

Cooler

by Craig Houk

PERUSSAL

COOLER

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COOLER

*To toxic masculinity!
Is there any other kind?*

PERUSAL

COOLER

CHARACTERS

JACK DUNN (Age Early to Mid-60s, Any Race)

WADE HENRY (Age Early to Mid-60s, Any Race)

WOMAN

Plays DELIA SABATINI (Age 90s, Italian American)

Plays JUDITH WILLIAMS (Age 30s, Any Race)

SETTING

Wade's home, in an affluent Connecticut neighborhood. His den is comfortably appointed, anchored by a large window. A Tony Award sits in plain view, surrounded by other theater and film awards. Shelves are lined with playscripts and screenplays. Instead of doors, a large archway opens into a hallway that leads off in one direction.

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.

COOLER

COOLER was originally produced by LAB Theater Project in Ybor City/Tampa, Florida, opening on Thursday, May 15th, 2025, and closing on Sunday, June 1st, 2025. The play was directed by Katie Calahan and featured the following cast and production team:

Jason Hoolihan as Jack Dunn

Kyle Stone as Wade Henry

Hippie Griswold as Wade Henry u/s

Denise Mestanza-Taylor as Delia Sabatini/Judith Williams

Producer: Beth Tepe-Robertson

Co-Producer: Owen Robertson

Set Designer: Owen Robertson

Costume Designer: Lindsay Ellis

Lighting Designer: Owen Robertson

Sound Designer: Rick Anthony

Fight Choreographer: Owen Robertson

Stage Manager: Amanda McLelland

Assistant Stage Manager: Crystal Reina

Technical Director: Anne Griswold

Set Dresser: Beth Tepe-Robertson

Props Master: Beth Tepe-Robertson

Scenic Artist: M'ria Swire

Videographer: Kapplan Bryant

Social Media Marketing: Samantha Parisi

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COOLER

COOLER

ACT 1

Mid-September. After midnight. Thunder in the distance. Occasional flashes of lightning. Lights rise slowly on the den.

(The room bears the aftermath of a poker game: empty glasses, bottles, plates, scattered snacks. Jack stands alone, finishing a drink, studying a lineup of awards.)

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, please? Unbelievable! Thank you! And don't let him drive! And don't just dump him on the lawn; get him inside his house this time! I mean it! Alright! We all sorted now? Good! Get home safe, fellas! *(Sound of cars peeling off. Silence. Then Wade enters.)* That was a goddam shitshow. *(The phone rings.)* And there she is, right on cue. *(Wade picks up the receiver.)* Hello...? Ah. Mrs. Sabatini. What can I do for you at this late hour...? Uh-huh... Well technically those bushes are on my property, so... I'm sorry, what? Ah, shit. I see. And how much fencing are we talking...? That's a lot. Alright. I'll write you a check, and I'll bring it over first thing in the morning... Okay, okay, a blank check but don't go crazy, you hear me...? No, no. Everyone's gone. Quiet as the grave, I promise. Thank you. Good night, Mrs. Sabatini. *(He hangs up.)* We'd better keep it down, Jack.

JACK. I suppose we'd better.

WADE. Otherwise, we're asking for trouble.

JACK. Last thing we need.

WADE. Ain't that the truth. Oh, hey. I put your bags in the guest room. Top of the stairs, end of the hall. Fresh sheets, towels. Private bath.

JACK. That's very nice. Thanks, Wade.

COOLER

WADE. Otherwise, if you're not too tired, we could have a nightcap.

JACK. A nightcap?

WADE. If you're up for it.

JACK. Guess I'm still a little wired, so what's one more drink?

WADE. Excellent. I'll get the good whiskey.

JACK. What? No, no. Save that for something special.

WADE. This is special. It's been way too long.

JACK. It has, but—

WADE. No "buts." We're celebrating.

JACK. If you say so.

WADE. I do say so.

JACK. Alright then. (*Wade retrieves a bottle of nice whiskey and pours two drinks.*) It really is good to see you, Wade.

WADE. You too.

JACK. And I appreciate you putting me up for the night.

WADE. Wouldn't have it any other way. Oh. And sorry about the, uh... impromptu poker game. Word got out you were in town, and... well... anything short of a get-together would've likely ended in a riot.

JACK. Charlie was especially fucked up tonight.

WADE. Yeah. I don't know what was going on with him. One minute he's fine – running his mouth as usual – the next he steps out for a smoke, and when he comes back, he's all of a sudden a different man. Barely a peep out of him after that.

JACK. He seemed spooked.

WADE. Who the fuck knows? He's an idiot. They're all idiots.

COOLER

JACK. Including us.

WADE. Fair enough. Anyway, now that they're gone, it'll give the two of us the chance to catch up on things.

JACK. Good. *(Wade hands him a drink. Jack takes both, sets them down, opens his arms.)*

WADE. What the hell are you doing?

JACK. Bring it in, my friend.

WADE. You're kidding me, right?

JACK. No. Come here.

WADE. This is very unlike you, Jack.

JACK. Maybe I'm getting a little soft in my old age.

WADE. I doubt it.

JACK. You want a hug or not? It's a very limited-time offer.

WADE. Alright. Why the hell not? *(They hug. It may be sincere or awkward. Perhaps both.)* Okay. That's enough of that. *(They grab their drinks.)* Cheers.

JACK. Cheers. *(They drink.)* I was just taking a look at your trophies over here.

WADE. Oh, yeah?

JACK. Still got that Tony front and center.

WADE. Yeah, well... you've got plenty of your own, right?

JACK. Never won a Tony.

WADE. Maybe not, but you've got an Oscar.

JACK. That I do.

WADE. You see one of those here?

COOLER

JACK. I do not.

WADE. Then what's the problem?

JACK. No problem. Just... always thought of myself as a stage actor. Always wanted a Tony.

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

JACK. Fair point.

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

JACK. Alaska's not the North Pole, Wade.

WADE. Close enough.

JACK. I was up in McGrath.

WADE. Okay. Why?

JACK. No one knows me there.

WADE. And?

JACK. That's it. I bought a cabin there years ago.

WADE. First I'm hearing of it.

JACK. Well, it was meant to be a secret. Just somewhere I could go when I needed time to myself.

WADE. And what the hell do you do up there?

