

ALL THERE IS

a British one act drama

by Joseph Hawkins

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ALL THERE IS
A ONE-ACT PLAY

Characters

Frank

A retired South London tailor, about 70. He is wiry, jazz-loving, frail yet given to mood swings and bouts of sudden energy. He has Parkinson's Disease and lives at the Cherry Blossom Residential Care Home.

Jeremy

Son of Frank. He is in his late 30s. Boyish, pugnacious yet deeply unsure of himself. He is twitchy, sweaty and easily riled, as though perpetually in need of a cigarette.

Scene

The Cherry Blossom Residential Care Home in Peckham, South East London.
Frank's room. Decorated innocuously with a view out onto a garden. Two armchairs, an imposing bureau, a coffee table, a single bed, various medical contraptions, a record player, a TV, a phone. On the wall is a black and white poster of Charlie Parker and a Malay wavy-bladed ceremonial dagger over the bureau.

Time

The present day. The play spans a week or two in early spring.

Note

There are occasional female screams and singing from the neighbouring room.
The first syllable of "Dazatronic" rhymes with "haze".

SCENE 1

Frank's room.

FRANK sits in an armchair, dressed in striped pyjamas and a rather aged silk dressing gown. There is a walking stick beside him and a copy of The Racing Post on his knee.

A knock on the door.

FRANK
Come.

Enter JEREMY, wearing a track suit. Neither say anything for a while.

FRANK
You came, then.

JEREMY
Yeah.

FRANK
You bring the fags?

JEREMY nods, pulls a packet of Rothmans International out of his pocket. He tosses the cigarettes into FRANK's lap, who unwraps them.

JEREMY
Allowed to smoke, are you?

FRANK
Open the window. We'll say you smoked them.

FRANK begins smoking. JEREMY opens the window.

JEREMY
Well, is it nice to see me, again? (Pause) Aren't you going to say anything at all?

Pause.

FRANK
You know, Jeremy, the biggest mistake of my life?

JEREMY
No, but I imagine there are a few to choose from.

FRANK
The biggest mistake of my life was giving up smoking. Been a smoker all me life, man and boy, then one bright morning I wake up, find I'm fifty years old. I reach for

a fag as normal and then think, Hold up, Frank. You're fifty now. Time to pack it in. Time to get fit, healthy, and live to a ripe old age. So I did pack it in. Then three years later the doctor tells me I've got Parkinson's Disease. Should have stuck with Doctor Rothmans.

JEREMY

You don't think it was just coincidence – stopping smoking and getting Parkinson's Disease?

FRANK

There are no coincidences, Jeremy. You coming here, for example, is that a coincidence?

JEREMY

I came because I wanted to see you.

FRANK

Oh yeah?

JEREMY

Big stuff is happening in my life, Dad. I want you to be a part of it.

FRANK

Well big stuff ain't happening in my life. Left to rot in this concentration camp.

JEREMY

Doesn't look like a concentration camp to me.

FRANK

It's a place they send people against their will to die. Same as Auschwitz. Same as Dachau.

JEREMY (sitting)

They didn't have nice comfy chairs in Auschwitz, though, did they? Or premium-brand cigarettes?

FRANK (Stubbing out his cigarette)

Funny things, fags. When you haven't smoked for a while, the first one always tastes horrible. Then after two or three they start to get more-ish.

JEREMY

You should quit. I have. You're killing yourself with those things.

FRANK

I'd rather die by my own hand than fade away like a bloody vegetable in this place, drugged up to my eyeballs.

Pause.

JEREMY

Well, I am glad I came. Can't think of anything nicer to do on a Sunday afternoon. So, how about a cup of tea, Pater? Isn't that the traditional beverage to accompany family visits of this sort? How does one go about getting that, eh? A nice cup of Rosie Lee?

FRANK
Try that phone.

JEREMY (picking up the receiver)
A concentration camp with room service.

FRANK
Dial "O".

JEREMY
It's gone dead.

FRANK
Hung up, more like.

JEREMY
They looked understaffed on the way in here.

FRANK
Understaffed? Bone bloody idle, more like. What day of the week is it?

JEREMY
Sunday. I said.

FRANK
They're always thin on the ground on a Sunday. Day of rest. For them, but not for me.

JEREMY
So what do I do about that cup of tea, then?

FRANK
Shout at 'em down the hall, that's what I do.

JEREMY (opening the door)
Excuse me! Excuse me! Could we have some tea, please? Two cups?

FRANK
Go on, bawl 'em out!

JEREMY (closing the door)
I think she heard me.

FRANK
One of the Japs, did you get?

