Are There Trees in Heaven?

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Synopsis

A proposal of marriage should be as simple as a mutual “I love you” and an earnest “will you marry me?” offered in unison with a particular kind of ring. This couple, however, must face a few additional questions that are a little less than simple—with answers that are quite a bit more than complex.

Cast of Characters

Marcus Carrson: the lover; dark blue jeans and a shirt that his girl would like
Matthew Carrson: the lovable middle brother to Marcus and Maria; business casual with a bowtie
Maria Carrson: the stickler elder sister to Marcus and Matthew; nun-like frock with a sexy sort of cut
Anne Glassing: the ponderer with a playful spirit; fun-colored adventure clothes with a deeper undertone
Esther Glassing: the want-it-all little sister to Anne; flouncy flowered miniskirt and well-worn jean jacket
Shellie: the best BFF ever to Anne; silly slippers and Star Wars pajama pants and a Muse t-shirt
Glinterson: the jeweler
Fran: the waitress
Customer
Diners
The Ring

SCENE: Glinterson’s, a small jewelry shop on 5th Avenue, New York City, New York

MARC leans against a counter, stage left, a nervous-excited grin playing at his lips. MATT stands beside MARC, one arm thrown over his shoulders, a proud, encouraging, and debonair sort of smile plastered to his face. MARIA faces a counter opposite her brothers, stage right, scrutinizing a display of diamond-studded necklaces and earrings. The avenue is visible through a window upstage.

Enter GLINTERSON with a black velvet box.

MARC: (whirling around and tugging at his shirt)
GLINTERSON: (opening the box and unveiling the ring) Here she is, Mr. Carrson.
MATT: (peering over MARC) Nice!
MARC: (staring, speechless, for a moment then smiling to himself) This is great—this is even better than—this is perfect—Thank-you, Mr. Glinterson. Thank-you very much.
GLINTERSON: Thank-you, Mr. Carrson.

Enter CUSTOMER.

GLINTERSON: Excuse me for a moment.
MATT: (exchanging a grin with MARC then contemplating the ring again) So… Anne…
MARC: Anne…
MATT: Think she might be the One?
MARC: (giving MATT a loaded look) She is the One—
MARIA: (glancing over her shoulder) I doubt that.
MATT: (laughing) Just making sure… Otherwise I would have offered to take her off your hands…
MARIA: (scoffing with disgust)
MARC: (glaring at MATT)
MATT: (bumping MARC with his shoulder) Not that you would ever let her go.
MARC: (returning the blow) More that she would never leave me to love you.
MATT: True… too true… I love the ring.
MARC: (beaming) Designed it for her myself.
MATT: Nice! I mean, in all seriousness, Marc, this is perfect for her… (winking at MARC) gives her no choice but to accept you—
MARIA: Oh, please, Matthew.
MARC: (exchanging a knowing grin with MATT)
MARIA: (scoffing, snatching the ring out of the box, holding it up to the light alongside her own, then raising an eyebrow at MARC) You… designed… this?
MARC: Yes…
MARIA: (shaking her head) Pitiful creation—even for our little Marcus… And you both consider it an engagement ring?
MARC: Um…
MATT: Yes!
MARIA: I hope—for your sake—that her opinion of it will never be of importance.
MARC: (narrowing his eyes at her) What—?
MARIA: If I were you, dear Marcus, then I would leave… this… right here with Mr. Glinterson and proceed to make a serious effort to find myself a more suitable girl— Because Mom and Dad and I have no choice but to refuse this one.
MATT: Bullshit! Maria—
MARIA: (gasing aloud)
MATT: Mom and Dad love her!
MARIA: (straightening up a little more) Perhaps… That, however, is soon to be a thing of the past, and (raising her right hand to silence her brothers) the reason, dear Marcus, is thus: Marriage is now and forever will be a contract between a man and a woman beneath the omnipotent eyes of God. It is a union of two souls—a hallowed union—an unbreakable union—and a decent Catholic man ought never to outright choose to bind himself to a… religionless… woman—no matter how much he supposes that he loves her—because a woman who knows nothing of God is not fit to be married; she would be certain to make her husband miserable, and you, dear Marcus, deserve a woman who will be sure to keep you—at the very least—satisfied.
MARC: (clenching his jaw and glaring at MARIA)
MATT: (rolling his eyes) Good thing Anne believes in God! Because she is a… um… (all of a sudden unsure) Because Lori—
MARIA: Do not associate that amoral heathen—who boasts six ex-husbands and two pre-marital abortions on her conscience—with any form of higher religion!
MATT: Because Lori and Esther belong to… I know she practices something.
MARIA: Atheism.
MATT: No!
MARIA: Then what? (zeroing in on MARC) Marc?
MARC: (lowering his gaze)
MATT: Marc?
MARIA: Oh, please, Matthew—I doubt that he has ever even bothered to discuss the matter with her.
MARC: (snatching the ring back from MARIA)