JACK. I don't know. Some reading, some fishing. Also, a lot of drinking. Other than that, I try to keep to myself.

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

JACK. I may have a lady friend up there.

COOLER

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 in no position to complain. At our age, you take what you can get.

WADE. Fair enough. Three years, Jack.

JACK. Almost four.

WADE. That's a long time.

JACK. You saying you missed me, Wade?

WADE. Of course. Everyone did. Mostly I worried, though. Thought you might just wander out onto the ice and – I don't know – wait for it to melt.

JACK. You're kidding me, right?

WADE. What?

JACK. Are you serious?

WADE. What're you talking about?

JACK. You thought I'd 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 what? Let myself drown? That's fucking morbid, Wade. Jesus.

COOLER

WADE. Now hang on a second—

JACK. I went away for some solitude. Okay? Not to off myself. Jesus Christ, what's the matter / with you?

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

JACK. Yeah, we're good. Though I did think about killing you once or twice while I was up there.

WADE. You're an asshole.

JACK. I'd argue you're the asshole, but I generally prefer not to argue.

WADE. Me neither.

JACK. *(Holding out his glass.)* I'll have another.

WADE. Same?

JACK. Keep 'em coming. *(Wade pours two drinks.)* Hey. So, how's Kate doing?

WADE. Oh. Well... she's... good.

JACK. Didn't want to ask in front of the guys.

WADE. Yeah. No, she's good. She's, uh... over in Europe. Shooting a film.

JACK. Oh, yeah?

WADE. Prague.

JACK. Beautiful city.

WADE. It is.

JACK. Thought she was taking a break from directing.

COOLER

WADE. Yeah, well, she talked about it. And then of course she took one. Spent a few months alone with me and then she went back to work. Guess she decided she had better things to do with her time than to hang out with a useless old fart.

JACK. She loves you, Wade.

WADE. When she's not threatening to leave me.

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

WADE. Or she'll file for divorce.

JACK. That's what I meant. *(He smiles.)*

WADE. I'm guessing you didn't spend your time away working on your genial disposition.

JACK. Oh, come on, Wade. What is it? Your third marriage? It's not like I'm wishing you bad luck. I just figured you'd be used to it by now.

WADE. Says the guy who's never had a wife. Sorry, that's not fair. You almost had one once. Till you scared her off.

JACK. Yeah... I think maybe I deserved that.

WADE. No. You most certainly did not. I'm sorry, Jack. I crossed a line.

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

WADE. You know what? Fuck it. No apologies. You're my friend. I appreciate the honesty.

JACK. Likewise.

WADE. We keep each other honest.

JACK. Agreed.

WADE. So, why'd you come back? Got something lined up?

JACK. Pfft. No. God, I wish.

COOLER

WADE. Then what? Just visiting? Or thinking about moving back? Plenty of people around here who'd like to see more of you.

JACK. And plenty who wouldn't.

WADE. We all have enemies. Comes with the territory.

JACK. I suppose.

WADE. Alright. So, you're here. What's next?

JACK. I don't know yet. I do miss acting. Which is crazy. Wasn't that long ago I couldn't wait to get away from it.

WADE. I know the feeling.

JACK. So, yeah. Just a visit. For now.

WADE. Right.

JACK. What about you? How've things been?

WADE. Ah, shit. Pretty dry. Not much work. A few nibbles here and there, nothing worth talking about.

JACK. Yeah?

WADE. Yeah. I stay optimistic, but who the hell knows. At our age... the last job might be the last job. You know?

JACK. I do.

WADE. So, I'm just trying to enjoy what's left of the rest of my life. That's about all you can do, right.

JACK. Except who's to say what the rest of your life's gonna look like. Unless you have a plan. Unless you're willing to do something about it.

WADE. Hm. And are we talking about me? Or you?

JACK. Just talking in general.

WADE. Of course you are.

COOLER

JACK. So... what do you think? Wanna play another hand?

WADE. Another hand? I don't know. It's late. You sure?

JACK. I'm the one who suggested it.

WADE. Fair enough. Alright. Why 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. Yeah. As a matter of fact, I do. Right over here. *(Wade grabs a new deck from a drawer. Jack pours them both another drink.)* Alright. Here we go. *(Wade sits, starts unwrapping the deck.)* Listen. I don't mind opening a new one, I've got plenty. Just seems a little odd, is all. I'm the guy who lost his shirt tonight. Thinking maybe the one we've already been using ought to bring you better luck.

JACK. Exactly. So, we start fresh. Level the playing field.

WADE. Very generous of you. And if it helps me win some of my money back, I'm all for it. *(Wade adeptly shuffles the cards.)*

JACK. What's the ante?

WADE. Let's, uh... start with a C-note.

JACK. I can manage that. *(Both toss in a chip. Wade shuffles, offers the deck to Jack to cut. Jack taps it. Wade deals five cards each, sets the deck down. They study their hands. Jack tosses in another chip. Wade follows with a chip.)*

WADE. Call. *(They look over their cards.)*

JACK. My Dad taught me how to play.

COOLER

WADE. Oh, yeah?

JACK. Yeah. He was a master at it. Always raking it in at the casinos.

WADE. Well, shit. And now here I am playing against the goddam apple.

JACK. I'll take one. *(Jack discards one. Wade burns a card, deals the next card to Jack.)*

WADE. Two for me. *(Wade discards two, deals himself two. They study their hands.)*

JACK. I was just fourteen when he died.

WADE. Jesus. I'm sorry.

JACK. Long time ago.

WADE. You never mentioned it.

JACK. Not my favorite memory.

WADE. Still... that's rough.

JACK. Yeah. Barely a hair on my chin, and then suddenly I'm the man of the house. And I remember thinking, this is bullshit. I mean, I loved him, of course. We were close. I was... devastated. But I was also pissed off that he left me in charge. I mean, what the hell did I know about taking care of my mother? She was a mess – which, fair enough – but I was the last thing on her mind. Neighbors dropping off food. Family dropping off food. Everyone dropping off food. Most of it garbage. Half of it rotting away on the counter because she needed time to grieve. Everything else just... waited. And if one more person told me my dad was “in a better place,” I swear to God I was gonna find something sharp and force it through their fucking skull. A better place for him would've been with us. Not in the ground. *(He looks at his cards.)* Check.

WADE. Check. *(Jack lays his hand down.)*

JACK. Flush.

