

Dealer Wins

A One-Act Play

Characters

Peter
Gabriel
Nick
George
Martha

Scene

The stage is divided into two, with focus shifting between stage left and stage right through lighting.

Stage right: PETER, GABRIEL and NICK are sitting at a square card table, playing Black Jack. They are dressed casually. There is an empty fourth chair at the table.

Stage left: GEORGE and MARTHA are sitting at a kitchen table having a simple breakfast. Both are in dressing gowns. There is a telephone in the kitchen.

Action

Lights up on stage right. Each of the men holds two cards.

GABRIEL: Card please.

NICK deals him a card.

PETER: Same for me.

NICK deals.

NICK: I'm splitting mine. *(places cards face down and deals himself two cards. He adds a card to each of those on the table in front of him)*

They contemplate their cards.

GABRIEL: I'll have another, Nick.

NICK deals him a card and then looks at PETER.

PETER: Yes, okay.

NICK deals PETER a card and then looks at his own two pairs carefully.

NICK: I'll sit on this one and take another for the other. *(he deals himself a card)*

Light fades stage right and comes up on stage left.

MARTHA: More tea dear?

GEORGE: Yes. Please. *(he looks preoccupied)*

MARTHA starts pouring the tea, then stops, a worried look on her face.

MARTHA: Troubling you again?

GEORGE: *(nods and thumps his chest lightly)* I'll go and see Barry again after lunch. He said to pop in any time it plays up.

MARTHA: Good idea. *(finishes pouring tea and adds milk)*

Light fades stage left, comes up stage right.

PETER: *(throwing down his hand)* We should never let you deal, Nick. I don't trust you.

GABRIEL: *(looks at his cards, then puts them down)* I agree with Peter. How in Heaven's name did you end up with a Jack and a ten in each of your hands?

NICK: No need to invoke Heaven. Just the luck of the draw. You two just ended up with a Hell of a hand each.

GABRIEL: *(stretches)* So. What are we going to do about George? Is it time yet?

PETER: He's a tough bloke, I'll give him that. But, yes, it's probably time we acted. Where should he go?

NICK: I'll be glad to have him.

PETER: I'm sure you would. But luckily it's not up to you. It's up to the Big G Himself.

NICK: No it's not! Not according to the old agreement.

GABRIEL: On what basis?

PETER: Yes, how do you figure he'd come to you?

NICK: I'm sure I could produce a long enough list.

Light fades stage right, comes up stage left.

MARTHA: George! I asked you if you want more bread.

GEORGE: *(as if coming out of a dream)* Sorry love. I felt like someone was talking about me. Walking over my grave as they say. What were you saying?

MARTHA: I asked if you wanted more bread.

GEORGE: Yes please.

MARTHA: And who are you imagining was talking about you?

GEORGE: I don't know. I get the feeling someone's deciding my fate.

MARTHA: Dr Marshall said you might start imagining that sort of thing.

GEORGE: I'm not paranoid! But I do admit that since the heart attack, I've been hearing voices. It's like my future is being discussed by someone.

MARTHA: *(cutting more bread and handing it to GEORGE)* Weird. Very weird. Anyhow, I'm glad you're still with us. I thought you were gone when I saw you in the hospital.

GEORGE: Yes, I know. So did I. A couple of times I had the strangest sense of floating around in different places, as I told you. The strangest thing was seeing those three men playing cards around a table. I can't figure out what it means.

MARTHA: Neither can I, dear.

Light fades stage left, comes up stage right.

GABRIEL: *(deals each of them two cards)* It's not as if he's so profligate that he'd be yours by right.

NICK: *(looking at his cards and frowning)* Maybe. But I can still make out a good case.

PETER: I'll sit. *(places cards face down on table)* You're not the only one who can make out a good case.

GABRIEL: I'll take a card. *(looks at NICK, who nods; hands NICK a card)* He's been a good husband and a good father. He worked hard. He gave to charity. He's kind.

NICK: Another card. *(waits for it, looks at it in disgust and throws his hand face down)* What about that woman in Accounts? That was hardly the action of a good man!

PETER: True. But they're all allowed some leeway. Just look at your own history, Nick.

NICK: Sure. And look at how *I* paid for it!

GABRIEL: *(takes another card, smiles and then grins at PETER; takes a further card)* Was George ever much of a card player? *(takes another card and grins again)*

PETER: No idea. What about you, Nick?

NICK: I'm out.

PETER: No. George. Was he ever much of a player?

