term.

FRANK

Are you insane?

VIRGINIA

I'm just relaying the information, Frank.

FRANK

What would the Potomac Horticultural Society say about that? How could we look people in the eye! Can you just imagine Phillips Saxon's reaction? What would we say to him?

VIRGINIA

We would look Phillip Saxon in the eye (Looks) and say: Listen buddy, a person has to do what a person has to do for the glory of gardening."

FRANK

No! Good God...that is a horrible idea. Squatters are poor people that are desperate.

VIRGINIA

Not always.

FRANK

Is there an uglier word in the English language than SQUAT? I mean, Squat is what you do when you defecate. Squat is what peasant women do in the fields to have babies. Squat is what degenerate bums do to get out of buying land. We cannot be squatters.

VIRGINIA

Jiminy Crickets! Then say goodbye to your perfectly symmetrical garden that you have worked on for a decade.

FRANK

This is not fair!!!

VIRGINIA

Squatter's rights are also about justice. Those laws exist to protect hard working people from greedy and neglectful landowners. And God knows, you have worked hard.

FRANK

I have.

VIRGINIA

We worked the land in good faith, with good intentions, with the full belief that this here soil was ours.

FRANK

We certainly did.

VIRGINIA

Only to have something we love and cherish be ripped away from us, at the roots, bringing down the value and aesthetic of our entire home.

FRANK
Selfish kids.

VIRGINIA
They are fully formed adults with growing earning potential who will stop at nothing.
We are simply a couple of old people on the brink of retirement who are in their way.
And they will mow us down for our lawn.

FRANK
Bullies. I don't think we should let them get away with this.

VIRGINIA
Now you're talking turkey. Let's show these unscrupulous brats what power to the people really means.

VIGNETTE 8- THURSDAY EVENING

(VIRGINIA grabs the coffee cup with the cigarette and exits. FRANK remains on the bench. Time passes.)

SCENE 8- THURSDAY EVENING

(Nighttime. FRANK is outside. PABLO enters with a beer.)

PABLO

I know it's after midnight, but do you mind if I join you?

FRANK

Yes I do.

(PABLO grabs a chair and sits, facing FRANK.)

FRANK

Did you just get home from work?

PABLO

Yes. My wife is horribly upset about the ... incident this morning.

FRANK

Women get so emotional when they are pregnant.

PABLO

I hear Virginia is not too happy either. (Beat) I also assume she's not pregnant.

(Beat. Men size each other up)

FRANK

No one is happy.

PABLO

You tried to make my wife feel small.

FRANK

Maybe she feels small, because she called my wife names.

PABLO

Virginia threatened Tania.

FRANK

Pablo. You are creating havoc over 23 inches.

PABLO

It's 80 square feet, at least. If it's so valuable to you, I'll sell it to you at market price.

FRANK

Ah, so it's all about the money.

PABLO

No. But it is a way to come to terms. A rational way to make peace.

FRANK

I shouldn't have to spend that kind of cash. I'm almost retired from the Agency. I've been tending this garden for years. Its' value comes from my care.

PABLO

Maybe you should be grateful you've had it for free for so long.

FRANK

Ginny and I have been researching adverse possession.

PABLO

You are invoking squatter's rights?

FRANK

I'm thinking we might have a case.

PABLO

Frank, I like you. I really do. And let me tell you, you don't want to get in a legal argument with Smith, Krause, and Wilson.

FRANK

Sometimes the little man wins.

PABLO

You've never been the little man, Frank Butley. And we can't have another incident like we did this morning.

FRANK

There was no incident. It was a spirited discussion.

PABLO

I have sixty colleagues coming on Saturday. We have every right to do what we are doing.

FRANK

But what about my garden and its infinite delicacy of planting? You are sacrificing all the work I have done. For what: to make it look ordinary and common? Just days after you said you loved it. Are you a liar, Pablo?

PABLO

I do like your garden. I like its' grace and elegance. But Tania's garden is better, because it is natural.