Enter ANNE and ESTHER behind the window.

ESTHER: (peeking in, gawking, yanking ANNE over to the window, jumping up and down, and gesturing towards the ring)
ANNE: (blushing then dragging ESTHER away)

Exit ANNE and ESTHER.

MATT: (to MARC) Maybe… you should… Maybe you should ask her about… all this… before you…
MARC: Maybe—
GLINTERSON: (rejoining them) Will that be all for Anne today, Mr. Carrson?
MARC: Yes… (returning the ring to the box and returning the box to GLINTERSON)
GLINTERSON: The price we agreed upon last month.
MARIA: Last month?!
MARC: (nodding, removing his checkbook from his pocket, and signing a check)
GLINTERSON: Pleasure doing business with you again, Mr. Carrson, (shaking MARC’s hand then holding out the box) as always.
MARC: (hesitating for a moment before accepting it) You, too, Mr. Glinterson.
MARIA: (scoffing) Best of luck tonight, Marcus.

Exit MARIA.

MATT: Maybe…?
MARC: Maybe I will.

END SCENE

Questions for Answers

SCENE: Central Park

A lamp post stands center stage, illuminating a twilit gravel path lined with trees and benches on either side. MARC sneaks away from one tree trunk and ducks behind another, as ANNE rolls out from underneath a bench then scrambles into shadow. She presses her back into a tree trunk on the opposite side of the path, clutching an unlit flashlight to her chest, listening. MARC glances towards the light post and begins to inch around his trunk. He pauses just before his toes touch the lamp light. Then he dives towards a bench, as ANNE leaps out from behind her trunk and shines her flashlight at MARC.