COOLER

WADE. Son of a— Are you fucking kidding me?

JACK. Hey. At least I didn't go all in. Because I happen to be a generous man.

WADE. *(Quiet, irritated.)* Goddamit. Alright. One more hand, and then that's it, Jack. I mean it. Double or nothing.

JACK. You're a masochist, Wade.

WADE. Piss off.

JACK. Alright. One more.

WADE. *(Offers the deck to Jack.)* Here you go.

JACK. No, no. You deal.

WADE. You sure?

JACK. Not even a little. Matter of fact, I've lost track. But go ahead.

WADE. Alright then. *(Wade shuffles again. Offers the deck. Jack cuts it this time. Wade deals five each, sets the deck down. They study their hands.)*

JACK. I'll take three. *(Jack discards three. Wade burns a card, deals three.)*

WADE. Two for me. *(Wade discards two, deals himself two. They study their hands.)*

JACK. Patrick McKinney.

WADE. What's that?

JACK. Patrick McKinney. The playwright. You familiar?

WADE. Of course, I am. What about him?

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

WADE. Oh, yeah? What about?

COOLER

JACK. He's working on something new. Or maybe he just finished it. Sounds like they're gearing up for a workshop. Not sure how far along it is.

WADE. Mm hm.

JACK. And I hear there might be a role in it for, uh... a mature actor. Male. Our age. The kind of role that might... reignite a fizzling career.

WADE. Right.

JACK. McKinney ain't no slouch. Chances of one of his plays being a flop are slim to none. Right, Wade? (*Wade looks up from his cards.*)

WADE. You have something you want to discuss with me, Jack?

JACK. Tell you what. Let's forget the money. Let's make this hand interesting.

WADE. Yeah? How?

JACK. Anything of mine. Whatever you want... it's yours.

WADE. Get outta here.

JACK. If you win.

WADE. No way, Jack.

JACK. Why not? You afraid?

WADE. Afraid? What is this, grade school? Of course I'm not afraid. It's a stupid idea. And 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 I don't get the sense you actually care what I want. So, why don't you just say it, Jack. What are you after?

JACK. I want that role. In McKinney's play.

WADE. And what makes you think I can help you with that?

JACK. Because you're the one who has it.

COOLER

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

JACK. I'm serious, Wade.

WADE. I know you are. That's why I'm telling you, you can't have it.

JACK. Bullshit.

WADE. It's done, Jack. Contracts are signed. Money's in place. Everything's locked in. You remember how this works, right?

JACK. Contracts get broken every day. You've had a good run, Wade. A great run. You're already heading out on top. So why not – just this once – step aside and let your old friend have it?

WADE. Unbelievable. You actually think you're owed that role? Because of what? Your need to prove something? Even if I stepped aside – which I am not doing – what makes you think they'd give it to you? You think you're better than me? You think they'd choose you over me? You're the coward who ran away because you couldn't hack it anymore. And now you show up – suddenly you've found your balls – and you think you get to take something from me that I earned? Fuck you, Jack. That role is mine. And you stay the hell out of my way, or I will / take you out.

JACK. / All I'm asking for is a chance to / win it from you.

WADE. / You're not listening.

JACK. So, there's nothing I have you'd / want?

WADE. / Are we even having the same conversation? (*A standoff.*)

JACK. Wade–

WADE. Your property. In Goshen.

JACK. I'm sorry?

WADE. You asked what I want. That's it. Your place in Goshen.

JACK. You serious?

COOLER

WADE. Dead serious.

JACK. Why the hell would you want that? It's a rundown cottage on three shitty acres. It's worth nothing.

WADE. You said anything, Jack.

JACK. Yeah, okay. But—

WADE. You want to play this game? You want to settle this with a poker hand? Then that's the wager.

JACK. I won't do it.

WADE. No? Why not?

JACK. You know why.

WADE. I don't give a shit about that place anyway. I'd probably tear it down and build something nice.

JACK. Fuck you.

WADE. Good. And fuck you too. So, are we done here? Because I don't want to hear another word about that play. You're not screwing this up for me. You understand? No one tells me how or when I finish my career. No one. And certainly not you. *(The phone rings. Wade grabs it.)* Hello? *(Quietly, aside.)* Jesus Christ. *(Into the phone.)* Mrs. Sabatini! What can I do for you, my dear...? I did say the fellas went home, yes... I'm sorry, you can see what...? *(Quietly, aside.)* Ah, fuck. *(Into the phone.)* Yeah, well hang on a second. *(He sets the receiver down, crosses to the window, pulls the curtains shut, then returns and picks up the phone.)* I've closed the curtains. So, I'm thinking maybe you tuck your fancy little opera glasses back in their fancy little case, go to bed, and mind your own damn business... Okay, so maybe I'm just over here waving my arms into the abyss. You ever think of that...? There's no one here but me... Right. Well. Then I'm a whackadoodle who talks to himself. And you're a nosy cow whose eyes and ears don't work so well. So, moo to you and good night. *(He hangs up.)* That woman's got nothing better to do. *(Jack has poured drinks. He hands one to Wade.)*

COOLER

JACK. We agreed. No apologies.

WADE. Wasn't planning on one.

JACK. Cheers.

WADE. Cheers. *(They drink.)*

JACK. I was just taking a look at your trophies / over there.

WADE. / We've already done that, Jack.

JACK. What?

WADE. We've already covered the trophies.

JACK. We have?

WADE. We have.

JACK. Right... So, where are we? Ah. Yeah. The, uh... the zesty tomato next door. So, what's her deal?

WADE. 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 know it. Hates everyone in this neighborhood, but she's got a special place in her heart for me. Also fancies herself a medium. Just the other day she warned me about "a mysterious visitor, someone no longer of this world, a somber spirit on its way here, not of its own volition." Her words. Verbatim. She's out of her mind.

JACK. Jesus. I'd never answer the phone.

WADE. Wouldn't matter. She'd be at the front door.

JACK. Christ. It's mostly industry people around here, though, right?

WADE. Yeah. Why?

COOLER

JACK. I don't remember ever hearing the name Sabatini.

WADE. Oh. Yeah, no. The, uh... the Sabatini's made their money renting goats.

JACK. I'm sorry, what?

