

**HEELS**

*"Kayfabe"*

by Michael Waldron

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In the world of professional wrestling,  
the heroes are known as Faces.

The villains are Heels.

OVER BLACK

The SLAM of a body hitting the mat. An unruly CROWD explodes, echoing the REFEREE'S loud, slow COUNT--

**ONE! TWO! THR--**

CHEERS from the thrilled crowd -- a FACE has kicked out of a HEEL's pin, narrowly avoiding defeat. REVEAL:

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - NIGHT

A STYROFOAM CUP sails through the air, launched from the bleachers lining this sweaty, makeshift ARENA. It crashes to the ground, splashing cheap beer up onto a pair of cheap heels and the long legs they belong to--

STACI SPADE (29), a spitfire Georgia peach, doesn't miss a beat. She nimbly swigs from a beer in one hand and a soda in the other as she weaves through the CROWD of 300...

Sloppy rednecks in overalls, young men in cheap suits, old housewives, new housewives, cops, convicts, doctors, bums -- everybody is here, yelling down at the action in the ring.

Staci passes an EXPENSIVE DIGITAL CAMCORDER on a tripod, finally reaching the front row and her captivated son, THOMAS (7). He BOOS with the crowd. She hands him his soda and--

Starts CLAPPING. And WHISTLING. And HOLLERING. *She's the only one in the entire arena cheering for the HEEL.*

CAMERA TURNS and PUSHES FORWARD until, at last, we're

IN THE WRESTLING RING

Where JACK SPADE (30) prowls with lupine intensity. His black tights feature a playing card on either leg, the JACK OF SPADES. He's drenched in sweat, his Ultimate Warrior-inspired FACEPAINT rubbed almost completely off. His body aches, his chest heaves. But right now, standing over his opponent -- BIG JIM KITCHEN (23), a redwood of a man -- Jack is grinning.

Jack positions Big Jim for the JACKKNIFE, his reverse DDT finishing move. He looks at the VIDEO CAMERA and runs his thumb along his neck in a SLASHING MOTION--

But Big Jim BREAKS FREE and GRABS Jack by the throat. He lifts him up and DRIVES him back down, a massive CHOKESLAM.

Staci looks away but Thomas can't take his eyes off the ring, where the exhausted Big Jim is now struggling toward Jack. The boy cheers him on... closer... almost there...

Finally, desperately, Big Jim drapes one arm over Jack's torso. The REF hits the mat and the crowd COUNTS ALONG--

**ONE! TWO! THR--**

*Jack kicks out.* The crowd GROANS in disbelief.

Big Jim lifts Jack up again, but this time, in mid-air, Jack ESCAPES and SWINGS AROUND, FALLING BACKWARD. On the way down he HOOKS Big Jim's head and SLAMS it into the mat. JACKKNIFE.

The crowd is gut-punched as Jack collapses onto Big Jim--

**ONE! TWO! THREE!**

The BELL RINGS and Jack rises to celebrate. CUPS and CANS fly into the ring. The fans *hate* him. He finds Staci's eyes -- she smiles, relieved, but Thomas is still BOOING.

The Ref holds Jack the golden TITLE BELT, his belt. He takes it and, for no good reason, TOSSES the Ref out of the ring.

A scrawny MECHANIC guns a CAN OF DIP at Jack's head. Jack reacts lightning quick, snatching the Skoal missile out of thin air. He pops the top and throws in a pinch, then tosses the can back to the stunned fan.

Jack grabs a MICROPHONE. It HUMS to life and finally we hear him speak, with an eloquent, biting DRAWL--

JACK

Tifton, Georgia... This town makes  
me *sick*.

The crowd lets him have it. Jack spits onto Big Jim's boots.

JACK (CONT'D)

Did y'all actually think I'd lose  
to Big Jim -- *the Freak from the  
Creek?* You must be as dumb as you  
look, and that's saying someth--

THE LIGHTS GO DOWN. **VAN HALEN'S "DREAMS"** plays over the PA. Down by the ENTRANCE TUNNEL, a FOG MACHINE sputters and MALFUNCTIONS. Jack scowls. An awkward beat, then--

ACE SPADE (22), a long-haired hotshot that never stopped playing quarterback, races out of the tunnel. The crowd, especially Thomas, ERUPTS -- this is their hero.

Ace slides into the ring and DUCKS a punch from Jack. He spins and DRILLS Jack with his finisher, the SUPERKICK. The crowd goes berserk as Jack is knocked over the top rope. He hits the ground carefully, with REHEARSED, CONTROLLED impact.

CRYSTAL TYLER (19), Ace's "manager", a sweet kid hiding beneath too much glitter makeup, appears and hands him a MICROPHONE. They share a long KISS. The crowd loves it.

Jack backs down the entryway, rattled. Ace points at him--

ACE

Where you going, big brother? Why  
don't we settle this right here...  
(leans into the crowd)  
*Tonight? Cause that's my best  
friend you just spit on. These are  
my people you been insulting. And  
that's my belt you're wearing.*

JACK

You ain't ever gonna wear this  
strap, boy.

ACE

Look at you -- turning tail,  
backing down. Daddy'd be ashamed.

That stings, and Jack starts walking, slowly, toward the ring. The crowd can't believe it -- *this might actually happen*. The noise is at a fever pitch...

When Jack stops.

JACK

... You know, two weeks from now  
we're back home in Duffy.

ACE

Any time. Any place.

JACK

Me and you, Main Event. You want  
the belt? Come get it.

BOOS as Jack turns and saunters toward the TUNNEL. Ace gets an idea. He calls after his brother, going OFF-SCRIPT--

ACE

Hey Jack...  
(Jack turns, surprised)  
*Fuck you.*

The crowd GOES WILD. Ace drops his mic and shoots two FINGER GUNS into the sky, then mimes blowing smoke from the barrels.

Jack's eyes go instinctively to the CAMCORDER. He SNEERS at Ace, then casts a final glance toward Staci and Thomas before disappearing into the--

INT. ENTRANCE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Jack passes through the shadows and emerges limping. He wears a weary, pissed-off look as he continues into the--

INT. STAGING AREA - CONTINUOUS

Ancient fluorescent lights flicker overhead. Over a dozen other WRESTLERS applaud as Jack enters. WILLIE DAY (late 40s), the league's no-bullshit female promoter, hands him a beer. Jack drains half the can in one gulp.

WILLIE

The Freak from the Creek? White trash poetry. When'd you come up with that?

JACK

(distracted)

Just now. Goddamn fog machine screwed up again.

Outside, the crowd begins to CHANT: **ACE!** **ACE!** **ACE!**

JACK (CONT'D)

Did you hear him out there?

She nods. Jack SLINGS THE CAN against the wall. He drops his belt unceremoniously to the floor and reenters the--

INT. ENTRANCE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Where he paces, waiting. After a moment Ace comes barreling into the tunnel, Crystal at his side. Big Jim follows behind. Ace shoves Jack good-naturedly--

ACE

Holy shit man, how bout that pop? Duffy's gonna *explode* when I win.

Jack doesn't say anything. A tense beat as Ace reads him--

ACE (CONT'D)

What? --What, you're pissed cause I said *fuck*? They loved it.

JACK

Kids come to these shows.

Ace can't believe this shit. The fans keep chanting his name.

ACE  
Yeah. To see me.

JACK  
You're in my ring -- you stick to  
*my script*.

Ace just smirks. He trots past Jack and into the locker room, cocky as hell. Big Jim and Crystal follow awkwardly.

CAMERA holds on Jack. **THE FUTUREBIRDS' "AMERICAN COWBOY"** begins as the crowd continues its chant:

**ACE! ACE! ACE!**

MAIN TITLES.

EXT. BACK ROAD - DAWN (2 WEEKS LATER)

Jack jogs down a long, empty stretch of road, passing under a FADED BILLBOARD for the Duffy Wrestling Association (DWA). Two MEN are pictured facing off against one another:

WILD BILL HANCOCK, long hair and a handlebar mustache, holding a TWO-BY-FOUR, and TOM "KING" SPADE, a silver fox raising two FINGER PISTOLS to the sky -- just like Ace. \*

The billboard's tagline reads: **"LONG LIVE THE KING"**

Jack looks up at Wild Bill and Tom, but doesn't stop running.

EXT. AROUND DUFFY - ESTABLISHING - MORNING

Sunday morning in DUFFY, GEORGIA. Population: 20,000. Churches, strip malls, tiny houses with front porch swings. The Deep South in all its simple, sluggish grace.

EXT. JACK'S HOUSE - MORNING

Decent neighborhood, modest one-story homes. AMERICAN FLAGS and BALD EAGLE YARD SIGNS herald the approaching 4th of July. Little league equipment is scattered across Jack's well-maintained lawn.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - THOMAS' ROOM - MORNING

An imaginative little kid's room. Walls covered in old school wrestling posters: Sting, Shawn Michaels, The Undertaker. \*

Staci rouses Thomas, who sleeps with a couple of GI JOE ACTION FIGURES. He rolls over in protest.

