

JACK OF THE SCARECROWS

By

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JACK OF THE SCARECROWS

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JACK OF THE SCARECROWS

For Charlie.

For Mike.

And especially for Tasha.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

JACK, human, male

MEL, scarecrow, male

PENELOPE, scarecrow, female

DELORES, scarecrow, female

ANNIE, human, female

SET: Exterior location.

A shack next to a cornfield sometime after the apocalypse.

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ACT 1
SCENE 1

Brown. Dull. A barren wasteland. The wind howls. Unrelenting and terrifying. There is but one abode in sight: A shack, beaten and decrepit (left). One of its windows hangs loose and several of the exterior wall panels have either pulled free or appear to be well in the final stages of doing so. There are several pieces of furniture (a couple chairs, a counter of sorts), that remain on the porch only because they are fastened to the floor or tied to the support posts. Off and to the right of the shack is a cornfield...well, what used to be a cornfield. The stalks have all since fallen or disintegrated. Guarding this sad display is a single scarecrow. For a while, we are kept fast in this hellish purgatory with no presence of human life until-A figure, clad in a very tattered black evening suit, appears beyond the field. Each step he takes towards his destination is one comprised of hard labor and absolute determination. Suddenly, a strong surge of wind knocks him onto the ground and sucks him out past the field. At the very last moment, he grasps hold of the stake the scarecrow resides upon. The wind whips him this way and that, frontwards and backwards. A moment passes then he begins to slowly work himself up to his feet. Once he has succeeded, he proceeds to the shack. When the figure finally arrives, he grabs hold of the support post and lifts himself onto the porch. He sits down on one of the bound chairs and sharply brings his fist up into his belly several times. Each time he does this, he hacks out a mouthful of dust and grime. This is not a quick process. There is an unnatural, otherworldly groan in

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the sky. The figure stands, opens the door and-He does not enter. Instead he moves back to the railing and looks again to the scarecrow. Still getting thrashed about by the wind. For a moment it seems that the figure may venture back out to rescue his inanimate companion but: There is another loud clap of thunder and-The figure escapes into the shack. The storm builds to an ear splitting crescendo as we slowly, slowly lead into:

SCENE 2

The next morning. Large mounds of dust cover the majority of the area. Footsteps can be heard inside the shack, coming to the door then-The door budes against the sand blocking it. Nothing. Beat. It is pushed again; this time with a bit more force and a bit more success. A hand emerges from the shack and grasps for the handle, just missing it. The hand disappears, there is an animalistic yell and then the door bursts open and out stumbles the figure, down the steps and onto his face. The figure does not move for a good while then, he lifts himself up, revealing his dust covered face. He wipes some of the grime away and, finally, we are able to see his facial features. This is a man worn down by the extremities of his environment. Malnourished. Clearly exhausted. The figure reaches over to a nearby mound of sand, picks up a handful and lets the grains sift through his fingers. A pang of remembrance hits and he looks to the scarecrow who has not moved from his spot. The figure makes his way over to the scarecrow, kneels down and begins to wipe some of the dust away from his face and shoulders. A slow, tedious task. Almost immediately after he has finished, the stake, on which the scarecrow is nailed, snaps and bends to the side taking the scarecrow with it. The figure bears down to stop the fall, grabs hold of the scarecrow's left arm which, upon this rather forceful rescue attempt, breaks off into his hand. The figure stares down at the arm in his hand

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then to the body then back to the arm then quickly lifts the scarecrow and stake out of the ground and hurries to the porch. Once arrived, he lowers the scarecrow onto the counter and sets the arm beside it. The figure looks about for something to sew the scarecrow's arm back to his body. His gaze happens down to his shoe. The lace! The figure sits in the nearby chair and works on removing the lace as fast as his fingers can. He succeeds, hurriedly kicks the shoe off then, taking the arm in one hand, he uses the shoe lace as a kind of needle and thread and runs it through the arm into the body. Every so often a stitch will pull through the straw stuffing of the scarecrow. Yet the figure does not give in to hysterics and continues to stitch, trying to be more careful with every new attempt. He finally finishes and gives the attached arm a slight tug. It does not break away. He leans back in his chair and for several long seconds, neither man nor scarecrow moves or makes a sound, then-The figure motions to the scarecrow that he will return and goes into the shack. A few moments later, he comes back outside carrying an old, rather sad looking Crosley radio. He sets the radio down upon the top step, carefully picks the scarecrow up and places him just beside the radio. He sits on the opposite side of the radio and begins to fidget with the knobs. At first there is no sound that comes from the Crosley. The figure continues. Eventually a high-pitched static breaks through the silence. The figure turns to the scarecrow, quite proud of his progress then moves his focus back to the radio. The static resumes. Louder. He continues to work at it. Turning the knobs this way and that way. Clearly without any idea of what he is doing but persisting through this task nonetheless. Suddenly a melody, distant in the mangled hum of static, becomes audible. The figure freezes, then gingerly starts back up with the knobs. Bit by bit until the song, an easy, swaying piece (Think Cheek to Cheek) wins out. So very light. Enchanting. There comes a brief spasm of static that threatens to take him from his musical reverie but the figure gives the head of the radio a good, sharp tap and the static

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disappears and the song continues. He closes his eyes and sways his hand back and forth. Completely absorbed in the song.

