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THE WOMAN IN A TREE ON THE HILL
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THE WOMAN IN A TREE ON THE HILL
for Neda Miranda Blazevic

characters: WOMAN, NARRATOR

WOMAN is sitting in a tree throughout; preferably a highly stylised tree. In the first performance, she appeared on top of a paint-splattered step-ladder. When NU WA speaks, the faint sound of a Chinese flute is heard behind her words.

WOMAN

I can hardly tell any more whether the waters are going up or coming down. It's so hard to tell. All this grey water and grey sky with no beginning and no end. Sometimes I think that all I can remember from before this water came is a dream. A child's dream of blue skies and green grass and dry earth...

NARRATOR

Wife! Wife! Where art thou, my wife?

WOMAN

I'm up here, Noah! Hanging out the laundry on the boom!

NARRATOR

Wife, Wife, can't thou see any sign of our winged messenger?

WOMAN

Sorry, Noah. Not a cheep. Looks like your bird's flown the coop good and proper.

By the way, Dear, I have some bad news... the mountain lions somehow got out of their pen on C Deck and got up onto B Deck with the ungulates and before anyone knew what was happening...

NARRATOR

Wife, Wife, do not spare me the worst...

WOMAN

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They killed the female unicorn. They ate her. All except her horn and four hoofs.

NARRATOR

Wife, Wife, what a calamity... and what became of the male unicorn?

WOMAN

Well, he's upset, naturally. He's got a few scratches here and there, poor creature... and his horn is a little chipped at the tip but he'll live.

NARRATOR

(to audience)

As anyone can tell you, a male unicorn without a female unicorn is no use when it comes to multiplying and filling the earth.

(back to wife)

Wife, wife, I charge thee, turn it upon a spit and we and all our house will feast this night...

WOMAN

[to audience]

And you know who's going to have to do the dirty work, don't you? Yours truly... it's me that's going to have to clonk it on its pretty head and put a bolt through its pretty ear... and me that's going to have to carve through its flesh and hack through its bones... head, neck, best end of neck, sirloin, topside, tenderloin, forequarter, shin...

Oh, Birdie, you're back are you? Poor Birdie, how tired you are. Your little wings are shaking, you can hardly stand, I wish the old man wouldn't keep sending you out, poor birdie...

NARRATOR

(to audience)

Through the ages it has always been a Woman's lot to be weary and to comfort the weary.

(to WOMAN)

Nora, you're always too tired...

WOMAN

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But Paul, I'm always so busy, Paul. There's always so much to be done... if only you didn't always throw your shirts onto the floor after you've tried them on and decided not to wear them...

NARRATOR

Nora, I resent the way you always manage to imply that I don't pull my weight around the house. You always do that. You never give me any credit for all the work I put in to support us in our standard of living!

WOMAN

Paul, I never meant to imply—

NARRATOR

I'm sorry, Nora. I've tried to make this marriage work, God knows I've tried. Even though my mother always said that no good would come out of marrying a girl without a university degree, I tried—

WOMAN

Paul, Paul, what are you saying?

NARRATOR

If you just listened to me instead of bleating off in a hundred different directions you would know what I'm trying to say.

WOMAN

But Paul, I'm not sure if you—

NARRATOR

Nora, I'm sorry.

But we both know that this is over.

There's no point in playing games any more, is there?

Let's be... reasonable.

Let's be... civilised adults.

Let's be... friends.

WOMAN

Friends!

Paul, I'm sorry, I really don't understand...

NARRATOR

I'm sure we can work everything out in a friendly way. I'm willing to do all I can

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to make things easy for you. I'm sure there are some things that you'll be wanting to take with you... those dried flower arrangements you made in your flower arranging classes, for instance.

WOMAN

Oh Paul, I always knew you hated them. Why didn't you say so sooner? I'll take them down! I'll throw them away! You'll never have to look at them again! I'll never go for another flower arranging class... but you said it was all right! I *asked* you if you minded me going and you *said* it was all right...

NARRATOR

Nora, you're getting hysterical. Please get a hold of yourself. Look, all I want you to do is sign this little piece of paper...

