

They Say You Should Talk To Your Plants

Raph D'Amico | Golden Cobra 2019 Submission
4-7 players including facilitator | 2 hours

A larp about dealing with life by talking to your plants, where you play the plants... and the talker.

There is one tragic **Protagonist**, a person who has brought **Plants** into their tiny studio apartment. The players all embody these Plants, immobile and masked around the room, fragile but with exquisite healing abilities. All players also take turns embodying the Protagonist in scenes from the fractured arc of their difficult life. These scenes in the game always feature the Protagonist alone with their plants, and are about the aftermath of big life events from the great (an exciting move, or a new love!) to the tragic (divorce, illness).

Before playing

- Print and cut Plant, Bloom, and Life Event cards
- Get masks for all the players (optional but makes the game better)
- Find a room, define where the sunlight is coming from if there isn't an obvious window. If you are in a large space, define a subset of it as the play area, representing the Protagonist's studio.
- Feel free to play the game with chairs or any support that will make the game more comfortable.

Getting started

- Everyone gets a Plant card—lay all of them out and let people choose—a mask, and a random Bloom card
- Place the stack of Story Cards in the middle, on a table or chair that is easy to reach. They should be in order, with “#1 Moving In” face down on the top.

To start, begin with this overview out loud. Read it together, passing this sheet around.

Overview

- This is a game about a period of a few years in the Protagonist's life, represented by the Life Events deck.
- Every player will embody a Plant for the whole game and will take turns playing the Protagonist, who is shared between all the players.
- The protagonist lives alone. No roommates. No kids. People may have visited (offscreen), and the Plants know about them. Perhaps they moved in with someone in between scenes, but by the next scene, this didn't work out and they are alone again. Loneliness is a big part of the game, so allow this to be the way you explore it.
- We will play scenes that show the Protagonist alone with their Plants in the aftermath of the events incited by the Life Events cards. These events always happen offscreen, and we both create and learn about them through the Protagonist's monologues and Plants' Greek Chorus.

You will talk to your plants

The core dynamic of the game is about being alone, and having your deepest feelings drawn out by your silently demanding plants. How?

The Plants slowly die if they are not Cared for by a Protagonist.

Caring happens by touching the Plants on the shoulder or upper arm, and **speaking truth**.

So you will be doing two things:

1. **Playing the Plants**, and slowly dying if there is no Protagonist taking care of you. Use this to encourage someone be the Protagonist.
2. **Playing the Protagonist**, and speaking your truth to both create the story of your Life Events and keep your plants alive.

Now flip to the next page and workshop Principles and Safety

Principles

We are going to workshop three principles that make the game work.

1. Silence

This game is supposed to be a contemplative experience. Sit with the emotions in the game. Leave time after you speak and don't try to fill every moment.

WORKSHOP: take turns asking each other simple questions (“What’s your favorite color?”), and practice leaving ten seconds of silence after the answer.

2. Give & Take

You will share the spotlight, all play the Protagonist, creating the world and story together in freeform conversation. The game works best if you slow down, and share the stage without speaking over each other.

WORKSHOP: Count from 1 to 10, one person speaking at a time. If two people speak at the same time, start again.

3. The greek chorus

The plants play two roles. As Plants, you force the player to monologue by watering you. As players, you are the Greek Chorus, You amplify strong emotions—sometimes literally by gently echoing words and phrases the Protagonist says. You may also flesh out details in the world. For example, saying out loud what the Protagonist *might* be feeling when they are silent, or adding details about the events on a card (“It was raining hard”, “Jen had been late for work that day”) or the scene in the apartment (“The smell of fresh bread”). These are short, poetic details that support the protagonist—fragments, not monologues.

WORKSHOP: a player goes into the middle and shares a situation in a few words (e.g. “A bad day at work”). All the other players then take turns, giving & taking, adding sensory (e.g. “It was swelteringly hot day”) and scene details (“Sat next to you was your workfriend, Jen”).

Safety

This game is about hardship in a person’s life—perhaps relationships falling apart, jobs being lost, illness, death. All trauma is offscreen as this is about the Protagonist’s reactions to it in the privacy of their own home.

