

May's Mandala

Stephen Foglia

CHARACTERS

MAY - F, 10

DERRY - M, 14

MOM - F, 40s

CATERPILLAR

GRASS

OAK

SQUIRREL

MOLE

CAT

RACCOON

LIGHTNING BUG

WASPS

DOG

BIRD

DEER

ANOTHER SQUIRREL

Non-human characters may generally be played by any gender. Raccoon and Squirrel characters are female, even if played by a male. Lightning Bug is male even if played by a female. May refers to Caterpillar as male, but she may be wrong about that.

PROLOGUE

A yard in coastal North Carolina. Flower bed, live oak tree, grass. A baseball.

May lays out a perimeter with twigs and fallen branches. With her foot, she nudges the baseball outside the circle.

MAY

There's so much suffering in the world. Sometimes I wonder if that's all it is. Not my life, specifically. I'm...pretty good. I guess. But the world. Life. The stuff that makes it up... I've tried to make it better. I know I'm only 10, but there are totally things you can do. Nickelodeon has some good ideas, actually. They have these kids at the Kids' Choice Awards who get to be on tv because they did something great, even though they're kids. I used to watch more when we first moved here. I was just seven. Church is good for ideas. We went there when we first moved, too. Ideas like...we volunteered in a food pantry. Me and mom. My brother Derry was supposed to come, but he said he got gut-crunch from some bad tuna. Mom's good for ideas, too sometimes. She's had a lot of lives, she says, but I only know about three. There was a before-life, before Dad, then life with Dad when we were an army family, and now life with us. She took me to the old folks' home — they call it Belle Reve which means beautiful dream (it's French) which I think is creepy because it's like they're putting all the old people to sleep and the dream is where their minds go to leave their dying bodies behind forever. I helped with their chores. Cleaning under furniture. Getting things in and out of the attic. I felt better for a while. And it really was a lot cleaner behind their sofas. But then you turn on the news. I'm joking, obviously we don't turn on the news. We're not psychos. And we don't live in Belle Reve. What I mean is you look on your phone, and you realize that Nickelodeon is lies, and the world is too suffering, and it's like a joke that a 10-year-old could do anything about it, when there's like...- you know?

But not here. I'm done fixing the whole world. I'm going to make a place, almost the size of my yard, so pretty small but also kind of big. In this area -- it's called a mandala, actually, do you need me to explain that to you? In this mandala, life isn't suffering.

May finishes outlining her mandala.

She looks at it.

SCENE ONE
A Late Spring Day

Mom enters.

MOM
So this is it?

MAY
Mm.

MOM
What do you do now?

MAY
I wait.

Silence.

MOM
You'll still come in for dinner, right?

MAY
Duh.

Mom bends down and kisses May.

MOM
If you want to talk about Dad, you'll let me know.

MAY
It's not about Dad.

MOM
I know.

MAY
I don't want to talk about Dad.

MOM
Then don't.

MAY

Can you get out of the mandala? Because you're making things worse. And you're only supposed to make things better when you're in here.

MOM

I'm sorry. But if you do want to talk about anything...

After a moment, Mom leaves.

May stares at her mandala for a while.

Her eyes catch on something in the garden. Upon closer inspection, she discovers Caterpillar.

MAY

Hello.

Caterpillar is busy eating everything they can.

MAY

Hello?

CATERPILLAR
(with mouth full)

Can't talk. Eating.

MAY

You're in my mandala.

CATERPILLAR
(loud chewing sounds)

Your what?

MAY

Mandala. In here, we don't allow suffering.

CATERPILLAR

Sounds good. Nice talk. Gotta eat.

MAY

Wow, you look hungry.

CATERPILLAR

You do this to your mom when you're out to dinner? Listen, I gotta be a butterfly in a few months: you think that happens by itself? Now you trying to decrease suffering or you just trying to make me feel bad about my eating?

Beat. Caterpillar and May in a staredown.
Caterpillar returns noisily to eating.

MAY

I didn't mean to make you feel bad. I eat a lot, too. Mom calls me the beast.

Caterpillar does not respond.

MAY

Do you like parsley? Because I think it tastes gross.

Caterpillar gives her a look.

MAY

I just mean I can give you more. I'd be happy to share. So that I don't have to eat it.

Caterpillar turns back to eating.

CATERPILLAR

(chewing, not looking up)

Okay.

MAY

What?

CATERPILLAR

Okay, bring that parsley over here. Like I said, butterflies don't make themselves.

May happily runs and grabs a bunch of parsley.
She deposits it near Caterpillar who makes a
grateful sound while munching.

May wanders out onto the grass and lies down.

GRASS lies nearby, facing her, but May does
not seem to notice them. Until suddenly she
does.

MAY

Oh!

GRASS

Ah!

Ah! MAY
 Oh! GRASS
 You're real! I see you! MAY
 Of course I'm real! What did you think I was? GRASS
 I thought you were just grass. MAY
 JUST grass? JUST grass? Listen, missy, I am grade-A certified Zoysia. There's no plusher lawn this side of -- I have a pile like the finest carpet -- I will have you know -- GRASS
 But I see you. MAY
 Big whoop you see me. Everyone sees me! You've been stomping around on me with those little meat paddles of yours for four years, and now you want an award for SEEING me? GRASS
 I'm sorry I didn't notice before. You are super comfy. MAY
 Too late for flattery! GRASS
 It's just that things are different since I made my mandala. I think I'm seeing things I couldn't see before. MAY
 Manda-what? GRASS
 It's a little universe. And you're in it. MAY

GRASS

Oh no, you're not tricking me into buying property! I have a ten-year growth plan, and kooky time-shares ain't part of it

MAY

But you're already here.

GRASS

And if you think I'm paying you a cent for it -- I invoke squatter's rights! Does everyone hear me? You're my witnesses!

MAY

Calm down.

GRASS

You calm down -- tell me to calm down -- you think I got where I am by staying calm? I'm burning, burning all the time! Tension fuels growth.

MAY

Derry's just going to cut you.

GRASS

You think I don't know that? Listen, your brother and I have a whole system worked out. He gives me a little trim, I re-route the energy to the border. One of these days I'm gonna break through into the flower beds, and THEN you'll see tension! THEN you'll see something whether it's in your mandawhatzit or not.

MAY

You want to grow in the flower beds?

GRASS

Ha. Ha. Ha. "You want to grow in the flower beds?" You're cute, kid. I wanna grow everywhere! I'm grass! I'm Zoysia! Look at those flower beds. Look at that rich soil. Look at that clear sunlight. No oak to cut you out. And you know the best part? Dogs aren't allowed to pee on you!

MAY

You don't like it when they pee on you?

GRASS

Have you seen my bald spot! No, that one over there. Hideous. Yeesh. Those dogs are menace.

MAY

The thing about my mandala is, nobody is supposed to suffer. So if it hurts when dogs pee on you...

GRASS

Yes! Yes! Sue their little tushies! Get em outta here.

MAY

I'll see what I can do.

GRASS

And while you're at it, how about walking a little lighter on my leaves? I have feelings, you know?