FRANK

Nature is not why people move to this neighborhood. You could have bought a house in hippy dippy Takoma Park and been as messy and native as you wanted. Why did you move here is you want to change everything?

PABLO

We don't want to change everything. We just want to add our touch to the landscape. Tania believes your plants are eroding the environment. They are foreign to the natural landscape.

FRANK

So is Tania, anti-foreigner?

PABLO

Of course not.

FRANK

Does she think YOU are eroding the cultural environment of this nation?

PABLO

Back away Frank.

FRANK

No. You tell her to back off my defenseless plants. This is a border dispute. And I'm not giving up one inch of my yard without a fight.

PABLO

You don't want to fight with me, Frank.

FRANK

I would say the same, Pablo. I've been in this town a long time. I know powerful people.

VIGNETTE NINE- FRIDAY MORNING

(TANIA enters with a tray of lemonade and a pint of ice cream with spoon and greets the GOMEZ GARDEN LANDSCAPE TECHNICIANS as they come in, delivering flats of flowers, a shovel and a post hole digger. One sits on one of Frank's chairs to finish the lemonade. Then they exit.)

SCENE 9- FRIDAY MORNING

TANIA

Maybe we should just cancel the BBQ- Stand down before we fall down.

PABLO

What? The plants and fence go in today. My entire firm arrives tomorrow afternoon.

TANIA

But Pablo, I called Virginia names!

PABLO

I'm sure she deserved it! Don't go soft, Tania. This is not about flowers. It's about principles. This is war.

TANIA

It's not war. Not yet. I need to go talk to her. I'll make her understand our point of view. The pressure we are under.

PABLO

I don't think you should. In fact I say no.

TANIA

No?

PABLO

Frank threatened me.

TANIA

Sweet Frank? No way.

PABLO

Oh. He showed some big "cojones" last night.

TANIA

That term is ridiculous. Testicles are the most delicate part of a man. What did you say?

PABLO

Nothing! All I know is he said we are wild, messy people and we should go native somewhere else.

TANIA

He did not say that!

PABLO

It's what he meant. And he says he knows powerful people. He says he works for the agency.

TANIA

What does that mean?

PABLO

In Chile it means very bad things.

TANIA

Do you think Frank Butley is CIA?

PABLO

CIA? No! Frank thinks ferns are a form of torture.

TANIA

But he knows powerful people. And she's a defense contractor. What have we gotten ourselves in to?

PABLO

Nobody tells me what I can do or not do. Not in my house. NOT IN MY BACK YARD!

TANIA

Pablo, are you feeling OK?

PABLO

It's nothing. He's getting to me. But we will not be bullied and threatened into submission.

TANIA

Pablo, they are our neighbors. We have to live next to them. Our children will have to live next to them.

PABLO

They are researching Adverse Possession.

TANIA

Mr. and Mrs. Frank Butley are invoking squatter rights? Do they have a case?

PABLO

I told them they didn't.

TANIA

But do they?

PABLO

They need to have been openly and notoriously using a piece of land as would an owner for a certain number of years.

TANIA

They have. Haven't they?

PABLO

My father lost a lot of land in Chile due to squatters. It was so demoralizing for him. I will not let that happen to me. Not in this way. It's ridiculous.

TANIA

I thought Squatter rights were for poor people.

PABLO

It's a travesty of justice.

TANIA

But you say they don't have a case?

PABLO

No, I didn't say that. I told them they didn't want to fight Smith, Krause and Wilson.

TANIA

You told them to not fight the Man?

PABLO

Yes.

TANIA

Because we are now: the Man?

PABLO

Yes.

TANIA

One thing is this being between two neighbors. But now you set up that small old couple against a huge cold law firm...and everything seems very different.

PABLO

Isn't that what the struggle is for you? Moving up? Buying a house? Becoming the boss? Isn't this the American Dream?

TANIA

Enabling large institutions to crush little old white people? No!

