

(Printed with an unregistered version of Fade In)

You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes

Written by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

MAX: Late 20s/Early 30s. Any ethnicity. Any gender.

CHARLIE: Late 20s/Early 30s. Any ethnicity. Any gender.

SETTING:

An old well in an old forest clearing.

TIME:

Last year.

CONTENT WARNING:

Drug use.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 1.

Darkness.

*The first thing we hear is
MAX'S voice.*

*As they talk, the lights
slowly rise on an aged forest
clearing, far away from any
discernible civilization.*

*A little more towards one side
of the clearing, an even older
stone well, complete with
moss-filled cracks and no
bucket in sight. It has
clearly not been used in
years. Eons.*

*Sitting with their backs
against this well, MAX and
CHARLIE.*

It is afternoon.

MAX

The lump inside of her twitched again.

Her esophagus felt so full. She felt empty of so much, so why did her chest feel so full? She wheezed, gasping for air, thinking it a miracle she could breathe as much as she managed. She felt the air colliding with the blockage in her throat, fighting for a way through. But the lump resisted. The poor girl let out another deep cough, trying to shake it loose, make it move in any direction. But it didn't.

The lump spasmed again. And again. And again. And again as her eyes widened in horror, starting to tear. She finally realized...she wasn't feeling a twitch. The lump wasn't spasming. It was moving. And it was climbing up her throat.

CHARLIE

Ohhhhhhh, shit.

MAX

Her eyes watered and tears rolled over their edges to stream down her face. She gagged, practically retching, and the lump surged higher. It felt longer now. Endless. It stretched onwards, scratching as it moved.

CHARLIE

Oh my god it's a snake! Fuck you! Fuck you, I hate snakes!
You know that!

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 2.

MAX
(Stopped, mildly
peeved, their
momentum broken)

...

CHARLIE
Sorry. Go on.

MAX
Go on? You just--completely killed all that momentum.

CHARLIE
(Not that sorry)
Sorry.

MAX
All the work that I just painstakingly did. For you.

CHARLIE
Mmmmm. Are we sure it wasn't also for you a little? You know
I hate snakes.

MAX
I do. I thought that would make for a nicer touch.

CHARLIE
You're not wrong.

MAX
I'm very patient. I never interrupt you.

CHARLIE
That is true.

MAX
You only interrupt me.

CHARLIE
Well, that's because you let me.

MAX
Do I?

CHARLIE
I usually interpret it that way.

MAX
Fuck you.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 3.

CHARLIE
(More sorry, but not
that sorry)

Haha. Sorry.

MAX

No, you're not.

CHARLIE

Yes, I am!

MAX

Really?

CHARLIE

...

Like a little bit.

MAX

So mildly toxic. Even now.

CHARLIE

Toxic?

MAX

Like a little bit.

CHARLIE

Here. Go on. I will be completely silent. Not a peep.

MAX

You can say that. Doesn't mean you're gonna.

CHARLIE

Yes, it does. Because now I'm motivated out of spite.

MAX

Oh, sure.

CHARLIE

...

MAX

...

Okay, then. Where were we?

CHARLIE

...

MAX

...

(MORE)

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 4.

MAX (cont'd)

What's the point? We were literally at the end.

CHARLIE

You're not gonna do the end?

MAX

I was, like, seven sentences away.

CHARLIE

And I wanna hear them.

MAX

You were right. It was a snake. It comes out of her mouth.

CHARLIE

Hey. What is our rule?

MAX

Dooooon't.

CHARLIE

What's our one rule?

MAX

Oh my good, fine.

(Pause, getting back
into character)

The lump stretched onwards, scratching as it moved. Higher. And higher. Up over the back of her throat. And then, a green, blood-stained serpent burst forth from the girl's mouth. It slithered over her tongue as the blood vessels in her eyes popped and leaked. And the girl screamed a muffled whimper of terror before collapsing to the ground, unmoving. Forever.