WADE. Goats. They had a farm not far from here. And if you had weeds, you could rent a herd. They'd clear everything out and then fertilize the place while they were at it. So, between that and the milk, the Sabatinis did very well. And when Delia's husband "passed," she sold the business and moved here. And I got lucky enough to buy the house next door.

JACK. Uh-huh. Well, the upside is, she'll be dead soon.

WADE. That's not very nice. Appealing, but not nice. Maybe we keep that one to ourselves. Hey. I gotta take a piss. Be right back.

JACK. Take your time. *(Wade exits. Jack pours another drink, takes his glass to the window, parts the curtain slightly, peers out. Nothing. He lets the curtains fall closed. He turns back, studies the awards again, then drifts to the shelves. He pulls out scripts, replaces them until he finds one he recognizes. He sits. Studies the cover. Turns it over. Flips through pages and then stops. He finds a photograph tucked inside. Removes it and looks at it intently. Wade re-enters.)* I poured you another.

WADE. Thanks. *(He takes the drink, moves in, looks over Jack's shoulder at the photo.)* Wow. I forgot how red her hair was. And she had a lot of it. She was beautiful, Jack.

JACK. She was. And kind. Honest to a fault. Not timid, though.

WADE. Not at all.

JACK. She had opinions. And she wasn't afraid to share them. She was smart—

COOLER

WADE. That was a long time ago, Jack. No offense, but I never understood why you couldn't just let her go.

JACK. Are you serious? I had to chase her. She had no interest in me. Didn't give a damn I was a movie star. I had women throwing themselves at me—

WADE. And you weren't exactly turning them away.

JACK. Neither were you.

WADE. We were young.

JACK. But Judith. She was... something else.

WADE. She was playing hard to get.

JACK. No. That's where you're wrong. And I know you're wrong because "playing hard to get" is the only thing you've ever experienced. Judith was different. If she was gonna be with me, I had to earn it. I had to prove there was something... redeemable in me.

WADE. Well, you must've convinced her.

JACK. Maybe. Except she didn't go through with it. That cottage? That was for her. For us. But you knew that, didn't you? That's where I was gonna retire. I thought... maybe we'd spend the rest of our lives there.

WADE. Alright, listen. There's no way to say this without sounding like a complete asshole but come on. Nothing good came out of that. The publicity, the rumors, what it almost did to your career... The best thing that could've happened to you was her leaving.

JACK. Jesus, Wade. You make it sound like she ran off with someone.

WADE. Maybe she did. Who the hell knows? Either way, it's been a long time. Might be time to find some closure.

JACK. Oh, Christ. "Closure." Everyone's favorite fucking buzzword. Never thought I'd hear that out of you. And you know, it's funny. You thinking three marriages is somehow better than none.

COOLER

WADE. I never said that.

JACK. In so many words, you did.

WADE. Alright. If I did, I misspoke. Truth is... I like being married. Or maybe I don't. Maybe I just need to be. Because for me, divorce... it's failure. Just another one to add to the pile. And those stretches in between – those times away from my wife, my kids – they were awful, Jack. You think I drink a lot now? And the drugs... barely holding it together. Couldn't sleep. Depressed. And the guilt–

JACK. All this from the guy who suggested he wouldn't sleep with a woman unless she had a full set of teeth.

WADE. Yeah. There it is. I figured that might come back to bite me in the ass. You're right. My credibility's shot.

JACK. Relax, Wade. You're a man. And in my experience – despite what people like to say – we're at least as complicated as women. Maybe more. All that posturing we do... and for what? We're already idiots just by being male. So sure... why not bottle it all up? Just pack every bit of anger, frustration, disappointment into every crevice of every internal organ until our bodies just fucking break down and we drop dead. That should do wonders for the self-image, right?

WADE. Sounds like you've given it some thought.

JACK. More than most. *(He looks back down at the photo.)* Where'd you get this?

WADE. No idea. I've had it for years.

JACK. Who's the other woman?

WADE. Oh. That's, uh... shit, what was her name? She did that film with us. In Beijing. I think this was taken on set.

JACK. *(Holding up the script.)* “For Fear of Nightmares”.

WADE. Oh, Jesus. Yeah. That's the one. Terrible title.

COOLER

JACK. Terrible movie.

WADE. Box office hit.

JACK. Somehow.

WADE. Boosted both of our careers.

JACK. Bought 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. Right... right. Whatever happened to her?

WADE. She's probably asking the same thing about us. *(A sudden knock at the window. They both turn, caught off guard.)* What the hell's that woman up to now?

JACK. Jesus. Is she always like this?

WADE. No. This is new. *(Wade crosses to the window.)* Okay, Delia, you're really starting to piss me off— *(He pulls the curtains open. Looks out. Then left. Then right. Quietly.)* What the fuck?

JACK. What?

WADE. There's no one out there.

JACK. She's screwing with you.

WADE. No. No, that's not how she operates. I'm gonna take a quick look outside.

JACK. Go get 'em, tiger. *(Wade exits. Jack sips his drink. He takes out his cell phone and taps it.)* Lorraine, it's Jack... Jack Dunn... Yeah, I know, it's been a while. Listen, I'm sorry. It's late, I know, but I just... No, no, no. I'm not looking for representation. That ship has sailed. No,

COOLER

I'm calling to ask you— What's that...? Oh, come on, Lorraine, you've gotta be kidding me. I thought we cleared that up... Yeah, well, nobody likes getting shit-canned from a show, least of all me. And I said I was sorry for the trouble it caused you, but— Jesus, Lorraine, can you just give me a break here...? Please. Just listen. You're the best agent in New York, alright? And I'm not blowing smoke; I need your help. And I'll pay you... No, no. You're not hearing me. This is a one-time thing. And I won't bother you again. Just give me a minute. That's all I need. One minute. Please... Thank you. You don't know what this means to me. *(He takes a breath. Steadies himself.)* Okay. So, listen. Patrick McKinney has this play that he's— Hello? *(He hurls the phone. It shatters.)* Oh, fuck. *(He stands there, head lowered, fists clenched, breathing hard. Wade enters.)*

WADE. I don't know what's going on. Delia's nowhere in sight. You alright, Jack? You look like you're about ready to go off.

JACK. My last play. The one I got fired from?

WADE. What about it?

JACK. I couldn't remember my lines.