May looks at Caterpillar.

CATERPILLAR

(mouth full)

Leave me out of it.

MAY

Hahaha. "Leave" me out of it.

Caterpillar and Grass stare at her.

MAY

Cause it's...

GRASS

Yeah leave him out of it. I'm not good enough for his palate. Oh, he tried to eat me, all right, but I put a stop to that. Sucked up some pretty noxious chemicals. Did widdle baby get a tummy ache?

Caterpillar just shakes his head at Grass's pathetic outburst.

May takes her shoes off.

MAY

Is there anything else I can do for you?

GRASS

What an offer. Well, let's see -- yes! As a matter of fact. Do you see that big dumb oak over there?

MAY

I don't think the tree is dumb.

GRASS

Honey, your opinion on these matters...

MAY

It's a perfect climbing tree, and a perfect swinging tree, and a perfect Christmas lights tree, and a perfect Halloween tree

GRASS

Sheesh, never mind. Smart tree, dumb tree, it's all the same to me. But take a look at the crown. Like he's headed to the Kentucky Derby! Ridiculous. It blots out half the sky! My little shoots can't grow. Who does he think he is?

MAY

You want him to drop his leaves?

GRASS

Just a little gap is all I'm asking. Is that so much? When he has so many...

MAY

Have you asked him?

GRASS

Trees are absolute zeros as conversationalists, darling, if there's one thing you take from me, I want it to be that. -- And the thing about the dogs.

MAY

Maybe I'll talk to him.

GRASS

Yeah, you talk to him. Tell him about the Mandalay Bay. There's a new sheriff in town.

May walks over to OAK.

MAY

Good morning.

OAK

Mm?

MAY

I don't know if you remember me. Actually I don't know if I've ever formally introduced myself. My name is May. I used to sit in your branches a lot?

OAK

Oh, I know you. Decent singer. Not much range, though.

MAY

Uh-huh. Well.

(in a bit of a rush, nervous)

Anyway I was wondering, you see Grass over there needs light to grow, and it's just you have such a massive crown, so many amazing branches and leaves, that it makes it hard for others, and here in the mandala what we're trying to do -- have I told you about the mandala?

OAK

Easy there, short stuff. You'll turn yourself purple.

MAY

I'm sorry, it's just I'm a big fan: I've looked up to you for a long time, and it's hard to believe I'm actually talking to you now, especially when I need a favor, on behalf of my friend, and that makes things awkward, but nobody said life wasn't going to be awkward and

OAK

Whoa, whoa. What's the favor?

MAY

Could you drop a few leaves to let some light in for Grass? You can see he's having trouble growing near you.

GRASS

Trouble? Forty years I've been locked out!

May signals Grass to be quiet and let her do the talking.

OAK

Haha. Nice try. But in case no one told you, I'm kinda the boss around here.

MAY

Oh, ok, I mean, that's not surprising, I definitely always thought you were the boss, but the thing is you'll still be the biggest. By far. Grass is really short.

GRASS

Who's short? I have a root system long enough to choke your house.

May signals Grass to cut it out again.

OAK

Sweetcheeks, you're missing the point. It's big man drinks first. I don't make the rules. Grass and me are in competition. If he drinks, I don't drink.

MAY

Even the plants are fighting each other?

OAK

Everything, as far as I know. Life is competition.

MAY

What about the moss growing on you? Or the birds that live in you? There are other kinds of relationships. There are friendships.

OAK

Speak for yourself. I don't have any friends.

MAY

What about other trees?

OAK

There's not another oak like me for a couple blocks. All I see are those crepe-myrtles on the sidewalk. Have you ever tried talking to them? They're airheads. Skinny, self-obsessed little roadsiders. No fun.

MAY

I used to think you knew everyone. And with your big arms and roots you had the whole world in a hug. Aren't you lonely?

OAK

Lonely...lonely. Yeah, I'm a little bit lonely these days.

MAY

Is there anything I can do for you?

OAK

Actually...

MAY

What is it?

OAK
No...

MAY
C'mon! Tell me!

OAK
It's embarrassing.

MAY
You can talk to me.

OAK
Ah, here goes. When you get to be my age -- no fair asking, by the way -- you're supposed to be surrounded by kids. And I don't have any. As far as I know. It's hard to tell.

MAY
But you drop acorns all the time! I used to collect them.

OAK
And you wonder why I don't have kids!

MAY
I'm so sorry! I don't know what I was thinking. I didn't realize, well I knew, but I didn't know --

OAK
-- No, no, it's a little bit my fault. I kinda starved all the ones that planted close by if you wanna know the truth. But I have to eat!

MAY
What about the others?

OAK
Oh, you know. It's tough out there for a little seed. You need your shell cracked, you need to get buried, but you can't let anyone eat you.

MAY
Sounds like you could use a little help...

OAK
I mean if you're taking care of everybody.

MAY
And what about some sun for grass?

OAK

Now that energy goes into making the seeds.

MAY

Huh.

OAK

But with a little helper maybe I don't need to make so many. So you help with my thing, and we'll talk about it.

MAY

Deal.

May begins to walk away. SQUIRREL gets her attention.

SQUIRREL

Psst.

MAY

Who's there? Oh, it's a squirrel! Hello!

SQUIRREL

Hey uh, so uh, I was up there, listening, can't help overhearing, you know how it is, and uh, I'm really interested in what you're doing with the mandala and whatnot, it'll probably never work, but it's visionary, you know, and I think vision's important in the youth such as yourself, only I was thinking, well I also heard the conversation with Mr. Oak, who is my house by the way, mostly, you know being a squirrel, and also somewhat my source of food, which is to say, acorn-wise, the deal you cut with him also has bearings on me.

OAK

Who are you talking to? Is it that squirrel?

SQUIRREL

It's me, Oak.

OAK

Get off of me! I told you to move out!

SQUIRREL

Oak's always like this; it's a thing we do.

OAK

It's not a thing. That squirrel eats my fruit.

SQUIRREL

And your buds. Don't forget your buds.

OAK

May, get her out of here. I don't want her.

SQUIRREL

I live in the mandala, too, Oak. I have rights.

(checking)

I have rights, don't I? I'm not totally sure how this works.

MAY

You definitely have rights. We all have rights.

OAK

What about my fruit? She eats the unborn!

SQUIRREL

From what I hear you aren't exactly a model father figure yourself -- something about starving your own seeds for light?

OAK

That was a private conversation.

SQUIRREL

What can I say, I'm a gossip and a busybody -- but seriously you should know that about me, May: I watch everything, you ever need any dirt...

MAY

What is it you want?

SQUIRREL

Oh, just a hundred nuts or so. A share of the mast. Nothing special. Nothing he can't afford. Enough to get through the winter.

MAY

Oak?

OAK

It's too many.

MAY

How many do you make?

In a good year? OAK

This year. MAY

Well...there are fluctuations... OAK

Guess. MAY

It's bad luck to count before they sprout... OAK

Oak. MAY

Five thousand? OAK

Pause.

So a couple hundred of those would be... MAY

May tries to do the math.

