

Acting Edition

That Which Isn't

by Matthew Freeman

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|| SAMUEL FRENCH ||

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THAT WHICH ISN'T was originally produced at the Brick Theater in Brooklyn, New York from August 11 to August 20, 2016. It was produced by Theater Accident (Matthew Freeman and Kyle Ancowitz) and directed by Kyle Ancowitz, with set design by Kerry Lee Chipman, lighting design by Nicholas Houfek, and costumes by Jonna McElrath. The stage manager was Jodi Witherell and the assistant director was Jordan Barsky. The cast was as follows:

HELEN.....Maira Stone
JAMES / WAITER David DelGrosso
MARCUSMick O'Brien

CHARACTERS

HELEN – a woman in her early and then later thirties

JAMES – a man in his early thirties

MARCUS – a man in his early forties

WAITER – thirties

SETTING

An open field outside an East Coast city.

A restaurant in Los Angeles.

TIME

One day, and five years later.

For John Walsh.

ACT ONE

Scene One

(HELEN and JAMES sit under a tree.)

(The tree is alone in an open field.)

(Dusk.)

JAMES. This tree. What kind of tree would you say it is?

HELEN. Hard to say.

JAMES. It's not that hard to say. I just didn't know if you knew. You tend to know about stuff like this.

HELEN. I don't know. Fir. Pine. Something like that.

JAMES. Okay.

(Pause.)

I didn't mean to offend you.

HELEN. Why would it offend me?

JAMES. Not offend. Not offend.

HELEN. Why are we even talking about this?

JAMES. I don't know.

(Pause.)

It's dark.

HELEN. I like it.

JAMES. I do too.

HELEN. So that's one thing.

JAMES. It is.

HELEN. And we both like the tree.

JAMES. I didn't say I liked it. I just asked what kind it is.

HELEN. But you do like it.

JAMES. I guess I like it. I don't have opinions about things I can't change.

HELEN. Do you have a favorite color?

JAMES. I do.

HELEN. And you have a favorite movie?

JAMES. Yes.

HELEN. So what you just said doesn't make any sense.

JAMES. I guess not.

HELEN. So do you want to revise what you said? Maybe?

JAMES. Not really.

HELEN. Why not?

JAMES. No reason.

HELEN. And the tree?

JAMES. I like it.

(Pause.)

HELEN. Good. Me too.

(Pause.)

A sycamore.

JAMES. You don't know.

(Pause.)

I don't think I actually care what kind of tree it is. You just tend to know about these kinds of things.

HELEN. You don't have to make conversation.

JAMES. What else am I going to do?

HELEN. You just don't have to. That's all.

JAMES. What's the alternative?

HELEN. Silence.

JAMES. You'd prefer that?

HELEN. Maybe I would.

JAMES. Would you?

HELEN. No.

(Pause.)

Well, yes.

(Pause.)

I guess it depends on what we're talking about.

JAMES. Just allow me to...ease into things. For once.

HELEN. Do what you will.

JAMES. Thank you.

(Pause.)

I think it's a maple.

HELEN. Nobody asked you.

(Pause.)

And I'm sure you're wrong.

(Blackout.)

Scene Two

(HELEN is standing, looking up. JAMES sits.)

HELEN. When's the last time you climbed a tree?

JAMES. I don't know.

HELEN. I haven't done it in a long time. I guess that's what the city does. Makes trees something to look at, not play with.

JAMES. I like it in the city.

HELEN. I know.

JAMES. You don't like it?

HELEN. I just miss climbing trees. I was tiny, and I could get way high up, and the tree wouldn't even bend. I was that light.

JAMES. I just don't like the idea of falling and dying.

HELEN. Right.

JAMES. The tree can't take my weight.

HELEN. It might. If you'd give it a go.

JAMES. Why risk it?

HELEN. For fun?

JAMES. Is that fun? To climb a tree?

HELEN. It used to be.

(Pause.)

JAMES. It used to be.

(Pause.)

You wanted us to move. I know that.

HELEN. It doesn't matter.

JAMES. I like the apartment.

HELEN. Well, that's good. Because no one is making you leave it.

(Pause.)

I remember risk as something you're perfectly comfortable with. Or at least, I thought so. Or at least, it seemed so.

JAMES. Seemed so? Seems so.

HELEN. Seemed. I think is the way I'd put it.

JAMES. Back when? Before now? When I was young.

HELEN. I don't want to play this game. I don't want to talk about verb tenses with you. No, is the answer, to whatever you're getting at. I just wanted to talk about climbing trees.

(Pause.)

Do you want to talk about that?

(Pause.)

Where did you go?

JAMES. I'm here.

HELEN. I know. But where did you go?

(Blackout.)

Scene Three

(**JAMES** and **HELEN** lying on the ground.
Darker.)

HELEN. The whole place was wall-to-wall cups. Little tea cups and coffee mugs and those tall sort of not-really wine glasses, if you know what I mean. I think she thought of it as a collection, but it wasn't a collection. It wasn't really a collection of anything. It was organized in no way I could imagine. Well, I guess it could be that anything she'd recently bought was closest to the entrance. There were a few I recognized from when fast food restaurants used to give away actual glasses, made of glass, with happy meals. For promotions. We had all these cups from movies. Family movies.

(Pause.)

I asked her what she intended to do with all these mugs and cups and she said she'd sell them, she thought, or give them away. She liked them. She said she has a friend with lots of shoes, like this, but she never really liked shoes.

(Pause.)

I told her that she was going to have to make decisions about these things, now. Even write it all down, if she wanted. She knew that we were going to try to sell that house, make her go somewhere they could take care of her, but she didn't like to talk about it. So that was hard.

(Pause.)

She couldn't argue against it, but she was scared of it, and didn't want to live that way. I get it. I wish we didn't have to make her live that way. But she can't stay with me. My brother? He doesn't even know what's going on.

(Pause.)

She said she wanted me to have them, so I could sell them. But I can't sell them, they're junk. I could put them out for a yard sale, but she might see. I don't know. I wish she hadn't told me to take them. I don't want them.

(Pause.)

Isn't that sad?

JAMES. It is.

HELEN. Are you listening?

JAMES. I am.

HELEN. Does it make you sad?

JAMES. It doesn't make me sad. But it is sad.

(Blackout.)

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