FIGURE. You know. I just realized. This is the last memory I have of my Annie. We went to this old theatre. The Paramount. Rather, it would show these old, classic movies. Like. Like Top Hat. *(Beat.)* You know? Fred Astaire? Ginger Rogers? *(Beat.)* No? *(Nothing.)* Heh, you know, you should really get out more. Broaden your cinematic horizons, as they say. Anyway, we...*(chuckle)*...we smuggled in a bottle of Grey Goose in her purse and paired with a paltry, half popped bucket of popcorn the two of us had what most would consider a very substandard anniversary date. *(Beat.)* It doesn't seem so standard now. *(Pause.)* They'd play music like this before the feature. You know. With a live band. And there was a little dance floor just in front of the screen that, if you felt brave enough, you could dance on. I could demonstrate, if you wouldn't mind. *(The figure motions off the porch, gets no response, and steps off and assumes a kind of starting position.)* Now, keep in mind. I'm no Fred Astaire. So...try to be gentle in your critique, alright? *(His hands bob as he counts out the beats then, he begins to dance, quite clumsily initially because, of course, he is only wearing one shoe. So, he kicks the remaining shoe off, and soon he is sliding about the place, eyes closed, in a near perfect imitation of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. The song eventually slows, nearing its conclusion when suddenly-The static overtakes the song and:)* No. No. No. Not again! Please stay with me! Oh, please! God! Don't take me away from her! Not again! *(The figure hurries back to the radio. Turning the knobs. Any way he can. One pops off. He shakes the radio. Violently. He screams. The static grows louder. The figure draws away from the porch and raises the radio high up above his head and hurls it to the ground. He freezes. Tears drip down his face. For a long, long while he does not move, instead staring down at the mangled heap of mechanisms and radio*

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parts. Then almost as if nothing has even happened, he disappears inside the shack, leaving the scarecrow, once again, alone.)

SCENE 3

The next day. There is a storm brewing in the distance that gradually moves closer as the scene progresses. The scarecrow sits alone on the porch rail and remains so until-The figure comes out of the shack and moves down to the pieces of radio, still strewn about the ground. He then goes about picking each one up and putting them into the various pockets on his person. As he does this he tries to avoid making eye contact with the scarecrow. Finally, he gives in and sits on the porch step directly below the scarecrow.

FIGURE. I'd...eh...I'd like to...eh...to apologize for yesterday. My conduct was inexcusable. I overreacted in front of a stranger and for that I am truly sorry. *(Silence.)* I'm Jack by the way. What's your name? *(No answer.)* Oh, come on. I know you aren't the biggest conversationalist around but you could at least tell me your name. *(No answer.)* *(The figure steps off the porch and examines the scarecrow.)* You have nice, strong features. Let's see, I'd peg you as a...Billy. No. Not Billy. How about...Cliff? No. Definitely not a Stan or a Mike. *(Another intense stare.)* Patrick? *(The next names delivered rapid fire.)* William. Henry. Ian. Donald. Mac. Kevin. Gabe. Simon. Peter. Mel. *(Pause.)* Say, what about Mel? Yeah. Yeah! Mel! I mean, if I were to pin a name to a fellow, er scarecrow, you would definitely be a Mel. So, there we are! Hello Mel. My name is Jack. We have just mastered the first step of basic communication. Look at us go! *(Pause.)* Now, for step number two, I might inquire about your occupation. So. Mel, what is your occupation? *(No answer.)* Do you have an occupation? *(No answer.)*

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Okay. Heh. Okay, well, I could assume your line of work would be scaring crows but that would be an automatic stereotype simply because you are a scarecrow and that's not right. (*Beat.*) Of course, there isn't anything wrong with scaring crows. I'm sure it's a very admirable profession. And to remain so dedicated to your occupation in these crowless times. That is a very noble quality to possess, my friend. A rarity to be sure. (*Pause.*) Me. I'm into graphic designing for a novelty item manufacturing company. You know. Coffee mugs. Shirts. Little, cute plush dolls and etcetera. (*Beat.*) I was one in this group of a hundred fellow designers and we would sit in a room with hundreds of computers and every day we would all spend countless hours researching and brainstorming different situations and scenarios that we could place our assigned character into. Things like holidays, special occasions, politics. (*Dry chuckle.*) Bad weather would sure be a timely subject now, eh? (*Beat.*) Anyway, the character we created around was this cat. Kind of the mascot of our company. Oh, what was his name? Right! Chester. The cat's name was Chester! I remember, he had these big, sad, blue eyes. Chester was always sad. A real down on his luck, pathetic kind of sap. Now, you'd be asking, "Why make him so downtrodden over and over and over again? Why continue to make the poor guy suffer?" And I would probably reply, "Well, you see, Mel, the whole idea was to make Chester up in a way that not only mirrored our own sad experiences and situations but also to endure them and make our tragedies seem a bit more tolerable." Even if it was a sliver of a smile. Or a half-hearted chuckle. We'd chalk it up as a success. So, the designs that worked. The designs that brought the best, I mean the happiest reactions, we'd slap them onto an object or two and ship them off to the masses. If Chester could make us feel better about ourselves through joy and humor then why couldn't he do the same with the general public? And wouldn't you know it. Chester proved a sensation. An institution. At least as far as non-medicinal, anti-depressants are concerned. (*A thoughtful pause.*) As luck would find it, one of my

