

To Be A Tree

A One-Act Children's Play

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

ABBY GREENE, a fifth grader who loves trees.

MISS KLINE, Abby's Teacher

KRISTA, a classmate of Abby's who walks with braces.

LINDA, Abby's Mother

PAUL, Abby's Father

CLAUDE, a bully.

BILLY, a bully.

JACK, a bully.

BOY ON SKATEBOARD

Other Students:

JON

MIKE

HEATHER

LISA

CANDY

KEVIN

MANDY

TOMMY

NICK

LOUISE

KELLY

WESLEY

MONICA

BEN

TRAVIS

GREG

DEAN

OSCAR

HENRY

ANDREW

Scene 1: Recess

(In the dark we hear electronic, synthesized, artificial sounding music. Music continues under the opening scene.)

(At rise JON sits to one side of the stage, a cell phone in his hand. He looks at the phone, expecting it to ring. After a moment, ABBY enters, ball in hand.)

Hi, Jon.

What?

Hi.

What do you mean?

I'm just saying 'hi'.

O-kaaay.

What are you doing?

Nothing. Just sitting.

Do want to play something?

Like what?

(MIKE enters to the opposite side of the stage, cellphone in hand, dialing.)

ABBY

We could play four square. Or we could play tag. Or play on the swings. Or tetherball.

JON

Um...sure... (?)

(JON's phone rings. He answers it.)

JON

(Suddenly brightening.)

Yo, Mike! What's up?

MIKE

I'm on recess.

JON

Recess?! Sweet. Me too!

MIKE

Where are you?

JON

By the swings.

MIKE

Cool.

JON

Where are you?

MIKE

By the kickball field.

JON

Cool. *(Turns to see Mike.)* Oh, hey!

(JON and MIKE wave to one another.)

MIKE

Hey, want to text each other back and forth?

JON

Yes! Do you?

Yes!

MIKE

Cool.

JON

I love recess.

MIKE

Recess is great!

JON

(MIKE and JON hang up their phones and start texting. ABBY watches them text for a bit.)

Well, goodbye Jon.

ABBY

Uh-huh.

JON

(MIKE and JON move off in opposite directions. ABBY sits down. She takes out a drawing pad and begins to draw. HEATHER and LISA enter with their electronic tablets. They sit down next to one other playing a game.)

I just planted forty tomato plants.

HEATHER

Awesome. I earned two more gnomes.

LISA

Cool.

HEATHER

No rabbits are getting in here.

LISA

I hate the rabbits.

HEATHER

No rabbits, please.

LISA

HEATHER

You have to plant cucumbers and beans too.

LISA

I know.

HEATHER

Ah! Crow! Look out.

LISA

Hey, Abby.

ABBY

Hi, Lisa.

LISA

What are you doing?

ABBY

Drawing a picture of a willow tree. See?

LISA

Nice.

HEATHER

Do you want to play PG with us?

ABBY

PG? What's that?

HEATHER

Pixel Garden.

ABBY

Garden?

LISA

Pixel Garden. You have to plant and grow as many vegetables and flowers as you can and earn garden gnomes to help protect your virtual garden from getting eaten by the rabbits and crows and squirrels.

ABBY

Why don't you just grow a real garden?

HEATHER

What do mean?

ABBY

Y'know actually plant and grow an actual real garden? My mom and I planted one last-

LISA

Why would we do that?

HEATHER

You mean get our hands full of mud and dirt and get bitten by bugs?

ABBY

Well...yeah.

HEATHER

Yuckies. Mud.

LISA

Bugs. Grossola.

ABBY

Well...it could be fun. To grow your own flowers and vegetables is one of-

HEATHER

Don't be weird.

ABBY

Do you want to go play in the sandbox?

LISA

Oh, you mean CyberSand!? Build a virtual castle for the grain people before the cosmic-tide washes it away.

HEATHER

Yes!

ABBY

No, I mean the actual sandbox. Uh, what about the seesaw?

HEATHER

SeeSawSimulator?!

LISA

That's cool. Make your way through the playground obstacles to earn weights and keep the seesaws balanced.

HEATHER

Yeah, or you have to ride in the merry-go-round pit until you e-
puke.

LISA

That game is awesome.

ABBY

No, I'm talking about the seesaw. Over there.

HEATHER

We can play right here.

LISA

Yeah, just go get your tablet and come play with us.

ABBY

I don't have a tablet.

LISA

Oh, well, then go get your phone then.

ABBY

I don't have a phone.

HEATHER

Uh, what do you mean?

