The Perfect Fourth

Henry Wolf
EXT. SUBURBAN STREET - MORNING

A peaceful moment in a middle-class neighborhood ends with the noisy arrival of a beaten-up sedan, 90's rock blasting out of its open windows.

INT. PAT'S CAR

JACK and PAT, both 17, are rocking out. Jack's on his phone and Pat's driving.

EXT. STREET

A stationary shot of the street from a distance, framed by greenery. Pat's car passes from one side of the frame to the other. The music is loud even from this distance.

INT. PAT'S CAR

Jack looks from his phone to the street.

JACK
(with urgency)
This is it.

Pat quickly pulls over to the side of the road.

INT. DILLON'S ROOM.

Looking out the window of a second-floor bedroom, we see Pat's car swerve up to the front of the house. We can hear the music. The camera pans to ANDREW, 45, who is kneeling atop the bed, taking down a Pearl Jam record from the wall. He steps down to look out the window.

EXT. STREET

Jack gets out of the car and readjusts his jeans. Pat watches on mischievously, and then starts to drive off slowly, the passenger door still open. Seeing this, Jack does a double-take. Then he catches up and leans over to have a word with Pat.

JACK
What are you doing?
PAT
(lowering the volume)
I told you, man. This is a drive by.

CUT TO:

ANDREW'S P.O.V. -- STREET

Jack walks quickly beside the moving car, its door still open.

JACK
(faintly overheard yelling)
Fucking stop it!

Jack stops and waits for Pat to stop the car. A moment later, it does.

CUT TO:

EXT. STREET

Pat's laughing as Jack leans into the car.

JACK
Jesus, I need to make sure it's not broken.

PAT
Be quick. We can't be late this time.

JACK
We won't be.

Jack slams the door.

PAT
Tell this guy you don't have time for any weird Craigslist shit.

PAT
(yelling after Jack)
You don't have time to get robbed... or raped!

INT. HOUSE - DILLON'S ROOM

ANDREW'S P.O.V. - FRONT LAWN
As Jack crosses the lawn on his way to the front door, he flips off Pat with a smile.

PAT
(yelling)
Dude, get out while you can!

CUT TO:

Andrew navigates the messy room on his way out of Dillon's room. Cardboard boxes crowd the floor. The walls are almost empty, a neat stack of records lies on the fully-made bed.

EXT. HOUSE - FRONT DOOR

Jack rings the doorbell. A moment later, he hears the door being unlocked. Andrew opens it.

JACK
Hi. I'm here for the guitar. I'm Jack.

ANDREW
(moving aside for Jack)
Come in!

INT. HOUSE - FOYER/ LIVING ROOM

Jack enters and looks around the simple but clean living room as Andrew closes the door. A GUITAR CASE is on the living room floor and an AMP is on the floor nearby.

ANDREW
(extending a hand to Jack)
Andrew.

Jack shakes his hand. Andrew signals that Jack's welcome to check out the guitar. Jack kneels down on the floor and begins undoing the buckles on the case.

ANDREW
So, uh, have you used Craigslist before?

JACK
Once. To buy a record player.

ANDREW
A record player... So you collect vinyl too?
JACK
(showing some excitement)
Yeah. Do you?

ANDREW
Not me. My son.

JACK
Oh, cool.

(beat)
Thought you might be selling some.

ANDREW
No. No, I don't think they're for sale.

Jack acknowledges this, and opens the case to reveal a pristine electric guitar. He removes it and inspects it.

ANDREW
How's it look?

JACK
Good.

ANDREW
Good.

JACK
I still need to check it out.

ANDREW
Oh. Yeah, of course.

Jack hangs the guitar around his neck and reaches down near the amp to find the cord he needs. Andrew leans down help, but Jack finds it first.

JACK
(holding the chord)
I've got it. You can get the amp if you want.

ANDREW
(to himself)
The amp...

Andrew finds the cord and plugs it into a nearby wall. Andrew smiles to Jack, and then moves over to lean against the wall. Jack strums the guitar, which is out of tune.

JACK
(concerned)
It's way out of tune.
ANDREW
Uh... yeah. It hasn't been played in a while.

Jack takes a seat on the couch. He's been tuning for a moment when he looks to Andrew.

JACK
Why don't you play it?

ANDREW
I don't play.

JACK
Oh. Whose is this, then?

ANDREW
It was my son's.

JACK
Why doesn't he want it?

ANDREW
Um, no. He died last year.

JACK
Oh. I'm so sorry.

ANDREW
Thank you.

Jack looks down and plucks another string. He continues to tune the guitar for a moment, but lacks concentration, and stops tuning altogether. He looks up to Andrew.

JACK
This was his?

Andrew nods. Jack looks back down to the guitar, and plucks aimlessly for another moment.