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designs was the last selected for print and distribution. (*Beat.*) It was this image of Chester that one would see on a T-shirt. Chester was on the T-shirt but he was also wearing a T-shirt and he's pointing to the middle of his shirt. Like so. (*Demonstrating for Mel.*) Okay. And, Chester's looking right at you with those sad blue eyes and he's pointing to his shirt and on his shirt in big bold print it says, "I survived the apocalypse and all they gave me was this fucking T-shirt." (*Pause for effect.*) The shirt never went into circulation on account of (gesturing out) well, you know. That's a strong occurrence of situational irony, if you ask me. Still, I'm confident it would have made an absolute killing. (*Silence.*) Now, I guess you could say my sole occupation is trying to find the one person I care most about in this accursed mess of a world. We were separated during one of the first storms, see. A terrible, terrible storm. One of the worst, I'd say. (*Beat.*) I have searched for her, Mel. I preface what I'm about to say with that. Oh, I have searched. And still. Obviously. Nothing. Lately. Lately, I've been content just to sit here and wait. It's easier to do that. Less heartbreak. (*Beat.*) So here I am. And here I've been. Weeks. Months. (*Silence.*) I dunno, Mel. I wonder if maybe it's time I just accepted the reality that... (*Deep, tearful sigh*)...that I am destined to spend the rest of my life alone. (*Long silence. Jack's attention is drawn to the scarecrow.*) But I'm not alone now. Am I? (*A low rumble of thunder. Jack vaults off the porch and thrusts his fist into the sky.*) Do you hear that?! Yeah! I'm talking to you! My name is Jack and I am not alone anymore! (*It is at this exact moment that Jack's triumphant declaration is cut short by a titan clap of thunder. The wind, howling and shrill follows carrying with it large clouds of dust. Building. Roaring. However, Jack does not falter. Instead, he hurries to the porch rails and lifts himself up onto the roof.*) Is that all you've got?! (THUNDER BOOM!) Oh, you're going to have to do better than that! Much, much better! (*There is something almost malicious about this current storm. It whips Jack this way and that way. Frontwards and backwards. And through its best efforts the storm*

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cannot loosen him from the roof.)) You have taken everything and everyone that I hold dear but you will not take Mel! Do you hear?! You will never take Mel away from me! (There is a loud burst of light and sound. Jack screams, pitches backwards and:)

SCENE 4

For a while all is black. No wind. No sound or sign of life. Nothing. Then-

VOICE. Jack. It is time to wake up. Open your eyes, Jack. *(A soft, cool light fades over the area.)* I know you can hear me, Jack. Open your eyes. It is okay. The storm has passed. *(A hand reaches out from behind the shack and grabs at the earth. Then another hand appears, pulling a very beaten and bloody Jack into the open.)* There we are. It's alright. The worst is over. *(Jack stops and lays his head against the porch. Exhausted. He coughs. Low and broken. Congested. He is still for a moment.)* That's just fine. Take your time. Adjust. There is nothing to worry over. Relax.

JACK. *(Pained)* Who...?

VOICE. It's alright. You don't have to talk now. You can close your eyes for a moment but, I caution you, do not fall asleep. You must not fall asleep, Jack. *(Jack nods in response. Even this simple gesture registers a great pain.)* Why don't you close your eyes for a moment?

JACK. I...

VOICE. You must not overly exert yourself. Do not talk unless you have to. *(Jack nods again and closes his eyes.)* There we are. The most important thing is for you to take it easy.

JACK. Alright.

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VOICE. That was one nasty blow to the head you took. I'd say you have suffered at least a major concussion. You are very lucky to be alive.

JACK. Water. Please. Water.

VOICE. I'm afraid I cannot get you any water, Jack. I am sorry. But in a moment when you feel up to it, you can get it yourself. At that time, I will coach you. Mentally. I will help you achieve your goal. When you are ready. (*Jack's eyes close.*) Jack. (*Long pause.*) Jack. You haven't gone to sleep, have you? Jack, open your eyes!

JACK. You said I could rest. I just wanted to rest my eyes.

VOICE. Well, that's fine. Yes. Rest your eyes. But you must not go to sleep.

JACK. I won't.

VOICE. Sleep would be the worst thing right now.

JACK. I just need to rest.

VOICE. Then rest. (*Silence.*) If I may. Yesterday. When you were sitting up on top of the roof. Shouting and raving like a lunatic. What were you possibly hoping to accomplish?

JACK. I don't really know. (*Beat.*) I guess I wanted to let it know I wasn't afraid anymore.

VOICE. You wanted to let it, a raging dust storm, know that you were not afraid anymore?

JACK. It sounded better in my head.

VOICE. Ah.

JACK. I guess you would have had to have been there.

VOICE. What makes you think I wasn't? (*Jack turns to look at the porch rail but the scarecrow is not there.*) Very good guess. But...no.

JACK. Where are you?

VOICE. Just past the porch. I have been covered by a pile of dirt. Can you see me, Jack? (*Jack nods.*) How do you feel? Could you move to me, do you think? (*Silence.*) Jack, you haven't gone to sleep have you?

JACK. No. No, I'm awake.

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VOICE. Could you try to move over here?

JACK. I'll give it a try.

VOICE. That's fine. Here. Now, this is what I want you to do.

Carefully, very carefully, lift up your right hand. Do that for me, Jack.

(After many moments of agonized effort, Jack succeeds in lifting up his hand.)

JACK. Okay. I've done it. Now, what do I do?

VOICE. Good. Now, just as carefully, I want you to check and see if you have any other injuries that might prevent you from coming to me.