ABBY

I mean I don't have a phone. I don't own one.

(HEATHER gasps.)

LISA

Wh-wh-what did she say?

HEATHER

She said she doesn't own a phone.

LISA

I don't understand.

HEATHER

It's a mad mad world.

*(HEATHER and LISA give ABBY blank
stares. CANDY enters, she has*

earbuds in her ears listening to her iPod.)

ABBY

Well, I guess, I'll see you later.

(ABBY moves off and passes by CANDY.)

ABBY

Hi, Candy.

(CANDY gives no response.)

ABBY

Hi, Candy. Candy? Candy?

(ABBY moves to stand right in front of CANDY.)

Are you okay, Candy?

(CANDY takes out her earbuds.)

CANDY

What?

ABBY

I was just saying hi.

CANDY

Oh. Okay.

ABBY

Do you want to—

(CANDY puts her earbuds back into her ears.)

ABBY

Never mind.

(ABBY looks dejected and walks away. KEVIN enters playing an electronic game that emits a lot of destructive sounds.)

KEVIN
Hi, Abby.

ABBY
Oh, hi, Kevin!

KEVIN
Did you need any extra lumber?

ABBY
Lumber?

KEVIN
Yeah, I just cleared five hundred acres of forest to build a new industrial robot complex.

ABBY
What are you talking about?

KEVIN
Deforestation.

ABBY
Deforestation?!

KEVIN
It's a game. You clear land to make room for building new cities.

ABBY
That's horrible!

KEVIN
You can also build theme parks.

(MIKE and JON enter walking next to one another but communicating by texts. They each let out a laugh.)

LISA
I just grew a watermelon.

HEATHER
There're squirrels trying to get in.

LISA

Put up a wall of roses to help keep them out.

HEATHER

I'll move over some gnomes.

LISA

Another watermelon!

(ABBY looks around at all of her peers interacting with technology. She gives a heavy sigh and sits down as lights fade.)

Scene 2: At the Tree

(ABBY sits on stool next to a small tree. She writes in a notebook.)

ABBY

Trees. By Abby Greene. Trees are the largest and oldest living organisms on our planet. All trees have DNA fingerprints the same way people do. The largest tree is a Redwood that grows in the Redwood National Forest. It is 369 feet tall and over two-thousand years old! If trees were able to talk they would be able to tell us the entire history of our universe! Trees are very helpful to humans and make our planet livable. Without trees, human beings would find it very difficult to live. Trees clean the air we breathe, cut down on noise pollution, create shade and shelter and make our lands look beautiful.

Scene 3: The Classroom

(MISS KLINE stands at the front of the class. She addresses ABBY and the rest of the STUDENTS.)

MISS KLINE

Just a reminder that we will start your oral reports in a couple of weeks. The report can be on a topic of your choosing. Today, everyone, we're going to talk careers—our future careers.

(MANDY raises her hand.)

Yes, Mandy?

MANDY

What's careers?

MISS KLINE

A career is a profession- what someone does to make a living. We're going to talk about the possible jobs, careers and professions that you might like to do when you become adults. Let's talk about a few. Does anyone have an idea what they might like to do for a career?

(Tommy raises his hand.)

Tommy? Stand up, please, Tommy.

(TOMMY stands.)

TOMMY

I want to work with robots.

MISS KLINE

Ooh. Robots. That's very exciting.

(Several students raise their hands.)

TOMMY

We already have a robot in our house.

MISS KLINE

Louise? And remember to stand.

LOUISE

I want to be an astronaut and go into space?

NICK

Girls can't go to space.

LOUISE

Yes they can.

NICK

Cannot.

MISS KLINE

Okay, okay. That is not being respectful of one another. As a matter of fact, Nick, many women have already been into space. It's quite common.

LOUISE

Yes. I want to live and work on the space station.

MISS KLINE

Well, that's very ambitious, Louise. Who else has an idea what they would like to do for a career? Kelly?

KELLY

I want to be a computer programmer.

MISS KLINE

Very good. Wesley?

WESLEY

I want to be an inventor.

MISS KLINE

Oh. What kind of inventor?

WESLEY

I want to invent things that help us. Like a longer lasting light bulb or a freezewave.

MISS KLINE

Well, what's a Freezewave?

WESLEY

A freezewave is like a microwave except it freezes things instantly instead of heating them up.

MISS KLINE

Ooh. Well, that's very creative. Excellent, Wesley. Who else? Monica?

MONICA

I want to be a chemist and make new health pills.

MISS KLINE

I see. Another scientist. Ben?

BEN

I want to be an engineer.