- **Take care of each other.** People are more important than the game, always. We are here for each other.
- **Take care of yourself.** Life is too short to force yourself to be in a difficult situation, mentally or physically. If it’s difficult for you to stay rooted in the same position for long, take breaks. If you’re not having fun, **the door is always open.** It’s absolutely fine to step out.
- **Touch.** This game involves touch, limited to the shoulder / upper arm. Check that this is OK with everyone. If not, please adjust.

Safety techniques

We will use the following safety techniques (although feel free to use others if prefer them!):

- **X Gesture.** If the game goes down a road that makes you uncomfortable, make an X with your arms and say “**Let’s not**”. Together, we’ll rewind and find a different way. It doesn’t matter why, and you don’t need to explain why. It’s just an easy way for us to be there for each other.
- **OK check-in.** If you notice someone seems uncomfortable, get their attention and make an OK sign to them. If they respond with a **thumbs up**, everything is good! But if there is literally any other response, pause the game and see what they need before continuing

Now flip to the next page and read the rules for playing the Plants and the Protagonist

Playing The Plants

Part Greek Chorus, part empathetic listeners, part sadistic attention sponges.

You are masked, and silent

- You cannot speak to the Protagonist, but may speak to each other if there is no Protagonist in play
- When there is a Protagonist, be their Greek Chorus. Amplify or add details. You know about anything the Protagonist knows, even if it's offscreen or in a scene that wasn't played directly.

You don't move

- Unless in a Dislocation scene, you must stay in the same spot unless moved by the Protagonist
- You don't have to be *completely* still. Move like a plant.

Withering & Death

- You wither over time, unless the Protagonist cares for you. Wither by slowly curling up, until you are on the ground, near death. **If this is uncomfortable, adjust this rule! (Players are more important than the game!)**
- You never die. The protagonist can always bring you back by **Watering** you.
- When the Protagonist is reading out the Life Event card, wither if what's happening resonates emotionally with you. Use this to draw the Protagonist to you.
- Go slowly. Don't wither completely in just one scene. Play your character (e.g. Cactus withers very slowly). Be kind and notice the others—it may be overwhelming for the Protagonist if all Plants curl up at once.

Being Cared for

- You may be Cared for by the combination of a touch on the shoulder or upper arm and the player speaking truth.
- Give them positive feedback by un-withering as they speak their truth. If they only touch, but don't speak, withhold your reaction. But don't wither further.

Blooming

- Once per game, you may Bloom, which is the only time you communicate directly with the protagonist
- To play this move, silently hold out your Bloom card until a Protagonist chooses to take it from you. Make this silent moment meaningful.

Playing the Protagonist

The shared Protagonist, whose life the plants pull at.

Setting up scenes.

- The Protagonist controls the Life Events deck, choosing to either continue the previous scene or starts a new one.
- When you pull a new Life Event card, always read it out loud so the Plant players can add details in their role as Greek Chorus.

Caring for your plants

You can touch a plant on the shoulder or forearm to Care for them. However, you can only do so while speaking your truth.

Becoming the Protagonist

- If there is no Protagonist in play, you may leave your role as a Plant by removing your mask (place it where you just left) and become the Protagonist.
- To move to the next Life Event, pull the top card off the deck, **read it out loud**, and take as much time in stillness and silence to internalize the content. No rush.
- You may continue the previous scene immediately after the previous person left off, or jump ahead in time.

Returning to being a Plant.

- At any point, you may end your turn as the Protagonist (your choice—no one can edit you). Replace your mask and take your position back as a plant, in whatever state it was before
- **Replacing the mask: look away from everyone, put the mask on, and then look back at the room. Avoid putting on or taking your mask off while looking at people.**
- Another player may take your place, or simply allow the Plants to feel stillness.
- If this goes on too long, begin to Wither.

Now flip to the next page and define the Protagonist.

Defining the Protagonist

Take turns, each answering one of the following questions. Everything else will emerge in play, but you should all agree on the basics.