This will probably hurt, Jack.

JACK. I do not doubt it. Okay. *(Jack does as he has been instructed. Slowly reaching down his chest, then to his knees and back up to his face. His hand stops and comes away from the side of his head covered in blood.)* Huh. Well, that's different. *(He promptly faints.)*

VOICE. (Fading) Jack, is everything alright? Jack, you must not go to sleep. Jack! Jack! Please! Open your eyes! Jack! *(Everything else fades slowly into:)*

SCENE 5

Moments after. Jack sits up abruptly and clutches at his head. He looks about, adjusting to the sudden flooding of light. Once his surroundings have become familiar to him, he exerts a kind of low groan and works himself up to his knees.

JACK. Oh. I'm back. *(Groan.)* I'm awake. *(No answer.)* Are you there?

VOICE. I am here, Jack. *(Beat.)* You know, I was beginning to think you had succumbed to your terrible injuries. I am glad that it not the case.

JACK. Sorry. For worrying you so much.

VOICE. No matter. How do you feel? Do you think you could work your way over to me?

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JACK. I'll try. (*Straining to look where he thinks the voice might be coming from.*) The dirt pile just beyond the shack, yes?

VOICE. Yes. That's it. Please be careful. (*Jack thusly repeats the same process. Hands go into the ground. One foot digs into the earth and up he comes. Once erect, he remains motionless for several moments. Not daring to move an inch. Then he takes a very awkward, laborious step to the mentioned pile of dirt. He stops after this step, reaches to the wound on his head, shudders at the thought of reliving the whole ordeal over again and takes a second step. Then another. Then two more. Each step, or rather each shuffle, brings him closer to his destination, until, eventually, he arrives. For a while he ponders down at what might well prove to be a disastrous descent to the ground and:)*

JACK. Here goes. Three. Two. (*Pause.*) (*He bends his legs but fear keeps him upright.*) Dammit! Okay. Five. Four. Three. Two...(*He buckles his knees and goes down without incident.*) Alright. I'm here. I've arrived.

VOICE. Wonderful, Jack. Now. Uncover me. (*Jack proceeds to do this. Pulling at clumps of dirt and tossing it this way and that until his efforts are awarded with-Nothing. He glances around his work place and still finds only bits of dirt and sediment.*) Is something the matter?

JACK. The pile of dirt in front of the shack...right?!

VOICE. Yes. That's what I said. (*Jack stands up and comes to the realization that the area in front of and surrounding the shack is littered with piles of dirt.*) What is it, Jack? Please say something. (*Jack suddenly moves to the next pile. Pulling and throwing the dirt any way he can. Again-Nothing. On to the next he stumbles. Pulling. Throwing. Again-Nothing.*) Do not lose hope. Keep at it! (*The next pile. Nothing. Jack graduates from using his hands to kicking at the dirt. With each kick he is rewarded with a large cloud of dust and dirt and still nothing. Finally:)*

JACK. Oh! I can't do this anymore!

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VOICE. No. No, Jack. Please do not give up. You are so close. I know it. I can feel it.

JACK. What's the point? Heh? Can you answer me that? *(No answer.)* Didn't think so. *(Slight beat.)* Why do I bother. You probably aren't even real. Yeah. Nothing more than a simple delusion I've brought about to deal with all this isolation. Solitude's been known to do that to a man you know. Yeah that's what this is. You're all of this loneliness just fucking with my head!

VOICE. Is that what you believe, Jack? Answer me. Is that what you truly believe? *(No answer.)* Very well. Don't keep looking for me. Leave me to rot beneath this pile of dirt. I accept the outcome of my likely suffocation with dignity. But if that's not what you truly believe...Please. Try again. At least once more. Jack, you have poured your heart out to me and exposed a tremendous vulnerability. I am grateful to you for that and I promise to give you the help you need. All I ask is that you try. Once more. Please.

JACK. I can't...Once more?

VOICE. That's all I ask. *(Jack looks down. There is in fact one final pile of dirt at his feet.)*

JACK. *(Softly)* Okay. Okay. I think I can do it one more time. *(Jack kneels down behind the pile and this time he does not remove it in as violent a fashion as he had before. No, this time he carefully removes a handful at a time. Slowly. Gently. After a couple handfuls are gingerly discarded to the side, Jack is presented with a familiar yellow patched arm. He takes the arm and lifts it from its dirt covered prison. Next comes the head. Then the body. Then the rest of the scarecrow. Jack is losing out to his emotions. Far from melancholy. These are tears of elation. With his other hand he takes the second arm of the scarecrow and brings him up in front of his own face and in this moment, he takes in every detail of his inanimate companion. Finally:)*

MEL. Hello, Jack.

JACK. *(Beside himself.)* Hi...Mel.

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SCENE 5

Later that same day. Jack is sitting on the porch. There is a box of an assortment of items (bottle of Grey Goose, several cut lines of radio wire and Jack's right shirt sleeve) on the counter just beside him and a large bowl from which he will pull out and place his sleeve "cloth". Mel, the scarecrow, faces Jack. Jack leans in close to Mel with the injured part of his head. The blood has dried leaving a very dark, very disturbing display behind.

JACK. Well...how is it?

MEL. It isn't good. Lean in to me. Closer. The wound is in shadows. *(Jack does so.)* There we are. Because of the dried blood I can't quite make out any bone damage which, frankly, could be something to lend itself to concern. Turn just slightly. *(Jack does so.)* Thank you. Right. Now to business. What have you brought for the procedure?

