

Turning Over a New Leaf

Written by
J.E. Clarke

EXT. CAMPUS LAWN - DAY

A sprawling stretch of nature - glimpsed between a gap in leaves. In the distance...

PROTESTORS scream across distinct battle lines. Political signs bob angrily in the air:

"Mother Nature isn't Woke - SHE just is!"

"There are only two sexes. Brains don't matter. Bodies do!"

Versus...

"LGBTQ Rights are HUMAN rights."

"Transphobia = Hate."

A female voice (unseen SAMANTHA) sighs.

SAMANTHA

Call me crazy. But I think I'm gonna miss all this.

Unseen ALEX answers back - male and warm.

ALEX

I KNOW I'm gonna miss you. All this drama? Not so much.

EXT. CAMPUS FOREST LINE - DAY

The teen lovebirds nestle at the base of a tree. Intertwined. In love. Samantha squints at the distant crowd.

SAMANTHA

"Drama" makes it sound so... trivial.

ALEX

Well, we are talking culture wars.

SAMANTHA

Correction. We're talking human rights!

Samantha jumps to her feet. Alex follows suit.

ALEX

A few minutes ago, we were talking about you taking a semester break. That matters. Those things don't.

SAMANTHA

They do to me. I want to stay here.

ALEX

With them? Seriously?

SAMANTHA

No. With you! 'Cause if not-

ALEX

This isn't the end of the world.

SAMANTHA

It's the end of something.

ALEX

Not us.

SAMANTHA

Sure, you say that now.

ALEX

What's one semester off gonna hurt?

SAMANTHA

One semester? Try a year. Or forever.
Real Life to Alex: No-one can "save
up" for tuition on minimum wage!

Samantha chokes. Alex hugs her, attempts to soothe the hurt.

ALEX

I'll help find a scholarship. Maybe
there's a silver lining here.

SAMANTHA

Like what? Getting to know my parents
while living in my old room?

ALEX

Consider it time to reflect. Explore
hobbies. Other careers, too.

SAMANTHA

I like studying biology. You can keep
that business major to yourself.
Yuck.

ALEX

Don't be such an academic snob. That
business major might scrouge up some
income you need. We just gotta...
work for it. Sam, look - we'll still
see each other off campus. There's no
rule we have to hang out here.

Alex looks around - cracks a grin.

ALEX

Though while we've got privacy -
wanna put these leaves to work?

He grabs at Samantha playfully. Sam giggles. Darts away.

An impromptu, romantic game of Tag ensues. Leaves crunch.
Sam dodges left. Alex races after her, pants.

ALEX

I thought you wanted to stay. Make up
your mind!

SAMANTHA

YOU gotta "work for it." Catch me, if
you can!

Alex spots a TREE split down the middle. The hollowed
center's just large enough for someone to hide.

Alex smirks. Ducks inside. In shadow, he waits. Not long -

POV ALEX

Samantha runs past the opening. Alex lunges out; a football
tackle... drags her down.

SAMANTHA

Oooooof!

She hits the ground on her back. Closes her eyes on impact.
Then opens them, smiles up -

SAMANTHA

You win, Silly. Want your prize?

Sam stops suddenly. Stares. Her amused expression melts.

SAMANTHA

What the hell?!?

Suddenly terrified, Sam flails - swings at Alex's face.

SAMANTHA

OMG. Get off!

Bucked sideways, Alex falls into leaves. Jumps up.

ALEX (O.S.)

Sam, what's wrong now?!?

His VOICE sounds wrong. Samantha's face drives the point
home. She grabs a BRANCH, holds it like a spear.

SAMANTHA

Who are you?!?

ALEX (O.S.)

Uh, if this is role-playing, weird.
But... if you insist, guess I'm game?

SAMANTHA

(yells)

Alex, help! You - get the *fuck* away!

Sam thrusts the stick forward, pokes Alex in the chest.

ALEX (O.S.)

Ow!

He slaps a hand over the injury. Freezes at what he feels.
Then looks down slowly at...

ALEX (O.S.)

Breasts?!?

