

The States Collection – Minnesota

A Paper Forest

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Running Time: 7 minutes

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### Minnesota - A Paper Forest

#### CAST:

LUCY (female) 18; She's on a mission and it may not be possible. Busy.

GARY (male) 20's; starving artist, wants to experience the great North Shore

(Characters can be any race.)

**PLACE:** A patch of land along the Gunflint Trail in Grand Marais. Plastic pots with baby-infant trees are all over (stick twigs in those nursery plastic pots). Use as many as you can. To keep the design simple, others will be referred to in script. A few of the saplings have their covered with drawings. It's an odd, eclectic mix of human activity and nature.

**SYNOPSIS:** Gary is sent to help Lucy plant a forest. Lucy needs art – fast-food art – to keep the deer from eating her forest. This could be the last forest planted in Minnesota because the forest really wants to move into Canada. A tale of climate change and clinging to hope.

A Paper Forest

AT RISE LUCY is folding sheets of paper across the main tree buds (the tops) of tree saplings. She staples the edges of the paper to hold them in place. The papers have been simply colored with scenes from nature. There's a picnic basket nearby.

It's early June – a time of wildflowers and new growth. Lucy is dressed accordingly – jeans, boots, a light jacket. She is on a mission – to build a forest.

GARY enters. He has a backpack and is dressed north-woodsny – but not Duluth-Pack north-woodsny. More like “living on the edge-have no money” north-woodsny. He watches. LUCY turns around and sees him and is startled.

LUCY

Campgrounds are a half-mile north. You missed the turn off.

GARY

No – I don't need campgrounds. I'm looking -

(LUCY grabs her cellphone and starts snapping photos.)

LUCY

*Stay away! I just took – like ten photos of you and now I'm posting them all over social media – so if something happens to me – they'll find you!* The photos are time-stamped. When they figure out my time-of-death, they'll know you were the last person to see me alive!

GARY

Wait! NO! I'm here because –

LUCY

And .... I have a gun!

(GARY whips out his cellphone and videotapes.)

*What* are you doing?

GARY

If you shoot me, I'll have it all down on videotape.

LUCY

Did I saw I was going to shoot you?

GARY

You said ... something about a gun.

LUCY

Yeah – up in the house. A hunting rifle. Locked away. Unloaded. Jeez – some people – just think the worst of everyone.

GARY

I just -

LUCY

- 2 seconds away from tweeting you. And I have twenty-five followers!

GARY

- STOP!

LUCY

*And* I have a cheese knife! Somewhere ...

(She digs around in her picnic basket and pulls out a knife  
– attached to a piece of cheese.)

GARY

Cora didn't say you were deranged. I'm gone.

LUCY

Wait. How do you know Aunt Cora?

GARY

I work for her. Just started last week. At the restaurant - The Whispering Pines.

LUCY

Don't you just hate that name? It's like a Nancy Drew mystery. What do you do there?

GARY

I'm a short order cook.

LUCY

Then you should be cooking.

GARY

Cora – *my boss* – sent me here. *To help you*. Are you Lucy? She says you need help planting. She said she stopped by yesterday and you were “overwhelmed and manic.”

LUCY

Maybe I'm Lucy. Maybe I need help planting. Who are you?

GARY

Gary.

LUCY

Don't come any closer. Trying to decide if you are legit or not. You are one step away from your photo being tweeted. And you should know – I'm jail bait. For a few more months. Nobody's kind to child molesters in jail.

GARY

Got it. See ya.

LUCY

Oh! A text from Aunt Cora. You are legit. Sorry about the misunderstanding. I'm not used to being alone out here. Feeling vulnerable.

GARY

Going.

LUCY

*Stop*. Sorry. I guess I'm not a good welcome-wagon.

GARY

Threatened with social media, a gun and a cheese knife – yeah – I've been welcomed better. If I can walk up the bluff – I can walk down it.

LUCY

You walked all those miles uphill to help someone you never met plant trees?

GARY

Love walking. And I'll love it more on the way down. All that distance away from you.

LUCY

Wait! Since you were kind enough to walk all the way here to help me – could you? Help me?

GARY

Looks like you're planted. Whatever it is you're doing. Planting paper?

LUCY

Look closely. I'm planting a forest. There are more saplings in the pick-up waiting to go in the ground. But first I need drawings.

GARY

Are you planting a garden of children's art? A paper forest?