- They no longer live at home. How often do they call their parents (daily, weekly, rarely, never)?
- They just moved to a city (play it where you are). Where did they come from (another city, a small town, rural)?
- Do they like horror movies?
- Which their your parent's habits do they know they'll grow to have too? How do they feel about that?
- How many friends did they have at 14 years old?
- Are they afraid of death?
- What's their love language (Quality time? Gifts? Touch? Words of affirmation? Acs of services?)
- What did they want to be when they were 9 years old?
- Do spelling and grammar mistakes annoy them?
- What's one good childhood memory?
- What's one bad childhood memory?
- **[End with this] What is their name and pronouns?**

Then begin play.

A note about masks

Plants are well studied healers—cleaning the air, reducing stress, quickening healing. But the way they ask you to care for them, demanding without being pushy, each beautifully different, takes you out of your struggles and reminds you of your place in the universe.

I wanted to use masks to capture this energy.

Masks create a strange distance allow surprisingly intense communication to happen. You feel free, speaking to someone who is masked. And those who are masked feel free to be alien. Demanding attention from you in a way that's just... different.

And anyway, plants don't have facial expressions...

Starting Play

Check if there are any questions about the rules, then guide everyone out of the room (or play area). If there is a bio-break, this is a good time to have people break off and meet back outside the room.

- The first person who enters the room will be the first Being, and pulls the first card (“Moving in”), which will tell them to walk the plants into the room, one by one, setting them up where it feels right. They are excited. This is going to be a wonderful chapter in life.
- When they are done, they place the card face up next to the stack of face down Scene Cards. Whichever card is face up is the current scene until another scene is placed on top of it.
- You are now all Plants around the room. You may talk, or you may be silent. When it feels right, another Protagonist emerges.

Go until all Event Cards have been played.

Ending the game

When the last Event Card is played, we transition into an epilogue. Together, the Plants tell the story of the Protagonist's remaining life.

Debrief

- Put the Plant cards back, place the masks on the ground
- In turn, share one way that you are different from the protagonist
- Then, in turn, share your experiences of the game—positive or negative
- Take the time to celebrate the best moments, and to take care of any hurt or difficult feelings
- As the facilitator, offer to be available for any further conversation

The end.

So plant your own gardens and decorate your own soul, instead of waiting for someone to bring you flowers.

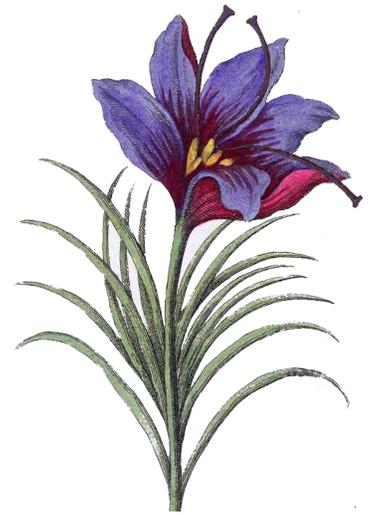
—Jorge Luis Borges



Tillandsia
Tillandsia tenuifolia



Orchid
Selenipedium grande



Saffron
Crocus sativus



Venus
Dionaea muscipula



Begonia
Begonia clementina



Succulent
Cotyledon secunda



Swordfern
Nephrolepis biserrata



Cactus
Opuntia polyantha



Maranta
Calathea roseopicta

You are good enough

Tell the story of that time when you knew this was true

To play this move, silently hold out this Bloom card until a Protagonist chooses to take it from you. As always, you may not speak. Make this moment meaningful.

You are wanted

Tell the story of that time when you knew this was true

To play this move, silently hold out this Bloom card until a Protagonist chooses to take it from you. As always, you may not speak. Make this moment meaningful.

You are not a failure

Tell the story of that time when you knew this was true

To play this move, silently hold out this Bloom card until a Protagonist chooses to take it from you. As always, you may not speak. Make this moment meaningful.

You are important

Tell the story of that time when you knew this was true

To play this move, silently hold out this Bloom card until a Protagonist chooses to take it from you. As always, you may not speak. Make this moment meaningful.