ANNE: Ah-ha!
MARC: (freezing then clutching his chest and collapsing upon the ground) Aw!
ANNE: Two-Three.
MARC: I’m still up by one!
ANNE: And I’m still warming up—next round might just be win number two of a six-win streak for me!
MARC: (propping his shoulders up off of the ground) Not a chance, Bullseye.
ANNE: (leaning over MARC) Maybe you should quit while you’re ahead.
MARC: Maybe I will.
ANNE: Better make it more than just a maybe.
MARC: (leaping to his feet) Are you going to surrender first?
ANNE: Question—Three-Nil.
MARC: Ugh!
ANNE: (chuckling at him) Listen close, Arrowhead, because I refuse to repeat this tonight—I surrender.
MARC: Thanks, Bullseye.
ANNE: Now we’re even.
MARC: Yeah right!
ANNE: Yeah. Right.
MARC: (grinning at her for a moment) Repetition—One-Three. (grasping both of her hands and slipping his fingers in between hers) I have to ask you something.
ANNE: (blushing) I guess that means I have to answer you something.
MARC: (nodding)
ANNE: (raising an eyebrow at him) Hesitation—Four-One—Lame performance, this is, Arrowhead. I mean, I was expecting to get a little more out of you tonight—because, one, Saturday, and, two, you asked me out.
MARC: (mumbling) I think this round is about to get a little more interesting.
ANNE: In that case, Arrowhead, tell me whether or not this question of yours has anything to do with marriage.
MARC: (starting)
ANNE: Hesitation—Five-One—I only mention marriage because I happened to be shopping on 5th Avenue this morning—for investment ideas—I always seem to find good investment ideas on 5th Avenue—and Esther happened to be with me—for clothes—she has yet to go a single Saturday since birth without shopping for clothes in spite of the fact that she’s been too broke to even consider buying anything inedible since she graduated from college—and, as we were passing a certain jewelry shop, Esther, of course, decided to peek through the window at all of those glittering, useless, overpriced, little things on display, and then she gasped and said, “Anne, look! There’s Marc!” And I just happened to look, and you just happened to be holding a ring at the time… She kept swearing to me that she knew it was an engagement ring for some reason; I just sort of nodded, and then I dragged us both away.
MARC: (staring at her… just staring at her)
ANNE: Hesitation… But, um, no change in score... no need for one…
MARC: (attempting to articulate some sort of response)
ANNE: (offering him a nervous grin then pulling him forwards along the path) Next time we see that kind of red in the sky we should go sailing or kayaking or something—Imagine… sunset, a little boat on the Hudson, skyline rising up behind us, city lights twinkling like stars on the water—I hope we a get a full constellation tonight… Plenty of light pollution to contend with, but no clouds up there to hide any of them from us right now… Transition (standing in place and facing him) to questions—Have I rambled long enough for you find your tongue?
MARC: Almost.
ANNE: Statement—Six-One—Arrowhead, are you at least going to attempt to make a comeback before you have to walk me home?
MARC: Am I that far behind?
ANNE: When are you going to ask me this question?
MARC: Um…
ANNE: Hesitation—Seven-One.
MARC: (taking a deep breath) Will you promise to give a me a legitimate answer?
ANNE: Will you promise to give me a legitimate question?
MARC: (offering a nervous smile then kneeling before her and grasping her hands) Bullseye… do you… do you believe in God?
ANNE: (blinking, taken aback)
MARC: (almost whispering) Hesitation—Two-Seven.
ANNE: (still groping for words) Will... you... bear with me for a sec?
MARC: (raising an eyebrow at her) What kind of a sec?
ANNE: (smiling then serious) Are you talking about a lowercase g “god” or the capital G “God”?
MARC: Do you believe in the capital G “God”?
ANNE: Is there a particular method of believing in Him that you have in mind?
MARC: (grimacing then returning to his feet) Have I ever told you that my parents are Catholic?
ANNE: Would I be wrong to assume that you and Matt and Maria are also Catholic?
MARC: Will you hate me when I say “yes”?
ANNE: Will you love me more when I say “no”?
MARC: (grinning with relief) So much more...
ANNE: Statement—Eight-Two.