JEREMY

She wasn't a Jap, Dad. Probably Filipino, or Taiwanese.

FRANK

One of the warders.

JEREMY

It was Granddad who was a prisoner of war in Singapore, Dad. You were a tailor all your life in Peckham.

FRANK

I'm living out his legacy.

JEREMY

You're wandering, Dad.

FRANK

Wandering. Wandering up and down the highways and by-ways of life. Do you know, when your Granddad came back from the War, I didn't even know who he was. Skinny chap with a beard in a de-mob suit, and that knife up there in his kitbag. Could have been anybody. Could have been an imposter!

FRANK is interrupted by the sound of a woman's screams from next door. "Help me! Help me!"

JEREMY

What's that?

FRANK

Next door. Screams like that morning, noon and night, she does.

More screams.

FRANK (Cont'd)

'Cept when she's singing.

JEREMY

Singing?

FRANK

Peggy Lee numbers. Is that all there is...

JEREMY

Sounds right up your street.

FRANK

Beats the screaming.

JEREMY
Who is she?

FRANK
Room Number 13.

JEREMY
Don't you know her name?

FRANK
They bring people in, then cart them out in wooden boxes. There's not a huge amount of meet and greet.

More screams.

JEREMY
Sounds like they're torturing her or something.

FRANK
Maybe they are, them Japs. They like a bit of torture. It's at night it's the worst. I lie here, listening to that, waiting for the light to come, listening to the Japs, doing their worst. And in the morning, sometimes, the singing comes: (Sings) If that's all there is, my friend, let's keep dancing...

JEREMY
And they allow that, do they?

FRANK
Oh, yeah, they allow it. Beatrice says it's good for the soul - let's the demons out.

JEREMY
Who's Beatrice?

FRANK
The chief warder. Head nurse.

JEREMY
Is she a Jap?

FRANK
Nigerian. Cold Christian bitch, she is. Spends half her time proselytising. Saving souls down on Rye Lane. The rest of the time she's stuffing my gullet with happy pills.

JEREMY
Well, they don't seem to be working. Look at you, about as happy as a car crash.

FRANK
Goes on about the End Times, she does. Too bloody right we're living in the End Times.

The screams from next door reach a crescendo.

FRANK

Oh for Christ's sake! Leave off!

The screams then die away.

A pause.

JEREMY

She's gone quiet now.

FRANK

Probably given her a chemical cosh. You know what that is, eh, a chemical cosh? It's when they drug 'em up so high they can't move any more. They try to do it to me all the time, but I spit the pills out when they ain't looking. Spit the pills out and listen to the screaming all night.

JEREMY

Maybe you should just swallow the pills.

FRANK

Maybe I should save them all up and take them in one go.

JEREMY

Are you threatening to do away with yourself?

FRANK

It'd suit you fine if I did.

JEREMY

No it wouldn't. I'm here because you mean something to me. You're my father. And well, I know we haven't always seen eye to eye...

FRANK

You can say that again.

JEREMY

But things are changing, Dad. I'm going places again. And when you're on the up, you want to know that the people around you are OK too.

FRANK

If you care about me so much, why did you let them imprison me?

JEREMY

They didn't imprison you, Dad. Social Services were concerned about you. Decided this was an appropriate level of care. And can you blame them? Batty old man, wandering up and down Rye Lane in his pyjamas at dead of night.

FRANK

I was putting out the milk.

JEREMY

Asking for a – what was it? – a female escort to take you to Shepherd Market. And not a milk bottle in sight.

FRANK

I couldn't sleep – them drugs they give me –

JEREMY

That's when you weren't making inappropriate advances on the meals-on-wheels woman. Pinching the social worker's arse.

FRANK

She wanted it.

JEREMY

I bet she did. Couldn't get enough of you, trolling about in those stripy pyjamas. What woman could resist?

FRANK

It's these drugs the social workers give me. They make me so fucking randy.

JEREMY

And that accounts for that spell at the Dorchester, too, does it?

FRANK

That was a different thing altogether.

JEREMY

Too right it was a different thing altogether. There you are, house sold, sheltered housing all lined up, an ideal retirement home, and you go and throw it all up and move into a penthouse suite at the Dorchester...

FRANK

The Dorchester is my idea of a retirement home.

JEREMY

You order magnums of champagne, pots of caviar...

FRANK

I had just sealed a very lucrative property deal.

JEREMY

And fly in that call-girl from Latvia.

FRANK (wistfully)

Ivona.

JEREMY

Not to mention running up a seventy-five grand debt on the horses.

FRANK

I was drinking life to the dregs.