JACK. A couple lines of radio wire. I thought there might be some use for it. Eh. My right sleeve. You know, to serve as a kind of cloth, I guess. And...*(Beat.)*

MEL. What else?

JACK. A bottle of vodka.

MEL. Is it Grey Goose by chance?

JACK. Yes. Will that brand work?

MEL. It's perfect, Jack! Well, shall we begin? Sterilize the cloth in the vodka. Get it nice and wet. *(Jack runs the cloth through the vodka. He rings it out in his hands then runs it through again.)* How is it? *(Jack sniffs the cloth and reacts to the strong aroma provided.)*

JACK. Definitely sterilized.

MEL. Very good. Now, I want you to take the cloth and dab, don't rub at the wound. We musn't be too forceful but neither should we be too gentle. *(Jack, after squeezing some of the excess vodka back into the*

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pan-and dreading what is to come, goes to work. After a couple concentrated dabs, some of the dried blood has begun to come off of his head and onto the cloth. +To avoid similar reactions of disgust from the audience, a method of performing this theatrical surgery is to have the actor playing Jack operate facing away from the audience. +) Rinse the blood off. (Jack does.) Good. Keep at it. (Jack does.)

JACK. (Wincing) Oh! Christ! Okay. Okay, Mel. I've reached the wound. Now what?

MEL. Now you are going to take the tip of one side of the radio wire and you are going to use it to stitch the wound back up.

JACK. What, stitch?!

MEL. Why yes, Jack.

JACK. (*Beat.*) I can't.

MEL. There really is no other option. The wound must be stitched in order to begin the healing process.

JACK. No.

MEL. No?

JACK. I can't, Mel. See, I have this extreme aversion to blood. Needles. Operations. Bodily fluids of any kind. You name it and I've got it. I realize it's horrible timing, my coming out and saying this now but I literally cannot go through with the surgery. Sorry.

MEL. You stitched me.

JACK. That was different!

MEL. How was it different? (*A whimper in response.*) If anything, this will pale in comparison to the fine display of surgery you previously exhibited.

JACK. But...But...Oh, alright! (*Jack, hesitantly, digs out the radio wire from the box.*) I can't see what I'm doing.

MEL. That is why I'm here. Take the wire and insert it just beside the bottom edge of the wound. (*Jack brings the wire to the general area.*)

JACK. Here?

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MEL. A little higher. *(Jack raises the tip of the wire a good inch.)*

JACK. Here?

MEL. And in just a bit. *(He brings it further towards his face.)* There we are. Perfect.

JACK. Then I...what...just put it in? Just go right to work?

MEL. Yes. Take a deep breath. And. Begin. Deep breath in, Jack. *(Jack sucks in a breath and does not let it out.)* You're going to have to exhale, Jack. *(Jack shakes his head.)* *(Sternly)* Jack...*(Jack blows all the air out.)* Deep. Easy breaths. Here. Breathe with me. In and out. In and out. In. And. Out. *(Mel begins to demonstrate. Deep, calm breathing. Jack listens for a while then starts up with Mel. At first his breaths are far from steady or deep but eventually they match up with Mel's in perfect synchronization.)* Now start the stitch. *(Jack takes in a final breath, holds it-wincing, and touches the tip of the radio wire to his skin.)*

JACK. Oh! It hurts, Mel!

MEL. You haven't done anything, Jack.

JACK. *(In tears)* Okay, but it's going to hurt, isn't it?!

MEL. It will probably be quite painful, yes. But we cannot stop now. You've got to press on. Push the wire through to the other side. Deep breaths. Deep. Breathe, Jack. *(Jack pushes the wire into his skin and through to the other side. Wincing. Whimpering.)* Very good. And again. *(Jack repeats the process.)* Again. *(He runs the wire through his skin. Once more. Twice more.)* Fine, Jack. You're doing fine. Breathe. *(Once more. Twice more and then-He finishes and his blood covered arms drop to his side and for what seems to be the first time through the whole ordeal, Jack breathes. Deep savoring breaths.)*

JACK. *(A deep exhalation.)* We made it, Mel! *(Long pause.)* Mel? *(No answer.)* *(Jack reaches forward and gives Mel a slight push. Mel pitches backwards over the porch rail and falls to the ground below where he, as most inanimate scarecrows might, lays still and silent.)*

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SCENE 6

Several days later. Mel sits on the top step leading up to the porch. For a while he is the only “being” in the area until the door opens and Jack, complete with radio wire stitching, comes out carrying with him a tin box and a rake. He sets the rake aside and, treating the box like someone would a priceless treasure, takes a seat beside Mel.

