

GROWTH SPURTS

by

I Don't Like Gardening

INT. SPACE VESSEL "OUTER EDEN" - LEISURE ROOM

Lights flicker heavily. Somewhere, an alarm reverberates...

A pot of flowers on a table. The pot has a child's drawing on it: mom, dad, and a little girl. Beyond the table, a window shows the vast emptiness of outer space.

A faint, male SINGING VOICE eerily echoes through the ventilation system. Unclear words, but a familiar melody.

FADE TO BLACK

INT. SPACE VESSEL "OUTER EDEN" - LABORATORY

A gloved hand inspects a purple-black ALIEN SEED the size of a marble, inside a brightly lit lab.

RICK (O.S.)

Looks kinda like candy, doesn't it?

RICK, late-30s, handsome, in need of a shave, inspects the seed at his desk, surrounded by dazzling lab equipment.

MALLORY, mid-30s, professional, laid-back, sits at her desk.

EDDY, 23, cocky, stands nearby. He wears an "INTERN" badge.

Alien plants of unseen colors and sizes are inside multiple glass cabinets, watered and otherwise cared for by machines.

SUPER: "Outer Eden: Research Vessel for Extraterrestrial Flora. Section Nine. Distance from Earth: 0.44 light-years"

MALLORY

Don't eat the alien jellybean.

EDDY

Who'd wanna strike roots in him?

RICK

My oldest is nuts about jellybeans.

MALLORY

What about your little boy?

Rick's face turns solemn. He drops the seed onto a tray, which holds two dozens of identical seeds.

RICK

I don't know, actually.

Mallory gets up and gently puts a hand on Rick's back.

MALLORY

Tell me about the "jellybeans".

Rick shyly attempts to move away from her touch.

RICK

They're, uh--

EDDY (O.S.)

Hey, guys!

Eddy has taped a picture of a fiftyish man, asleep and drooling in bed, to a computer screen on an unstaffed desk. Bold letters underneath the picture read:

"ILL BILL - FEARLESS LEADER OF SECTION NINE"

RICK

Bill's not gonna think that's funny, you know?

EDDY

He'll have to survive his monthly case of the sniffles to see it.

MALLORY

If he hadn't gone to the infirmary, he surely would have doomed us all... You were saying, Rick?

RICK

Atmosphere was similar to Earth's. If we accelerate the sprouting process, we'll see them tomorrow.

EDDY

There were fields of them, Mal. All the same size. Lotsa bugs around, chirping. Kinda like music. It was quite romantic...

MALLORY

I'm more of a "getting drunk on the couch together" -type of girl.

EDDY

You get the vodka, I get the ice.

MALLORY

Cheapskate.

The station's A.I., EVE, speaks up in an emotionless voice:

EVE (V.O.)

It is now 1800 hours. Lab personnel is required to clock out at the exit. Have a wonderful evening!

RICK

Thank you, EVE!

EDDY

The A.I. with a stick up her ass.

The three of them pack up. Rick tidies up his desk, singing.

RICK
 (sings)
 "You are my sunshine, my only
 sunshine. You make me happy..."

MALLORY
 Rick, you comin'?

RICK
 Just a sec.

Rick walks up to an empty glass cabinet and puts one of the seeds onto a tray, which he then slides into the cabinet.

A robotic arm snatches it up and buries it in the soil.

INT. SPACE VESSEL "OUTER EDEN" - LEISURE ROOM

Rick sits at the table, opens a new message on his tablet. The sender's name says "HOME".

A photo pops up. It shows a little girl hugging a toddler in a park on Earth. The text underneath it reads:

"LITTLE ONE IS STOKED FOR LITTLER ONE'S BIRTHDAY!!! :-)"

Mallory enters the room and smiles at the picture.

MALLORY
 Aww. Someone's had a growth spurt.

Rick nods, unhappy. He looks at the flower pot.

RICK
 When Rose and I told Sarah we were expecting a baby, she said next time I'd come home, she would draw her brother or sister on there.

MALLORY
 And she will.

RICK
 I'm afraid it won't be until she has to draw him as a big brother.

MALLORY
 He's not that tall, yet. More handsome than you, though.

RICK
 Maybe I'll just stay next time...

Mallory's face saddens. Rick doesn't see it.

MALLORY
 We all oughta be with whom we love.

RICK

Look at them. I oughta run that distance to get back there.

MALLORY

You will get back. And that is all that matters to them.

RICK

Yeah, maybe... Thanks, Mal.

MALLORY

Always.

They share a smile. Rick looks after her as she leaves.

INT. SPACE VESSEL "OUTER EDEN" - LABORATORY

Rick, in his chair, stares at the glass cabinet. He sees nothing but undisturbed soil. He looks puzzled.

He rolls back behind his desk. Again singing the same song:

RICK

(sings)

"The other night, dear, as I was sleeping, I dreamed I held you..."

In the cabinet, a tiny ALIEN PLANT breaks through the soil.