You are worthy

Tell the story of that time when you knew this was true

To play this move, silently hold out this Bloom card until a Protagonist chooses to take it from you. As always, you may not speak. Make this moment meaningful.

You are capable

Tell the story of that time when you knew this was true

To play this move, silently hold out this Bloom card until a Protagonist chooses to take it from you. As always, you may not speak. Make this moment meaningful.

You are strong

Tell the story of that time when you knew this was true

To play this move, silently hold out this Bloom card until a Protagonist chooses to take it from you. As always, you may not speak. Make this moment meaningful.

You are enough

Tell the story of that time when you knew this was true

To play this move, silently hold out this Bloom card until a Protagonist chooses to take it from you. As always, you may not speak. Make this moment meaningful.

You are whole

Tell the story of that time when you knew this was true

To play this move, silently hold out this Bloom card until a Protagonist chooses to take it from you. As always, you may not speak. Make this moment meaningful.

1. Moving in

A new beginning.

You've just moved to a new town. It's exciting! New friends. New opportunities. A new job.

STARTING THE GAME: Take plant players, one by one, and direct them where you want. As you move, say how you feel about this event. When they are all in place, take a beat and end the scene.

2. Something new

Friendship, perhaps love.

A serendipitous encounter.
A first date.

- *How did you feel the connection?*

3. The work thing

An office. A new ratrace.

The opportunities. The unexpected realities. A challenging personality.

- *How is the work for your soul?*
- *Is this why you moved?*

4. Something lost

A relationship. A friend.

Betrayal. Secrets revealed.
It wasn't a good fit.

- *Why so soon?*

5. Something hurt

A body. A mind.

Illness. Injury.
Sticks and stones.

- *Who hurt who?*

6. A new place

DISLOCATION

Circumstances you couldn't control.
Freedom. Unexpected comforts lost.

- *Why was the old place untenable?*

DISLOCATION: the plants may start to move freely around the room. the Protagonist takes them one by one. When they are all placed, the move is complete.

7. Pushing through Stress. Burnout. Void.

The expected crunch. The unexpected resilience. The straw that breaks the back.

- *What helps you cope?*
- *Why did you keep pushing?*

8. Love True & intoxicating.

The meet-cute. The escapades. Losing yourself. *Losing* your, self.

- *What does it help you forget?*
- *How do you know it can't last?*

9. An ending This too shall pass.

Separation. Divorce. Layoff. The honeymoon ends.

- *What did you resent?*
- *Who ended it?*

10. Escape DISLOCATION

Return to childhood comforts. Closing ranks. Family, good & bad.

- *What makes you feel safe?*

DISLOCATION: the plants may start to move freely around the room. the Protagonist takes them one by one. When they are all placed, the move is complete.

11. Caring Leap of faith. Creation.

Healing others, healing yourself. A purpose outside yourself.

- *What makes you feel whole?*
- *Who gave you clarity?*

12. Rebirth Transition to Epilogue

The end of a difficult time. Perhaps the beginning of another.

- *What did you learn?*
- *Who do you miss?*

Saffron

Crocus sativus

Resourceful. Rich and giving, with a fine heritage. You like to be with the finer things.

Care needed: Plenty

Orchid

Selenipedium grande

Beautiful, but hard to care for. Gives a lot, but requires a lot. High maintenance.

Care needed: A whole lot

Tillandsia

Tillandsia tenuifolia

Alien. Enigmatic. Aloof, not one to go with the crowd. Air plants think they're invulnerable. They're not.

Care: Infrequent, but particular

Succulent

Cotyledon secunda

Relaxing. Soothing and enigmatic. Brings a sense of order.

Care needed: A small, precise amount of care

Begonia

Begonia clementina

Simple. Pleasant, but not particularly interesting. Yet you give a lot.

Care needed: A normal amount

Venus

Dionaea muscipula

Violent yet alluring. Some fear you. You are proud of what you do.

Care needed: People think you take care of yourself, but you actually need love too

Maranta

Calathea roseopicta

Optimistic. Not flashy, yet you're kept around for some reason. You earn your nickname of the Rose Painted.

