

BUTTERS' GARDEN

Written by

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EXT. BUTTERS' GARDEN - DAY

A fly crawls across the vacant, glassy eye of an old tabby in a shoebox. It darts away as a lid slides over the corpse.

A young child prays.

OLIVIA (O.S.)
...and you'll be missed even though
you scratched Ben a lot. Amen.

A small family kneels next to a tiny dirt hole amidst a sprawling garden that towers above them on all sides:

TRICIA (40) whose eyes are as warm as they are doleful, holds BEN (2) sucking dirt-covered fingers. OLIVIA (6) a fiery rascal whose grin often falters now, clutches the shoebox.

TRICIA
Amen.

Tricia places the box in the hole. She looks at her daughter.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
I can do this part.

Olivia nods, solemn.

OLIVIA
Bye, Butters.

BEN
(through fingers)
Bye, Butters.

Olivia and Ben scamper off. Wildflowers and weeds ripple in the wind as Tricia shovels dirt over the dead feline's box.

INT. OLIVIA AND BEN'S ROOM - DAY

Tricia's slender fingers unwrap a picture frame from a towel.

INSERT - THE PICTURE

Sunshine-covered smiles spread across the faces of Tricia, Olivia, Ben, and a HANDSOME MAN (40s) in a canoe on a lake.

BACK TO SCENE

Tricia's jaw clenches against bitter emotion as she hangs the picture on the wall.

A half-empty glass of red wine sits on a window sill. Behind it, Olivia and Ben chase each other in the yard.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY - SAME

Olivia shrieks with glee as Ben takes her down. His hands stab an imaginary knife into her stomach.

BEN
Die, die, die.

She groans theatrically and flops over, dead.

Wind rustles wildflowers around Butters' Garden.

INT. OLIVIA AND BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Tricia kisses a yawning Olivia on the forehead. Ben snores from inside his toddler crib.

OLIVIA
Do you think he went to heaven?

TRICIA
He was a very good cat.

Olivia nods, deep in thought as Tricia tucks her in.

OLIVIA
He was.

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT - LATER

GEORGIA (50s) with faded lipstick and a wrinkled button up rubs her eyes from a laptop screen.

Tricia sits on a peeling leather couch: the only furniture in an otherwise bare room. A cardboard box props up her feet. A glass of wine swirls in her hand.

GEORGIA
Don't know how you do it alone. I'd kill myself.

TRICIA
It's not fun.

GEORGIA
Couldn't even get Colton to wear underwear today. I just let him run around freebie.

Tricia nods distractedly, sipping wine.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
 (really looking at her)
 How was the move, really?

TRICIA
 Cat died. Olivia was pretty upset.

GEORGIA
 Sheesh.

TRICIA
 Honestly can't complain. Better the
 cat than us.

GEORGIA
 Silver-linings.

Tricia yawns.

GEORGIA (CONT'D)
 Get some sleep, Trish. I need you
 sharp for the Baker account.

TRICIA
 Say "hi" to Len for me.

She tosses her laptop down, chugs wine as she ambles down the

HALLWAY

And silently pushes open the door to

OLIVIA AND BEN'S ROOM.

Dim hallway light falls upon a wide-open window.

Wind ruffles the hair against Tricia's face, frozen in shock.
 Her eyes flick to her sleeping kids, and land on a furry
 clump spread across Olivia's duvet.

Butters' stiff corpse stares back at her.

Tricia rushes to the window, locks it, and closes the blinds.

She grabs the abandoned towel that covered the picture frame
 from a cardboard box and uses it to grasp the feline's paw.

She tucks her nose beneath her shirt as she rushes down the

HALLWAY

To the

ENTRYWAY

And drops the body in the darkness just outside the door. She bolts the door closed, eyes wide with fear.

INT. OLIVIA AND BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

The door creeps open and Tricia's eyes flit to Olivia, then Ben, who sleep. The door closes. The light beneath cuts out.