Alex gasps. Feels again. It's a C-CUP. This can't be real,
can't it? Alex looks up -

EXT. CAMPUS FOREST LINE - DAY

Or rather... "ALEXANDRA" does. If Alex had a sister, this is
what she'd look like: same DNA, formed into a female shape.

Clutching her makeshift spear, Samantha backpedals a few
steps. Snarls.

SAMANTHA

Go grope yourself somewhere discrete.
And leave me out of it.

(yells)

Alex, where the FUCK do you go?

Alexandra (Alex) stands stunned. She raises a trembling hand
to her face. Feels the changes there, too.

ALEXANDRA

Um - I'm Alex. At least... I was?

SAMANTHA

What? How crazy are you? Help!

ALEXANDRA

Sam - how do I look? Do you have a
mirror? I gotta know!

Alexandra stumbles forward, hand outstretched.

SAMANTHA

Whatever sick game you're playing,
count me out!

Samantha shoves Alexandra backward, knocking her back into the hollowed tree. In shadow, Alexandra yelps in pain.

ALEXANDRA

Jeezus Christ. This bark hurts! That
scrape's gonna get infected...

Covered with leaves and dirt, Alex climbs from the opening. Face scratched, bewildered. But his male form: RESTORED.

Samantha drops the stick. Gawks.

SAMANTHA

Alex, this is so not funny.

ALEX

I'm back? You sure?

He feels his chest. Yup, the C cup's gone.

ALEX

Thank God! Man, if that had been
permanent -

He bear hugs Samantha, swings her around. She stomps his foot. Stunned, Alex lets her go.

SAMANTHA

Where is she?

ALEX

Where's who?

SAMANTHA

Who else? Your friend, who helped you
with that dumb prank!

Sam runs to the other side of the tree. The hole doesn't seem to have another opening. She runs a hand over the wood - yells out to whoever might be listening.

SAMANTHA

You might think it's funny. But I
could've killed you with that branch.
Or grabbed a rock! You would've
laughed your way to the ER. Or the
morgue!

She swings towards Alex, suppresses a partial grin.

SAMANTHA

Fess up, Smart-Alex. How the hell'd you pull that off?

ALEX

I... I didn't. That really happened. Maybe we hallucinated it?

SAMANTHA

Hallucinated the SAME THING?

ALEX

What other explanation is there?

The two lock eyes. Confused.

MOMENTS LATER

Alex and Samantha stand before the tree. Alex diverts his gaze from the hole, unnerved. Samantha looks skeptical - still convinced it's a prank.

SAMANTHA

We've got to test it.

ALEX

Spoken like a typical science major. I'm never going in there again. You couldn't pay me. No freakin' way!

SAMANTHA

I thought business majors were all about profit? Either go in, or admit this is just some stupid game.

ALEX

If it were a con, me going in proves nothing. I could just do the same trick. Why don't YOU try?

SAMANTHA

Me? Um... I...

Fear flashes in Samantha's face. Alex crows:

ALEX

See? Deep down, you know it's real!

SAMANTHA

Real?!? Give me a break.

ALEX

It's waiting. Right there. Prove me wrong, oh intrepid gatherer of evidence.

SAMANTHA

If it'll make you shut up, fine!

Samantha stomps into the hole. Disappears.

Alex watches - nervous. Samantha's pissed off voice echoes from the shadows.

SAMANTHA (O.S.)

It smells in here. Major gross.

ALEX

You don't have to take up residence. Though if you want someplace other than your old room during the break-

SAMANTHA (O.S.)

Ha-Ha. Alex, if this is your way of convincing me to break up with you, it's creative. I'll give you that.

She emerges from the hole -

Or rather: SAM does. If Samantha had a brother... well, you get the drift.

Alex stares at his/her transformation. He points a shaking finger at "Sam's" new look.

SAM

What?

No response from Alex. He's speechless.

Sam reaches sloooowwwly down to his own crotch. Cops a feel. His face whitens.

SAM

Holy shit balls!

ALEX

Bad choice of words?!?

Sam 180s, races back into the hole. Alex watches, helpless: his jaw dropped to his chest.

MOMENTS LATER

Alex and Samantha sit silently in the grass. Restored but intertwined in fear, they face the tree. Stare into the lightless hole.

