

# THE ROPE SWINGS

TEN-MINUTE PLAY

By **Toni Wilson**

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## **THE ROPE SWINGS**

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**SYNOPSIS:** After their mother dies, a pair of sisters meet privately for the first time in the backyard of the house they grew up in. Fifteen years has passed and in the ten minutes that pass in the play, we see what those fifteen years have done to the sisters, and we see if amends and healing are possible.

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

(2 WOMEN)

*A pair of sisters...*

MARGO..... 33, no frills kind of woman, no make-up, simple hairstyle. She has spent the last fifteen years caring for her sick mother, who recently died. She is seeing December for the first time since.

DECEMBER..... 38, appears as a woman who wants to try and look as young as possible, perfect hair, make-up, clothes. She left Margo to care for their mother fifteen years before and attempts to make amends, or at least begin the healing process.

### **SETTING**

The house where MARGO and DECEMBER grew up. The backyard. Two ropes swings hang from two trees and there are leaves all around.

### **TIME**

Present. Fall. Evening, almost dusk.

## PROPS

- Leaves
- A pair of rope swings (weight bearing)

### NOTE:

These notations “—” in the play denote overlapping and interrupting of the lines from the characters.

## PRODUCTION NOTES

The pushing of December off the swing could be replaced by Margo kicking December in the rear end, causing her to fall down. Margo then repeatedly trips her down as indicated in the script. Safety of the actress playing December is the key issue. Any kind of fight choreography can be used in place of what is indicated so long as Margo manages to keep knocking December down literally.

The lighting for the play should be a fall colored light with a leaf patterned gobo. You could have someone in the catwalk of the theatre dump leaves after the rope swings are lowered from the catwalk. These need to be weight bearing, per the actions of the script.

**AT RISE:**

*LIGHTS UP. Enter MARGO. She is dressed in simple black and looks tired and angry. She sees the two swings, she looks around and then looks back at the house. When she's sure she's alone, she sits on one of the swings and begins to cry. Beat. Enter DECEMBER. She wears an expensive-looking black suit and looks slightly bothered. She observes MARGO until MARGO notices her there.*

**MARGO:** *(Quickly wiping away her tears, embarrassed.)* What are you doing out here?

**DECEMBER:** I was looking for you. You're hard to find. There wasn't a place in that house I didn't look.

**MARGO:** I needed a breath of fresh air.

**DECEMBER:** I know what you mean. This has been a hell of a day, hasn't it? We couldn't have asked for better weather, though, or a lovelier service. Father Justin, is that his name? He's delightful, simply delightful.

*Beat.*

**MARGO:** What?

**DECEMBER:** You're in my swing.

**MARGO:** And?

**DECEMBER:** Move it. It's my swing. I want to swing on it.

**MARGO:** You—

**DECEMBER:** It's still my swing, even if it's been a couple decades since I last swung on it. So scoot.

**MARGO:** Fine.

*MARGO moves to the next swing and DECEMBER sits on hers. MARGO tries to ignore DECEMBER, who starts to swing and sing.*

**DECEMBER:** *(Singing.)*

*Would you like to swing on a star?*

*Carry moonbeams home in a jar?*

**MARGO:** Do you have to sing?

**DECEMBER:** *(Singing.)*

*and be better off than you?*

*Or would you rather be a mule?*

Is there something wrong with my singing?

*Beat.*

**DECEMBER:** I've missed this place, and that song, oh, the memories it brings back. Mom had the most beautiful singing voice and one of my favorite memories was when she would sing us to sleep every night with that exact song. Don't you remember it?

**MARGO:** If you don't mind, I'd like to be alone.

**DECEMBER:** That was the life. Playing all day, being sung to at night. All those wonderful carefree days! They just don't make the days like that anymore. All there is, is work, responsibility, work.

*MARGO stands.*

**DECEMBER:** Hey, where are you going?

**MARGO:** Back in the house.

**DECEMBER:** Oh, speaking of the house, what do you want to do with it?

**MARGO:** *(Deep breath, speaking as evenly as possible.)* Is this a conversation we have to have right now?

**DECEMBER:** Why not? This seems like it's as good a time as any. All the guests have left and—

**MARGO:** Which means I should go back in the house and clean up.

**DECEMBER:** Don't worry, Aunt Shelley's cleaning up.

**MARGO:** All the more reason to go and help.

**DECEMBER:** Margo, she's capable. Come on, let's sit and chat.

**MARGO:** Chat? - - I really don't want to talk to you right now.

**DECEMBER:** Why not?

*MARGO stares at DECEMBER.*

**MARGO:** You can't just expect - -

**DECEMBER:** What? What can't I just expect?

**MARGO:** I'm not doing this.

**DECEMBER:** What?

**MARGO:** Fighting with you—

**DECEMBER:** I'm not fighting. I'm just trying to have a conversation—

**MARGO:** (*Pleading.*) December, please, this is how it always starts—

**DECEMBER:** —with my kid sister. (*MARGO gives up and listens, annoyed.*) I haven't seen you in so long! You've gotten so skinny, you can't be eating right—

**MARGO:** —I'm going back in the house—

**DECEMBER:** —and, honey, those clothes, and no make-up, and your hair is an absolute scream—

**MARGO:** I have things to do. Certain duties—

**DECEMBER:** Duties? Duties! Always with the duties. God, I hated how she called them that. She's dead, she won't know if the duties don't get done.