The only movement was the snake...giving her lips a gentle, final caress as it left her body, eaten from the inside.

Beat.

CHARLIE

I hate that. I hate that so much.

MAX

Thank you.

CHARLIE

You were going to deprive me of that.

MAX

Again, you did rudely interrupt. Pussy.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 5.

CHARLIE
I don't like snakes.

MAX
You're welcome.

CHARLIE
I will have nightmares tonight.

MAX
Good.

THEY both smile and chuckle.

Beat.

Their smiles fade.

CHARLIE
Shit, what time is it? I wanna make sure this time we have enough light for the walk back.

MAX
We should be fine. Have enough time for a few more.

You save your best one for the end?

CHARLIE
You bet I did. You bring the S'mores?

MAX
...

Yeah, I did.

CHARLIE
You okay?

MAX
Yeah.

Hey, why don't I set up a fire while you do your next one?

CHARLIE
All right.

You want any help?

MAX
No. No. You, uh...you concentrate on the story.

CHARLIE
All right. You're not ready for this one.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 6.

MAX

Am I ever?

Over the following, MAX builds, starts, and tends to a fire. It's fine if a portion or most or all of the firewood is already set up.

Maybe that's even preferable.

CHARLIE

I call this story...
(Dramatic pause)
The Celery People.

MAX

Fuck off.

CHARLIE

I'm serious!

MAX

You're telling me you're closing out the year with *The Celery People*? Your best story? Best scary story? You've called it *The Celery People*?

CHARLIE

Don't knock it, this shit's real.

MAX

Nooooooo way.

CHARLIE

Besides, it's a good title.

MAX

It is a title.

CHARLIE

That is good.

MAX

Just start.

CHARLIE

Are you sure you're ready?

MAX

As I am ever going to be.

Oh my god.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 7.

CHARLIE

Yes?

MAX flips CHARLIE the bird.

CHARLIE

Funny enough, that is actually how the story starts.

MAX

Me flipping you off?

CHARLIE

No. With God.

You're familiar with Genesis? The book of the Bible. Not Phil Collins.

MAX

I am familiar with both.

CHARLIE

Well, you know the very beginning of Genesis talks about the Creation. How God made the stars and planets and light and dark and all the oceans and seasons and plants and animals. All of this took place over the course of six days, and on the seventh day...He rested.

But that is not actually true. Because on the seventh day, God did make something.

He made the Celery People.

Perhaps a full-body eye roll from MAX.

CHARLIE

Of course, the word celery comes to mind, you picture the vegetable. It does conjure a silly image. Maybe a stalk of celery with goofy arms and legs. No.

They're a darker green. And they really don't have arms or legs. Just a curved, slender build, covered all over with that leafy texture on the tops. No eyes. No face, really. Just a mouth. With rows and rows of teeth. Hidden somewhere beneath all the leaves.

Now some liked to say these creatures, they were God's first attempt at man. And they exist because He told them what He would eventually tell us, "Be fruitful, and multiply." But God made man on day six. We were here before them. So why did God make something else? Why make something less human? Why make us share the world with something so...unnatural? Well, that's something we can only guess at.

(MORE)

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 8.

CHARLIE (cont'd)

You see, whatever the Celery People are, we know what they're not. Human. And the real rub with that, is that they want to be. They want so badly to be human. To have our arms. Our legs. Our eyes and our faces. Everything that makes us human. That God deprived them of.

It's not even an envy for them. It's more. They need what ignites us. On a molecular level. Our souls. Energy, whatever you want to call it. But they don't have it. So they're sad. And deeply angry.

They watch us. Always. You think, "How? I would see them." But they've survived by learning the art of concealment. They had to. Or else we would've eradicated them long ago. They had to learn to hide. To rely on camouflage in the environment. They learned when our brains will tell us they're an illusion. We'll see them out of the corners of our eyes, but when we turn our heads to look--

Nothing.

So they watch us. Undisturbed. Seething. Drooling with desire to get closer. To become human. To become us.