JEREMY

Yeah, and now that's what you've got – the dregs. So don't blame me.

FRANK

And so you've come here to crow, have you?

JEREMY

As a matter of fact, I've come because I could help you. As your next of kin, I could help you get discharged from this place. You've got money stashed away, I know you have. You don't need to live here. I could get you into a nicer home. You know – prettier nurses, tea that comes on time.

FRANK

I wanna live in my home, not a home.

JEREMY

Yeah, well, that's sold now, isn't it?

FRANK

I know it's sold! Believe it or not, Jeremy, I am not so gaga I can't remember selling the house I grew up in!

JEREMY

So tell me – what do you want to do? Let's talk about it. See how I can help you.

FRANK

How you can help me?

JEREMY

Well, you know how it works – I scratch your back, you scratch mine.

FRANK

Oh, yes, I know how it works. I scratch your back and get fuck all in return. Just like last time, that little loan of seven hundred quid or whatever it was.

JEREMY

Are you keeping a tab or something?

FRANK

And what about that twenty thousand nicker it cost to put you through rehab, stop you snorting them drugs?

JEREMY

That was money well spent, Dad. I've been clean and sober for over five years now.

FRANK

Clean and sober for five years! Cor! You must be itching for a drink! Shame all I can offer you is tea. (Shouts towards the door) When one of those bone idle Japs comes to make it! Nice, though. Nice to know you've finally cleaned up your act. Nice to know I wasn't flushing my money down the toilet as usual.

JEREMY

You won't be this time, either. Five grand, that's all I'm asking.

FRANK

Blimey, this is an expensive packet of fags, isn't it? Five thousand pounds for twenty Rothmans. I remember when they were ninepence.

JEREMY

I am asking for an investment, Dad, not a hand-out. I've got plans. I'm getting the band back together. Yeah. I'm going to reform Dazatronic. The musical phenomenon of 1993.

FRANK

Shame you didn't set aside any of that money while you were making it, back in 1993.

JEREMY

I made mistakes, OK? I made mistakes. But now I want to make it right again. I want to get back what we had, when we were up there.

FRANK

Oh, don't we all.

JEREMY

And then once the whole Nineties Revival thing starts, you and me are going to cash in, big time, let me tell you.

FRANK

Nineties Revival!

JEREMY

Don't knock it - I tell you, nostalgia is Britain's one remaining growth industry.

FRANK

In my day...

JEREMY

In my day! Doesn't that prove my point exactly! This is a country in love with its past.

FRANK

In my day we had real music. Jazz! You know I once saw Zoot Sims play at the Hundred Club?

JEREMY

Yeah, you have mentioned it once or twice before.

FRANK

1963 it must have been. God, he set that club on fire that night. 1963. Those were the days. Guys in sharp suits, girls in tight dresses. Jazz! And then them bloody Beatles came along and ruined everything. (Sings) I wanna hold your ha-a-a-nd! Never mind holding your hand, love, there's a couple of other bits I wouldn't mind getting hold of... Long-haired Scouse tossers. Nearly put the fucking barbers out of business, that lot. Almost did for tailoring and all. I was lucky to get as much as I did for the business, in the end.

JEREMY's mobile rings. He checks the caller, looks worried, but doesn't pick up.

FRANK

Ain't you gonna answer that?

JEREMY

EMI again. Won't stop pestering me. They want to get us back in the studio. I've told them time and again, it's too soon to talk about a new album. But we're hot property again, you see. They're hungry for us. But we're not going to make the same mistakes again this time round. We're going to take it slow and easy, and just play that stuff again.

FRANK

Where you playing?

JEREMY

Well, the tour kicks off with the Folkestone Alhambra, then on to the Worthing Hipp –

FRANK (Interrupts)

All the big places!

JEREMY

All the bands nowadays start a tour with the small venues. They test the waters, play boutique gigs. The big places like Wembley and the NEC come later. And then there's America. You know, Dazatronic never did quite crack America, but this time, it's going to be different. You should get on board too, Dad. This whole thing's going to be a money train.

FRANK

Money train! Hard work was always good enough for me. Good enough for your Granddad, and all.

JEREMY

Dad –

FRANK

The answer is no.

JEREMY

Since when did you ever do any hard work, anyway? Whenever I visited you at work there was nothing on your desk except an ashtray and a telephone.

FRANK

And that's all I needed as a captain of industry.

JEREMY

Captain of industry! You ran a tailoring shop on Peckham Rye Lane.

FRANK

Get some underling to do the paperwork, that's the style! I needed to be up front of house, talking to the customers, giving them a bit of razzle dazzle.

