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FILIATION

A Play in One Act

by

Jerome McDonough

A 'Stage Magic' Play

Dramatic Publishing Company

Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

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FILIATION

Dramatis Personae

Martin Benmal — age 33, works in a government plant
Susan Benmal — age 30, his wife
Tracy Benmal — Their sons, 9 and 10. One year apart
Joel Benmal in age but duplicates in temperament.
Policeman's Voice — he may be seen, if desired.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1 — Wednesday evening
Scene 2 — Friday evening
Scene 3 — Later that night

No Time or Place is indicated. The action is not, unfortunately, of a single time or place. It is a memory — or a prophecy.

★

This 'Stage Magic' Acting Script, along with Director's Production Script designed to accompany it, is based on a production of "Filiation" directed by Neil Hess at Tascosa High School, Amarillo, Texas, on May 17, 1973, with the following cast:

SUSAN Carolyn Halford
MARTIN Mike Rinehart
JOEL Mike McKenzie
TRACY David Barwin

NOTES ON THE PLAY

Martin and Susan Benmal are a young husband and wife who love each other; but perhaps more than anything, they love their sons, Tracy and Joel. Martin works in a government factory in a police state . . . where or when we are not told. He works devotedly for his country, making every effort to follow the rules and do his duty.

What happens when this patriotic sense of obligation to one's nation comes into conflict with one's love for his children? What decision does a man make when either choice is certain to be a tragic one?

Jerome McDonough carries his audience through a tense half hour of suspense in "Filiation" as the Benmal family approaches, faces, and is forced to choose between country and family.

The action of "Filiation" is not, unfortunately, of a single time or a single place. It is a memory — or, even worse, a prophecy.

CHARACTERS

MARTIN BENMAL

Martin is, first, a family man. His employment at a state-owned factory provides a comfortable living for his boys, his wife, and himself. Nothing distinguishes Martin from his neighbors except, perhaps, his earnest devotion to his country and his continuing efforts to do what is expected of him.

SUSAN BENMAL

Susan is wife and mother. She, like Martin, is a good citizen but her patriotism takes second place to her devotion to her family. Her world is the home, wherever it may be.

TRACY AND JOEL BENMAL

The boys are sons. Active, curious, happy and education-resistant describe Tracy and Joel. They sense the fierce love their parents have for them and they reciprocate to the degree that nine and ten-year-olds are willing to do so.

POLICEMAN'S VOICE

A male voice. He may appear onstage or merely be heard.

'STAGE MAGIC' PRODUCTION SCRIPTS

Stage directions in this playscript have been kept to a minimum for a specific reason: Many directors want their actors and actresses to create their own characterizations without help from the play publisher. An imaginative cast member often introduces exciting bits of business and line readings if he is made to do his own thinking. But if printed stage directions do his thinking for him, his own creativity is nearly always stifled.

Some directors, on the other hand, are so deluged with details of publicity, ticket sales, and house management that they can never find time to devote full attention to staging, blocking, and characterization. For these harried directors, '*Stage Magic*' provides a director's Production Script loaded with full stage directions which show every action of every actor in detail.

The Production Script describes the blocking of each scene. It contains drawings and information on costumes, scenery, props, lighting, make-up, and other technical aspects of the play.

To save the director even more time, the Production Script gives details on the background and significance of the play and discusses the characterization of each role.

With the help of the '*Stage Magic*' Production Script the inexperienced director can present a praiseworthy production.

But '*Stage Magic*' Production Scripts are a dream-come-true for the experienced director, too. Experienced directors know how many hours of research must be spent to stage a worthwhile play successfully. Although the experienced director may decide to ignore many of the stage directions and other suggestions, he will find that the '*Stage Magic*' Production Script saves hours of his valuable time by supplying authenticated details which are the fruits of extensive research into the history of the play, the period in which it is laid, and the circumstances or environment under which it was written.

Each '*Stage Magic*' Production Script is the work of the director who successfully staged the play. It is an invaluable tool.

'*Stage Magic*' Production Scripts may be obtained from

'STAGE MAGIC' PLAYS

P. O. Box 246
Schulenburg, Texas 78956

F I L I A T I O N

Scene 1

[The curtain opens on the living-dining room of the Benmal home. The setting must have a timeless, placeless quality so that the action of the play cannot be said to have taken place here or there, or in this time or that time. The living-area furniture consists of a chair and a small couch. The dining furniture includes four nondescript chairs and a round table. There is an entrance from the outside of the house, and an exit into the kitchen. Near the outside entrance is a window. The play begins with the lights up in the living area. SUSAN is straightening the room.]

MARTIN. *[Entering from work, removing a coat and putting it on the shelf.]* Hello.

SUSAN. Hello, darling. *[Kiss.]*

MARTIN. *[Looking around.]* Where are the boys?

