

# **COOLER**

A play  
By Craig Houk

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### Synopsis

Three-time Oscar winner, Jack Dunn, returns to Connecticut after being gone for nearly four years in McGrath, Alaska. His closest friend, Wade Henry, also an award-winning actor, has something Jack wants. After a long evening of drinking and poker with their pals, Jack and Wade, both eager to cement their legacies, face off one last time.

### Characters

**JACK DUNN** (Age 60s/70s, Any Race)

**WADE HENRY** (Age 60s/70s, Any Race)

### Setting

Wade's home in an affluent Connecticut neighborhood. A nicely furnished den set up for poker night. A Tony Award and an Oscar are on display among other theatrical awards. There are shelves filled with playscripts and screenplays.

### Time

The present. After midnight.

### Note About The Play Title

In the game of poker, a cooler refers to a situation in which a strong hand, usually played correctly, loses to an even stronger holding. In a cooler situation you lose, not because you were outplayed, but because of the luck of the draw.

## SCENE 1

*Mid-September. After midnight. Thunder in the distance. Occasional flashes of lightning. Jack is alone in the den. He is finishing a drink. He's looking at a lineup of awards on a shelf or mantel. The room is a bit messy from the evening. Empty drinking glasses, beer bottles, liquor bottles, plates, snacks, etc.*

**WADE.** *(Off.)* Hey, Charlie! Take it easy! Watch where you're going there! Holy Christ! And down he goes! Can one of you guys help Charlie out of the bushes there, please? Unbelievable! Thank you! And don't let him drive! Leave the car here! I'll get it back to him tomorrow! Are we all sorted now? Good! Get home safe, fellas! *(We hear two or more cars pull away, perhaps tires squealing. A quiet moment passes before Wade enters the den.)* That was some shitshow, let me tell you. *(The phone rings.)* Oh, Jesus. And what do you know? There she is. Right on cue. *(Wade picks up the receiver.)* Hello...? I love it when you curse at me in Italian. It's downright sexy. And what can I do for you at this late hour, Mrs. Sabbatini...? Uh huh. Well, technically, those bushes are on my property, so... I'm sorry, what...? Oh, shit... I see... So, your mailbox is completely gone...? Right... And how much fencing do you think you'll need to replace...? Christ. Okay, well that's a lot. So, listen. How about I write you a check? And I'll bring it over first thing in the morning...? Well, yeah, I guess if you want to take me to court, you can do that, but I'll just plead no contest and pay you what I owe you anyway. So maybe we can skip that part this time around. Save me a little time and some money. What do you think...? Right. Okay, well I'll wear my good suit this time. Maybe the judge will take it easy on me... Yeah, well don't worry about the noise. Everyone's gone home for the night... Thank you... Good night, Mrs. Sabbatini. *(Wade replaces the receiver.)* We'd better keep it down, Jack.

**JACK.** I guess we'd better.

**WADE.** I put your bags in one of the guest rooms. Top of the stairs and to your right at the end of the hall. It's got a private bath. There's fresh bedding and towels for you.

**JACK.** Thanks, Wade.

**WADE.** Otherwise, if you're not too tired, I'd be more than happy to share a night cap with you. I'll probably have one either way.

**JACK.** I guess I'm still a little wound up from the evening, so why not?

**WADE.** Excellent. I'll get the good stuff.

**JACK.** What? No, you should save that for a special occasion.

**WADE.** What're you talking about? This is a special occasion. It's been way too long, my friend.

**JACK.** Agreed.

*(Wade retrieves a bottle of nice whiskey and pours a drink for himself and for Jack.)*

**WADE.** Hey, and I'm sorry about the impromptu poker game. The fellas caught wind of your visit and, well... Anything less than a get-together would've ended in a riot.

**JACK.** Not to worry. It was good to see the boys.

**WADE.** They're a bunch of idiots.

**JACK.** You and me included.

**WADE.** True.

*(Beat.)*

**JACK.** I was, uh... I was just taking a look at your trophies over there.

**WADE.** Oh, yeah?

**JACK.** I see you got that Tony front and center.

**WADE.** Yeah. That and the Oscar. You've got more than your share, though, right?

**JACK.** Never won a Tony.

**WADE.** Maybe not, but what? Two Oscars?

**JACK.** Three, actually.

**WADE.** Oh, yeah. How could I forget? *(Beat.)* So, what're you complaining about then?

**JACK.** I wasn't complaining.

**WADE.** Sounded like maybe you were.

**JACK.** No. No, it's all good. I guess I just always fancied myself a stage actor. Always wanted a Tony.

**WADE.** Well, you're not dead. So, there's still time.

**JACK.** Right.

**WADE.** Cheers.

**JACK.** Cheers.

*(They drink.)*

**WADE.** So, what the hell's been going on with you, hunh? You just fuck right off to the North Pole and don't tell anyone? I have to hear about it on the news?

**JACK.** The North Pole?

**WADE.** Alaska. Whatever.

**JACK.** I was up in McGrath. It's hardly the North Pole, Wade.

**WADE.** Okay, fine. McGrath. So, what made you go there?

**JACK.** Population of roughly three hundred and not a goddamn one of them knows who I am.

**WADE.** And?

**JACK.** I bought a cabin up there years ago, Wade.

**WADE.** Really? First I'm hearing about it.

**JACK.** Yeah, well it was meant to be a secret. Just a place for me to go when I needed time to myself.

**WADE.** I see. And what the hell do you do up there?

**JACK.** Some reading, some fishing – a lot of fishing in fact. And then I spend most evenings at the only pub in town. Other than that, I mostly keep to myself.