NICK: Oh! I saw him once or twice in bars when he was younger. He never won a hand.

GABRIEL: Your cards had better be good, Peter.

PETER: *(turns his cards face up)* Twenty-one!

GABRIEL: *(shrugs and gathers all the cards up and hands them to PETER)* Your deal.

NICK: Let's find out.

GABRIEL: Find out what?

NICK: Which of us claims George.

The three look at each other silently.

PETER: Sounds fair.

Light fades stage right, comes up stage left. We see a teacup on the floor at GEORGE's feet.

MARTHA: *(worried)* Should I call Barry?

GEORGE: *(gasping)* Better call an ambulance.

Light fades stage left, comes up stage right.

GEORGE enters stage right, in his dressing gown; looks around confused.

NICK: *(pulls out the empty chair)* Hello George. Come to join us for a couple of hands?

GEORGE: *(still looking around, confused)* Where am I? Who are you guys? *(he hesitates)*
You're the ones...!

GABRIEL: *(to PETER)* A perceptive one.

PETER: George, we would like you to join us for a round of cards. First one to have twenty-one wins.

GEORGE: *(moving towards them)* Wins what?

NICK: Your destiny.

GEORGE: What?!

NICK: Whether you spend the rest of eternity with me or with them. *(nods in turn towards GABRIEL and PETER)*

GEORGE: You mean I'm done for?

GABRIEL: I'm sorry George. Seems so. It's just a matter of which direction you go. We can't decide from the life you've lived.

PETER: Nick says that you're not much of a card player.

GEORGE: I've never won a game in my life.

PETER: Then you might as well join us, rather than just stand around. I'm Peter. *(indicates the other two in turn)* And these are Gabriel and Nick.

NICK: *(shuffling the cards)* No hard feelings, George. This is as good a way as any.

GEORGE sits down slowly, uncertainly. NICK deals two cards to each of them. All four look at their cards. GEORGE looks uncomfortable.

NICK: *(looking at PETER to his left)* What will it be?

PETER: Card please. *(NICK gives him one, then looks at GEORGE)* Card for you?

GEORGE nods. NICK deals him a card. GEORGE looks at it for some time before laying his cards face down. He looks crestfallen.

GABRIEL holds out his hand for a card and NICK gives him one, then takes one for himself. He smiles then looks at PETER again, who nods. This silent dealing of cards to PETER, GABRIEL and NICK himself continues as lights come up on stage left.

MARTHA: *(on the phone)* Yes... I see... Please let me know if anything changes.

Lights fade stage left.

The three still in the game each has five cards and they slowly place them face up, in turn.

NICK: *(laughs)* Would you credit it? Twenty each. So much for my luck.

PETER: *(gathering up the cards and shuffling)* One round down, two to go. *(he deals two cards to each)*

They study their cards.

PETER: *(looking at GEORGE)* Another card, my friend?

GEORGE: I suppose so, though what good it will do me, I don't know.

PETER deals him a card. GABRIEL and NICK each hold out their hands for another card – PETER deals to them. Then PETER looks at his cards and deals himself another. All four men throw their cards in.

NICK: It almost seems like someone is interfering.

PETER: Never!

GEORGE starts to gather the cards, but GABRIEL intervenes.

GABRIEL: My deal, George.

GEORGE: But...!

GABRIEL: *(gathering the cards and shuffling)* The game is between the three of us. You're only playing as you're here anyway. *(he deals two cards each)*

NICK: *(placing his two cards down separately on the table)* I'm splitting.

PETER: Not again!

GABRIEL deals NICK two more cards which NICK places on the two face-down cards. NICK looks at each of his hands and smiles. GABRIEL looks at PETER.

PETER: Yes please.

GABRIEL deals him a card.

GEORGE: I might as well have one.

GABRIEL deals GEORGE a card and then one to himself. All four look at their cards.

NICK: Two cards please.

PETER: Same for me... I mean one for me, please.

NICK deals them, then looks at GEORGE.

GEORGE: *(sounding a bit lighter)* In for a penny, in for eternity. I'll have another please, Nick.

As NICK deals him his card, all three look questioningly at GEORGE, who smiles back. GABRIEL deals himself another card.

They all look at their cards and all except GEORGE grunt and throw in their hands.

GEORGE: *(turning over his cards and smiling for the first time)* Looks like I've won my first hand ever. Nineteen!

The other three look amazed.

NICK: I suppose unlucky in life, lucky in death.

GEORGE: *(belligerently)* I'm not dead yet!