\*  
\*

EXT. CLETA'S HOUSE - MORNING

A much older, much smaller house, tucked away at the end of a long dirt road. This is where Jack and Ace grew up.

INT. CLETA'S HOUSE - ACE'S ROOM - MORNING

CLETA SPADE (60s), a shell of the woman she used to be, enters a bedroom covered in sports trophies. She looks for Ace, but he isn't in bed. She's not surprised.

EXT. FIELD - MORNING

The end of an all-nighter. Good ol' boys and cute young girls are littered around a dying bonfire. A SHOTGUN comes into frame, followed by a shirtless, still-drunk Ace--

ACE

Pull!

One-by-one, everybody tosses their bottles into the air. Ace BLASTS THEM with ease.

One of the girls (TRICIA) walks up and hands him a joint. He HITS IT and mimes the FINGER GUNS in her direction. She faux-swoons as his PHONE ALARM buzzes.

ACE (CONT'D)

Shit. I gotta get to the arena.

He grabs his clothes and a to-go beer. She pulls him close.

TRICIA

When do I get to walk out to the ring with you and play make believe?

ACE

I reckon you're next in line... but who says it's make believe?

They share a grin and a kiss, and he runs off into the woods.



## INT. CONVENIENCE STORE - MORNING

A shitty gas station, just off the interstate. Crystal daydreams behind the register, gazing out the tiny window at the big Georgia sky.

YOUNG TRUCKER (O.S.)  
I'm worried about Ace.

Crystal is caught momentarily off-guard. A dopey YOUNG TRUCKER stands at the counter. She stares at him--

YOUNG TRUCKER (CONT'D)  
The match tonight. I'm rooting for Ace, but Jack fights dirty.

And now Crystal slips into character, adopting a more theatrical, swaggering tone--

CRYSTAL  
Jack's time is over. This is Ace's league now.

YOUNG TRUCKER  
Tell him I said good luck.  
(then)  
Can I have the bathroom key?

A beat, then Crystal hands him the key. He walks out, giving her the thumbs up. She goes back to staring out the window.

## EXT. ARENA - ESTABLISHING - MORNING

An ancient arena on the outskirts of town, bought out long ago and converted into the home of the DWA. When they aren't hosting wrestling events, it's Christian rock bands and antique gun shows. \*

## INT. ARENA - MORNING

Willie steps into the dark arena, nursing a coffee and a hangover. The ring is center stage, barely visible. She flips a switch and the overhead lights BLAST ON, bright as the sun.

She winces, *no thanks*, and turns the lights back off. HOLD on the dark, empty ring.

## INT. JACK'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING

Jack comes in from his run and drops his keys on the table, next to a BRAND NEW FOG MACHINE.

It looks expensive (as far as fog machines go). He pours himself six Advil and sticks his mouth under the sink to take them.

INT. JACK'S HOUSE - JACK AND STACI'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jack opens an old LAPTOP on his nightstand. The SCRIPT for tonight's show is up. He scrolls down and we see various PRODUCTION ELEMENTS and MATCH RESULTS before stopping at:

**JACK VS. ACE**

No ending has been written. Jack stares at his computer.

STACI (O.S.)  
Needed to leave five minutes ago.

Staci stands in the doorway, stunning in her Sunday best. Jack doesn't even look up.

JACK  
You're really making me go. *Today.*

STACI  
Your momma was adamant. And I think we could use it. Thomas said he heard us fighting last night.

JACK  
I heard my folks yell all the time.

STACI  
Me too. Look how we turned out.

There's a lightness to their back-and-forth that makes it hard to tell when they're being playful and when they're actually pissed off.

STACI (CONT'D)  
Can you please just admit you shouldn't have bought a \$300 fog machine without asking?

Jack finally spins in his chair--

JACK  
Baby. It's for the league.

STACI  
That's what you said about the microphones.

JACK

Again -- what's the point of having  
wrestlers talk *if you can't hear*  
*them?*

STACI

Again -- what's the point of having  
wrestlers talk?

Jack can't even dignify this with a response.

STACI (CONT'D)

I know you say you want me home  
with Thomas, but pretty soon we're  
not gonna have a choice.

He turns back to his computer, not interested in retreading  
this path. Staci gives up and starts to exit, but--

JACK

Staci--

She lingers, hoping for an actual apology.

JACK (CONT'D)

(re: the script)

--Who do you think should win?

Not what she wanted to hear. When Jack looks up again, she's  
gone. He refocuses on the computer. **JACK VS. ACE.**

I/E. BIG JIM'S TRUCK - TRAVELING - DAY

Big Jim drives through the country with his pregnant, Yankee  
transplant wife, MELANIE (23). They're in nice clothes.

MELANIE

I can't believe he's making us  
drive all the way out here.

Big Jim doesn't respond. He just looks at her belly, smiling.

MELANIE (CONT'D)

What?

BIG JIM

You -- y'all. My girls.

Melanie relents, charmed. Big Jim leans over and kisses her.

EXT. DIRT ROAD - MORNING

Ace waits on the side of the road. Big Jim's truck rumbles up and Ace hops in the back--

ACE  
You're a lifesaver, bro. Mom  
would've killed me.

Melanie notices Ace cracking a beer in the truck bed.

MELANIE  
Hey -- not in the car, Ace!

ACE  
This ain't a car, city girl.

Ace slaps the roof, good to go. The truck pulls off. Ace takes a gulp and leans back, not a care in the world.

I/E. JACK'S JEEP - TRAVELING - MORNING

Jack and his family ride in silence. Jack glances over at Staci, but she ignores him and fixes her makeup. He tries to make eye contact with Thomas in the rear mirror. No luck.

JACK  
Excited for tonight?

Nothing. Jack stares ahead and keeps driving.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

The tiny community church. You can hear the organ from the gravel parking lot as the Spades hurry toward the entrance.

They reach the front door at the same time as Ace and the Kitchens. An odd, uncomfortable beat -- the brothers size each other up, like they're still in character.

Staci breaks the tension by hugging Melanie. Ace tousles Thomas' hair and enters first. Jack follows, annoyed.

INT. CHURCH - CONTINUOUS

The **CHOIR** sings "**PEACE IN THE VALLEY**" as the two trios immediately divert. Ace and the Kitchens sit on the right side of the aisle, next to Cleta Spade. Her eyes light up when she sees Ace.

Jack and his family hug the left side of the church, settling in an empty pew up front. FOLKS whisper, taking note of both Spade brothers -- this is like Ali and Frazier showing up to church together the morning of a fight.

Thomas looks back and catches his uncle's eye. Ace flexes and makes a strained Macho Man face. Thomas snickers and flexes back. Jack taps his son on the arm, making him face forward.

Cleta sees all this. Jack glances across the aisle and makes eye contact with his mother. She looks away, focusing on the CHOIR. Jack listens to the music but doesn't sing along.

EXT. CHURCH - MORNING

The flock mingles after church. Everybody knows everybody, and they have forever. Ace and Big Jim emerge from the chapel, leading Cleta carefully down the steps.

BIG JIM

What'd y'all pray for?

CLETA

You mean besides for it to be over?  
New pastor can't no more preach  
than a cat.

ACE

Hey, but at least *I* made it, right?

CLETA

Yes, Lord. It's good to see my  
boys in church again.

Ace kisses his mom on the head as they approach Staci and Melanie chatting. Jack is nowhere to be found. Ace hugs Staci and lifts Thomas up.

ACE

Dang kid, how much you weigh?

STACI

Say we've got a ballgame later,  
Uncle Ace.

THOMAS

Our team sucks.

\*

STACI

Where'd you learn that word?

THOMAS

Dad.

ACE  
Think he taught me that word too.

THOMAS  
Sorry...

STACI  
I know he didn't teach you that one.

LAUGHS. Melanie looks around.

MELANIE  
Where is Jack?

STACI  
Getting the car. He doesn't like to be seen in public, much less being friendly, the day of a match.

ACE  
Especially not with yours truly. \*

MELANIE  
(to Big Jim, making sure) \*  
... That's "kayfabe", right? \*

BIG JIM  
(nodding) \*  
That's kayfabe. \*

ACE  
Gotta keep up the act *allllll* the \*  
time, even outside the ring... \*  
(tongue in cheek) \*  
So folks know it's real. \*

CLETA  
Idiotic. Once, when Tom "broke his \*  
leg" in a match, he rolled around \*  
the house in a wheelchair for a  
month just so the boys would think  
it really happened. \*

More laughter. Ace tosses Thomas to Big Jim and the boys start play-wrestling.

MELANIE  
But people know it's fake, right?

STACI  
They do. I think.

MELANIE

.. So what's the point?

A group of CHURCHGOERS watch Ace and Big Jim, eager to catch a glimpse of their favorite local celebrities.