**WADE.** Right. Well, no offense, Jack, but that sounds awful. Please tell me you at least get laid once in a while.

**JACK.** I may have a lady friend up there.

**WADE.** Or two.

**JACK.** Or two.

**WADE.** Okay, well there's that. Do they at least have a full set of teeth?

**JACK.** Come on, Wade--

**WADE.** Do they?

**JACK.** Of course, they do. Smart ass. And even if they didn't, I'm not in a position to complain. I mean, when you're almost seventy, you take whatever comes your way.

**WADE.** Fair enough. *(Beat.)* Three years, Jack.

**JACK.** Almost four.

**WADE.** That's a long time to be away.

**JACK.** So, what're you saying, Wade? You saying you missed me?

**WADE.** Of course, I missed you. Everyone missed you. Mostly, I was worried, though. I thought maybe you were gonna just wander off onto the ice somewhere and just, I don't know, wait for it to melt.

*(Beat.)*

**JACK.** You're kidding me, right?

**WADE.** What?

**JACK.** Are you serious?

**WADE.** What're you talking about?

**JACK.** You honestly thought I was gonna kill myself?

**WADE.** What? No.

**JACK.** Are you out of your fucking mind?

**WADE.** No, that's not what I meant at all.

**JACK.** Wait for the ice to melt? Like if I didn't freeze to death first, I would just let myself drown? That's fucking morbid, Wade. Jesus.

**WADE.** Now hang on a second--

**JACK.** I went away for some solitude. Okay? That's all. I needed some time to myself. To regroup. To refresh. Not to off myself. Jesus Christ. What's the matter with you?

**WADE.** Take it easy, Jack. It's not what I... I mean, it just came out wrong. I wasn't trying to suggest that... Look, just forget I said it. Okay? I'm sorry. *(Beat.)* Jack, I'm sorry. Are we good?

*(Beat.)*

**JACK.** Of course, we're good. But you know, I was thinking about ways to kill you while I was up there. *(Beat.)* I'm kidding.

**WADE.** You're an asshole.

**JACK.** I'd argue that you're the asshole. But I prefer not to argue.

**WADE.** Me neither.

*(Jack holds out his glass.)*

**JACK.** I'll have another.

**WADE.** Same?

**JACK.** Sure. *(Wade pours himself and Jack another drink.)* How's Kate?

**WADE.** Oh. Well, uh... she's good.

**JACK.** I didn't want to ask in front of the guys.

**WADE.** Yeah, no. She's... she's good. She's uh... she's over in Europe shooting a film.

**JACK.** Oh, yeah?

**WADE.** Prague.

**JACK.** Beautiful city.

**WADE.** Yeah.

**JACK.** I thought she was gonna take a break from directing.

**WADE.** Yeah, well, she talked about taking a break. And then she took one. And then she spent several months with me. And then she went back to work. *(He chuckles.)* I guess she decided she had better things to do with her time than to hang out with an old fart.

**JACK.** She loves you, Wade.

**WADE.** Yeah, when she's not threatening to leave me.

**JACK.** Eh. She's young. She'll figure it out.

**WADE.** Or she'll file for divorce.

**JACK.** That's what I meant. *(He winks or cracks a smile.)*

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** I'm guessing maybe you didn't take the time to work on your genial disposition while you were away.

**JACK.** Oh, now come on, Wade. What is it? Your third marriage? You think you'd be used to it by now.

**WADE.** Says the guy who's never had a wife. No. Sorry. I take that back. You almost had a wife once upon a time, right? Until you scared her off, of course.

*(Beat.)*

**JACK.** I think maybe I deserved that.

**WADE.** No. I'm sorry, Jack.

**JACK.** I'm the one who should be sorry.

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** You know what? Fuck it. Let's not waste our time with apologies. Okay? You're my friend. And I appreciate your honesty.

**JACK.** Likewise.

**WADE.** We need to keep each other in check.

**JACK.** Agreed.

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** So, why'd you come back then? Hunh? You got something lined up?

**JACK.** Pfft. No. God, I wish.

**WADE.** So, what then? Are you really here for just a visit? Or maybe you're planning on moving back?

**JACK.** I don't know yet. *(Beat.)* I miss the work. A lot. Which is crazy because it wasn't that long ago, I couldn't wait to get away from it.

**WADE.** Fair enough. I've been there myself.

*(Beat.)*

**JACK.** And what about you, my friend? How's things been for you?

**WADE.** Shit, I don't know. It's been pretty much a dry spell, I guess. Not much in the way of work. Hints of things here and there but nothing noteworthy.

**JACK.** Oh, yeah?

**WADE.** I try to stay optimistic. But who the hell knows? At our age, the last gig could very well be the last gig. You know what I'm saying?

**JACK.** I most certainly do.

**WADE.** And, you know, I'm just doing my best to try and enjoy the rest of what's left of my life. I have a good relationship with my kids. I get to see my grandchildren a lot. I'm in decent shape, so I'm able to hang out with the boys fairly regularly. And to top it all off, tonight, I had the opportunity to reconnect with one of my oldest and dearest friends. So, all in all, things are pretty damn good.