WOMAN

No, Paul, no! Please—

NARRATOR

No?

Nora, you're being silly again.

WOMAN

Paul, the children...

NARRATOR

Yes, you'll have to think of something to tell the children... we can talk about it after you've signed this...

WOMAN

But Paul, this is so sudden...

NARRATOR

No it's not. I've been thinking about it for a long time.

WOMAN

But what will everybody think? We've always been so happy together...

NARRATOR

It doesn't matter what everybody thinks.

WOMAN

Paul... I don't know what's happening. Paul, why are you doing this to me?

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NARRATOR

Look, Nora, I'm not doing anything to you. I'm just trying to free the both of us.
So that we can find new lives for ourselves.

WOMAN

But I'm happy.
I've always been happy.
I thought you were happy too.

NARRATOR

It just goes to show how little you know me, doesn't it? And you're not really happy. You're just stuck in a rut where you don't realise that you're unhappy because you don't think about it. Maureen says that—

WOMAN

Maureen.

NARRATOR

Maureen was just giving me a little advice. We went out for a drink. Just to talk. It's nothing. She's a good friend. She likes you. She told me so.

WOMAN

Maureen.

NARRATOR

She's trying to help me work all this out, that's all. Maureen's always liked you, you know. She's always telling me that I should try to see your point of view. She's always trying to help me see your point of view.

WOMAN

Maureen.

NARRATOR

You know what we discovered? We discovered that your real problem is that you don't *Have* a point of view!

WOMAN

Paul. How could you discuss me with Maureen.

NARRATOR

Look, Nora. Don't say anything about Maureen. She's a very nice girl. You know she's a very nice girl.

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WOMAN

Paul. Have you slept with her?

NARRATOR

Look, what kind of question is that? I consider that a question in very bad taste. Nora, I don't know what kind of mind you have. I hate to think of you talking this way in front of the children.

WOMAN

What are you going to tell the children?

NARRATOR

Well... I thought you would want to come up with something. You're good at that sort of thing. Anyway, you're the one that's leaving. I don't think it's necessary to bother them with too many details, do you?

WOMAN

I'm leaving?

Where am I going?

NARRATOR

Wherever you want.

WOMAN

I—I want to stay here.

NARRATOR

Nora, you don't seem to understand... I said you're free to go anywhere you want. Besides you can't stay here. I'm keeping the house. It's all here in writing. You can read through your copy after you've signed it.

Nora, where are you going?

Nora, Nora, don't be such an idiot!

Nora, get down from that tree!

Nora, the Neighbours will see you!

[WOMAN sits serenely up in the tree, looking off
into the distance]

NARRATOR

All right, Nora. You win. We'll talk about it.

I said all right, Nora. You win. You can have your lawyer look at this before

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you sign.

Nora! Stop making a fool of yourself. Come on down.

Nora, the children will be home soon. Do you want them to see you acting like this?

Nora, I want you to know that I think you're behaving in a ridiculous, childish fashion!

[NARRATOR stamps his feet in a childish tantrum]

NARRATOR

[To audience]

Have you ever noticed that sometimes men and women don't see things in exactly the same way?

But there was once a woman who could, because she was both man and woman.

[Sage Chinese accent]

This woman is Nu Wa.

WOMAN

I was created of Nu and Wa, the sister and brother whose union marks the beginnings of the human race.

NARRATOR

[chinese accent]

She is sometimes described as having a human head but the body of a snake or fish. Bi-zarre.

WOMAN

Having the head of one species and the body of another may sound bi-zarre to you, but if you think about it with the Chinese part of your brain, it will be easier for you to understand.

You see, it is very difficult to imagine a goddess with bound feet. Can you see me as a two-year old goddess held down on a bed with cotton in my mouth to gag my screams while my foot is bent inwards into itself until the tender arch snaps and breaks? And can you see me, lovely ephemeral creature that I am, unwinding the stinking bandages from my feet once a week, to squeeze out

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the pus and cut away the dying flesh?

But for many years, you couldn't be a Lady without bound feet, and can you imagine a goddess that isn't also a lady?