STACI

Them "believing", that makes them part of the show.

Cleta walks over and shoos away the gawking fans. Melanie turns to Staci.

MELANIE

Every time he gets in the ring it scares me to death. I don't know how you do it.

As Jack pulls around in the Jeep and HONKS, Staci shrugs--

STACI

Kayfabe.

EXT. ARENA - MORNING

Crystal drives into the parking lot on her old, beat-up DIRTBIKE. She looks up at the arena, excited.

INT. ARENA - MORNING

Three WRESTLERS are already in the RING:

ROOSTER ROBBINS (30s), black, sweet-faced and pot-bellied, fastens protective pads onto the rusted turnbuckles.

BOBBY PIN (26), 6'6 with an absolutely beautiful mullet, lies anxiously on the mat.

DIEGO COTTONMOUTH (28), wiry, smartass Italian, is perched upon the top rope, playing on his iPhone.

DIEGO

Remember *Glacier*, the blue ninja dude from WCW? He's on here.

ROOSTER

I'm telling y'all, Twitter is the key to a fruitful wrestling career.

BOBBY

How many followers you got, Rooster?

ROOSTER  
 (proudly)  
 36 as of this morning.

DIEGO  
 All these guys. They all got old.  
 (then, to Bobby)  
 Alright rook, here I come--

Bobby tenses, but stays still. Diego leaps off the top rope and BUTCHERS an ELBOW DROP. He lands painfully, driving his elbow into Bobby's side and slamming his shoulder on the mat.

DIEGO (CONT'D)  
 You moved, dickhead! This is why  
 you haven't won a match yet!

BOBBY PIN  
 I'm so sorry, I don't know what I--

Crystal calls out from the last row of the bleachers--

CRYSTAL  
 It wasn't his fault.

The guys all look up, noticing her for the first time.

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)  
 You let your weight come down on  
 your elbow. You gotta bring it  
 down on your leg, then *lightly*  
 drive your elbow into his side.

Diego rolls his eyes.

DIEGO  
 Well then, ring rat, if it's that  
 easy why don't you come do it?

Without hesitation, she scampers down into the ring and mounts the turnbuckle. Bobby scoots closer to her--

CRYSTAL  
 You don't think I can jump as far  
 as Diego?

Rooster chuckles as Bobby crawls back where he was. Crystal shoots a look that says *keep going*. Bobby obliges.

ROOSTER  
 Careful there Crystal, this ring's  
 older than you are.



Crystal LAUNCHES into the air and lands a PERFECT ELBOW DROP. Everybody, even Diego, is impressed. Crystal KICKS HER LEGS and SPRINGS UP, a la Shawn Michaels.

CRYSTAL

It's all about controlling your impact. You land the wrong way, you could really hurt yourself.

DIEGO

Too bad you're a manager and not a wrestler.

Ouch. Before Crystal can respond, Jack enters, dressed in an old flannel and carrying a gym bag. Everybody stands up a little straighter. He nods to the gang, barely noticing them.

INT. HALL OF CHAMPIONS - MORNING

Jack heads down the HALL OF CHAMPIONS, stopping to look at the cheaply framed photos of past DWA champions. A younger Jack is up there, still wearing the heel's scowl. So are the men we saw on the billboard, WILD BILL and TOM SPADE. Wild Bill holds up his TWO-BY-FOUR and howls at the moon.

Willie appears behind Jack, sucking a screwdriver from an old Dale Earnhardt Big Gulp (she's always carrying this thing).

WILLIE

Shall I make room for the kid?

JACK

You think he should win?

WILLIE

Wrestling's fake. Who gives a shit who wins?

Jack peels away and heads for his office. She follows.

WILLIE (CONT'D)

But somebody's gotta, and Ace is the one selling tickets. It'd behoove us all to keep him happy.

JACK

The outcome will be in the best interest of the overall narrative.

WILLIE

Whose narrative?

JACK  
I thought you didn't care who won.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Jack opens his gym bag. He removes the TITLE BELT, then hands Willie the NEW FOG MACHINE we saw in his kitchen.

WILLIE  
How'd Staci take this?

JACK  
She doesn't appreciate the  
importance of synthetic fog.

Jack grabs a beer from his mini fridge.

WILLIE  
Toss me one, Dale Senior's dry.

He does. Willie pours the beer into her cup and they toast.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
So our ref quit.

JACK  
Another one?

WILLIE  
Twisted his ankle when you threw  
him out of the ring.

JACK  
He signed a waiver. I was in  
character.

WILLIE  
You're always in character. He  
says it ain't worth the shitty pay.

Jack tips his drink to that sentiment.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Speaking of, Jacksonville called  
again. They remain interested in a  
potential merger.

JACK  
Why? Cause they're hacks and  
they're scared I'm going to run  
them out of business?

WILLIE  
Charlie Gully wants to bring back  
the territories.

JACK  
Tell him the 80s are over.

Willie looks around at the ancient office.

WILLIE  
You could've fooled me.

JACK  
They got nothing we need.

WILLIE  
Except money. They want our *stars*:  
Ace, Big Jim...  
(off Jack's glare)  
You, and your creative. It's a way  
to keep doing this, Jack.

JACK  
You know how many views we've had  
since I put my match with Big Jim  
online?

WILLIE  
Every promotion puts their shit  
online now--

JACK  
Almost thirty thousand.

Willie takes this in, genuinely impressed.

WILLIE  
.. Seriously? Jesus.

JACK  
It's cause our shit's better. And  
as soon as I can get this second  
camera, and somebody to work it--

WILLIE  
Another camera. You think a fog  
machine pissed off your wife?

Jack stands down, content to put a pin in this conversation.  
Willie rises and picks up a framed PICTURE on the desk --  
Jack and his father, years ago. Jack is around Thomas' age.  
He rides on Tom Spade's broad shoulders. They look happy.

WILLIE (CONT'D)  
Who do you think Tom would have  
win?

JACK  
I don't care. He's dead.

She sets the picture down, facing away from Jack. She grabs the fog machine and exits. Suddenly fatigued, Jack leans back in his chair and takes a deep breath. He cracks another beer.

EXT. COUNTRY MART - DAY

Big Jim's truck is parked outside an old country market.

FARMER (O.S.)  
Grew up watching your pop.

INT. COUNTRY MART - CONTINUOUS

Ace signs a John Deere hat for a middle-aged FARMER.

FARMER  
He was my favorite.

ACE  
Mine too.

FARMER  
Thanks again. This'll mean  
everything to my boy.

The Farmer smiles. They shake hands and Ace rejoins Big Jim, who has just finished signing autographs for a couple of LITTLE KIDS. They peruse the drink aisle together.

ACE  
Jack should let us charge for that.

BIG JIM  
I don't mind it.

ACE  
Tonight's sold out cause of *me*, and  
I'm only making fifty bucks.

BIG JIM  
It's more than most of the guys. I  
can ask about hiring you back at  
Winn Dixie--

ACE

I don't want to work at fucking  
Winn Dixie, that's why I got fired.

(then)

Tomorrow, when I'm champion, I'm  
demanding a raise. Hundred a show.

BIG JIM

Are you for sure winning?

Ace smirks -- *obviously*. Big Jim pays for two Gatorades. Ace  
also throws down some CHEAP EYELINER. Big Jim glares at him.

ACE

What? I'll pay you back.

(then, defensive)

It's supposed to really help your  
eyes stand out on stage.

Big Jim shakes his head and pays for the eyeliner too. The  
Farmer gets in line behind the guys as Ace casually leans up  
against the CHEWING GUM.

ACE (CONT'D)

Got with Tricia Bell last night.

BIG JIM

What about Crystal? She really  
likes you.

ACE

Crystal had her title shot, but  
there's a new number one contender.

(then)

It is a bummer though, she's pretty  
good at the manager shit.

The overweight and overworked clerk, HELEN COOPER (30), gives  
Big Jim his change. She rolls her eyes at Ace's bullshit.

BIG JIM

Thanks Helen, good to see you.

Ace discreetly SNEAKS A PACK OF GUM into his pocket. He fist  
bumps the oblivious Farmer and starts to exit--

HELEN

Put it back, Ace.

Ace stops, reddening. He plays dumb, not turning around.

HELEN (CONT'D)

You steal shit every time you come  
in here.

(MORE)

HELEN (CONT'D)  
Only reason I ain't called the cops  
is cause your daddy was good to my  
family. Put it back.

Ace swallows hard. He backs up and sets the gum on the counter, then tries to leave without looking at anyone. He's halfway out the door when--

\*  
\*

HELEN (CONT'D)  
Tom would be ashamed.

Ace's eyes go cold. He steps back in and looks dead at Helen.

ACE  
(measured)  
Remember that time y'all came over  
to our house, for supper? When we  
were kids? I do. I was real  
little. Had to sit at my own table  
and just listen to you talk, and  
eat. Man did you eat -- scoop  
after scoop of casserole. I  
thought for sure you'd bust.