JEREMY

And that's when you weren't off on some Caribbean cruise with Siobhan or Patsy or some other little slapper of a secretary.

FRANK

Now don't bring women into it or we'll never hear the last.

JEREMY

Why the fucking hell shouldn't I? They were slappers, the lot of them. You treated Mum like dirt, you did.

FRANK

I loved that woman.

JEREMY

Don't try to soft soap me.

FRANK

I loved her and I begged her to stay. You know her moods. What do you think it was like, being married to her?

JEREMY

It wasn't any fun for any of us.

FRANK

With you kids and the shop and the house and everything. And her just sitting in her room with the curtains drawn, staring, staring, staring as though all the horrors of the world were going on inside her head. And me trying to bring her a cup of tea, say "Are you alright dear?" "Do you want me to fetch a doctor, dear?"

JEREMY

That's when you weren't down the pub, enjoying a scotch or six. Or off on a business trip with Siobhan or Patsy.

FRANK

Do you blame me, stuck with that bloody black hole of a woman, till death do us part? Is it any wonder I needed a bit of light relief. (Pause) And if you're looking for five grand, you're going the wrong way about it.

JEREMY moves to the bureau, runs his finger along the top of it.

JEREMY

This is where you keep it, isn't it? All the paperwork. The proceeds from the business. The ill-gotten gains.

FRANK

You keep your hands off!

JEREMY

What's in this bureau - it's mine as much as it is yours.

FRANK

What's that?

JEREMY (Louder)

I said what you've got in that bureau is mine as much as it is yours. Granddad earned that money. Granddad created Player Bespoke.

FRANK (raising his stick)

I still got the strength in my right arm to lift a stick you know.

JEREMY pauses, considers.

JEREMY

In that case you leave me no choice.

FRANK

What do you mean?

JEREMY

You heard of something called Power of Attorney? Power of Attorney, if you'll allow me to explain, is when your next of kin, that's me, takes control of your financial affairs. It's common enough in cases of this sort.

FRANK

Cases of this sort?

JEREMY

Where old people start losing it.

FRANK

I ain't losing it, boy. I've very much got it. Of sound mind. I may have Parkinson's Disease but I am crystal clear in the noddle department. So why don't you get that into your expensively-educated loaf?

JEREMY

What you scared of, Dad? That little Jeremy'll get the keys to that treasure chest of yours? (Gestures to the bureau).

FRANK

Little Jeremy don't have what it takes.

JEREMY

How would you know what it takes?

FRANK

You don't have the balls. You don't have the bottle. You've written one pop song –

JEREMY

Two albums, actually –

FRANK

Two albums that have amounted to what, exactly?

JEREMY

A world come-back tour – that's what! A new album, a deal with EMI. Albeit belatedly, Dazatronic are finally going to get the acclaim we deserve! Only you're too stupid to see it – too short-sighted to invest in my musical career! You, who put your foot through my first guitar.

FRANK

What are you talking about?

JEREMY

Don't pretend you don't remember! You put your foot through my first guitar.

FRANK

(Simultaneously, under his breath) Oh, not this again! (Then aloud) I tripped over it.

JEREMY

You purposefully –

FRANK

Well, you shouldn't have left it laying around on the landing.

JEREMY

I watched you from my bedroom as you did it, kicking it, cursing it, stewed to the eyeballs in Glenlivet.

FRANK

Well, what do you want a guitar for anyway, what are you, a wandering gypsy minstrel?

JEREMY

I've been through all this in therapy, you know.

FRANK

Therapy! Another hiding place for them too weak to face the world.

JEREMY

What did you call me?

FRANK

Weak. I called you weak.

JEREMY

Weak? You dare to call me weak, after all the shit you've put me through?

FRANK

If you had any strength you'd have stood up and fought back. That's the only way to get through this world, boy – fighting back.

JEREMY

Well, welcome to it. Cos I am gonna fight back, Daddy Dearest. Right here and right now. And I aint gonna stop until I hold the key to your kingdom in this hot little hand. What do you think about that, eh?

FRANK

Sod you.

JEREMY

Oh, that quicksilver wit again. Never fails to delight.

FRANK

You'll never get my money. Never.

JEREMY

You're scared. Scared that as soon as I walk out of here and pick up the phone to my lawyer –

FRANK

Never, you hear? Never.

JEREMY

Scared that for once it won't be you calling the shots. That for once you'll have to trust another human being.

FRANK

I won't trust you! You'll never get the money. I'll bury it in the ground. I'll set light to it. (Waves his lighter menacingly).