MARC: (rolling his eyes)
ANNE: Do all of them expect me to be Catholic?
MARC: Will you hate them when I say “yes”?
ANNE: Do you expect me to be Catholic?
MARC: (almost hesitating) Will you still love me when I say “I expect you to be something”?
ANNE: Am I not?
MARC: (shutting his mouth)
ANNE: Hesitation—Nine-Two... (narrowing her eyes a little) How do you and your siblings regard the Vatican?
MARC: What do you mean?
ANNE: If Catholics are supposed to forgo their worldly possessions and live simple, holy, selfless lives, then why do your popes live in a guarded palace amongst the most lavish décor known to man in the wealthiest country on Earth?
MARC: (defensive) Anne—
ANNE: Statement—Ten-Two—How do you regard that ritual of cannibalizing your capital G “God”?
MARC: (gaping at her) What?!?
ANNE: Was He a human in form or not when He first directed other humans to ‘eat His flesh’ and ‘drink His blood’?
MARC: (turning away from her)
ANNE: Hesitation—Eleven-Two—In all seriousness, Marc, why do you do it?
MARC: (facing her again) In all seriousness, Anne, can you think of a more... efficient... method of drawing near to God?
ANNE: (folding her arms across her chest and sort of scoffing) Is it any less efficient for sinners than it is for saints?
MARC: Oh, come on, Anne—
ANNE: Statement—Twelve-Two—How do you regard Heaven?
MARC: What is ‘the Kingdom of God’?
ANNE: Is it a place?
MARC: Is that a question?
ANNE: Is there an answer?
MARC: Yes!
ANNE: Statement—Thirteen-Two—Where might one find Heaven?
MARC: Would you like me to ask a dead man?
ANNE: Might a dead man lead us to Hell?
MARC: *(gritting his teeth)* Would you like me to dig up a saint?
ANNE: Might that make you even more of a sinner?
MARC: When are you going to give me this answer?
ANNE: Have you run out of questions?
MARC: Have you come up with more?
ANNE: *(almost grinning)* What kinds of beings live in Heaven?
MARC: Have you heard of souls?
ANNE: How do you regard them?
MARC: What are ‘spiritual beings’?
ANNE: Are they alive?
MARC: How are we defining alive?
ANNE: Do they require food and water and oxygen?
MARC: Are you referring to things we consume on Earth?
ANNE: What else would they consume if they were alive?
MARC: Is it possible for them to be living but not alive?
ANNE: Does your capital G “God” ever recycle them?
MARC: Are you referring to some sort of reincarnation?
ANNE: *(taken aback by his tone)* Is it wrong for someone to ask whether or not a soul can be refurbished in Heaven for reuse on Earth?
MARC: Is it right to expect someone else to answer?
ANNE: Is that a “yes” or a “no”?
MARC: *(approaching his limits)* Are you out of questions yet?
ANNE: Are there trees in Heaven?
MARC: *(clenching his jaw)* Can I use a ‘pass’ on this one?
ANNE: *(huffing at him)* If you’re expecting to convince me that this place exists, then shouldn’t you tell me a little more about it?
MARC: *(almost shouting)* What more do you want to know?
ANNE: *(still calm and stone-faced)* What more do you know?
MARC: How dissatisfied will you be when I say “not too much”?
ANNE: *(huffing)* Why do you even bother to believe in a place that no living person has ever been to or learned enough about to tell other people where it is or what it looks like?
MARC: Is that not what it means to believe?
ANNE: *(lowering her gaze)*
MARC: Hesitation—Three-Thirteen… Do you believe in God?
ANNE: *(quiet)* Repetition—Fourteen-Three… Will your family still love me when I fail to say “yes”?
MARC: Will you hate them when I say “no”?
ANNE: *(meeting his gaze)* Will you still love me?
MARC: I…
ANNE: Hesitation—Fifteen-Three—Honest, Marc, if I were a Jew or a Muslim or a Hindu or an Atheist or just not some kind of a Christian, would you still love me?
MARC: (unable to respond)
ANNE: Hesitation… Sixteen-Three…
MARC: (reaching for her, as she steps away) Anne—
ANNE: (on the verge of tears) Why does it matter?
MARC: Anne—
ANNE: Why should it matter? Why should it be normal—acceptable—encouraged—for one person to think less of another just because both believe in different deities or different workings of the universe?
MARC: It shouldn’t…
ANNE: Statement—Seventeen-Three—Then why do my beliefs matter to you?
MARC: (meeting her gaze, a million and one apologies in his eyes)