He approaches the counter. Other CUSTOMERS are watching.

ACE (CONT'D)  
And you just *kept talking*, all  
night, about this puppy dog you'd  
found off the side of the road.  
How excited you were to keep it.  
Remember that?

He's leaning over the register. Big Jim tries to stop him--

BIG JIM  
Ace, c'mon. Let's go--

ACE  
Bout a week later, Mom told us your  
dog got loose, got hit by a car.  
And you know what ol' Tom said?  
"Probably for the best. That  
Cooper girl was just gonna eat it,  
anyway."  
(smiles icily)  
Goddamn, did we laugh.

The Farmer is aghast. Helen fights back tears. Ace grabs the gum off the counter and Big Jim jerks him out of the store.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack stares at the script on his laptop. **JACK VS. ACE**. He minimizes the window, revealing his DESKTOP BACKGROUND: Jack, Staci, and Thomas at a little league game.

He brings up the DWA's Facebook page and watches video footage of his match with Big Jim, fast-forwarding to the confrontation with Ace. The video's sound has been MUTED to omit Ace saying "Fuck you." The crowd starts their familiar CHANT: **ACE! ACE! ACE!** The fans really do love him.

Jack minimizes the video and reopens the script, on the precipice of a decision. He starts to type but is interrupted by his PHONE RINGING. He checks the caller ID and picks up--

JACK

How's it going, Mr. Cooper?--

Jack's face frosts at the answer. The chant continues.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

More WRESTLERS have shown up. Everybody drinks beer and shoots the shit in the locker room. Bobby curls 60 pound dumbbells with ease while talking to Rooster and Diego.

BOBBY PIN

Can't wait to get my ass whooped again tonight.

ROOSTER

Ain't about winning. It's about *getting over*, with the crowd. Jack'll make the people love you.

DIEGO

Or hate you. I started out as the Venice Menace, since I'm Italian? None of these rednecks gave a fuck.

ROOSTER

I thought he was from California.

DIEGO

Then one night Jack hands me a mask, says I'm a Mexican luchador. *Diego Cottonmouth*. Now the fans can't stand me.

ROOSTER

Point is, Jack makes 'em care.  
*That's* how you get noticed by  
scouts from the big leagues.

DIEGO

And getting noticed is how you get  
the hell out of Duffy.

INT. HALL OF CHAMPIONS - DAY

Crystal stands in the Hall of Champions, looking at all the pictures. Willie breezes past, taking down another drink in her Dale Earnhardt cup. Crystal hurries after her--

CRYSTAL

Hey, Willie, I was wondering -- is  
there a locker I could use?

Willie stops at the locker room door. She sizes Crystal up.

WILLIE

How long have you been his manager?

CRYSTAL

I'm not just a manager--

WILLIE

True, you're really more of an  
escort. How long?

CRYSTAL

Two months.

WILLIE

(does the math)

Yeah... sorry sweetie, knowing Ace,  
you should be gone any day now.

And with that, Willie blows into the locker room. Crystal watches as the door swings open, then shuts.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Willie enters and WHISTLES for the guys' attention. Nobody gives a second thought to seeing her in the locker room.

WILLIE

Jack's got the card, everybody  
hustle up!



The wrestlers all drop what they're doing and head out. She SLAPS Rooster's ass good-naturedly as he lumbers by.

INT. ARENA - CONTINUOUS

Jack stands in the ring, beer in hand, going through the script. The wrestlers crowd around, looking up at him in quiet reverence. Crystal stands in the back, by herself.

JACK

... Rooster over Rude Rudy, Diego  
over Bobby Pin--

Ace and Big Jim enter quietly through a side door. Ace ducks a kiss from Crystal, still caught up in what happened at the store. Jack makes hard eye contact with Ace, then continues--

JACK (CONT'D)

After intermission, y'all are all  
back out there for the Battle  
Royale. Big Jim and Diego are the  
last men standing, and Jim, just  
when it looks like he has you, I  
want you to start a USA chant. You  
channel the crowd's energy and toss  
him over the top rope for the win.  
You're the star tonight.

The guys holler their support. Big Jim looks down, humbled.

JACK (CONT'D)

Then Ace and I bring it home, with  
Ace going down by pinfall.

A few hushed MURMURS as everyone turns to Ace. He manages to keep a straight face. Crystal squeezes his hand.

WILLIE

I got your full scripts, with  
finishes. Autographs are an hour  
before showtime, don't be late--

Ace stares daggers up at Jack.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Jack walks toward his Jeep. Ace catches up with him--

ACE

How bout I just don't wrestle at  
all? What then?

JACK

Fine. I'll put Big Jim in the Main Event. Folks love the Freak from the Creek.

ACE

Why are you doing this?

JACK

Doing what? Making a decision in the best interest of my business?

ACE

How is me losing good for the league?

JACK

You win tonight, where do we go from there? But if you lose -- the hero, defeated by the villain, has to start over and fight his way back to the top? *That's* an angle.

Jack calmly gets into his Jeep. Ace is fuming.

ACE

Folks are coming *tonight* cause they want to see me win *tonight*.

JACK

No. They're coming because they trust me to tell them a story better than the ones they sit at home and tell themselves.

ACE

Dude, it's rednecks in tights pretending to hit each other. It's supposed to be *fun*.

JACK

Not at the expense of being good.

Checkmate. Jack cranks the Jeep and stares at Ace.

JACK (CONT'D)

Marty Cooper called me up. Said his daughter left work sobbing.

ACE

*That's* what this is about? Me hurting Helen Cooper's feelings?

JACK  
 In *public*, the day of a match.  
 Folks need to believe you're a good  
guy.

ACE  
 They do.  
 (then)  
 I am.

JACK  
 Are you?

They hold each other's stare until Jack finally shuts his door and drives off.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

The locker room is empty, save for Big Jim. He tapes an ULTRASOUND PICTURE of his daughter-to-be in his locker. Ace tears inside, breathing fire.

ACE  
 Can you fucking believe Jack?

Big Jim remains quiet. He doesn't look happy either.

ACE (CONT'D)  
 What? Now you're pissed at me too?

BIG JIM  
 I didn't say anything.

Big Jim shuts his locker and exits. Ace sits on a bench, all alone. A moment passes, then Crystal appears in the doorway, holding a copy of the SCRIPT.

CRYSTAL  
 It's just a belt.

Ace looks out past her, into the Hall of Champions.

ACE  
 Sure.  
 (then, re: the script)  
 How's it happen?

CRYSTAL  
 (reading)  
 "Ace Superkicks Jack, but instead  
 of pinning him, Ace trots around  
 the ring, playing to the crowd."  
 (MORE)

CRYSTAL (CONT'D)

When Ace finally goes for the pin,  
Jack traps him with an inside  
cradle for the win."

ACE

Jesus. I could come up with  
something better than that.

(then, quietly)

It's bullshit. Dad leaves it all  
to him and I'm just... stuck.

CRYSTAL

I been watching matches here since  
I was little. Sometimes losing is  
the best way to win over a crowd.

ACE

The crowd already loves me.

CRYSTAL

And after tonight, regardless,  
they're gonna love you even more.

Ace stares at her, his mood shifting--

ACE

Come in here.

CRYSTAL

I don't think I'm allowed in the  
locker room.

ACE

I'm the star of this league. And I  
say you are.

She enters. They kiss as the door locks behind them.

EXT. BASEBALL FIELDS - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Ancient browngrass ballfields. LITTLE LEAGUERS play.

EXT. BLEACHERS - CONTINUOUS

Jack sits next to Staci in the bleachers. He wears a Braves  
hat and sunglasses so as not to draw attention to himself,  
but a few of the PARENTS and KIDS recognize him anyway.

Down on the field, Thomas steps into the on-deck circle.  
Staci offers her husband some boiled peanuts in a dixie cup,  
but his thoughts are clearly elsewhere.

STACI

You okay?

JACK

You know I hate that.

STACI

Well I hate it when you sigh and  
clear your throat because you're *so*  
*bored*.

JACK

I'm not bored.

STACI

I am. Kids are boring. We're  
boring. Eat a peanut.

They both smile, finally thawing. Jack grabs some peanuts as  
Thomas comes up to bat.

JACK

(with some difficulty)  
I'm sorry. I should've told you  
about the fog machine.

STACI

*Thank you.*

JACK

... And so now, I'm *telling* you --  
I have to buy another camera.

STACI

(way too loud)  
Are you shitting me?

Parents look at them. Jack lowers his voice--

JACK

We've already got the best product,  
now we just need the best  
*presentation*, and--

As they start to argue, Thomas RIPS one down the third base  
line. The crowd GOES WILD as he rounds toward second. Jack  
and Staci don't realize until he's already slid into the  
base. Staci stands and cheers. A moment later, Jack follows.

STACI

Can we just talk about this later,  
please?