ALEX

OK. Evidence gathered. What now?

SAMANTHA

We could *pretend* this never happened.
Walk away, don't look back.

ALEX

That sucks as an option.

SAMANTHA

You're right. This find is amazing!
It'd be criminal to not figure out
what's causing it.

She jumps to her feet.

SAMANTHA

I gotta tell the science lab. You
stay here, keep guard!

ALEX

Wait - not yet!

SAMANTHA

What? Why not?

ALEX

This IS on campus property.

SAMANTHA

And? Less distance for me to walk!

ALEX

What if they take it away from us?
This is the opportunity of a
lifetime!

SAMANTHA

For the world? Yeah, that's why -

Alex pulls Samantha back down, stares into her eyes.

ALEX

No. An opportunity... FOR US. If this
tree can change who people are, just
think how much folks would pay!

Samantha starts to object, then - realizes Alex has a point.

SAMANTHA

But - we don't even know how long the changes last. Or what else they do.

ALEX

Duly noted, Science Chick. Let's find out.

INT. ALEX'S DORM ROOM

Your average "college guy" man-cave.

On a dresser: A framed PICTURE of Samantha and Alex. A SHAVING MIRROR nearby.

On a second bed, a BONG and HOW TO GROW WEED FOR FUN AND PROFIT books. Whoever Alex's Roomie is, they're MIA.

A key clicks in the lock. The door swings open -

Alexandra and Samantha stride in. Alexandra hurriedly closes the door; panicked who might see.

Grabbing the mirror, she stares at her feminine features.

ALEXANDRA

Holy shit. This is real?!?

SAMANTHA

And apparently not limited to the tree.

The two sit down on the bed in shock. Awkward silence. Then:

SAMANTHA

So - now we wait.

ALEXANDRA

For what? And how long?

SAMANTHA

To see if you change back on your own. As for timing: it's best we be conservative.

ALEXANDRA

"Conservative"? I just had a tree powered sex change! Conservative's the LAST thing this would be!

SAMANTHA

What I *mean* is, let's not take too many risks.

(MORE)

SAMANTHA (cont'd)

We don't know what other side effects there'll be. The longer you stay like that, maybe the more permanent it is? I do want old school Alex back -

Samantha reaches out to touch Alexandra's cheek. Despite her existential angst, Alexandra perks up.

ALEXANDRA

While we're waiting: wanna test drive some girl with girl experiments? This isn't the way I imagined it -

SAMANTHA

Excuse me?!? Imagine what?!

ALEXANDRA

Um - uh - never mind. But given the circumstance now... why not?

Samantha recoils. At first. But she subtly warms to the idea. No matter their gender, chemistry sparks between these two. But before either makes a first move...

The door SWINGS open: Breezy TOM (jock sophomore) intrudes.

He stalls at the sight of Alexandra and Samantha on the bed. Double-takes all around.

SAMANTHA

Tom?

TOM

Samantha? Hey. This is unexpected. Where's Alex?

SAMANTHA

Uh - Alex stepped out. But I'm pretty sure he's... nearby?

Tom goggles Alexandra, clearly finds her cute.

TOM

Who's your friend?
(to Alexandra)
You new at school?

Awkward! Alexandra winces, scooches closer to Sam.

ALEXANDRA

Um, no... and sorry, I've already got a girlfriend. No offense!

Tom's eyes drift towards Samantha, wondering -

ALEXANDRA

No. Not Sam. At least, that way.

(snaps)

Tom - I thought you were dating
Brenda?

Thrown off-guard, Tom backs away.

TOM

How do you know about Brenda? We just
hooked up last night. The only person
I told was -

Tom shoots Samantha an ah-ha look - edges out towards the
dorm hallway.

TOM

Sam, when Alex comes back tell him we
gotta talk.

He exits. As the door closes, Alexandra and Samantha relax.

SAMANTHA

That rules out hallucinations. Even
Tom saw the change!

ALEXANDRA

Now my Roomie's splitsville.. wanna
try that girl alone time after all?

SAMANTHA

No! Not that there's anything wrong
with that. I just think we need to
keep experimenting. Scientifically I
mean.