So, the solution... if you have the body of a snake or fish you can be still have a beautiful face and be a lady without having bound feet.

NARRATOR

[chinese accent]

Nu Wa is the goddess of marriage and the patroness of matchmakers.

WOMAN

Well, somebody had to do it.

What few women realise and fewer women take advantage of, is the fact that it is I, Nu Wa, a woman, who first laid down the perimeters of marriage.

And what too few women realise too late is that marriage is best considered as a business venture.

What do you hope to get out of marriage, little girl?

NARRATOR

[little girl]

Live happily ever after. Like in the books I read. Like Snow White and Little Red Riding Hood and Cinderella.

WOMAN

What do you hope to get out of marriage, young woman?

NARRATOR

[young woman]

I'm not a dreamer. I know I'll have to work hard

[launches into aerobics]

... and do my share, but I will. We will live happily ever after. It will be a fairy tale ending but realistic. Like in the books I read. Like in Judith Krantz and Barbara Bradford Taylor.

WOMAN

And what do You hope to get out of marriage, young man?

NARRATOR

[young man]

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Well, I never thought much about—

WOMAN

But what about all the fairy tales you've been told, all the books you've read, telling you how you're going to live happily ever after.

NARRATOR

[young man]

I don't really read much... but hey, I like The Far Side, Gary Larson, he's my kind of writer. Have you seen the one where the huge net comes out of the sky and swoops this woman up and her husband says—

WOMAN

Stop. You can't quote that on stage without copyright permission.

But if you do decide to get married, what do you hope your wife will be like, young man?

NARRATOR

[young man]

Oh, that. Someone like my Mum, of course. Someone who loves me, who will be faithful to me, who will take care of my children, who will take care of...

WOMAN

All your cats and dogs and rabbits and pelicans and ostriches and caymans, and root rats and three-toed frogs and miniature pork bellies! My mother warned me, but did I listen? No, I did not. No, not me. No... Oh! Oh! Ooooooooooh!

NARRATOR

Wife, wife, what aileth Thee? Hast thou been bitten, pecked, scratched or clawed by one of the creatures given into our care?

WOMAN

No—no—Noah, it's the bird, the bird's back!

NARRATOR

I knew the creature would return... as long as he findeth not a perch upon which to rest his weary wi—

WOMAN

It's so beautiful... oh, Noah, it's so beautiful... Noah, it's so green... I'd almost

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forgotten what fresh green looked like... Noah, my husband, my love, my lord, look at this twig the bird brought back. Look at the leaves. The first leaves of the first tree on the first hill...

NARRATOR

[to audience]

Paradise may be regained. But it's not the same. The fault, it is possible, lies not in the quality of the paradise but in the person returning.

[to WOMAN]

Wife! Wife! Why hast thou vanished from my sight?

WOMAN

I'm up here, Noah, my love. In my tree.

NARRATOR

Wife, wife, I cannot understand what it is that ails thee, that thou spendeth thy sweetest hours within the lofty reaches of this tree that standeth so awkwardly upon land ripe for development.

WOMAN

Noah, we've been over this a hundred times before. No, you are Not going to cut down this tree. I know you. You just want to build one more of your factories or another of those multi-storey shopping centres!

NARRATOR

Wife, Wife, standeth thou in the path of progress?

WOMAN

No, Noah. I sitteth in a tree. And I intend that there should be at least this one tree for me to continue sitteth-thing in!

Noah, dear husband, don't you remember this tree? Don't you remember how excited, how happy, how wonderful we felt when that bird came back to us with a twig in its beak? Remember how the live wood felt, after all that time in an ark of dead timber? And remember how we saw this tree, the first leaf, the first stem, the first branch... Noah, the first tree on the first hill where we knew, where we absolutely knew for the first time that it was all over and we were beginning our new life?

NARRATOR

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Wife, Wife, how you chatter. I have matters of greater importance to attend to.

[to audience]

There are always matters of great importance to be attended to.

[NARRATOR describes a graceful swing and
upstroke with an imaginary golf club]

NARRATOR

When Nu Wa created Man, she considered it a matter of utmost importance.