Exit ANNE, running.

END SCENE

Ben or Jerry

SCENE: Apartment in Queens

ANNE sits on the floor of a half-lit little kitchen, fingers curled around an empty water glass, knees tucked against her chest. Her hair is unkempt, her cheeks are pale, and her eyes are bloodshot and dull. A small table with four chairs stands a few feet behind her, center stage, pressing up against a refrigerator and a short counter with a shallow sink and with cupboards above and below.

Enter SHELLIE with two loaded reusable grocery bags.

SHELLIE: (plopping her bags down on the table) Okay… I think I got us covered: (pulling items out of the bag, as she speaks) tissues—just in case you finish off our last box at some point tonight—paper towels—because we were out—new bottle of sexy red O.P.I., toothpicks, cotton rounds—because your nails look fabulous in red, and I am in dire need of a manicure—bubble wrap—no explanation required—Silver Linings Playbook—because we lent The Princess Bride to Liz last week, and you’re not a fan of Gone Girl, and I’m just about through with Pride and Prejudice—ZzzQuil—just in case one of us has trouble falling asleep later—and, most important of all, dessert—Half Baked, Phish Food, Chunky Monkey, or Americone Dream?
ANNE: (attempting to smile up at her roommate) Thanks, Shellie.
SHELLIE: Pick a pint.
ANNE: (shaking her head)
SHELLIE: (pulling two spoons out of a drawer then selecting a pint for ANNE) Here—and I expect you to finish it.
ANNE: (accepting both items with a sort of reluctance) Not in one sitting.
SHELLIE: (rolling her eyes and plopping down beside ANNE with a pint of her own) No… Just in one night.
ANNE: (staring at her unopened pint) No.
SHELLIE: (digging into her own pint) Yes.
ANNE: No.
SHELLIE: Yes. Otherwise (reaching over to open ANNE’s pint) start talking.
ANNE: (shoving a spoonful of ice cream into her mouth) No.
SHELLIE: (a smug smile spreading across her lips) So be it.
ANNE: (two or three bites later) He bought a ring.
SHELLIE: (sucking in her breath) Right…
ANNE: (glancing at SHELLIE) Esther?
SHELLIE: (nodding) Eighteen-minute phone call instead of three hundred texts this time around… Then a couple snapchats this morning.
ANNE: I told her not to talk about it.
SHELLIE: She talks no matter what we tell her, and, lucky for you, she learned to limit her talking to me.
ANNE: (playing with her ice cream) He asked me out tonight.
SHELLIE: And…?
ANNE: I met him for dinner.
SHELLIE: And…?
ANNE: We ate.
SHELLIE: (almost rolling her eyes) And…?
ANNE: Then he…
SHELLIE: (silent for half a moment before leaping up and tearing open a box of tissues then offering one to ANNE)
ANNE: (fighting back tears) In the Park… after we… and then he… down on one knee… and he asked me… “Do you believe in God?”
SHELLIE: What the fuck?
ANNE: (drying her eyes with a tissue and sniffling) Right?
SHELLIE: Why…?
ANNE: He’s Catholic—
SHELLIE: Good grief—
ANNE: So his parents—and Maria—and maybe even Matt—sort of expect him to marry someone Catholic—or at least someone Christian—
SHELLIE: Prehistoric—!
ANNE: And I guess he just assumed that I was… religious… because he seemed to want to propose to me!
SHELLIE: But…
ANNE: (sobbing) Now he knows…
SHELLIE: (furrowing her brow then biting her lip) How much?
ANNE: Enough—more than enough—and now…
SHELLIE: (sort of nodding) He’s conflicted…
ANNE: Because of his religion—
SHELLIE: His values—
ANNE: And my lack of one!
SHELLIE: *(folding another tissue into her hand)* Anne—
ANNE: Shellie, he looked at me tonight as if I had just confessed to sleeping with his best friend…
SHELLIE: *(pausing for a moment)* Was this before or after you called him a practicing cannibal?
ANNE: *(shaking her head)* It’s just… over… Conflict resolved.
SHELLIE: No—no! I mean, look at yourself!
ANNE: *(half-smiling, half-scowling)*
SHELLIE: Now think of how you swore to me after I broke up with Bren and spent four whole days like this—and lost two damned jobs in the process—that you would never waste that much time and that many tears over someone… unless you were as sure as science that he was the One!
ANNE: I guess I was stupid enough to hope that Marc might be the One.
SHELLIE: He is the One!
ANNE: *(shaking her head, lips quivering, another wave of tears streaming down her cheeks)*
SHELLIE: *(slamming down her pint)* Forget about his religion for a sec, and remember that Marc is more—Marc is so much more—than some fucked-up look that he gave you tonight!
ANNE: *(shaking her head even harder)*
SHELLIE: Listen to me, Anne, you get one shot at life—either you put the ball in the back of the net and win the game, or you lose. If you love him enough to hope that he might be the One, then make him the One—or don’t, and spend the rest of your life wishing that you did.

*END SCENE*

*Forgive and Accept*

*SCENE: Beans Encountered, an itty-bitty coffee shop in Soho*

    *MARC sits at a counter, center stage, nursing a steaming mug of tea, not coffee, and staring off into space. Three or four tables are visible behind him, some half-occupied by DINERS, others empty or abandoned, between the counter and the storefront window.*

*Enter MARIA.*

MARIA: *(scanning the tables then spotting MARC at the counter with a disgruntled huff)* Morning, Marcus.
MARC: *(glancing back at MARIA)* Morning.
MARIA: *(seating herself beside him and glaring at him)* You neglected to shave.
MARC: *(stroking his chin)* Guess I forgot…
MARIA: I suppose you also neglected to go to Mass this morning.
MARC: Guess I overslept…
MARIA: *(raising her right hand)* You may save your other blasphemous excuses for a more forgiving saint. Now, I need a large soy latte, extra sugar, and I want one of those banoffee pie muffins. Then *(rising from her seat, purse in hand)* we can talk about this girl of yours.