Care needed: Medium

Cactus

Opuntia polyantha

Prickly. Beautiful in their own way, but may push you away when you need them most.

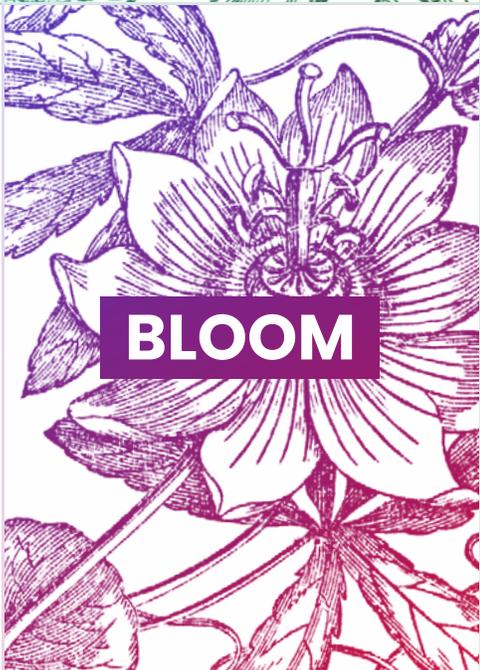
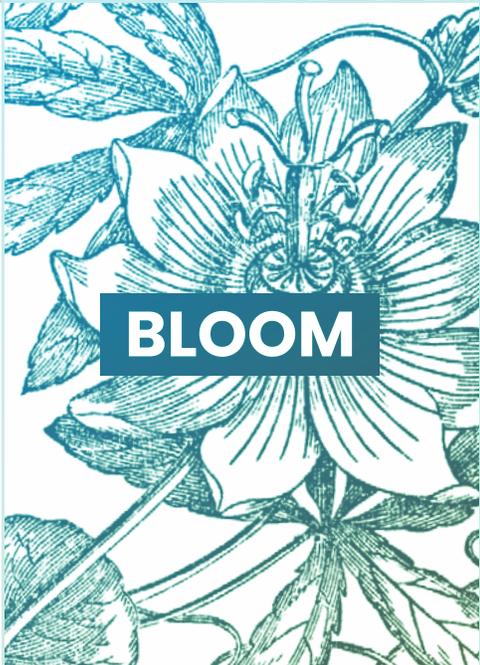
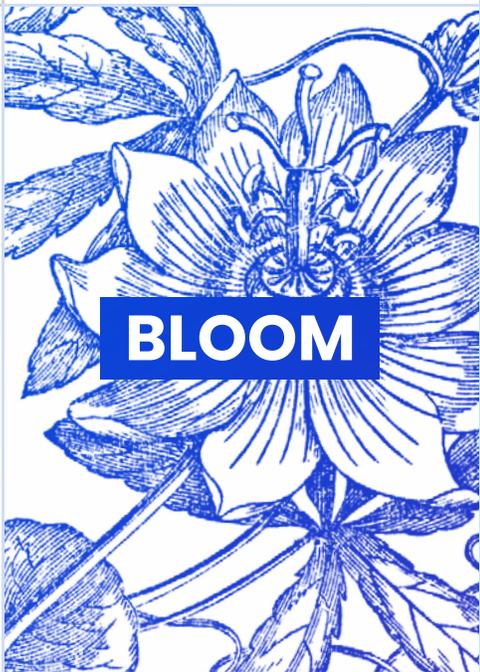
Care needed: Minimal, but intense when it happens

Swordfern

Nephrolepis biserrata

Wise. 114 years old. An heirloom, given to the Protagonist. May outlive you.

Care needed: Little, as long as the conditions are good



2

**Something
new**


Event Card


1

Moving In


Event Card


4

**Something
lost**


Event Card


3

**The work
thing**


Event Card


6

A new place


Event Card


5

**Something
hurt**


Event Card


8

Love

~~~~~  
Event Card  
~~~~~

7

**Pushing
through**

~~~~~  
Event Card  
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10

Escape

~~~~~  
Event Card  
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9

An ending

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Event Card  
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12

Rebirth

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Event Card  
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11

Caring

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Event Card  
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