PABLO

They are Republicans!

TANIA

They are still people!

PABLO

Tania you know better than anyone that we don't reverse years of discrimination, of growing up like second-class citizens, of being the "minority" because in one instance we have the upper hand.

TANIA

We? Wait a second, Señor Mister. You were part of the upper class. You weren't called a spic in second grade or asked if you were illegal when you applied for a waitressing job. You were not treated inferior in Chile in anyway. Pablo, you grew up with the biggest silver spoon in your mouth of anyone I know.

PABLO

I became a minority the moment I moved to in this country. And I know that we have to WANT to be the MAN or nothing will ever change.

TANIA

No! It's all this Man, Machista, Cojones talk that is the problem. I'm going to talk to Virginia, woman-to-woman. And get this resolved.

(TANIA marches inside, PABLO follows her.)

VIGNETTE 10- FRIDAY MORNING

(Morning. VIRGINIA enters through the Center stage alley with a cup of coffee and a newspaper. She surveys the damage. She crosses in to the Del Valle yard and dumps her coffee in their birdbath. She then goes to her deck, opens her newspaper and sits, aggressively, in wait. TANIA comes out, spots her...and approaches.)

SCENE 10 FRIDAY MORNING

TANIA

Virginia. I don't mean to intrude on your morning.

VIRGINIA

Tania. I've taken the day off. Don't you have a big party happening tomorrow? Sixty fancy schmanzy lawyers rolling in your mud pit?

TANIA

Pablo and I are good people. We don't want to hurt you.

VIRGINIA

Frank and I are good people too.

TANIA

I'm so sorry I said those things to you.

VIRGINIA

Thank you. Well, it wasn't my finest moment either. And at least I learned something. Swearing in Spanish seems so much more satisfying.

TANIA

I promise, you won't hear that type of language again.

VIRGINIA

Would you like a seat? You must be tired.

TANIA

Thank you.

VIRGINIA

You should take a load off. Here let me help you prop up your feet. Your poor ankles.

TANIA

I never thought I would swell up like this.

VIRGINIA

None of us do. And then it happens. But it's so worth it. You'll see. Kids add a lot of color to your life.

TANIA

Ginny, you need to know, I never intended for this to get like this.

VIRGINIA

I know. I know. The men got involved and suddenly...

TANIA

Exactly! The men talked and then things just blew up. And I don't want this to get worse. I knew if I came here, and we talked that would be a step in the right direction. There has to be a compromise.

VIRGINIA

I am so relieved to hear you say that.

TANIA

It's just been so overwhelming and all at once. The pregnancy, the move, and the firm and now all this stuff. The entire office is coming tomorrow. The baby is due in four weeks...

VIRGINIA

The only thing that matters is you need to take care of yourself. Keeping you and the baby healthy has to be your priority.

TANIA

Yes. Of course.

VIRGINIA

So ironic this all had to happen the same week as Frank's gardening competition.

TANIA

How did all of this spiral out of control?

VIRGINIA

Oh, that's simple. You and Pablo wanted more than what you had.

TANIA

Excuse me?

VIRGINIA

Frank and I are just so grateful for what we already have.

TANIA

Pablo and I are just trying to build a better future for our family.

VIRGINIA

I think I might have a very similar story to yours. I grew up with very few things. Not in New Mexico. But Buffalo. Like you, I made my way into the world. I started earning money...oh my...the flushness of it, the possibility of it, gave me quite a rush. Made me want things even more. Especially things that seemed hard to get. Like Respect.

TANIA

Ginny, we don't mean to be disrespectful. But we do have the right to build the fence.

VIRGINIA

You see, this is what I am talking about. Getting combative. I do that too. But Frank tells me, "honey: this is not about your rights, managing privileges. It's about your manners." Tania, you've worked so hard. So hard. And I commend you. And now you feel you earned the right to want things...But there is a polite way of getting what you want. Creating a broo-haha because you suddenly want a wood fence makes you come across as...entitled.

