Scene Two

(Entrance and lawn of Middletown Hospital. Bright day. A sign that says “Emergency” is staked into the grass. LANDSCAPER is on his knees on the grass, preparing to plant a tree, a young sapling. COP enters and quietly approaches LANDSCAPER from behind. COP holds his hand out in the shape of a gun, aimed at the back of LANDSCAPER’s head.)

COP. Bang!

LANDSCAPER. (Startled. Recovers.) Jesus. Hey.

COP. I could have killed you, just then.

LANDSCAPER. And that’s somehow my fault?

COP. Planting a tree?

LANDSCAPER. Great work — you solved the case of what I’m doing.

COP. Don’t be smart.

LANDSCAPER. Done.

COP. How’s my sister?

LANDSCAPER. She’s good. She wants you to come over for dinner next week. We finished the new patio and we’re having a cookout. (some business with the tree)

COP. Sounds good. (very brief pause) What type is it? Elm?

LANDSCAPER. White Ash, I think. Although it could be a Green Ash. They’re surprisingly hard to tell apart.

COP. Fair enough. (brief pause) Pretty day.

LANDSCAPER. (looking for a place to plant the tree) Where do you think this should go?

COP. I don’t know — somewhere. (Brief pause. Shaking his head, contemplatively, somewhat disdainfully.) People.

LANDSCAPER. I know. (brief pause) Actually, I don’t know. What, specifically, about people?

(On the COP’s lines above, LANDSCAPER picks a spot on the grass, stands straight and still. Immediately after the COP has finished speaking, LANDSCAPER gently sweeps for a few moments, his eyes closed, pretending he’s a tree, making the sound of wind in the leaves.)

LANDSCAPER. Whhhshhhhhhh. Whhhshhhhhhh. This feels good, right here. What do you think about here?

COP. I’m sure that’ll be fine. Ninety-nine percent of the trees on earth weren’t planted by anybody.

LANDSCAPER. (digging, preparing) So they wheeled some guy past here, this morning. He lifted his head up, you know, “Wait, wait, one more look.” That was a sight. Then a pregnant lady went in, crying, trying to carry all her stuff. She looked so lonely, which, you know, when you think about it, she totally isn’t. It made me wish the thing was already done. I think it’ll be soothing, you know, this tree, just nice for people. Bald kids going in on sunny school days. Shattered families leaving in the rain. Just a good old tree. Year in, year out.

COP. Sure.

LANDSCAPER. Maybe someday some young lovers’ll carve their initials into it.

(He pinches the tree, not even an inch in diameter, with thumb and forefinger.)

Into this. Pretty incomprehensible: The future.

COP. There are some guidelines, some givens.

LANDSCAPER. Yeah, maybe. (He begins to dig.) I buried some sunglasses around back, this morning. Just to give somebody something to find, someday. (He strikes something with the shovel.) Hey, what’s that? (picks up the object, which is a rock) I always think it’s going to be gold or a skull or something. (Brief pause. Holding up the rock.) Alas. That’s got to be a really old word: “Rock.” (He carefully sets the rock aside.)

COP. It fits pretty well, doesn’t it.

LANDSCAPER. It sounds like a name the rocks would’ve picked out themselves. Same thing with Treec.

(He digs up another small rock and places it on top of the other and looks at the two rocks.)

There. A monument to the moment of its own construction.

COP. A rock a person put on top of another rock.

LANDSCAPER. There’s that word again. It’s got a real honest ring to it: “rock.” “Person,” on the other hand – I’m not so sure. It feels sort of last-minute, doesn’t it? Sort of fleeting? “Person.”

COP. Sounds like an average-paying job.

LANDSCAPER. It does. “I’m a person. Been one for years, now. It’s okay. The benefits, and so on. Of course, I’m not going to do it forever.”

COP. This isn’t really my kind of conversation.

LANDSCAPER. No?

COP. Yeah, not really. In fact, I’ve got to go in here. It’s potentially a crime scene, if you can believe it. Tell my sister I said hi. I’ll see you later.

(COP exits, to enter the hospital.)

LANDSCAPER. See you later, person. I mean that in all the best ways.

(He digs up another rock, and places it on top of the others, making a tiny snowman or a semi-human statue.)

Rock. Tree. (He pokes in the dirt.) Worm.

(Stands up straight, leans on his shovel and sighs.)