4 percent. SQUIRREL

Four percent, that's not bad! MAY

It's too many. I told you, I want kids. Who will support me in my old age? OAK

What if I personally plant a few of your seeds, so you know some made it into the ground. MAY

Here in the yard? OAK

MAY

I'll put them outside of your shade. They'll have lots of light.

OAK

Four percent...

SQUIRREL

It's a good deal. Be grateful I'm not asking ten. I could have a family, too, you know.

OAK

I thought you did have a family. I swore I used to see them running around...

SQUIRREL

Hey! Hey! Let's stick to the point.

OAK

I accept.

MAY

Do you shake on it?

SQUIRREL

Don't be ridiculous.

Squirrel starts to scamper further off.

MAY

(to Squirrel, Oak, and Grass)

See you got what you want. And you got what you want. And you got what you want.

(remembering Caterpillar)

And you, too!

Caterpillar looks up briefly from munching
parsley.

GRASS

What I want? All I heard was a vague promise that'll take years to fulfill!

MAY

It can all work out. Is what I'm saying.

SQUIRREL

I hope you're right. I want this to be real. But remember I watch everything. You haven't seen what I've seen.

SCENE TWO
A Summer Day

May brings Caterpillar another bunch of parsley.
She lays it down next to him. He comes over and
starts eating.

CATERPILLAR

Thank you.

MAY

You're welcome.

He continues to eat. She watches.

MAY

You have really pretty colors.

CATERPILLAR

Mmm.

MAY

How old are you?

CATERPILLAR

Why, you wanna date me?

MAY

Ew no. Gross.

CATERPILLAR

Oh, I'm gross now?

MAY

I mean you're a caterpillar.

CATERPILLAR

But one day I'll be a butterfly.

MAY

I'm sorry. You're a very attractive caterpillar. Like I said. And I'm sure you'll make an even prettier butterfly. But it's just as a human person -- and I don't think I'm being species-ist -- but also I'm kind of young, and honestly I'm not even sure I'm ready to date

Caterpillar, who has remained silent, suddenly bursts out laughing.

CATERPILLAR

I'm just playing with you.

MAY

Oh.

May smiles.

CATERPILLAR

I'm a couple weeks old. How about you?

MAY

Ten. Years.

CATERPILLAR

Whoa.

MAY

I know.

CATERPILLAR

I ain't tryna date a grandma.

May laughs.

CATERPILLAR

You look good though. For your age. Ten years...

Caterpillar laughs.

Derry comes out from the house carrying his skateboard.

MAY

Where are you going?

DERRY

None of your business.

MAY

Are you meeting Lys?

DERRY

Do you wanna meet these hands?

May laughs.

MAY

Hey hold on. Come here.

DERRY

I don't have time for this.

MAY

It'll just take a second. I want you to meet someone.

DERRY

This better not be another doll you made to practice kissing.

Derry approaches May. May gestures towards Caterpillar.

MAY

There.

DERRY

Where?

MAY

Right there, look.

DERRY

What am I looking at?

MAY

It's a caterpillar.

DERRY

Cool.

Derry starts to leave.

MAY

Aren't you going to say hello?

DERRY

Hi. Bye. I hope you're enjoying life in May's little lalaland.

MAY

He is, as a matter of fact.

CATERPILLAR

(with mouth full)

It's all right.

MAY

Everyone is. I think you would, too.

DERRY

Why would I want to play in the yard with bugs? I've got people to see. Because I have friends.

MAY

I have friends.

DERRY

Actual friends.

MAY

Your friends are lame.

DERRY

Oh no! The authority on lameness says my friends are lame? I better ditch them for a bunch of invertebrates.

MAY

It's better here. We all try to make things better.

Derry starts to leave again.

MAY

Could you take your shoes off? When you're out here? Grass likes it if you walk a little softer.

DERRY

OK, "Grass" is not a person. "Grass" doesn't have likes.

MAY

That's what I thought, but then we started talking, and it turns out pretty much everything is a person, and they all have likes.

DERRY

May, you're out of control. Get a real hobby. Play *Minecraft*.

MAY

Take off your shoes, please.

DERRY

I don't think I will. Because that's not my like.

MAY

Well, it's the rules.

DERRY

Your rules. Literally just your rules.

MAY

And if you want to be here.

DERRY

I don't. I'm leaving. Everything I want is out there.

MAY

Nothing good's out there.

DERRY

May, this mandala is made up. The border is just twigs. Where do you think the fertilizer came from that's in the flower beds? Where do you think it goes? It washes off and ruins the water. Where do you think the money that lets you sit in this yard all day comes from? Half of it's Dad's from the Army. Your clothes were manufactured by kids in China. You think you've got some little bubble where nothing bad happens, but your shirt is literally soaked in blood from outside. Now have fun with your caterpillar.

Derry leaves. May sits down. On the verge of tears.

CATERPILLAR

Your brother's a jerk.

MAY

No he's not.

CATERPILLAR

Just saying.

He's smart. MAY

Smart people can be jerks. CATERPILLAR

He's right. MAY

What's he right about? CATERPILLAR

I brought the outside in here. MAY

Yeah but you brought me food, too. So that's cool. CATERPILLAR

Thank you. MAY

Caterpillar grimaces. Writhes.

What's wrong? MAY

Haven't been feeling so good lately. CATERPILLAR

Are you starting to make your chrysalis? Is that why? MAY

Nah. Not time yet. This is something... CATERPILLAR

Maybe you ate the wrong thing? Did Grass poison you? Is it the parsley I brought? MAY

Girl, my life is eating. Nothing I eat is wrong. CATERPILLAR

What do you think it is? MAY

I don't know. But my stomach hurts all the time. CATERPILLAR

MAY

You don't look so good.

CATERPILLAR

My life must seem pretty glamorous to you. But it ain't easy. Gotta go go go. Got these feelings all the time telling me there's no time. But at least then I know everything's working. It's when stuff doesn't fit the plan, like you're feeling ill, you look up, and you're like what am I? What's the point of all this?

MAY

Can I touch you?

CATERPILLAR

Nah better not.

MAY

What makes you feel better?

CATERPILLAR

Eating.

MAY

My dad's in the army. Do you know what that is? They're like...the people who fight other people. When you need to fight other people.

CATERPILLAR

We're not really fighters.

MAY

We are. My dad's stationed in Niger. That's a country way far away. And a month ago he and some of his men went into a village where they thought bad guys were, and they shot everyone. They killed them. Most of the men. Some of the kids. They killed them, in their own hometown. Even though they weren't doing anything.

CATERPILLAR

Did they eat them?

MAY

We don't eat other people.

CATERPILLAR

You just kill them.

MAY

When I think about it I get sick to my stomach. And there's nothing that makes it go away. Because there's nothing that will bring them back. And that's my dad.

CATERPILLAR

I didn't know my dad.

MAY

Maybe that's better. I would never be in the army. That's Derry's thing. He says as soon as he turns 18 he's enlisting. I'd rather be a caterpillar.

CATERPILLAR

I don't think you're that different than the rest of us.