TANIA

Entitled?

VIRGINIA

Don't you think destroying someone else's flower bed is somewhat rude?

TANIA

Rude?

VIRGINIA

It's your attitude Tania. Think of where you came from and look around you! Look at all the resources you have, all you have accomplished...

TANIA

So we should be relieved and thankful to have gotten this far...?

VIRGINIA

Yes! Exactly!

TANIA

Because it's arrogant for someone like me to think she might deserve more?

VIRGINIA

No. But I just don't understand -with all you have going for you-why you would throw two families into such a terrible row over 23 inches of land.

TANIA

I felt you were the one blowing this out of proportion. You are the ones that felt entitled to plant flowers wherever you want...

VIRGINIA

Can you hear yourself? You are accusing us of what? Planting flowers. Now what kind of crime is that?

TANIA

It's our land. And those flowers are detrimental to the environment.

VIRGINIA

The environment! Great! Save the world, but screw your neighbors. You said you didn't understand how this all spiraled. And I do... So I'm explaining it to you: Your desire for more started this all.

TANIA

You mean my greed?

VIRGINIA

I didn't say that word. Did I?

TANIA

No one has ever called me greedy before.

VIRGINIA

You are a woman. They probably masked it with more generous words...like ambitious and determined....or bitchy. It's so unfair. Believe me, I know.

TANIA

I'm greedy for hoping to get what I paid for? So Virginia, what are you? How did you acquire more land than you bought?

VIRGINIA

As far as I remember, this has been like this for a very long time.

TANIA

And that's the crux of it. You have because you have. Because you are used to it. Stolen goods are not stolen, they are acquired. The world is already so entrenched in your favor you don't even need to recognize how you benefit from inequity. You are blind to your privilege! And you don't stop unless you are held accountable. You...you people...you...

VIRGINIA

You? What do you mean...by: You people?

TANIA

(Beat) You and Frank.

VIRGINIA

You mean senior people?

TANIA

I mean... you and Frank.

VIRGINIA

Do you mean white people?

TANIA

Do not put words in my mouth.

VIRGINIA

You are attacking us because we are rich and white. That's classism and racism. Would you make this kind of ruckus if Frank and I had been black? Or Latino? Would you attack us if we had a Cactus in our back yard?

TANIA

Oh, because Mexicans only want Cacti in their back yard?

VIRGINIA

Ah there it is, the big chip on the shoulder. You would handle this different if we were different.

TANIA

No. I would not. If you were my Latino neighbor and you had 2 feet of our yard, you better believe I would still come and claim it. But...I bet you would be a lot less resistant to our rightful legal rights if we "fit in better".

VIRGINIA

You think you're better than us because you're young and hip. That, young lady, is ageism.

TANIA

Virginia, the only "ism" you feel is your own narcissism. How you managed to paint yourself as the victim in all of this is a feat of self-delusion. We are the ones that have been cheated. Not you.

VIRGINIA

You are taking land we've nurtured for years.

TANIA

You know, I came over to apologize....

VIRGINIA

And I graciously accept your apology.

TANIA

I don't think I am giving it to you anymore.

VIRGINIA

Honey, you are pregnant. It's making you irrational.

TANIA

I'm passionately rational! (TANIA turns to go, then stops.) I've never been entitled a day in my life. Except now. When the title of our land actually says we are entitled to the land we bought and that you have. You are the occupation. But we shall overcome. You will not stop us.

VIGNETTE 11- FRIDAY MORNING

(The INSPECTOR enters and looks at her clipboard. She slaps a STOP ORDER on to the tree and exits. TANIA freaks out and runs in to the house to call PABLO. VIRGINIA stand tall.)

SCENE 11- FRIDAY AFTERNOON/EVENING

(Split scene. FRANK AND VIRGINIA's house)

VIRGINIA

She called us racist!

FRANK

She actually said those words?

VIRGINIA

Not exactly but it was implied.