TRAVIS

Why do you want drive trains? That's boring.

MISS KLINE

I don't think that's what Ben means. Is it, Ben.

BEN

No.

MISS KLINE

No. What do mean by being an engineer?

BEN

My father is an engineer. He works with big machines. I want to work with technology and invent new machines, new kinds of engines to help us go faster.

MISS KLINE

Okay. Fantastic. You'll have to study much science and math if you want to do that for a career. Greg, what about you?

GREG

I want to make videogames.

MISS KLINE

Okay.

GREG

All virtual videogames using realistic holograms.

MISS KLINE

Okay. Very good. Anther very creative profession. Yes, Abby. What about you?

ABBY

I want to be a tree.

MISS KLINE

Oh, you mean you want to work in forestry or at a nursery?

ABBY

No. I mean I want to be a tree.

(Laughter and reactions from STUDENTS.)

MISS KLINE

All right. All right. Well, Abby, I'm afraid you can't actually be a tree. You can *work* with trees but you can't *be* a tree.

ABBY

Why not?

TRAVIS

Because you're a person, dummy, you're not a tree.

(More laughter.)

OTHER STUDENTS

Yeah. She wants to be a tree. What is her problem? Why would she want to be a tree?

MISS KLINE

Okay, class. Okay. Travis, please don't call someone that. You know better.

TRAVIS

Sorry, Miss Kline.

ABBY

I can be anything I want to be, can't I?

MISS KLINE

Well, yes, but—

ABBY

Then I want to be a tree. An actual tree.

MISS KLINE

Well, okay, uh, what kind of tree would you like to be, Abby?

ABBY

I don't know. Maybe a maple. Or a large willow. Or a strong oak tree.

TRAVIS

Or a dead tree?

(More laughter.)

MISS KLINE

Enough. Travis. All right, thank you, Abby. Who else has a career in mind?

Scene 4: Gym Class

(We hear sounds of a dodge ball game off stage. Several students

stand in a line watching the game, anxiously waiting to go in. KRISTA, her walking braces next to her, sits away from the group reading a book.)

TRAVIS (off)

You're out, Abby.

(ABBY enters as a ball rolls in from off stage.)

ABBY

I know. I'm going.

TRAVIS (off)

Hey, I got the tree!

(Laughter off.)

STUDENTS (off)

The tree is out. He cut the tree down. He got her right in the leaves. He knocked the trunk out of her.

ABBY

BE QUIET!

(ABBY picks up the ball and throws it off stage. She then sits down in a huff away from the line of students.)

ABBY

I hate gym class.

(KRISTA stands up, gets into her walking braces and approaches ABBY.)

KRISTA

Hello.

ABBY

Hi.

KRISTA

I'm Krista.

I'm Abby.

ABBY

I know.

KRISTA

I hate gym class.

ABBY

Me too.

KRISTA

Why? Oh. Um, sorry.

ABBY

It's okay.

KRISTA

(The dodgeball game continues off as KRISTA and ABBY converse.)

ABBY

What are you reading?

KRISTA

A book about Redwoods.

ABBY

Oh, yeah? I like trees.

KRISTA

Yeah, I kinda figured that out. Why do you like trees so much?

ABBY

Well, a lot of reasons, I guess. I don't really know. I just like them.

KRISTA

The redwoods are the largest trees.

ABBY

Super large. They're the tallest and largest trees in the world. Some of them are so big around it would take over twenty people holding hands to get their arms around one of the trunks.

KRISTA

Wow. Is that the kind of tree you want to be?

(Pause.)

ABBY

No.

KRISTA

I think it's okay for you to want to be a tree.

ABBY

Really?

KRISTA

Yes.

ABBY

What happened to your legs?

KRISTA

Nobody knows. They just sort of grew this way.

ABBY

Will they...I mean, will they...

KRISTA

Will I ever be normal? Is that what you're trying ask?

ABBY

Sorry, no, I wasn't trying to-

KRISTA

No worries. I get it. The doctors say no. But I've been doing a lot of physical therapy. And I've already started walking better than they thought I would.

ABBY

Wow. What's physical therapy like?

(TRAVIS, DEAN and OSCAR enter from off and go to the end of the line. TRAVIS takes out a hand held video game and begins playing. DEAN, OSCAR and other students gather around TRAVIS to watch.)

KRISTA

It's kind of like gym class. But with no actual running. Or jumping. Or anything like that.

Let me try it, Travis.

OSCAR

Hold on.

TRAVIS

(TRAVIS and others, not watching where they're going, start backing into ABBY and KRISTA.)