PRE-LAP - Olivia screams.

INT./EXT. SUBARU OUTBACK - DAY

Tricia's haunted eyes jump from the empty country road around them to her kids, who arm wrestle in the backseat.

TRICIA
Olivia, please.

OLIVIA
Sorry.

Tricia's eyes return to the road. Strange, old houses appear between trees and thick grass every so often as they drive.

QUICK FLASHBACK

A crack of morning sun lights Tricia's bath-robed form, bent over Butters' grave and covering the shoebox with speed.

OLIVIA (V.O.)
Mom?

BACK TO SCENE

Tricia's eyes jerk to her daughter in the rearview mirror.

TRICIA
What, Liv?

A small, slow town unfolds around them as the Subaru pulls into a parking lot beneath a faded sign: "Mag's Market."

OLIVIA
Can we call dad?

Fingers clench on the gear shift as she pushes it into park.

TRICIA
After we're done in the store.

EXT. MAG'S MARKET - DAY

A MAN (50s) on the sidewalk watches Tricia unbuckle Ben. Olivia's skirt flies around her as she jumps from the SUV.

OLIVIA
... He'll like our new garden.

Tricia nods, emotionless, as she leads them into the market.

INT. MAG'S MARKET - DAY

Silent, furtive glances from an ELDERLY COUPLE follow the small family down an aisle.

Tricia drops pasta sauce into her basket, clocks the couple, and tucks Ben beneath her arm. Olivia wiggles around her.

TRICIA
(to Olivia)
Hold your brother's hand.

Olivia obeys, oblivious.

At the counter, a heavy CLERK with cat glasses scrutinizes them as she scans Tricia's groceries.

CLERK
Want a lollipop? You can have some
from my private stash.

She pulls a handful of crusted lollipops from the till and holds them out to the kids.

OLIVIA
What kind is best?

TRICIA
I don't generally give them candy.

CLERK
(unkind)
I don't generally give out lollies
from my stash.

OLIVIA
Can we, mom?

TRICIA
Just one.

CLERK
(to Olivia)
Red. Always been my favorite.

Olivia and Ben both grab red lollipops.

CLERK (CONT'D)
You the new family moved into the
acreage on the south side?

TRICIA
We're new, yes.

The clerk squints at her.

CLERK
No husband?

Tricia shifts uncomfortably.

OLIVIA
Dad 's in Toronto.

TRICIA
Olivia.

CLERK
(off Tricia's concern)
I'm no stalker, hun. Whole town
knows you've moved in. Hard not to
in a place like this.

She offers Tricia a receipt.

Tricia glances at an OLD BIKER (70s), who saddles-up behind
them, watchful. She takes the receipt.

TRICIA
Good to know.

SERIES OF QUICK SHOTS - EVENING ROUTINE:

- Kitchen: The small family eats spaghetti around a little
table. Tricia's eyes never stray too far from the kids.

- Kitchen: Olivia stands on a stool at the sink and rinses
dishes next to her mom. Ben plays with a toy on the floor.

- Olivia and Ben's Bedroom: Tricia secures the window and closes the blinds. The kids squirm in their beds.

- Living Room: Tricia settles onto the couch with her laptop and a bottle of wine.

- A clock on the wall shifts from seven to ten o'clock.

BACK TO SCENE

INT. OLIVIA AND BEN'S ROOM - NIGHT

Hallway light cracks slowly across Butters' corpse on Olivia's bed. Bugs crawl in a line down the side of her bed.

Tricia tears the cat from Olivia's bed, towel be damned.

EXT. BUTTERS' GARDEN - NIGHT

Darkness squeezes around Tricia as she slams a shovel into the ground with the fury of a mother at the end of her rope.

When the grave is unnecessarily large -- a black pit that sinks into deep earth -- Tricia stops and chugs back wine.

Wind rustles the wildflowers and grass looming around her.