*Exit MARIA.*
MARC: (wincing at her words)

Enter FRAN with two steaming mugs on a tray.

FRAN: (slipping out from behind the counter, shuffling over to two DINERS at a table to deliver both mugs, checking in on another DINER, then retreating back behind the counter and shuffling over to MARC) She here yet?
MARC: Yes.
FRAN: (placing a hand on her hip) Off to the powder room already?
MARC: Yes.
FRAN: Course she is… and (glancing at her wristwatch) right on schedule, too, as per usual.
MARC: (almost smiling)
FRAN: (removing a pad and pencil from her apron pocket) She leave her order with you?
MARC: (nodding)
FRAN: Let me guess—one latte, soymilk not skim anymore, extra dash of brown sugar, not white, and one muffin, banoffee pie since we have them this morning… She in a small mood, a medium mood, or a large mood today?
MARC: Large.
FRAN: (making a face at her pad) I be sure to keep my distance then—Matt coming, too?
MARC: No… He has to be at JFK in an hour—His boss decided to send him to some convention out in California—
FRAN: Ooh! Good for him!
MARC: He booked his ticket almost three weeks ago, Fran, and he told me this morning—after moseying on home from Mass—that he was just getting around to dropping off his business suits at a dry cleaner.
FRAN: (tucking her pad back into her apron) He be fine—He always is… You a different case though.
MARC: (hanging his head a little)
FRAN: Give me a holler when things get ugly, and I bring some more hot water for your tea.
MARC: Thanks, Fran.
FRAN: Best of luck with Miss Maria, Little Carrson.

Exit FRAN.

MARC: (rolling his mug of tea around between his palms until a drop jumps out and burns his hand, compelling him to shove his mug aside, cross his arms, and glare at the counter)

Enter FRAN with an enormous mug, a muffin plate, and a fork on a tray.

FRAN: (pausing before MARC) Here go. Either of you need anything else now?
MARC: No, thanks.
FRAN: (nodding then slipping out from behind the counter)
Enter MARIA, hair and face all done up.

MARIA: (resituating herself beside MARC then taking a long sip of her latte) So. Anne.
MARC: (feeling something crack a little more inside) Anne.
MARIA: Did you at least make an effort to ask her about her beliefs in something last night?
MARC: Yes.
MARIA: And how did she respond?
MARC: She… asked me a question…
MARIA: (scoffing) Of course she did.
MARC: She asked me a lot of questions…
MARIA: (rolling her eyes) Did she happen to provide you with any answers in the process?
MARC: Yes.
MARIA: (scooping a sliver of muffin onto her fork) Yes?
MARC: (hesitating for a moment more) How did you know?
MARIA: I invited a certain little bird to join me for lunch, and, I suppose I must have mentioned something about your growing obsession with proposals of marriage, because, all of a sudden, she began to twitter about a great deal of things…
MARC: (wounded) Esther?
MARIA: She went on and on and on about flowers and rings and dresses and how different her own ideals of love and marriage are from those of her sister… I asked her at one point to tell me what kind of church Anne might wish to be married in. She looked at me for a moment. Then she laughed and said, “One that knows how to have a lot of fun… Because Anne makes games out of everything, and a priest who could tolerate her antics would give God a good chance of getting her to believe in Him again.”
MARC: (staring at nothing in particular) I love those games…
MARIA: (pursing her lips then swallowing another sliver of muffin) Learn to love them less…
Learn to love her less.
MARC: (focusing in on MARIA) Why?
MARIA: Quite simply, because you, dear Marcus, ought to be with a woman who shares your ideals and supports your beliefs, and, more importantly, because Mom and Dad and Matthew and I do not approve—
MARC: Why?
MARIA: She is Godless!
MARC: And what are you?
MARIA: (taken aback) Excuse me?
MARC: (holding her gaze) Narcissist.
MARIA: I am not—!
MARC: You know a better word for one who idolizes herself even more than she idolizes God?
MARIA: (scoffing)
MARC: Glutton.
MARIA: How dare you—?
MARC: You want me to use another word for a single person sitting down to three-quarters of a pot of coffee and a giant cupcake-without-frosting for breakfast on a Sunday after Mass and Confession?