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

JACK. No. This was different. We'd just started previews. I was making my first entrance. And I was feeling pretty fucking confident in that moment. 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 as soon as I hit my mark, my mind went blank. My body went hot. And I just stood there, in a haze. I could hardly 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 couldn't move, there wasn't much air, and I had no goddam 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

COOLER

night? Same as the first, except this time I... I walked off. I fucking walked off. I left everyone standing there. I went to my dressing room, chugged some water, took a look at the script, steadied myself, and then went back onstage like nothing happened. But something did happen. 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, with the real responsibility of performing for an audience, of honoring the work, of sharing the stage with others who were depending on me. And I failed.

WADE. I had no idea.

JACK. Call it stage fright. Call it a panic attack. Whatever it was... it damn near ended me.

WADE. That's rough, Jack. I'm sorry.

JACK. You know why I became an actor?

WADE. Because your ego outweighs your fear of rejection.

JACK. Yeah, well that may've had something to do with it. But mostly... I just wanted to live an extraordinary life. You know? I wanted something most people might never have. A chance to leave a mark.

WADE. You've done that, Jack. We've both done that. But just like me, it's never gonna be enough for you, is it?

JACK. Wade...

WADE. Yeah?

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

WADE. / Okay. I figured that's where this was / going.

JACK. / Don't patronize / me.

WADE. / Yeah, so listen. I think it's time for you to go. Plenty of hotels / nearby.

COOLER

JACK. / I'm not going anywhere until we settle this.

WADE. There's nothing to settle. And what exactly are you gonna do about it?

JACK. I'm gonna kick your ass.

WADE. Oh, yeah? And that solves it?

JACK. No. But I'll enjoy it. And, you know, I can't let things end like this.

WADE. End like what?

JACK. With you... stealing my thunder. Taking something that's mine. Something I earned.

WADE. Something you earned? You're a fucking idiot. You know, I am curious, though. Maybe you can run me through your little thought process here. 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 kick my ass? 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, Jack? Nobody wants to work with you anymore. You do know that, right? No one wants to work with you. Which means you're done, my friend. So, take the loss and move the fuck on. *(Jack takes a swing at Wade. Whether it lands or not, it ignites a full physical fight. They crash into furniture, struggle, grapple. It's messy, desperate. At some point, Jack grabs Wade's Tony.)*

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

WADE. / Don't be so dramatic, Jack. You're embarrassing yourself. And put the fucking Tony down. *(Jack advances, Tony raised. Wade backs up.)* Jack. Jack, don't. You need to calm down. You hear me? You're out of your fucking mind. Jack, don't! *(Jack swings. They disappear into the hallway. A loud crash off. Then silence. The phone rings. And rings. Stops. Silence. It rings again. Stops. Wade reappears. Disheveled. Breathing hard. He crosses to the phone. Rips the cord out.)*

COOLER

A louder knocking at the window. Wade crosses to the window, closes the curtains. He snaps.) Enough! (A crack of thunder. Flash of lightning. Lights go black. A power outage. In the darkness...) Oh, for fuck's sake. (End of Act One.)

PERUSAL

COOLER

ACT 2

Continuous from Act One. A crack of thunder. Lightning. Lights flicker, then come up full.

(Wade stands at the window. As he turns, Jack appears from the hallway.)

JACK. You okay?

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

JACK. I did.

WADE. You just tried to crack my skull open with my Tony, Jack.

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

WADE. Right. Well, for what it's worth, I'm a little concerned about my wellbeing at the moment.

JACK. Understandable.

WADE. Is it?

JACK. So, what are you gonna do? Call the police?

WADE. I thought about it. Pretty sure I busted the phone, though.

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

WADE. No. Because I'm an old man and I hate cell phones. Though I'm starting to reconsider it.

JACK. Fair enough. You've got another phone in the house, though, right?

WADE. I do.

JACK. Well, I won't stop you if it's what you want to do.

WADE. It'd be a lot easier if you just grabbed your shit and left.

COOLER

JACK. Or we could talk. Clear the air?

WADE. You really think that's gonna help?

JACK. I do. Feels like maybe we got off on the wrong foot.

WADE. One of us might need stitches, so I'm inclined to agree.

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

WADE. Start over?

JACK. Yeah.

WADE. From where, Jack? Where exactly do you suggest we start? Because I'm not even sure how we got here. It's like we've been moving around on some fucked up carousel, and we've been jumping off and then right back on again in random spots.

JACK. Yeah. Well, it's called "life", Wade.

WADE. Maybe. But it's no way to live. *(A doorbell rings.)* Oh, Jesus. Let's put a pin in this. I'll be right back. *(Wade exits. The moment he's gone, knocking at the window. Jack turns. Moves slowly to the window. Peers out. Nothing. Wade, off.)* Alright. 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 want to know what the devil's going on / over here!

WADE. *(Off.)* / It's none of your damn business. And 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 is yelling and fighting and / things breaking.

COOLER

WADE. *(Off.)* / Go get yourself some earplugs then! And go back to bed!

DELIA. *(Off.)* I'm old; I don't have time for sleep!

WADE. *(Off.)* So, what then? You're gonna spend what's left of your life nagging the hell out of / me?

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

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

DELIA. *(Off.)* 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! Don't take another / step!

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

WADE. *(Off.)* / You gotta stop pushing me, okay? You're gonna get yourself / hurt!

DELIA. *(Off.)* / Get out of my / way!

WADE. *(Off.)* / Delia, stop! *(A thud – a body hitting the floor. Silence. The lights flicker.)*

JACK. Wade?

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

JACK. Everything okay?

WADE. *(Off.)* Just give me a goddam minute! *(The lights flicker again. Jack pours two drinks. Wade enters. Jack hands him a glass. They drink quietly.)*

JACK. What happ—?

WADE. She fell.

COOLER

JACK. Right. And she's—?

WADE. Dead. Yes.

JACK. Mm hm. And you—?

WADE. I put her in my office. Any more questions?

JACK. Just one. Who's the idiot now?

WADE. Go to hell. *(They drink.)*

JACK. So, what are you gonna do?

WADE. I don't know yet, Jack. I need a minute to think. And maybe to calm down, if that's alright with you. I just killed a woman. And it's a little hard to unwind something like that. She's been dead all of a minute and you're asking me for a plan? It's not like I've got experience here. So, if you've got suggestions, I'm all ears

JACK. Right. Okay. Well... if you leave her where she is – and given the time of year – you've probably got a couple days before she starts to smell. Keep the AC on, maybe buy yourself an extra day or two.

