

# The Garden

by

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## Characters

**March** – female, late teens.

**Toby** - male, late twenties.

**Linden** – female, early forties.

# The Garden

## Spring

1.

*North Springs Community Garden, Hull.*

*The garden is full of flowerbeds and veg patches.*

*A couple of wheelbarrows among the plants; spades and forks.*

*A little hut.*

*A tall iron gate to the street.*

*The centre of the garden is a living archway made of willow.*

*Pause, the garden is still.*

*Then MARCH appears, sliding out from among the bushes unexpectedly, trowel in hand.*

MARCH                      Springtime is me favourite time. It's the light. Way it runs through the estate, racing down the streets, excited as it hits the houses an' shops. Even the chippy with its dodgy batter looks better at this time of year. That light bounces from tarmac to brick until eventually it hits here, hits the green and that's when you realise what light really is when it meets a plant. That's when you realise what 'green' really is when it gratefully pulls that shine in. When spring light hits the plants, that's when the Compost Gets Real. It means the year is on. New shoots pushing through, the world waking up. Bits of colour peaking out, all tentative like. Crapping their pants at the first sign of a late frost.

Don't want their year all messed up. Trying to come out at the right time. Too eager, then you may not have what it takes to go the distance, used up all that energy, Jack Frost rotting your leaves, your stems. Too late, too late, too lazy then you can't get your house in order to bloom. Timing, timing is the King, Queen, Princess and Prince of the garden. Don't worry, they [*the plants*] they all know. Been doing it for well, a long time, but even they had to learn it, and there's many that have fallen. Spring is my favourite time.

*Toby exits the hut, mug of tea in hand.*

*MARCH begins weeding.*

*TOBY stops, closes his eyes and takes a deep breath.*

TOBY                   Smell that.

MARCH                 Flowers of the first primroses?

TOBY                   I think the compost bog's playing up.

MARCH                 Probably full.

TOBY                   Can't stand that, people not sticking t'system. There's a system for a reason. There's a system so it gets emptied and doesn't fill up with everyone's-

MARCH                 -the rota works.

TOBY                   The rota is an inanimate object on shed wall, it's not the rota that works or don't work. It's people that are the problem. It's people who don't work, they don't stick to rotas unless you train

them, train them like a puppy – especially when it comes to  
them shi-

MARCH -the rota works.

TOBY Then why is toilet full?

MARCH Your turn last to swap the bins on it.

TOBY Was not.

MARCH Check the rota.

TOBY What you saying?

MARCH Check the rota, Toby, that's what I'm saying.

TOBY You saying I don't pull my weight?

MARCH The R-O-T-A.

TOBY I've emptied that bog many, many times, I won't have anyone  
say I haven't.

MARCH Who's turn was it last then?

TOBY Not mine.

MARCH You sure?

TOBY Yeah.

*Pause.*

*TOBY sticks his head in the shed, comes out.*

*Drains his tea and puts the mug down.*

TOBY Somebody changed rota?

MARCH Your name down, is it?

TOBY Somebody's changed it.

MARCH Same inanimate object it's always been.

TOBY                    Hope you're not saying I've deliberately ignored it?

MARCH                Thought never crossed my thoughts.

TOBY                    Good, cos I won't stand for it.

MARCH                I know.

TOBY                    I pull my weight.

MARCH                Absolutely.

TOBY                    So long as we're clear on that.

MARCH                Clear as concrete.

TOBY                    Good. Was thinking of giving the greenhouse a tidy, get it all  
ready, won't be long before we're sowing first seedlings.

*TOBY heads towards the greenhouse.*

MARCH                Spade.

TOBY                    Eh?

MARCH                You'll need a spade, for the bog.

TOBY                    Yeah, course. I was gonna do it after lunch, otherwise it can  
make me feel a bit [*sick*]...

MARCH                No time like present, get shoveling.

*TOBY knows the game us up, grabs a nearby spade and heads in the direction of the  
compost toilet.*

*On his way he passes through the willow archway, he stops, looks up into it, pats one  
of the trunks like an old friend, then carries on his way and exits.*

*MARCH weeds, seemingly engrossed in her work for a moment.*

MARCH                (*Raised voice*) You can come in, you know.