MARIA: (pressing her lips together then pushing her plate away and folding her arms across her chest) Go on.

MARC: Hypocrite.

MARIA: (almost flinching inside) Yes?

MARC: I’m done.

MARIA: I doubt that.

MARC: I made my point.

MARIA: (narrowing her eyes at MARC) I feel so enlightened.

MARC: Then we’re even.

MARIA: Not quite…

MARC: (long pause, staring into his mug of tea, thinking) Maria?

MARIA: Marcus.

MARC: (meeting her unenthusiastic gaze and holding it for a beat) Are there… trees… in Heaven?

END SCENE

The Proposals

SCENE: Central Park

MARC paces back and forth across a sunlit patch of grass, center stage, hands stuffed deep into his pockets. He pauses, glances at his wristwatch, looks around, then continues to pace. ANNE leans against a tree, stage right, half-concealed in its shadow. She is silent and watchful and still. MARC pauses again, hangs his head, and plops down in the grass. ANNE stares at him for a moment more before stepping out from behind her tree and sitting down behind him, her back a foot or so apart from his.

MARC: (lifting his head a little, fighting an urge to turn around) Long time no see.

ANNE: (nodding)

MARC: Hesitation… One-Nil… I have to tell you, Bullseye, I was getting kind of nervous about us—I mean, at one point, Maria told me to just give up and go return the ring to Glinterson, and… believe or not, I almost did…

ANNE: (dropping her gaze to the grass)

MARC: Hesitation… Two-Nil… Then Matt convinced me to hang onto it for a little while longer, so…

ANNE: I bet he does that a lot.

MARC: You have no idea.

ANNE: (almost grinning) I pick up on certain things pretty fast.

MARC: Wait—

ANNE: He called the firm, pretending to be some kind of overexcited, know-nothing, made-it-overnight millionaire in dire need of a decent stock broker—

MARC: How could he have known that you would pick up?
ANNE: Question—One-Two—and he almost had me. Then he mentioned that his name was Carrson, and I was this close to hanging up on him before I realized that the boss might be listening in again—Because he tends to have nothing better to do while sucking down his first cup of coffee, and I happen to be the only receptionist who still makes an effort to be in before 7:30 AM.

MARC: Wow—

ANNE: Right?

MARC: Question—Three-One—

ANNE: He sat through the entire spiel on options trading before he even mentioned you, and he survived more than half of the big wink-wink-nudge-nudge-invest-with-us rant before he even got to his point. And—transition to questions—do you know what he said to me next?

MARC: Should I know?

ANNE: How could you not? Transition to statements—He used your words!

MARC: What—?

ANNE: Question—Two-Three… He said, “You know, Anne, your Arrowhead has been missing his Bullseye a lot these days. To be honest, at this point, he just wants a chance to hit the damned target again…”

MARC: Ah…

ANNE: He tried to keep talking—

MARC: I bet he did—

ANNE: But I stopped listening.

MARC: (nodding) Then he hung up.

ANNE: (hanging her head with shame) Then I texted you.

MARC: (grinning at the grass)

ANNE: Hesitation… Three-Three… (silent for a while) Thank-you for, um, meeting me…

MARC: Thanks for giving me a target.

ANNE: You might have to do a little more to earn your Bullseye.

MARC: Fine with me.

ANNE: (taking a deep breath) Then tell me something, Arrowhead… Transition to questions—Where do you see yourself in ten years?

MARC: (exhaling) Will I be… jamming out on a piano… full time… in an orchestra on Broadway or at the Met… and writing a new score for best-selling indie album number three… and opening up a music school for kids who come from nothing and just want a safe place to jam, and making some kind of special appearance at each of those bars—just for the heck of it—to thank them for hiring me and giving me a chance…?

ANNE: Will you be married?

MARC: (glancing over his shoulder) Will you marry me?

ANNE: (pressing her lips together)

MARC: Hesitation—Four-Three—Should I expect a response to that one now or later?

ANNE: How are we defining later?