FRANK

Did you tell her that I considered voting for Obama?

VIRGINIA

No. I wouldn't dignify her with that.

(TANIA AND PABLO's house)

PABLO

I hurried home the moment you called me.

TANIA

And then the officials. They came. They came.

PABLO

Where are all the fence workers?

TANIA

Pablo, a stop order from the DC government is a STOP ORDER. I had to send them home.

PABLO and FRANK

Sons of bitches.

FRANK

Just because we disagree does not mean we are racist. How could she think us racist?

VIRGINIA

Who knows with these people.

PABLO

Frank said he knew people.

TANIA

They came, with their little tablet and little pen and looked over everything and then they slapped a big yellow sign on my tree.

VIRGINIA and TANIA

It's code.

VIRGINIA

Why do they always have to turn it into a race thing?

FRANK

Every time.

VIRGINIA

I think it gives them a sort of moral impunity...permission to do what they want. But the stop order gave them a scare.

FRANK

Wait. A stop order?

VIRGINIA

Yes. I called in some favors. Paul made sure they got a big fine. I thought you would be happy.

FRANK

Happy! Have you seen that mess? We need that fence. The judges will look at this and I'll be the laughing stock!

PABLO

How did we break code?

TANIA

Our fence is six feet and one inch. It should only be six feet.

PABLO

But it's not even up! It's on the ground. It's not even a fence yet.

TANIA

Just a reminder that we are "wrong" and don't do things their way. They have such a huge home field advantage. They were just looking for a reason to stop us. And they did. So there is a stop order. And a huge \$2000 fine.

VIRGINIA

I'm at my wits end. We are decent people. Did we not welcome them with open arms?

FRANK

We brought them wine and chocolate.

VIRGINIA

We bought them FINE wine and chocolate ...so they would know...how extra happy we were to have them here.

FRANK

And this is how they repay us.

TANIA

The BBQ is tomorrow.

PABLO

I'm going to have to cancel. I'm going to have to go back and tell everyone that it's off.

TANIA

Pablo. You can't.

PABLO

The only thing that looks good in our lawn is Frank's friggin' flower bed...we are doomed.

TANIA

Don't talk like that, Pablo.

PABLO

I have to look reality in the eye. There will never be Smith, Krause, Wilson, and Del Valle.

TANIA

Shut up, Pablo. And stop talking nonsense.

FRANK

I'm withdrawing from the competition.

VIRGINIA

No. Let the judges see what we are up against. It will build good will.

PABLO

I'll never make partner.

FRANK

I'll never take Best Garden.

PABLO and FRANK
We've lost.

VIRGINIA and TANIA
No!

TANIA
We just haven't had a chance to win...but we will. We will.

PABLO
It's Friday afternoon. A stop order is a bureaucratic nightmare...of waiting for the judge, paying a fine. There's no way we can get that fence up by tomorrow.

VIRGINIA
Frank, those plants are living things and you are their only line of defense.

FRANK
I can't bear to think of it.

TANIA
Pablo, where is the man who was sixth in his class? Where is the man who stood up to his father and demanded to marry the woman he loves? You are telling me that Frank and Virginia are bigger and stronger than you?

VIRGINIA
Are you telling me that after all that de-grubbing, all that insecticide, all that miracle grow... you've decided to sit back and watch your beloved flowers be trampled by a wood fence?

PABLO and FRANK
Hell No. You're right.

VIRGINIA and TANIA
Justice is on our side.

TANIA
So we have a stop order. Time for you to start writing and documenting a defense.

PABLO
No. Let me see your hands.

TANIA
My poor swollen puffy pregnant hands?

PABLO

These are the hands of people who scrubbed floors, and worked the land. It's time for me to buck up.

VIRGINIA

I thought she was coming over to apologize. And instead she taunted us.

FRANK

Enough. They must be stopped!

PABLO

Time for my delicate Chilean hands to get rough.

VIRGINIA

Frank, let's get tough.

FRANK

Tough is my middle name.