JEREMY

Oh, very mature.

FRANK

I'll put it on a horse. Look! (He opens the Racing Post, stabs at random at a page)
What about this one? Dolce Vita. Hundred to one shot at Kempton Park. I've seen
hundred-to-one shots romp home, too. Mon Mome at the 2009 National, to name but
one...

JEREMY

You know what? I don't have to listen to this.

JEREMY barges out of the door, giving FRANK the finger as he goes.

FRANK (calling after him)

Oh, but you should, Jeremy, you should. Your inheritance is going on the hundred-to-
one shot at tomorrow's 2.30 at Kempton Park. What do you think about that, eh, boy?
What do you think about that?

There come sounds of screaming from next door.

FRANK

Go on, cosh her! Give her the chemical cosh! Put us all out of our misery, why don't
you? And where's our fucking tea?!

SLOW FADE TO BLACK.

SCENE 2

Frank's room. A few days later. Sunlight is streaming in through the window. There are half-packed suitcases on the floor. FRANK is wearing a tie, waistcoat and trousers and is talking on the phone.

FRANK

Yeah, well, you know me, Len. Player by name, Player by nature, my old son.

(Laughs) Well if you ain't got the guts, Lenny, after that spanking at Kempton.

(Pause) Good, that's settled then. Yeah, cash in a brown envelope. You can pick it up on Thursday.

A knock at the door.

FRANK (Cont'd)

Ooh, hold up – here comes trouble. Alright then, Ta-da. (he puts down the phone).
Come!

Enter JEREMY.

JEREMY

Dad.

FRANK

So. You're back.

JEREMY

You asked to see me.

FRANK

I did. I've been hearing rumours about you, boy.

JEREMY

What, in here?

FRANK

I still keep an ear out, you know, round the manor.

JEREMY

And now what? Do you want to offer some fatherly advice? Hold court? What do you think you are, Don Corleone or something?

FRANK

I heard that you been borrowing money. From Sid Hands's boy – what's his name?

JEREMY

Dave. So what of it?

FRANK

What of it? Borrowing money from that potato-faced little cunt?! I don't like it

Jeremy. I don't like it one little bit. You want to be careful, getting in hock to a family like that. You don't even want to think about what Sid Hands used to do to his bad payers. Scraped out their kneecaps with a grapefruit knife, they say.

JEREMY

Yeah, well, my kneecaps are just going to have to chance it, because no one closer to home was willing to advance me the money, were they?

FRANK

You give up this whole Power of Attorney thing, I might consider it.

JEREMY

I'm going to get your money after you die. Why not just give it to me now?

FRANK

There's nothing automatic, you know, about your inheritance.

JEREMY

What do you mean? Oh yeah – you were going to bury the money in the ground, weren't you?

FRANK (Interrupting)

I've been making plans, too, Jeremy. You're not the only one who wants to ring the changes.

JEREMY

What sort of plans?

FRANK

Escape plans. I'm going to break out of this place.

JEREMY

Break out? Dad, this is an old folks' home, not Alcatraz.

FRANK

Too right it ain't Alcatraz. Soft as shit, the security here. (Gesturing out of the window) You see that gate down there, end of the garden?

JEREMY

Yeah.

FRANK

You know where that leads? Straight on to Peckham Rye Lane.

JEREMY

And that's your escape route?

FRANK

I get out that gate, I'm on Rye Lane, I flag a taxi and vwoom. Leave Beatrice, the

Japs and that sodding woman next door behind. Forever. (Pause) You've got to admit, it's a neat plan. Simple, see. People over-think these things.

JEREMY (Looking out)

That gate's state of the art. It's got about twelve different locks on.

FRANK

Two. It's got two locks and two bolts. Both locks work on a combination, 1996 – I overheard the Japs talking about it the other day.

JEREMY

Why don't you just go out of the front?

FRANK

With all this baggage? (points to the baggage on the floor). We wouldn't get further than reception.

JEREMY

What do you mean, we?

FRANK

Well, that's where you come in, son. I'm going to need someone to help me throw them bolts, carry me bags and that. Hail a taxi to Southampton. Act as my aide-de-camp.

JEREMY

What happens in Southampton, anyway?

FRANK

I get on one of them cruise ships. You can wave me off with your hanky, like we did with Granddad going off to the war.

JEREMY

You can't get a taxi to Southampton.

FRANK

Lenny Richards got a taxi all the way to Paris one time. Wanted to impress some bird.

JEREMY

Who's Lennie Richards?

FRANK

Geezer down the bookies.

JEREMY

He's in on this too, is he, your break-out plan?