

HARD TIMES

by Shawn Deal

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ISBN: 978-1-64479-284-1

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A Dramatic Monologue

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SYNOPSIS: Confined to Oregon State Penitentiary, a father confronts his profound failures and the decade lost to adult-onset schizophrenia. Grappling with the memory of battling internal personalities and a terrifying encounter with his six-year-old daughter, Avery, he now seeks to explain his past and make amends. A poignant exploration of guilt, mental illness, and a desperate plea for connection.

TIME: Present.

SETTING: Oregon State Penitentiary.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(1 male)

NARRATOR (m) Adult male old enough to have a teenage daughter.

PRODUCTION NOTES: This can be done very simply: bare stage, no costuming and no props. However, the narrator is in prison, so the set can be a prison cell, and the narrator can be dressed as a prisoner. The prisoner can have an old style hand-held phone to talk into.

DEDICATION: For Azery.

NARRATOR: Avery, I would love to see you. I wish you would come by. We could talk, and I could try to explain. I know we are going through a hard time, together, you and I. So, I thought you could come by, and we could clear the air, so to speak.

It's completely my fault. Everything, absolutely everything, is completely my fault; however much it pains me to say that out loud. We are both where we are in life, right now, directly because of me.

That's a terrible thing to say, but absolutely true. Made much worse because I'm the parent. I'm your father. I shouldn't be the one at fault. You're the younger person. You would have thought if anyone would have to admit fault it would have been you.

Just logically, it would follow that you would have come to me, admitted the mistake you had made, and as your father, I would have been there to support you, guide you, to help you move forward. I would have been there to pass on my wisdom, to tell you everything was going to be alright, to be that shoulder to cry on, to help you in any way possible.

The thing is, you didn't do anything wrong.

Nothing whatsoever.

I did the wrong. Not just once, but repeatedly.

All the wrong was mine.

I say that now. Out loud for everyone to hear. I should scream it. It was all me! It was all my fault!

You didn't do anything wrong. Never think you did. We are where we are because of me.

Does all this surprise you? It surprises me, too. I should have told you all this long before now. I should have been willing to tell you. I should have been honest with both myself and you. I should have just said something. I should have been able to say something.

So why am I telling you know?

Time, mostly.

I have time to myself now, to think and to look back. I have time to get healthy and to do the things to keep healthy. Now I realize, and only now do I realize, what a horrible father I've been.

I do wish you would come by so we could talk in person. So I could apologize in person. So I could apologize once for everything, and a thousand times for every solitary little moment, when I should have chosen you. When I should have chosen the right thing, no matter how hard, instead of choosing the wrong thing, no matter how easy. A thousand times I chose wrong, and so I owe you a thousand apologies.

So why was my life so hard then? Why was I going through such a hard time?

I can't explain it all, frankly, because I don't understand it all. I was always just an average student. On a side note, I'm taking some more classes now and doing quite well.

I have adult-onset schizophrenia. I know you know this. I just have to be able to acknowledge it to myself, as often as I can. That's what the therapist says. On another sidenote, I'm going to therapy now. And I'm listening.

As you know, I haven't been able to do that since I was diagnosed. A part of those thousand apologies I owe you.

You must have been six years old or so, when I, your dad, started going crazy. Until just a couple of months ago, I still thought you were just six years old. I honestly didn't realize you were sixteen. I still don't quite understand how that happened, how I lost a decade of your life. But it's a reality. I've seen photos of you now. I see my eyes, my hair and oval face. It's you for sure, just suddenly grown up.

Time is a funny thing. For me, those ten years went by in the blink of an eye, and for you, they crawled by waiting for your dad to get better.

I don't know why this happened to me. Why was I the affected one? It's strange to hear other voices in your head. They talk so loud and so fiercely to me... and they are so believable.

Everything they say makes so much sense. I know that what comes out of my mouth during those times doesn't make any sense, but in my head, it's all so logical. And it's not just believing in the voices. I long to believe in them. And as they talk to me, I accept them. I start to become them or maybe they start to become me. They become me so much that they take over. Like any of those old science fiction films, where some alien entity takes over a human. I can't think of the titles of any of them, although those were my favorite kinds of films when I was a kid. My brain is kind of mush these days.

It's the right analogy, though. The personalities take over and they take over completely. I'm consumed from the inside. My body, the outer part, the part everyone else sees, is just a shell, like the body of a car. It's just that somebody else is driving. Not me.

According to the doctors I now see, there are seven different people talking to me, and whoever is talking the loudest seems to take over. They fight among themselves on who can take me over, or so it seems.

I just seem to be along for the ride, no control, and no care in the world. I have no memory at all when someone takes me over. It may happen for an hour, it may happen for a year. But no matter how long it happens, I don't remember any of it. And the only way I can get pulled out of these hard times is with medication.

My personalities seem to know that, and since they want to maintain control, they fight tooth and nail for me not to take the medication. They fight it hard. They don't want me to get better. They are mean to your dad like that.

I didn't intend to scare you the last time I saw you in person, back when you were indeed six years old. And no matter what your mother says, I wasn't there to kill you, and I didn't threaten to kill you either.

I'm not dumb, and I'm not trying to lie. Hopefully, my days of lying to you, your mother and myself, are long behind me. Well, behind me at any rate. I'm trying to change.

I know what I must have sounded like and looked like that day. I understand that I must have looked scary and dangerous. I do get that.

If it makes any difference to you, I was very sick then and had been hopping from one personality to another every few days and sometimes every few hours. It was taking a toll on me. I had been off my medicine for at least six months. I was going through a very hard time.

Not that any of that was your fault. Still all mine. All my fault. Not yours, whatsoever.

I know I sounded angry that last day I saw you, and I know now how much I must have scared you. Scared you so much that you screamed and cried and ran to your mother.

I no longer blame your mother for calling the police on me that day. I did for a long time, but I understand it now and don't hold it against your mother. She did it to protect you. And that's what she should always do. It's what makes your mom the great mother she is. I understand it now, didn't understand it then, but I do now, and had the situation been reversed, I would have done the same thing.

Anything to protect you, Avery.

I know you may not believe it. In fact, you have no real reason to believe it, but I was trying to protect you that day.

I know that's not how it looked, but for me, that's how it was.

I was there in the background, and one of my personalities was there driving the car. Both him and I were deeply paranoid, and we thought that an assassin of some kind was coming to kill you. The memories are pretty hazy and all jumbled up in the mash that is my brain these days. But we were there to protect you and kill the assassin.

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