TANIA

Let's build our own fence...between us...and the imperialist gardens beyond.

FRANK and PABLO and TANIA and VIRGINIA

We will not stand down.

VIGNETTE 12- FRIDAY EVENING

(TANIA and PABLO exit in to their house. FRANK exits up the CS alley. VIRGINIA grabs the chair off the deck and moves it to between the flowerbeds. FRANK enters with a chain. He crosses to VIRGINIA. They chain her to the chair. FRANK then picks up a shovel and begins to patrol the property line. TANIA and PABLO come out.)

SCENE 12- FRIDAY EVENING

(VIRGINIA and FRANK are chanting, "Give our plants a chance!" as the scene begins.)

PABLO

What are you doing?

FRANK

Border patrol.

TANIA

You are on my property, Mr. Butley.

FRANK

I'm protecting my property, Senorita Del Valle.

TANIA

That's almost Doctor Del Valle to you, Butley.

PABLO

Frank, I'm going to have ask you to move aside.

FRANK

To build a fence. Never.

TANIA

Virginia, please get up.

VIRGINIA

No can do.

PABLO

Don't tell me you are doing a sit in.

VIRGINIA

They were effective for young folk back then. Maybe they will work for us old folk now.

FRANK

Are you building the fence by yourselves?

PABLO

We are.

VIRGINIA

But there's a stop order.

TANIA

Well, a little sign can't stop us.

PABLO

We are taking back what you took from us.

(TANIA crosses upstage to get the post hole digger.)

FRANK

Oh no you don't!

(FRANK picks up an acorn; he throws it at PABLO. An acorn fight ensues.)

VIRGINIA

GET OFF MY LAWN!

TANIA

It's our lawn.

VIRGINIA

Get off my lawn before I call the police.

TANIA

It's our lawn. Thought we could talk this out. But no. There is no talking with you people.

VIRGINIA

You people. Did you hear that? That's it!

(VIRGINIA runs off to call the police)

FRANK

This is my property. My land.

TANIA

No, it's my land. I'm building my fence to keep you out!

(TANIA raises the post hole digger above the flowerbed.)

FRANK

You can't! You can't do that.

PABLO

Don't tell my wife what to do.

(TANIA plunges the digger into the flowerbed.)

FRANK

NOOOOO!

Wait a minute-I planted those flowers. I paid for those seeds and bulbs. I can prove it.
You can't keep them on your side.

PABLO

He's right.

(She reaches down and plucks one out. She throws it at FRANK)

TANIA

Here you go. I'm returning your flowers to you.

FRANK

No! Stop!

TANIA

You stop, Frank.

FRANK

It's a massacre.

(TANIA starts pulling out a lot of flowers. Suddenly VIRGINIA comes out with a chain saw.)

VIRGINIA

Unhand my husband's flowers. Or else!

(VIRGINIA revs up the chain saw and crosses to the tree.)

TANIA

No!

(VIRGINIA starts to attack the tree.)

PABLO

Not the tree!

TANIA

My Oak Tree.

PABLO

No!

VIRGINIA

This will make us better neighbors, Pablo.

PABLO
Stop!

TANIA
I'm going to call the police.

PABLO
I can't be part of an incident!

TANIA
None of this would have happened if it wasn't for the BBQ.

PABLO
No, they would have been happy with a normal lawn...but no...you had to go exotic.

TANIA
Native is not exotic.

FRANK
It's ugly. It goes against the historical landscaping of this neighborhood.

TANIA
It was here before the neighborhood ever existed.

PABLO
Oh my God.

(FRANK make to squirts TANIA with the hose- PABLO jumps in front of her. Only a fine mist comes out.)

PABLO
Maldita sea!!!

TANIA
Argh!!!!

PABLO
Tania are you OK?

TANIA
ARGHHH My Water...

PABLO
The baby. It's early.

VIRGINIA
The Baby!

TANIA
It's coming.

VIRGINIA
Tania, just breathe.