JACK. I’ve been thinking, Mel. Every man has a purpose in life, you know. A driving force. Me, I’ve spent the better part of these two years thinking I had no purpose. Like I was trapped in this...this limbo of sorts with little hope or prospect of continuing on, which is certainly the worst kind of thinking for someone trapped in a post-apocalyptic setting. *(A thoughtful beat.)* But...just recently I met you and I got to know you and, hand straight to God, you gave me the purpose I was thirsting for. The simplicity of the idea is actually quite astounding! *(Beat.)* I am going to help you get your job back! And I’m going to do it with these! *(Jack gently rocks the tin box back and forth. There are many little things rolling around inside.)* Do you know what these are? *(No response.)* Have you any idea? *(Still no answer.)* No? Okay, I’ll bite. Inside this tin box are thirty little seeds. Corn seeds. Er...pop corn kernels not cooked all the way but, you know, same principle. Anyway, until this exact moment, for two years, they have been sitting on a shelf. Collecting dust. I think it’s about time we put them to good use. What do you say? *(Jack looks up and scans the skies. Far from confident.)* I know what you’re thinking. Mother Nature has rendered me skeptical as of late but, well, there hasn’t been a storm in over three days, so...that’s got to account for something, right? *(No answer.)* Mel, have I done something wrong? *(Beat.)* Mel? *(Nothing.)* Will you say something to me? *(No.)* Anything? *(Still nothing.)* It doesn’t matter. We’re going to plant these popcorn kernels and they’ll grow the best damned crop of corn you’ve ever seen and crows will fly in from miles just to have the honor of

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getting scared by you. (*Jack retrieves the rake then gently sets the tin box beside Mel.*) I'm entrusting these to you, Mel. They mean an awful lot to me. Will you watch over them while I'm gone? (No answer.) (*Jack heads back to the patch of land that had, at one time, been the home of the corn field and walks about the perimeter of the area, intently stamping each step he takes into the soil. After his second time around, Jack moves to the center of the patch and starts to rake out a kind of diagonal path to the stamped outskirts of the circle. He repeats this routine, perhaps a touch too vigorously, until the dirt has been raked and combed into every which direction. Most un-uniformed, yet Jack is satisfied. He chucks his rake aside and crosses back to the porch steps where Mel the scarecrow continues to keep watch over the tin box of kernels. Jack carefully takes the box, toasts it up to Mel, then goes back over to the patch and sprinkles the popcorn kernels about the raked patch. Every couple of steps he will turn back to pick up a kernel not discarded to a spot of his liking and sprinkle it elsewhere. He then stomps each spot with a well-placed, very deliberate stomp. Jack finishes and takes a moment to review his progress, only then coming to the realization that he is directly in the center of the patch. His movements instantly become a kind of balancing act as he turns this way and that way trying to find the best path of exit. He finds a possible choice and reaches out to the edge of the patch with his left foot. It plants on the other side leaving him in a rather precarious position. Again, Jack tries to assess the situation as best he can when suddenly: His feet start to spread apart. Bringing him down. Down. Down. Closer to the intricately stamped kernels he spent so long distributing and- Jack takes in two quick breaths and vaults his right foot up and over and in doing so effectively clears the patch. For the first time in this horticultural venture of his, Jack rewards himself with a rest. Leaning on his legs and taking in deep long breaths. A smile creeps onto his face. This smile leads to laughter. Triumphant laughter and Jack partakes in, what appears to be, a rather strange display of personal victory which*

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leads him back to the porch steps. He sits beside Mel and gradually dispenses with his jubilations.) And now we wait. (He looks up into the sky.) I have a good feeling about this. We'll give it a week. Maybe a month. The rains will be here before you know it. (Long...long silence at the end of which Jack's eyes open saucer wide.) Mel, did you see where I left the rake? (Jack slowly, slowly turns to the patch and lo and behold there is the rake. Right. In. The. Center.) Oh. (Jack lets out a long, deep sigh, and rises up from his seat.) I'll be right back. (And so, Jack sets off again to the patch of thirty little planted popcorn kernels and one haphazardly discarded rake where, upon arriving, he lifts his right foot up and over to the center of the patch. His first step, like before, proves to be successful when, far off in the distance, there is the low rumble of thunder. Jack freezes. Right foot held in the air.) Mel...did you hear that? (No answer.) (Jack gently sets his foot down and just as he is about to raise up his other foot-Another rumble of thunder sounds. This time it is unmistakable. This time it is much, much closer. Jack lets free a cry of sheer joy and promptly begins to tumble towards the patch. At the last moment he turns face first, palms out and lands the fall. There is a third, very loud rumble. Then just in front of Jack, a single drop of rain falls.) It's happening! (More thunder. Another drop of rain. Then a second. A third. Jack brings his legs up to his hands and vaults himself over to the other side of the patch, completely clearing the planted kernels.) Oh, it's happening, Mel! Can you believe it?! (A monstrous roar of thunder booms across the sky. Jack cowers back but only for a moment as the downpour of rain follows close behind. Jack turns to the steps, grabs Mel and slings him about the place, cackling with glee and dancing about. He even commences to toss Mel up into the air and catch him. He continues. Spinning around. Tossing Mel into the air. Cackling. Spin. Toss. Cackle. Spin. Toss. Drop...?! Jack quickly scoops Mel up off the ground and checks to make sure all vitals are in check. They appear to be.) Sorry about that! (There is another loud explosion of thunder and then the rain really starts to come down.) (Upon notice that his

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companion is getting drenched.) Oh, you're soaked. Here. (Jack takes off his shirt and wraps Mel up in it leaving only his head exposed.) There. We can watch from inside. (He runs to the shack but slips and drops poor Mel yet again.) Sorry. Oh! Sorry. Let me help you up. (Jack shakes him off this time, then re-covers him back up with the shirt and enters into the shack as carefully as he can. The rain continues to build in intensity and volume and then there is a final clap of thunder and:)

SCENE 7

The next day. The rain continues throughout the scene as a steady downpour. Mel sits on the porch rail. Jack exits the shack and watches the rain for a while before sticking his head out into it.