Somebody goes missing on a hiking trail? Doesn't come home? They didn't get lost. They didn't get kidnapped. The Celery People got close enough.

Maybe somebody you know starts acting a little weird? Has a breakdown? That's because they aren't human anymore. The Celery People got close enough.

They're here now. Watching. Do you feel them? Around us? Behind? How close are they? If we turn our heads quickly enough, maybe, just maybe we might catch them. If not a glimpse, at least we force them to hide again. For another moment.

Until they creep closer again.

Closer.

Always creeping closer.

The next time you feel wind on the back of your neck. Make sure you ask yourself...

"Is that wind?

Or is it breath?"

Silence.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 9.

MAX

(Maybe mild applause)

Goddamn. You actually turned that around.

CHARLIE

Thank you very much.

MAX

I have a few goosebumps.

CHARLIE

It's probably just the wind, right?

MAX

Right. Yes.

Still a dumb title.

CHARLIE

Come ooooooooooon.

MAX

It's fucking dumb.

CHARLIE

That's why it's amazing. Takes you by surprise. Makes you let your guard down.

MAX

Yeah.

...

CHARLIE

(Re: the fire)

How we looking?

MAX

It's going, ain't it?

CHARLIE

Sure is. It's beautiful.

MAX

Yeah. It is.

CHARLIE

Fire is one of those things I could just stare at forever.

MAX

Yeah.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 10.

CHARLIE

...

MAX

...

CHARLIE

You wanna set us up? I'll go find us some sticks?

MAX

...

Sure.

CHARLIE

(Preparing to go
stick searching)

Sweet.

MAX

...

Hey.

CHARLIE stops.

MAX

What if we, uh--what if we didn't do S'mores?

CHARLIE

...

We always do S'mores.

MAX

I know. What if we change it up?

CHARLIE

Why? We love S'mores.

MAX

Just--shits and giggles. I think I have a joint in here
somewhere.

CHARLIE

Por que no los dos? Light that shit up.

*CHARLIE moves about the space,
searching for two perfect
S'more sticks, ad-libbing no's
along the first few options
they encounter.*

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 11.

*MAX has a wave of reluctance,
but CHARLIE doesn't notice.*

*MAX keeps themselves together
and grabs their bag.*

*They pull out a joint and
light it with the campfire.*

They take a good drag.

They'll need it.

They exhale.

Maybe let out a few coughs.

*Then they begin pulling
S'mores ingredients from their
bag and prepping them for
assembly.*

CHARLIE
(Finding stick #1)

Aha!

One down.

MAX
It's beautiful.

CHARLIE
Beautiful?! It's immaculate.

MAX
Hey, there, SAT word.

CHARLIE
Uno mas. Uno mas.

MAX
...

CHARLIE
The key is finding that perfect medium. Too short, you get
singled along with the mallow. Too long, you can't watch it
properly.

MAX
You say that every time.

CHARLIE
Cause it's important. You just burn the shit out of them.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 12.

MAX

Because they taste the best that way.

CHARLIE

Burnt to shit?

MAX

Yeah. Burnt is the best.

CHARLIE fake vomits.

MAX

I'm sorry, do you something to add?

CHARLIE

When you burn 'em to shit, all you taste is burnt. You gotta delicately toast it all around. So it gets perfectly melty.

MAX

It gets perfectly melty when you burn the shit out of 'em. And the burn is part of the best tasting S'mores. You're adding the smoke of the fire and the wood. The earth.

CHARLIE

Maxy, I'm tired of telling you you're wrong.

MAX

Then don't tell me. Just accept it.

CHARLIE

NEVER!

MAX

Search your feelings. You know it to be true.

CHARLIE

Hey. Do not bring *Star Wars* into this.

MAX

If you only knew the power of the Burnt Side.

CHARLIE

No!

MAX

Charlie. *I* am burnt.

CHARLIE

That's not true! That's impossible!