She tosses Butters, the shoebox, and the lid into the pit and pitches her shovel into the mound of earth next to it.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Tricia stares out the window, phone pressed to her ear.

TRICIA
Are you available today?

She waits, bloodshot eyes pinned on the garden.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
Yes. Thank you.

She hangs up.

INT. OLIVIA AND BEN'S ROOM - DAY

Olivia and Ben play -- an entire box of toys spread around them. Ben grips a lion figurine.

OLIVIA
 ...and then this one says --

BEN
 Roar!

The lion attacks Olivia's doll.

OLIVIA
 Wait!

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Tricia strolls to a truck in the gravel driveway. The insignia on the side reads: "Pest Control." An EXTERMINATOR ambles from the truck.

EXTERMINATOR
 You Trish?

TRICIA
 Tricia. Thank you for coming.

He nods and glances at the property.

EXTERMINATOR
 I always thought it was a weird
 place to put a home. Too much empty
 space around it.

Tricia glances at the tangle of wild plants. Unkept grass shifts in the wind in every direction around the house.

TRICIA
 Yeah.

EXTERMINATOR
 It this way?

He points to Butters' Garden. Tricia nods.

INT. OLIVIA AND BEN'S ROOM - DAY

Ben chases Olivia from the room with a squeal of laughter.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Tricia and the exterminator circle the yard's perimeter.

EXTERMINATOR

Best I can figure is a prank, maybe
your kids?

TRICIA

Why would my kids dig up their dead
cat?

He shrugs.

EXTERMINATOR

You alone out here?

Tricia pulls her sweater tighter as they approach his truck.

TRICIA

No.

EXTERMINATOR

Mag down at grocery store said you
were. Best be careful.

She nods as he climbs in.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

Tricia shuffles to the fridge, shoulders heavy.

TRICIA

Olivia, come help with lunch.

Silence meets her.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Liv.

Again, nothing.

INT. OLIVIA AND BEN'S ROOM - DAY

Tricia peeks into the vacant room littered with toys.

EXT. HOUSE - DAY

Tricia stands just past the front door.

TRICIA

(with increasing concern)
Olivia! Ben!

With panicked speed, Tricia rushes through the yard. Eyes whip around wildly.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Olivia!

A childish SQUEAL and immediate SHUSH come from the garden.

TRICIA (CONT'D)

Benjamin?

Tricia shoves away grass and flowers as she stumbles forward.

EXT. BUTTERS' GARDEN - DAY

Tricia breaks through the grass to find Olivia and Ben covered in dirt. Butters' dead corpse lies next to them.

TRICIA

Get back!

Tricia grabs her children and tugs them from the feline. Olivia squeals against her mother's grip.

OLIVIA

Stop it, mom!

TRICIA

What? Why?

OLIVIA

I have to get him back.

Tricia pauses and kneels next to her daughter.

TRICIA

What do you mean, Olivia? Get who back?

OLIVIA

Butters. If we pray really hard, we can get him back.

Tricia takes in her kids' dirty attire and the corpse.

TRICIA

Have you been digging up Butters?

Olivia nods, eyes watery. Ben sucks on his fingers.

Tricia sits in the dirt and pulls them both into her lap.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
We buried Butters. Remember? Why
are you trying to bring him back?

OLIVIA
... I didn't give him enough food
in the car, and he died.

Tricia blinks, takes in the new information.

TRICIA
You didn't kill Butters, Liv. You
gave him plenty of food and lots of
snacks. He was a very happy cat.

She squeezes her kids closer.

TRICIA (CONT'D)
Sometimes...
(emotion catches in her
throat)
Sometimes things we love fade away,
even if we do everything right.

Olivia holds her mother's gaze -- the perception of a child.

OLIVIA
Okay... Will you help us bury
Butters again, mom?

Tricia smiles.

TRICIA
Maybe this time we can give him
some flowers from our new garden.

Olivia nods. A wide grin cracks across her face.