WOMAN

Some of the time. Some men were carefully made, delicately fashioned out of earth; with care, with love, with attention. Other men were created by dragging a string through mud.

Without looking too closely at them, you can already tell the difference.

You!

NARRATOR

Yes, my lady.

WOMAN

What have you got there?

NARRATOR

It is a giant ox, my lady. It is destroying our fields and our huts and eating our crops and our stores. There has never been an ox like this and there is nothing that anyone can do about it.

WOMAN

Fear not, poor peasant. I will save you from that bull-headed creature.

NARRATOR

But-but my lady. That ox has already killed a dozen strong men, and you are only a woman... flee with us and save your own life!

WOMAN

I am not *only* a woman.

No woman is *only* a woman. If a woman is *only* a woman, she is probably not a woman at all, but only a *girl*.

Anyway, I am Nu Wa. Bring me to that great ox.

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NARRATOR

Whooooo aaaaaare Youuuu, Woooooaaaaaan?

WOMAN

Nu Wa.

NARRATOR

Whoooo aaaare?

WOMAN

You, with your great horns and your great ears, you are destroying the peasants' homes and their stores and their supplies and their cultivated land and they will all starve in Winter.

NARRATOR

Gooood. This laaaand was Miiiiine loooooong before they stooooooooole it from me.

WOMAN

Look, I do sympathise. But you really can't go around killing people like that. It isn't *Nice*.

NARRATOR

lieee am nooooot *Nice*.

WOMAN

Really.

Well, there's nothing more that I can do with you, then.

Except pass this magic rope through your enormous nostrils.

NARRATOR

Whaaat haaave yooooou doooooone?

WOMAN

I'm leading you by the nose, you stubborn ox. Every bull has a soft spot. The more stubborn you are, the more vulnerable you are to a woman who waits and watches and grows smarter and stronger as you grow more stubborn.

NARRATOR

But women can also be stubborn without being particularly strong or particularly intelligent...

WOMAN

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I'm not looking for a divorce, Paul. I don't want a divorce.

NARRATOR

You can't refuse to divorce me!

Look, Nora. You can't stop me from marrying Maureen. If you won't give me a divorce I can always become Muslim and take a second wife, how would you like that? I'll leave the church and it will be all your fault. What will people think of you then?

Think of Maureen, Nora.

Think of Maureen. Think of what she's going through. You two used to be such good friends, how can you do this to her.

WOMAN

I don't want a divorce, Paul. I don't want to be divorced.

NARRATOR

Nora, this is your mission school upbringing talking.

Nora, I have to tell you this, the way you're hanging on to the past just isn't healthy. You should learnt to let go. Do you understand? You're only hurting yourself when you behave in such a silly, selfish way.

And how long do you think that you can stay up there in that stupid tree, anyway?

June, what do you think you're doing? I told you not to bring your mother any more food.

What do you mean, she's your mother? She may be your mother, but I am your father!

No, I don't want a char siew pao.

June, are you deliberately disobeying me?

June?

Look, Nora, did you see that? Did you see your daughter deliberately turn her back on me? On her only father? Do you see now what kind of example you're setting for your children?

WOMAN

Thank you June.

But you really shouldn't be rude to your father, you know.

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People will think that I didn't bring you up properly and then you'll find it difficult to get a husband when you grow up.

NARRATOR

At least you can't turn my son against me, eh Stanley? We're a team, me and Stanley.

Stanley, tell your mother to come down out of the tree right now.

Nora, listen to your son, he needs you. Nora how can you ignore the needs of your only son?

WOMAN

Stanley, I am your mother and I love you, but just for now, just for today, ask your father to fix your sandwich, pour you your glass of milk, find the notebook that you have to bring to school tomorrow, remind you to study for your science test, give you your pocket money and iron your school uniform. Mummy can't come down from her tree right now.

NARRATOR

For heavens' sake, Nora. I can't do all those things for Stanley! You must be mad to expect me to! Is this some weird New Age rubbish?

WOMAN

But Paul, Stanley only needs...

