

From One Good Thing
By Don Zolidis

TRAVIS' FATHER, 40ish
TRAVIS, 17, an awkward boy.

(TRAVIS' FATHER has abandoned the family and has returned to attend the funeral of TRAVIS' brother, NICK. TRAVIS has just been talking with his neighbor, JESSIE, a fourteen year-old with a crush on him. TRAVIS' FATHER has just finished a talk with his mother, where he has decided to leave once again.)

TRAVIS' FATHER

What's her name again?

TRAVIS

Um...
(realizes he doesn't know it.)
Jessie, I think.

TRAVIS' FATHER

Isn't she a little young for you to be hanging out with?

TRAVIS

Yes. Yes she is.

TRAVIS' FATHER

Oh.
(Pause.)

TRAVIS

How's Mom doing?

TRAVIS' FATHER

She's been better.
(short pause.)
You wanna sit down?
(TRAVIS looks around, seeing nowhere to sit except the curb.)

TRAVIS

Where?

TRAVIS' FATHER

Yeah. Yeah I guess. Uh...

TRAVIS

Are you coming home? For good?

TRAVIS' FATHER

Well that's one of the things your mother and I talked about.

TRAVIS

She misses you a lot.

TRAVIS' FATHER

I know.

TRAVIS

And I miss you.

(Pause.)

And it's really kinda mean what you've been doing.

TRAVIS' FATHER

When you're older—

TRAVIS

I understand now.

TRAVIS' FATHER

You can say that, but I don't think that you do.

TRAVIS

So are you coming home or not?

(Pause.)

You're not coming back?

TRAVIS' FATHER

To live here?

TRAVIS

Yeah that's what I'm asking!

TRAVIS' FATHER

No.

TRAVIS

Why not?

TRAVIS' FATHER

Travis, this doesn't really change things between us—

TRAVIS

What?

TRAVIS' FATHER

I mean it doesn't really alter the situation—

TRAVIS

Are you kidding me? It doesn't alter the situation?!

TRAVIS' FATHER

Between me and your mother, no.

TRAVIS

Did you see her in there?!

TRAVIS' FATHER

Yes I did and—

TRAVIS (*overlapping*)

She's dying in there! With you and Nick in the same month?!

TRAVIS' FATHER (*overlapping*)

That's unfortunate but—

TRAVIS

It's more than unfortunate! She needs you! Do you understand that? Do you know what she's been like since you've been gone? Do you care? She cries every night—you know that! There hasn't been a day I haven't come home and found her absolutely miserable wandering around the house like a ghost—she's destroyed—going through pictures, crying herself to sleep, shaking herself—and then on top of it, on top of it, just for kicks, Nick gets blown up in Iraq and you're just gonna let her drown here?!

TRAVIS' FATHER

I am not responsible for her—

TRAVIS

Yes you are!

TRAVIS' FATHER

I have to live my own life!

TRAVIS

That's the most selfish damn thing I've ever heard—

TRAVIS' FATHER

Look, I sacrificed for your mother—

TRAVIS

You did not! Oh come on—

TRAVIS' FATHER

You think this is the only time your mother has cried herself to sleep for a month! When her grandmother died, I was there—she was the same—when her Dad died, I was there, I stayed with her, I held her, I did all of that—I have been in this family—you are old enough now, you are old enough to be able to deal with this—

TRAVIS

That's what you were waiting for?

TRAVIS' FATHER

I do not love your mother. And I'm not going to stay trapped with her just because of a tragedy. You understand? I stuck it out in this marriage for a long time, and most of that had to do with you and your brother, and me being afraid to hurt her, but that's not a way to live. That's not a way to be happy. I wasn't happy—

TRAVIS

Yeah and she's happy—

TRAVIS' FATHER

She will survive. There are times in this life when you have to deal with pain, and we all have pain right now, but the response, Travis, isn't to curl up into a corner and hope that someone saves you. The response is to be strong and deal with it and live your life. And that's what I'm doing.

TRAVIS

What do you think Nick would say about that?

TRAVIS' FATHER

I think Nick would be stronger than you. I think he would understand.

TRAVIS

You're a coward. And you wreck his memory by this.

(Pause.)

TRAVIS' FATHER

Travis, I'm sorry that Nick died. I'm sorry this had to happen. I'm sorry that I had to leave. But I did not do this because of a whim, I did this because it was time, and I had to do it. And you're the one who needs to take care of your mother now, because you're all she's got. And she loved your brother very much, and I loved your brother very much, but we all deal with pain in different ways. And you need to help her. Because I can't.

TRAVIS

You won't.

TRAVIS' FATHER

I can't.

TRAVIS

You're running away from this. I don't care what you say, deep down you know you're just running away and hoping someone will clean up this mess. And by leaving you say that you don't care about me—

TRAVIS' FATHER

I care about you—

TRAVIS

You wouldn't do this if you cared. You wouldn't do this if it were me instead of him...

TRAVIS' FATHER

What do you mean by that?

TRAVIS

You know what I mean.

TRAVIS' FATHER

You want me to say I loved him more?

TRAVIS

It's true, isn't it?

TRAVIS' FATHER

That I got one son who's a hero and one that's nothing? That's what you want me to say?

TRAVIS

I know you think it. And you're leaving cause you don't want anything to do with us any more—like you're in a beartrap and you're sawing off your leg to escape. That's all you're doing here.

TRAVIS' FATHER

I love you and your brother the same—

TRAVIS

That's a lie.

TRAVIS' FATHER

Travis—

TRAVIS

That's a lie and you know it. So go on, get out of here. If you're leaving, if you need to escape so badly that you can't even stick around to help out after your favorite son's funeral, go ahead. I feel sorry for you. Because you gotta live the rest of your life being you. And I'm happy because I get to live the rest of my life being me. And one of these days, when you're in your crappy little California apartment, and you're lonely, and you got no life, and you got a crappy job, and you think about running on back here to see if we still need you: We won't. We won't need you. And you're going to be stuck out there lonely and sad and miserable because you had love in your life and you trashed it. So get out.

TRAVIS' FATHER

You know what, you're right. I did love your brother more. You like that answer? Because he had character, he knew about responsibility, and all the time you've just been drifting along behind him, content to sit on your lazy butt and do nothing. And I wish that you were half the man he was, and yes, if I had my way, he'd be alive today and you'd be the one we'd be talking about. So fine, you like the truth? You like tough answers? There you go. I'll see you around.

(He leaves.)