MAY

I don't see caterpillars massacring villages just because. I don't see you burning the planet.

CATERPILLAR

The planet's burning?

MAY

You haven't noticed? The temperature's going up every year.

CATERPILLAR

How long do you think I live?

MAY

Oh, right. Well, maybe that's why your stomach aches.

CATERPILLAR

Y'all are doing that??

MAY

The same day they said the news about my dad, there was this picture of a polar bear so skinny you could almost see through her. Polar bears are giants. They're like ten times the size of me. And they live where it's always cold and they can hunt seals in the water. But it's not cold enough anymore, and the ice they live on falls apart, and the seals aren't around, and they have to ride the ice and swim and look for more seals far away. And sometimes they ride the ice and they swim and they starve anyway.

CATERPILLAR

Nothing to eat.

MAY

Nothing to eat. I couldn't stop looking at the bear. She lost her home. She was looking for her place in the world, but it doesn't exist anymore. And nobody wants her. No one's saying "come here, Polar Bear, we need you, you're important, too."

CATERPILLAR

They should go further north.

MAY

There is no further north.

CATERPILLAR

Dang. More seals for us, I guess.

MAY

You don't even eat seals.

CATERPILLAR

I never tried one.

MAY

They're not plants.

CATERPILLAR

What's a plant?

MAY

They're not green.

CATERPILLAR

Mm. Speaking of green.

Caterpillar goes on eating.

Mom comes out.

MOM

Did Derry leave?

MAY

He went to hang out with his skate friends.

MOM

Goddamnit.

What? MAY

Nothing. MOM

How do you know if a caterpillar is sick? MAY

I don't know. If it stops eating? MOM

Caterpillar is still eating up a storm.

That's good. MAY

Suddenly Mom winces and grabs at her shoe.

Are those new? MAY

Painfully, Mom pries the shoe off. Her foot is bleeding. She hurls the shoe against Oak, who laughs softly.

Mom takes a couple steps out into the yard. May almost says something about wearing heels on Grass, but remains quiet.

Mom yanks her other shoe off. She can't decide what to do with it.

You're coming in for dinner. MOM

Now? MAY

When I say so. MOM

Okay. MAY

MOM

And we're going to talk about your grades.

MAY

My grades are good.

MOM

Not your grades. Your teacher's note.

MAY

Okay.

MOM

We're going to talk about summer plans.

MAY

Okay.

MOM

We're going to talk.

Mom walks back into the house carrying one shoe.

SCENE THREE***Another Summer Afternoon***

May examines a ridge in the yard. She is now dressed in a skin-color tank top and short green shorts.

GRASS

See? What'd I tell you? This neighborhood is a disaster. All kinds of unsavory elements. I'm Zoysia! I need decent, clean earth. A little bit of light. Is that so much? And what do I get instead? Moles. Can you believe it? Literally the worst people in the world. It's like having a colonoscopy, and they don't even know I'm up here! Do they care? Ha!

MAY

A mole did this?

GRASS

It wasn't a dolphin.

MAY

How do you know what a dolphin is?

GRASS

I read.

MAY

Okay, well technically moles have a right to be here, too.

GRASS

Oh, I didn't know the mandala extended *underground*.

MAY

You're underground.

GRASS

A couple inches, at most! You could pull me up with a finger. What's next, infinite air-space? That hawk up there is protected, too? You know if you keep digging straight down you'll get to the earth's core. Is that part of your mandala? Or how about straight through to the other side? Is a little patch of India part of your mandala?

MAY

Let me talk to him.

GRASS

Oh, like you talked to that big lummoX of a tree? Fat lotta good that's done me.

MAY

You have to be patient.

GRASS

Patient! I'm Zoysia. Do you know my growth rate?

MAY

Shh.

May crawls on the ground, knocking on the mole track.

MAY

Hello? Hello, Mole? Can we talk for a second?

Mole appears, wearing light-blocking glasses.

MAY

Oh!

MOLE

Howdy.

MAY

Um, hi. I'm May.

Mole nods.

MAY

And, um, first: welcome to the neighborhood.

MOLE

What neighborhood is that?

MAY

Oh, you can't...you can't see can you? There's um. Well there are a lot of houses and yards between two busy streets, and

MOLE

Not my line. The surface. I been on the range below long as I can recall. Maybe I oughtta be welcoming you.

MAY

Sure. Thanks. But so also, this particular yard, or part of it anyway, the part you're on now, see where the branches -- well you can't see -- but there are branches kind of marking it off, and inside is my mandala.

MOLE

Never cared for those two-dollar words.

MAY

It's like a neighborhood within a neighborhood.

MOLE

I got places to be, so if you'd scoot to the point.

MAY

There are certain rules in this mandala. Like we try not to harm others. We try to decrease suffering.

MOLE

Who tries?

MAY

We all do.

MOLE

Those sound like surface rules to me. Y'all're always cooking up some newfangled ideas for this or that. But I know my ways so simple I can find em in the dark.

MAY

I think you might find you like it here if you give it a try.

MOLE

Oh I like it here plenty as is. Whole mess a earthworms down there.

MAY

You, um, you're friends with earthworms?

MOLE

Friends? Ha. Yeah, I'd say worms and me get along just fine.

May looks at Caterpillar, who mimes eating.

MAY

You eat them?

MOLE

What else?

MAY

Oh. I'm not sure. I'm not sure how I feel about that.

MOLE

Food don't care about your feelings. And neither do I, frankly. Told ya life's simple down in the dirt. So if you'll excuse me.

MAY

Could you do it gently, then, if you have to?

MOLE

Oh, sure. I fix em with my little bite first, so they can't move or nothin. Then I put em away for later. And before I eat em I squeeze all the crud out of em. Just like this. Gentle as can be.

MAY

That doesn't sound gentle.

MOLE

I guess you'd have to ask the worm.

MAY

Maybe I will.

MOLE

Come on down sometime, and I'll introduce you. Get a look at the real world.

MAY

Okay. Nice talking to you.

Mole starts to leave.

MAY

Can you leave Grass alone?

MOLE

Who's Grass?

Mole leaves.

GRASS

Who's grass? Who's this jerk?

SQUIRREL

Mole originally hails from the woods behind the Petermans but traveled here by way of the old creek bed running between the Coffeens, Reyeses, and Welches. She has been a controversial figure and uniformly antisocial.

OAK

Gal made me laugh.

GRASS

Oh, mighty oak! Nothing bothers me! Listen mister, one day there'll be a mole for you, too.

OAK

And she got a rise out of ol' Zoysia.

GRASS

How are your kids, by the way? Got any pictures to show me?

SQUIRREL

So uh I can ask if she has any interests or hobbies or other uh areas of potential discussable conversational common ground, diplomatically speaking, but uh the general consensus, the word on the wind so to speak is uh maybe a little discouraging.

May looks at Caterpillar, who is grimacing again.

MAY

More parsley?

Mom and Derry come out and make right for the mole tracks.

DERRY

Just let me stab it.

MAY

No!

DERRY

It's gonna destroy the lawn.

MAY

It's not an it! Mole's a living person.

