

A Warm Wave

a short play by Jake Lewis

First draft: 12/20/23

A Warm Wave

Characters:

FRED. – 60s-70s, has no lines but lies in a hospital bed for the duration

FREDDIE – 30s, Fred's son

BETH – 50s-60s, hospital nurse

DAVIS – Freddie's fraternal twin

Setting:

A hospital room, midnight

Present day

A Warm Wave

Lights rise on: a hospital room.

FRED SR. (FRED) is in the hospital bed, asleep. He is connected to several machines, which beep in rhythm.

FRED JR. (FREDDIE) sits in a chair by his bedside, asleep himself.

NURSE BETH enters, checking on FRED'S vitals/machine, making notes on a clipboard/chart. FREDDIE wakes up, as though he is trying to convince the NURSE he wasn't sleeping.

BETH: Good morning.

FREDDIE: Morning? Have I been asleep that long?

BETH: No, sorry. It's almost midnight. But it's like morning for me. My shift just started.

FREDDIE: How's he looking?

BETH: He's hanging on.

FREDDIE: *(Slight hostility)* Well, don't ever say an old dog can't learn new tricks.

BETH turns to look at him, perhaps confused, but waiting for him to say more as though he needs to get something off his chest.

FREDDIE: It's....nothing. I'm just tired and don't know what I'm saying.

BETH holds her look at FREDDIE a moment longer then turns to go.

NURSE: I'll just be down the hall at the desk. If you need anything.

BETH starts to exit.

FREDDIE Nurse?

BETH: Beth. You can call me Beth.

FREDDIE: Beth. I'm Fred. Frederick Waldron, Jr, actually. But everyone calls me Freddie.

BETH: Nice to meet you, Freddie.

FREDDIE: *(Jokingly.)* Don't say that until you actually know me better. *(Beat.)* Could you tell me...umm...forget it. Stupid question.

A Warm Wave

BETH: I'm sure I've been asked whatever it is before. And even if it's stupid, I promise to act like it isn't.

FREDDIE: Ok, well, I was wondering...*(pointing to FRED)* what's going on in there?

BETH: With your father?

FREDDIE: Yeah. Like, is he aware of everything and feels a lot of pain, but can't move or talk? Like that Stephen King story where the guy is locked into his own comatosed body?

BETH: *(Completely serious)* Yes. Just like that. *(Turns to leave.)*

FREDDIE: Ok, ok! I'll say it. I'm being stupid.

BETH: It's ok. I've heard a lot worse. But I read that story too. And as good as it was, you can rest assured that your father is not in any pain.

FREDDIE: *(Somewhat disappointed.)* Oh.

BETH: I can tell you, however, that he knows you're here with him. Even if it doesn't look that way.

FREDDIE: The company line, huh? You don't need to peddle that happy horseshit to me.

BETH looks shocked at FREDDIE's statement.

BETH: It's not a line. But I can see no matter what I say, you'll push back at it, so I'll be on my way.

Again, she starts to exit.

FREDDIE: How do you know that?

BETH slowly returns to him and shows FREDDIE the clipboard she wrote on earlier.

BETH: You see these two numbers here? Those indicate his brainwaves. This first one was recorded at the beginning of the previous shift today, at 3:03pm. It's on the low side, which is not uncommon for someone in your father's condition. Still, shows brain functionality, but not like this second number.

FREDDIE: That's considerably higher. When was that taken?

BETH: When I came in here about 5 minutes ago. This increased activity shows that something triggered your father's brainwaves to increase.

A Warm Wave

FREDDIE: Like a dream?

BETH: No, dreams do not register much higher than that first number.

FREDDIE: Is it a stroke then?

BETH: Not that either. Think about it this way: What was different about this place at 3pm and 12am?

FREDDIE: I don't know. I wasn't here at 3pm. I didn't get here until 6, so—

BETH smiles as FREDDIE discovers the answer. She starts to leave again.

BETH: I'm right down the hall.

FREDDIE: Thanks.

BETH exits.

FREDDIE: Hey Dad. So you can hear me, huh?

Obviously, there's no response.

From the hallway, DAVIS enters. FREDDIE doesn't even need to turn around to know he's there. They are fraternal twins.

FREDDIE: Hey, brother.

DAVIS: No improvement, huh?

FREDDIE: Nope. Looks like he's down for the count.