ANDREW
(upbeat)
So does it pass inspection?

JACK
(snapping back to it)
Uh, yeah. I think so.

ANDREW
Great. So, we decided on eight-hundred...
Jack takes a moment before he starts looking for the money. He finds it in his pants pocket, but doesn't remove it. Jack hands over the money.

ANDREW
(pocketing it)
Thank you.

Jack watches Andrew walk over to unplug the amp and gather the cords. Then Andrew notices him just standing there, watching him blankly. At that moment, Jack takes the guitar off and places it in its case. He follows Andrew, who is carrying the amp, to the door. Andrew opens the door and sees SARAH'S CAR pulling into the driveway. He closes the door and turns to Jack.

ANDREW
(hesitating)
Would you wait here for a moment?

JACK
Uh, Sure.

Andrew is about to walk out the door, and then turns back to the Jack, who stands there unmoving, still holding the guitar case.

ANDREW
Actually, you should check out the vinyl.

JACK
Uh... okay.

ANDREW
It's right upstairs, in the first room. You'll see it.

JACK
Oh... yeah. Okay.

Andrew watches as Jack puts down the guitar and starts hesitantly walking up the stairs.

ANDREW
Thanks. This won't take long.

Andrew waits for Jack to get to the top of the stairs before he opens the door.
INT. HOUSE - UPSTAIRS HALLWAY

The door to Dillon's room is open and daylight floods through it into the hallway. Jack stands at the threshold for a moment, looking in at the partially disassembled room, before hearing the door open downstairs, followed by Andrew's voice and then a woman's. He retraces his steps in order to listen.

ANDREW (O.S.)
Hi. Did you get my text? I needed another hour.

SARAH (O.S.)
I got it. Whose car is that out there?

ANDREW (O.S.)
It's the, uh, the kid who's buying the guitar.

SARAH (O.S.)
Oh. You found someone? Already? (beat)
Where is he?

ANDREW (O.S.)
Dillon's room.

Sarah starts up the stairs. When Jack hears her coming, he moves quietly towards Dillon's room and looks for the records.

ANDREW (O.S.)
I thought you wanted distance from this.

SARAH (O.S.)
I just want to say hi.

When sees Sarah reach the top of the stairs, he awkwardly approaches the doorway.

SARAH
Hi.

JACK
Hi.

ANDREW
Jack, this is my wife, Sarah.

SARAH
(extended her hand)
Hi, Jack.
SARAH
Nice to meet you.

Sarah looks past Jack, into Dillon's dismantled room.

SARAH
(to Andrew)
Wow. You made so much progress.

Jack moves back into the room so Sarah can make her way in. She walks him into the center of the room, as Andrew approaches the doorway. She looks around around for a moment.

SARAH
(to Andrew)
Did you tell him?

Jack and Andrew look to another and nod.

SARAH
(to Jack)
This was his room. You know that the guitar was his, too?

Jack nods.

SARAH
So, uh, what kind of music do you play?

JACK
I'm in a grunge band. Do you know-- grunge?

SARAH
Dillon started a jazz-rock fusion band with his friends. He would write their songs.

JACK
Oh. Cool.

SARAH
He went to ACES--in New Haven, the performing arts school. Do you know about it?

JACK
Uh... I don't think so. ACES. No.
SARAH
So do you play any other instruments?

JACK
I play the drums. And some piano.

SARAH
Dillon would learn instruments overnight. But that guitar was always his favorite instrument. His favorite possession, really.
(collecting herself)
So...you're... uh...in a band? What's it called?

ANDREW
(approaching Sarah)
Honey, Jack has to go--

Andrew walks into the room towards Sarah. She signals Andrew to "stand down", as if he is rudely interrupting her conversation with Jack.

JACK
Uh, yeah, we're sort of in-between names right now.

ANDREW
Jack, don't you need to--?

SARAH
(to Jack as she approaches Andrew)
--I'm sorry, will you wait here for a moment?

Sarah gently pushes Andrew towards down the hall.

ANDREW
He has to go.

SARAH
(to Andrew, soothingly)
Real quick. Real quick.
(faintly)
Please, Andrew. Please. I need to talk with you.

ANDREW
What is it?

SARAH
Please, Andrew.
She gently pushes Andrew in the direction of their room. She turns back to Jack.

SARAH
We'll be right back.

ANDREW
I'm sorry.

Sarah closes the door to her room behind her. Jack idly stands there, right outside of Dillon's room. He then takes out his phone and makes a call. As it's ringing, he peers into Dillon's room from the doorway.

JACK
Hey.
(beat)
I need a few more minutes.
(beat)
He's talking with his wife.
(surprised)
No, you're not. Stop it.

Jack stumbles over boxes on his way to the window and looks out to see Pat's car slowly rolling forward.