WADE. And how exactly do you know that?

JACK. I've been in a couple of detective movies. And I did that episode of Murder, She Wrote awhile back.

WADE. Uh-huh.

JACK. You think the neighbors heard anything?

WADE. How the fuck would I know?

JACK. Fair enough.

WADE. No. I'm just... It's a dead-end road. No one on that side. The Bennetts are across the way, but I think they're out of town. Maybe I just – hell, I don't know – take her back to her place. Leave her there.

JACK. Make it look like a fall.

COOLER

WADE. Something like that.

JACK. That scratch on your neck... that's not from me. *(Wade touches his neck or checks a mirror.)*

WADE. Oh, shit.

JACK. Here's what I think you should do...

WADE. What's that?

JACK. You get rid of the body. Bury it. Make it disappear.

WADE. You're not serious.

JACK. What's the alternative? You leave her, hope it passes for an accident? Maybe you get lucky. Maybe. But that's not how it works anymore. You can't outsmart science. No body, no crime. So, you make it disappear... and you 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 help you.

WADE. And what do you want in return? *(A script suddenly falls from a shelf. Both men jump.)*

JACK. What the fuck was that?

WADE. How should I know? A ghost. Maybe the one Delia was talking about.

JACK. I'm not laughing.

WADE. Neither am I. *(They're both anxious.)*

JACK. Hang on a second. *(He picks up the script.)* This... This is it, isn't it? McKinney's play.

COOLER

WADE. Like a dog with a bone.

JACK. How much?

WADE. What the hell are you talking about?

JACK. The budget. What are they spending?

WADE. On the show?

JACK. Yes. On the show. What the fuck else?

WADE. We've got a deceased nonagenarian lying on the floor in my office and you're asking about the budget?

JACK. That's right.

WADE. And you think I know?

JACK. I do.

WADE. Six and a half. Last I heard.

JACK. Million?

WADE. Of course, million.

JACK. That's a lot.

WADE. Yeah.

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

WADE. I'm flattered.

JACK. Fuck you, you're flattered.

WADE. Open the script, you goddam idiot.

JACK. Why?

WADE. Because I said so. Open it. Look at the character descriptions. *(Jack hesitates.)* Go on. *(Jack opens the script, flips pages.)*

COOLER

JACK. Alright. So, which—?

WADE. Bottom of the page.

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

WADE. That's the guy.

JACK. Mid-seventies. Spends most of the play seated in a well-worn chair. Recovering from a stroke. Not entirely incapacitated, but unwell. Could speak and move if he chose to... but doesn't. (*He looks up at Wade.*) Ah... shit.

WADE. You anxious to get your meat hooks on that role now? I've got maybe a handful of lines. The rest? Grunts. Mumbles. The occasional gesture. And I had to audition for it. I had to beg to audition for it.

JACK. Alright. So, it's not ideal, but at least it's work.

WADE. And I am grateful. I get to spend two hours a night drooling and groaning in a chair in front of a live audience. Which is what old people do anyway. Real tour de force.

JACK. Yeah, but it's McKinney.

WADE. Oh, don't get me wrong. It's a brilliant play. It'll be a hit. And I'll go down as the highest-paid stage prop in theater history.

JACK. Wow. That's... That's rough.

WADE. Sorry to have wasted your time. You should've stayed in McGrath. There's nothing here for you but scraps.

JACK. Right. So... 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.

COOLER

WADE. Hold on a second. Get where? Where are we going?

JACK. Goshen.

WADE. Goshen?

JACK. Where else?

WADE. And that's where we're leaving her?

JACK. There's a spot in the basement.

WADE. In the basement?

JACK. Yeah. You anxious to get your meat hooks on that property now? *(They both laugh, an uncomfortable laugh.)* So, what about that drink then?

WADE. I think we're gonna need more than that.

JACK. Depends on what you've got.

WADE. Well... when I grabbed that deck of cards earlier, I noticed that one of the guys left behind a little gift. *(He moves to the drawer.)*

JACK. Oh, yeah? What's that? *(Wade pulls out a small bag of white powder. Holds it up.)*

WADE. Oh... just a small bag of blow.

JACK. Holy / shit.

WADE. / Charlie, I'm guessing.

JACK. Right. Well, I gotta say, it's been a while.

WADE. Yeah. Same here. But I'm thinking it might help get us through the night. You agree?

JACK. Oh, geez. *(He considers it.)* Yeah. Yeah, alright. Fuck it. Let's do it. But let's be smart about it, Wade.

COOLER

WADE. Of course. Nothing more sensible than snorting a few lines before hauling a dead Italian woman off to Goshen.

JACK. I mean it. We need to pace ourselves. *(Wade deftly lays out the lines.)*

WADE. We'll be fine. Just a little boost of energy. Because what're we looking at here? What's the plan? We gotta get Delia into the car, right? Oh, shit. Whose car?

JACK. Mine.

WADE. Good. Alright. So, we get her into your car... Oh, man. And we're gonna need shovels, right? What else?

JACK. Everything we need's already at the cottage.

WADE. Oh. Okay then. And what's that gonna be timewise do you think?

JACK. Two hours. Round trip. We'll need to make space in the trunk.

WADE. How much space?

JACK. We'll have to shift things around. It's gonna be tight.

WADE. Why not just leave whatever we don't need here? Toss it in the garage, grab it later.

JACK. Because what's in the trunk, we're taking with us.

WADE. Then put it in the back seat.

JACK. No. It stays in the trunk.

WADE. I don't / understand.

JACK. / It stays in the trunk.

WADE. Alright, fine. You're in charge. *(Wade finishes setting up the lines. Jack reaches for the "For Fear of Nightmares" script.)*

JACK. I'll never understand how this thing took off.

COOLER

WADE. We took a mediocre script and acted the hell out of it. That's how. *(He snorts a line. Thunder rolls. Lightning. The lights flicker.)* Whoa! This is good stuff. Here, Jack. Give it a go.

JACK. Don't mind if I do. *(Jack sets the "Fear of Nightmares" script aside, leans in, takes a line. Wade picks up the script, flips through it.)*

WADE. And there it is.