MAX

Join me, and I will complete your training.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 13.

CHARLIE

You are--doing this all out of order.

MAX

We have S'mores! And green milk!

CHARLIE

(Stopping, staring at
the ground)

...

MAX

...

What's up?

CHARLIE

...

MAX

Charlie?

CHARLIE

...

MAX

Charlie?

CHARLIE

...

*CHARLIE suddenly spasms and
lets out a disfigured yelp
sound.*

*They fall to the ground,
twitching.*

MAX

Charlie!!

(Running to CHARLIE
to help)

Holy shit! Fuck! Charlie!

*CHARLIE continues to twitch,
emitting more...inhuman kinds
of noises.*

MAX

Oh my god. Oh my god oh my god.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 14.

CHARLIE
(Choking out the
words)

M--m--Ma MA. MAAA! MAX.

MAX
(Horrificed)

Jesus Christ.

CHARLIE
W w ww would--WOULD you--

Like SOME

celery?

MAX

...

*CHARLIE starts laughing, the
twitching no longer affected.*

MAX

What the fuck?

CHARLIE keeps laughing.

MAX

What the fuck, Charlie?!

CHARLIE

Did I scare you?

MAX hits CHARLIE.

CHARLIE

Ow!

MAX

Why the fuck would you do that?

MAX hits CHARLIE again.

CHARLIE

Ow! Stop it!

MAX
(Overlapping)

What the fuck is wrong with you?

CHARLIE

I was just joking!

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 15.

MAX

You basically gave me a heart attack. Holy shit.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry.

MAX

I thought you were having a fucking seizure, you don't--joke about that shit.

CHARLIE

I'm sorry! I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you that bad.

MAX

...

CHARLIE

Really. I mean it. I shouldn't have done that. That was a dumb idea.

MAX

...

MAX hits CHARLIE again.

CHARLIE

Ow.

MAX

Don't be a fuckhead.

CHARLIE

Aye-aye.

MAX

So mildly toxic.

I need another hit after that. Fuck.

MAX crosses back to where they were, but realize--

MAX

Shit.

MAX begins searching the ground.

CHARLIE

What?

MAX

I dropped the fucking joint. Running over to help your ass.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 16.

Oh, shit. CHARLIE

Goddamn it. MAX

... CHARLIE

Do you see it?

... MAX

MAX doesn't.

Sorry. CHARLIE

Was that the only one you had?

Yup. MAX

I'm really sorry, Max. CHARLIE

You should be. This is what happens when you don't fucking think! You always-- MAX

...

What? CHARLIE

Nothing. MAX

Nothing. I'm sorry. Forget it. It's fine.

No, I owe you a joint. CHARLIE

Forget it. MAX

No. I owe you a joint. CHARLIE

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 17.

MAX

...

Fine.

CHARLIE

Are you okay?

MAX

I'm fine.

CHARLIE

You've been acting a little not fine. From time to time.

MAX

...

CHARLIE

I'm not stupid. I can tell you got something on your mind.

MAX

It's fine.

CHARLIE

Do you wanna talk about it?

I'm happy to talk about it.

MAX

No.

I don't. I don't wanna talk about it.

CHARLIE

Okay.

Silence.

CHARLIE

It's, uh...your turn. You got one last story?

MAX

(Maybe in tears)

...

Yeah.

CHARLIE

You wanna go for it?

I'll make the S'mores. Burn 'em to shit. Just for you.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 18.

MAX

...

Sure.

CHARLIE

All right. Okay.

CHARLIE grabs stick #1 and crosses back to the fire.

Over the following, they make S'mores.

NOTE: For MAX'S story (and beyond), please adjust pronouns as needed.

CHARLIE

What's the story called?

MAX

This one doesn't have a title.

CHARLIE

No?

MAX

I've never been able to think of one.

CHARLIE

Spooky.

MAX

...

CHARLIE

Go for it.

MAX

...

About...18 years ago. There was a little boy and a little girl.