DERRY

I thought Grass was a living person, too.

MAY

They are.

DERRY

And since I'm in charge of the lawn, and this mole is busting up my work, I think I better take care of it.

MAY

You can't!

DERRY

Watch me.

MAY

I'll kill you.

DERRY

Not in your mandala you won't.

MOM

Hey! Both of you.

Pause.

MOM

Jeez. When did this get here?

MAY

A couple days ago.

DERRY

Mom, let me put an end to it.

MAY

There has to be another way. We can't just kill someone because we don't like what they do to the yard.

MOM

We can't have our yard all torn up either.

MAY

Mom!

MOM
I heard you, May.

MAY
It's not allowed.

MOM
There might have to be a break in the rules.

MAY
No! There are no breaks!

DERRY
She's probably friends with this mole.

MAY
I'm not friends with her. We talked, and she's kind of a butthole,

MOM
May, don't say butthole

MAY
but that doesn't mean we can murder her.

DERRY
It's murdering all the grass.

MAY
The grass grows from the same root system, Derry. I thought you knew that.

DERRY
What about the worms it eats?

MAY
You're allowed to eat. We're not all starving here.

DERRY
What's that supposed to mean?

MAY
I mean we're not all trying to impress Kara Coons or Lys Walker with our six-pack, which you only have because you're so skinny, so it's not a real six-pack anyway.

DERRY
Shut up.

MOM

Knock it off. Derry could you bring me some of Chester's litter?

DERRY

Ew. Why?

MOM

They say it scares moles off.

MAY

Yes!

MOM

But if this doesn't work, Derry gets to do it his way.

DERRY

It's not gonna work.

MAY

Shut up.

MOM

Both of you stop it. Derry.

Derry goes in.

MOM

I thought this place was supposed to be a refuge. Not finding it very relaxing these days.

May ignores her. Mom approaches and touches
May between the shoulders.

MOM

Hey, bug.

MAY

Hi.

MOM

Cute outfit.

MAY

Thanks.

Mom sits on the grass. Massages her feet.

MOM

When I was your age I used to run around barefoot, too. There was a creek in the woods behind my parents house where we'd go to cool off and look for waterbugs. Every week it'd break into a mudfight, and we'd come home without a stitch on, all covered in mud like a buncha little Indians.

MAY

Mom, don't say Indians.

MOM

Sorry. Who are you looking at now?

MAY

Caterpillar. He's still not feeling well.

MOM

Oh. Did he tell you that?

May is silent.

MOM

Is there anybody new you want me to meet?

MAY

You can spend time with oak. He's lonely.

MOM

Is he?

MAY

Yeah, and he's got issues about parenthood.

MOM

Well, I can certainly talk about that.

Silence.

Derry returns with a bag of used litter. Mom takes it, reacting to the smell.

MOM

Jeez.

DERRY

Not too late for a little stabby-stabby.

Beat it.

MOM

Mom uses a spade to mix the litter into Mole's tracks.

GRASS

Ow! Ow! Oh, why me?

SQUIRREL

What is she doing? Why is she digging? And what is that smell?

MAY

That's Chester's litter.

GRASS

The indignity! The disrespect!

SQUIRREL

And Chester is?

MAY

Derry's cat.

(to Grass)

And be quiet: you like nitrogen.

GRASS

Now that you mention it there is a flavorsome quality to this Chester's effluence.

SQUIRREL

A cat? Wow. I never took your brother for a cat guy.

MAY

He's a convert. They got him at a sensitive age.

SQUIRREL

And the toilet -- project -- here?

MAY

They're scared of the smell, so hopefully it'll drive her out.

GRASS

This just keeps getting better! I retract all my previous complaints!

SQUIRREL

Drive her out?

GRASS

Yes! Yes! Drive her out!

SQUIRREL

OK, sure, I noticed there was some discussion earlier, and I couldn't help overhearing...

MAY

I know you were listening.

SQUIRREL

Couldn't help it. But what I want to know is, is driving someone out in accordance with the rules?

MAY

It's better than Derry killing her!

GRASS

Or her killing me!

SQUIRREL

So that's the, uh, legal reasoning?

MAY

She tore up the yard!

SQUIRREL

So does Derry. So will Oak here if any of the acorns, uh...

OAK

Can we not talk about my fertility? It's humiliating. And the pressure is NOT helping.

MAY

She's eating all the worms!

GRASS

I need those worms. Zoysia cannot do all this without a little help.

SQUIRREL

You need all the worms?

MAY

Yes! How am I supposed to know?

GRASS

Maybe! How are we supposed to know?

SQUIRREL

No need to get defensive. I'm on your side, remember? I'm just trying to understand. If I crossed the wrong person would you banish me?

MAY

Derry wants to kill the mole. I'm trying to diminish suffering. So I talked Mom into a peaceful solution where she puts out kitty litter, and maybe the mole leaves on her own. Or maybe she doesn't. It's her choice.

MOM

What's that?

MAY

Nothing.

SQUIRREL

When you put it like that. I mean I get it's a tough job. I understand, I do. I'm not saying everyone will. But I do.

MAY

Who's everyone?

SQUIRREL

I travel here and there. Friends in high places. Low places. I get the word out. And in.

MAY

You've been telling them about the mandala?

Squirrel seems almost a little embarrassed at first,
but they warm up.

SQUIRREL

Sure. It's a news item. I told you I want it to work. In a world of cars, hawks, dogs, electrical wires, swimming pools, and long winters you've got something...maybe different.

MOM

I think that's about all I can do.

MAY

Will it work?

MOM

We have to wait and see.

Maybe now you can tell me why you're not talking in class?

SQUIRREL

If you don't mind, I'm gonna get a little closer. Really see what this plan is all about.

Squirrel moves to sniff at the litter.

The door swings open and Derry emerges.

CHESTER, the cat, flies out from behind

Derry's feet.

SQUIRREL

Cat!

MAY

Chester!

DERRY

Whoa!

Squirrel sprints for the tree, but Chester gets there first. She bites down on Squirrel's leg.

May races in to separate them.

MOM

May!

MAY

Bad cat! Bad cat!

SQUIRREL

Oh no! Oh no!

Squirrel screams as Chester continues to attack. Live Oak laughs. May strikes Chester several times and finally scoops him up. She throws him at Derry.

GRASS

Blood on my leaves! Blood on my leaves!

OAK

Oh what a gorgeous day. Finally strayed too far, didn't you?

DERRY

Jesus!

MAY

Get him out of here!

Squirrel twitches on the ground. Half of their leg is missing.

MAY

Squirrel are you okay? What can I do? Squirrel?

Squirrel shakes their head. No sound but uneven breath. Squirrel suddenly gets up and makes for the tree. They try to climb but struggle due to the injured leg.

OAK

You seem to be missing something there, partner. Gosh, I'm just torn up about it. Reminds me of what happened to that old mate of yours. Little gray fella.

Blood everywhere. Squirrel finally falls back to the ground.

MAY

Let me help you.

Squirrel gasps in fear and limps away, reaching the edge of the mandala and crossing the border into the wider world.

