

Forbidden Fruits

by Fengar Gael



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CHARACTERS:

JACOB ABRAMOV, a New York estate lawyer, age late 40s

EVALEIGH (EVE) EDEN, a wealthy American heiress, raised in London, age 22

ADAM EDEN, her twin brother, also raised in London, age 22

LUCY FYRNE, An Irish emigrant orchardist, age mid 40s

TIME:

The present

PLACE:

A stylized set represents the operating theatre of a hospital on Wards Island; a law office in Manhattan, and an apple orchard in the Hudson River Valley.

PROLOGUE

(New York City: the operating theatre of Wards Island Hospital. JACOB ABRAMOV, a middle-aged lawyer, staggers to the edge of the stage, facing the audience. HE wears a robe, dark glasses, a surgical mask, and speaks boldly.)

JACOB

Can you hear me through the mask? No...? Then I'm taking the damn thing off!

(HE yanks off the mask and thrusts it into a pocket.)

JACOB

There's no proof of contagion at this distance, but feel free to leave. *(pause)* So you're staying after all. Good for you! I was told I'd be speaking to the physicians on staff and visiting specialists, but I hope there's a few witch doctors among you because we're desperate here, ha, ha! I say that in all sincerity, though I'm not like those patients I've seen gorging on exotic plants under full moons. Even in my youth I was committed to conventional cures and concepts, destined to be a cog in a wheel, though I never expected to wind up handling the estates of wealthy New Yorkers, especially that of Godfrey Eden whose son and daughter flew in from London.

SCENE 1

(Music is heard as JACOB evokes the past, removing his robe and dark glasses. HE enters an office to sit at a desk across from EVALEIGH (EVE) EDEN, a striking beauty of twenty-two and her dashing twin brother, ADAM. THEY both speak with British accents.)

JACOB

With the passing of your father and as his sole surviving heirs, you inherit all his accounts, assets, and properties which include the orchard and the penthouse. You're both extremely wealthy.

ADAM

So how much are we talking about or is that too vulgar a question?

(JACOB jots numbers on paper and turns it towards ADAM and EVE.)

JACOB

This is an estimate, though it could be more depending on fluctuations in the market.

ADAM
Nice.

EVE
Much better than trying to live off an allowance.

JACOB
(*pause*) So Adam and Evaleigh, what are you planning to do with the rest of your lives?

EVE
We haven't a clue, and please call me Eve.

JACOB
From what I understand you were both at Oxford but left after a year, so you only have a minimal advanced education.

ADAM
Right and no regrets.

EVE
None whatsoever.

JACOB
So do you have any specific goals or ambitions?

EVE
No.

ADAM
No.

JACOB
No compulsion to leave your mark on the world?

EVE
No.

ADAM
No.

EVE
You don't approve...?

JACOB
I try not to judge my clients, but you realize that people with your kind of money can make a difference -- a huge difference. I have clients who've contributed to cancer research, building schools, housing for the homeless, not to mention supporting the opera, museums, and city parks. There are people who could help you create a foundation to disperse some of your wealth. Several of my clients are financing the construction of wells in South Sudan where people lack access to potable water and latrines.

ADAM

Bully for them, but we're not a philanthropists, and we're not ashamed of having more than everyone else.

JACOB

Not just more, most people spend their entire lives working for a fraction of what you already have.

EVE

Lucky us! Now what about the orchard?

JACOB

Have you seen it?

ADAM

No

EVE

No,...

EVE

...have you?

JACOB

Only on the website.

(JACOB taps his computer keys and the TWINS stare as the orchard is revealed on the screen.)

JACOB

Ah, there it is. *(reading)* "Paradise Farms is located in the scenic Hudson River Valley and consists of six thousand apple trees spread over one hundred acres and is open for picking season from late September through early November." *(turning to the twins)* The woman in charge is Lucy Fyrne. She's called several times and is eager to meet you.

EVE

Why apples? Whatever possessed Daddy to buy an orchard?

JACOB

He said he was investing in the Homeland. Even though he made his fortune in high risk hedge funds, he wanted to own something wholesome that symbolized America -- you know, apple pie, Johnny Appleseed, The Big Apple. Your father had the Midas touch.

EVE

We wouldn't know about his touch. Truth be told, we repulsed him. *(pause)* Oh dear, did he neglect to mention that he blamed us for Mummy's death?

JACOB

He never spoke of it.

EVE

Really...? Well, we twins were too much for Mummy and she perished giving birth. Daddy kept us around till we were ten then shipped us off to London to be prepped and polished.

JACOB

So you really haven't seen much of your father...?

