

## THE WILD

### *The Place*

A small, rarely inhabited campsite far from the Ozark Highlands Trail in northwest Arkansas.

### *The Time*

The play opens on an early afternoon of a hot July day.

### *The Characters*

NICK – 24  
LANDON – 63  
RACHEL – 15  
DON – 49  
CLARISE – 40  
BARRY – 42

### *The Setting*

The campsite is in a secluded wilderness clearing surrounded by pine and hickory trees, and the trunks of a few towering oaks. Sunlight filters through the trees, casting dappled patterns on the leaves, needles and pinecones carpeting the forest floor. There are lichen-covered granite boulders and logs from fallen trees, and the faint trace of a deer trail disappears into the undergrowth.

The sole evidence of previous human occupation is a long-abandoned fire ring made from rocks the size of small bread loaves. A few pieces of charred timber are visible among the mix of mud and ash.

When the play opens, the only sounds are the wind whistling through the treetops, many varieties of birds, and the trickle of a rapidly evaporating mountain stream.

## THE WILD

### ACT 1

*The forest clearing is brightly lit by a very hot July sun that's tempered only by an overhead canopy of branches and leaves.*

*LANDON, 63, stands center, hands on hips. He is 100 pounds or more overweight and struggles for breath but does what he can to not let it show. Wearing chinos and a polo shirt, LANDON has been sweating profusely under a backpack that now leans against a tree. He wears sunglasses, a wide-brimmed hat and L.L. Bean boots.*

*NICK, 24, sits on a large rock downstage. He is youthful, muscular, and wears cargo shorts, hiking boots with wool socks, a ball cap, and a t-shirt tied around his waist, baring a tanned torso. His North Face backpack, twice the size of LANDON'S, is next to him, loaded down with camping gear.*

*A moment as both men take in their surroundings.*

LANDON: I feel her here.

NICK (*with a slight drawl*): Sid'down, Daddy.

*NICK scooches over on the rock to make a place for LANDON, who joins him. NICK hands LANDON a water bottle.*

NICK (*looking off*): They's gonna be able to find it?

LANDON: We did.

NICK: How far back?

LANDON: Depends how many rest stops Fat-Ass had to make.

NICK: Pepper patch hot.

LANDON: I *told* him. More'n once. Twelve miles. Didn't I tell him?

NICK: Yep. What was he gonna do?

LANDON: Stay home.

NICK (*turning toward a sound*): That be a creek or a river, I reckon.

LANDON: Stream. Got lucky.

NICK: Any fish, Daddy?

LANDON: Never useta be. (*long moment*) Wish it coulda been just us.

NICK: Family weekend.

LANDON: *You're* family.

*NICK leans in and they kiss, tenderly.*

RACHEL (*offstage*): Hey, Grandpa! Nick! Am I close?!

*NICK moves away from LANDON and begins unpacking.*

*LANDON stands and shouts in the direction of RACHEL'S voice.*

LANDON: Where'd you come from, girlie-girl? Blazin' your own trail?

RACHEL (*offstage*): Always.

LANDON (*chuckling, to NICK*): Hear that?

*RACHEL enters. She is 15 and wears short-shorts, a tank top, sneakers and a pony tail.*

*Like the others she also wears a pack, but it wouldn't be out of place in a high school hallway. Smartphone earbuds hang around her neck, the cord snaking down to a pocket.*

RACHEL: One long-ass hike.

LANDON: Others behind ya?

*From the opposite side of the stage RACHEL entered, we hear DON.*

DON (*offstage*): They're over here!

*DON, 49, enters the clearing. He carries in his arms a large backpack to which is strapped a sleeping bag and tent. DON wears glasses and the outfit of someone in training for a marathon.*

*He makes a beeline for the nearest tree and props the backpack against it.*

LANDON: You'll find it a might easier to carry, Don, you wear it on your back.

DON: Hilarious. Strap broke. 'bout a mile back. Damn thing's heavy. What *happened* to you guys?

CLARISE (*offstage, from the direction DON appeared*): Don?!

DON (*shouting*): Over here!

LANDON: Sorry. Stoppin' every five minutes was killin' my calf muscles.

DON: Worried we were lost.

CLARISE (*offstage*): DON?!

DON (*turning in her direction*): I'm right here, Clarise!

RACHEL: How's my dad doing?

*DON shakes his head.*

LANDON: That bad, huh?