**MARGO:** You . . . wouldn't understand.

**DECEMBER:** (*Stands and crosses to MARGO, places her hand on her shoulder, and MARGO shrugs it away.*) Oh, my poor sweet Margo. You're so tense over this whole thing, you're liable to just explode.

**MARGO:** Who wouldn't - be -

**DECEMBER:** You're right to feel this way. Look at all you gave up: fifteen years, your youth, your education, friends, possibilities for marriage and children. All that, so much, just to care for her.

**MARGO:** She was our only mother.

**DECEMBER:** Point well taken. I know I would feel exactly the same way, had I been in the same situation.

**MARGO:** You - you - - I'm going back in the house.

**DECEMBER:** Margo, you should take a vacation.

**MARGO:** A vacation?

**DECEMBER:** (*Sitting back on her swing.*) Yes, a vacation. Don't look at me like that. I know what I'm talking about. Somewhere tropical, with palm trees and hot little cabana boys to take care of your poor tired body.

**MARGO:** Where do you -- how can you --

**DECEMBER:** Come on, Margo. Why don't you ever finish your thoughts? I would sure like to know what you think about things. I can tell you're angry, you're completely pissed, but you're too damn **you** to do anything about it.

**MARGO:** Mom always said, if you can't say something nice—

**DECEMBER:** —don't say anything at all. I know. But you know what? She's dead and she's better off that way. God help me, I believe it. She wasn't a very good mother, or a good person for that matter—

**MARGO:** —how can you say—

**DECEMBER:** —she was a cantankerous old bitch who used and manipulated everyone around her. I saw what she did to Dad before he finally walked out. When he told me it was because he couldn't handle her anymore, I completely understood. Just be quiet and listen. I saw her treat him like a dog and then expect him to treat her like a queen in return. I would see her when she would get drunk—don't interrupt me!—and one time, she broke a bottle over his head, there was blood and glass everywhere. I know what she was like before she got sick, just as well as you did, and after she got sick, when her body was rebelling and it was broken and falling apart, that she was still the same person on the inside. A stroke couldn't change that. And now I look at you, and I just can't believe what she did to you.

**MARGO:** That doesn't -- I'm going back in the house.

*MARGO goes to leave.*

**DECEMBER:** Sell me your half of the house.

**MARGO:** What?

**DECEMBER:** Sell me your half of the house.

**MARGO:** Why would I do that?

**DECEMBER:** What's left in that house for you? All that's rattling in those rooms are ghosts of the past, and things, tons and tons of things, all possessed by ghosts that will never release you. You've lost enough.

*Beat.*

**DECEMBER:** Margo, if you won't break out of this cell you've allowed yourself to be put in and kept in all these years, then I will just have to break you out myself.

*MARGO, angry to near bursting, stands silently blinking.*

**DECEMBER:** Come on, Margo. Get angry. Let it all out. Fifteen years of her, of everything she did to you, is a damn long time to keep that all in inside. It doesn't matter if she was our mother or not. Just because she gave birth to us doesn't give her the right to abuse us. No one deserves what you got. Come on! That's it! It's struggling, just let it out!

*MARGO rushes at DECEMBER and pushes her off the swing and onto the ground.*

**DECEMBER:** What the heck are you doing?

**MARGO:** I'm letting it all out.

*DECEMBER gets up and MARGO trips her down again.*

**DECEMBER:** For heaven's sake, cut that out!

**MARGO:** But this is what's coming out, I can't control it.

**DECEMBER:** I meant that you should yell at me! Not physically assault me!

*DECEMBER gets up again and MARGO trips her down to the ground again.*

**MARGO:** That one's for being selfish. The first one was for being a bitch. The second one is for your audacity to come here and act like we should be all buddy-buddy after everything you haven't done. She was your responsibility, too.



*DECEMBER gets up again and MARGO trips her down to the ground again.*

**DECEMBER:** What was that one for?

**MARGO:** I was just on a roll. *(Beat.)* Appraise the house. Give me my fair share. Then let it burn, implode, explode or vaporize, I don't care anymore. But don't try and talk to me ever again.

*MARGO goes to leave. DECEMBER starts to stand up. MARGO turns back and DECEMBER falls back to the ground.*

**MARGO:** Another thing. You were right about Mom.

*MARGO exits humming 'Would You Like to Swing on a Star?' as the lights go down.*

**THE END**