SUSAN. Playing in the back yard with Sarah.

MARTIN. They ought to play with other boys, not girls.

SUSAN. Sarah's more boy than girl. They play ball and tag.

MARTIN. Somehow, I don't like that little girl. Her family is so strange.

SUSAN. *[Not wishing to condemn.]* We've hardly spoken to them.

MARTIN. I still wish the boys had another playmate.

SUSAN. Children are children. The closest boys are in the next block.

MARTIN. I guess it's best. The streets aren't safe. *[The BOYS burst in and chase each other breathlessly into the living room. JOEL carries a ball.]*

MARTIN. *[Lovingly.]* Slow down, athletes.

[Greetings exchanged between FATHER and SONS — ad lib, as boys remove coats and put them on the shelf. JOEL throws ball on chair. SUSAN exits to the kitchen.]

MARTIN. How are my boys?

JOEL. }
 TRACY. } [*Ad lib.*] Fine.

MARTIN. Hungry?

TRACY. [*Affirmative.*] Umm Umm!

MARTIN. [*Glancing toward kitchen.*] What's for dinner? Smells good.

[*The BOYS giggle to themselves.*]

JOEL. We can't tell.

TRACY. It's a surprise. [*They giggle more.*]

MARTIN. [*Shouting to kitchen.*] Better hurry that surprise dinner. I can't get a word out of your conspirators.

JOEL. What does that mean?

MARTIN. What?

JOEL. Cons . . .

MARTIN. Conspirators?

JOEL. Yes.

MARTIN. Let's see. [*Picking up ball.*] Say you and Tracy wanted all the toys in the world. You could buy some, but you'd have to steal many of them. Your plot would be a conspiracy. You would be conspirators.

TRACY. That's wrong. Were we wrong?

MARTIN. [*Putting his arms around each boy.*] I guess mother-and-son plots aren't too bad. Real conspiracies, though, are serious.

[*Lights up in dining area. The table is set. SUSAN brings in the serving dishes.*]

SUSAN. Dinner, men.

MARTIN. Enough conspiracies. Get washed now.

[*The boys rush out. MARTIN crosses to the dining area. Susan is putting large spoons and serving pieces in place and fussing with the table arrangement.*]

MARTIN. Roast with mushrooms! [*He crosses and hugs her. She pushes him away, affectionately.*]

SUSAN. Stop that.

MARTIN. [*Rolling up sleeves; as he exits into kitchen.*] I couldn't

pry any dinner secrets from the boys. [*From offstage.*] They wanted to know about conspirators.

SUSAN. [*Mildly concerned.*] Should they know that word?

MARTIN. Why not?

SUSAN. What if they let it slip while the inspectors are at the school?

MARTIN. Sweetheart, we'll have no more trouble with inspectors. [*Re-entering, drying hands.*] They found out for themselves I hadn't contacted Uncle Kirk in fifteen years.

SUSAN. But they don't stop . . .

[*The boys burst in, running to the table.*]

MARTIN. See here! No running in the house, please.

TRACY. Sorry.

JOEL. Me, too.

MARTIN. All right.

[*They begin to eat. Table conversation.*]

MARTIN. How was school today, boys? [*The BOYS look to their mother.*]

SUSAN. [*Uneasily, protectively.*] They were sick this morning. I kept them home.

MARTIN. [*Sternly to boys.*] A remarkable recovery. Did you lie to your mother, Joel? Tracy?

JOEL. No, sir!

TRACY. No, sir!

SUSAN. They were better after lunch, so I let them play outside.

JOEL. [*Anxious to change the subject.*] With Sarah.

MARTIN. Was she sick, too?

TRACY. [*Sheepishly.*] I guess so.

MARTIN. [*Regaining some of his humor.*] Playing's more fun when you should be in school, isn't it?

JOEL. [*With a grin.*] Yes.

MARTIN. I used to think so, too, as I recall. [*A bit more stern.*] You do plan to go back tomorrow, though?

JOEL. Yes, sir.

SUSAN. I'm nearly glad they stayed here.

MARTIN. Why?

SUSAN. The inspectors visit the school on Wednesday. The boys have talked with them enough.

MARTIN. [*Giving her a stern glance.*] They won't hurt the boys.

SUSAN. They twist things.

MARTIN. [*Changing the subject.*] Joel, those peas are as good as anything else on the plate. [*JOEL nods.*]

MARTIN. John Krebs finally got back from his vacation today.

SUSAN. *Finally* back?

MARTIN. He was due Monday. He had trouble with his car in the mountains where his parents live, and it took two days to get a mechanic. When you work for the government, they get curious if you're not where you're supposed to be. There was talk that he had defected.

SUSAN. Did he straighten it out?

MARTIN. It took a while, but he's all right. They went skiing and sledding. It was the children's first time. [*The BOYS become interested in this.*]

JOEL. Could we go to the mountains some day?