May turns on Derry.

MAY

Look what you did!

DERRY

I didn't do anything! Chester was following his instinct.

MAY

He's not even supposed to be outside!

DERRY

Actually, he was born outside, so he belongs here more than you do

MAY

I hate you!

MOM

Hey! It was an accident. We've all accidentally let Chester out before.

MAY

He did it on purpose!

DERRY

What are you psychic now?

MOM

I think the squirrel's going to be okay.

MAY

No she's not, she's going to die. She can't even climb a tree.

DERRY

At least you got one thing right.

MAY

Shut up!

MOM

He's just traumatized. He'll figure it out. Dogs get around on three legs all the time.

MAY

Do dogs climb trees?

DERRY

Facing downward?

MOM

Y'all think you know so much. A little humility would do you both some good.

MAY

You're not allowed in my mandala any more.

DERRY

You mean my *yard*?

MOM

You mean *my* yard.

MAY

I mean you better not come in. It's not for people like you.

DERRY

What kind of people am I?

MAY

You know.

Derry spits into the yard. Then goes back into the house.

MOM

Do you want me to help find him? We could take him to the vet.

MAY

It's too late. She's already telling everyone it's not safe here. No one else will come.

MOM

We could still look.

MAY

She went outside on purpose. She doesn't want me to help.

MOM

Sometimes when we're hurt we behave out of character.

MAY

Like Derry spitting on the lawn?

MOM

Or you threatening to kill him.

MAY

I'm not going to kill Derry.

MOM

Thank you. I'm glad to hear that.

Silence.

MOM

Didn't we use to talk, May? Didn't you use to tell me what was going on?

MAY

Yeah.

MOM

Tell me about this. Tell me what's going on.

MAY

It's not for you, either.

MOM

Why not?

MAY

Because you already chose something else.

MOM

Can you tell me what you mean?

MAY

I don't want to talk anymore. If you're serious about talking to Oak, he's waiting. And if you're just humoring me, then you can go inside, too.

MOM

I'm trying my best, sweetie. I'm trying every way I know.

MAY

You're going to let Derry kill Mole.

MOM

I hope it doesn't come to that.

MAY

You let Chester kill Squirrel.

MOM

That was your brother, and it was an accident.

MAY

You let him get away with it.

MOM

Chester doesn't know your rules. You can't blame him for being a cat.

MAY

I can't even look at him.

MOM

Nature is nature, sweetpea. It's not always nice.

MAY

That's just an excuse people make up for being terrible.

MOM

Who's being terrible?

MAY

Is that what you say about Dad?

MOM

Your daddy's --

MAY

-- Terrible.

MOM

Well obviously I'm not his biggest fan either.

MAY

You married him.

MOM

Yep. I sure did.

MAY

And you had us with him. Even though he's terrible.

MOM

I didn't know at the time.

MAY

You just couldn't tell.

MOM

I was in love.

MAY
You still talk to him.

MOM
May, he's your daddy.

MAY
You still take his money.

MOM
It's not *his* money. Would you rather be poor? Would you rather we move into grandma and grandpa's double-wide?

MAY
Yes.

MOM
No you wouldn't, and I wouldn't either.

MAY
Yes I would.

MOM
Well you wouldn't have the choice. I'd marry someone else terrible with lots of money before I put you and Derry in that situation.

MAY
Gross.

MOM
Life's gross, and you don't get to judge me. I put up with a lot from your daddy. We live in a fallen world, sister, and we're all doing the best we can.

MAY
You're not doing anything.

MOM
Excuse me? I'm raising you. And I thought I was doing a pretty good job, but right now you're being a brat. You don't know a thing but you're ready to tell off the world. You're gonna see. One day you'll be just like me.

MAY
No I won't.

MOM

Oh yes you will. There's no hiding from the world. You're in it. Dinner's in ten minutes.

MAY

I'm not coming.

MOM

Then you're not eating.

MAY

I'm staying out here. I don't want to live with you.

MOM

Fine. Starve to death.

MAY

Maybe I will.

MOM

I lock the doors at night, so I hope you're not still scared of the dark.

Staredown. Mom leaves.

SCENE FOUR***That Night***

Night falls.

May goes to Oak. Oak snores. She goes to Caterpillar, who also snores.

MAY

Sleep tight, friend. I hope you feel better soon.

GRASS

He won't. Your friend's doomed. I've seen it before. He's never gonna be a butterfly.

MAY

Shut up. Shouldn't you be asleep, too?

GRASS

I am Zoysia! I never sleep! I just...rest my leaves.

Grass snores.

May looks into the dark, frightened. She sings to herself.

A pair of eyes blooms in the dark.

MAY

Who's there? Who are you?

RACCOON creeps in.

RACCOON

Who am I? Who are you?

Raccoon touches oak. Checks out the border of the mandala.

MAY

I'm May. This is my mandala.

RACCOON

Uh-huh. Yeah, all right. Lots of new...things, I see here.

MAY

In here, we try not to hurt each other.

RACCOON

Interesting. Interesting. What's your policy on trash?

MAY

You can have it?

RACCOON

I'm in, kid. You don't have any on you, by any chance, do you?

MAY

Trash?

RACCOON

Mmm.

MAY

I'm hungry, too.

RACCOON

Hungry? Out here? Be a little adventurous, kid. The world is your buffet. You ever check out your neighbors' cans?

MAY

Mom says it's not polite to stare.

RACCOON

Trash cans, kid.

MAY

Oh. Well, before tonight I got my meals inside.

RACCOON

Oh, *inside*. Fancy. Go ahead, rub your privilege in my face. I don't mind.

MAY

I'm sorry. I'm outside now.

RACCOON

And you want advice from a real outsider. An authentic representative.

MAY

Mostly I just want food.

RACCOON
Have you tried the garbage?

MAY
I...haven't.

RACCOON
Call yourself an outsider. Gimme a second.

MAY
Hey. Have you heard from Squirrel?

RACCOON
You know there's like a million squirrels around here, right kid? Gonna have to be more specific.

MAY
The squirrel that lost her foot.

RACCOON
Oh. Oh yeah. Yeah, she's not doing so hot. Limping around depressed. Not a pretty sight. Why, you knew her?

May says nothing.

RACCOON
Hang on, I'm gonna get this garbage.

Raccoon goes.

Meanwhile, LIGHTNING BUG appears.

MAY
Ooh.

LIGHTNING BUG
Yeah, it's nice, right? Too bad nobody seems to notice.

MAY
I noticed. I'm not nobody.

LIGHTNING BUG
If you say so.

MAY
How do you do it?

LIGHTNING BUG

It's just a bunch of chemicals. Throw em together and your butt gets hot. Look, you don't have to pretend to be impressed.

MAY

I really am impressed.

LIGHTNING BUG

I said stop it. You're gonna hurt my feelings.

MAY

Is everything OK?

LIGHTNING BUG

I'm sorry, it's a very difficult time for me.

MAY

Me, too.

LIGHTNING BUG

Are you looking for a mate, too?

MAY

Ew. No.

