

My Mind Matters

by

Autumn Olsen

Email: autumnolsen7@gmail.com

EXT. SUBURBAN NEIGHBORHOOD - DAY

A quiet road with rows of houses.

DANIEL, 16, black, reaches into a mailbox and pulls out envelopes. He stuffs the mail in his pocket and records his surroundings with a handheld camera.

EXT. DANIEL'S HOUSE - DAY

He gets close-up shots of the different plants around him. He turns the camera toward himself and smiles.

DANIEL

Hey, future self. It's January twenty-ninth. Today has been a great day. Had a blast at film club. Looks like we got a real future in our hands.

INT. DANIEL'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY

Daniel enters and his smile fades.

Pictures of Daniel and his dad decorate the area. Photos of his father and his crew of cooks accent the kitchen. Every area is dim, and quietness fills the atmosphere.

Crying echoes in the distance, and Daniel looks around.

INT. DANIEL'S HOUSE - HALLWAY - DAY

He walks near the bathroom, and the door is cracked open.

Daniel peeks in through the crack and sees his dad, TOBIAS, 40, black, bending over a sink, hyperventilating with his hands gripping each side.

Tobias looks into the mirror into his own eyes as sweat drips down his forehead. He takes deep breaths.

Daniel freezes and drops his arms to his side. His camera faces upward toward his dad and is rolling.

TOBIAS

Pull it together.

Tobias slaps himself a couple of times as tears drip down his cheeks.

Daniel's eyes fill with tears as he trembles, and sweat rolls down his face.

TOBIAS (CONT'D)

I got all the strength I need. Life ain't got nothing on me.

Tobias wipes his tears, turns the facet on, and rinses his face.

Daniel hyperventilates and speed walks to the living room.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

A TV sits across from a couch decorated with pillows.

Daniel trembles and sweats as he sits on the couch. He pulls mail out of his pocket and takes a deep breath.

Daniel opens up an envelope, and pulls out a therapy flyer for men dealing with mental health, and looks over it. He folds it up and slides it into his pocket.

Tobias enters and smiles.

TOBIAS

What's up, son? How was your day?

DANIEL

It was cool. We had a blast at film club. Got some pretty dope shots.

TOBIAS

Good to hear. Glad you've been enjoying yourself. Feel like doing some cooking?

DANIEL

Sure. What you got in mind?

TOBIAS

Well, business has been a little slow. Was thinkin about testing a new dish out for next weeks special. Hopefully bring in some extra customers.

DANIEL

Alright, bet. Let's get it.

Daniel hops up.

INT. KITCHEN - DAY

A red rug accents granite countertops. Tobias pulls out a phone and taps a button on the screen. He sets the phone on a countertop. An upbeat jazz instrumental fills the room. A pot filled with beef and gravy sits on a stove.

Daniel enters. He hands Tobias different seasonings, and he adds them to the pot and stirs.

Tobias slices Poboy bread on a plate and puts, lettuce, pickles, and tomatoes on it. He scoops up some of the beef w/debris, pours it across the Poboy, and adds parsley.

TOBIAS

Go ahead and get you a little taste.

David grabs a fork and a knife, cuts a piece off, and takes a big bite.

DANIEL

Oh yeah. That's it right there.

TOBIAS

That's what I like to hear.

Tobias gets a fork and a knife and takes a couple bites.

Daniel continues to eat here and there.

DANIEL

Yo, Dad. You think we can talk about something a little more serious?

TOBIAS

Yeah. What's up?

DANIEL

I think I wanna get into therapy.

TOBIAS

Therapy? Boy, you don't need no therapy.

Tobias laughs.

DANIEL

Dad, I'm serious. I really wanna start taking care of my mental and emotional health. Everybody's getting into therapy right now. It's perfectly normal.

TOBIAS

So you wanna do something just cause everyone else is doing it, huh? They jump out a plane you gone jump too?

DANIEL

Pops, it's really not that serious.

TOBIAS

Boy, where's all this craziness coming from?

DANIEL

We all know anxiety and depression runs in the family, and I'd be lying if I tried to act like I didn't struggle with it. This isn't some game. I'm not tryna live like this all my life.

TOBIAS

You know what. I hear you. If you really wanna try this out. I'm here for you.

DANIEL

Thank you. Just don't wanna act like I don't need help when I do. You know?

TOBIAS

Yeah.

DANIEL

Think you could go with me to check it out? You know, see what it's all about.

TOBIAS

Don't you gotta schedule an appointment first?

Daniel reaches into his pocket, pulls out the folded-up flyer for men dealing with mental health, and unfolds it.

DANIEL

We actually got a flyer in the mail from an organization earlier. They specialize in catering toward men.

TOBIAS

So, you got a appointment set already?

DANIEL

Nah, it'll probably be a few days till the next opening. Gotta set up an appointment still.

TOBIAS

Oh okay. Well, you let me know once they send you a date. Probably need to see if they have something one of my days off, so I can drive you up there.

DANIEL

Alright, cool.

Daniel gives his dad a quick hug.

TOBIAS

Alright, boy don't push it. Don't start getting all soft on me.

INT. THERAPIST OFFICE - DAY

Three days later. Daniel and his father sit in two chairs that face the THERAPIST, 35, black male.

DANIEL

All my life I grew up around black men who made it seem like it was a sin to express your emotions.

Daniel's eyes tear up and he wipes a tear away before it can drop from his eye.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

It go to a point where I became scared to express any kind of negative emotion with anyone. Even my family.

