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Dramatic Publishing

GROWN UP TREE

By

CALEEN SINNETTE JENNINGS

Inspired by the Seventh Commandment

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CHARACTERS

BITTY, age 11 (played by a girl 11-13)

BILLY, age 16 (played by a boy 16-18)

BETH, 40 (played by a woman 35-45)

SETTING: An oak tree dominates the stage. It has a thick trunk and roots deep into the ground. It looks embracing and menacing at the same time. On the ground beneath the tree is a rumpled sheet.

TIME: The early 1960s.

Grown Up Tree

AT RISE: *BITTY sits on the sheet rubbing her arm. She catches a glimpse of a gold wedding band, grabs it and holds it up to the light. BETH runs in from R, still looking over her shoulder at someone offstage. She is breathless and disheveled. BITTY quickly hides the ring in her pocket and rubs her arm again.*

BETH. Is it broken, Bitty? Let me see?

BITTY. It's just sore. *(BETH checks BITTY for broken bones, BITTY eases away.)* I'm all right, Mama.

BETH. Get off the sheet. *(BETH pulls the sheet out from under BITTY and bundles it up.)* Why aren't you in school?

BITTY. Half day. *(Pointing offstage R.)* Who's that, Mama?

BETH. I'm calling the school so you'd better be telling the truth. *(BETH starts to exit. BITTY grabs her arm and points offstage R.)*

BITTY. Who's that man running?

BETH. I ought to spank you for sitting up there.

BITTY. I like being up in my tree. Daddy promised to make me a swing, but he didn't.

BETH. Maybe he'll make it when he gets better.

BITTY. Is he gonna die?

BETH. Hush now, Bitty. Come in the house.

BITTY. The sky's mad today.

BETH. It's gonna rain.

BITTY. Who was that man?

BETH. Nobody.

BITTY. Mr. Nobody?

BETH. Look, Bitty... It was nothing. We were just talking.

(Starting to exit.) Now come on in. You're just getting over a cold.

BITTY. You kissed him.

BETH. No, honey, I...

BITTY. I saw you. You kissed him and then he... *(BETH puts her hand gently over BITTY's mouth. Then she smooths BITTY's hair and hugs her.)* If you hadn't screamed, I wouldn't have fallen out of my tree.

BETH. I'm sorry. I was surprised to see a face in the branches.

BITTY. I was surprised when you and Mr. Nobody found my secret tree.

BETH. Let's forget about it, okay? *(BETH glances at her left hand and jumps. She spreads out the sheet and looks, then she searches the ground all around the tree.)*

BITTY. What's wrong?

BETH. Nothing. Go inside now.

BITTY. I love Daddy.

BETH. I know, honey.

BITTY. Do you love Daddy?

BETH *(continues searching the ground)*. Yes.

BITTY. Then why did you kiss Mr. Nobody?

BETH. Mama can't talk about this now, Bitty-baby.

BITTY. Don't call me that! I'm not a baby!

BETH. I'm sorry. You're Bitty-Big Girl, okay?

BITTY (*cries in frustration*). I've got underarm hair, and leg hair, and I got a boyfriend named Raymond Branch, and he's gonna marry me, and he kissed me too, nicer than Mr. Nobody! (*BETH, startled by the outburst, hands BITTY a handkerchief.*)

BETH. Bitty, please don't cry. Blow your nose. I know you're upset. I'm sorry. Hush now. (*She drops to her hands and knees to search again.*)

BITTY. What are you looking for?

BETH. Nothing.

BITTY. Maybe Mr. Nobody took your nothing. (*BITTY stretches out her arms and circles around the tree. BETH searches the ground but occasionally glances at BITTY.*)

BETH. Have you seen my ring?

BITTY (*chanting as she circles her tree*).

What you doing?

I don't know.

Ring around my tree I go.

Daddy says my tree has rings, and every ring tells you what happened to my tree each year it was alive—if it had too much rain, if it was thirsty, if it got hit by lightning. The rings tell me secrets. I'm making rings around the rings. (*BITTY makes circles around the tree as she chants.*)

Ring around my big oak tree

Who is going to marry me?

BETH. Help me look for my ring, Bitty. Please? (*BITTY joins BETH on her knees. BETH searches, BITTY talks.*)

Promise not to say anything about what you saw.

BITTY. 'Cause you'll get in trouble?

BETH. You don't want to hurt Daddy, do you?