ALEXANDRA

Speaking of talks: assuming I change
back successfully -

SAMANTHA

"Assuming"? I'm sure you will!

ALEXANDRA

How shall we put this "find" to use?

SAMANTHA

Well, first we call the research
labs. Then we contact the Press!

ALEXANDRA

That's not what I have in mind.

EXT. CAMPUS FOREST LINE - MORNING**SUPER: TWO DAYS LATER**

A "restored" Alex and Samantha lead a college student (KYLA) towards the tree.

Kyla's Trans-Flag t-shirt makes it obvious why she's here. Though the skepticism on her face screams she doesn't think this'll work.

Samantha points to the tree.

SAMANTHA

There it is. Field tested, Sam approved. Don't be scared. We tried it out!

KYLA

You... want me to walk in there?

ALEX

Just a second. You'll be shocked how quick it is!

KYLA

And do what?

SAMANTHA

Nothing! Super simple. Just walk in. Then walk out!

Kyla wrinkles her nose, sniffs.

KYLA

That smells rank.

ALEX

Yeah. I caught that, too.

SAMANTHA

We'd clean, but that might disrupt the process. So best to leave it as-is for now. Ready to give it a whirl? All it takes are a few steps... then voila, a whole -

ALEX

(snickers)

Nice pun... hole!

SAMANTHA

WHOLE New You!

Kyla edges towards the tree. Side-eyes Alex, still unsure.

KYLA

If you wackos are serial killers-

ALEX

Pinky swear. We're not. You're totally safe.

KYLA

If it was "totally safe", why'd you make me sign a waiver?

SAMANTHA

We've only known about this two days. If there are side effects later -

ALEX

We'd have no clue.

KYLA

This is such a waste of time. But it'll make for a good bar story. And anything to avoid homework, I guess?

She steps into the tree nook, fixes the couple with a glare.

KYLA

If this is a dud, you don't get a dime.

ALEX

Satisfaction guaranteed. That's in the contract, too!

Darkness swallows Kyla. Alex and Samantha hold their breath. Will the "magic" work this time, too?

Kyla steps from the tree, blinks in sunlight - transformed into a more feminine shape!

Samantha bounces with glee, claps hands. Pulling out a MIRROR, she shows Kyla her new face.

KYLA

OMG. I was so SURE this was bullshit!

SAMANTHA

I didn't believe it at first, either. How do you feel?

KYLA

Reborn!

The two squeal. Hug. Happiness all around. Kyla turns to Alex, slaps FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARS into his outstretched hand.

ALEX

Remember, we don't know how long this lasts.

SAMANTHA

But it could be forever.

KYLA

Fingers crossed!

Kyla turns to leave. But one last question gives her pause.

KYLA

About the Confidentiality Addendum.
Can I tell SOME friends?

SAMANTHA

Word of mouth to those you trust.

ALEX

But not the press or college admins.
No social media, either. This had to
stay on the down low - between us.

MONTAGE BEGINS

Kyla beholds her new face in a mirror. Applies careful lipstick, then dials her cell -

KYLA

(into the phone)

Ronnie? Brace yourself. You're gonna
think I'm tripping. But cancel the
surgery. There's a Green New Deal you
just gotta see!

Word of Mouth proves contagious. In various closeups, MEN and WOMEN take excited calls (MOS).

On a ZOOM, a PARTICIPANT drops Google Maps into the chat. A picture of the TREE pops up, captioned "Freedom from the Binary: Nature's Cure!" The entire group GASPS.

EXT. CAMPUS FOREST LINE - AFTERNOON

Samantha and Alex stand guard. Alex's shaving mirror now gerry rigged to a convenient branch.

Sam handles waiver CONTRACTS. Alex counts cash. He picks a BLOSSOM off the tree, tucks it artfully into Sam's hair.

ALEX

You look stunning.

SAMANTHA

You're pretty studly yourself. Thank you for all this. In whatever gender, Alex, you're my guy.

The two share a sweet smile. And a kiss.

A newly minted MAN (MICHAEL) steps from the tree. He feels his new beard, marvels over his inflated biceps.