*CLARISE and BARRY stumble into the clearing. Both look as if they've hiked three days of rough terrain.*

*CLARISE, 40, wears a backpack a bit too large for her frame and is dragging another along the ground. She wears a fashionable shorts and blouse ensemble, with running shoes and a large-brimmed floppy hat. The hat, and her sweat-soaked hair, are constantly in her face.*

*BARRY, 42, appears on the verge of collapse. It's not just the several dozen extra pounds he carries but also the apparent lack of any previous physical exertion that account for his current condition. His arms and neck are bright red. He wears jeans, a button-up cotton shirt, Rockports and a baseball cap. Everything is wet.*

*CLARISE stops at the edge of the clearing and collapses, face down, on top of the pack she was dragging.*

*BARRY weaves his way to LANDON and NICK, and stands blinking. Though his mouth moves, he makes no sound.*

LANDON: Oh, christ.

CLARISE (*without lifting her head*): I'm just gonna lie here awhile. Until I die.

RACHEL: Dad, you okay?

*BARRY turns, wide-eyed, in her direction, but continues to mouth silent words.*

DON: You think he might have sunstroke?

LANDON: Naw, nothin' that exotic. He's sufferin' from fat-ass-itis.

DON (*to BARRY*): How'd you get wet? You're *soaked*. (*to the others*) He wasn't wet five minutes ago.

CLARISE (*still face down*): He fell in a puddle.

NICK: Barry, seriously, ya alright?

LANDON: A *puddle*?! Wha'did he do, take a *bath* in it?

NICK (*to BARRY*): Ya gotta get out of those wet clothes, buddy.

DON: Terrific.

CLARISE: It was surprisingly deep.

NICK (*to BARRY*): Where are your things? Your pack?

DON: My wife is lying on it.

CLARISE (*not looking up*): What?

LANDON: Look, y'all, we gotta fix up camp. Two more minutes, Clarise, then I need you up and at 'em. Barry's project will be changing his clothes. He's as worthless as tits on a bull anyway. Don, would you do a firewood search? It'll get dark — and cold — before we know it. Nick and me'll set up the tents.

*LANDON and NICK start to unpack.*

CLARISE: I think one tent should be here. I'll continue to mark the spot.

DON: Honey, your brother's going to need some dry clothes.

CLARISE: Okay.

DON: You're on top of them.

CLARISE: Crap.

*CLARISE stands slowly, groaning.*

DON (*to LANDON*): Any one type of firewood better than another?

NICK: Likely we'll need a raft o' tinder, but your dead pine needles and leaves'll work for that. Small sticks and kindlin', branches and short logs, if you can find 'em.

NICK (*Cont.*): No pine, but hickory and oak are durn good, partic'lar hickory. Hardwoods burn hot. Perfect for cookin'.

DON: Can I just haul in whatever I find and you sort through it?

NICK: Sure. Just bring—

BARRY: SHHH!

*BARRY suddenly becomes very alert, listening.*

BARRY (*pause*): You hear that?

RACHEL: What is it, Dad?

BARRY (*a long pause*): Never mind.

LANDON: No, I heard it. The sound of Barry shitting his Pampers.

*LANDON laughs alone.*

DON: Then I'm off.

*DON starts to leave the campsite on his search for firewood.*

LANDON: Don't get yourself lost.

*A somewhat forced laugh from DON.*

LANDON: Or et by a bear.

NICK (*admonishing*): Landon!

RACHEL: Grandpa!

CLARISE: C'mon, Dad.

DON (*keeping it light, to LANDON*): You're kidding, right?

LANDON: Wouldn't surprise me none if we see a black bear or two on this trip. You respect them, they'll respect you.

DON: Just so I know, how would I show *dis*respect?

NICK: Gettin' 'tween a mama and her cub ain't never a good idea.

CLARISE: Barry, I've got some dry clothes for you. (*no response*) Barry?

BARRY: Huh?

RACHEL: Thanks, Aunt Clarise.

*CLARISE hands BARRY a dry shirt, pants, socks and underwear.*

DON: No grizzlies, right?

LANDON: Not in these parts, not for the last two hun'erd years. Just black bears. And snakes. Cottonmouths ... rattlers.

CLARISE: Dad, will you *stop*?!

LANDON: Just make sure ya don't cut yourself. Cuz bears, they can smell human blood from two miles away.