NARRATOR

Real Men don't do things like that.

WOMAN

But Paul...

Look, Paul. All my life, I grew up wanting to be a good woman, wanting to be a good wife. To me it was the same thing. In school, we learnt that the ideal woman learns to master, to grow and to serve. I was ready to serve you. All my energy was directed towards making you happy, towards making your children healthy, towards making your home one that you would be glad to come home to at the end of the day. And all that wasn't enough for you?

NARRATOR

Nora, I know you did all that. Nora, I appreciate all that.

It's just that—Nora, I don't know how to tell you this, but you just aren't a very

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interesting woman.

WOMAN

But Paul, what did you *want*? A woman like your mother? I tried to be a woman like your mother...

NARRATOR

Well, come to think of it, my mother wasn't very interesting either... Maureen! You're here! What are you doing here?

WOMAN

Maureen.

Hello Maureen. Is it your turn up here already?

Good, have a good sit.

NARRATOR

Maureen, what are you doing up in that tree?

[WOMAN sits serenely up in the tree]

NARRATOR

Wife, Wife, get thee upon the ground.

This tree's time hath come.

WOMAN

No, Noah. Please, not this tree.

The animals that were in the ark.

The animals are in this tree, with me.

NARRATOR

You, cut down the tree!

What do you mean with the lady in it... of course with the lady in it. If the lady wasn't in it would I have to cut it down? And for your information, that's not a lady, that's my wife!

NARRATOR

Despair, you foolish mortals, see the hole in the sky? The pillars of heaven are falling and you will be crushed between earth and sky!

Kung Kung has destroyed you. The tree of life is tearing a hole in the hole and falling, falling...

WOMAN

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No, the heavens will not fall!

NARRATOR

Nu Wa is said to have fashioned the four pillars of heaven by using the feet of a tortoise and melted rocks that formed a five-coloured mixture.

WOMAN

I have taken the feet of a tortoise, I have bound with five strong spells, the five rocks... courage, that glows red, awareness, that glows green, joyousness, that glows yellow, patience, that glows blue, good fellowship, that glows violet, and all together, one and yet not one, they burn with a strong white light till the rock within melts and melds and yet they burn on... the white light of undying fire that is what I now use to forge and free you from your boundaries.

The next time these boundaries are shattered it will be by man's desire and man's design.

NARRATOR

She was on my property. Anyway, she's my wife. No, I didn't realise that she was in the tree when I ran the car into it.

Who said that? Who said that I did it on purpose to try to kill her?

Who says that it's murder?

Who... Maureen?

Maureen told you I tried to kill my wife?

Maureen?

WOMAN

[sings]

For the first time, I was alone

But not lonely

For the first time, I was unknown

But it only

Freed me

I dreamed of pathways out of sight

I could see miles from up this height

I could see visions of before

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I was a child once more

Not the first time, I've been alone

Now I know it

Not the first time, I've been unknown

I'll control it—

Frees me

NARRATOR

What do you hope to find up there?

WOMAN

The person I lost when I was growing up.

The person I was meant to be.

NARRATOR

These women are crazy.

WOMAN

After all, trees are an honourable Singaporean preoccupation, aren't they?

[sings to *Lemon Tree*]

Planting trees in the city

Is the way we

grow our roots

So we see

Minister's wives

spading up

for photoshoots

[NARRATOR mimes spading in a tree and posing for photographs which WOMAN mimes taking from her perch in tree. But when WOMAN speaks again, it is as a siren in a bar leading a hungry man on.]

WOMAN

[seductively]

Angsana trees,

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NARRATOR

A!

WOMAN

Banyan trees,

NARRATOR

B!

WOMAN

Cigarette trees,

NARRATOR

C!

[WOMAN looks at NARRATOR till NARRATOR
catches on, lights a cigarette and hands it to her.]

WOMAN

Durian trees,

NARRATOR

D!

WOMAN

Eucalyptus trees,

NARRATOR

E!

WOMAN

Fir trees,

NARRATOR

F!

WOMAN

Guava trees!

NARRATOR

G!