JACK. (Shaking his head off) Can you remember a time it ever rained like this? (Pause.) The kernels! (Jack hurries over to the side of the porch and leans out to inspect any progress of the crop's growth. Like a child at Christmas.) Of course there wouldn't be any difference. Stupid. (He sits down on the top step and watches the rain.) You know. Any other day this rain might be considered a nuisance. Or worse. Not today. Today it's a...I dunno...a God send. Do scarecrows believe in that kind of thing? Religious phenomena? Godsendings? (No answer.) Anyway, a rain like this comes along after it's been bone dry for what...two years. It gets you to think that maybe...just...just maybe there really is such a thing as miracles. (Pause.) Or...maybe it is just the rain. (He continues to stare out into the pouring rain and...)

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SCENE 8

Several days later. The rain has not slowed or diminished. If anything, it has intensified. Mel is sitting against one of the support posts. Jack, meanwhile, is knelt down at the patch, inspecting his infant crop. His black dinner jacket is held above him serving as a kind of umbrella. For a while, Jack does not move from his crouched position. He just keeps staring. Finally, he stands up, shakes his jacket off and lifts it above his head. However, he forgoes any idea of continuing to use it as an umbrella and walks back to the porch without any head shelter. Once arrived, he tosses his jacket onto the porch then leans against the support post. Long silence.

JACK. Still nothing. (*Silence.*) Kind of monotonous sounding, isn't it? Pitter. Patter. Pitter. Patter. (*A humbling sigh.*) It doesn't seem like much right now. This rain. But enough of it's been known to topple whole civilizations. (*Beat.*) Just think on it. Something as insignificant as a little drop of rain can bring about so much destruction. So much suffering. (*Beat.*) Sorry, Mel. Sorry. I didn't mean to frighten you. (*No answer.*) I tell you what I would do when it would rain real hard. Now, this is back when I was a child of course, but when it would rain really hard, like this, I'd arrange my pillows strategically beneath my bed. Kind of like a makeshift floatation device. You know, so that in the off chance the flood waters were to rise up into my room I'd have the means to survive. Silly kid's stuff, I realize but, hey, it gave me some peace of mind. (*A long sigh.*) You wouldn't happen to have any pillows on hand, heh? I'd say...about a hundred thousand should probably do the trick. (*No answer.*) No. I didn't think you would. (*Long silence, then almost absently, he commences to sing "Keep on the Sunny Side". Clearly not a professional singer, but he makes do with the talents he's been given.*)
There's a dark and a troubled side of life,
There's a bright and a sunny side too,

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Though we meet with the darkness and strife,
The sunny side we also may view-
*(There is a low grumble of thunder. Jack sighs again in response and
lays down on the porch. Suddenly as if he had never stopped
communicating:)*

MEL. Keep on the sunny side, always on the sunny side,
Keep on the sunny side of life,
It will help us every day, it will brighten all the way,
If we keep on the sunny side of life. *(Jack stares bewildered at his
“awakened” companion.)* Well, don't just sit there, Jack. We've only
just started. You take the next part. *(A large smile appears on Jack's face
and:)*

JACK. Okay. Here goes!
The storm and its fury break today
Crushing hopes that we cherish so dear
Clouds and storms will in time pass away
The sun again will shine bright and clear.

MEL. Wonderful and now the chorus!

JACK/MEL. Keep on the sunny side, always on the sunny side
Keep on the sunny side of life
It will help us every day, it will brighten all the way
If we keep on the sunny side of life

JACK. One more time, together!

JACK/MEL. Keep on the sunny side, always on the sunny side
Keep on the sunny side of life
It will help us every day, it will brighten all the way
If we keep on the sunny side of life.

If we keep

On

The

Sunny side of-*(There is a final rumble of thunder.)*

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JACK/MEL. *(Drawing out the last part.)* Life! *(This last note of the song leads straight into a:)*

SCENE 9

Several days later and still raining. Jack and Mel sit side by side on the top step.

JACK. Mel. I've got to level with you. I worry the kernels have probably all drowned by now.

MEL. Well...(Silence)...you did what you could.

JACK. I am sorry.

MEL. Let's not take all the credit, Jack. After all, try as they may, mere humans have never been able to control the weather.

JACK. Yes. I know that but...well, I was hoping it would have given you a...a sense of purpose again.

MEL. But, I have purpose, Jack. It's helping you. And I have enjoyed this little break so. These many months we have spent together have been...well...if it's all the same, I'd like to stay with you. Please don't make me go back.

JACK. *(Beat.)* Sure, you can stay, Mel. Hey. I'd be happy to have the company. *(Jack leans against the porch rails. Troubled. Pondering.)*

MEL. What is troubling you, Jack? *(No answer.)* You're thinking about her again, aren't you? Your wife. Annie?

JACK. *(Pause.)* She's out there, Mel. Somewhere. Alone. Helpless. Hurt. Jesus. I can't imagine her being hurt.

MEL. But you know that she may be. So, if I may, why continue to search, to wait, if it will only bring more pain and suffering?

JACK. Because I love her, Mel. No. It's more than that. I cherish her. The memory of her. I long for her.

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MEL. Isn't it painful, though? Holding on when you know you probably will never see her again?

JACK. When did you become such a realist? (Thoughtful beat.) Well, at first...yes. It was very painful. Agonizing, even. But then...this may sound a bit...well...strange, but, there were times...there are still times I think I can see her. My wife!