*Pause.*

MARCH I know you're there.

*Pause.*

*LINDEN enters through the gate.*

*MARCH keeps weeding*

LINDEN I wasn't...sure, wanted to make sure that it was the right place.

MARCH An' is it?

LINDEN This is North Springs Community Garden?

MARCH What does sign on gate say?

LINDEN 'North Springs Community Garden'.

MARCH Then welcome.

*MARCH weeds.*

LINDEN They said I should come.

MARCH Do much gardening?

LINDEN What?

MARCH Do you do much gardening?

LINDEN Well, you know, I've, in the past...not really, no.

MARCH That's alright.

LINDEN I live in a flat, see? Fourth floor, so I, I don't really know what I'm doing.

*MARCH stops weeding and looks at LINDEN.*

MARCH You'll be fine.

LINDEN I did have a window box, put some little flowers in it, yellow and red, don't know what they were, but I put them in. Then two

days later the birds stripped them. Always meant to plant some more, but...I've been busy.

MARCH There's enough work here to be done. Tea's in shed if you want some, everyone makes their own.

LINDEN Right. Right. Right. No, thank you. They said I should come, but I don't really think it's my thing really....really. I might just go.

MARCH How do you know if you've never done any before?

LINDEN I don't know what to do.

MARCH You sure?

LINDEN All these plants you have in here, I don't know what any of them are, how can I possibly know what to do? I'll probably kill them all off in a week, some big plant murderer.

MARCH What's them plants there, the ones in rows?

LINDEN I don't know.

MARCH Broad beans.

LINDEN Right.

MARCH So what's that plant there?

LINDEN You just said.

MARCH What is it?

LINDEN But you just said.

MARCH *Sooooo* what is it?

LINDEN It's a...broad bean.

MARCH See, you're a natural. It likes full sun and to be kept out of strong winds, though with all the houses surrounding us there's not



much danger of that. We sow direct in autumn, like to get them cropping early. Needs a bit of water, 'specially when they flower.

LINDEN            Okay.

MARCH            Now you know how to give it a hand, Linden, you do that then you're a gardener, easy.

LINDEN            I've got a lot on. Wouldn't have much time to come here.

MARCH            A couple of hours is all it needs from you.

*LINDEN looks around.*

MARCH            Just give it a go.

LINDEN            It's not for me. They said I should come, but it seems so silly...no offence.

MARCH            Only a bit taken.

LINDEN            I mean it's not for me. Sorry.

*LINDEN turns to go.*

MARCH            Linden.

LINDEN            Yes?

MARCH            You're always welcome here.

*Beat – LINDEN might stay...but she leaves.*

*MARCH watches her go, then tends to the broad beans checking their leaves and stems, clearing the ground around the base of it.*

*TOBY enters through the willow archway, queasy, might puke.*

*He takes some big, deep breaths trying to keep his stomach down.*

MARCH            No one else makes such a big deal of it.

TOBY I don't know what people have been eating...

MARCH Fact, everyone else says how little it smells, all breaks down nice an' quick. There's gold in that muck, my best fertilizer.

*TOBY dry retches a little.*

TOBY I bet Old Harry's been at the Tikka Masala again.

MARCH You, you are soft. That composter'll smell less funky than your bog at home. Stop your whining, you can hit the greenhouse now.

TOBY Keep your shirt on, I'm at it. Was there somebody here?

MARCH What?

TOBY Just now, thought I heard someone come in the gate?

MARCH Not really.

TOBY Not really?

MARCH You know what it's like, it's Spring, new shoots come through, but you don't know which one's will make it or not.

*TOBY heads to the greenhouse.*

TOBY If you say so.

*He goes into the greenhouse.*

MARCH It's always so hard to tell.