WOMAN

House trees...

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NARRATOR

Hah! Don't you mean tree houses?

WOMAN

I mean house trees.

Silly.

Igloo trees.

Jackfruit trees...

NARRATOR

There are historical associations between women and trees which we would do well not to ignore; there are tree fairies and tree nymphs and tree spirits... the Greeks in their mythology have always—

WOMAN

Don't forget our pontianaks in banana trees.

Don't forget the poor women who hang themselves from trees after they have been jilted by unfaithful men.

A woman climbs a tree to get away.

NARRATOR

From what?

WOMAN

Whatever.

Dogs, floods, mud... Men...

NARRATOR

There are no dogs, or floods or mud... or... Oh.

WOMAN

I was speaking generally.

Women need trees.

I knew a woman once, who climbed up a tree to get her cat down.

NARRATOR

She had never climbed a tree before even though she had always been a tomboy.

WOMAN

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But after she climbed up the tree to get her cat, her cat climbed down quite easily, and she sat in the tree and thought to herself; what am I doing with myself? After about half an hour of that she looked around her and she saw how beautiful the tree was, and how beautiful the ground was from up in her tree, and she decided to become an artist.

NARRATOR

[Painting trees wildly, gaily, flamboyantly]

She painted trees, from a tree's point of view. And she painted the ground, from a tree's point of view. And she painted people, from a tree's point of view. And she found it much easier to like people from a tree's point of view than from a human point of view.

WOMAN

When you see people from a proper perspective, they're really much easier to take.

NARRATOR

You're saying that being up in a tree gives you a proper perspective?

WOMAN

You might say... a higher perspective.

NARRATOR

Is this woman you were talking about yourself?

WOMAN

No.

NARRATOR

Who looked after her family while she was up in her tree?

WOMAN

I don't know. I suppose her family looked after itself.

NARRATOR

How irresponsible of her.

WOMAN

I knew another woman once, who climbed up a tree because she wanted to be irresponsible.

NARRATOR

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This woman was a secondary school teacher who had been a socially responsible person all her life.

WOMAN

She had also been a ladylike person all her life, so she had never climbed a tree before. Climbing trees is not a ladylike pastime at all, though I believe convent girls are known to indulge in it.

Then one day just before the exams,

NARRATOR

When her students were being particularly troublesome and her students' parents were being particularly troublesome, and her principal was being particularly troublesome, and all her colleagues were getting pregnant and having to take days off...

WOMAN

This woman thought that she might seriously consider killing herself, because she looked down into her future and she could not see any chance of things getting much better than this as the years passed.

NARRATOR

She could see herself taking a holiday tour to HongKong and Taiwan after saving up. She could see herself going on a cruise to nowhere on a luxurious ocean liner. She could see herself investing her CPF in a nice little flat somewhere that would be paid up for just as she retired from active service...

WOMAN

But none of these things are really enough to feed the hungry soul of a woman that hides beneath of proper exterior of a Secondary School Teacher...

NARRATOR

So did she kill herself?

[to audience]

This could be an unusual case. Many women try to commit suicide over love, or over a loss of love; but not many women try to commit suicide over a complete lack of love.

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WOMAN

That's because if you've never had it, you don't know what you're missing.

NARRATOR

How did she kill herself?

WOMAN

Don't be stupid. She didn't kill herself. Did you think I would tell morbid suicide stories about a personal friend to a total stranger like you? Of course she didn't kill herself.

NARRATOR

You keep raising my expectations.

WOMAN

Raising expectations is a woman's role in life.

This woman I knew *thought* that she would seriously consider killing herself, and she thought an easy way might be to hang herself. But if that was what she was going to do, she wanted to practice first.

NARRATOR

Secondary School teachers are very thorough in everything that they do. That's why other women think they make the best mothers, although other men don't always seem inclined to give them a chance to prove it.

WOMAN

So one night this woman took a rope and decided to practice suicide. She took a step ladder, and she carried the step-ladder over to a tree and she climbed the step ladder carrying the rope.

And then she discovered that she had no idea how to tie the rope into knots that she could hang herself with.