MEL. You are right. That does sound strange.

JACK. Okay. Just hear me out on this though, yeah? Each time she comes to me she seems so...so real. And those first couple of meetings, I'd swear to you she was the genuine article. But then there'd be these characteristics that'd throw the illusion off. Characteristics that were not the way they should be.

MEL. Imperfections?

JACK. No. No, not at all. They are perfections. For example. My wife had a crook in her nose. Here. The mirage, if you will, her nose was totally straight. My wife had this slight shuffle in her step on account of her having flat feet. Made her a terrible dancer. Well, the way the mirage would present itself, it almost seemed like she was dancing up on top of the clouds. Flowing. But far too dream like. (*Beat.*) Each time I've been presented with the fantastical illusion it is the recollection of my wife's silly imperfections that bring me back to reality. And there are times, so many times, I wish I could remain in the fantasy but I convince myself to keep searching. Or even. Just to keep waiting. I'd like to believe she has not stopped looking for me. If. If she's still alive. Anyway. When you find someone like that, Mel, you don't give up hope. No matter the circumstances.

MEL. Undying love and devotion.

JACK. Yeah. I guess you could call it that. (*Pause.*) What about you?

MEL. What do you mean what about me?

JACK. Well, surely, you've had someone in your life you've felt that way about.

MEL. No. I can't say that I have.

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JACK. Come on. You're joking. (*No answer.*) You're serious? (*No answer.*) No one?

MEL. No, Jack. You see, in order to be efficient at this whole crow scaring business one must be isolated from everyone else for the entirety of their existence. And in these many, many years since I began my life's shift, I have indeed been truly alone. (*Pause.*)

JACK. Well last I checked you were officially on extended leave. So, I think that kinda frees you up a bit, doesn't it?

MEL. I guess it does. Funny. I have become so used to perpetual loneliness that the idea of something so abnormally different as that seems so...Jack, I'd like to ask you something. Something I have not truly given any thought to until this exact moment. Do you think, now that I have some idle time on my hands, I could finally find someone to share such a connection with?

JACK. Sure, I think it's possible but...it's not exactly an instantaneous occurrence. Building up to that kind of connection, I mean. There are many, many factors that work into it all. Eh. Communication for starters. Understanding each other's likes, dislikes, quirks and well, look around. We are not exactly in the most peopled of areas, are we?

MEL. You are right. We would have to travel far and wide which proves quite problematic as we scarecrows tend to be of a more stationary nature. (*Beat.*) What if you were to find her for me, Jack?

JACK. Me?

MEL. I wouldn't have the first clue what to look for. But you. You have had extensive experience with this sort of ritual, yes?

JACK. Well. More...than less, I guess.

MEL. Then it is settled. *You* will find the perfect someone for me.

JACK. Just hang on a minute. If I'm going to be looking for someone that is quote quote perfect for you, I'm going to need to have a basic understanding of certain attributes you might be interested in.

MEL. Hm. Certain attributes. I like corn. Let her like corn.

JACK. Sorry. Let her like corn?

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MEL. Yes. I happen to find the whole process quite fascinating in its monotony. If she does as well then, we have just found a similar interest and we can immediately profess our love and devotion for each other.

JACK. That's not really giving me a whole lot to work off of, Mel. Is there anything else?

MEL. You mean more interests? Very well. Let her also despise crows.

JACK. Alright. Eh. Is there a certain physical type you might prefer?

MEL. A certain physical type? Why would that be a necessity? I am much more interested in one's personality than in looks.

JACK. (*Exasperated*) Because if I am going to be creating...I mean finding this...eh...perfect individual for you, I am going to need to have a rudimentary idea of what your type is, Mel. This information will help me in my...eh...searches. For you.

MEL. Are all humans this shallow, Jack?

JACK. (*Beat.*) Yes, Mel. To some extent or another. Every human usually has a physical type. (*Beat.*) Have you got any idea what yours might be?

MEL. Well. I hardly approve of such a medieval sort of selection. Types over personality. No, what I truly care for is to have someone that can contribute meaningful and intelligent conversation. (*Pause.*) This being said, if she were to be clothed in black...

JACK. Black?

MEL. Yes. Clothed in black. Not just normal black, mind you. Black like a starless night sky. If she were clothed in such a deep black, I think that might be quite agreeable.

JACK. I think I can manage that.

MEL. You don't find it petty?

JACK. No. I don't find it petty at all.

MEL. (*Abruptly*) Then let her also have green locks!

JACK. Come again.

MEL. Green locks. The greenest you can find. Long and curled locks that run down her body like water. (*Beat.*) Eh. I mean such a request is

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hardly essential when you take into account someone's mind and soul. To simply base the longevity of a relationship off of the color of one's hair is so...so...*(quietly)*...you will make a note, won't you? Green locks?

JACK. *(Playing along)* It's been done. *(Pause.)* Anything else you'd care to mention?

MEL. Well. Since you are asking...I do have several very minor additions to make.

JACK. Oh yeah? Well. How many is several exactly?

MEL. Five thousand, three hundred and fifty two. *(Beat.)* Exactly. *(Loud rumble of thunder. Jack's mouth hangs agape for a moment then he looks out into the rain and:)*

JACK. Well...then I guess we'd better get started, huh?

MEL. Oh, what fun. Yes. Do let us begin. *(Another clap of thunder which holds into:)*

END OF ACT 1

THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—

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