ADAM

Oh, he endured the obligatory months of summer by sending us off to camps, and at holidays was kept busy or counting the hours for us to leave -- which explains why we're more Brits than Yanks.

EVE

So you see, we're not in mourning, but don't think we're ungrateful because really, we're thrilled Daddy left his loot to us.

JACOB

Yes, well... *(pause, he sighs)* Of course there are pitfalls to inherited wealth.

ADAM

Like what? Like being susceptible to spending it?

EVE

We're also susceptible to drugs, alcohol, and distractions of every kind, but I'm sure you know that.

JACOB

No, your father only mentioned that you didn't seem to have any sense of purpose or passions.

ADAM

Oh, bollocks! We may not have purpose, but we have passions -- like sailing, riding, and clubbing with the minor celebrities we seem to attract.

EVE

We're shameless hedonists really, sometimes we just lay about reading novels, playing videos, or binge watching trendy telly serials. Our shrink says we were given too much too soon so we lost our intrinsic motivations, but why does everyone have to have a plan? A profession?

ADAM

At least our educations helped to cultivate our tastes in literature and the arts, so we're not complete vulgarians.

EVE

Now please arrange a meeting with that woman in charge of the orchard. Of course, we'll be inclined to sell since neither of us are particularly fond of apples.

SCENE 2

(Music as ADAM and EVE depart and JACOB dons his dark glasses and approaches the audience of medical professionals.)

JACOB

Before I continue, I have a complaint about the medications you've been giving us: the gastrointestinal side effects are unacceptable -- not to mention the sensitivity to light and it's harder to concentrate, to keep the chronology straight, though I distinctly recall arranging a meeting at the orchard with Lucy Fyrne the very next day.

(As JACOB continues, the apple orchard is revealed with ADAM and EVE standing among the trees. LUCY FYRNE, a middle aged woman in jeans approaches. SHE speaks with an Irish accent.)

JACOB

Those of you who've seen Paradise Farms know how stunning it was: rolling green hills studded with trees laden with apples. But Lucy told the twins they couldn't sell unless they revealed that the orchard's...

JACOB

...infested.

LUCY

Infested...

LUCY

...with worms! At the first sign of them, I tried every organic pesticide available. Of course, worms aren't inherently bad. They're nature's best recyclers, and these are full of protein, but they're not pleasant to find while biting into a fresh apple. Now if I may demonstrate.

(LUCY retrieves an apple bites into it, then removes a worm from the other half.)

LUCY

There, you see.

ADAM
Oh, gross!

EVE
Cheeky little buggers!

LUCY
Mind you, the apples aren't a total loss. You can mash them for jams, jellies and cider. I had cultivated a new variety, grafting a genetic cross between Ambrosia and Celestial varieties, hoping to create an apple with less core that didn't brown so quickly, and oh, what a marvel! I named it Temptation, and the apples were crunchy, juicy, tangy, even better than I imagined, but who knew the worms would find them irresistible? Oh, here I am rambling, and I'm sorry to disappoint since I'm sure you want the orchard to prosper. Your pa had such grandiose plans, especially after we brewed the cider and discovered its potential. We thought we could change the world!

EVE
With cider...?

EVE
How?!

ADAM
How...?

LUCY
There's only one word to describe it: *(pause)* Engorgement! One cupful and your blood starts to heat up and flow straight to the sensual zones, but it's more than carnal cravings 'cause beyond being aroused you feel a great glowing affection for whomever you're with along with the whole of humanity.

EVE
So the cider's an aphrodisiac?

LUCY
A euphoric! A pity the passion doesn't last beyond a few hours, though you feel the afterglow for days and it changes you -- makes you less fretful, lighter on your feet.

EVE
Sounds lovely.

LUCY
We hired a pomologist to do some tests, and even he thought what we had was a miracle, a potent stimulant that was actually good for you. "An apple a day" as they say. Your pa and I thought it might have a curative effect on crime, tribal wars, even his cancer, but he was too far gone -- though not too far gone to keep from falling in love.

ADAM
Really? With whom?

LUCY

With me if you must know. The feeling was mutual, though we didn't have much time.

EVE

Well, bully for Daddy. *(to Jacob)* Did you know about this?

JACOB

He said he was smitten with Lucy but never mentioned the cider.

EVE

(to Lucy) Did he ever mention us?

LUCY

Oh, yes, pet, he was fretful about your futures and full of regrets.

JACOB

You should be grateful to Lucy. Your father wanted to leave her his entire estate, but she insisted he leave it to you.

LUCY

The man abandoned his children in life, so the least he could do was express his loyalty after death.

ADAM

Thanks, but why didn't he leave the orchard to you?