MARC: What is ‘not now’?

ANNE: How about ‘after this conversation ends’?

MARC: Will you accept me later?

ANNE: Can we move on now?

MARC: Sure.
ANNE: Statement—Four-Four… Will you have… children… in ten years?
MARC: Do you want us to have children?
ANNE: (blushing a little) Yes…
MARC: Statement—Five-Four—In that case… Will you marry me before we have our first one?
ANNE: (through clenched teeth) Did we not just agree upon ‘later’?
MARC: (rolling his eyes and grinning) What about you? Where do plan to be in ten years?
ANNE: Will I be… making bank and managing the firm instead of answering the damned phone and fetching coffee for the boss…?
MARC: (laughing)
ANNE: And will I be CEO of Laser Duels, best outdoor laser-tag operation ever to exist in a city setting, operated by kids who come from nothing and just need a fun place to earn a decent wage, headquartered in New York, located in Boston—Miami—Chicago—St. Louis?
MARC: What about L.A.?
ANNE: How about Tokyo and London, too?
MARC: Will you ever be home?
ANNE: Where will home be?
MARC: Here.
ANNE: Statement—Five-Five—Will you consider moving out to a suburb before we have our first child?
MARC: (angling himself towards her, one eyebrow raised) You and I will be married at this point.
ANNE: Is that supposed to be a question?
MARC: No.
ANNE: Statement—Six-Five—Or should I make it Seven?
MARC: When I am allowed to propose to you again?
ANNE: (angling herself towards him) Later.
MARC: Statement—Six-Six—
ANNE: Did I request face-to-face or back-to-back?
MARC: (grinning at her before spinning around) What kind of church do you want us to be married in?
ANNE: Is that decision even up to me?
MARC: Who else do you expect to make it?
ANNE: What about our parents?
MARC: What about our parents?
ANNE: Repetition—Seven-Six… Have I ever mentioned that… Lori… is… Catholic?
MARC: (whirling around) Your mom is Catholic!
ANNE: Statement—Eight-Six—In spite of her nightmare of a life before going back to college—not to mention her addiction to falling for assholes and filing for divorce—she is Catholic.
MARC: Statement… Seven-Eight… (staring at her for a moment) Then what happened with you?
ANNE: (taking a deep breath) Have you… taken… a lot of science classes?
MARC: Before Julliard?
ANNE: Do remember learning about… DNA… transcription into RNA then translation into proteins—replication during mitosis or binary fission—mutations—evolution…?
MARC: Yes…?
ANNE: Were you ever... amazed... by it? I mean—transition to statements—these molecules somehow came into existence, and, because of forces that just happen to exist between ions and dipoles and induced dipoles due to different arrangements of a bunch of subatomic particles like electrons, these molecules were able to interact with each other to form new molecules and macromolecules, and life somehow resulted from... that...
MARC: (unable to articulate a response)

ANNE: So, of course, I began to assume that something has to be behind it—a designer—ubiquitous—indomitable—I guess a sort of god—but, at the same time, I came to this conclusion that the Bible must be... just another book... because, to me, this... designer... just isn’t human enough to be an equivalent of any omnipotent being ever conceived on Earth—it’s indifferent—unpredictable—as much a force of life as it is of death—not something to revere or pray to or depend upon...

MARC: Makes... sense...

ANNE: Believe it or not, Arrowhead, Lori used to drag me to Mass once a week... even when I was too little to listen... even when I was too big to want to listen... And I used to like to think that, even after all of this time, I had gotten absolutely nothing out of it—I had just been wasting my Sundays, and our priests had just been wasting their breath—but, sometime between our... conversation... a few weeks ago and now, I realized that I had managed to learn a few things...

MARC: (pulling that black velvet box out of his pocket, popping it open, and contemplating the ring)

ANNE: Just... little things... but nothing unimportant... (glancing over at MARC) I learned to love people... and to help people who are in need... and to forgive people who have failed... and to just accept people as they are... no matter how much they choose to love me or hate me or help me or hurt me in return... (beginning to angle herself towards MARC) I guess—I just wanted to—

MARC: (facing ANNE, balanced on one knee, the ring pinched between his thumb and two quivering fingers) Tell me something, Bullseye...

END SCENE