Jack relents, nods. Thomas takes off his batting glove and FIRES TWO FINGER GUNS into the sky, just like Ace. Jack looks around at the crowd clapping and cheering for his son.

I/E. JACK'S JEEP - TRAVELING

Jack drives back to the arena, no longer in disguise. He stops at a red light and a MINIVAN pulls up beside him. He catches two young BOYS staring at him from the back seat, mesmerized. Jack does his signature THROAT SLASH and the boys look away, terrified but thrilled.

The light turns green and Jack hits the gas, actually allowing himself a smile.

INT. ARENA - DAY

Jack enters the arena and finds it oddly empty, save for some CATERERS setting up barbecue on folding tables. Willie approaches, looking a little flustered.

JACK  
The hell's going on?

WILLIE  
We have a visitor.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wrestlers crowd around an old TV. A homemade SEX TAPE plays--

MAN'S VOICE  
... And I told 'em, y'all think  
Hulk's sex tape is bad? Just wait  
until you see mine, motherfuckers!

LAUGHS. The crowd parts, revealing WILD BILL HANCOCK (late 50s), the other wrestler from the billboard with Tom Spade. He's still larger-than-life, but larger in the waist, too. He wears a gaudy suit and ridiculous rattlesnake boots. Ace stands next to him, beaming.

WILD BILL  
There he is -- Jack Spade.  
Nastiest heel I ever saw.

JACK  
(turning on the charm)  
I learned from the best.

WILD BILL  
I was only the best cause I had  
your dad...  
(then, re: Ace)  
... Sort of like you two, I hear.

JACK  
Ace is a rising star, no doubt.

WILD BILL  
Can't wait to see who wins tonight.  
(then, to the group)  
But first, how bout we eat all that  
barbecue I just had delivered?

The guys cheer and head for the arena. Wild Bill grabs Jack--

WILD BILL (CONT'D)  
They can have the pig, but I need  
some Turkey.

Ace watches anxiously as Wild Bill, Jack, and Willie exit.  
Crystal walks up and puts her arm around his waist.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack enters his office. Wild Bill stops Willie in the  
doorway.

WILD BILL  
Boys only, sweetheart.

Willie looks over Wild Bill's shoulder -- Jack rolls his  
eyes, indicating that this isn't a battle worth fighting. She  
regards Wild Bill with disgust -- there's history here.

WILLIE  
You got fat as fuck.

Willie exits, shutting the door behind her. Jack pours WILD  
TURKEY WHISKEY into a styrofoam cup, hands it to Wild Bill.

WILD BILL  
Brings back memories. You poured  
me and Tom a lot of these.

Jack grabs a beer for himself.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)  
He always said you'd grow up to be  
a beer drinker.

JACK  
Whiskey makes me mean.

WILD BILL  
Me too.

Wild Bill grins and throws back the Turkey. He orbits the office, picking up the picture of Jack and Tom.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)  
Been what, two years? Goddamn.  
Your mother doing any better?

JACK  
We don't talk much.

WILD BILL  
She don't blame you, does she? For  
what happened?

No response. Wild Bill sits down across from Jack and resets--

WILD BILL (CONT'D)  
How's the business?

Again, no response. The pleasantries have been dispensed.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)  
Christ, Jack, I know you think I  
could've done more to help--

JACK  
--Or done *anything*--

WILD BILL  
--But I got bills too. Ex-wife.  
Kid in some fucking hippie private  
school. I did my time in Duffy.

JACK  
Then why are you back?

Wild Bill pours himself some more whiskey and puts his boots up on Jack's desk.

WILD BILL  
We're offering your brother a  
developmental contract.

A long beat. Jack stays quiet, the wind knocked out of him.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)  
I know Ace is your best man, so I  
wanted tell you in person.



JACK  
He's barely been at it a year.

WILD BILL  
We think he's ready.

JACK  
He's a *kid*, he's nowhere near ready.

WILD BILL  
I say he is.

JACK  
You haven't even seen him in the ring--

WILD BILL  
We have, Jack -- thanks to you, those videos you put up online.

JACK  
(reeling)  
He won't leave what we're building here.

WILD BILL  
I left. Came back this morning on a Learjet. How'd that work out?

JACK  
You think I care about private planes?

WILD BILL  
I think your brother will. Planes, limos, sold out stadiums... Didn't y'all do a show at the Golden Corral buffet last year?

JACK  
There were 200 people there and it was better than anything y'all have done in a *decade*.

The room is silent. Wild Bill slides the whiskey toward Jack and adopts a softer tone.

WILD BILL  
I'm gonna offer some advice I think Tom would have given you--

JACK  
Get out of my office.

Wild Bill just grins, totally in control. He finishes his whiskey and exits. Jack collapses into his chair.

INT. HALL OF CHAMPIONS - CONTINUOUS

Ace and Crystal stand in the hallway, pretending not to eavesdrop. Wild Bill walks out and approaches Ace.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Jack hears a joyful HOLLER from outside as Wild Bill gives Ace the news. He eyes the Turkey on his desk, but doesn't drink. He grabs a copy of the script and stares at it.

**JACK VS. ACE.**

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. AROUND DUFFY - ESTABLISHING - DAY

Daylight fades as the town closes up shop. Folks are piling into their trucks and heading to the arena.

INT. ARENA - DAY

We're CLOSE on Ace's face. He talks energetically to CAMERA:

ACE  
So -- I backflip off the top  
turnbuckle, but you catch me mid-  
air and WHAM, Jackknife. Everybody  
thinks I'm done, *but I kick out--*

PULL BACK SLOWLY, REVEALING:

Ace stands in the center of the ring, Big Jim at his side. Crystal is perched on the ropes behind him.

ACE (CONT'D)  
We trade punches until I catch you  
with a Superkick, and we both go  
down. I get up right before you  
and BAM, another superkick.

REVEAL JACK AND WILLIE eating barbecue in the ring, opposite Ace and his posse. Jack does not look impressed.

JACK  
That's it?

CRYSTAL  
 (protective)  
 No, there's more--

ACE  
 Right. You're down, but I don't  
 pin you yet, cause *I don't want the  
 match to end*. You get up and I  
 nail you again. I start to go for  
 the pin, but you wave me off -- you  
 know you're beat, *but you don't  
 want it to be over either*. You  
 stand up, one last time, and smile.  
 Shake my hand. We're brothers.  
 (lets that sit)  
 Then I hit a final Superkick, and  
 pin you for the win.

Quiet as everybody digests this. Ace looks real proud of  
 himself. Willie turns to Jack.

WILLIE  
 I don't hate it.

CRYSTAL  
 (eager)  
 And Jack -- if y'all play it right,  
 it'll get the fans on *your* side  
 going forward.

JACK  
 Who are you again?

CRYSTAL  
 You know who I am.

JACK  
 What makes you think I want the  
 fans on my side?

CRYSTAL  
 Nobody would expect it.

This lands with Jack, but Ace interrupts--

ACE  
 This is exciting, Jack. It's good.

Jack looks at Big Jim, who's been silent this whole time.

JACK  
 What do you think, Jim?

BIG JIM  
(uncomfortably)  
Feels like the end of something.

Ace glares at Big Jim. Jack takes note, then stands--

JACK  
*Exactly.* It's a conclusion.

ACE  
Well, yeah. I'm leaving.

JACK  
I'm not.  
(final)  
Finish stays the same. You want to  
win the belt, you can stick around  
and earn it.

Ace looks at his brother.

ACE  
Everybody else is happy for me.

He exits through the ropes. Big Jim and Crystal follow.  
Willie turns to Jack as if to ask, *What now?*

JACK  
We're okay. We've still got me,  
still got Big Jim. It's fine.

They keep eating in silence. Willie drops her plate.

WILLIE  
This barbecue's fucking awful.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - DAY

Ace enters, Big Jim behind him. Ace isn't happy.

ACE  
(biting)  
Thanks for the backup, bro.

BIG JIM  
Jack shaking your hand? Nobody's  
gonna believe that.

Ace stares at his friend.

ACE  
You're just a sidekick. You know  
that, right?

Ace grabs his stolen gum and storms off.

EXT. PARKING LOT - DAY

Volunteers set up concession stands and parking cones. Fans are already showing up to tailgate.

EXT. BEHIND THE ARENA - DAY

Ace paces out back, smacking his gum. Crystal smokes a cigarette on the steps.

CRYSTAL  
We should go somewhere tonight,  
after. To celebrate.

ACE  
(petulant)  
Celebrate me losing?

CRYSTAL  
No, celebrate *us*. Getting called  
up.

Ace stares at Crystal, thrown by her use of "us." A rented CADILLAC pulls up. Wild Bill rolls down the window.

ACE  
Where'd you go?

WILD BILL  
Had to pick up an old friend.

There's a TWO-BY-FOUR in the back seat, the kind Wild Bill was holding on the billboard. Ace grins like a little kid.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)  
Now, where can we get a drink?