## 2.

*Very early morning, the garden in shadow.*

*Someone comes out of the greenhouse. From their shadow and the way they move, they don't seem to be able to walk easy. They're sweeping the greenhouse out, using the brush half to sweep, half to keep them steady on their feet. It's OLD HARRY.*

*Having finished the job his shadow shuffles off through the willow archway.*

*The sun comes up.*



TOBY                    Yes.

*TOBY puts whatever he's been picking up in his pocket.*

*LINDEN puts her hand out to shake.*

*TOBY looks at it as if he doesn't know what to do. LINDEN'S hand hangs there, waiting.*

*MARCH enters through the archway, secateurs in hand. TOBY and LINDEN pay no attention to her. She starts clipping at a plant.*

TOBY                    Yes.

MARCH                Stop saying 'yes' Toby, sound a right idiot.

TOBY                    Yes, I mean, 'ello.

*He shakes Linden's hand, then turns and bolts into the shed.*

LINDEN                Is he...

MARCH                What?

LINDEN                Is he alright?

MARCH                Yeah.

LINDEN                He seems a bit, y'know?

MARCH                No I don't.

LINDEN                A bit, funny.

MARCH                What does that mean?

LINDEN                Nothing, I wasn't saying anything.

MARCH                Then what were you saying?

LINDEN                He seems a little odd.

MARCH                Maybe you're the one who's odd.

LINDEN                Me?

MARCH            You, love.

LINDEN            You don't know me so you can't-

MARCH            -you don't know him, so you can't.

*Beat.*

LINDEN            Maybe he's just a bit shy.

MARCH            Maybe he is, no crime in it.

LINDEN            No, no, I didn't mean to say anything...I thought I'd come and give it a go, the gardening I mean, I thought I'd come and give it a go.

MARCH            Ok.

LINDEN            Now I know that this (*plant from scene 1*) is a runner bean.

MARCH            You mean a broad bean.

LINDEN            That's the one, yes, that's what I meant. Now I know that, I thought maybe that's a start so I'd come back. They said I should come, that it might help.

*MARCH gets a broom and bucket and gives them to LINDEN.*

MARCH            Paths need sweeping. Anything you sweep up can go on the compost heaps round the back, but make sure that you put it on the left hand pile, not the right hand pile.

LINDEN            Why the left?

MARCH            If you put it on the right hand pile you'll be mixing the new stuff with the old rotted stuff and you'll spoil it, meaning that we'll have no compost this year and everything in the garden will die.

LINDEN            (*Worried*) Left hand pile, left hand pile, got it, left hand pile.



TOBY                    But it's *my* day.

MARCH                Everyone is welcome.

TOBY                    I know, course...a community garden, for the community, come  
in come in...just not on a Friday.

MARCH                Everyone, Toby.

TOBY                    I think she'd probably like Thursdays, or Tuesdays, Tuesdays are  
lovely days.

MARCH                She comes on a Friday.

TOBY                    Fine (*it's not*). Fine, just so long as she doesn't-

*LINDEN is by the willow archway, she snaps a small branch off it.*

TOBY                    -woah woah woah!

*LINDEN turns to look at TOBY.*

TOBY                    For the love of biscuits what are you doing?

LINDEN                It was half off, this twig.

TOBY                    Twig, twig? You don't just rip a branch off. You can't simply *tear*  
it off, you must prune. You must snip.

*He grabs the secateurs from MARCH and walks to LINDEN (when neither LINDEN or  
TOBY are talking directly to MARCH she busies herself in the garden, paying them no  
attention).*

*TOBY mimes snipping a branch off.*

TOBY                    It needs a clean cut. You tear it an' disease can get in, needs to  
be clean. Twig blight, canker – it's a battle ground of diseases  
here. You do not just come an' tear things off, got it?

LINDEN                Who put the rod up your arse?



TOBY                   The, the what?

LINDEN                You heard, darl'.

*TOBY doesn't know what to say.*

LINDEN                I'll get on with me sweeping then?

TOBY                   The willow, you leave the willow to me.

LINDEN                That's a willow tree is it?

TOBY                   You just leave that to me, I look after it.

LINDEN                Willow, that's two things I know. You can have it, it's not all that.