*(A moment.)*

**JACK.** You wanna play another hand?

**WADE.** Oh, I don't know. I mean, it's pretty late. You sure you're up for it?

**JACK.** I happen to be the one who suggested it.

**WADE.** True. All right. Why the hell not?

**JACK.** Good. Have a seat. You deal.

*(They move to the table and sit.)*

**WADE.** Okay. So, what'll it be?

**JACK.** Five Card Draw.

**WADE.** Easy enough.

*(Wade reaches for a deck.)*

**JACK.** You got a fresh deck?



**WADE.** Uh, yeah. Right over here. *(Wade grabs a new deck from a drawer nearby. Jack pours the two of them another drink.)* Okay. Here we go. *(Wade sits again and starts to unwrap the new deck.)* So, listen, I don't mind opening a new deck. I got plenty. Just seems odd, I guess. I mean, I'm the guy who basically lost his shirt tonight. So, I'm thinking maybe the one we've already been using ought to bring you more luck.

**JACK.** Exactly. So, we start fresh with a new deck. It'll level the playing field.

**WADE.** All right. Fine by me. Anything to give me a chance to win some of my money back.

*(Wade begins to shuffle. He's very adept at it.)*

**JACK.** What's the ante?

**WADE.** Let's start with a C-note.

**JACK.** I think I can manage that.

*(They both toss in a chip. Wade continues to shuffle and then offers the deck to Jack to cut. Jack taps the top of the deck. Wade deals five cards to each and then places the remainder of the deck on the table. They both manipulate their cards as they review their hands. Jack tosses in another chip. Wade follows with a chip.)*

**WADE.** Call.

**JACK.** I'll take one.

*(Jack discards one card and Wade deals one card to Jack from the deck.)*

**WADE.** Three for me.

*(Wade discards three cards and then deals himself three cards. A moment as they review their hands.)*

**JACK.** Patrick McKinney.

**WADE.** What's that?

**JACK.** Patrick McKinney. He's a playwright. You familiar?

**WADE.** Of course, I'm familiar. What about him?

**JACK.** Hard to say exactly. Except I've heard some rumblings.

**WADE.** Oh, yeah? What about?

**JACK.** Heard he's working on a new play. Or maybe he's just finished one. I don't know. Sounds like maybe they're planning to workshop it.

**WADE.** Mm hm. *(Beat.)* So, you gonna bet here?

**JACK.** I understand there might be a role in it for, uh... a mature actor. A male actor. Around our age.

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**WADE.** (*Focused on his cards.*) Okay, well, whatever you bet, don't go crazy. I'm running a little low on funds here.

**JACK.** You know, the kind of role that might reignite a fizzling career so to speak.

**WADE.** Right.

**JACK.** I mean, McKinney ain't no slouch. Chances of one of his plays being a flop are slim to none. Am I right?

(*Beat.*)

**WADE.** You have something in particular you wanna discuss with me, Jack?

(*Beat.*)

**JACK.** Tell you what. Let's forget about the money. Hm? And maybe let's make this next wager interesting.

**WADE.** Uh huh. Interesting how?

(*A moment.*)

**JACK.** Anything of mine... Anything you want. It's yours.

**WADE.** Get outta here.

**JACK.** Assuming you win the hand, of course.

**WADE.** No way, Jack.

**JACK.** Why not? You afraid?

**WADE.** Afraid? What, are you in grade school? Of course, I'm not afraid. It's just a stupid idea. And sometimes, when a stupid idea presents itself, the smart guy in the situation – that being me in this case – feels obligated to call it what it is: stupid. And anyway, I don't get the sense that you're actually interested in what I want. So, why don't you tell me exactly what it is you're angling for here, Jack.

(*A moment.*)

**JACK.** I want that role in McKinney's play.

**WADE.** And what makes you think I'm the guy who can help you with that?

**JACK.** Because you're the guy who has it.

(*Beat.*)

**WADE.** I think it's time for you to go to bed.

**JACK.** I'm serious, Wade.

**WADE.** I know you're serious. And that's why I'm telling you that what you're asking for, you can't have.

**JACK.** Bullshit.

**WADE.** Everything's lined up, dipshit. Jesus. Contracts are signed, the money's in place, everything's locked in. You remember how this works, right?

**JACK.** Contracts get broken every day. *(Beat.)* Now, listen Wade. You've had a good career. A damn good career. You're already gonna go out on top. So, why can't you find it in your heart to just step aside and let your old pal have this one?

**WADE.** You wanna know what really pisses me off about this? That you honestly believe you're owed that role by virtue of your... your what? Your sad little need to prove yourself? I mean, even if I did decide to step aside – which I will remind you is not happening – what makes you think they'd just hand it to you? Hunh? You think you're better than me? Is that it? You think they'd be happy to have you instead of me? You're the coward who ran away because you couldn't hack it anymore. And just because you suddenly found your missing balls, you think you can come back here and take something from me that I earned through dedication and hard work? Well, fuck you, Jack. That role's mine. And you better steer clear because I will take you out.