ACE  
Us?

CRYSTAL  
We got autographs pretty soon--

WILD BILL  
When it comes to autographs, if  
you're not getting paid, you should  
at least be getting drunk. Come  
on, superstar.

Ace starts for the Cadillac but Crystal grabs his arm--

CRYSTAL  
I just gotta grab my purse.

ACE  
(sotto)  
I think he meant just me.

Ace pulls away from Crystal and gets in with Wild Bill. She watches them drive off.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - DAY

Jack sits at his desk, staring at the script. **JACK VS. ACE.** He can't stop thinking about what Crystal said. He gets an idea, stands up--

INT. ENTRANCE TUNNEL - DAY

Willie talks with RAY (19), the seedy-looking replacement REF. The new fog machine is laid out in front of her.

RAY  
What's the rate?

WILLIE  
Twenty bucks.

Jack enters through the open door--

RAY  
I made twenty-five in Jacksonville.

JACK  
Then go back to Jacksonville, where they staplegun ref's faces, and don't have insurance.

Jack stares the young referee down. Ray rises and exits. Willie flips on the fog machine. Mist fills the tunnel.

WILLIE  
We don't have insurance.

JACK  
He doesn't know that. Have you seen Big Jim?

INT. DIVE BAR - DAY

Ace and Wild Bill are in a shitty dive, finishing their first whiskeys. Wild Bill has his two-by-four up on the bar and uses a POCKET KNIFE to scrawl something into the wood.

A few buzzed DRINKERS point and stare. Ace takes note, feeling pretty cool to be out in public with Wild Bill.

ACE

You remember the day you got the call?

WILD BILL

I barely remember this morning.  
(to the female BARTENDER)  
Two more, senorita.

As the Bartender pours their drinks, Wild Bill produces a money clip packed with CASH. Ace's eyes get big.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)

(a la Indiana Jones)  
Fortune and glory, kid.

Wild Bill goes to pay, but the Bartender gestures to a couple of OLD-TIMERS down at the other end of the bar. They raise their glasses to Wild Bill. \*

BARTENDER \*

They got y'all. \*

WILD BILL \*

(to the Old-Timers) \*  
Salut, fellas. \*

Wild Bill fishes a PILL BOTTLE from his pocket and washes down a PAINKILLER with liquor. He offers Ace the bottle-- \*

WILD BILL (CONT'D)

Roxys. Good shit.

ACE

(hesitantly)  
I shouldn't. Fucks me up too much.

WILD BILL

That's the point.

Wild Bill hands Ace a PILL anyway. A young REDNECK and his GIRLFRIEND approach from behind--

REDNECK

Excuse us--

The wrestlers both instinctively look up.

REDNECK (CONT'D)  
Holy shit -- *Wild Bill*. Could we  
get a picture? We're huge fans.

Wild Bill turns on his stool. Ace scoots out of the way--

REDNECK (CONT'D)  
No no, you too, man. Y'all two  
together, that's so badass.

Wild Bill examines the Redneck's girlfriend with leering  
eyes. He points to her with his pocket knife--

WILD BILL  
We'll take a picture with *her*.

Half an awkward beat, then the Redneck shrugs. His girlfriend  
poses between Ace and Wild Bill. Wild Bill GRABS HER WAIST  
and forces her onto his lap. Other patrons watch.

REDNECK  
She don't need to be *that* close--

WILD BILL  
(snarling)  
Take the picture, boy.

The Redneck swallows hard and snaps a picture on his phone.  
His girlfriend pulls away and they hurry out. Wild Bill goes  
back to carving the wood. Ace sits back down, unsettled.

WILD BILL (CONT'D)  
Gonna tell your brother about that?

ACE  
.. No.

WILD BILL  
You hate him, don't you?

ACE  
(beat)  
We're different.

Wild Bill finishes the two-by-four. He blows off the dust and  
slides it over to Ace. Carved into the wood are the words:  
**"LONG LIVE THE KING"**

WILD BILL  
"King Spade." Jack Spade, Ace  
Spade. Tom loved that stupid shit.



Ace plays with a STRAW, mulling the question about Jack.

ACE  
Jack always drove me to school.  
This one morning, Dad was loaded--

WILD BILL  
(cutting him off)  
Don't tell me a depressing story.

Ace stops, embarrassed. He downs his whiskey, then--

ACE  
Jack's just always tried to protect  
me, I guess.

Wild Bill finishes his drink and gestures for two more--

WILD BILL  
So he could control you. Keep you  
from getting what's yours.  
(burps)  
Like your daddy's belt.

INT. STAIRWELL - DUSK

Jack ascends the arena's old stairwell, stopping briefly to catch his breath. He continues out onto the--

EXT. ROOF - CONTINUOUS

Big Jim sits on the ledge, looking out at the Georgia pines brushing against the purple sky. Jack approaches--

JACK  
Willie said you come up here a lot.  
The view really worth the climb?

BIG JIM  
Yes. And, you can see the  
lightning bugs.

Down below, tiny FIREFLIES illuminate the parking lot. Big Jim offers Jack a cigarette. They both light up as Jack settles hesitantly onto the ledge.

JACK  
When I was real little, Mom  
wouldn't let me come to the shows  
here.

(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)

But one night Dad had some friends over to watch this WCW pay-per-view, and I snuck out of my room for the main event -- Sting vs. Ric Flair, for the belt. It was amazing... all those people booing Flair and cheering for Sting, like he was a superhero.

BIG JIM

I hated Flair.

JACK

Everybody did. Mom made me go back to bed, but I hid my Fisher Price cassette recorder by the TV. Next day I played it all back -- Flair got cocky and Sting beat him with an inside cradle. The fans cheered so loud the arena was shaking.

Jack stares down into the trees, remembering.

JACK (CONT'D)

But the *crazy* thing was, after the match, Sting gets the mic and the first thing he says is, "Ric Flair is the greatest World Champion of all time." And the crowd doesn't know what to think -- these guys are supposed to be mortal enemies. But Sting broke kayfabe just to give Flair credit, cause he knew -- folks only love the good guys as much as they hate the bad.

Big Jim slowly realizes the point of Jack's story.

BIG JIM

You want me to turn heel.

JACK

(nods)

After I win, you come out and attack Ace. You're jealous, through playing second fiddle. I see you whipping him, and I'm torn... *that's my brother*. So I Jackknife you and save him. Ace rides off into the sunset, and you and I pull a *double turn* -- now I'm the face, and you're the heel.

Big Jim is silent. He takes a long drag of his cigarette.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Nobody will expect it.

BIG JIM  
I don't want people to boo me.

JACK  
They will, for a while, cause  
they'll see themselves in you --  
someone who's made a mistake, who's  
trying to work things out--

Big Jim tries to say something, but Jack talks over him--

JACK (CONT'D)  
But one day you'll turn back.  
Folks need to believe we can get  
better. Fix ourselves, and--

BIG JIM  
I'm retiring. After tonight.

This stops Jack in his tracks.

JACK  
--What?

BIG JIM  
Melanie's wanted me to for a while.  
And Ace leaving, I guess that's  
probably, some sort of sign.

JACK  
Why does she want you to quit?

BIG JIM  
If I stop wrestling, I can take on  
more ours at work. Maybe become an  
assistant manager one day.  
(exhales smoke)  
And she thinks it's dangerous.

JACK  
Is that what you think?

BIG JIM  
No. I love it.  
(beat)  
But I love her more. So.

JACK  
Let me talk to her, I can--

BIG JIM  
I got a daughter coming, Jack. I  
can't do this forever.

Jack doesn't understand this, but he can't argue with it. He looks up at the sky, struggling to comprehend everything.

BIG JIM (CONT'D)  
(earnestly)  
I'll still turn bad, if that's what  
you need me to do.

JACK  
... No. Don't worry about it.

Jack taps out his cigarette and rises. Big Jim follows suit.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Crowd's really gonna miss you.

BIG JIM  
I'm gonna miss signing autographs.  
That's my favorite part.

**An instrumental arrangement of "PEACE IN THE VALLEY"** begins and continues over this next scene:

EXT. DUFFY ARENA - DUSK

We see shots from the AUTOGRAPH SESSION:

- The WRESTLERS sit at folding tables, signing tacky memorabilia for excited FANS.
- The longest lines are for Ace and Big Jim's empty seats. Big Jim appears and the crowd CHEERS. He waves and smiles.
- Crystal poses for pictures with some love-struck guys.
- Rooster signs with his Twitter handle, @RoosterWrestles.
- Swooning COUGARS surround Bobby Pin, who seems unnerved by all the attention.
- Diego, wearing his LUCHADOR MASK, flirts with some cute young LADIES. This really pisses off their boyfriends.
- Melanie sneaks up behind Big Jim, surprising him. He gives his wife a giant bear hug, lifting her off the ground.
- Staci and Thomas wait in line for Ace, like regular fans. Thomas looks around for his uncle. Staci searches for Jack.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Jack sits at his desk, drinking WHISKEY now, watching the autograph session through a window in his office.