DAVIS: *(Sarcastically.)* You sound all torn up about it.

FREDDIE: And you don't sound torn up enough.

DAVIS: Can you blame me?

FREDDIE: No, I just...I mean, it's sad either way.

DAVIS: Please expand upon your answer.

FREDDIE: I dunno, it's sad. He's dying. His life is over. Beth just said—

A Warm Wave

DAVIS doesn't know who BETH is.

FREDDIE: Beth is the night nurse. Beth said that Dad is still aware of me...us. Maybe. But if that's true, then he's also aware he's at the end of his life. And that's sad.

DAVIS: For him, or you?

FREDDIE: For anyone, Davey! He wasn't a bad guy.

DAVIS: Agree to disagree.

FREDDIE: C'mon, you know it wasn't his fault! Not really when you get right down to it.

DAVIS: I didn't come here to bring this up again.

FREDDIE: Then why did you come here?

DAVIS: To see you, you moron. You're my twin brother. We have a special connection, like it or not! But if we're going to get into a fight about this bullshit again, I can go.

FREDDIE: No, no. I'm sorry. I'm just...

DAVIS: Sad.

FREDDIE: Yeah.

DAVIS: *(Going to the door and looking out.)* So which one is Beth? She cute? I could work some of my magic for you...

FREDDIE: Cut that out! I can't believe you're trying to hook me up with a nurse who's taking care of our dying father!

DAVIS: Hey, if some good can come from this...sadness...then I see no problem.

FREDDIE: I'm not interested.

DAVIS: Suit yourself.

FREDDIE: You still act like you're fourteen.

DAVIS: I am. Sort of. I only look this way because I need to keep up with you.

FREDDIE: Sometimes I think you got the better deal.

A Warm Wave

DAVIS: Shut up.

FREDDIE: I mean it.

DAVIS: Trust me. I didn't.

FREDDIE: You weren't there...after. Once you left, Dad became worse. Meaner. He never hit me or mom, but his words cut just as deep. His silences, too. Man, those were scary. He could go a whole week without saying a thing apart from "Pass the salt," or "The dog needs to go out."

DAVIS: And, what? You think I was living on Cloud 9? I couldn't see you, or Mom anymore. I was on my own. At age 10, Freddie! Sure, I knew I was OK to an extent, but I still felt everything.

FREDDIE: *(Starting to boil.)* Maybe if you'd seen the torture Dad put himself through, you wouldn't hate him so much.

DAVIS: *(Nonchalant.)* Yeah. Maybe. *(Beat.)* But I didn't. So I do.

FREDDIE: *(Angry.)* Why'd you come back after all that time, anyway?

DAVIS: I dunno. We got older. I figured it was the right time, I guess.

BETH re-enters. DAVIS slips back into the shadows of the room. Her back is turned to him for most of the time and therefore does not see him.

BETH: You ok?

FREDDIE: Huh?

BETH: I heard you raising your voice.

FREDDIE: Oh, I'm sorry. I just got a little...upset.

BETH: No sorries needed! As my mama used to say, "Sometimes you need to shout to get it all out!" Apparently, she had a lot to get out! Is it productive, though?

FREDDIE: It's pretty one-sided.

BETH: I know what you mean.

FREDDIE: You do?

A Warm Wave

BETH: I'm a nurse, aren't I? But even if I weren't, I was in your shoes not too long ago myself. My sister – God rest her soul – put up a pretty good fight. Pancreatic cancer. Man, I wouldn't wish that on my worst enemies! But we were twins, so we had a special bond.

FREDDIE: I have a twin, too. He was just here– (*Looks for DAVIS, sees him in the shadows.*) I mean, earlier tonight he was here.

BETH: Yeah, Rose – that was...*is* my sister's name – she was like that, too. Coming and going as she pleased all throughout her life. But when she got sick, I promised her I'd stick with her until the end. That's what siblings do, hang together. I hope she'd have done the same for me, but I'm not sure. (*Beat.*) Guess that'll remain one of life's unsolved mysteries!

FREDDIE: My brother, Davis...he had a harder relationship with my dad than I did. We never really saw eye-to-eye on it. Even now.

BETH: That can be difficult. My youngest, Samuel, he and his father have been butting heads going on 30 years now! It used to bother me more, but now I've decided that they're both adult men who can figure it out on their own, and they don't need me telling them what to do or how to feel.