They were best friends. Met on the very first day of first grade. And just connected. Instantly. They would hang out together all the time. Before school. After. During. Neither of their parents really neglected them, but they were always at work. Just didn't ever have the time that both of those kids deserved.

(MORE)

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 19.

MAX (cont'd)

But they didn't mind. They had each other. They had a friend.

CHARLIE

Is this us?

MAX

...

CHARLIE

Sorry! I'm sorry. I won't interrupt.

I think that's sick, though. I'm intrigued.

MAX

Max and Charlie would hang out together all the time. Whatever idiom you wanted to throw, "thick as thieves," "peas in a pod," it applied. One of their favorite things to do, was explore.

They loved exploring. Finding new places, forgotten places. Places in the universe where nobody had ever set foot before. Or if they had, they hadn't been there in a very long time. Where were those places? Did the people who left leave anything behind? Those were the questions they loved.

One day, they were hiking in the forest. And they came across an old clearing, where sunlight filtered through the breaks in the trees and cast a warm glow across the dirt floor. The clearing was exciting enough for Max and Charlie, but something was in that clearing that had been their best find yet.

An old, stone well. Cracks all throughout it, covered in moss. Whoever used to use it, they didn't know. But it hadn't been used in a very long time. They were so excited. They ran over to the edge and looked down into the darkness. And that darkness just stared back at them. They couldn't see the bottom. It was an abyss. Naturally, they had to know how deep it was. So they grabbed a rock and let it drop down into the hole.

When you get older you realize how much time is a construct. Why it feels like it's fast or slow depending on how you're feeling. When you're young, you're not that clued in when it seems to freeze. As a kid, time just...stops. It feels wrong. Unearthly. That rock probably only fell for about six...seven seconds? It felt like thirty. Like an eternity.

But it landed. Eventually. It landed with a soft thunk against the earth. No water in that well. And that rock was never coming back.

(MORE)

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 20.

MAX (cont'd)

It unnerved Charlie. But Max wanted to throw something else.

CHARLIE

I remember this.

MAX

...

CHARLIE

This is just the day we found this place. Why are you telling this story?

MAX

(Not okay in any way)

...

CHARLIE

Max, what is wrong?

MAX

...

It's funny, you know, I can't--

I can't even remember what it was you said.

CHARLIE

What?

MAX

We just started arguing. Because I wanted to throw something else down the well. And you didn't.

CHARLIE

...

MAX

And you called me something or said something. I don't remember what.

Something mildly toxic, and--

CHARLIE

...

What are you saying?

MAX

You still don't remember?

CHARLIE

Max, you're scaring me.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 21.

MAX

I don't want to say it again.

CHARLIE

Max.

MAX

Please don't make me.

CHARLIE

Okay! Stop! We're done. I don't like this story. We're done.

MAX

It's not a story, Charlie. It happened.

CHARLIE

Whatever it is, it's done.

MAX

(Shaking their head)

...

What's our rule?

CHARLIE

No.

MAX

If we start a story...

CHARLIE

(Overlapping)

No! Max.

MAX

(Overlapping)

We have to finish it.

CHARLIE

We don't. I'm done. This can be the exception. Executive decision.

MAX

Charlie.

CHARLIE

(Handing MAX a S'more)

Here. Fucking eat a S'more. You win. Okay? You scared me. I'm sorry about earlier. Okay?

MAX

...

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 22.

*CHARLIE bites into their
S'more.*

MAX just watches them chew.

MAX

...

CHARLIE
(Something's wrong
with the S'more,
still chewing)

...

MAX
You can't taste it, can you?

CHARLIE

...

MAX
I'm so sorry.

CHARLIE
What the fuck is going on?

MAX
You have to remember. Somewhere in there. After all this
time.

CHARLIE
Max...

...

Whatever it was that Charlie said, it made Max mad. So she
pushed him. Just reached out and gave him a shove.