JACK. What?

WADE. Our scene. Just the two of us. We nailed it in the first take.

JACK. I remember.

WADE. You know... I should probably thank you.

JACK. Oh, yeah? For what?

WADE. You really don't know?

JACK. What are you talking about, Wade?

WADE. My first Oscar nomination. From a movie that never should've been made. And it's because of you.

JACK. Get the fuck outta here. *(He snorts another line.)*

WADE. I'm serious, Jack. I looked up to you. Still do. That director was a joke. Total hack. You knew it.

JACK. What's your point?

WADE. You coached me through that scene. With everything else you had going on, you took the time. One scene out of a hundred... and you showed up for me. I had no idea what I was doing. People don't realize what that kind of thing means. Just... being there. Giving someone your time. You did that for me. I never forgot it.

JACK. I did it to cover my own ass. And to this day, I'll never understand how you got that nomination. By the skin of your teeth.

COOLER

WADE. Yeah? You won that year. Maybe you should be thanking me.

JACK. Get lost. *(He snorts a line. NOTE: The following underlined dialogue indicates lines from "For Fear of Nightmares".)*

WADE. *(Reading from the script.)* Something's not right.

JACK. Tell me about it.

WADE. No. Jack. Look at me.

JACK. What?

WADE. *(Indicating the script.)* Something's not right.

JACK. Oh. I see what you're doing. Yeah, no thanks. I don't want any part of that. So, piss off.

WADE. Come on. It'll be fun. We'll share the script.

JACK. I said, no. And even if I did want to – which I definitely do not – you can rest assured I remember every fucking line from that scene. It's burned into what's left of my brain. *(A sudden knock at the window. They freeze.)* Okay. Well, that's not Delia. Right?

WADE. No.

JACK. So, then who's–?

WADE. I don't know. *(Wade goes to the window, takes a breath, and pulls the curtain open. Judith is standing outside, her red hair catching the light. Thunder. Lightning. Wade quickly shuts the curtain and turns to Jack, shaken. Lights shift.)* Something's not right.

JACK. *(Compelled to perform, he rises.)* What do you know about right? Holed up in this broken-down shack. All alone for... Jesus, how long has it been?

WADE. I don't know. It's not safe out there.

JACK. You gonna keep yourself hidden away then?

COOLER

WADE. It's all I know. Everything outside these walls... everything out there... it's not real.

JACK. Oh, it's real. Maybe not what it used to be... but it's real.

WADE. No. I think I fell asleep one night and never woke up. I don't even think you're real. This is all just some nightmare that won't end. I've seen others. Not fully formed, though... just shapes. Something in the corner. Behind a chair. Under a table. Watching through the windows... Then you show up. And you seem real. I want you to be real. But something's not right.

JACK. There are others.

WADE. Where?

JACK. Half a mile that way. Small clearing in the woods. We've set up camp.

WADE. How many?

JACK. Nine.

WADE. Children?

JACK. Not yet. But we have the means to make it happen.

WADE. That'd be an awful thing to do.

JACK. Why do you say that?

WADE. To bring a child into this world. The way things are.

JACK. If none of it's real, then what difference does it make?

WADE. You're right.

JACK. Alright. If you want to grab a few things – whatever you can carry – I'll wait outside. When you're ready, I'll take you to the campsite.

WADE. I can't. I appreciate it. I do. But I just... I can't.

COOLER

JACK. Okay. If you change your mind, we're heading out in the morning.

WADE. I've lost track of mornings. Could be one. Could be a trillion. I'm not a religious man. But every night I pray... to whatever's in charge of this mess... that morning doesn't come. At least not for me. Safe travels... to you and your friends. *(A sudden gust, the window slams open. Wind tears through the room. Lights flicker and shift. The phone rings.)* And what do you know? There she is, right on cue. *(Wade crosses to the phone, picks up the receiver.)* Hello Mrs. Sabatini!

DELIA. *(Through the phone.)* You think you're gonna get rid of me that easily?

JACK. Wade...

DELIA. *(Through the phone.)* Because I'm not finished with you. Not just yet, tu piccolo stronzo...

JACK. Wade...

DELIA. *(Through the phone.)* I've got my eye on you.

JACK. Wade! *(Wade turns. Jack crosses to him.)* Give me the phone. *(Wade hands the receiver – the cord clearly torn – to Jack. Jack looks at it, then sets it aside.)* Sit down. *(Wade sits.)* You comfortable?

WADE. Not particularly.

JACK. Good. There's a question I need to ask you. But I'm gonna give you a chance not to answer it.

WADE. Oh yeah? How's that gonna work?

JACK. We've got an unfinished hand of Five Card Draw sitting over there.

WADE. So?

COOLER

JACK. So, here's what I'm proposing: if you've got the winning hand, I don't ask the question. We take care of what we need to in Goshen, come back here, and I get out of your hair... for good. Simple as that.

WADE. Jack—

JACK. But if I've got the winning hand, you answer my question. And you answer it truthfully.

WADE. And if I say no?

JACK. Then I ask it anyway.

WADE. Alright. I'll take my chances with the cards then.

JACK. Good. *(Jack moves to the table, picks up his hand.)* What the fuck is this?

WADE. What?

JACK. You having a good time, Wade?

WADE. What are you talking about?

JACK. You've been messing with me all night.

WADE. I haven't been messing with you.

JACK. Then explain this.

WADE. I don't even know what you're looking at. *(Jack flips a card, shows it.)*

JACK. This.

WADE. Is that a joker?

JACK. Yeah. It's a joker. It's a fucking joker. *(Jack flicks the card at Wade. Wade rises.)*

WADE. Hey! Take it easy. *(Jack flips another card, shows it.)*

JACK. Here's another one. *(He flicks the card at Wade.)*

COOLER

WADE. Cut it out, Jack.

JACK. And another. (*Flicks card.*) And another. (*Flicks card.*) And another. (*Flicks card. Jack grabs Wade's hand, turns it over, spreads the cards, and then sweeps them off the table.*) Every last one of them. Jokers!

WADE. Alright! Just calm down. I had nothing to do with that.

JACK. Bullshit. If not you, then who?

WADE. Maybe you, asshole. Maybe you've been fucking with me all night.

JACK. Oh, no. No, no, no. You're not gonna gaslight / me.