*LINDEN picks up her bucket and exits to the compost heaps.*

*TOBY looks at where the twig was pulled off, tests it with his fingers.*

TOBY                   She'll kill everything.

MARCH                 You don't think you're over-doing it?

TOBY                   It'll be an apocalypse. They'll be nothing left by winter,  
everything wiped out.

MARCH                 I don't think you've much to worry about, don't think she'll last.

TOBY                   Really?

MARCH                 Heart's not in it. She'll be one of them that comes a handful of  
times then never again.

TOBY                   *(Brightly)* Oh, right.

*MARCH gives him a look.*

TOBY                   That is a shame. Look what I found.

*He takes the things from earlier out of his pocket and shows MARCH.*

TOBY                   Three this time. It's not right that he's littering up the garden.

MARCH                 I don't think Old Harry means to.

TOBY I'm forever finding his pens from the bookies. There were two floating in the water butt last week.

MARCH No harm done.

TOBY Somebody should tell him he's making a mess.

MARCH He does a good job.

TOBY I never see him.

MARCH He comes when he comes.

TOBY I'll leave him a note - stop littering with the pens.

MARCH Don't, Toby.

TOBY I will.

*Beat.*

And I still think Linden'd be happier on a Tuesday.

MARCH Can you pass me that rod?

TOBY What?

MARCH Spade, can you pass me that spade, there's digging to be done.

**4.**

*TOBY is pruning the willow archway. His movements are slow and careful as he looks for any diseased parts of the tree. He treats the willow tenderly, talking reassuringly to it under his breath. It is a labour of love.*

*LINDEN comes through the archway from the back of the garden, she's pushing a wheelbarrow, tools lying in it - the work is making her out of breath.*

*TOBY steps out of her way, turning his back on LINDEN as he does.*

*LINDEN puts the wheelbarrow down and wipes her the sweat from her face with the back of her sleeve.*

LINDEN        I am literally sweating cobs.

*TOBY ignores her, carries on with his pruning.*

LINDEN        Thought this was supposed to be good for me?

*She sniffs herself, doesn't like the smell.*

LINDEN        Christ. (To Toby) Tea?

*TOBY pretends he hasn't heard.*

                  Still not talking to me, Tobe's?

TOBY           I'm busy.

LINDEN        You've been fondling that willow for an hour.

TOBY           There's been a report of Willow Leaf Beetle over at the Playing Fields.

LINDEN        Call the cops.

TOBY           I'm checking for larvae.

LINDEN        Aren't you the charismatic young man?

TOBY           You can mock all you like.

LINDEN        I will. I am.

*LINDEN starts putting the tools back in the shed, back and forth to the wheelbarrow.*

TOBY            This archway, these willow trees, they're important.

LINDEN        They're just trees, like any trees.

TOBY            Yes, no, yes they are like any trees, but they're important too.

LINDEN        Why?

TOBY            They just are.

LINDEN        You haven't been doing anything...unnatural with them, have you?

TOBY            What does that mean?

LINDEN        I was just wondering.

TOBY            You, you're very funny.

*LINDEN bows like a comedian at the end of their act.*

TOBY            (*Low*) Least you reckon you are.

*TOBY turns back to searching the willow.*

LINDEN        It's a tree, it'll grow and then it'll die, that's it.

TOBY            You should be on Gardener's World seeing as you know so much.

LINDEN        All it is, is digging stuff up, cutting stuff down, watering stuff. I don't see why people go on about it so much. They think turning over compost heaps is gonna sort me out.

TOBY            And does it?

LINDEN        It makes me stink is what it does. I'm on reduced hours at work cos of this. Short staffed as it is and look at me, covered in rotting vegetables and Christ knows what type of insects.

TOBY            Don't come then.

LINDEN        Don't tempt me.

TOBY Don't stay on for me, I'll manage.

LINDEN Want to be left alone with your precious willow is what you mean.  
People will talk.

TOBY Yes, you do.

*LINDEN'S finished putting the tools away.*

LINDEN You need to get out more, Tobe's.