FREDDIE: But doesn't it bother you? You love your kid, you love your husband, but they don't love each other?

BETH: They don't? How do you know?

FREDDIE: I mean, no, I don't know for sure, but–

BETH: It's like I told you before: sometimes just because you can't see something, doesn't mean it's not there. Your father might not *look* like he's listening, and my boys – yes, I'm calling my husband a boy – might not *look* like they love each other. But it's there.

FREDDIE: How do you know for sure?

BETH: Because I believe that love isn't that fickle. It doesn't just go away at the drop of a hat. Especially between fathers and sons. I know them both. I've seen them both at their worst moments, and they might not like each other very much currently, but they still love each other. (*Beat.*) Do you need anything to eat? A drink I can get you?

FREDDIE: Huh? Oh. Yeah. Sure. Thanks.

BETH exits.

DAVIS reemerges.

A Warm Wave

DAVIS: So that's Beth, huh?

FREDDIE: That's Beth.

DAVIS: Yeah. You're right. Not your type. But she sure is something.

FREDDIE: I think I want to be alone for awhile.

DAVIS: Oh. Sure. Yeah. Ok. I'll, uh...check back on you...later.

FREDDIE: Thanks.

DAVIS starts to leave.

FREDDIE: He always hated the beach.

DAVIS turns around.

FREDDIE: Dad. Every time Mom wanted to go, which was several times every summer, you could tell how much he hated it. Did you ever see him swim? I mean, maybe on one of our family vacations in a hotel pool where it's warm and only goes 6 feet deep, but can you recall a time he ever got into the ocean with us?

DAVIS: No.

FREDDIE: That day Mom wasn't feeling well, remember? But you were itching to go for one last swim before we went home the next day. Jesus, "one last swim." Sorry, Davey, wasn't thinking.

DAVIS: It's ok. But Dad took us down to the beach, anyway, as much as he didn't want to. I remember he always had a book with him. Once he was zoned into that, the whole rest of the world was tuned out. Including me.

FREDDIE: He tried to save you, y'know. When he saw you flailing around out there. I was done swimming for the day, and I hear his voice – something I wasn't used to hearing at the beach because he usually never took his attention off that book of his – and he asks me, "Freddie, what's Davey doing out there?" I told him you were probably just goofing around, showing off for some girls. How was I supposed to know? Because we're twins, I should've known something? We took all those swim classes. But Dad knew. He bolted out of his chair like a bat out of hell...I'd never seen him move so fast. I didn't think he *could* go that fast!

DAVIS: I thought I saw him coming for me. I thought I heard him yelling my name, like he was scolding me for...for drowning. I saw him just...treading water, and my last thought was, "Why isn't he coming to save me?"

A Warm Wave

FREDDIE: He nearly died trying to get to you. The waves were too strong. You were too far out. He was not a good enough swimmer. You were gone too quickly.

DAVIS: Why didn't you ever tell me this, Freddie? I've harbored resentment towards Dad ever since. Didn't you think this would have been helpful information to know?

FREDDIE: If he weren't dying, would you really have listened to me? And anyway...It was my fault. I wasn't ready to admit to it.

DAVIS: What're you talking about, your fault? It was no one's fault. Maybe my own, as a matter of fact!

FREDDIE: If I hadn't said you were just splashing around, or if I had been out there with you—

DAVIS: Then both of us would've drowned.

FREDDIE: Yeah. Maybe. I guess it'll remain one of life's unsolved mysteries.

BETH re-enters with some snacks and a drink. DAVIS doesn't move, but she does not see him.

BETH: I hope you like these. The cafe doesn't restock until the morning shift comes in.

FREDDIE: These are great. Thank you.

BETH starts to exit and walks right by DAVIS. She stops, as though she has sensed something.

BETH: That's funny. I just felt a...I don't know how to explain it. Like the opposite of cold breeze.

FREDDIE: A wave of warmth?

BETH: Yeah! A wave of warmth! I like that! That means that love is here. A lot of love... *(Exits.)*

FREDDIE turns to his father in the bed and grabs one hand. DAVIS goes to the other side of his father's bed and takes his other hand. FREDDIE and DAVIS grab each other's free hand across their father, and rest their heads on his shoulders.

Heart machine continues to beep, perhaps a little bit faster.

Lights and sound fade to black.

The End