TANIA
I am breathing!

(TANIA screams)

VIRGINIA
Your breathing is all wrong.

PABLO
We have to get to the hospital.

TANIA
I don't think so...

PABLO
I'm getting dizzy.

VIRGINIA
You are hyperventilating Pablo. (VIRGINIA slaps PABLO) Stay focused.

TANIA
Forget it. I don't think I can walk more.

PABLO
Wait, you can't have the baby out here in the field! Like...

TANIA
Like a peasant!???!

FRANK
Is she going to squat?

VIRGINIA
Get a grip, Frank.

(TANIA screams)

VIRGINIA

(To Tania) Honey, lean on me.

TANIA

Ginny, I'm so scared. My baby...

VIRGINIA

It's OK. The baby is going to be fine.

FRANK

Can you take another step?

TANIA

I have to lie down.

PABLO

Not here...in the dirt.

VIRGINIA

It's going to have to be here.

(FRANK takes off his sweater)

FRANK

Lie on my sweater.

PABLO

Breathe Breathe Breathe. I'm so sorry Tania. This got too big...we lost sight.

TANIA

It's OK (Screams) Ay Dios Mio de los Santos!!!!

PABLO

I love you.

TANIA

Put a Madre!

FRANK

Your Spanish is so much better than you think.

VIRGINIA

Breathe.

FRANK

Breathe.

PABLO
Breathe. Honey.

VIRGINIA
We are here. It's going to be fine.

TANIA
Arghhhhhhhh!

PABLO
(Yelling with her) Arghhhhhh!

(Lights out...a Baby cries:Arghhhh!)

EPILOGUE: SPOTLIGHTS – ONE YEAR AND ONE MONTH LATER

(ALL actors move to the positions they were in for the Prologue. A NANNY brings out a baby in a carrier, then exits.)

PABLO

There is a now a six foot wood fence that divides us.

FRANK

It is tall. And it is stately.

TANIA

Right were the property line is supposed to be.

FRANK

I didn't know the fence was in the wrong place.

VIRGINIA

But if we really had looked...we would have seen...that of course the yard wasn't right. We just never noticed. We never needed to notice.

FRANK

The new fence forced me to re-design my garden... I decided to relax and include a couple more indigenous Mid-Atlantic plants. It's a hybrid garden now...not as formal...

VIRGINIA

But a lot more interesting! This year Frank won Best Garden.

FRANK

Take that Phillip Saxon!

VIRGINIA

And our new hybrid garden will be the perfect setting for our son's upcoming wedding!

FRANK

To Bill.

TANIA

We trimmed back all the branches on the tree.

FRANK

No acorns getting stuck in my bushes.

VIRGINIA

Less raking. More spiders.

TANIA

Fewer mosquitos! And I planted some peonies. Some transplants can work well in a Native environment.

PABLO

It became too big of a problem. Too fast. We could have taken our time.

TANIA

I don't know why we didn't.

PABLO

I didn't expect to behave that way.

VIRGINIA

We are civilized people again.

FRANK

We got too caught up.

TANIA

In all of it.

PABLO

And what better reason to cancel an ill-conceived BBQ than the birth of a baby girl.

TANIA

A girl!

FRANK and VIRGINIA

A girl!

(A beat)

PABLO

Her name is Margarita.

FRANK

Which is Daisy in Spanish

TANIA

A native plant.

VIRGINIA

That is both a weed...

FRANK
...and a flower.

(They all look at each other)

TANIA
I defended my dissertation.

PABLO
And last week, I finally made partner.

VIRGINIA
Now and then when Tania and Pablo go out, Frank and I get to babysit.

TANIA
And I'm expecting again.

PABLO
Lots of surprises!

VIRGINIA
So soon!!! Ah! Irish twins.

FRANK
Sorry- that's an old expression. Like I said. New neighbors.

TANIA
New...

TANIA and PABLO and VIRGINIA and FRANK
Friends.