

CULTIVAR

Written by

Braxton Beckham

Writer Contact:
braxtonbeckham11@gmail.com

1 INT. GREENHOUSE - EVENING

There are sounds of HUMMING and TRIMMING in the greenhouse.

Though the few windows it has are too caked in dirt to actually let in any light. Instead, the plants are sustained by blue, futuristic lights hanging above them.

The lone hummer, PAUL (30s), sits in front of a bonsai tree, snipping off different parts with his shears. The HUMMING stops as Paul accidentally CUTS his finger. He gasps before laughing.

PAUL
It's ok, I'm alri--

There's no one there. He looks at a large pot filled with dirt on the ground as he sucks his finger. Somber, Paul turns to a pair of seeds under a magnifying glass. His eyes fill with new determination and he takes the seeds.

Paul examines the seeds under a microscope. He takes them out, brushes over them with a yellow solution, then examines them again. A smile creeps onto his face from what he sees.

Satisfied and excited, Paul walks over to the pot and plants the seeds. He pats the soil.

Paul looks at his watch before grabbing his jacket and walking out the greenhouse door. With Paul gone, sounds of rapid GROWTH can be heard. A small, green vine begins to creep into the frame.

2 INT. GREENHOUSE - MORNING

Paul walks into the greenhouse, hair frazzled. His eyes look up and he stops, a giddy expression filling his face.

PAUL
Hello there...

In the pot in the back of the room stands DAPHNE. Her hair has vines interspersed throughout, most of her torso is covered by bright green moss, and various small branches shoot off from her body.

She responds to Paul, clearly able to learn quickly, but her speech is still stuttered and broken.

DAPHNE
Hel- lo?

Paul takes out a notepad as he approaches her, writing while gazing.

PAUL
You've grown so fast, I- I wasn't
expecting that.

Paul sees Daphne's confused face. He puts away his notepad.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Oh, sorry. I haven't had company in
a while. I'm Paul.

Daphne looks around the room, confirming Paul's claim. Then she sees his proffered hand. She reaches out her own hesitantly. Paul gently shakes it.

DAPHNE
Hello... Paul.
(beat)
Wh- who am... I?

PAUL
You? ...you will be Daphne.

Daphne toys with the sound in her head. She smiles.

DAPHNE
Daphne.

PAUL
Yes. But first, we need to get some
brackets on you.

Paul goes to one of the side tables and grabs various wooden brackets that look roughly like a wooden dress.

DAPHNE
Brackets?

PAUL
They'll help contain and shape your
growth. Otherwise, you'll become
more tree than woman. It's tougher
to talk to a tree...

Paul is momentarily lost in memory and Daphne notices. But he snaps back.

PAUL (CONT'D)
Of course, only if you want.

Daphne pauses for a moment, thinking. Then she looks into Paul's weary eyes. She nods her head.

Paul reaches out to start attaching the brackets, but first he briefly feels the moss on her back, mesmerized. Daphne looks back at him and he stops, bashful.

As Paul attaches the brackets to Daphne, repeated SNIPPING sounds can be heard...

3

INT. GREENHOUSE - NIGHT

...we see the cause of the SNIPPING as Paul holds Daphne's arm, cutting away small branches. Daphne focuses on steadying her breathing. Despite this, she still winces slightly with each SNIP.

Time has passed with the plants of the greenhouse changing color and Daphne's brackets now being too tight. This does not go unnoticed by Paul. Daphne catches Paul staring, he quickly looks away. She enjoys embarrassing him.

 DAPHNE
Something wrong?

 PAUL
It's just, your brackets. They're
too small now...

 DAPHNE
I hadn't noticed.

 PAUL
(playful)
Stop, this is serious.
(beat)
I think I'm gonna have to cut your
nutrients for a while.

 DAPHNE
Oh. For how long do you think?

 PAUL
Until you've stabilized and there's
nothing left to distinguish you
from flesh and blood.

 DAPHNE
...and when will that be?

Daphne catches Paul's eyes, and they hold for a moment. Paul breaks it with a smile.

 PAUL
That, my dear, is up to you.

Daphne clearly isn't satisfied with this answer, but she concedes.

DAPHNE
If that's what it takes... I trust
you, Paul.

PAUL
As you should. Sleep well.

Paul starts to get up and head toward the door.

DAPHNE
I don't sleep.

Paul stops with the door open, cold winds breezing in.

PAUL
Right, I always forget that.

4 INT. GREENHOUSE - NIGHT

Daphne stands hunched over, clearly taking a toll from the lack of nutrients. She watches Paul, who's dressed in a heavy coat, clipping away at a plant with fallen leaves.

