

Milo

Frame Character

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The letter hadn't come as a surprise. *Milo*, it read, *come see me as soon as you can. We need to talk about my will. - Dad*

Dad was nearing 90 years old, and he had been disturbingly reclusive ever since Mom died. So thoughts of his eventual death weren't news to you and, as the one attorney in the family, you had been expecting to end up as the executor. You called your secretary and had her book you a flight out as soon as possible.

When you got to the old house, you found Dad in his study at the same old typewriter. Reams of paper were scattered about the room. "Well, what took you so long?" he snapped. Sigh. Same old Dad.

Dad explained to you that the papers were his life's work. He was writing, he explained, a unique and world-changing novel. And as his last wish, he wanted it to be published posthumously. He was going to finish it, and then he was going to die.

"But - " you started. "No buts!" said Dad. "This novel's going to get done, and then I'm going to die. And you and your brothers and sisters are going to see it gets published."

"Well, what's it about?" you asked. "No spoilers!" Dad shouted. "Read it after it's written. Now go! Get out of my house and leave me to my writing. Send me a will and I'll sign it. Do whatever you want with my money, just make sure it says my novel has to get published or nobody sees a dime."

Some things never change. Dad was as stubborn and intractable as ever. You went home the next day and did exactly as he had instructed. Dad was as good as his word: a week later, you got back a signed and dated copy.

It was scarcely a week after that that you got the phone call from the hospital. A stroke, the doctor said. You thanked him and hung up. The air around you felt heavy. After a while, the moment passed. You picked up the phone again and called the funeral parlor.

The memorial service passed you by with barely any effect. You just felt numb. Afterwards, you took the close family members into a side room. Here, you had placed two large packing crates, each with reams of typewritten paper. It was time for the reading of the will... and the reading of the novel.

NOTE: *Your function in this scene is to explain to your family the situation regarding the novel quickly. You can allow them a short time to react, but before long, you should ask them to split into three groups of 4 so they can begin reading through the novel. Players will split into groups according to their scene placement cards.*

What to Expect from This Game

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Structure

The structure of *A Garden of Forking Paths* is quite unusual. First, it is a story-within-a-story game, in which you'll spend much of the game roleplaying a character from a story being told to or by the characters in the frame story. This structure is not unheard of in LARPs; however, unlike most such LARPs, this one is focused primarily on the inner story, as opposed to the frame story. You'll be cast both as a frame story character and an inner story character, but you'll be spending most of the game playing the inner story character and, as such, we cast *A Garden of Forking Paths* with more emphasis placed on the inner story.

This is a game for twelve players; however, the inner story has only four characters in it. This is because we'll be running three separate instances of the inner story simultaneously. (The frame story provides an explanation for this.) The inner story has two acts, each consisting of four scenes. The choices made in each scene will persist and affect future scenes. Between scenes, we will ask certain players to switch from one instance of the inner story to a different one, playing the same character as before. Because you are entering a new instance of the story, things in the past will now be different than in the story you left.

Mechanics

There is no combat in *A Garden of Forking Paths*. The characters in this game should not need to physically fight. If you feel it absolutely necessary to do so for dramatic and/or story reasons, please pantomime it out with the other players improv-style in a safe and fair manner.

A Garden of Forking Paths has no items, special abilities, magic, or stats.

There is one storytelling-related mechanic. In the inner storyline, the choices you as a group must make are each given a letter. For example, in the first scene, the choices are "A" and "B". Your scenario packet will contain two cards: an "A" card and a "B" card. Once you've made a choice, your group should take the card representing the choice you have made and tape it to the wall with blue painter's tape we'll provide. This will give new people entering the group an easy way to track what's happened in the story so far.

Genre and Play Style

The overall genre of *A Garden of Forking Paths* is literary fiction. This is a story about people having realistic problems and attempting to work through them as best they can.

This is not a story with winners and losers: in a sense, everyone wins or loses together. Bad things will happen to good people, sometimes for seemingly no reason at all. You'll be asked to make choices without fully knowing the ramifications of each option. The characters in the story do not understand the ramifications either, and yet they must choose.

