

Write a dramatic monologue

Animal

By Oliver Hailey

When the curtain rises a slim, attractive, middle-aged woman, dressed in summer black, enters and moves about the stage, looking up into its imaginary trees.

THE WOMAN: All right, Claire Marie, I know you're up there. I just don't know which one you're in. That's all I don't know--which one you're in. Oh, the minute I saw these damn trees, I knew we were in for a battle. I made it very clear in my letter I was looking for a summer place with no trees. I said, "If you have trees, and you want me, then you will cut down the trees." And they assured me there were no trees at this place. They assured me. And then I saw these, and I said, "These are trees! I know trees! I've been deceived." And they said these trees don't count because these trees aren't tended. And I said, "Untended trees are the worst possible kind." But it was too late. Here we are--you up high in one of them. All right, which one is it and comedown! I mean it, Claire Marie. Do you hear me? *(There is a pause as THE WOMAN looks about. Then she moves downstage right)* All right, I see you. I see you now, Claire Marie, so come down. I see you very clearly. And what a sight! Claire Marie, don't you know what trees do to yellow? Your lovely yellow dress, and matching slip and panties. Claire Marie, cover yourself--I can see your panties! You are twelve, young lady! What are your plans, anyway? This is a very expensive party and it is meant for your enjoyment. You are to meet these young people and you are to call them your friends. And they will call you their friend. And it will be a nice summer for a change. Do you hear? Do you? Kindly don't sulk, Claire Marie.

Shout a crude curse, but do not sulk. I cannot endure sulking. You know that. I was married to the world's worst sulker and that was enough. Your father sulked at me all of his life. In fact, he was sulking the day he died. You know that. And how you are able to climb trees after that dreadful experience, I cannot comprehend. Myself, I can never look at another tree without shuddering. *(She looks directly at the tree in front of her and shudders with exaggeration)* The picture of your father's body being brought down from the very top of that old cottonwood. Oh, how he could have done that to me, I don't know. It was as deliberate as suicide. I can remember his voice so plainly: "I'm going to the top of the cottonwood--to the top--and no matter how loudly you yell, I shan't hear you once today." And off he went. Is that marriage? Certainly none of it was my fault. In fact, I have only one small regret. You always do, I suppose, have at least one when it's something as severe as suicide. I couldn't help feeling a bit guilty I didn't shout one final time: "Remember your heart condition." Not that it would have stopped him. He got that heart condition climbing trees in the first place. You know, when I married your father I had no idea he climbed trees. Didn't even suspect it. Of course, he always argued he didn't climb trees until he married me. Well, I don't

believe that. I can distinctly remember him climbing several on our honeymoon. And then you came, and he taught you to climb them, as I knew he would. "Go climb a tree and wait for me," he'd roar, and you'd giggle and obey, and all that made you so close, and it was all so wonderful. Is that how you intend to die too? High in some tree, avoiding me? Well, I'm not going to let it be that simple for you. He's gone now and you're my daughter and you're going to come down to the ground and meet the people on it. You are no bird and you are no monkey and you are no anything else that stays in trees. You are a girl and you are... *(She stares into the tree)* What is that? What is that up there with you? What do you have? I can't see it. *(She strains to see)* Is that that damn doll? Is it? All right, how did that get here? I searched your suitcase! I told you not to bring that doll. You're not going to live with it this summer, to the exclusion of human beings. Another result of your sick father! Teaching you to call that stupid stuffed doll Mother, and to put more faith in it than you put in living people. Oh, your father was such a sick man. Give me that doll, Claire Marie. Give it to me. I mean it. *(A pause)* All right, you hear the noises? You know what that is? The children are beginning to arrive. Does that scare you? Of course it does, little tree animal. They will all be human. No birds. No monkeys. No stuffed dolls. All humans. Now suppose I make a little agreement with you. You just give me that doll and I'll make an excuse for you. I will. I'll tell them you're sick and we'll have the party without you. Okay? Now just throw me the doll. *(A pause)* Claire Marie, throw me the doll. Throw it! So help me, you don't throw that doll and I'll bring every one of those children under this tree. I'll point to where you are and I'll let them stand and tease. I mean that. I will! Throw the damn doll! *(The doll is suddenly hurled from above, striking THE WOMAN on the face. She stoops to retrieve it, then smiles softly into the tree)* Thank you. And now I'm going to do something for your own good, Claire Marie. For your very own good. I'm going in to those children and I'm going to announce the first game of the party. The game will be called "Find Claire Marie," and the child who finds you first shall have as prize this lovely stuffed doll. It isn't a mean thing to do, Claire Marie, and you mustn't think it is. The children will think it is a new and clever game, and they'll think you're a great sport to climb the tree and wait for them. They'll help you down, and everybody will laugh, and you will belong, Claire Marie. And that will be very good. Believe me. *(She turns to exit, then turns again toward the tree)* Be sure to wait there, Claire Marie. Right there. Don't move. Count to a hundred and look down. And they will all be looking up.

(She exits. There is a brief pause and then a young girl's party slipper is dropped from the tree. Then the other slipper. Her yellow socks follow. Then her yellow dress floats down. Then a yellow slip. And yellow underwear. Finally a long green hair-ribbon falls)

Blackout