LIGHTNING BUG

I am. There's a lot of pent-up energy. You know what I'm talking about. This drive that just takes over your body. And all you feel is want.

MAY

I mean I've heard the idea.

LIGHTNING BUG

It must be so great being a human. Plenty of girls around. 80 years to chase them. The females of my species are disappearing. There's probably one for every four of us guys. And we only have a couple days to find them.

MAY

Jeez. Can I help?

LIGHTNING BUG

I want a girlfriend so bad!

MAY

I'll look, too! I'll keep an eye out for you!

LIGHTNING BUG

It's not that simple. See, the ladies, they're gonna burn their butts, too, to tell us where they are.

MAY

That's helpful.

LIGHTNING BUG

Oh yeah. So helpful. There's a signal they use that says: "c'mere fella! I'm ready to Get. It. On." Kind of like that look you give boys.

MAY

I'm probably not as old as you think I am.

LIGHTNING BUG

BUT sometimes they're faking the look.

MAY

They are?

LIGHTNING BUG

Oh yeah they are. Sometimes they do not want to get it on with you after all. They just want your attention.

MAY

Attention is good.

LIGHTNING BUG

Oh no it's not. See because they've actually just gotten it on with *another* bug. Then they lure you in acting like you're the one, but when you get close RRAARRW: they eat you!

MAY

What?

LIGHTNING BUG

They eat you. For protein for their new eggs.

MAY

But but but that's horrible.

LIGHTNING BUG

Yeah...I'm told it's unpleasant.

MAY

But you should run away. Why go near them at all?

LIGHTNING BUG

I told you, I only live a couple days. And maybe she really does want to mate.

MAY

But what if she doesn't?

LIGHTNING BUG

But what if she does?

MAY

But what if she doesn't?

LIGHTNING BUG

But what if she does. Uh-huh. Got you there.

Raccoon returns with a Chinese container.

RACCOON

You're in luck, nerd. We have some primo Chinese-o tonight. I think it's
(sniffs)

Broccoli in garlic sauce?

Lightning Bug gets some distance.

RACCOON

Who you talking to? Who's this guy?

MAY

Lightning Bug. Come say hello.

LIGHTNING BUG

Uh, hello.

RACCOON

Hey there.

MAY

You don't have to be scared.

LIGHTNING BUG

My butt has chemicals.

RACCOON

What kind of chemicals?

So many. LIGHTNING BUG

He's not gonna eat you. MAY

I'll totally eat him. RACCOON

What? No. MAY

Just to try. RACCOON

See? LIGHTNING BUG

Can you focus on the garbage? MAY

I got this one for you, kid. RACCOON

I don't want to eat garbage. MAY

I thought you said you were hungry. RACCOON

I am, but MAY

No no no no no. If you're hungry you eat. RACCOON

That's not always true. MAY

RACCOON LIGHTNING BUG
That's always true. That's always true.

RACCOON
See, this guy gets it. What's your deal?

Looking for a mate.

LIGHTNING BUG

On the prowl. Exciting.

RACCOON

But she might eat him.

MAY

Very exciting. When will you know?

RACCOON

When she starts to devour me.

LIGHTNING BUG

Or not, right?

RACCOON

Isn't that horrible?

MAY

Horrible...horrible. Yeah. Maybe. Love is horrible.

RACCOON

Have you ever been in love?

MAY

That's an awfully personal question.

RACCOON

I'm sorry.

MAY

RACCOON

I love it. Yes, I've been in love. Twice. Both times it ruined me. The first was a mysterious gentleman who only allowed me to call him Maestro. And let me tell you, life with him was a symphony...until he was run over by a van full of bagels. The second time was this really sweet guy who followed me everywhere. I ignored him for as long as I could, but the heart is basically a dog with a chocolate bar. Chris. What a basic name for a raccoon. When I was pregnant he'd scout the whole neighborhood to bring me unfinished yogurt containers.

Raccoon sighs.

You have kids?

MAY

Sure. Sure, I have kids.

RACCOON

Where are they now.

MAY

Good question. My point is: love, right? It's horrible, but it's all there is. That and garbage. And you don't seem too keen on garbage.

RACCOON

May picks up the Chinese again.

RACCOON

Don't bother. I'll eat it later.

LIGHTNING BUG

There she is! The signal! The signal!

Lightning Bug flashes in response.

RACCOON

Whoa! That's a serious come-on if I ever saw one.

MAY

Don't go! It could be a trap!

LIGHTNING BUG

I gotta go.

MAY

But what if she eats you?

LIGHTNING BUG

What if she loves me?

MAY

Maybe we can go with you, to protect you?

LIGHTNING BUG

Oh no. Whatever happens, you don't wanna see this!

RACCOON

I kinda wanna see this.

Goodbye, goodbye! Wish me luck!

LIGHTNING BUG

Please don't!

MAY

Here I come, baby!

LIGHTNING BUG

Lightning Bug flies off towards the light.

May and Raccoon watch for a moment as he fades into darkness.

You'll understand it one day. Mind if I, uh...?

RACCOON

Raccoon starts to eat but is startled by a sharp noise. Raccoon runs off.

Derry enters, dragging a yield sign.

What are you doing? Where did you get that?

MAY

He drags the sign into the yard, then drops it and collapses next to it.

You're gonna hurt the grass!

MAY

Screw the grass!

DERRY

Are you ok?

MAY

No.

DERRY

What's the sign for?

MAY

It was for Lys.

DERRY

MAY

Why would she want a yield sign?

DERRY

She didn't. Not from me.

MAY

Oh. Are you going to return it? Because there could be accidents if

DERRY

Not right now! OK?! I just want to...lie here. For a while.

MAY

Okay.

Silence.

MAY

Is Lys the one with the cool hair? Or the one with the huge boobs?

He doesn't respond.

MAY

I can see why you like her.

DERRY

I don't like her.

MAY

Oh.

DERRY

I'm in love with her.

MAY

That's nice.

DERRY

It's not nice! It'd be nice if she liked me back. But she's only into these older guys who like, why are they even hanging out with her? Don't they have girls their own age to hit on? Or are they so pathetic they have to put all their focus on Lys.

MAY

But you do.

DERRY

That's different. We're friends. We know each other. These guys. They don't know her.

Silence.

DERRY

How's your caterpillar?

MAY

Still sick.

DERRY

I thought suffering wasn't allowed here.

MAY

We try to make it better. But it still gets in.

Derry bursts into tears.

DERRY

I love her so much! Why doesn't she like me?

MAY

I don't know. Maybe that's how love is. Sometimes you're sending the same signals. And sometimes...you get eaten.

DERRY

What?

MAY

Never mind.

DERRY

So can I stay here a while or what?

MAY

Totally.

DERRY

Do you remember when we used to lie in that tree? And pretend we were leopards.

MAY

Yeah.

DERRY

That whole summer, when we first moved here. That's what I remember most, being up in the tree.

MAY

You moved a lawn chair up there. Just like a leopard.

DERRY

That's right.

MAY

Then you brought Chester up with you once, and we almost couldn't get him down. That's when he had to be an indoor cat.