NARRATOR

What a hopeless case. You would think that they would teach something useful like basic knot-tying in schools. But do they? TOGETHER

No.

WOMAN

But when she was up there on the ladder, leaning over the branches of the tree she was going to practise committing suicide from, the soft night breeze

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began to blow.

NARRATOR

I can feel the soft night breeze...

WOMAN

And she could hear the rustling of thin, papery leaves in the dark.

NARRATOR

I can hear the rustling of thin, papery leaves in the dark...

WOMAN

And when she looked up, through the dark, dancing leaves and through the shadows of the dark, dancing leaves, she could see the clear moon shining silver through wisps of cloud; light over a light-dark sky.

[NARRATOR has been mesmerized by the images, but now falls out of the imaginary tree]

NARRATOR

She could have looked it up in a book.

WOMAN

What are you talking about?

NARRATOR

How to tie knots to hang yourself with. She could have looked up the knots in a book. A Boy Scouts book on knots or something like that.

I hate it when someone doesn't do a job properly and gives up on it halfway.

WOMAN

There's nothing wrong with that if you find a better job to do.

NARRATOR

What happened to this stupid woman, anyway? I suppose she became an artist too?

WOMAN

Not at all. She went back to school and finished the year and then she quit.

She went back to the university and got her Ph.D. in Biology.

NARRATOR

Oh.

WOMAN

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She did her thesis on night insects. She had always been interested in insects. Her thesis was hailed as a landmark study and later it was published to much acclaim. But she always said that the best thing about doing it was that it had allowed her to spend so much time alone with herself up in a tree in the still night. She got to know herself again, and she discovered that she was actually a nice person with a lot of potential. You see, she had been putting herself down like it would never have occurred to her to put any of her friends down.

NARRATOR

I bet it rained sometimes.

WOMAN

It did. And I bet that was good too.

NARRATOR

I don't suppose you're that woman who wrote books about bugs and all that.

WOMAN

No I'm not. But I can tell you where to get a copy of the book, if you'd like to know.

NARRATOR

What I'd like to know is what you're doing up there.

WOMAN

There's something in a woman that needs a tree.

NARRATOR

What you need is a man.

WOMAN

You're not supposed to be vulgar. You're supposed to be an auditor.

NARRATOR

I ask a simple question, and—

WOMAN

And then you refuse to listen to a simple answer.

Women need trees because they need to know that they can stretch out into the sky while keeping their roots in the ground.

NARRATOR

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You see little boys flying kites.

WOMAN

They can fly, oh yes they can fly, but they never fly so high that they lose touch with Mommy who is still hanging on to them on the other end of a long umbilical cord. In the West they tie ribbons on it. Here we glue on powdered glass.

But little girls should be taught to climb trees. Our problem is not that we climb trees now, but that we were never allowed to climb trees earlier.

NARRATOR

Boys climb trees. Boys climb trees all the time. I don't think it has made any difference to their lives at all.

WOMAN

Because a boy climbs a tree to conquer it.

A girl climbs a tree to become part of it.

To try to become part of it. It doesn't always work.

NARRATOR

You mean it hasn't worked for you?

Why are you up there, anyway?

WOMAN

Because I didn't want to marry a man.

[Uncomfortable pause]

NARRATOR

At least tell me your name.

WOMAN

Maureen.

It's becoming so dark.

NARRATOR

Wife, Wife, where are you, wife.

Wife, Wife, where are you, wife.

The sky grows dark and the storm clouds loom.

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We must go to our ship where we will be safe.

WOMAN

I remember now, when all this has happened before.

God promised that never again would He tear open the heavens and destroy
the earth with many waters and God keeps His word.

What is happening now, Man has brought upon himself.

NARRATOR

Is there—is there room for one more up there?

WOMAN

No.

[WOMAN turns and plucks a fruit that she throws
down to NARRATOR]

Plant your own future.

Trees grow.

If you let them.

THE END

rehearsed reading by THEATREWORKS, Jan 1992, WOMAN was read by
Jacintha Abisheganaden, NARRATED by Gerald Chew.