The man fist-pumps at his new physique, high-fives Alex. The force nearly knocks Alex off his feet. Who chuckles...

ALEX

Careful with the new muscles, Rachel.

MICHAEL

That's my dead-name. I'm Michael now.

ALEX

"Michael"? Cool. See you at the gym, big guy!

Michael slips Samantha \$500. Kisses her on the cheek and struts off. Sam blushes, waves as he leaves.

ALEX

You think she's cute? Tell the truth!

SAMANTHA

That's "he". And yes, I do. But don't get jealous - I'm *your* gal. This is yours, too.

She hands Alex the payment. He adds it to a growing stack.

ALEX

Who said money didn't grow on trees? With the amount this gig is pulling down, *both* our tuition's covered. A vacation in the Bahamas, too!

SAMANTHA

Leave for v-

ALEX

(snickers)
You said "leaf." Heh.

SAMANTHA

I did not! I was saying, you can't
make me *leave*. I'd rather stay right
here, keep doing good.

The two glance away from the tree, towards...

A GROWING LINE OF CUSTOMERS. At least fifteen await their
turn in the hole. Kyle's word of mouth has stretched... far.

The next GIRL (EILEEN) steps forward. Alex squints.

ALEX

Haven't I seen you recently?

Eileen pulls out a DRIVER'S LICENSE, depicting: "Eddie."
Flashes a sarcastic smirk.

EILEEN

I was last night's final customer.
You forgot me? My feelings are hurt.

Samantha turns white, stammers.

SAMANTHA

Um, are you experiencing problems?
You signed a waiver, but we'll do
everything possible to help -

EILEEN

Problems; are you kidding? MY gal and
I had a blast. But now it's time to
switch back, so...

Eileen slaps SIX HUNDRED into Alex's hand. Winks.

EILEEN

Enjoy that extra hundred. Last night
was worth the tip!

Eileen steps into the hole -

Emerges as Eddie. Then strolls off. Samantha and Alex watch.

SAMANTHA

Repeat customers seem to be -

ALEX

Even more profitable than I thought!

Sam looks down the line, sighs.

SAMANTHA

We've been at this for hours. Will we ever have time alone?

The RUMBLE of a distant crowd makes Sam freeze. Before either can react, MULTIPLE GROUPS descend on the tree.

Familiar political SIGNS bob up and down.

"Mother Nature isn't Woke - SHE just is!"

"There are only two sexes. Brains don't matter. Bodies do!"

Versus...

"LGBTQ Rights are HUMAN rights."

"Transphobia = Hate."

Alexander, Samantha and the tree are surrounded. Alex gulps.

ALEX

So much for confidential.

SAMANTHA

Make that cancelled. Look!

From the Anti-LGBTQ mob, a WOMAN with a "Gender Critical" T-SHIRT rips a contract from Sam's hand. Snarls and reads:

GENDER CRITICAL WOMAN

Do you have campus permission for this illicit operation, Missy?

SAMANTHA

It's Sam. And well, the answer's no. This is more of a hobby, really. I don't think permits for stuff like this even exist.

GENDER CRITICAL WOMAN

Where's your section on side effects? Or do you pretend they don't exist, either?

SAMANTHA

Um, we don't know what they are yet. That's covered by the Caveat Emptor Clause. Section 2B.

GENDER CRITICAL WOMAN

How many innocent children have you put through that.. that thing?

SAMANTHA

None! This IS a college campus -

GENDER CRITICAL WOMAN
 Give it time, you'll sneak minors in.
 Anything to make money from that
 filthy tree!

SAMANTHA
 It's not "filthy". I mean the bark's
 slimy in spots, sure. But what we're
 doing here improves lives. Look!

A BLUE HAIREd MAN steps forward from the LGBTQ ranks.

BLUE HAIREd MAN
 If we pay for it. I hate to say, that
 TERF -

GENDER CRITICAL WOMAN
 TERF's a slur!

BLUE HAIREd MAN
 It fits, so what? That Terf makes *one*
 good point: capitalism corrupts
 everything. What that tree does for
 humanity should be free. Nature
 provides. You're monetizing and
 exploiting it for you!

SAMANTHA
 I know. But -

ALEX
 Not fair. We found it first!

