

Fatherhood

A Ten Minute Play

By Ian Herring

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## FATHERHOOD

Characters

NATHAN     Male, early-20s. White. An addict.

DON           Male, mid-50s. White. His father.

Setting

Nathan's apartment: a dinner table, two chairs.

At rise. NATHAN and DON sit across from one another at the dinner table. They each have a glass of water in front of them. NATHAN's is half empty and DON's is untouched. A contract and pen lie adjacent to DON's glass. Trash is littered around the room

NATHAN

Good to know.

DON

That's not an attack on you. It's just the situation you were in. You were hurting. And that's how you decided to cope. I understand, son. I do.

NATHAN scoffs.

NATHAN

Obviously not. You think I used it as an excuse. That this is something I always wanted to do.

DON

No. That's not it. It's like... It's like, after her death, when you were hurting, you wanted to feel better and so you chose to go down this path.

NATHAN

Chose? You think this is a choice?

DON

At first it was. No one made you take those pills.

(pause)

And taking them doesn't make you bad. It makes you human.

NATHAN

Dad, just go. I'm sorry but I'm not in the mood to have this conversation again.

DON

I'm sorry, too.

DON slides the pen and the contract across the table to Nathan.

I'm not leaving until you sign these.

NATHAN

I'm not signing a thing. Now get out. Please.

DON

How many times have we had this conversation? How many times have you seen me cry over your addiction? How many times have I gotten calls from the police about—

NATHAN

How many times did you hug me after she died?

DON

Don't. Don't do that.

NATHAN

How many times, Dad? How many times? Not goddamn once.

DON

Nathan, I was in pain, too.

NATHAN

My mother died. And my father never gave me a fucking hug.

DON

I'm sorry... I'm so sorry, Nathan. I lost the love of my life. I didn't know what to do.

NATHAN

How about just being a father to your son?

DON

That's what I'm trying to do. Now, please just sign the paper.

NATHAN

I survived without you then. I'll survive without you now.

DON

You didn't. You won't. Not without help. You died two days ago. You flatlined in that hospital. The doctors brought you back by a miracle. You won't be so lucky next time.

NATHAN

I've been doing better.

DON

As soon as I heard what happened, I got on a flight.

NATHAN

I didn't ask for you to come.

DON

You didn't have to. I regret not being there for you emotionally after your mom died. I never thought about how you were doing. And that kills me every single day. I want to be the father that I should've been then. And I'll be damned if I let my son die too.

NATHAN

You're not "letting" me do anything. I don't want your help. I refuse. So, you're off the hook. You can go.

DON

I'm not looking for a way out. You've been struggling for so long, Nathan. I'm going to help you. I found this place. It's in California.

NATHAN

You've already sent me to rehab. Three times. None of them worked. This one won't either. I'm better off on my own.

DON

Those were all local places on a very low scale. And they only lasted a month each. This place is ranked first, nationally, for patients that get clean and stay clean.

NATHAN

I don't care. I've got a good thing going right now. I'm not going to just leave.

NATHAN takes a sip of water.

DON

A good thing going? Flipping burgers at a diner? You flunked out of college after three semesters. You have so much untapped potential. You wanted to make movies, like your mother. I've never seen anyone so good with a camera other than yourself. Get clean and go back to school. Your mom would be so proud of you.

NATHAN

You don't know that. And just because I'm not a lawyer like you doesn't mean that my life is as shitty as you think.

DON

Take a second and look around. Look at the quality of your life. Look at how you're living. This place was spotless when you first moved in. And now it's a complete wreck. When was the last time you cleaned?

NATHAN

I don't have time to clean. It's not even that bad.

DON holds up his glass.

DON

This cup hasn't been washed in weeks.

NATHAN

What's your point? What does this have anything to do with?

DON

You look like you haven't slept in days. You are a mess and you're living in a pigsty.

NATHAN

I'm living the way I want to. And I'm enjoying it. I don't want to change my life. I appreciate what you're doing, but it's time for you to leave. I have a friend coming by soon. We have plans.

DON

What plans?

NATHAN

We're just gonna watch some movies and... just hang out. It doesn't matter. I don't want you here when he arrives.

DON

It'll be fine. That can wait. Look. This place in California. Like I said, it's the best rehabilitation site in the country. They have a lot of different things to do. Rope courses, hiking, a garden, and they even have a pool. The food is even supposed to be amazing.

NATHAN

A pool? That changes everything then.

DON

Nathan. Be serious.

NATHAN

How can I? You're asking me to change my entire life. Just to do a complete 180. Do you know how ridiculous that is? How what you're trying to do goes against everything that I want?

DON

What is it that you want? To just get high every day and waste away?

NATHAN

I want to be my own person. To live my own life. To not have anyone telling me what to do. I want to be free. Free from you.

