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Eng. 41a

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25 April 2018

BENJ

A Play in One Act

Background: The setting is in a post-apocalyptic world. The year is 3294. Years before, an evil magician Maleanic Hyriden used aether to absorb all electricity and set back humanity to the dark ages because he wanted to control everyone. In 3104, a Maven who called himself Augustus Caesar defeated him. However, the issue at hand, fear of others who are different, doesn't require a time frame so I attempted to be slightly ambiguous about the time period.

CHARACTERS

PRISONER: a male voice that talks to BenJ when he is in prison.

BENJ: a 19-year-old boy that looks average but is hiding a big secret: he has magic.

YOUNG BENJ: skinny, smallish little boy about 7 years old.

BENJ'S MOTHER: very protective of her son. Simple woman. Laundress to LARA's family.

LARA: the same age as BenJ. Has a rich family. BenJ's best friend until she betrays him.

TYRES: BenJ's popular older brother. Good at tackleball. Has dark brown hair.

GUARD/POLICEMAN: largish man that fits the stereotype of the character's title job

[Scene 1: Dark stage. Dim lights shine on stage left where BENJ is sitting. He is dressed in torn, dirty, and disheveled clothes. His hands are slightly glowing with blue light. He is in a stone prison cell with a small window with bars above his head on the wall. The noise of a door slamming and keys jingling. BENJ doesn't even react to the noise.]

PRISONER: *[Off-stage]* (yelling) I am innocent! The accusations against me are ridiculous!

[Footsteps getting gradually quieter]

PRISONER: Come back! I don't belong here! I am innocent! I demand you release me at once!

[BENJ glances off-stage then hangs his head again]

BENJ: (croaking) It's no use. The guard won't listen.

PRISONER: (surprised) Hello? Is someone there?

BENJ: (hopelessly) Not for much longer. I am to die in a few hours.

PRISONER: Why? Who are you? What did you do to deserve the death sentence?

BENJ: I was born.

[Silence for a minute.]

PRISONER: (curious) What do mean by that? Who are you?

BENJ: (reluctantly) My name is Benjamin Joakim, but everybody calls me BenJ. There was seemingly nothing special about my birth. I don't have some tragic backstory that will haunt me the rest of my life. My mother did not die when I was born; in fact, if you ask her, my birth was easier than my older brother's. Both my parents, along with my less enthusiastic older brother,

Tyres, were happy to see me. My parents are not royal, in fact, one might call them the middle class and the backbone of our country. However, as normal as my family was, I was different, and I didn't realize how different I was from everyone else until much later. My parents started to get suspicious when I was 7 years old.

[Lights on BENJ go black.]

[Scene 2: Lights shine on stage right and center stage suddenly. YOUNG BENJ is sitting on a small wooden chair facing the corner. The walls of a simple house are seen with a sink near center stage. BENJ'S MOTHER is standing in front of the sink washing dishes. A small table sits between them with an old-fashioned kerosene lamp in the middle. A book is on the edge of the table closest to BENJ. Holding a dish, BENJ'S MOTHER dries it and turns to look at BENJ]

BENJ'S MOTHER: (Scolding) If you had done what I had told you, you wouldn't have gotten into trouble. Your brother did his chores before he played tackleball with his friends, but you wanted to run off and mess around. And you did so without telling me.

[BENJ'S MOTHER sets the dish on the side of the table closest to her. She puts her hands on her hips]

BENJ'S MOTHER: (Agitated) You had me worried sick. Where did you go?

[YOUNG BENJ turns in his chair resting his arm on the top of the chair.]

YOUNG BENJ: I went to the library. I was reading more about Mavens. I wanted to know how I could become one. Tyres told me that there were many different types, so I wanted to know the different types too. The book you got me didn't have that much information about it.

[BENJ'S MOTHER's hands fall from her hips in her shock. She quickly masks her shock while she looked at YOUNG BENJ curiously]

BENJ'S MOTHER: Did you decide which one you want to be?

YOUNG BENJ: (Confidently) I want to be an Aether Maven. Just like Augustus Caesar.

[BENJ'S MOTHER grabs another dish out of sink and almost drops it]

BENJ'S MOTHER: (hesitantly) I don't think that's possible BenJ... Times were different when Augustus Caesar was training to be a Maven... You can become a Carpentry Maven like your father.

YOUNG BENJ: (disappointed) Can I light the lamp, so I can read my book?

[YOUNG BENJ reaches for the kerosene lamp but BENJ'S MOTHER whacks his hand with the towel]

BENJ'S MOTHER: (firmly) No. You are still in trouble and you know that we can't afford to waste the lamp.

[YOUNG BENJ frowns and turns back to the wall]

YOUNG BENJ: (mutter) I want to read my book.

[The lamp flashes with a spark and lights up. YOUNG BENJ and BENJ'S MOTHER stare at the lamp in shock. Lights go dark]

[Scene 3: The scene returns to BENJ in his cell with the dim lighting]

BENJ: (hoarse and tired) I didn't realize at the time that I was the cause of the lamp lighting. My mother knew exactly what had happened but didn't tell me till I was 16 years old. She told me to tell no one about it. Even after telling me, she still worried about me, and tried to make up excuses for me to spend more time at home. I knew that she was just doing what she thought was best, so I humored her most of the time. I only left home to go to school and get books from the library. That is, except for the day I was sentenced to death. I should have listened to her...

PRISONER: *[Off-stage]* (confused and slightly annoyed) You still haven't told me why you are in here... If anything, I have more questions now... What did you do to get the lamp to light? What did your mother not tell you till you were 16? What was your mother protecting you from?

