FRANK, VIRGINIA, TANIA AND PABLO

PABLO. Tania is an avid gardener too!

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

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

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

VIRGINIA. She has a lot of work and a little baby on the way.

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

PABLO. You mean, our oak?

VIRGINIA. You mean your future disaster!

(Laughs.)

TANIA. Disaster?

FRANK. It's so dangerous.

TANIA. But. We. Love. The Tree.

PABLO. We do.

VIRGINIA. Really?

TANIA. Really.

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

PABLO. You had an oak tree like ours here?

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

VIRGINIA. How about right now? We have a chainsaw. And an axe!

FRANK. Oh Ginny. You will need a professional tree guy, of course. Posthaste.

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

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

VIRGINIA. And we get your leaves and acorns. All over our lot.

TANIA. The tree is the centerpiece of our plan for a Native Garden.

FRANK. Native Garden? That sounds very exotic.

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

PABLO. Which is better for the environment.

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

VIRGINIA. My. That's a patriotic call to action.

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

FRANK. So...you are suggesting: No azalea? No peonies? No hydrangeas?

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

FRANK. Blasphemy!

TANIA. But there are beautiful ferns, mulberry, Virginia creeper, Carolina silverbell. Low-maintenance greenery that's high-output and low-impact.

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

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

VIRGINIA. Isn't it their purpose to be ugly?

(Everyone laughs.)

TANIA. *(Good-natured.)* That's a misconception. Native plants can be quite arresting.

FRANK. So, you are going to plant a bunch of weeds –

VIRGINIA. – So that your yard will attract more bees and bugs?

TANIA. Yes.

FRANK. Fascinating.

VIRGINIA. Crazy.

TANIA. Do you listen to NPR? National Public Radio?

VIRGINIA. Of course we listen to NPR.

FRANK. We're old, not dead.

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

VIRGINIA. Are you all vegetarian?

TANIA. No –

PABLO. We love barbecue.

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

TANIA. It's a gardening philosophy developed by entomologists.

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

TANIA. Except, we're not Mexican.

PABLO. I'm from Las Condes Santiago, Chile. I did boarding school here.

TANIA. And, I'm from...*New* Mexico.

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

VIRGINIA. That's why we thought you were Mexican.

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

PABLO. She can swear in Spanish.

TANIA. Maybe you imagined the accent?

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

TANIA & PABLO. *(Smiling. Good-natured.)* That's what people tell us.

VIRGINIA. *(Beat.)* We love Mexico. Love it.

FRANK. Saw the Pyramid of the Sun in Mexico City.

VIRGINIA. We saw Warren Beatty at a disco in Acapulco.

FRANK. No one talks about Acapulco anymore.

VIRGINIA. Mexico now is all Cancún, Cancún!

FRANK. And drug trafficking. Illegal immigration – and that wall business.

TANIA. I don't know Mexico very well.

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

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

FRANK. England. Mostly.

TANIA. Do you introduce yourself as English-American?

FRANK. Of course not. I'm a New Englander. From the Northeast.

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

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

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

PABLO. She is conducting some identity experiments. For her doctoral dissertation in anthropology.

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

PABLO. It's interesting and it's controversial.

FRANK. Hey! Our marriage was controversial in our day.