*(A moment.)*

**JACK.** All I'm asking for is an opportunity to win it from you.

**WADE.** You haven't listened to a word I've said, have you?

**JACK.** So, there isn't anything I have that you'd want?

**WADE.** Are we having the same conversation here?

*(A moment.)*

**JACK.** Wade--

**WADE.** Your property. In Goshen.

**JACK.** I'm sorry, what?

**WADE.** You asked me what I want. And I'm telling you. I want your property in Goshen.

**JACK.** You serious?

**WADE.** You bet your ass I am.

**JACK.** What the hell do you want that for? It's a fucking run-down cottage on three acres of land. It's not worth much.

**WADE.** You said whatever I wanted, Jack.

**JACK.** Yeah. Okay, I did say that but--

**WADE.** But nothing. If you really wanna do this. If you really wanna settle this with a poker hand, then you're gonna have to wager that property.

*(A moment.)*

**JACK.** I won't do it.

**WADE.** Is that so? You care to tell me why?

**JACK.** You know why.

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** Eh. I don't really give a shit about that cottage anyway. I'd probably just tear it down and put something nice up.

**JACK.** Fuck you.

**WADE.** Does that mean we're done with this nonsense? *(The phone rings. Wade picks up the receiver.)* Hello...? *(Aside.)* Jesus Christ. *(Into the phone.)* Mrs. Sabbatini! What can I help you with, my dear...? I did say that the fellas went home, yes... I'm sorry, you can see what...? *(Aside.)* Oh, fuck. *(Into the phone.)* Yeah, well hang on a second. *(He puts down the receiver and goes to the window. He closes the curtains fully and then heads back to the phone.)* I just closed the curtains. So, maybe you should go back to bed and mind your own business... Yeah, well maybe I'm over here yelling into the void. You ever think of that...? There's no one here but me... Okay, well, I'm a whackadoodle who likes to talk out loud to himself and you're a nosy cow whose eyes and ears don't work very well. So, moo to you and good night. *(He replaces the receiver.)* That lady's got nothing better to do.

*(During the previous, Jack has poured them both another drink. He offers the drink to Wade who takes it. A moment.)*

**JACK.** We agreed: no apologies.

**WADE.** I wasn't planning on offering one.

*(Beat.)*

**JACK.** Cheers.

**WADE.** Cheers.

*(Beat.)*

**JACK.** So, what's the deal with the zesty tomato next door?

**WADE.** Oh, man. Don't get me started on Delia. Though you best not call her by her given name if you know what's good for you.

**JACK.** She sounds like a hard-ass.

**WADE.** She's in her nineties, except you wouldn't guess it. And she doesn't like anyone in this neighborhood, though she does maintain a special level of hatred for me. Oh, and she fancies herself a medium. Just the other day, she warned me about "a mysterious visitor, someone no longer of this world, an enraged spirit on its way but not of its own volition". She's nuts.

**JACK.** Christ. I'd never answer the phone. Or better yet, I'd get my number changed.

**WADE.** Wouldn't make a difference. She'd just show up at the front door.

**JACK.** Oh, shit. *(Beat.)* It's mostly industry folks around here, though, right?

**WADE.** Mostly, yeah. Why do you ask?

**JACK.** Oh, I don't know. It's just that I don't remember ever hearing the name 'Sabbatini'.

**WADE.** Oh, yeah no. The, uh... The Sabbatini's made their fortune renting goats.

**JACK.** I'm sorry, what?

**WADE.** Yeah, she and her husband had this goat farm. Not far from here. And if you just happened to have a surplus of weeds growing on your land, you could – you know – rent a bunch of goats to eat those weeds. That way, you didn't have to deal with pesticides or worry about brush fires or shit like that. And of course, goats generate their own fertilizer. So, between that and the goat milk, the Sabbatini's were very well-to-do. And when Delia's husband passed, she sold the business and moved here. Which of course made me the chump who drew the short straw when I bought the house next to hers.

**JACK.** Uh huh. And, so, what exactly did you do to piss Delia off, Wade?

**WADE.** It didn't take much, let me tell you. You see, Meryl Streep owned this house before me.

**JACK.** Oh, yeah?

**WADE.** Yeah. And wouldn't you know it, Delia's a huge fan. I mean, who isn't, right? So, in Delia's eyes, I was a significant downgrade.

**JACK.** Ah. I see. *(Beat.)* Well, she's right.

**WADE.** I don't disagree.

**JACK.** No offense, of course.

**WADE.** None taken.

**JACK.** Well, the upside is, she'll be dead soon.

**WADE.** Jesus, Jack. Can we please not? We're talking about Meryl Streep here.

**JACK.** I was referring to Mrs. Sabbatini, you dumbass.

**WADE.** Oh. Right. Well, that's not very nice either. I mean, it's an appealing thought but maybe we should keep those sentiments to ourselves, don't you think? *(Beat.)* Hey, listen, I gotta take a piss. I'll be right back.

**JACK.** Take your time. (*Wade exits the den. A quiet moment passes. Jack pours himself and Wade another drink. He then goes to the window, pulls back the curtains a little, and peers out. He closes the curtains and turns to survey the room. He takes another perusal of the awards before moving to the shelves and looking at the scripts. He pulls various scripts out and puts them back neatly until he finds one that he recognizes. He takes it and then sits. He examines the cover of the script and then turns it over to examine the back. He begins thumbing through the pages and then stops when he finds a photograph inside. He removes the photograph and looks intently at it. Another quiet moment passes before Wade enters the den.*) I poured you another.