LUCY

You don't know much do, you? I need to cover the tree buds. It's science. If you're here to help – help. Here – draw!

(Giving him magic markers and some paper.)

GARY

I like parameters – boundaries. Give me a subject.

LUCY

A forest. Go. (Beat.) You're not drawing.

GARY

I'm taking it in – finding clarity in the colors first. Those wildflowers -

LUCY

- weeds –

GARY

- point of view – every view is breathtaking. Lake Superior really is magnificent.

-

LUCY

It's always pretty here. You get used to it.

GARY

I'd never –

LUCY

Totally lying again. It's pretty over-the-rainbow wonderful. Draw!

GARY

I'm drawing!

(He looks at one of LUCY'S drawings.)

A dog?

LUCY

Do you know nothing? That's a martin. Sort of. What do you think of my bear?

GARY

That's also a dog.

LUCY

Try and do better than me. (Beat - while they draw.) So, what brings you to these parts?

GARY

How do you know I'm not from around here?

LUCY

P-lease! Grand Marais is a freaking cult when the season's over. Everybody knows everything about everybody – all the way down to Duluth.

GARY

I'm on a mission. To experience America the Beautiful before the beautiful is erased.

LUCY

And I'm on a mission to build a forest. So draw! Faster.

GARY

Can't rush art.

(LUCY grabs GARY'S drawing. It has a tree or two made from small dots/circles. And it's not too shabby.

\*There are two ways you can do this: it can be hidden on the set. Or the circles can be lightly drawn earlier (copied so there's enough for rehearsals and performances) and the actor simply fills them in with pre-designed colors.)

LUCY

You're a freaking artist.

GARY

No! I – just like playing with color.

LUCY

You sure do. Blue and yellow dot trees.

GARY

Step away. Go on. Take a few steps back. Now what do you see?

LUCY

Kind-of-green. A mish-mosh of kind-of-green trees. You're doing that Seurat thing!

GARY

You know him?

LUCY

Not personally – he's sort of – dead. But yeah – I know his famous painting – the one in Chicago – “A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grand Jette.”

GARY

It's a beauty. (Beat.) Still not getting the purpose of the drawings.

LUCY

To protect the baby trees! They're a wish. For my grandfather. I can see them fully matured – forty – fifty - *sixty* feet tall! What do you think?

GARY

Now that's clearly a dog!

LUCY

Thought I'd stump you. But yeah – it's a dog. Get going on the next drawing. The drawings need to be in place before the deer come at dusk!

GARY

Wait. We're drawing for deer? My not-too-shabby pointillist drawing is for – deer?

LUCY

Well – ye-ah. So they don't eat the tree buds. You know what happens when the tree buds are eaten? Death. Nothing left but ghost trees.

GARY

When I am done no deer will come near my tree. They will be in awe of my creation.

LUCY

They're color-blind. They're not known for their art appreciation skills. Get a move on. I'm on a deadline. I need a forest before my grandfather comes home from the hospital.

GARY

Sorry. That he's in the hospital.

LUCY

Dehydration. It happens. A lot of stuff happens to old people. It's not – fun.

GARY

Are you trying to trick your grandfather into seeing trees that aren't here? It isn't a forest.

LUCY

You just can't see the forest for the trees! You know the first landing when you hiked up the hill? The one with the scraggly pines? Once they were the start of a great pine forest. And where we are standing? There were more than ten birch trees here.

GARY

And now there are none.

LUCY

I want it back.

GARY

Then you should plant birch trees.



LUCY

They keep - dying. They had a good run –twelve thousand years – but they're history. I want – something for my grandfather to look at when he comes home. Something that will make him relax and think the forest's regenerating. There's a dream here. Please sir, draw some more. There's hope here. In the planting, in the drawing.

GARY

Your forest – it will do what it will do. You can't will a forest into being.

LUCY

Then why are you helping me?

GARY

I'll photograph it. Paint it. Document it – for future generations. Maybe there will be a time when people will try to bring back what was once here. And they can refer to my work to see what it was like before we pillaged it.

LUCY

Logging, forest fires – no matter what happened to the land – the trees came back. Imagine if everyone along the Gunflint Trail planted a forest – we could regenerate the area. Once – this was littered with trees. You couldn't see the lake because of all the trees. We can make them return. Then the moose will return. Draw. Draw hope.

(And THEY draw,)

END OF PLAY