TRACY. [*Chanting in.*] Could we?

SUSAN. [*Almost as enthusiastic.*] Why not, Martin?

MARTIN. [*Thoughtful.*] Hmmm. My vacation's not far off. We'll plan on it. [*The BOYS shout and whoop.*]

MARTIN. [*Overcoming them.*] All right, all right! Let's finish dinner, first, huh? [*To Susan.*] More roast, if I might, dear? [*SUSAN passes the plate to him.*]

TRACY. Sarah's parents sure listen to funny things.

SUSAN. On the radio?

JOEL. Yes. We never listen to those programs.

MARTIN. Maybe they don't care for classical music.

JOEL. It isn't music. It's talk.

MARTIN. [*Concerned but concealing it.*] Some people don't like music at all.

SUSAN. [*Probing.*] What are the programs about?

JOEL. Other countries. Can we go there some time?

TRACY. Those places sound nice.

SUSAN. Martin, do you suppose they're listening to the . . . ?

MARTIN. [*Cutting her off; to the boys.*] How'd you like to have dessert by the radio, boys?

TRACY. } Yes, yes. [*A hubbub as the BOYS pick up their dessert*

JOEL. } cups and spoons and start toward the living room.]

[SUSAN looks questioningly at Martin but he raises his hand to her reassuringly.]

MARTIN. [*Mildly chiding the boys.*] You didn't thank your mother for supper? [*They come back, kiss her in little boy fashion, and move again toward the living room amidst Thank you's. She smiles.*]

MARTIN. [*After they go; hesitantly.*] Susan, you mustn't talk about the inspectors.

SUSAN. I'm sorry, but since that Uncle Kirk business . . .

MARTIN. That's over [*Broaching an unpleasant subject.*] I was thinking the same thing you were about the radio programs.

SUSAN. Maybe it wasn't an illegal broadcast. It could have been a State program.

MARTIN. Praising other countries? I wish we knew more about that family.

SUSAN. I don't even remember their last name.

MARTIN. Garrett, wasn't it? No, Garnett.

SUSAN. We only met once.

MARTIN. Even so, something felt wrong. Something. The State says that if we even have suspicions . . .

SUSAN. No. I don't want any more dealings with the inspectors.

MARTIN. Shhh! What if the boys should hear?

SUSAN. I can't help it. They treated you like a criminal until the proof was in.

MARTIN. Settle down, Susan. That's treason!

SUSAN. Not treason, Martin. It's fear.

MARTIN. We owe the State everything.

SUSAN. But . . .

MARTIN. [*Analyzing.*] Think about this. Sarah stayed home from school today.

SUSAN. She could have been sick. The boys were.

MARTIN. Perhaps, but today was inspectors' day. It fits. I'll notify the police.

SUSAN. We have no proof.

MARTIN. What if they're discovered later? How could we be next-door neighbors and suspect nothing? Susan, we must.

SUSAN. [*She is not convinced.*] It's wrong.

MARTIN. It's probably nothing. Just in case, though, don't let the boys play with Sarah any more.

SUSAN. She's the only playmate they have.

MARTIN. Think of our position. I'll call the police in the morning, from the plant. [*Trying to lighten the conversation.*] Let me help with the dishes. We can hear the concert hour if we hurry. [*They begin clearing the dishes, she disconsolately, he with much feigned enthusiasm as the lights fade.*]

End Scene 1

[*During a brief blackout all dishes are removed. MARTIN and BOYS take their coats and exit in the dark.*]

Scene II

[*The same. Two nights later. Lights up, living room area. SUSAN enters from the kitchen as the BOYS enter from outside, carrying books. They toss the books on the chairs as they greet her.*]

BOYS. Hi.

SUSAN. [*She is apprehensive, but tries to hide it.*] Hello. [*She touches each head. Noting books.*] You know where those go. [*They move the books to a shelf and start removing their coats.*]

SUSAN. Keep your coats on if you're going back out, O.K.?

JOEL. It's warm.

SUSAN. And getting colder. Coats on, you two. [*The BOYS readjust the coats and move toward the door to the outside. Susan speaks after them.*] And don't go next door. [*They exit. She crosses to the window and watches them. MARTIN can be heard outside greeting the boys. He enters.*]

MARTIN. Hello, darling. [*Kiss.*]

SUSAN. [*Taking his coat.*] How was your day? [*She places the coat on the shelf.*]

MARTIN. [*Dropping his light tone.*] Not good. The police took John Krebs this morning.

SUSAN. [*Concerned.*] John? Why?

MARTIN. They weren't convinced by his car-trouble-in-the-mountains story. He hadn't come back when I left the plant. Interrogation, I suppose.

SUSAN. His poor family.

MARTIN. Yes.

SUSAN. Has he ever acted, well, strangely?