DERRY

I'm sorry about what Chester did to your squirrel.

MAY

She's not my squirrel.

DERRY

I didn't actually mean for him to get out.

MAY

I know.

DERRY

I really didn't.

MAY

It reminded me of Japan. When you fed my bugs to your turtle.

DERRY

Oh yeah. Why did I do that?

MAY

I don't know. Mom says it's tougher for you.

Silence.

DERRY

I guess it was. Or is. But I didn't make our yard into a wildlife refuge.

MAY

Are you still gonna join the army?

DERRY

I might. I've got a few years.

MAY

I don't think you want to. I think you tell Mom that just to hurt her.

DERRY

I do want to.

MAY

Why?

DERRY

Because it makes sense.

MAY

It doesn't make sense. Look what Dad did

DERRY

You don't know what he did.

MAY

It was on the news.

DERRY

Nobody knows what happened. So we can't judge.

MAY

Doesn't sound like it makes a lot of sense.

DERRY

I don't like talking about this.

MAY

You have to talk sometimes.

DERRY

That's good coming from you. But if I don't like it, I don't have to do it in here, right?

MAY

If it hurts you.

DERRY

So let's not. Let's just be here.

Okay.

MAY

Or we could be in the tree.

DERRY

I think he'd like that.

MAY

Derry climbs into the tree. After a while, he lets out a leopard growl.

May laughs.

OAK

This is what I remember. The touch of young people on my bark. Little ones who look up to me. Is this what being a parent feels like?

You're awake.

MAY

Who are you talking to?

DERRY

The tree is waking up.

MAY

OAK

Not really. My leaves are still off...but when you're my age you don't make it through a whole night. You wake up with all these thoughts rushing in, trying to catch you now you're slowed down.

Thoughts like what?

MAY

OAK

Like maybe it's too late to be better. Maybe I missed the chance to be good. It was so long ago I didn't notice. Or it was so long ago it was never a chance at all. Trees make choices, and they have to live with them. You start putting energy into a new branch, and you're always going to have that branch. There's no sucking it back in when the sun's weak or the soil's starved. Even when winter breaks that mistaken branch, you see where it was supposed to be. You never get back to your first ring.

MAY

I think you must be pretty different than you were on your first ring.

OAK

Maybe not as different as you want me to be. Even I can't remember that far back. Do you think I'll make a good dad?

MAY

I know you will.

The sun begins to peek out.

Caterpillar groans awake. He gasps in pain and confusion. May rushes to him.

MAY

Caterpillar! Are you ok?

Caterpillar continues to groan.

MAY

What can I do? Tell me. Tell me what to do.

CATERPILLAR

There's something inside of me. Something's wrong. Inside of me. It's growing. It's eating.

MAY

That's you. You're growing. You're eating.

CATERPILLAR

Nnnnnnnn.

GRASS

I told you, it's bad, what's happening to him. They don't survive.

CATERPILLAR

Nnnnnn.

MAY

You can't die. You're going to be fine.

DERRY

What's happening down there? Do you need help?

MAY

Caterpillar's in trouble.

Derry jumps down. Caterpillar, breathing heavily, looks into May's eyes. He is frightened.

CATERPILLAR

The grass is right. I'm gonna die. Was it something I ate?

GRASS

Something eating you.

CATERPILLAR

I wanted...I really wanted to be a butterfly. All this time I was working on it. To get those wings. Eating, eating, all my life. And I finally felt it these past days. Like it was gonna happen. I was ready to go in the dark. And wait. And change. The change was calling me. Can you imagine flying? Can you imagine.

Caterpillar waves his legs in a butterfly dance.

CATERPILLAR

I'm never gonna be nothing at all.

MAY

That's not true. You're my friend. You've been an excellent caterpillar your whole life. The best I've ever seen. Any of us.

May looks around.

GRASS

Yeah.

OAK

Yeah.

DERRY

Yeah.

CATERPILLAR

I wanted to feel what it was like. Unnhh. It hurts. I cant. I can't.

With a gasp, Caterpillar goes silent.

MAY

No. No. Caterpillar. Please. Caterpillar. Please. No more.

May cries. Derry touches her shoulder.

GRASS

(gently)

Hey, um, what's-your-name, May. Um, come over here maybe. Or the two of you go up in Oak. You don't want to watch this part.

Something begins to happen to Caterpillar. His belly moves.

MAY

What's happening to him?

DERRY

Something's moving.

Caterpillar's belly opens and WASPS fly out.

DERRY

Eww!

MAY

What?

DERRY

They're wasps! Run!

MAY

Get away from him! Get away from him!

May swats at the wasps. They sting her.

MAY

Ow! Ah!

DERRY

May, let's go inside!

MAY

How could they!

May rushes inside. Derry follows.

May returns with a spray bottle and begins to fumigate the yard.

Grass coughs. Tree coughs. The Wasps cough and die. A thick cloud hovers over the stage.

Whoa! Whoa!

GRASS

Hey, little girl...

OAK

May stomps on the wasps' dead bodies.
Coughing continues.

Suddenly she looks up, as if realizing where she is. She looks down at the broken wasps bodies, at the spray-can in her hand.

She drops the can.

May goes to the borders of her mandala, the twigs and branches that shape her little world. She tosses them away, breaks them, separates them until there is no more border.

Mom is there.

May stands across the lawn.

Mom opens her arms.

May walks to her and into her arms.

MAY

You were right. All of you were right.

MOM

I love that you tried, sweet-pea. I love that about you so much.

SCENE FIVE*Another Summer Day*

May sits near the parsley in the garden. She puts the finishing touches on a butterfly attached to the top of two sticks.

Mom putters about the flower beds, watering. She touches May's head as she passes. Derry lies lazily in Oak.

May looks back at grass, who coughs and turns away from her.

OFF-STAGE VOICE

Hey Derry! Let's go get a stop sign!

Derry leaps from the tree and runs off. Mom's phone rings. She wipes her hands on her jeans as she takes the call inside.

May digs the sticks into the dirt. A memorial for her friend. As she works, A FEW BIRDS ARRIVE, landing on Oak's branches.

OAK

Uh...

Another PAIR OF SQUIRRELS darts into the edge of the yard. Then a NEIGHBORHOOD DOG. The dog and the squirrels eye each other warily, then nod and maintain their distance.

GRASS

Dog. Dog. May? Dog.

Raccoon totters up, rubbing her eyes. Then a DEER.

OAK

May.

At last May turns to discover the animals.

Who are you? MAY

Well... DEER

The squirrel told us about you. DOG

What? What are you doing here? MAY

We heard this was a place without suffering. BIRD

MORE ANIMALS creep in to where the edges of the mandala once were, very loosely replacing the branches and twigs with their bodies.

It's not. MAY

We heard that you tried. ANOTHER SQUIRREL

I don't think we can live here. Not enough garbage, for one thing. RACCOON

But we wanted to see it. DEER

They look at the space.

Can we come back some time? To visit? DOG

Can we come back? BIRD

Can we come back? ALL ANIMALS

THE END