DON

I'm sorry. But that will never happen. I'm your father. It's my job to look after you.

NATHAN

No. Your job is putting people behind bars. You always chose your work over your family. You were never around. Even before mom died.

DON

I chose my work for my family. I worked so much so that I could provide for you and your mother. To give you the life that I never had when I was young. For so many years I didn't know where my next meal was coming from. I wanted to save you from that.

NATHAN

And now mom's dead. And all that time you spent at your firm has been wasted. Time you could've been spending with us.

DON

I know. Trust me, I know. I want you to go to rehab so that we can have more time. So that I can make up for all those days I wasted at work.

NATHAN

So you're doing this for yourself then? Just to put your conscious at rest?

DON

No. No, absolutely not. I'm doing this for you. I want you to have a better life. Do I feel guilty? Of course. But I promise you that I'm not here out of selfishness.

NATHAN

Signing a paper isn't going to magically fix my life.

DON

You're right. But it is the first step towards saving it.

NATHAN

I decide how I live my life. No one else.

DON

No one is trying to take that away from you.

NATHAN

Like I said... I'll be fine on my own.

(pause)

DON

What would your mother think?

NATHAN

What?

DON

How would Amanda, your mother, feel if she saw you living like this?

NATHAN

What is wrong with you?

DON

I know it's hard. But think, Nathan. What would your mom say to you? How much would her heart hurt seeing you like this?

NATHAN

How dare you? How dare you!

NATHAN stands and throws his glass against the wall.

She's dead! She doesn't feel *anything* anymore! You say that I used her death as an excuse to start taking pills! But now you're using her death to get your stupid point across! What gives you the right?! What gives you the right to use her death like that?! After you berate me for disrespecting her memory! How could you do that to me? How can you do that to her?

DON

Answer my question. How would she feel seeing her only child throwing his life away for Xanax and Oxycontin? Think about it!

NATHAN

Shut up! Shut up! Just stop talking! You don't get to pull that card! I can't believe you even tried.

DON

Four years. Four years, Nathan! You said it yourself. You won't last another four. Let alone two.

NATHAN

Don't talk to me. Get out. Go home! I want nothing to do with you.

DON

I'm not going anywhere until you sign the paper.

NATHAN

I'm not signing the fucking paper! You're wasting your time!

DON

And your time is running out! Can't you see that? You're killing yourself, Nathan! It's time to make a change! This place will save you.



NATHAN

How do you know? What if it doesn't? What if it's just like the others?

DON

Then we'll keep trying. We'll keep on moving forward.

NATHAN

How many places are you willing to send me?

DON

As many as it takes.

NATHAN

You'd go broke.

DON

I'll pick up more cases.

(pause)

NATHAN

Just give up on me.

DON

I can't. And even if I could. I wouldn't. I'm here for you. I wasn't back then, but I'm am now. Now and forever.

NATHAN shakes his head from side to side.

NATHAN

What would she think?

DON

What?

NATHAN

Mom. What would she think if she saw me now? Would she recognize me?

DON

You have changed. You're not the same as you were when she died. But it doesn't matter how long you let your hair grow or how much weight you lose. She'd always know that you're you.

NATHAN

She didn't see me graduate high school. She wasn't there when I moved to college. She doesn't know that I got hooked on pills. That I failed out. How could she recognize me?

DON

You're her son, Nathan. You're our son.

NATHAN

Would she still love me?

DON

Oh, my god. Yes. Yes, of course she would still love you.

DON moves to Nathan and embraces him. NATHAN hugs him back.

She'll always love you, Nate. No matter what.

NATHAN

You promise this will work?

DON

I do, Nate. Wholeheartedly.

NATHAN sits down and slides the contract in front of him. DON sits down too.

NATHAN

If I sign this, what will happen to my apartment?

DON

We'd have to sell it.

NATHAN

I don't want to lose everything.

DON

I'll get a storage unit for all of your stuff. I'll take care of everything. I'll take care of you.

NATHAN

How long is it?

DON

Six months.

NATHAN

Six months. Okay.

DON

Do it for your mother.

NATHAN signs the contract.

DON

She would be so proud of you, Nate.

NATHAN

Yeah.

DON

Nate, listen. This is going to be the most difficult six months of your life. Nothing about it will be easy. Every day you will suffer, but each day it will just get a little bit better. You just gotta make sure that you're there for every step of the way.

NATHAN

I know. I will be. I appreciate you... I'm getting tired. So, I think I'm gonna get some sleep.

DON pulls two tickets out of his pocket.

DON

Actually, we have a flight to catch. I love you, Nate. More than you will ever know. Always and forever.

NATHAN

I love you too, Dad. Thank you.

END OF PLAY