Audition Pieces

**TINA**

TINA: John? How are you? (Pause.) The doctor says you’ll be OK in a few days. You gave us a nasty scare. (Pause.) Look, John...I know things have been difficult for you. For all of us. And this business with James...I know it’s hit you hard. And I know you feel helpless. You blame God, you blame the doctors...you even blame me! And I understand all that. You wanted a son, and you’re upset about how things have turned out. And you turn to drink because it makes you feel better, and you lash out because you’re angry. And tonight you almost died because of it. You almost left your children without a father. (Pause.) You have a son, John. He’s 8 years old and his name is James. And he’s a great little boy. You’d be so proud of him. Yes, he’s very ill. He can’t walk, and he can’t talk. He won’t do many of the things that other boys will do. But we can move him and we can be his voice. He’s amazing, John, he really is. He can do incredible things. He’s a fighter. And he’s happy. He’s always smiling. And he loves you. He loves you very, very much. Much more than you deserve.

(The DOCTOR enters.)

DOCTOR: Mrs. Cooper?

TINA: Come back, John. Your son needs you.

**TINA AND JOHN**

TINA: (Cont’d.) Oh, James! What have you done? Look at you, you’re a mess! Come, let me take that off you and put it in the wash straight away. (SHE removes his shirt and begins to stomp off.) Honestly, you kids really know how to pick the right time for everything!

(JOHN enters. He has been drinking.)

TINA: (Cont’d. Angrily.) Where have you been?

JOHN: Out.

TINA: That pipe is dripping again. I thought you said you fixed it. And Lynette needs some help with her math homework and I can’t do it because James needs a bath. Also, you need to spend more time with the kids because you’ve been out all day and James has missed you.

JOHN: Really? Did he ask for me?

TINA: (Looks closely at JOHN.) Have you been drinking? (There is a tense pause.) John? (Beat.) Is that where you’ve been? Down the pub again, while I’ve been here dealing with dripping pipes and dirty clothes? (Another pause.) John! Listen to me!

JOHN: Leave me alone!

TINA: No, I will not leave you alone! You cannot do this to us! Turning up late, stinking drunk, and then telling us to leave you alone! (A pause, then softer.) What’s wrong, John? What’s going on?

JOHN: I’m sorry. I can’t cope with this anymore.

TINA: This? What do you mean this? You mean him! (Pause.) That’s what you can’t cope with. Him! (Pause. JOHN avoids eye contact.) He’s your son, John! He’s your son!

JOHN: My son? Look at him! There’s my son! In his wheelchair. Smiling. Stains on his face and not a hope in hell. That’s my son!

TINA: John, you can’t do this. I...I know you’re angry. (JOHN scoffs.) No, I do! I understand, John. I might not be a man and believe in all this father-to-son football, family name nonsense, but I understand why you’re so angry. But you mustn’t take it out on James, or on us. And you mustn’t blame yourself either. No one’s to blame.

(JOHN looks accusingly at TINA.)

TINA: (Cont’d.) You’re blaming me? You think all of this is my fault?

JOHN: The doctor said, didn’t he? That it’s the maternal gene. All this – you gave it to him!

TINA: You think I did this on purpose? You think I somehow willed this to happen? To condemn my son to spend his life on a wheelchair? That I deliberately damaged my genes just to spite you? (Beat.) Of course, I didn’t! These things – they simply happen. It’s not my fault, it’s not your fault, it’s no one’s fault! These things happen!

JOHN: Yes. They happened to me.

TINA: They happened to us, John.

(JOHN and TINA hold each other’s gaze as he rises and leaves. Tina starts to cry and exits

**JOHN**

(HE exits. JAMES is looking and smiling at JOHN, who seems very uncomfortable with the situation. He paces around and fidgets. There is a long pause before he starts to speak.)

JOHN: How did you do it? (JAMES does not react to the question. A beat.) Because I know it was you. I don’t know how you did it but you did. That was you, James. I saw you. I heard you. You were right in front of me. (Pause.) You saved me. You took me into your arms and flew me to safety. Yes – you were flying, James. And you were talking. You knew I was in trouble and you came to me. One moment I was falling and then...you caught me! You caught me and carried me to the roadside for the ambulance. You...you saved my life.

(HE approaches JAMES tearfully. James still seems impervious to everything.)

JOHN: (Cont’d.) I’m sorry, son. I am so, so sorry. I promise I’ll never drink again. I’ve sought help, and I’m going to meetings, and I’m doing really well so far. But I know I will never drink again...because I have no reason to. I used to drink because I was angry, angry that you were ill and that you couldn’t do all these things. But I’ve realized you can do some amazing things that I never thought possible. I’ve realized that you are a special little boy, that you have given me a second chance and that I need to do everything in my power to deserve it. You have given me a chance to be a father again, James. You saved my life. And not just on the cliff. (A pause as he gazes lovingly at JAMES.) I love you, son. (HE starts to walk away.)

JAMES: I love you too, Dad.  
(Shocked, JOHN turns around to look at JAMES, who still smiles blankly.)

**JOHN AND MICHAEL**

MICHAEL: (Cont’d.) Here I lie, a defeated villain, powerless and unable to continue. I pray that you forgive me.

(JOHN enters, slightly drunk. He surveys the scene with disdain.)

MICHAEL: (Cont’d.) I hereby renounce all my powers and all my claims to the throne of Quartzeria, and vow to send myself in exile to a remote island where I can no longer do harm to the people you have sworn to protect, Angel-Man.

JOHN: (Sharply.) What are you doing?

MICHAEL: (Surprised to see him.) Sorry. We were just...playing.

JOHN: Is that what I pay you for?

MICHAEL: Well...

JOHN: No. I pay you to care for him. To massage him, to do his therapy, to push his wheelchair and to give him his medicines. Not to crawl about on the floor pretending to be Darth Vader.

MICHAEL: The Dark Overlord.  
JOHN: I don’t care. Just do your job. Or I’ll find someone else who will. (Starts to exit.)

MICHAEL: I was trying to stimulate his imagination.

(JOHN stops and turns to HIM.)

MICHAEL: (Cont’d.) Studies show that active role-play is good for all children, even those with Angelman. After all, their imagination is the biggest strength they have. I was trying to engage with his fantasies in order to encourage a response. All children love superheroes. Even those in wheelchairs.

JOHN: Spare me your psycho-babble bull crap. What he needs isn’t role-play. What he needs is a miracle. (HE starts to exit but stops again.) Oh, by the way: Angel-Man isn’t a superhero. It’s a disease. Believe me, there is nothing super nor heroic about it.

JAMES and MICHAEL AND NEIL

(MICHAEL is very matter-of-fact with James, very much unlike how the others have been treating him.)

MICHAEL: Hello? (There is no reply.) I’m Michael and, yeah, like your mom said, I’m going to be your caregiver. So, we’re going to have to become friends. And, yes, I’ll look after you. I’ll push you around, I’ll feed you, I’ll take you to places...but there will be times that I will be challenging you and stretching you and you’re going to hate me. But do you know what? I won’t care. Because I’m not the one sitting on a wheelchair.

(There is a tense pause. JAMES is responding more to him than to any other character. MICHAEL takes out a Kit-Kat, opens it, breaks it in half and offers some to James.)

MICHAEL: (Cont’d.) Hungry? Kit-Kat?

(JAMES’ eyes light up. He takes the chocolate and eats it.)

MICHAEL: (Cont’d.) I thought you’d like it. Your mom said you like chocolate. (There is a pause as JAMES eats.) So, what things are you interested in?

JAMES: (Suddenly.) Is this because I can’t walk?

MICHAEL: Is what because you can’t walk?

JAMES: That I have a caregiver.

MICHAEL: Yep.

JAMES: And because I can’t control my arms and my legs?

MICHAEL: That’s right.

JAMES: And because I can’t talk?

MICHAEL: Well, you’re talking to me now.

JAMES: Yeah, I don’t know how that’s happening. Because, you know, I can’t actually talk. And yet we’re...

MICHAEL: (A beat.) Maybe we’re communicating at a different level.

JAMES: Maybe. Like telepathy or something. Whatever it is, though, we –-

MICHAEL: -- understand each other.

JAMES: Yes. I guess it’s because you’re different than everyone else.

MICHAEL: How so?

JAMES: You talk to me, not at me, even though you know that I can’t actually respond. Everyone else speaks to me with that sympathetic, almost condescending tone of voice, as if they’re scared of upsetting me, as if I can’t understand them. But you...you’re different.

MICHAEL: And I gave you chocolate.

JAMES: That too. But, somehow, you get me. (Pause.) Bit corny, isn’t it?

MICHAEL: Yes. But that doesn’t mean it isn’t true. (Pause.) I asked you a question. (JAMES looks at him blankly.) What things are you interested in?

JAMES: (Immediately.) Superheroes.

MICHAEL: (Interested.) Oh, really?

JAMES: Yes. I like them all, but Superman’s my favorite.

MICHAEL: I see. (Another pause.)

JAMES: I’m a superhero, you know? In my mind. And that’s all that matters. Have you ever heard the phrase cogito ergo sum? (MICHAEL smiles.) It means “I think, therefore I am.” And I think I’m a superhero, therefore –

MICHAEL: --you are. Wow. Descartes and a Kit-Kat. Quite a first day! And what superpowers do you have?

JAMES: I can fly, of course. And run faster than any other superhero, even the Flash. And I have superhuman strength. And I can shoot lasers out of my eyes. And super- hearing. I can even turn invisible if I want to. I fight crime and save lives. I give back to the world what it has given to me.

MICHAEL: That’s very noble of you. And do you have a superhero name?

JAMES: Yes. I’m the Amazing Angel-Man. (NEIL enters. He’s watching, interested.)

MICHAEL: And who’s this?

JAMES: Who?

MICHAEL: Him.

JAMES: (Shocked.) You can see him?

MICHAEL: Of course. He’s standing right there.

JAMES: But...no one else can see him!

MICHAEL: I can...

JAMES: (Uncertain.) Yeah. I don’t really know how you’re doing that.

MICHAEL: As you said, clearly I get you. Now, are you going carry on being rude or are you going to introduce me to your imaginary friend?

JAMES: Erm...he’s Neil.

MICHAEL: Neil? Seriously?

JAMES: He’s my sidekick. He’s known as The Thunder.

(NEIL coughs.)

JAMES: (Cont’d.) No, Neil, not again! What have you changed it to this time?

NEIL: (Sheepishly.) Dragon-Boy.

JAMES: Dragon-Boy?

MICHAEL: I think that’s a great name! (JAMES and NEIL glare at each other.) So, Angel-Man and Dragon-Boy. Looks like the three of us are going to have loads of fun!

**JAMES**

(JAMES pauses for a beat before addressing the audience.)

JAMES: OK. You’re probably wondering what is going on, right? Well, all this that just happened, that was all in my imagination. Because I can’t fly, obviously. In fact, I can’t even walk, hence (Gestures to his wheelchair.). As it happens, I can’t talk either, which probably comes as a bit of a surprise to you because I’m talking to you right now. But this is just a narrative device so that I can clear a few things up for you. And I’m going to be doing this every now and then, so the sooner you get your heads around it, the better it is for all of us.

My name is James. I am confined to this wheelchair, and my imagination is pretty much the only thing I’ve got. Luckily, though, it’s a pretty powerful one. Like all kids, I dream of being a superhero, one who can fly and run fast and use his superpowers to do good things...like save people from falling from tall buildings.

I call myself Angel-Man, but, of course, that’s all in my head. I’m not actually Angel-Man. In fact, Angelman is not something that you can be but something that you...you know what? It’s a bit early to give everything away just yet.