Program

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Prologue: After the Memorial Service, a Family Meeting

Act I

- Scene 1: A Question of Marriage - Barbara's twenty-first birthday
- Scene 2: A Question of Fidelity - two years later
- Scene 3: A Question of Divorce - two years later
- Scene 4: A Question of Care - five and a half years later

Intermission: The Second Box is Opened

Act II

- Scene 1: A Question of Money - four years later
- Scene 2: A Question of Parenting - eight years later
- Scene 3: A Question of Love - six years later
- Scene 4: A Question of Generations - fifteen years later

Epilogue: Game Wrap & Discussion

Family Background

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Jessica's Eulogy for Dad

Stories are important. The stories people tell about themselves define who they are. This is the story of my family.

Let me tell you about Dad. Dad fixed cars for a living, but he would have done it even if old man Mulroney hadn't paid him. It was a lifelong fascination for him - practically a calling. On his breaks, he read books. Science, literature, anything he could get his hands on. The other guys looked at him funny, but they didn't say anything - he was the best damn mechanic in the place and they knew it too.

The books were how he and Mom met. She was shelving books in the library to make some extra money. He knocked over the book cart by accident, and they both bent down to pick up the mess, and their eyes met... you know the drill.

Mom and Dad got married and bought a house together. Dad couldn't afford much on his mechanic's wages, but it was cozy. Before too long, they had a baby boy. That was Milo. Kathy followed shortly after, and by the time Mom had me and Lindsay, old man Mulroney had retired and left Dad the garage. Now most people, being put in charge of a business like that, would stop fixing cars, but not Dad. He had motor oil in his veins.

So it was doubly tragic that it was a car accident that took Mom from us. I was 15. I can't imagine what it must have been like for Dad, but it just about killed us kids. And we could tell Dad was hurting too. He tried to put on his bravest face for us, but we could tell. He was distracted, perturbed, on edge all the time. He just wasn't Dad.

And so it was that Dad forgot to check the safety lock on one of the lifts and lost both his legs. By that point, I was in college and Milo was already in his first job, but we all immediately came home to help. We got him the best wheelchair we could find, put a lift on the stairs, made the house safe for him.

After that, Dad didn't go into the garage much anymore. Driving just wasn't the same in his new, specially-equipped sedan. He became increasingly distant, and eventually he just stopped returning our calls altogether. I haven't spoken to my father in over ten years.

You know what the last thing Dad said to me was? We were coming back from the park. I had to catch the bus back to the airport, so I was just going to take him home. He got this weird gleam in his eye, and he turned to me and asked me if I believed in fate. I said I wasn't sure. He said, "Well, I don't know. I just can't help thinking that if one little thing had gone just a little differently..." Then he trailed off, wheeled himself over to the lift, cast one long glance back at me, and waved.

Do you think that's true? If one little thing had gone differently, would our lives be completely changed? If that lift had fallen differently, would Dad have been fine? Or would his distraction have led something else to go wrong?

I don't know either, Dad. But I love you, and I miss you, and nothing that could have happened would change that.

The Funeral

Dad passed away last week. The doctors said he went peacefully in his sleep and there was nothing anyone could have done. Milo, being the lawyer in the family as well as the closest to Dad, made most of the arrangements.

Dad was buried in Mount Pleasant Cemetery next to Mom. It was a small, private ceremony. Afterwards, a memorial service was held at the cemetery, during which several family members gave eulogies.

Milo has asked the family to stick around after the service so that they can deal with some family business concerning Dad's will.

The Family

- **Milo** is Dad's oldest child. He's a partner in a law firm in the city, and mostly works on contracts for corporations. He is not married.
- **Kathy** is Dad's second child. She is married to **Patrick**, a systems administrator at a shipping company. Kathy used to work as an administrative assistant at the same company, but quit when she and Patrick had their first child, **Devon**. Devon and his younger sister **Lily** are both in middle school.
- **Jessica** is Dad's third child. While in college, Jessica started dating **Faith**. The two of them came out to Dad and Faith's parents a year later, and both families were supportive and accepting. Jessica works as a video editor for NBC News, and Faith is a restaurant inspector for the city.
- **Lindsay** is Dad's youngest child. She writes a syndicated advice column for a newspaper. She is married to **Rick**, a neurologist. They then have two children, **Paula** and **Noah**. Paula is in sixth grade, and Noah is in fourth grade.
- **Larry** is Dad's younger brother. He is a veteran of World War II, in which he was an Navy pilot in the Pacific. After retiring from the Air Force, Larry opened a sandwich shop, which he runs to this day.