NICK (*admonishing*): Landon. (*to NICK*) That's sharks, not bears.

*DON walks off toward the sound of the stream.*

BARRY: Where do I change?

CLARISE: Behind the nearest tree, I guess.

BARRY: I can wait for a tent.

LANDON: Barry, stop bein' a woman and just put on your clean panties! *Christ*, son.

RACHEL (*pointing*): Over there, Dad. No one will look.

BARRY: Okay. I don't care anyway.

*BARRY walks offstage in the direction RACHEL was pointing.*

*LANDON and NICK are laying out a two-person tent.*

CLARISE: What should *I* do?

LANDON: Reckon ya might as well get the cookin' stuff together. That'll be *your* job. You and Rachel.

CLARISE (*to RACHEL*): Natch, 'cause we're bitches.

RACHEL: Glad we brought the stove.

LANDON: Kerosene stove's just for heatin' water, not food.

RACHEL: We're cooking over the fire?

LANDON: Nothin' better. Gotta reinforce that fire ring, though.

RACHEL: I can do that. More rocks?

LANDON: Get a whole mess of 'em. By that stream. (*something catches his eye*) Hey, will you take a gander at that! The moon's out early today.

NICK (*looking up*): The moon?

LANDON: Oh, wait! Sorry. That's just Barry's fat ass! (*shouting in BARRY'S direction*) HEY, FAT-ASS! (*to NICK*) Look at 'im! Look at 'im!

*CLARISE takes RACHEL'S hand and starts off.*

CLARISE: C'mon, I'll help you look for rocks. We can find a nice big one to bash in your grandpa's head.

*CLARISE and RACHEL disappear.*

LANDON (*shouting*): That's one hell of a full moon! The whiteness of it is blindin' me!

*LANDON laughs as NICK continues laying out the tent.*

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## GOLDEN HOUR #1

*The lights shift to signify a heightened passing of time. What happens next is simultaneous and magical.*

*Together, LANDON and NICK quickly raise the first two-man tent, while a second tent of the same size and a smaller third tent also appear.*

*CLARISE and RACHEL bring on armfuls of rocks, and the fire ring is somehow suddenly reinforced and noticeably taller.*

*DON enters with a large selection of timber that he stacks next to the ring; the makings of a fire, ready to be lit, appear inside it.*

*A clothesline is strung by BARRY on which his wet clothes are already hung to dry.*

*Throughout all of the above, cooking pots, pans and utensils; a kerosene lamp; a small stove; and various other pieces of camping gear appear in the camp.*

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*Late afternoon, the same day. CLARISE and BARRY are alone in the campsite.*

*CLARISE, sitting on a small folding stool, reads a paperback novel. She drinks from a water bottle and is wearing her floppy hat.*

*BARRY, now in the dry clothes, is examining the contents of several freeze-dried meal bags. He has white zinc sunblock on his nose and ears, and is eating a granola bar.*

*BARRY (holding up a bag): Freeze-dried Turkey Tetrazzini. That sound good to you?*

*CLARISE (noncommittal, eyes fixed on her book): Mmmm.*

BARRY: Yeah, me neither. (*holds up another bag*) What about Potatoes and Beef with Onions? (*no response*) Potatoes and Beef with Onions?

CLARISE (*annoyed, still trying to read*): Barry ...

BARRY (*examining another package*): What're you reading?

CLARISE: S.J. Kilner.

BARRY: I've heard of him. Dried Sweet Garden Peas.

CLARISE: Mom had all his books. This is one of 'em.

*A moment, then a quick snort of a laugh from BARRY.*

BARRY: Yeah! Not mocking them now.

*CLARISE looks up from her book for the first time.*

*BARRY turns the dried peas package over in his hands.*

CLARISE: Sweet Garden Peas, huh? Doesn't sound too bad.

BARRY: Remember how great Mom's camping food always tasted? She cooked all day.

*CLARISE returns to her book. BARRY unwraps another granola bar.*

BARRY: But I don't remember it being so *hot* here. This is pizza oven hot. (*a thought*) A pizza would be good right now, huh?

*No response from CLARISE.*

*BARRY takes a few bites of the granola bar.*

BARRY: Think they're okay?

*LANDON enters with a Sports Illustrated magazine.*

LANDON: That's one damn fine shitter. I'm startin' to think Nick can do damn-near anythin'. (*spotting BARRY*) What's with you?