DAPHNE
Hey Paul?

Paul remains tunnel-visioned on his task.

PAUL
Uh-huh?

DAPHNE
How much longer do you think it
will be till I get more food?

PAUL
That depends. Do you look human
yet?

Daphne shivers and looks through her viny hair at the branches still protruding from her arms.

DAPHNE
...no. But then why don't you come
over here and help me?

PAUL

Honey, I don't know if you've noticed, but you're not the only plant in my greenhouse. I'll help you when I'm done.

Daphne clenches her jaw at this.

DAPHNE

How am I supposed to become human when you won't even look at me?!

Paul, surprised by her outburst, accidentally CLIPS away a large branch. Paul looks at the error and SLAMS the shears on the table, causing Daphne's eyes to widen in shock.

PAUL

(through gritted teeth)
Do you ever stop to think about what I'm trying to fucking do?! I'm splicing genes, rewiring DNA, creating new *life*. That's hard enough without you whining in my ear for attention.

Daphne's lip and chin quiver as she tries to keep a normal face. Paul looks at her and sees that he's clearly hurt her. He gets up and slowly walks over to Daphne. He places his hands on each side of her head and brings her forehead to his.

PAUL (CONT'D)

I'm sorry. I didn't mean that. I just get stressed trying to make... *this* work.

They look into each other's eyes.

DAPHNE

(meekly)
I know.

Paul turns around with a new idea. He looks behind him and grabs the shears. He presents them to Daphne.

PAUL

Here.

Daphne takes the shears and looks up questioning.

DAPHNE

You want me to do it?

He squeezes her shoulder.

PAUL

If everything goes right, you won't
always need me. I trust you.

Paul goes to his seat and gets back to work. Daphne looks at the shears in her hands and hesitantly brings them up to her hair. She CUTS one of her vines and quietly gasps in pain.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Don't forget. Cut at the base.

Daphne takes the same vine and cuts it shorter.

5 INT. GREENHOUSE - DAY

Paul and Daphne stand facing each other. Daphne now looks almost entirely human. The surrounding plants have begun to bloom into new colorful combinations.

PAUL

Alright. Let's see.

Paul begins his examination of Daphne. He starts with her arms, lifting each up. He traces his fingers down her torso to her legs. He's clearly enjoying this. A grin finds its way onto his face as he gets to her head. He brushes his thumb against her cheek.

He combs his fingers through her hair, almost as if he's about to kiss her. Then he feels a small branch growing out of the back of her neck. He brings her head forward aggressively to confirm, and the intimacy is gone.

PAUL (CONT'D)

That's a shame.

DAPHNE

What? It's just one small thing, I
can trim it right now.

Daphne grabs the shears off the table.

PAUL

No. No you would've been ready by
now. Though you have done better
than expected. Perhaps, a few more
tweaks to the seed and we'll be
there.

DAPHNE

Seed... what're you talking about?

PAUL

Well, I'll have to go back and make edits to the seed stage.

DAPHNE

But, what about me?

PAUL

I'll take away all the human bits; try and figure out where you went wrong. But I assure you, Daphne, after your memories are gone living on the shelf isn't that bad.

Paul gestures to a wall that has rows of shelves with tree-like plants whose color and texture are similar to Daphne's. Daphne's eyes lock onto the plants, her predecessors. She is stunned by the image of what her future may be.

PAUL (CONT'D)

Don't worry. You've been a great help to me... and the next Daphne.

Paul turns around with a large smile on his face, only to be STABBED in the neck by Daphne with the shears. His eyes show a flash of curiosity before he slumps to the floor.

Daphne heaves with the weight of what she's done. She looks down at Paul's corpse which bleeds out onto the floor. Then, desire fills her eyes.

Daphne PULLS her discolored, but human, feet out of the pot and stumbles onto the cold concrete. She dips her hand into the pool of Paul's blood and slowly absorbs it into her hand. Her pale skin fills again with green undertones.

DAPHNE

Thank you.

Daphne crawls over Paul to the door of the greenhouse. She struggles to pull herself up and push it open.

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EXT. FIELD - CONTINUOUS

Daphne continues crawling into the sunny outdoors. As she crawls forward onto the grassy field, the brackets constraining her break and fall away revealing her moss-covered skin underneath. She feels the blades of grass between her fingers. Small, brightly-colored flowers appear on her shoulders and arms.

Daphne feels the warmth of the Sun on her face for the first time and breathes in the fresh air. She closes her eyes.