Come on.

OSCAR

Just a second.

TRAVIS

I get to try next.

DEAN

It's my game. I decide.

TRAVIS

Hey, look out!

KRISTA

Watch where you're going!?

ABBY

You look out.

OSCAR

We were here first.

ABBY

So? You don't own the whole school. We can be here too.

DEAN

You can't walk on top of us.

ABBY

Just leave us alone.

KRISTA

Yeah, go someplace else.

ABBY

DEAN

Zip it, Abby.

OSCAR

Yeah, zip it, Abby. Abby the tree.

DEAN

Yeah, Abby the tree.

HENRY

That's so dumb. Who would want to be a tree?

KRISTA

Who cares if she wants to be a tree? She can be anything she wants to be. Stop being so mean.

ABBY

Go away.

HENRY

Make us.

OSCAR

Yeah, make us.

DEAN

Yeah, what are you going to do? Fall on us?

HENRY

Yeah, hit us with one of your branches?

OSCAR

Drop leaves on us?

(Laughter from the boys.)

ABBY

Stop it. Get out!

KRISTA and ABBY

GO AWAY!

(Everyone freezes and stares at KRISTA and ABBY.)

Scene 5: At the Tree

(ABBY sits by the small tree writing in her notebook.)

ABBY

Trees and people have a sym-bi-otic relationship. Trees produce oxygen for us to breathe. And human beings expel carbon dioxide which the trees can absorb. A single tree can create over two-hundred pounds of oxygen per year. That means two full-grown trees can make enough oxygen every year to support a family of four! Trees do not die of old age. They are usually killed by insects, by disease or by people. If age equals wisdom then trees could be considered some of the smartest beings on the entire planet. Bristlecone Pines and Giant Sequoia trees are the oldest trees in the world and can live up to five-thousand years. The average tree in an urban area has a life expectancy of only eight years.

Scene 6: Abby's House

(The Greene house. ABBY enters and crosses the stage. Before she exits, PAUL and LINDA, ABBY's parents enter.)

LINDA

Abby.

ABBY

Yes, mom?

LINDA

Where are you going?

ABBY

Outside.

LINDA

Why?

ABBY

Why can't I go outside?

LINDA

Because.

ABBY

My room is clean.

LINDA

Yes, we know, but, um...

PAUL

Come over here for a minute, Abby. Please.

ABBY

Why? What did I do?

LINDA

No. Nothing. Your father and I just want to talk to you.

ABBY

Your teacher Miss Kline called.

LINDA

Oh.

PAUL

She said you told your class you think you're a tree.

ABBY

What? No, I didn't.

PAUL

Listen to me, Abby: You are not a tree.

ABBY

I didn't say that.

PAUL

Good. See? It's just a miscommunication.

LINDA

No, Paul— She doesn't think she's a tree. That's not what Miss Kline said.

PAUL

You told me—

LINDA

Miss Kline said that Abby wants to *be* a tree.

PAUL

Oh, that's much better.

LINDA

Abby, is this true? Did you say that? Did you say you want to be a tree?

(Pause.)

ABBY

Yes. So? Why?

LINDA

Well, Abby, you can't be a tree.

ABBY

Why?

PAUL

Well, because. It's just not possible. There's no way you can be a tree. You simply can't be a tree.

ABBY

That's not a reason.

PAUL

Abby—

LINDA

Because you're not a tree, Abby. You're a girl. And you have to be a girl. And one day you'll grow up to be a woman. Not a tree.

ABBY

But I really want to be a tree.

PAUL

Why do you want to be a tree?

ABBY

Because I can think of nothing else better in the world to be.

LINDA

Well, Abby, that's, I mean—

ABBY

You always said I could be anything I want to be. Didn't you? Didn't you?

LINDA

Um, well—

PAUL

That's not—

ABBY

When I grow up I could be anything that I want. You said that, right?

LINDA

Yes, Abby. We said that. We know we told you that and you can. You can be anything that you want, but—

ABBY

Well, I want to be a tree.

LINDA

Abby, you can't—

ABBY

You said that you would support me. You said.

(LINDA and PAUL look at one another. They are trapped.)

LINDA

All right, Abby.

PAUL

What do you mean "all right"? She can't be a tree. You can't be a tree. No.

LINDA

Paul, just a minute. Abby, if you want to be a tree. Then we'll support you.

ABBY

Good. Thank you.

LINDA

But how are you going to do this, Abby? Hm? How will you grow up to be a tree?

ABBY

I'm going to practice.

Practice?