LUCY

I didn't want it, and frankly things are a bit precarious. The pomologist fears the worms are some new pesticide-resistant species. He thinks they're responsible for the euphoria, excreting chemicals into the pulp of the apples. *(pause)* Well, now it's up to the two of you. As I see it you have four options: one: you sell the orchard at a loss as it is: trees, worms and all; two: you cut and burn the trees and sell the orchard for the land; three: you cut and burn the trees and replant common varieties or other crops in hopes of discouraging the worms; or four: you keep the trees, keep the worms, and continue brewing the cider.

EVE

Do you have some cider with you?

(LUCY draws a bottle from her satchel.)

LUCY

Indeed I do! It takes thirty six apples to make a gallon; I've already made twenty barrels.

EVE

So if I drink it, I'll fall in love?

LUCY

Very likely, so be cautious; you don't want to fall for Adam.

EVE

Oh, god, no, my brother's forbidden fruit, aren't you darling?

ADAM

Yes, and you're rotten to the core!

(EVE takes a long swig from the bottle, then hands it to ADAM.)

ADAM

No thanks.

EVE

Oh, come on. You're not afraid, are you?

ADAM

I'm not stupid. *(to Lucy)* She's so reckless, so bloody impulsive!

EVE

Adam just hates to lose control.

ADAM

And you're a bully!

EVE

Coward!

ADAM

Bitch!

EVE

Baby! Oh, for heaven's sake, man up, Adam, it's really quite delicious!

ADAM

(pause, he sighs) Oh, all right.

(ADAM takes a drink, then hands the bottle back to EVE.)

EVE

(to Jacob) What about you, Jacob?

JACOB

No, thanks, I have to be in court later today.

EVE

Just a sip won't hurt. I don't feel a bloody thing.

ADAM

Neither do I.

EVE

Oh, come on, Jacob, just a sip, a taste, a teensy weensy drop.

JACOB

Well,...all right, just a...a sip.

(As JACOB lifts the bottle to his lips, music is heard and the lighting alters. Then HE swallows and approaches the audience.)

JACOB

(he sighs) There are pivotal moments in every life when things take a turn, and for me it was when that cider exploded its sweet-tarty flavors on my tongue, then flowed down my throat. I recall how I felt a slight reflux as if my gut knew what my brain failed to grasp, and then it happened, beginning with Eve who suddenly swooned,...

JACOB

...ohhhhhhhh.

EVE

Ohhhhhhhhhh,...

EVE

...it's happening: my skin's prickly and I'm feeling waves of radiant heat and the sweetest, purest...

EVE

...bliss.

ADAM

Bliss....

JACOB

Bliss...

EVE

Oh, Adam, isn't it lovely? Let's stay here!

ADAM

In the orchard...?

EVE

We'll renovate the barn, convert it into a smashing new country estate.

LUCY

It's already electrified and there's heat and water.

EVE

We'll adopt goats, horses, dogs and cats, and Lucy and Jacob will help us won't you?

LUCY

Yes, as long as Jacob deals with the finances.

JABOB

And as long as Lucy stays in charge of the orchard.

EVE

And production! So you see, we do have ambitions; we'll keep the orchard and brew raging rivers of Paradise Farms Homeland Cider!

(Music resounds as EVE, ADAM, JACOB and LUCY dance in slow motion until JACOB steps forward.)

JACOB

That was the beginning of our rapturous revelries in Paradise, breaking all the laws of nature and propriety in twosomes, threesomes, foursomes, with the animals, the plants, everything so exotically and erotically alive because you see, at Paradise Farms there was no such thing as forbidden fruit.

SCENE 3

(As JACOB speaks, ADAM and EVE reconvene in the office, their arms around each other.)

JACOB

We all know how capitalism motivates the rich to get richer, and the orchard was producing bottles, barrels, cases and crates of cider which was all the rage in Manhattan and spread to all corners of the free drinking world. Occasionally we'd meet in the office to check the twins immense profits until one day while sipping our teatime cider...

(LUCY dashes in and snatches the cups out of ADAM and EVE'S hands.)

LUCY

Stop drinking! Right now! I'm serious! Not another drop!

ADAM
What's wrong?

JACOB
What's going on?

EVE
For gods sake, Lucy...

JACOB
You don't look well.

LUCY
I'm not! Now listen! I have something to say that affects us all.

(Pause as THEY sit and LUCY takes a deep breath.)

LUCY
At first my only symptoms were fatigue, a bellyache, and bit of weight loss, but then I developed a rash on my chest and a yellow tinge to my eyes -- which is why I drove to the city. The doctors at Mount Sinai insisted on an MRI and grilled me like detectives, asking about my habits, so naturally I explained about the cider. Well, that piqued their interest and soon I was telling them about the orchard and the worms which led me to Genesis, to how the world began with an apple and could end with an apple. Well, then one of the smart ass doctors said the logic of the sick is not the logic of the sane, but really, I said, is what I've got any more of a freakish horror than viruses coming from bats and mosquitos like Ebola and Zika? Well, that shut the bastards up!