**WADE.** Thanks. (*He takes the drink and moves to Jack.*) She was beautiful.

**JACK.** She was. And kind. Honest to a fault. She wasn't timid, though...

**WADE.** No, she was not.

**JACK.** ...She had opinions, and she wasn't afraid to speak her mind. She was smart--

**WADE.** It was a long time ago, Jack. And no offense my friend but I'll never understand why you weren't able to just let her go.

**JACK.** Pfft. I had to chase that woman. She had no interest in me. Didn't give a damn that I was a movie star. Hell, I had women throwing themselves at me--

**WADE.** And it wasn't like you were turning that shit down.

**JACK.** No, I wasn't. And neither were you for that matter.

**WADE.** We were young.

**JACK.** But Judith, she was... She was something else.

**WADE.** She was playing hard to get.

**JACK.** No. No, you see, that's where you're wrong, Wade. And how do I know you're wrong? Because 'women playing hard to get' is the only thing you've ever experienced in your life. (*Beat.*) Judith was different. If she was gonna be with me, I was gonna have to prove myself. I was gonna have to show her that there might be something redeemable in me. Even though I expect there wasn't.

**WADE.** You must've done something to convince her.

**JACK.** Except she wouldn't go through with it. (*A moment.*) That cottage was for her. For us. But you already knew that didn't you? That's where I wanted to retire. And I guess I was hoping that's where we'd spend the rest of our days.

(*Beat.*)

**WADE.** Okay, but listen, Jack – And, you know, there's really no way for me to say this without sounding like a douchebag – But, come on, man. Nothing good ever came of it. The publicity, the speculation, the accusations, what it nearly did to your career... The best thing that could've happened to you was her running off.

**JACK.** Come on, Wade. You make it sound like she took off with another guy.

**WADE.** Maybe she did. Who the hell knows? I mean, do you know where she is?

**JACK.** Of course not.

**WADE.** Yeah, well nobody does, right? So, I'm thinking it's way past time for you to find some closure.

**JACK.** Oh, Jesus. Everyone's favorite fucking buzzword: closure. Never thought I'd hear that coming outta your mouth. And you know, it's funny to me that you think three marriages is somehow better than none at all.

**WADE.** I never said that.

**JACK.** In so many words, you did.

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** Well, if I did, I misspoke. *(Beat.)* My problem is, I like being married. Or maybe I don't like it so much. Maybe it's better to say that I need to be married. You see, for me, divorce is... Well, it's just a sign that you've given up. You know? Another failure to add to your list of failures. And the in between times when I was away from my wife and kids? Those times? They were... They were fucking awful, Jack. You think I drink a lot now? And the drugs. Barely able to keep things together. I was depressed, I couldn't sleep... And, oh, man, the guilt--

**JACK.** All this from the guy who just this evening suggested he wouldn't consider sleeping with a woman unless she had a full set of teeth.

**WADE.** And there it is. You know, I kind of expected that might come back to bite me in the ass. I know I shouldn't be talking like that. And you know what? You're right, Jack. My credibility is shit.

**JACK.** Relax, Wade. You're a man. And in my view – despite popular opinion – men are generally as complicated as women, if not more complicated. All that goddamn posturing we do. And for what? We're already idiots by virtue of being male. So, hey, why not let's bottle everything up then? Hunh? Just fucking cram all that anger, and frustration, and disappointment into every crevasse of every internal organ until our bodies just fucking break down and we die. That should help with our already shitty self-image. Am I right?

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** Sounds like you got thoughts on the matter.

**JACK.** Thoughts that no one – except maybe you – wants to hear. *(He goes back to the photo.)* Where'd you get this?

**WADE.** I don't remember. I've had it for years.

**JACK.** Who's the other woman here?

**WADE.** Oh. That's, uh... Oh shit, what was her name? She did that film with the two of us. And in fact, I think this was taken on set. In Beijing maybe?

**JACK.** *(He holds up the script.)* For Fear of Nightmares.

**WADE.** Oh, geez. Yeah, that's the one. Terrible title.

**JACK.** Terrible movie.

**WADE.** Box office hit, though.

**JACK.** Afforded me that Ferrari. *(Back to the photo.)* Judith flew in for a visit.

**WADE.** Krista Van Blair.

**JACK.** What's that?

**WADE.** The actress. Krista Van Blair. That was her name.

**JACK.** Oh. Right. Right. Whatever happened to her?

**WADE.** She's probably wondering the same about us. *(We hear a knocking at the window.)* What the hell's that woman doing now?

**JACK.** Is she always like this?

**WADE.** No. No, this is new. *(Wade crosses to the window.)* Okay, Delia. You're really pissing me off now... *(He opens the curtains. He looks out and then to the left and to the right. Quietly.)* What the fuck?

**JACK.** What's the matter.

**WADE.** There's no one out there.

**JACK.** She's just screwing with you now.

**WADE.** Yeah, no, I don't think so. That isn't how she operates. *(Beat.)* I'm just gonna take a quick look outside. See what the hell's going on.