NICK: As good as.

NICK starts to gather the cards.

GEORGE: *(puts his hand over one of NICK's)* Why not let me deal? Just for the hell of it.

PETER: I'd be careful about your choice of words, George, given the situation.

GABRIEL: George has a point. We have nothing to lose and it could be amusing.

NICK shrugs and lets GEORGE gather the cards. GEORGE shuffles and deals two cards to each. They all study their cards.

GEORGE: *(shrugs and places his cards face down)* I'm taking no chances. I'll sit on this one.

GABRIEL: Card please.

GEORGE deals him one. He looks at the other two in turn and each indicates he wants another card, which GEORGE deals. The three study their cards.

GABRIEL: *(looks at PETER, then NICK and then at his own cards again)* Okay George, I'll have one more. *(GEORGE deals him one)*

NICK: *(shaking his head)* Hmm... Yes, I'll have another card. *(GEORGE deals him one, then looks at PETER)*

PETER: *(looks up, as if asking for inspiration, then looks at GEORGE)* I might as well. *(GEORGE deals him his card)*

GEORGE: *(smiling)* This is actually quite exciting.

The other three look at him surprised.

GABRIEL: *(laughing)* What's got into you, George? It almost seems as if you're treating this as a social occasion.

GEORGE: *(shrugging)* Another card, Gabriel?

GABRIEL: (*considers GEORGE for a moment*) I might as well. As you said, in for a penny...

GEORGE deals him a card. GABRIEL looks at it and adds to his other cards. He smiles as he places his cards face down.

GABRIEL: I'll sit.

GEORGE looks at NICK.

NICK: Why the hell not. Thanks George.

GEORGE deals NICK a card. NICK looks at it and puts it with his other cards, giving nothing away.

PETER: (*looks at his card again, then*) George, I'll also have another card. (*GEORGE deals it*)

GEORGE: What about it, Nick? Another one?

NICK studies his cards, looks as if he decides to take another card, then shakes his head. He holds out his hand for another card while still looking at his hand, but doesn't take the card GEORGE holds out for him.

PETER: (*exasperated*) Nick! For Heaven's sake! You're taking this much too seriously.

NICK looks up and he is looking serious. He slowly takes the proffered card. His face changes and he throws his cards face down and sits back in his chair. He lets out a grunt.

PETER and GABRIEL both look with surprise at Nick, who won't meet their eyes.

PETER: (*turning to GEORGE*) I'll have one more, please.

GEORGE deals him the card. PETER looks at the card briefly and then places his hand face down on the table.

The three still in the game eye each other.

GEORGE: You said that the first with twenty-one wins, right?

NICK: Between the three of us, that is.

GEORGE: That's hardly sporting! *You* invited me to play.

GABRIEL: He's right, you know. We did.

All look at PETER.

PETER: (*uncertainly*) That's not the way we usually do things here.

GEORGE: Why on Earth not?

PETER: We just don't.

GABRIEL: But we've never had the... uh... subject playing with us. This is a first.

NICK: Come *on*, you guys. This is not on. You can't be serious.

GEORGE: *I am.*

NICK: You would be!

PETER: Yes, of course he would be. This is about his whole future.

GEORGE: So...?

The other three look at each other.

PETER: *(looking suspiciously at GEORGE)* Fair is fair. If you win this hand, then you are in this game as an equal. First to twenty-one.

GABRIEL: *(turning his cards over)* Nineteen.

PETER: *(turning over his cards, a smile on his face)* Twenty.

All turn towards GEORGE, who gives nothing away on his face.

GEORGE slowly turns over his cards, with the others craning to see.

ALL FOUR: *(simultaneously)* Twenty-one!

GEORGE: *(rising)* Thank you, gentlemen. *(exists slowly)*

As GEORGE exists stage right, the lights come up on stage left (they remain on stage right), where we see MARTHA sitting at the table. The phone rings.

As MARTHA answers the phone, the three men stage right are obviously arguing, silently. But during the following conversation, they calm down and PETER gathers the cards and starts to shuffle.

MARTHA: *(excitedly)* Anna, your dad's woken up! The doctor says he'll probably be alright! ... Yes it *is* wonderful. ... I'll see you at the hospital. *(she puts the phone down)*

PETER: Well, my friends. That was a turn-up for the cards. Another round?

Blackout and curtain

THE END

This play won first prize in the Break a Leg Theatre Group's 2007 playwright's competition and was given a public reading by the group in Traralgon on 5th July 2008.