EDDY

Okay. What's up with you singing that one song the entire week now?

RICK

My wife has trouble singing our boy to sleep. She wants me to try it.

EDDY

Wait, so you're practicing? Is he, like, gonna give you a grade? Is that what it's like on Earth?

RICK

You've never been to Earth, huh?

EDDY

No... But it's on my bucket list. Any place you recommend I go see?

RICK

Pete's hot-dog stand in New Jersey.

Eddy seems puzzled. Mallory grins as Rick goes back to work.

RICK

(sings)

"I'll always love you, and make..."

Eddy now sees the plant GROW with every word Rick sings. It is black and green in color, with eight pink-yellow petals.

EDDY

Holy shit... Look!

Rick and Mallory look up. Their jaws drop. Mallory checks a screen by the cabinet: everything's in the green.

MALLORY

Its charts have hardly changed...

EDDY

What'd we do except listen to Rick?

Rick looks at the plant... He slowly begins to sing to it.

RICK

(sings)

"You are my sunshine, my only..."

The plant grows, now man-high. It brushes against the glass.

RICK

Eddy? You have any music with you?

Eddy nods and grabs a soundbox off his desk. He pushes a few buttons on it, before it plays an obnoxious DUB-STEP track.

The plant recoils from the glass and squirms with pain.

RICK

Eddy, shut it off!

Eddy quickly kills the music. The plant stands still.

EDDY

If it's too loud, you're too old...

Eddy puts on a 1960s OLDIE, upbeat and catchy. The plant now grows again. It even seems to sway along to the tune.

They look at it, amazed. Eddy turns up the volume and holds the soundbox up against the glass.

The plant opens its petals, giving Eddy a glimpse down its stern, where a bright LIGHT pulsates.

The plant grows several extra heads, hydra-like. Weeds become thick tentacles. Thorns flash like shark teeth.

Rick sees this, becoming alarmed.

RICK

Eddy? Eddy? Eddy, shut it off!

Inside the light, Eddy recognizes a long throat, rigged with teeth, right as the plant SMASHES through the glass.

Rick falls back against his desk, sending the tray of seeds to the ground, and--

The cabinet's soil spreads on the floor, burying the seeds, which immediately sprout NEW PLANTS.

One of the original plant's stems wraps around Eddy, like an anaconda. Eddy drops the soundbox, SCREAMS as--

Tongue-like appendices carry him into the plant's mouth.

RICK

Mallory! The herbicide!

Mounted on a wall is a large HERBICIDE SPRAYER. Mallory and Rick run to it as--

Numerous tentacles grab Mallory and pin her down on a table.

Rick watches the plant regurgitate Eddy's steaming SKELETON, along with his "INTERN" badge. They land near the herbicide.

Rick hesitates, then runs on towards it, when a THORNED TENTACLE wraps around his leg, cutting into his flesh.

He falls down next to the skeleton and reaches out for the herbicide, that is only an arm's length away.

Rick sees Eddy's skeletal arm and grabs it. He turns his face away in disgust, yanking at it, until--

He tears the arm off the skeleton and reaches for the herbicide with it, knocking it off the wall.

Mallory grabs a garden shovel off the table she's on. She hacks the tentacles holding her to pieces, screaming.

Rick grabs the sprayer and douses the tentacle with its fluid. It lets go off him, partly melting away.

Mallory has also freed herself. Rick and her both run to the soundbox on the ground, still playing its tune.

The plants encircle them and close in, as Mallory grabs the soundbox, switches songs and holds it up.

The plants SCREAM with a dozen different voices, pulling away. Mallory screams triumphantly.

RICK

Come on, Mal! I have an idea!

Mallory follows as Rick runs out of the lab, the herbicide sprayer slung over his shoulder.

INT. SPACE VESSEL "OUTER EDEN" - HALLWAY

They turn a corner and run through a door on the right, as hellish, slithering sounds resonate across the hall.

INT. SPACE VESSEL "OUTER EDEN" - CONTROL ROOM

A room alight with panels and readouts. Rick heads to a keyboard underneath a huge screen. An ALARM rings out.

EVE (V.O.)
Hazardous anomaly detected.

MALLORY
Yes, EVE, no shit... Hurry, Rick.

Mallory throws him the soundbox. He sets it down and furiously hammers his fingers into the keyboard.

The screen announces its connection to an external device.

Rick puts his hand onto the soundbox. Mallory puts hers on top of his. They look at one another and press "PLAY".

The DUB-STEP loudly plays over the station's speakers.

MALLORY
"If it's too loud, you're too old."

Mallory turns the volume up all the way. They cover their ears as they hear the plants' awful, high-pitched CRIES.

The dub-step becomes deafening, until all the station's speakers just BLOW OUT. Only the alarm keeps blaring.

Rick and Mallory look at each other, taking their hands off their ears. The control room's screen reads "AUDIO FAILURE".

MALLORY
Is it over?