*TOBY looks at LINDEN for a moment, then turns away, hurt.*

LINDEN Tobe's?

*He carries on with his pruning.*

LINDEN Tobe's, what did I say? It's just banter, right, a way to pass the time?  
Don't need to take it all personal.

TOBY *(Not looking back)* It's 'Toby'.

*Pause.*

LINDEN Right, Toby. You need to toughen up a bit.

TOBY Maybe, and maybe I do need to get out more, but that's my business,  
got it?

*Pause.*

LINDEN Alright, alright.

*Pause.*

*LINDEN goes into the hut.*

*TOBY stops pruning, cross with himself for being hurt by her comment, scratches at his neck hard, stops himself. Places his hand on the willow instead, draws strength from it.*

*LINDEN comes out with two cups of tea.*

*As soon as TOBY realises she's coming out he carries on working.*

LINDEN I've made you a brew.

*Pause.*

LINDEN Do you want it or not?

TOBY How do I know you haven't done anything to it?

LINDEN What? Why would I do anything to it?

TOBY 'Banter'.

LINDEN What could I do to it?

TOBY Pepper in it.

LINDEN Like I'd bring some in 'specially?

TOBY Or a worm?

LINDEN I hate worms, could never touch them.

TOBY Compost then?

LINDEN It's tea. In a mug. Take the blinking tea.

*TOBY takes it.*

LINDEN Two sugars, right?

TOBY One.

LINDEN Have no sugar next time. 'Thank you, Linden'.

*TOBY takes a careful sip – it doesn't kill him.*

TOBY Not bad, bit sweet, but not bad.

LINDEN I'm sorry if I said something that were...I'm just used to...banter...at the depot...it's banter all the way.

*Long pause, TOBY drinks his tea.*

LINDEN Now it's your turn.

TOBY           For what?

LINDEN        I've apologised to you, so now you...?

TOBY           What for?

*LINDEN looks at TOBY.*

TOBY           I'm sorry for.....I'm just sorry.

LINDEN        That's it?

TOBY           Can't really think of anything, but I am sorry, really.

*They both drink their tea.*

LINDEN        I suppose that's something.

**5.**

*MARCH on her own in the garden, she's older, thirties (this can be done by a change of clothes, hair style etc)*

*MARCH kneels down to look at a small plant, then stands, reaches up into the air and with a flourish, turns spring into summer: the light changes, growing into deeper yellows and oranges – it calls the flowers out to bloom.*

*LINDEN comes out of the greenhouse, a tray of seedlings in her hands. She's holding them like they may explode with the slightest provocation.*



## The Garden

The play is set over a year, following the seasons.

**March** is a physical embodiment of the garden. She only talks to Linden and Toby individually, never both at the same time. She is their individual relationship with the garden. She's tough and says what needs to be said, even if they don't like it, but she can't fix everything. March ages each season, starting as a teenager, becoming an older person by the winter, before returning as the teenager when Spring comes again at the end of the play. March is not the clichéd smiling 'Mother Nature', she can be moody, sarky and manipulative to get what she wants.

**Toby** is the primary carer for his Mum, who is ill and house bound. Toby really wants to work and live his life, but he has no time while he cares full time for his Mum. He's a proud person, and wouldn't want anyone to think that he can't handle looking after his Mum. A health visitor/carer comes once a week on a Friday for a 2/3 hours to give him a break which is how he can come to the garden – this time is his lifeline, it means he can keep going. When the funding is cut for the health visitor Toby can't come to the garden and this has a big affect on his health and wellbeing.

**Linden** has been recommended to come to the garden by her GP as she has high blood pressure and other health issues due to a sedentary lifestyle. She's a bus driver and spends all day sitting down. She's completely sceptical that 'weeding' will help her health. Though she thinks it's waste of time, she gradually gets pulled into it, not for the plants, but just to have the time to be with people, talk, to slow the pace of her life down to those of the seasons. She'll never openly admit it, but the garden does help her

Toby and Linden don't get on at the start, but slowly start to fall in love under the willow despite their differences, but when Toby's Mum's carer is cut, their chance at love is threatened.