**JACK.** Sounds good. *(Wade exits. A moment passes as Jack sips his drink. He then takes out his cell phone and taps it.)* Lorraine, it's Jack... Dunn... Jack Dunn... Yeah. Yeah, it has been a while. And I'm really, really sorry to be calling so late, but listen I... No, no, no. I'm not looking for representation. I think that bus has already left the terminal. No, you see, I was calling to ask you... What's that...? Oh, come on, Lorraine. You've gotta be kidding me. I thought we got that all sorted... Yeah, well no one likes to get shit canned from a show, least of all me. And I'm sorry for the trouble it caused you but... Jesus, can you please just give me a break here...? Listen, please. You're the best fucking agent in New York. Okay? And I'd never say otherwise... I need your help. And, of course, I'll pay you... Yeah, well, you see, that's my point. This'll be a one-time thing. And I won't bother you again... Just give me one minute of your time. That's all I need. Please... Thank you. You don't know what this means to me. *(He takes a deep breath.)* Okay, so listen. Patrick McKinney has this play that he's... Hello? *(Beat.)*



Fucking bitch. *(Beat.)* Goddamn it! *(He tosses his phone, and it breaks.)* Oh, fuck. *(He lowers his head, clenching his fists and breathing heavily. Wade enters.)*

**WADE.** I don't know what's going on out there. Delia's nowhere in sight. *(Beat.)* You okay, Jack? You look like you're about to ready to go off.

*(A moment.)*

**JACK.** My last play? The one I was fired from?

**WADE.** What about it?

**JACK.** I couldn't remember my lines, Wade.

**WADE.** Yeah, well, so what? We've all been there.

**JACK.** No. No, this was different. *(Beat.)* We'd just started previews. I was making my first entrance. And I gotta say, I was feeling pretty fucking confident in that moment. I mean there I was backstage, I was warmed up, I was limber, loose, ready to go, I was like a fucking freight train rolling on to that stage. Except that as soon as I hit my mark, my mind went blank. And my body went hot. And I just stood there, in a haze. I could barely make out what was in front of me. I could hear the other actors breathing and the audience muttering. Outside that, it felt like someone'd just dropped a metal box over me. I could hardly move, there wasn't much air, and I had no goddamn idea what I was supposed to do or say. Seemed like forever before I could pull myself together. But I did. Eventually. And then we moved on. We got through it. And then the next night: Same shit happens but at a different spot, later in the show. And then the third night: Same as the first, except this time I... I just walked off. I fucking walked off, Wade. I left everyone standing there. I went to my dressing room, I chugged some water, took a look at the script, steadied myself, and then went back onstage like nothing happened. But something did happen. Something big. I wasn't some cocky young actor anymore. I was a seasoned actor who was suddenly dealing with the gravity of the situation at hand, who was dealing with the responsibility of performing for an audience, of honoring the character I was playing, of sharing the stage with others who were depending on me. And I failed.

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** I had no idea, Jack.

**JACK.** Call it stage fright or call it a panic attack if you want. Whatever it was, it almost knocked my ass into retirement.

**WADE.** That's rough. *(Beat.)* So, is that why you went away?

**JACK.** For the most part, yeah.

**WADE.** I'm sorry to hear it.

*(A moment.)*

**JACK.** Wade...

**WADE.** What is it?

**JACK.** You're gonna get me that role in McKinney's play.

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** Okay. Okay, I see what's going on here.

**JACK.** Don't patronize me.

**WADE.** Yeah, so listen. I think it's time for you to get outta here, Jack. There's plenty of hotels nearby--

**JACK.** I'm not going anywhere until we get this settled.

**WADE.** There's nothing to settle, Jack. And what're you gonna do anyway? Hunh? You gonna kick my ass? Will that settle things for you?

**JACK.** Maybe. I might even kill you.

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** You're a fucking idiot. *(Beat.)* You know, I am curious, though. Maybe you can run me through your little thought process here. I mean, seriously. Explain to me how you think you're gonna get from where you are now – which is essentially out to pasture – to getting a role on a Broadway stage. My role. So, what? So, you're gonna kill me? You think that'll clear a path for you, big guy? I suppose I can be replaced; I'll give you that much. But you, my friend? Nobody wants to work with you, so you're just plain fucking useless.

*(Beat. Jack takes a swing at Wade – maybe he lands a punch, maybe he misses. Either way, this sparks an extended full-on physical altercation between the two men. At some point, Jack will get his hands on Wade's Tony and will wield it at him.)*

**JACK.** This is the end of the road for you, Wade Henry--

**WADE.** Put the fucking Tony down, Jack. *(Jack starts towards Wade with the Tony raised. Wade backs up.)* Jack. Jack, don't do it. You need to calm down, do you hear me? You're outta your fucking mind, man. Jack. Jack, don't! *(Jack takes a swing at Wade with the Tony as the two disappear into the hallway. We hear a loud crash off and then silence. A long moment passes before the phone rings several times and then stops. Another moment passes. The phone rings again several times and then stops. Suddenly, Wade appears. He goes to the phone and pulls the chord from it. We hear a louder knocking at the window. Wade crosses to the window and as he closes the curtains...)* Enough!

*(A crack of thunder and a flash of lightning as lights go black – a power outage. A quiet moment passes. Lights come up. Wade is still at the window. As he turns, Jack appears.)*

**JACK.** You okay?

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** Did you just ask me if I was okay?