Rick doesn't answer. He follows her out of the room.

INT. SPACE VESSEL "OUTER EDEN" - HALLWAY

They look down the hallway, into the lab's direction... No sight or sound of the plants.

They hug and hold each other tight, full of joy, until--

Down the hall, unseen horrors become audible again. GROWING.

MALLORY
What?! Noooo! There's no music!

Rick looks up at a warning light. His eyes fill with horror.

RICK
It's the alarm... That's the music.

MALLORY
Oh, God... We have to end this.

Rick and Mallory stumble back into the control room.

INT. SPACE VESSEL "OUTER EDEN" - CONTROL ROOM

MALLORY

You have to stop the alarm, Rick!

Rick, at the keyboard, tries to shut it off. All of his attempts are repelled with one single word: "DENIED".

He steps back and stares at the screen, near tears.

RICK

I can't... I don't have the authority.

MALLORY

What?! Then who the fuck does?!

Rick turns to her with a crazed, painful smile.

RICK

Ill Bill... Ill Bill does.

All hope in Mallory's face crumbles. She bursts into tears.

MALLORY

Fuck! Fuck you and your fucking sniffles, Bill! Fuuuck!

An EXPLOSION resonates from somewhere in the lab. Close enough to rouse Mallory; she toughens up again.

MALLORY

Rick. We gotta go.

RICK

Go where?! We can't stop it, Mal!

MALLORY

Anywhere, goddamnit!
(hesitates; sincere)
You said you oughta run to your family, right? Now's the time.

He looks at her for a long beat. His face hardens. He nods.

RICK

Section Eight?

MALLORY

Let's go.

INT. SPACE VESSEL "OUTER EDEN" - HALLWAY

The two of them bolt out of the control room, to see--

Large shadows of tentacles on the wall, coming from the lab.

Rick and Mallory run into the opposite direction, followed by the nightmarish ROARS of a thousand monsters.

They turn a corner, now having eyes on their goal: a large gate reading "SECTION EIGHT", 20 meters in front of them.

Running for dear life, Mallory looks back at the WAVE of tentacles, thorns and teeth behind them, approaching fast.

RICK

We're not gonna make it!

MALLORY

Ruuuuun!

They are about to pass an open door to their right, as the WAVE is about to catch up. Mallory sees this and--

She TACKLES Rick. Both fly through the nearby door.

INT. SPACE VESSEL "OUTER EDEN" - BEDROOM

Rick hits the ground of his bedroom. He turns and sees--

Mallory is grabbed by the plants. She holds on to the doorframe, limbs spread. Tentacles wrap around her body.

Mallory punches the digital keys of a panel near the door, which quickly registers her command: "LOCK"

Rick sees this, about to get up and run over to her--

RICK

Mal, wait!

With her fingers losing their grip on the door, she smiles at Rick, cheeks damp with tears, as--

MALLORY

Rick, I lov--

She is YANKED outside, as the door shuts in Rick's face.

RICK

Mallory!

Mallory's SCREAMS grow faint and die away, as if carried off by a train. Rick, on all fours, begins to sob.

INT. SPACE VESSEL "OUTER EDEN" - HALLWAY

A warning light on the ceiling, flashing orange, before being CRUSHED by the growing plants which roam the hallway.

INT. SPACE VESSEL "OUTER EDEN" - BEDROOM

Rick's on the floor, back against the wall. Blank. Worn out.

RICK

EVE? EVE, if you can hear me, show me the damage on the vessel.

A screen on the wall lights up, showing the vessel's map through some interference. A third of it is colored red.

RICK

Thanks, EVE... That'll be all...

The screen turns off. Rick grabs his tablet off the bed, opens the contact "HOME" and sees the picture of his kids.

Trembling, he selects the option "RECORD AUDIO".

RICK

Baby? We've got problems. There's--

Another EXPLOSION, somewhere nearby. Rick looks around in terror. His eyes stop at the room's ventilation shaft, as--

Small WEEDS inside the shaft delicately clutch the grill, that covers the vent. Rick stares at them, panting heavily.

He checks the herbicide's fluid container: a third left. Rick closes his eyes, apparently giving up... But then--

His breath slows, eventually steadying. He opens his eyes. There is no panic. Zero fear.

Rick looks at the tablet in his hand, lifts it up to his lips. He begins to sing to it. Calmly, as if to a newborn.

RICK

(sings)

"You are my sunshine... My only
sunshine..."

The weeds begin to rattle the vent's cover, loosening it.

RICK

(sings)

"You make me happy, when skies are
gray..."

The cover further loosens. Rick aims the herbicide sprayer with one hand, now singing with a genuine warmth and joy.

RICK

(sings)

"You'll never know, dear, how much
I love you..."

A screw wiggles wildly, at its last thread, about to drop--

CUT TO BLACK

RICK (V.O.)

(sings)

"Please don't take my sunshine
away..."

Rick's voice echoes and fades away.