JACOB
So what's gone wrong?

LUCY
I'm getting to that. *(she sighs)* Well, lo and behold, the MRI revealed three full bodied worms inside my stomach and two outside, one devouring my liver, the other my spleen.

EVE
Bloody hell.

JACOB
Oh, god...

ADAM
I knew it!

LUCY
Shush! Let me finish! It seems that after we mash, boil, and imbibe the buggers, they regrow themselves inside the swamp of our innards. Then they start munching our meals, then our organs, feasting on our bodies from the inside out. Of course, I'm the one who's imbibed the most, so I'm the sickest, but you're sick too, and everyone else who's been drinking our Homeland Cider!

JACOB
Did they prescribe any anti-parasitics?

LUCY

Christ, yes, I'm chock full of drugs! The hospital heads called the CDC in Atlanta, and they're sending a team to track everyone who's consumed the cider.

EVE

I just served it to the entire swim club!

ADAM

I just mailed a case to Oxford!

JACOB

This means tracing all your customers, plus online orders sent to Paris, Moscow, Montreal...

LUCY

Not to worry. They're putting notices on the Internet, the radio and telly, and by the by, the doctors want to see all of you as soon as possible.

JACOB

You mean *now*...?

LUCY

Afraid so.

JACOB

I'm due in court in an hour!

ADAM

I'm leaving!

LUCY

Wait! Wait! I'm not finished! (*pause*) Before I left, the doctors mentioned that it's likely we'll be quarantined.

EVE
Quarantined...?

JACOB
Quarantined?!

EVE
Shit...

Where?!

LUCY

Ward's Island.

JACOB

You can't be serious; you mean isolating everyone who's ever...?

LUCY

That's right, everyone who's ever taken so much as a wee nip.

EVE

But that's thousands...!

LUCY

Millions if it's contagious.

EVE

Contagious...?

ADAM

Contagious!?

JACOB

Please tell me this is a nightmare.

LUCY

The inspectors are meeting me at the orchard. *(to Adam and Eve)* You both should join me.

JACOB

They'll confiscate all your barrels.

LUCY

Worse! They'll burn the trees and extract the worms from the soil before they contaminate other farms -- if they haven't already.

ADAM

I knew this was wrong! *(to Eve)* You and your madcap schemes!

EVE

It's a plague; God's revenge for our greed and gluttony. For consuming the world, He's sent his beastly army to consume us.

ADAM

You know you're batshit crazy, don't you?

EVE

Oh, shush!

ADAM

I'm too young to die!

LUCY

Aren't we all, pet?

(A siren is heard in the distance.)

LUCY

Oh, damn, it sounds like they're here already.

JACOB

What...? They're coming to get us?!

LUCY

They said they might. I told them where you were.

ADAM

I'm not going anywhere!

EVE

Damn!

JACOB

(grasping Lucy's hand) Listen, whatever happens, let's promise to stick together!

(The siren blares shrill notes while the lights dim.)

EPILOGUE

(JACOB approaches the audience of medical specialists.)

JACOB

Since then we've been trapped here for eighteen fun filled days. At last count we have six hundred and twelve fellow prisoners with more on the way and you're running out of beds. It's hard to believe that our lives have narrowed to a morbid monitoring of blood, bowels, and the daily dwindling of our mental health and hygiene.

(As JACOB continues, ADAM, EVE, and LUCY appear to join him.)

EVE

It's so damn annoying, isn't it? How all our bloody money hasn't rendered us immune. We're as sick as everyone else!?

ADAM

Bad shit happens -- no one's exempt.

EVE

I'm afraid I'm losing more weight.

JACOB

I'm afraid I'm losing Lucy.

ADAM

I'm afraid I'm losing hair.

LUCY

I'm afraid I'm losing hope.

(THEY grasp each others hands for a moment, then release them to focus on JACOB who limps to the edge of the stage, facing the audience, pointing a finger.)

JACOB

To keep our minds occupied, Lucy and I are composing a play featuring Adam and Eve and the infested apples as a metaphor for the corruption of the ideals of democracy, civilization, and our future lives on Earth. (*pointing to the audience*) So now I'm afraid the pressure's on all of you to restore us to our health and homes! In the meantime, you'll notice that starting tomorrow some of us will be planting trees on the hospital grounds despite Lucy's conviction that since world began as an apple, it may end with an apple.

End of Play