JACK
I'll tell him. Give me a two more minutes.

Jack stumbles over boxes on his way back the hallway.

JACK
(talking over Pat)
I know, I know, dude.
(forcefully)
Pat, if you leave me here--
(beat)
-- I'll fucking hunt you down and--

A door next to the master bedroom opens to reveal BEN, 12. He wears a gaming headset and carries a controller. Jack quickly puts his phone in his pocket.

BEN
Who are you?

JACK
I'm Jack.

BEN
Did you know Dillon?
JACK
No.

BEN
What are you doing here?

JACK
Buying his guitar.

BEN
You are?

JACK
Why... did you... want it?

BEN
I don't play guitar. I play basketball.

JACK
Basketball. That's cool too.

Jack's phone rings.

JACK
(silencing it)
Sorry.
   (gesturing to door)
I need to talk to your parents.
Should just... knock?

Ben goes back to his video game, but keeps an eye on Jack who knocks softly. Ben stays there, looking at him. No one answers.

JACK
I'll just wait.

Jack idles in the hallway, in-between the closed door to the master bedroom and the open door to Ben's.

BEN
(gesturing to the TV)
Do you play?

Jack steps inside Ben's room to take a look at the screen.

JACK
(excited)
Oh, yeah. I play.

BEN
Do you want to?
Jack takes the controller.

JACK
I really can't. I'm sorry. My friend's waiting for me. I need to go.
(eyeing the door to the master)
Do you think--

The bedroom door opens and Sarah emerges to see Jack standing right there.

SARAH
Oh, hi. You met Ben.

JACK
Yeah, I did.

Andrew is behind Sarah. The three stand silently for a moment in the cramped hallway before Sarah walks towards Dillon's room.

SARAH
Jack, would you come over here for a moment?

JACK
Uh, sure.

Jack smiles to Ben as he places the controller down on the bureau.

INT. HOUSE - DILLON'S ROOM

Sarah stands by Dillon's bed. Andrew stands near the doorway and waits for Jack, who walks hesitantly into Dillon's room. Ben follows.

SARAH
Ben, will you give us a second to speak with Jack?

ANDREW
(to Sarah)
This has to do with him as well.
(to Ben)
You can stay.
SARAH
Alright. Well, Jack: I'm sure you've got places to be, so I'll just say it; we're going to keep the guitar. I'm so sorry.

JACK
That's fine. Whatever you want.

BEN
Why are we keeping it?

SARAH
We don't feel that we need to get rid of it quite yet.

ANDREW
Your mom thinks you might want to learn how to play.

SARAH
(looking to Andrew with annoyance)
Someday. I said I think you might want to someday.
(beat)

ANDREW
I told her you're not interested. Are you?

BEN
I don't know. Maybe.

SARAH
(excited)
We could get you lessons. I could call up ACES and see if there's someone there to teach you. But you don't have to make up your mind right now.

Jack's phone rings and he reaches for it quickly. He sees that it's Pat. He silences it.

JACK
(holding the phone up)
I should... I need to get going.

SARAH
Yes. I'm sorry.

Sarah starts to walk for the doorway.
BEN
(to Andrew)
I don't think I'm going to learn.

JACK
I... uh... I need my money back.

SARAH
Oh, you paid already? I'm sorry.
(to Andrew)
Andrew?

ANDREW
(to Ben)
Tell your mother that.

Ben doesn't do what Andrew says. The doorbell rings.

ANDREW
Sarah, did you hear him?

SARAH
We can talk about this later. I need to get the door. Please give Jack his money back.

Sarah starts walking towards the door. Jack gets a text from Pat: "Ding dong where the fuck are you?".

JACK
(to Sarah)
Oh, uh, I think that's my friend.

Sarah stops. Then they all hear the front door opening.

JACK
I'm sorry. I... I'll be right back.

As Jack passes Sarah on his way to the stairs, he gives her a forced smile.

INT. HOUSE - STAIRWELL

Jack rushes down the stairs to meet Pat, who is standing inside the foyer with the guitar case in hand.

JACK
What are you doing?

PAT
(opening the door with his foot)
Helping you get a move-on.
JACK
They don't want to sell it anymore.

PAT
(stopping)
What? Why the fuck not?

Jack looks back up the stairs. He can hear them arguing.

JACK
(hushed)
It was their son's. He died.

PAT
(putting down the case)
Shit.

They stand there together for a moment.

PAT
Well can we go then?

JACK
They have my money.

PAT
(with annoyance)
Can you get it back?

Jack looks up the stairway, and then back to Pat.

JACK
(not moving)
I don't know.

PAT
We've got to go.

Jack is motionless.

JACK
(clapping as he climbs up the stairs)
Come on, man.

Pat keeps going up the stairs until Jack stops him.

JACK
Stop. Wait for me downstairs.