ABBY
Yes. I'll practice every day.

LINDA
Well- But- How are you going to *practice* being a tree?

ABBY
I know all about trees. I've been studying them. I know what they do.

PAUL
What they do? Trees don't do anything, Abby?

ABBY
That's not true. Trees do many, many things. They breathe. They grow. They make shade. They fertilize the ground. They make oxygen. They-

PAUL
All right, all right, all right, Abby, all right. I guess you can...be a tree.

ABBY
Thank you.

(Abby turns to leave.)

LINDA
Abby. Where are you going?

ABBY
Well, outside of course. Trees live outside.

Scene 7: Front Yard

(ABBY stands, smiling, eyes closed, arms outstretched, face turned toward the sun. ANDREW enters. He looks at ABBY for a moment before he approaches her.)

ANDREW
Hi, Abby.

ABBY

Oh, hi, Andrew.

ANDREW

Do you want to come to my house to watch TV?

ABBY

No, thanks.

ANDREW

We could listen to some music?

ABBY

I'm okay. Thanks anyway.

ANDREW

Want to take our bikes out? We could bike down to the park.

ABBY

No. I can't today. I have to practice.

ANDREW

Practice what? What are you practicing?

ABBY

I'm practicing being a tree.

ANDREW

A what? A tree?

ABBY

Yes.

ANDREW

You're not a tree.

ABBY

Well, no. Not now. But one day I will be.

ANDREW

Are you serious?

ABBY

Of course.

ANDREW

But...No one grows up to be a tree. I'm pretty sure one has ever grown up to be a tree.

ABBY

Well, then I'll be the first.

ANDREW

That's ridiculous. *(Pause.)* Why do you want to be a tree?

ABBY

Because trees never hurt anybody. They never cause trouble. They just live and breathe and grow and make oxygen for everyone on the planet.

ANDREW

I guess. That's true. But...So how do you practice being a tree, anyway?

ABBY

You just sort of stand here, breathing, growing, enjoying the breeze and the sun. Y'know. Like a tree.

ANDREW

Oh.

ABBY

Want to try?

ANDREW

No, thanks. *(watches Abby for few moments)* Well, I guess I'll get going.

ABBY

Okay.

ANDREW

Good luck with your tree thing.

(ANDREW exits. LINDA enters with her phone in hand.)

LINDA

Abby?

ABBY

What is it, mom?

LINDA

Your friend Georgina is on the phone. She wants to talk to you.

ABBY

I can't right now, mom. I'm practicing.

LINDA

Oh. Right. Well, what should I tell her?

ABBY

Tell her I'll call her back later.

LINDA

She wants to invite you to her birthday party.

ABBY

Okay.

LINDA

Do you want to go?

ABBY

Mom, I'll call her back later.

LINDA

Okay. I'll just tell her you can't come to the phone right now.

ABBY

Thank you.

*(LINDA exits as PAUL enters
dragging one end of a garden
hose.)*

PAUL

Hi, Abby.

(Pause.)

PAUL

Abby?

ABBY

Yes.

PAUL
Are you okay?

ABBY
Yes. Hi, Dad.

PAUL
What are you doing?

ABBY
(starting to get very annoyed)
I'm practicing being a tree.

PAUL
Oh, right. Your tree thing. How's it going?

ABBY
Fine.

PAUL
What are you doing— I mean, how are you practicing?

ABBY
Can we talk about it later, dad?

PAUL
Oh, sure, sure. I was going to water the garden. Is that okay?

ABBY
Yes. Fine.

PAUL
Hey, maybe I should water you too. Since you're trying to be a tree, and trees need water, then maybe I should water you. How about it? Should I water you?

ABBY
No, thanks, dad. I'm fine. I'm not thirsty now.

PAUL
Okay. Well, you just let me know if you want to be watered.

(PAUL exits with the hose, it gets wrapped around ABBY's legs.)

ABBY
Ah, Dad. DAD!

What is it? PAUL *(off)*

Dad. ABBY

What's going on? PAUL
(Entering)

Watch where you're going with the hose? ABBY

Oh, sorry. Abby, could you...? Little help please. PAUL

I can't. ABBY

What do you mean, you can't? PAUL

I'm a tree. ABBY

Can you just step over it— I can't reach the garden. PAUL

No. ABBY

No? No, what? Just step over the hose. PAUL

No, dad. I can't. Trees don't step over things. They're planted in the ground so I can't step over it. ABBY

Well, trees don't really talk either. PAUL

Dad. ABBY

(PAUL walks back over and unwinds the hose from around ABBY's legs.)