COOLER by Craig Houk

**JACK.** I did.

**WADE.** You endeavored to open my skull with my Tony award, Jack.

**JACK.** Yeah, well normally I'd apologize but we agreed no apologies so... *(He shrugs.)*

**WADE.** Right. Well, to be honest with you, I'm a little concerned about my wellbeing at the moment.

**JACK.** I understand.

**WADE.** Do you, though?

*(Beat.)*

**JACK.** So, what are you gonna do? You gonna call the police?

**WADE.** I was thinking about it. Except I'm pretty sure I busted my telephone there.

**JACK.** Yeah, well I busted mine too. You don't have a cell phone?

**WADE.** I don't. Because I'm an old man. And I hate cell phones. But right now, I'm regretting not having one.

**JACK.** Fair enough. Though I expect you have other phones in the house, right?

**WADE.** That's right.

**JACK.** Well, I won't stop you if that's what you wanna do.

**WADE.** It'd make things a lot easier if you just grabbed your shit and left of your own accord.

**JACK.** Maybe we can talk things through first? Clear the air a bit?

**WADE.** You really think that's gonna help?

**JACK.** I do. Because, you know, I feel like maybe we just got off on the wrong foot tonight.

**WADE.** At least one of us is gonna need stitches, so I'm inclined to agree.

**JACK.** So, maybe we start over then. What do you say?

*(We hear a doorbell.)*

**WADE.** Oh, Jesus. Hold that thought, Jack.

*(Wade exits. As soon as he's clear, we hear a knocking at the window. Jack crosses to the window and looks out. No one is there.)*

*NOTE: The following dialogue does not need to be heard clearly. We just need to understand that Jack is having an argument with Delia Sabbatini.*

**WADE.** *(Off.)* Okay, so listen, Delia--

**DELIA.** *(Off.)* Don't you call me Delia, piccolo Bastardo!

**WADE.** *(Off.)* I'll call you whatever I damn well feel like calling you!

**DELIA.** *(Off.)* I wanna know what the devil's going on over here!

**WADE.** *(Off.)* It's none of your damn business what's going on over here. And frankly, I'm sick and tired of having to explain myself to you. I'm a grown man!

**DELIA.** *(Off.)* A grown man? Please! You're a ragazzo!

**WADE.** *(Off.)* You need to go!

**DELIA.** *(Off.)* I'm not going anywhere! All I hear over here is yelling and fighting and things breaking--

**WADE.** *(Off.)* So, go and get yourself some earplugs then! And go back to bed!

**DELIA.** *(Off.)* I'm ninety-three years old! I don't have time for sleep!

**WADE.** *(Off.)* So, what then? You're gonna make it what's left of your life's mission to nag the hell out of me?

**DELIA.** *(Off.)* I'm coming in!

**WADE.** *(Off.)* What? No, you're not!

**DELIA.** *(Off.)* And who's gonna stop me?

**WADE.** *(Off.)* I'm gonna stop you!

**DELIA.** *(Off.)* You better not lay a finger on me, stronzo!

**WADE.** *(Off.)* I'm not kidding, Delia! And you better not take another step!

**DELIA.** *(Off.)* Keep your hands to yourself!

**WADE.** *(Off.)* I'm not touching you! But you gotta stop pushing me, okay? You're gonna get yourself hurt!

**DELIA.** *(Off.)* Get outta my way!

**WADE.** *(Off.)* Delia, stop!

*(We hear a thud – a body hitting the floor. Silence. The lights in the den flicker.)*

**JACK.** *(Calling off.)* Wade?

**WADE.** *(Off.)* Stay where you are, Jack! I'll be right there!

**JACK.** *(Calling off.)* Everything okay?

**WADE.** *(Off.)* Just give me a goddamn minute!

*(The lights flicker again. Jack pours himself and Wade another drink. As he does, we see Wade dragging Delia's body across the den entry and to the other side out of sight. A moment passes before Wade enters the den. Jack hands him a drink. They both drink quietly for another moment.)*

**JACK.** What hap--?

**WADE.** She fell.

**JACK.** Right. And she's--?

**WADE.** Dead, yes.

*(A moment.)*

**JACK.** Who's the idiot now?

**WADE.** Go to hell.

*(They drink.)*

**JACK.** So, what are you gonna do?

**WADE.** *(Agitated.)* I don't know yet. I need time to think. *(Quietly.)* Jesus Christ.

**JACK.** Well, if you leave her where she is – and at this time of year, temperatures being what they are – you maybe have a couple of days before she starts to smell. Leave the AC on and that might buy you an extra day, possibly more.

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** And how do you know so much about it?

**JACK.** I've got a couple of detective movies under my belt. Also, I did an episode of *Murder She Wrote* awhile back.

**WADE.** Right.

*(Beat.)*

**JACK.** You think the neighbors heard?

**WADE.** I don't know. I mean, it's a dead-end road, so there's no one on that side. The Bennetts live across the way but they're out of town. *(Beat.)* So, maybe I just – fuck, I don't know – maybe just I take her back to her house and leave her there.