Pat goes down the stairs, impatiently eyeing Jack.

PAT
Hurry up. You're killing me.
INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY

Jack moves slowly towards the raised voices in Dillon's room. Andrew stands quietly by the door, arms crossed. Ben is sitting on the bed, staring down, and Sarah is leaning in front of him, holding his hands.

BEN
(sullenly)
Well I've just never really wanted to learn.

SARAH
...Well I remember how you would just sit there and watch him play for hours on end. And when he would leave the room, you would take it and pretend to play? Don't you?

BEN
I do.

SARAH
Well, it's yours now if you want it.

Reaching the door, Jack hesitates, and then knocks on the door frame.

JACK
I'm sorry. I really should go.

SARAH
(looking to Andrew)
We'll get you your money right now.

ANDREW
Sarah, he needs to decide this for himself.

SARAH
(to Ben)
Honey, just give it a shot. We'll get you lessons. You have nothing to lose.

ANDREW
Sarah, this isn't what he wants. (to Ben) Tell her.

BEN
Give me a second!

The room quiets and Ben thinks for a second.
BEN
(to Jack)
Didn't you want it?

JACK
(looking to Sarah)
No!
(calming down)
No, it's yours. It should be yours.

BEN
Do you love it?

JACK
I mean, it's a great guitar, it really is, but I'll--

BEN
No, I meant do you love playing guitar?

JACK
Oh. Yeah, man. Guitar changed my life. It's the best thing, like, ever. You have to learn.

BEN
It is?

JACK
I think so. When you're on stage, just grooving-- have you ever seen a video of Kurt Cobain play?

BEN
You like him?

JACK
He's been my favorite musician since I was ten. I grew my hair out to look like him. Dressed like, him rocked out like him. This was before fucking--I'm sorry--this was before Guitar Hero made that, like, sort of okay to do.
(calming down)
Why? You like Cobain too?

Ben shakes his head "no".

ANDREW
Dillon was obsessed with him.
JACK
Oh. He was?

ANDREW
(to Sarah)
That actually sounds a lot like him.
(approaching Sarah)
Do you remember? Cobain was the Nirvana guy. Remember that awful black shirt Dillon wore, with the yellow smiley face?
(looking around the room)
I think I packed it somewhere here.

JACK
(excited)
I have that shirt.

They are all quiet for a moment.

JACK
So, yeah, I think guitar is sick. Definitely, learn to play.

Sarah goes from kneeling in front of Ben to sitting on the floor, and she is crying.

BEN
(timidly touching his mother)
Mom, mom...

SARAH
(turning to Ben)
It's okay, it's okay.

Jack hears Pat approaching.

PAT
(raising his arms in exasperation)
Dude...

Jack gives Pat an aggressive, "stay away" look. Pat sees Sarah, in tears, hugging Ben.

PAT
(surprised)
Oh, hi.

Andrew acknowledges Pat.
ANDREW
Sarah, I think Dillon would have
really liked Jack. I think he would
have liked for him to have his
guitar?

Sarah looks to Ben, through her tears, to see that Ben is
nodding along with his dad.

SARAH
You're sure?

Ben continues to nod.

SARAH
(to Ben)
Will you help them out?

Ben doesn't move. Sarah stands up and encourages Ben to
leave.

SARAH
(to Ben)
I'm fine. I'm fine. Go.

Andrew takes Ben, and they leave the room. Sarah sits on the
bed. Jack stays behind for a moment and looks at her, and
the others wait for him in the hallway.

JACK
(apologetically)
I'm sorry.

Sarah gets up and approaches him.

SARAH
No, no. Please. Thank you.

Sarah hugs Jack, and he exits, looking back on her as she
goes.

INT. HOUSE - HALLWAY - FOYER

Andrew opens the door for Pat and Jack, who carry the amp
and guitar respectively. Ben looks on from the stairs. They
have a silent goodbye. Jack waves back to them.

EXT. HOUSE - LAWN

Once the door to the house closes, Pat starts to walk
quickly for the car. He looks back to Jack.
PAT
(seriously)
I'm going to kill you.

JACK
(somberly)
I'm sorry.

PAT
(beat)
Jesus, man. Do you understand the concept of a drive-by?

JACK
I didn't plan--

PAT
No! You do not get touchy-feely during a drive-by! Unheard of, man.

Jack breaks a smile as Pat goes on and on.

INT. HOUSE - DILLON'S ROOM

Sarah approaches the window when she hears Pat's yelling.

CUT TO:

SARAH'S P.O.V

PAT
(yelling)
No, you can't call that a drive by!
It was a fucking cluster-fuck!

The boys load the guitar and amp into the car, and then get in and slam the doors. The music comes back on.

CUT TO:

Sarah smiles as she watches them speed off.