But Charlie slipped. And the little boy fell right over the
edge of the well. He probably only fell for about six, seven
seconds. It felt shorter.

It felt instant.

CHARLIE
No.

MAX
It was an accident.

CHARLIE
No, I--

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 23.

MAX

I'm so sorry, Charlie. I'm sorry.

CHARLIE

You're fucking with me.

MAX

I'm not.

CHARLIE

(Losing it, maybe
starting to
hyperventilate)

...

You win. All right? You've scared me. Stop. Please.

MAX

...

CHARLIE

...

(A wail (or many) of sudden realization and grief)

(This takes as long as it needs)

(Pleading)

But we--

We walked here together. Tonight.

MAX

No, we didn't.

Think back.

CHARLIE falls apart.

MAX does too.

*They eventually embrace each
other to get through it.*

*(Again, this takes as long as
it needs)*

CHARLIE

...

How many times have you told me this story?

MAX

Every year, Charlie.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 24.

CHARLIE

...

And I forget every time?

MAX
(Nodding)

...

Long Silence.

The sun is setting.

CHARLIE

The sun's setting.

MAX

Yeah.

Silence.

CHARLIE

You have to go.

MAX

I don't want to.

CHARLIE

I don't want you to either.

Silence.

CHARLIE

I'm remembering the next part of the story.

After Charlie fell, Max was so afraid and scared. She never told anybody what happened.

She played dumb. And when Charlie was declared missing, people asked her about him, when did she last see him? But she played dumb.

Search parties looked and people searched, but they never found him.

As the months went by, Max kept it inside. But the guilt was eating her alive. Everywhere she went, she would hear whispers behind her back. See people staring out of the corners of her eyes. "She knows something," they said. "Maybe she did it."

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 25.

MAX

It got so bad she decided she couldn't take it anymore.

She walked back to the well, fully intent on leaping over the edge herself.

CHARLIE

But then I was there.

MAX

But then you were there.

CHARLIE

Max started to cry in disbelief.

MAX

Shame.

CHARLIE

Delight.

MAX

Hope.

CHARLIE

Fear.

MAX

Guilt.

CHARLIE

And Charlie started acting like nothing was wrong.

MAX

Because to him, there wasn't. They were thick as thieves, like nothing had happened.

CHARLIE

And it was amazing.

MAX

Just like old times.

CHARLIE

Playing games.

MAX

Telling stories.

CHARLIE

But Max slowly realized she'd eventually have to tell him.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 26.

Or would she?
MAX

What if she didn't?
CHARLIE

Some years she tried not to.
MAX

But Charlie always figured it out.
CHARLIE

No matter what.
MAX

Every year.
CHARLIE

Every year.
MAX

Max would come back.
CHARLIE

Max would come back.
MAX

Why?
CHARLIE

...
MAX

Why do you come back? Every year?
CHARLIE

...
MAX

Is it for me? Or for you?
CHARLIE

...
MAX

Por que no los dos?

Silence.

I, uh...
CHARLIE

I'm thinking.

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You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 27.

MAX

Yeah?

CHARLIE

...

I don't think you should come back next year.

MAX

What?

CHARLIE

What if that's why I keep forgetting?

MAX

We don't know that.

CHARLIE

We don't not.

I mean, what is this? This can't be...healthy?

MAX

Let me worry about that. Okay? Don't talk like that.

CHARLIE

Max. I don't want this for you. I forgive you. Okay? It was an accident.

We have to let each other go.

MAX

Why?

CHARLIE

...

Have I asked you this before? To not come back?

MAX

...

No.

This is the first time.

CHARLIE

...

CHARLIE turns their head to look at something in the distance.

(Printed with an unregistered version of Fade In)

You See Them in the Corners of Your Eyes, Daniel Prillaman, 28.

MAX

What is it?

CHARLIE

(Not seeing anything)

...

Nothing.

Nothing. I just thought I saw something.

Silence.

The sun continues to set.

END OF PLAY.