Ace walks in. He sways slightly, all the booze catching up to him. But, for the first time, his claws don't seem to be out.

JACK

You're late. Fans are waiting.

Ace shuts the door and approaches the desk. Jack remains staring out the window. Ace speaks with raw, honest emotion--

ACE

*I really want to win.*

(no response)

After I make it big, I could come back. Help you, help the league.

Jack turns to face Ace.

JACK

You make it big, you won't see Duffy again until they bury you here. Which, the way you're headed, won't be long.

Ace absorbs this blow, keeps his cool--

ACE

I just want my picture on my wall. Next to you. And Dad.

JACK

(coldly)

He'd hate you for leaving. But he wouldn't be surprised.

Outside, the fans start a familiar CHANT, one that continues over the rest of the scene: **ACE!** **ACE!** **ACE!** Ace seems to feed off this, growing angry now--

ACE

Let me win.

Jack stands, gets right in his brother's face--

JACK

No.

Ace looks out the window, over Jack's shoulder. He sees Staci and Thomas. The argument escalates rapidly from here--

ACE  
Is this because I made your kid  
laugh in church this morning?

JACK  
Please.

ACE  
Cause he cheers for *me* in the ring?  
Cause *they all* cheer for me?

JACK  
They cheer for the character.

ACE  
The character *I* play.

JACK  
*The character I created.*

Ace SHOVES Jack. Jack stumbles backward, but holds his ground.

ACE  
I'll tell everybody what really  
happened. With you and Dad.

JACK  
(quietly, mirroring Ace's  
ad-lib in the ring)  
Fuck you.

Ace turns and exits. A dangerous line has been crossed.

Jack looks out the window and, after a moment, sees Ace appear outside. The crowd LOSES IT. Thomas runs into Ace's arms. Staci takes a picture of Thomas with Ace and Big Jim.

Jack pours another whiskey as the crowd's cheers build into--

INT. ARENA - NIGHT

The arena has transformed. The overhead lights are on and DWA flags have unfurled from the rafters. Excited FANS file in, filling the rickety bleachers.

Staci and Thomas take their seats on the front row. Staci sees Willie prepping the CAMCORDER a few rows up. The women exchange polite but distant nods.

INT. HALL OF CHAMPIONS - NIGHT

Crystal faces the locker room. She braces herself, then strides confidently through the door--

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

She enters into a tense pre-game atmosphere. The wrestlers are all getting dressed, and nobody seems to notice her. She smiles to herself and goes to Ace's locker. She looks in the mirror and starts applying her GLITTER EYELINER--

WILLIE (O.S.)  
The fuck are you doing?

Crystal spins, startled. She's face to face with Willie.

CRYSTAL  
--Just making sure Ace has everything--

WILLIE  
Ace is leaving. The locker room's for *wrestlers*, not groupies.

CRYSTAL  
I can wrestle.

Willie looks around at all the huge men. She gestures to the GOBLIN BOYS, a couple of 350 pound oafs.

WILLIE  
Against who? Them? Nobody wants to see that.  
(then)  
Go do your makeup in the ladies' room.

Crystal grabs her things and starts off, pissed. She turns back to Willie--

CRYSTAL  
How come *you're* in here?

WILLIE  
I belong here. You don't. Take that for the compliment that it is.

EXT. BEHIND THE ARENA - NIGHT

Ace paces the back parking lot, making a PHONE CALL.

INT. CLETA'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The PHONE RINGS in Cleta's house. She's PASSED OUT on the couch, still in her church clothes. There are pill bottles and a bottle of wine on the end table.

EXT. BEHIND THE ARENA - CONTINUOUS

Ace hangs up. He takes out the PAINKILLER Wild Bill gave him, as well as a STRAW from the bar. He puts the Roxy in the straw and BITES DOWN onto it, crushing the pill. Then he puts the straw to his nose and SNORTS.

Wild Bill approaches from behind, carrying the two-by-four. He holds it out to Ace.

WILD BILL  
Long live the king.

Ace takes the two-by-four.

INT. JACK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

Jack stands in front of a mirror, putting the finishing touches on his FACEPAINT. He drinks Wild Turkey from one styrofoam cup and spits tobacco into another. There's a KNOCK at the door, and Willie pokes her head in--

WILLIE  
Five minutes.

JACK  
How's the fog machine?

WILLIE  
It's a fog machine.

Jack stares into his whiskey cup, defeated.

JACK  
What would you do? If you didn't do this?

WILLIE  
(no hesitation)  
Tournament bass fishing.  
(then)  
I'll call Jacksonville tomorrow.  
See if they'd still be interested.

JACK  
Without Ace and Big Jim?



A long, empty beat.

WILLIE

You should say something to the  
guys.

INT. LOCKER ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Jack follows Willie into their locker room where, to their surprise, Wild Bill has just finished delivering a ROUSING SPEECH, Ace at his side. The wrestlers CHEER, all fired up.

WILD BILL

Anything to add, Jack?

Jack's wrestlers look to him. A beat, then:

JACK

Nope.

He turns and walks out. **FATHER JOHN MISTY'S "FUNTIMES IN BABYLON"** begins and continues over this next sequence:

INT. ARENA - NIGHT

The arena comes alive, lit up by CHEAP SPOTLIGHTS and EVEN CHEAPER PYROTECHNICS. The crowd of almost 600 GOES CRAZY as the matches commence. We see shots from the show:

- Willie on the mic, riling up the crowd and introducing the wrestlers with theatrical charisma.

- Rooster and RUDE RUDY'S match spills out of the ring and into the audience. The crowd loves it.

- Staci and Thomas cheer from their spot on the front row.

- Diego climbs the turnbuckle and waves a MEXICAN FLAG, infuriating the crowd.

- Diego launches off the top rope and lands a PERFECT ELBOW DROP on Bobby Pin, just how Crystal taught him.

- Crystal tries to apply her glitter eyeliner in the packed women's restroom. There are wasted girls all around, including TRICIA, Ace's squeeze from the bonfire. Tricia spots Crystal and shares a knowing LAUGH with her friends.

- Ace and Big Jim sit on the same bench, getting ready in awkward silence. Big Jim tapes his forearms; Ace applies his eyeliner. Finally Ace offers an olive branch fist bump, and after a moment, Big Jim obliges.

\*  
\*  
\*

- The Battle Royale RAGES, with ten guys in the ring at once. Big Jim kicks ass, tossing both Goblin Boys over the ropes.

- Thomas YAWNS. Staci checks her watch as he rests his head on her hip, trying to stay awake.

NOISE from the crowd echoes as the MUSIC SLOWLY FADES OUT, and we DISSOLVE TO:

INT. HALL OF CHAMPIONS - NIGHT

Jack stands alone in the Hall of Champions, swaying drunkenly. He puts on the title belt and stares at his father's picture.

Staci walks up behind him, holding a now-sleeping Thomas. Jack's bleary, bloodshot eyes light up a little.

JACK  
Hey, what are y'all doing?

STACI  
Just wanted to say good luck before  
we took off.

JACK  
You're leaving?

STACI  
This one's tapped out, couldn't  
keep his eyes open.

Her words barely register.

STACI (CONT'D)  
Heard about Ace. That's really  
great for him.

Jack says nothing. Staci touches his arm--

STACI (CONT'D)  
Are you okay?

JACK  
(who, me?)  
Yeah, I'm fine.  
(then, re: Thomas)  
We should wake him up. This match  
is gonna be something.

Staci stares at her husband.

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STACI  
 Honestly, I'm not sure it's a good  
 thing for him to see his father and  
 uncle beat the hell out of each  
 other.

\*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*  
 \*

Outside, the crowd begins to CHANT, signaling the imminent  
 end of the Battle Royale--

USA! USA! USA!

JACK  
 That's my cue.

STACI  
 Okay. Be safe.

JACK  
 I will. Love you.

STACI  
 Love you.

They kiss. She smells the booze on him, but doesn't say  
 anything. Staci and Thomas start off. Jack calls after them--

JACK  
 Don't y'all want to know what  
 happens?

Staci turns and looks at Jack, her heart breaking for him,  
 for his family. For *their* family.

STACI  
 It's not real, Jack.

They walk away. Jack watches them disappear down the Hall of  
 Champions.

INT. ENTRANCE TUNNEL - NIGHT

Crystal waits in the entrance tunnel, alone. She looks out at  
 the ring, where Big Jim is WAVING to his adoring fans.

Ace stumbles up, chomping gum, holding Wild Bill's two-by-  
 four. They idle in silence for a moment, then--

CRYSTAL  
 Am I coming with you?

ACE  
 (beat)  
 No.

Tears well in Crystal's eyes, but she holds it together. Jack finally approaches. He goes straight to Ace--

JACK  
We'll do Crystal's ending.