The man shoves Sam side, dives into the tree - head first.

He emerges as a beautiful BLUE HAIREd WOMAN. Her body's
 perfect - and he's thrilled. It's such a happy
 transformation, Sam can't help but smile.

SAMANTHA
 You look perfect. Welcome to your new
 life!

The Gender Critical Terf rips the mirror from the Blue
 Haired Woman's hands... throws it down. Glass BREAKS.

GENDER CRITICAL WOMAN
 You don't "perfect" to me. And you're
 no woman. Don't pretend!

Sam contemplates that. Raises a hand as if in class.

SAMANTHA

Um, can't you see? She IS a woman now.

GENDER CRITICAL WOMAN

No, she - I mean "he" - is not!

ALEX

Yes, she is. I mean - take a look!

Alex almost drools. Sam shoots a silent "shut up" rebuke.

SAMANTHA

(to Gender Critical)

Ma'am, I know this is a lot to absorb, but hear me out. I'm a biology major, so I did a test before we went public. This tree changes peoples' DNA, and all their... other stuff. So, yes - she IS a woman. XX chromosomes n' all.

That wasn't expected. The woman stutters out a retort.

GENDER CRITICAL WOMAN

What matters is his brain inside. He was born a man. That can't change!

Alex raises a tentative hand next.

ALEX

All this "culture war" stuff ain't my thing. But - isn't the whole point of you gender critical types that "what's in your head doesn't count"?

BLUE HAired WOMAN

Logic makes TERFs malfunction. Poor little things. It's too much.

GENDER CRITICAL WOMAN

Ah-ha! There's the misogyny. It always comes out!

BLUE HAired WOMAN

Misogyny? Look at me. What more do you want?

GENDER CRITICAL WOMAN

You - out of Woman's Spaces!

BLUE HAired WOMAN
 YOU should get out of other people's
 business, lady. What part of My Body,
 My Choice do you not get?!?

Gender Critical shoves the Blue Haired Woman into Alex. Alex
 pinwheels, stumbles back towards the hole. Stops himself
 from falling in last second. Looks relieved.

ALEX
 Whew. Not again.
 (beat, to Blue Hair)
 No offense!

The crowd erupts - closes in. Sam fights to maintain order,
 but she's outnumbered. Chaos ensues.

Someone LIGHTS A MATCH. People scream. The tree... burns.

INT. ALEX'S DORM ROOM - AFTERNOON

Alex and Samantha huddle glumly on the bed. Roommate Tom
 sits across from them - stares.

TOM
 Lemme get this straight.

ALEX
 You said straight. Heh.

TOM
 YOU were Alexandra?

Alex stares at the floor. Nods his head.

ALEX
 For a few hours. Then I... reset.

TOM
 I thought about Alexandra later

SAMANTHA
 We noticed. You "liked" her, didn't
 you? A lot.

TOM
 Yeah - that's the problem. I "liked"
 her. All night!

Alex gags. He gets Tom's drift.

TOM

You should've warned me, Bro! Now I have to sleep in the same room.

ALEX

That's your problem. And Brenda's. Not mine.

Tom growls, stomps out of the room. Calls over his shoulder.

TOM

I'm putting in for a transfer!

Alex waves a sarcastic "goodbye". After Tom leaves, he turns to Sam. Melts at the tears in her eyes.

SAMANTHA

We should've been more discrete.

ALEX

You tried to stop them. It's no-one's fault.

SAMANTHA

All those people we were helping. All that potential, burned to the ground!

Alex shrugs, pulls a HUGE WAD OF CASH from his jacket.

ALEX

Speaking of "potential": I can think of one we saved. You.

They share a moment. Alex's eyes drift to... The TREE BLOSSOM he'd tucked behind Sam's ear. IT HAS SEEDS.

Alex flashes a grin, looks to Tom's side of the room.

ALEX

Tom's into... botanicals. I know where he keeps nutrients and soil.

The two hold hands - cradle the Blossom between them.

ALEX

Here's to even more potential. Yours. Mine.

SAMANTHA

And everyone else. Little seed, you're safe now. Welcome to your future life!

FINAL FADE OUT: