

Sunrise

By

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OPEN ON the moon, gleaming like a silver coin in the sky.

PAN DOWN to BENJAMIN (10), a skinny Egyptian youth perched in a window, the moon reflected in his bright, curious eyes and a mouth that always looks moments away from a smile.

Behind Benjamin is a room in the Cairo slums in the year 1800, filled with the huddled forms of sleeping children.

Benjamin hears someone coming and pretends to be asleep. BENJAMIN'S UNCLE (40), a gaunt man with oily hair and complexion like candlewax, leads TIA (7), a young girl with black hair and a small, serious face, to an empty corner of the room. Benjamin watches them with one eye cracked open.

UNCLE

This is where you'll sleep.
Everyone earns their keep here.
Your mother says you can sing?

TIA

Yes, sir.

UNCLE

And if no one gives you money... Do you know how to take it? (*Tia nods*)
Good. You can stay as long as you bring in coin. Understand?

TIA

I do, sir.

UNCLE

Then we should get along.

As he walks away, Tia realizes how cold it is.

TIA

Sir, could I have a blanket?

He's already gone. Tia sinks into her corner, shivering and afraid but trying to put a brave face on it.

Benjamin uncurls himself and steals over to Tia. She shrinks away as he crouches down in front of her.

BENJAMIN

You'll get used to my uncle, he's not so bad. I'm Benjamin. What's your name?

TIA

Tia.

BENJAMIN

Tia. Can I tell you a secret, Tia?
A secret I've never told anyone?

Tia hesitates, then nods.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I've met Ra.

TIA

The sun god?

BENJAMIN

The sun god.

Tia seems to believe him, then skepticism sets in.

TIA

You haven't met Ra.

BENJAMIN

You're right.

He leans in with a grin and lowers his voice.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I *stole* from Ra. He walks the streets at night with the sun in a pouch. I saw it shining on his belt once and took a piece. Just a little piece. He didn't even know I was there.

TIA

You're lying.

BENJAMIN

Am I?

Benjamin conjures tongues of flame that curl around his fingers like ribbons. Tia's face lights up with wonder.

TIA

How are you doing that? What is it?

BENJAMIN

It's the sun, Tia. It's my little piece of the sun. And it's shining for you.

TIA

But won't Ra come after you?

Unnoticed, Benjamin's uncle watches in the doorway, transfixed. Benjamin's secret is discovered.

BENJAMIN

That old bird can chase me all he wants, Tia. He'll never catch up.

EXT: GARDEN - NIGHT

1810. A garden in Suez. Benjamin plays with a small flame in his hand as he watches an older Tia and her husband through the windows of the house above. Tia carries a lantern.

Benjamin's eyes are red now, the boyish curves of his face sharpened. He is 15, but looks older somehow. Transformed.

AMUN (V.O.)

You're different now, Benjamin.

Benjamin closes his eyes and FLASHBACK TO INT: CAVE - NIGHT

A desert cave. A newly-transformed Benjamin (15) sits in a daze after his first feeding as AMUN, a vulture-like older man in a flowing red robe, cleans blood off Benjamin's face and hands. A mangled corpse lies on the ground behind them.

AMUN(CONT'D)

You belong with us now. Your human life has no place here. And neither does she.

CUT BACK to the Suez garden. Benjamin winces at the memory.

A man steps out of the house. Benjamin douses his flames. For a moment, the light from the house illuminates Tia, now 17, standing in the doorway. She is radiant, with long midnight hair, a calm, intelligent face and faraway eyes.

The man kisses her hand and leaves. Benjamin breaks into a brilliant smile.

BENJAMIN

Tia.

EXT: CAIRO MARKETPLACE - DAY

FLASHBACK to five years earlier, 1805. Benjamin stands on the edge of a fountain in a crowded marketplace. He's 15 years old, but this is before his transformation. His eyes are dark brown and his face is still young and boyish.

He spots Tia (12) in the crowd, wearing a hood to hide her face, and gives her a wink. She rolls her eyes.

Benjamin's uncle struts in front of the fountain.

UNCLE

Gather round! Gather round and see
the miracle boy with fire in his
hands! My nephew, the boy who stole
sunlight from Ra himself!

The crowd is unimpressed. Then Benjamin begins dancing along the edge of the fountain, fire streaming from his hands and spiraling into the air. The crowd is awestruck.

As he performs, Tia sneaks through the crowd, grabbing purses from the watchers and stowing them in a sack. Eventually, Tia gets too ambitious and goes for a larger purse. The man feels her take it and turns on her.

MAN

(outraged)

Thief! They're thieves!

Benjamin's uncle flees without a second thought.

Benjamin sends a burst of fire in the air and dives into the rioting crowd. After a few moments of chaos, he finds Tia's hand and grabs it, pulling her free of the marketplace. They run and laugh as coins spill from Tia's overflowing sack to glitter on the dusty street behind them.

From a shadowy corner of the marketplace, the hooded figure of Amun watches them run.

EXT: GARDEN - NIGHT

CUT BACK TO Suez in 1810. Benjamin hears laughter and the jingling of coins in his head as Tia goes back inside.

Benjamin watches Tia's lantern travel through the house. Then she stops, silhouetted in a window, facing the garden. Benjamin freezes. It's almost as if Tia senses him outside.

For a long moment, the night holds its breath.

Finally Benjamin reaches out and conjures fire in his hand. The lantern in the window drops with a clatter and goes out.

Moments later, Tia bursts from the house and throws herself into Benjamin's arms. They embrace like two halves of the same whole, reunited after an eternity apart.

EXT: CAIRO BACK ALLEY - DAY

FLASHBACK to 1805, moments after young Benjamin and Tia fled the marketplace. Benjamin and Tia huddle on the rooftop of a slum house, counting the coins Tia stole and giggling. The sun is setting behind the rolling hills of the desert.

BENJAMIN

Were you even trying to be sneaky?

Tia shoves him playfully.

TIA

Oh, stop. If you were more impressive no one would have noticed!

BENJAMIN

(grinning)

I'm always impressive! (*imitating his uncle*) I'm a miracle.

TIA

A miracle that almost fell into the fountain today. Don't think no one saw.

BENJAMIN

I have no idea what you're talking about.

He suddenly remembers his uncle and frowns.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

I hope uncle got away.

TIA

Don't worry about him. I'm sure he didn't worry about us.

Benjamin laughs and lets the coins flow through his fingers.

BENJAMIN

(mischevious)

Well, maybe we should keep all of this to ourselves, then.

As Tia watches the coins fall, her smile fades.

TIA

We could.

BENJAMIN

(half-listening)

Hm?

TIA
 We could just tell him that we were
 caught and lost the money.

BENJAMIN
 (startled)
 What? Why?

Tia takes Benjamin's hands and presses them lightly onto the
 pile of coins. Benjamin studies her face curiously.

TIA
 I don't like how he uses you,
 Benjamin. I don't like how he uses
 either of us.

BENJAMIN
 Uncle's taken care of us...

TIA
 Because we're useful to him. But
 I...I made a mistake today. You've
 seen what he's done to children who
 don't make money. Any day he could
 decide that selling me is easier
 than keeping me.

BENJAMIN
 He wouldn't separate us.

TIA
 Are you sure? Are you willing to
 take that chance?

Benjamin hesitates, conflicted. Then he looks at Tia's
 imploring face and his mind is made up. He can't lose Tia.
 He leans forward and presses his forehead to hers.

BENJAMIN
 No.

TIA
 Then I need you to promise me
 something.

EXT: SUEZ STREET - NIGHT

CUT BACK TO Suez, 1810. In the early hours of the morning,
 Benjamin and Tia walk through the shadowy streets of Suez,
 continuing a conversation that began in the garden near
 Tia's house. Benjamin keeps a respectful distance.

TIA

After you disappeared and Uncle died, I took our money back to my mother. But it wasn't enough. She had to marry me off for a dowry.

BENJAMIN

Are you safe with him? Are you happy?

TIA

Of course I'm not happy! Benjamin, you vanished! For five years! I thought...it's so stupid.

BENJAMIN

What?

Tia tears up, looking angry and embarrassed.

TIA

I thought Ra caught up with you.

BENJAMIN

(smiles softly)

No. Not Ra.

Tia gently touches Benjamin's face.

TIA

Then what? What happened to you, Benjamin?

Benjamin stops. He gently takes her hand in his, then takes a step back, letting their hands fall apart.

BENJAMIN

(pained)

Someone took me because of my gift. Changed me into something else. To make me stronger.

FLASHBACK TO EXT: CAIRO STREET - NIGHT

1805, the night after the performance in the marketplace went wrong. Benjamin's uncle hauls him by the arm through a darkened street in the slums.

UNCLE

(hissing)

Where's the money, Benjamin?

BENJAMIN

(struggling)

I don't know what you're talking about!

UNCLE

Do you think I'm a fool? I know you're covering for your little friend, Tia. She's always putting ideas in your head. (*shakes Benjamin*) I could have ended up in chains today because of her!

BENJAMIN

You're wrong, Uncle. Please stop, you're hurting me!

Benjamin's uncle stops and pins Benjamin against a wall.

UNCLE

Tell me where you hid the money!

AMUN (O.S.)

Pardon me.

Amun emerges from an alley, a slim figure in a hooded robe radiating silent menace. Benjamin's uncle shoves Benjamin and storms toward Amun, jamming his finger at Amun's chest.

UNCLE

Can't you see we're busy?

AMUN

Of course. I just wanted to say...

Amun grabs Benjamin's uncle and hurls him across the street. Benjamin's uncle crashes into the wall and drops, unmoving.

AMUN (CONT'D)

...loved the show.

He turns toward Benjamin, who backs away, horrified.

BENJAMIN

What have you done?

AMUN

You'll understand soon.

He steps toward Benjamin. Benjamin's hands ignite and he lashes out at Amun. Amun catches his wrist in an iron grip. Benjamin struggles to break free as Amun looks at the flames in his hand with red, hungry eyes.

AMUN

It's not a trick. *(smiles)* You're going to change everything.

BENJAMIN

You have to let me go. Please. I made a promise. *(shouts)* Tia! Tia!

Amun lunges at Benjamin with his teeth bared. Blackout.

CUT BACK TO EXT: SUEZ STREET - NIGHT

1810. Benjamin tries to explain what happened that night but his voice catches. He looks down, shakes his head. Tia cups his face in her hands and makes him meet her gaze.

TIA (CONT'D)

You can tell me. I want to understand.

Benjamin sinks against a wall, pained and uncertain.

BENJAMIN

This man, Amun, took me away. Hid me. He said there were others like him who'd use me for my powers, as a weapon. He's been trying to protect me from them.

TIA

Protect you how? What did Amun do to you?

The sun begins to rise, streaking the street with amber.

BENJAMIN

I'm...not *human* anymore, Tia. I can't go out in the sun, and I...for so long I thought I was going mad. I had to stay away to make sure I wouldn't hurt you.

TIA

You'd never hurt me.

Benjamin tries to smile and fails. The look on his face breaks Tia's heart. She reaches out to him again.

BENJAMIN

(sharply)
I drink blood, Tia.

TIA
 (shrinks back)
Blood?

Benjamin's face crumbles. He pushes away from the wall and starts to stumble backward, away from Tia.

BENJAMIN
 (stammering)
 I'm sorry. Amun was right. He tried to stop me from coming and I should have let him. I just wanted... but this was a mistake. I'll go. I'm sorry.

Benjamin is so distressed as he backs away that he doesn't notice the ray of sunlight behind him.

TIA
 Benjamin, stop! Please! The sunlight, you said--

Tia catches his arm before he can step into the light, but his other hand catches the sun and his skin glimmers like crushed diamonds.

Slowly, wonderingly, Tia takes his glistening hand in hers.

TIA
 A creature of night and still you shine like the sun.

Benjamin meets her gaze, devastatingly vulnerable. Tia makes her decision.

TIA (CONT'D)
 I want to know everything, Benjamin. And then I want to come with you.

BENJAMIN
 But it's dangerous. I have to go back to Amun, stay hidden. I don't know what he'll do if I bring you back. You're still human.

TIA
 I don't have to be. Make me like you. You can do that, can't you?

BENJAMIN
 Yes, but... Tia, you have a husband. A life.

TIA

I didn't choose my husband and my life. I chose the boy who told me stories to chase off the dark. I chose you.

Benjamin is still unsure. Tia moves closer.

TIA (CONT'D)

You promised me that if we got the chance, we'd run away together. You've never broken a promise to me. Are you going to start now?

Benjamin's smile can only stay away for so long. It spreads across his face again and he laces his fingers with hers.

BENJAMIN

You always make things so simple.

TIA

(smiles back)

I don't know how you survived without me.

BENJAMIN

Neither do I.

His smile turns shy.

BENJAMIN (CONT'D)

Can you promise me something?

Tia turns so she's standing in the sun and Benjamin is in darkness except for his glimmering fingers, laced with hers.

TIA

Anything.

FLASHBACK TO: Young Benjamin and Tia sitting on the edge of the roof in Cairo, looking out over the desert as the sun sets, their hands intertwined over a pile of gold.

BENJAMIN (V.O.)

Promise I'll never have to survive without you again.

TIA (V.O.)

I made that promise years ago. I just didn't tell you.

THE CAMERA SWEEPS past them and out into the desert as the sunset becomes a sunrise. Benjamin and Tia leave Suez and walk toward the horizon, hand in hand.