Tobias's eyes fill with tears and he wipes them up before they can fall from his eyelids. He looks down.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

It's like I could feel the judgment before I could even finish the thought of considering opening my mouth.

Daniels hands tremble.

Tobias holds one of his hands.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I'm ready now. I'm ready to be here for me. But, I have one request.

Daniel looks at his father.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

I want you to do this with me.

Tobias lets go of his hand and looks at the therapist then back at Daniel.

TOBIAS

Aww, Son, I appreciate the thought, but I don't need therapy. I'm good. Okay.

Tobias laughs.

TOBIAS (CONT'D)

In fact, I'm great. Really. Honestly, never felt better.

DANIEL

You don't gotta lie, Dad. You're in a safe space. It's okay.

THERAPIST

He's right. This room is a safe zone. I promise it's not gonna make you any less of a man to talk about your feelings.

TOBIAS

What about, I don't need therapy, don't y'all understand?

DANIEL

For real? This what you doin'?

TOBIAS

Yes. Really.

Daniel stands up.

DANIEL

Do you not understand your only hurting yourself right now?

TOBIAS

Son, sit down.

DANIEL

No. I'm not sitting down. I'm not about to sit here and give up on you. Do you realize you're the reason my mother left us?

Tobias's eyes fill with tears.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Did you know you were one of the men who made it feel like a sin to express any negative thought? Any negative emotion.

Daniel tears up.

DANIEL (CONT'D)

Do you realize how much mental damage you caused me? How much emotional damage? How much anxiety? I'm over it. And nothing is gonna change until you decide to take care of you.

Tobias stands up and looks Daniel in the eyes.

TOBIAS

Boy, have you lost your mind? I did everything I could to take care of you. I did what I had to do to make you a man.

The Therapist goes over to Tobias and stands in between Daniel and Tobias.

THERAPIST

Gentlemen, you will either sit down or leave. There will be no physical contact in this room.

TOBIAS

Man, get out my face.

DANIEL

Dad, calm down.

TOBIAS

Ain't this a safe space to express our emotions? I'm just expressing how I feel.

THERAPIST

Sir, I'm really gonna need you to take a seat.

Daniel trembles.

DANIEL

Dad, breathe.

Daniel sweats and hyperventilates.

The Therapist sits Daniel down.

THERAPIST

Breathe.

Tobias's eyes widen and tear up.

TOBIAS

Son? Hey, I'm sorry. Okay. I was wrong.

Tobias turns toward the Therapist.

TOBIAS (CONT'D)

Where's his inhaler? He needs his inhaler.

DANIEL

Pocket. Pocket.

The Therapist reaches into Daniel's pocket and hands him his inhaler.

Daniel takes in a few puffs of air.

Tobias sweats and his hands tremble.

TOBIAS

Come on, son. I need you. You hear me? I need you.

Daniel takes deep breathes from his inhaler.

THERAPIST

You alright kid? I need you to let me know if you're okay.

DANIEL

I'm fine.

Tobias hugs Daniel.

THERAPIST

I know that was a very intense moment for you all. Do you feel calm enough to move forward?

Daniel looks at his father.

DANIEL

Well. Do you? You said you need me. I'm here. Just need you to help me help you.

Tobias looks at the therapist and Daniel.

TOBIAS

Actually. I think I am. I really think I am. I'm finally ready to be here for me.

THERAPIST

So, where do y'all wanna start?

DANIEL

Where's the best place to start?

THERAPIST

We can talk about childhood trauma. Think you'd be willing to start there?

DANIEL

I think I already shared quite a bit. Dad, you wanna take the floor?

TOBIAS

Yeah. I think I do.

THERAPIST

That's what I like to hear. Now, there's only so much time left for today, so we'll just start you off with some typical questions.

Tobias takes a deep breath.

Daniel holds his hand.

THERAPIST (CONT'D)

When you were a little boy, how did you feel about your mother?

TOBIAS

She was my everything.

THERAPIST

What did you love about her?

TOBIAS

She had all the love one could ever need. Plenty to go around too. I swear she had the biggest heart one could ever have.

THERAPIST

How did you feel about your father?

TOBIAS

He was like any other father. Strict. Old school. Was all about tough love. Never heard too many nice words from him.

Tobias giggles and clears his throat.

THERAPIST

Were his words abusive?

Tobias snuffles.

TOBIAS

A little.

THERAPIST

For how long did he speak to you like that?

TOBIAS

It's funny you know. You'd think it would've stopped at some point. Right? Nope. He didn't want me to end up soft.

Tobias wipes his tears.

TOBIAS (CONT'D)

Had to have thick skin as a black man in America. Had to stay strong. Couldn't afford to be seen as soft.

Daniel gives his Dad a hug.

THERAPIST

Well, gentlemen. That's all the time we have for today. Started off pretty rough, but I hope today helped.

DANIEL

It did.

Tobias gives the Therapist a handshake.

TOBIAS

Thanks, man. See you later.

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

Daniel and Tobias sit on the couch.

DANIEL

Thanks for coming with me today.

TOBIAS

Thank you. Felt good to get some of that off my chest. I got one more thing I need to say though.

DANIEL

What's that?

TOBIAS

I'm sorry. For everything and anything I've ever done to hurt you. Starting today, I promise to do all I can to keep improving, not just as your father, but as a man.

Daniel cries.

DANIEL

And I promise that you ain't gotta do it on your own. We in this together, Pops.

Daniel and Tobias give each other a huge hug.