Ace and Crystal both react, surprised--

JACK (CONT'D)  
It was her idea, right?

A beat, then Ace nods. Jack stares at his brother.

JACK (CONT'D)  
You win.

Before Ace can say anything, Big Jim passes through, victorious, adrenaline pumping. He hugs Jack and Ace--

BIG JIM  
I love y'all.

A sad, sweet moment passes, then Big Jim lets go and disappears into the locker room.

**THE HOLLIES' "LONG COOL WOMAN IN A BLACK DRESS"** plays over the PA system as the new FOG MACHINE fills the tunnel, enveloping the Spade brothers in thick, dark mist.

INT. ARENA - CONTINUOUS

The crowd roars with BOOS as Jack emerges from the fog and strides down the entryway. Their jeers are LOUDER now, amplified -- almost as if, tonight, Jack's hearing them for the first time.

He enters the ring and gestures, begging the crowd for more. They oblige, screaming, swearing, slinging bottles and garbage, raining down all their hate on the elder Spade.

Jack looks at the CAMCORDER and starts to run his thumb along his neck--

But before he can, **VAN HALEN'S "DREAMS"** kicks in. The crowd EXPLODES as Ace bursts out of the tunnel, waving the two-by-four. Crystal follows, fully committed to her performance.

CAMERA holds on Jack as he listens to the booming cheers.

Ace jumps over the ropes and POINTS WILD BILL'S TWO-BY-FOUR DEAD AT JACK, taunting him. FIREWORKS GO OFF as ACE SHOOTS HIS FINGER GUNS INTO THE SKY, oozing charisma, more than a superhero now -- a god.

\*  
\*  
\*  
\*

**ACE! ACE! ACE!**

It's too much for Jack. He makes a decision. \*

Just before the bell rings, he grabs a MICROPHONE. He looks out at the surprised crowd and SPEAKS, slowed by the liquor--

JACK  
Duffy, Georgia...

The crowd instinctively BOOS. Jack pauses, listening, then--

JACK (CONT'D)  
... This is my home.

More BOOS. They're not buying it. Jack lets them finish.

JACK (CONT'D)  
People say wrestling is fake.  
They're right -- it is.

And *that* shuts the crowd up.

INT. ENTRANCE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Willie, Wild Bill, and others watch from the tunnel--

WILLIE  
What the hell is he doing?

INT. ARENA - CONTINUOUS

JACK  
The fights aren't real. The stories are made up -- there's even a script, that I write. Like a movie. We got a word for this in our business -- *kayfabe*.

The crowd is silent. Nobody knows what's happening.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Kayfabe was everything to my dad--  
(then, re: Ace)  
--Our dad.  
(a long beat)  
I hated him. He was a mean, alcoholic son of a bitch. But that's not what y'all remember. You just remember the *King*, flying off the top rope, 500 rednecks chanting his name.  
(MORE)

JACK (CONT'D)  
And damnit if, after a while, that  
wasn't how I remembered him, too.  
Tom Spade was a drunk, but *King*  
*Spade* was a hero.  
(then, to himself)  
Why?

The crowd stares at Jack, unsure of the answer. Ace tries to grab the microphone, but Jack collects himself and pulls away. He points out at the bleachers--

JACK (CONT'D)  
It's y'all. The crowd. Your  
cheers, your boos... *you make this*  
*real.*

Jack pauses, sobering, letting his words sink in with the fans. He has them now.

JACK (CONT'D)  
Y'all need to cheer for someone to  
win and someone to lose, *tonight*,  
cause in the "real world", you  
don't know whether you won or lost  
until it's too late.

The wrestlers watch Jack from the tunnel, transfixed. He locks eyes with Ace.

JACK (CONT'D)  
My brother's moving on. Leaving  
Duffy for greener pastures.  
Something better than *this*.

The crowd reacts, stung--

JACK (CONT'D)  
But me, I'll always be right here.  
Tonight, and every night, for  
y'all, until that bell rings for  
the very last time.

Jack points at the mat beneath him--

JACK (CONT'D)  
Cause *this* ain't fake. *This* is  
more real than anything.

Jack holds for a moment, then tosses the mic over the top rope. The crowd is stunned. Moved.

Ace has no idea what to think. Jack PUTS OUT HIS HAND, wanting to shake. Ace refuses, and the crowd takes note.

The BELL RINGS and Jack circles his bewildered brother. Finally they GRAPPLE, and Ace throws Jack into the ropes. He hits Jack with a CLOTHESLINE--

And a few people in the crowd BOO.

Jack gets up. Ace runs forward and CLOTHESLINES him again--

And now even more people boo.

Ace throws a right cross, but Jack parries and WHAP! He catches Ace across the mouth with a BACKHANDED SLAP. The impact is real. Ace wipes blood from his busted lip--

And the whole crowd CHEERS. They're on Jack's side now -- he's orchestrated a DOUBLE TURN:

Jack is the face, and Ace is the heel.

Jack grins crookedly, loving it. Ace's face gnarls with rage--

INT. ENTRANCE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Willie's stomach turns as she realizes what Jack has done.

WILLIE

Oh, shit...

INT. ARENA - CONTINUOUS

Ace runs forward and TACKLES Jack. The brothers break into a STREET FIGHT. The crowd goes insane. This is the most intense wrestling match they've ever seen -- because it's real.

The CAMCORDER records everything, as do countless raised CELL PHONES.

Jack and Ace pummel each other as the young Referee looks on, shell-shocked. Jack grabs him by the collar--

JACK

Don't ring the bell until it's over.

Outside the ring, Crystal is distraught. She looks to the--

INT. ENTRANCE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

WILLIE

I'm stopping this.

Wild Bill puts his arm up, blocking Willie from entering the arena. The crowd is absolutely ELECTRIC.

WILD BILL  
Are you kidding? Listen to that!

INT. ARENA - CONTINUOUS

Jack tires quickly and Ace gets the upper hand. He lifts Jack high in the air and SLAMS him into the mat. Ace goes for the pin, but Jack KICKS OUT and gets back to his feet. The crowd ROARS, firmly on Jack's side.

Ace tries a SUPERKICK -- but Jack anticipates and ducks behind him, grabbing his neck for the JACKKNIFE--

WHAM! Ace HEADBUTTS BACKWARD with all his might, catching Jack square in the jaw. Blood splatters across the mat. Jack gathers his bearings and raises his fists, asking for more--

INT. ENTRANCE TUNNEL - CONTINUOUS

Wild Bill is suddenly TOSSED ASIDE as BIG JIM barrels through the tunnel and back out into the--

INT. ARENA - CONTINUOUS

The brothers trade HAYMAKERS, just like in Ace and Crystal's pitch for how the match should end.

The crowd CHEERS as Big Jim appears, but he immediately RINGS THE BELL, signaling the end of the match. Everyone GROANS -- to them, he's just stopped the fight of the century.

Big Jim climbs into the ring and pleads with Jack and Ace--

BIG JIM  
Stop.

The BOOS are deafening. A BEER CAN strikes Big Jim in the back of the head. His eyes are pained. Then--

The crowd TURNS again. They CHEER louder than ever as WILD BILL runs toward the ring. He grabs his two-by-four from Crystal and TOSSES IT to Ace.

Ace SWINGS WILDLY, cracking the lumber over Jack's shoulder, driving him to his knees. Ace raises his weapon to STRIKE AGAIN, but Big Jim GRABS the two-by-four from behind--



CAMERA is with Jack, watching from the mat as Ace and Big Jim FIGHT for the two-by-four at the edge of the ring. Finally, with a powerful HEAVE, Big Jim RIPS the wooden board from Ace's grasp--

But the combination of his and Ace's momentum sends Big Jim TUMBLING BACKWARD, OVER THE TOP ROPE. He disappears from our view entirely.

Jack rises to see if Big Jim's okay, but Ace immediately turns and POP! He DRILLS Jack with a SUPERKICK. Jack CRASHES BACK onto the canvas, dazed, looking up at the LIGHTS.

Ace falls onto his brother, holding down his shoulders. Wild Bill hits the mat and COUNTS with the crowd--

**ONE! TWO! THREE!**

CHAOS as Ace and Wild Bill raise their arms in victory -- some fans are CHEERING, some are BOOING. Ace grabs the TITLE BELT and puts it on triumphantly. He shoots his finger guns into the sky, just like his father.

Jack tries to get to his feet, but his knees buckle. A concussed RINGING fills his head as he tumbles over. Somehow, amid all the mayhem, his eyes find Melanie Kitchen.

She's SCREAMING.

Jack crawls toward the ropes, looks down below the ring -- and all at once, so does everyone else. The arena falls silent.

Big Jim lies unmoving, his neck twisted and limp.

**WILLIE NELSON'S "GEORGIA ON MY MIND"** begins as we CLOSE IN on Jack, eyes flickering, processing just how real this all is--

Big Jim is dead.

FADE OUT.