[BENJ sighs]

BENJ: My mother wasn't protecting me. She was protecting others from me. I was born with the ability to control aether.

[BENJ flinches in preparation to PRISONER's reaction. There is only silence]

PRISONER: (curious) You mean the same stuff that Maleanic Hyriden used? That aether?
[laughs] That makes it ironic that you wanted to be like Augustus Caesar when you were younger.

BENJ: *[looking up]* You're not afraid of me? Afraid that I will use my powers to hurt you?

PRISONER: Are you? I don't think you will. You are locked up in a cell and you've already told me that you are going to die tomorrow. Sounds like you've already accepted your fate. What good would hurting me do?

[Pauses]

PRISONER: So, you were sentenced to death because you are a magician of aether... You also mentioned that you didn't listen to your mother the day you were sentenced. What did you do?

BENJ: I trusted my best friend with the knowledge of my aether controlling abilities. It was August 17th, and a celebration was raging for the great Augustus Caesar. As every citizen of our country knows, this year was the famous 190-year anniversary. I was excited to go to the event with my best friend, Lara. My mother implored me to stay home...

[Lights on BENJ go black.]

[Scene 4: Lights come on to the same setting as scene 2. BENJ'S MOTHER is standing by the sink looking older than in the previous scene. About 12 years have passed. BENJ is standing in front of the small chair facing the wall. He looks about the same as he does in the prison cell except his clothes are not as ragged, just well worn. LARA stands next to BENJ. Her clothes look new. A basket sits in the middle of the small table instead of the lamp.]

BENJ'S MOTHER: I don't think you should go. There is much to do at home.

[She gives him a knowing "mom look"]

BENJ: (calmly) But mother, I have it planned, and I have done all my chores. Tyres is already there with his friends. I will just be there for a few minutes to see the fireworks with Lara.

[BENJ'S MOTHER sighs]

BENJ'S MOTHER: You are 19 and will become a Maven in a few years. You do as you wish. I don't control your actions.

[BENJ'S MOTHER reaches across the table and grabs BENJ's hands]

BENJ'S MOTHER: Promise me that you will be careful.

BENJ: I promise, Mother.

[BENJ'S MOTHER lets go of BENJ'S hands and hands him the basket]

BENJ'S MOTHER: (briskly) Well, if you must go, make yourself useful and get us some food while you are there.

BENJ: Yes, Mother.

[BENJ'S MOTHER exits stage right]

LARA: Wow, you were right; your mom is strict. I thought that you stayed home because you wanted to, not because your mother was pressuring you. Why didn't you tell me when we were younger?

BENJ: She is strict because she cares for me. In the past, I did what she said willingly, knowing exactly what I was giving up. I didn't mind though; she needed help after Father died suddenly. As long as I had my books, I was fine. But today, this celebration, is different.

LARA: What makes it different?

BENJ: Well... You know that I wanted to be just like Augustus Caesar when I was little...

LARA: [interrupting] Yeah, when we played together, you always made me play the evil magician while you got to be the great Aether Maven

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BENJ: I have a closer connection to Augustus Caesar and Maleanic Hyriden than you think.

LARA: What?

BENJ: You can't tell anyone else. Promise me you won't, and I will tell you.

LARA: *[raising her hand]* I promise.

[Stage goes dark. LARA and BENJ exit.]

[Scene 5: Lights come up on the house but darker than before to show it is later in the day.]

GUARD/POLICEMAN: [Off-stage] Get him!

[Miscellaneous yelling similar to a mob plays. BENJ and LARA run into the kitchen. BENJ grabs the small chair for support.]

BENJ: [Panting] I think we lost them for now. How did everyone find out about me?

[LARA looks guilty]

BENJ: Lara what did you do? Did you tell someone?

LARA: Yes. But I didn't think that this would happen. I talked to a priest to see if he could remove your powers. I was afraid. I also told him where you live.

[TYRES and GUARD/POLICEMAN enter and grab BENJ. BENJ fights.]

BENJ: (angry) How could you do this to me Lara? I trusted you! *[Notices TYRES]* And you are part of this too Tyres?! You would condemn your own brother to death?! I have done nothing to deserve such reproach.

TYRES: (guiltily) I had no choice BenJ. They gave me an ultimatum. Side with them or die with you.

[TYRES and GUARD/POLICEMAN drag BENJ off-stage. LARA buries her face in her hands crying.]

BENJ: (yelling) NO! I am innocent! I am innocent!

[Scene 6: Setting returns to the prison cell with BENJ. The lighting is slightly more than before to show that it is morning.]

BENJ: [annoyed] There are all your questions answered now?

PRISONER: Yes. Thank you. But are all of yours answered?

BENJ: My questions?! You are the one who has been badgering me and won't let me live out my last few hours of life in peace.

PRISONER: Considering I am here, I don't think you know what you really want.

BENJ: What does my wants have to do with your being here?! Why are you here? I deserve that answer since I told you why I am here.

PRISONER: You just haven't figured it out yet, have you, my Benboy? Your aether powers are very strong. I am here because you need me.

[BENJ jerks up and stares at his glowing hands. They stop glowing.]

BENJ: Only one person ever called me Benboy. How do you know the nickname my father called me?

[GUARD/POLICEMAN enters from stage left and ties BENJ's hands together.]

BENJ: *[to the guard]* (agitated) Who is the prisoner in the cell next to me?

GUARD/POLICEMAN: There is no prisoner in the other cell.

BENJ: That can't be.

[GUARD/POLICEMAN pushes BENJ off-stage]

BENJ: Father! Father! HELP ME! I don't want to die! FATHER!

[END SCENE]