

A Garden in the City

John once told me that he admired the eccentricities of botany. The *eccentricities* of botany. Maybe that's the reason I started inviting him out with us; most financial analysts don't say things like that. Everyone else in our office drinks aged scotch when we go out. John orders tap water. Their cars get traded in every year. I've never seen John drive.

At one of our after-work meetups, John told me his plan to build a farm in the city. "I've thought about it a long while," he said, "and banking isn't the way that I want to spend my life." I told him that was absurd. Jobs at our firm are one in a million.

He quit the next day.

Before long, he was buying carrots and corn and rambling on about different varieties of tomatoes. During the first few weeks of his agricultural adventure, he walked around with bags under his eyes. I love a man with tenacity so I found people to take interest in his little project. I talked up the brand values of associating with urban development; I even found a sponsor for the grand opening.

John worked late. He even built a cramped office in one of the sheds where he could keep track of the plants. He charted their progress. He charted everything. He wrote more notes on carrots than I had on the analysis of an upcoming public offering. It was nonsense, but I wanted to help. He told me he needed fertilizer; I found him the best guy in the state. He told me he needed volunteers; I found him interns.

I wanted him to succeed because he deserved to succeed. He deserved everything that was coming his way.

He greeted everyone who came to the farm and took them on personal tours. When I met people there, I would tell them about John's career in finance and how he wanted to open this little farm to take his mind off the big issues. John kept at it. He seeded and watered and did whatever else he could think of to make a plant grow in a world built for commerce.

John took me aside a few weeks later. He was crying. "I dreamed of this," he told me. "This whole place is exactly what I was looking for. I poured everything I had into it." It was ridiculous, of course, and I told him so. This was no way for a man to spend his time. He was a banker by trade; this should be a vacation from his work.

"No," he chided. "It was all going well." He paused to wipe some tears away from his eyes and continued, "Someone vandalized the garden last night. They killed every plant we had. They broke down the infrastructure where it was weakest. I don't think we can save anything."

The damage wasn't news to me. Most of us watch the news, I reminded him. More importantly, I reminded him that the loss of a single season was a blessing. The delay would give us time to focus on building our client base. It would give us time to reach out to magazines and television stations. We could finally launch a PR campaign. We could finally find some investors. I went on, but he was already sobbing about the next planting season.

Some people aren't meant for business. It's a tough city.