**JACK.** Make it look like she fell down the stairs.

**WADE.** Something like that, yeah.

**JACK.** Uh huh. *(Beat.)* That, uh... That scratch on your neck. That's not from me, you know.

**WADE.** *(He feels his neck or looks at it in a mirror.)* Oh, shit.

**JACK.** Yeah, so here's what I think you oughtta do...

**WADE.** What's that?

**JACK.** ...Get rid of the body. Take it somewhere remote, bury it, make it disappear.

**WADE.** You're not serious.

**JACK.** What else are you gonna do, Wade? You can't just leave her for someone to find. I mean, so, maybe you do get lucky. Right? Maybe they find her, nothing looks out of place, they rule it an accident. Maybe. But that's really not how things work anymore, man. You can't outsmart science. *(Beat.)* No body, no crime. So, like I said... Make it disappear. And then you just keep your mouth shut.

**WADE.** And what about you?

**JACK.** What about me?

**WADE.** You gonna keep your mouth shut?

**JACK.** I'll do you one better. [I'll give you a hand with the body.]

*(A moment.)*

**WADE.** And let me guess what it is you're gonna want from me in return.

*(A script falls off a shelf or a table, from somewhere relatively discreet, startling both men.)*

**JACK.** What the fuck is going on around here, Wade?

**WADE.** How the hell do I know? A ghost, I expect. Maybe the one Delia was talking about.

**JACK.** You think that's funny?

**WADE.** Do you see me laughing?

*(They're both anxious. Beat. Jack picks up the script.)*

**JACK.** This is it, isn't it? This is the one. McKinney's play...

**WADE.** Like a dog with a bone.

**JACK.** ...How much?

**WADE.** What do you mean, how much?

**JACK.** The budget. How much are they planning to spend?

**WADE.** On the show?

**JACK.** Of course, on the show. What the hell else would I be talking about?

**WADE.** We've got a deceased nonagenarian lying just on the other side of that wall right there and you want to know how much money they're spending on this goddamn fucking play?

**JACK.** That's right.

**WADE.** And you think I know?

**JACK.** I do.

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** Three point five million. Last I heard.

**JACK.** That's a lot of money.

**WADE.** It is.

**JACK.** And that's a lot of people putting their necks on the line...

**WADE.** What's your point?

**JACK.** ...For you.

**WADE.** I'm flattered.

**JACK.** Fuck you, you're flattered.

**WADE.** Open the script, you goddamn moron.

**JACK.** Why?

**WADE.** Just do what I told you. Okay? Open the script and take a look at the character descriptions. *(Jack hesitates.)* Go on.

*(Jack opens the script and finds the page listing the characters.)*

**JACK.** Okay. So, which--?

**WADE.** Bottom of the list there.

**JACK.** Here it is. *(Reading.)* Martin...

**WADE.** That's the one.

**JACK.** ...Age, late seventies. Martin spends much of the play seated in a well-worn, upholstered chair. He is not altogether incapacitated, nevertheless he is unwell and recovering from a recent stroke. Though it might be a challenge for him, he could speak and move if he wanted but instead chooses to be obstinate... *(He looks up at Wade.)* Oh, shit.

**WADE.** You anxious to get your hands on that role now? *(Beat.)* I've got maybe a handful of scripted lines. Other than that, I'm being given the unique opportunity to grunt or to mumble or gesture at appropriate moments. And I had to audition for this, Jack. I had to beg to audition for this.

**JACK.** Okay, so, I'll grant you it's not ideal but at least you've got work.

**WADE.** And I'm grateful for it. *(Beat.)* And you know, it's gonna be a real challenge for me playing an elderly disabled crank groaning and slobbering all over himself for two hours in front of a live audience. Which is what old people do anyway, right?

**JACK.** Yeah, but Patrick McKinney, Wade--

**WADE.** Oh, yeah, no, don't misunderstand me, Jack. It's a fucking brilliant play. And it's gonna do very well. And I will go down as the highest paid stage prop in theater history.

*(Beat.)*

**JACK.** Wow.

**WADE.** Sorry to have wasted your time, my friend. You should've stayed up in McGrath because I can assure you, there's nothing here for you except scraps, unless of course that's what you're after.

*(A moment.)*

**JACK.** How about one more drink before we hit the road?

**WADE.** What do you mean?

**JACK.** We've got a goat farmer to unload, don't we?

**WADE.** Now?

**JACK.** If we want to get there and back before sunrise.

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** Okay. And so, where are we taking her?

**JACK.** Goshen.

**WADE.** Goshen?

**JACK.** Where else?

**WADE.** And that's where we're gonna leave her?

**JACK.** There's a spot in the basement.

**WADE.** The basement?

**JACK.** You anxious to get your hands on that property now?

*(Beat.)*

**WADE.** Have we always been like this?

**JACK.** Like what?

**WADE.** Spiteful, antagonistic, competitive...



**JACK.** Not always with each other, but yeah, we have. I mean, let's face it. We're a couple of genuine douchebags. You being the douchey-er of the two, of course. (*Beat.*) So, what about that drink?

**WADE.** I think we're gonna need more than that, don't you?

**JACK.** What do you have in mind?

**WADE.** Well, when I was getting that fresh deck of cards, I noticed that one of the fellas left me a little gift in the drawer. Charlie, I suspect.

**JACK.** Oh, yeah? And what's that?

WORK IN PROGRESS. MORE TO COME.