WADE. / Gaslight you? Oh, come on— (*Jack moves in tight on Wade.*) Whoa, whoa, whoa. What're you gonna do, huh? What's this? Round two?

JACK. Yeah. Only this time, one of us goes down. And he stays there.

WADE. Bring it on. (*A standoff. They hold their positions, seething, unmoving. Jack exhales. Breaks. Sits.*) So, listen, Jack. I'm just gonna answer your question. And then maybe we can finally put this to rest. Judith and I never slept together. Alright?

JACK. That's not what I was gonna ask.

WADE. No?

JACK. No. My question isn't "if", Wade. It's "why"?

WADE. And I just told you... it didn't happen.

JACK. And I'm telling you... that's a baldfaced lie.

WADE. I'm a lot of awful things, Jack. But I'm not a rat bastard. I've got at least an ounce of self-respect. More importantly, you're my friend. And that's not something you do to a friend.

JACK. Bullshit.

COOLER

WADE. Alright. Believe whatever you want. But your first mistake was buying into those goddam tabloids all those years ago. I never responded to any of that nonsense because I didn't have to. I knew the truth. And that was enough. If you had doubts... if you thought for even a second I'd betray you, you should've asked me straight out. Instead, you just let it fester. For years.

JACK. I have to believe you and Judith had an affair.

WADE. Yeah. Well, that's just fucked up.

JACK. You spent a lot of time together in Beijing.

WADE. So, what? You were on set for hours on end, and Judith and I had time to kill. What the hell else were we gonna do?

JACK. There were photos.

WADE. Yeah. No shit.

JACK. A lot of them. And you two looked pretty damned cozy in them.

WADE. We were having a good time.

JACK. Fuck you, you were having a good time.

WADE. Nothing happened! *(Softer tone.)* Jesus, Jack. I don't know how else to say it. What do you want from me? Would it help if I told you we were screwing around behind your back while you were busting your nuts trying to spin straw into gold?

JACK. It might.

WADE. It must be really dark and lonely in there... inside your head.

JACK. I confronted her.

WADE. No doubt. How'd that go?

JACK. Not good. I went at her. Full tilt. Screaming, throwing things... like a goddam hurricane. And she just stood there. Scared, maybe. But steady. She just let me burn myself out. And when I finally had nothing

COOLER

left in me... she said, "I'm here, Jack. I love you. There's nothing to worry about." And she smiled. Soft. Kind. The sort of smile that could put out a fire. I expect she was being honest. Because that's who she was. But it didn't matter anymore. I'd already gone to a very dark place. And I wasn't coming back.

WADE. You can't blame her for leaving.

JACK. She didn't leave, Wade.

WADE. No?

JACK. No. She's been up in McGrath all these years.

WADE. McGrath? What are you talking about?

JACK. I'm talking about where I kept her.

WADE. Kept her? *(Jack goes silent.)* Come on. Every time we get to this point, you clam the fuck up. I need you to push through. You hear me? Where, Jack? Where did you keep her?

JACK. In an icebox. Under the back porch. *(A crack of thunder. Lightning. The lights flicker.)*

WADE. *(Quietly.)* Jesus.

JACK. And a few months ago, I thought... maybe it was time to bring her home. To the cottage. Where she belongs.

WADE. I see. And that's where she is now? Please, Jack. Tell me that's where she is. *(Jack looks to Wade. Says nothing.)* Yeah. I don't know why I asked. Of course. She's in the trunk. Stupid of me to think you might've handled that on your own before dragging me into it.

JACK. I came here because I needed to hear the truth from you.

WADE. The fuck you did. You already knew the truth. You came here to unpack your guilt. To shift blame. To bury your problems – literally. And you figured... what? I'd feel sorry for you? Hand over that role in McKinney's play? Maybe even be stupid enough to go to Goshen with

COOLER

you... where you'd get rid of me. Dump me next to her. Alongside a woman who was far too good for you.

JACK. It was Judith's idea to go for a hike.

WADE. I don't want to hear / this, Jack.

JACK. / Up Noir Hill.

WADE. No, no, no. We need to stay / focused.

JACK. / Some bad weather was coming / through.

WADE. / I've got my own business to attend to / in Goshen now.

JACK. / She insisted. Said it would be good / for us.

WADE. / We're in this together / whether we like it or not.

JACK. / The fresh air, the views...

WADE. I'll be watching you. / Make no mistake.

JACK. / Said we wouldn't be out for / long.

WADE. / Assuming we get out / of here, of course.

JACK. / It gets dark early that time / of year.

WADE. / Because it feels to me like we should've been / gone by now.

JACK. / The ground was slick.

WADE. Jack, please!

JACK. It was an accident, Wade. (*Wade relents.*) I was... I don't know... a few feet ahead of her when she slipped. She grabbed my sleeve, pulled me sideways, but couldn't hold on. She went over, straight down a steep ravine. I went with her, but I caught a root on the way down. Hung there, kicking for footing until I found a ledge. Took me a minute to turn myself around, and when I did... there she was. Blood pooling behind her head, but she was breathing. Her legs... twisted. I called out. She turned her head, opened her eyes, and I swear to you,

COOLER

Wade... she smiled. Like she was happy to see me. Like she'd been worried and was relieved I was okay. I don't think she knew how bad it was until she tried to move. And then the panic hit her. I didn't know what to do. I couldn't leave her, not like that. There wasn't time. Climbing back up would've been easier, but I could see the ravine sloped out about a mile down. Half an hour, maybe more, before I could get help and come back. She'd be dead by then. And the snow had already started falling. The fastest way to her was down. So, I let go. Pushed off the ledge, slid the rest of the way, grabbing at anything I could to slow myself. Hit the ground hard. But I was alright. The snow was coming down heavier, the ground soft near the river. And when I got to her... she was partly under water. I didn't want to move her, but I had to. Had to get her dry. Had to get her warm. I slid my arms under her, careful as I could, but Jesus... the blood... and her legs. I had no idea how to do it without making it worse. But what choice did I have? So, I lifted her. And the sound she made... I've never heard anything like it. Not before, not since. We made it maybe ten feet. Then I tripped. Fell forward on top of her. And she just... went quiet. I pushed myself up, straddling her, close to her face. "Judith... look at me." Her mouth opened. She took a breath... and then opened her eyes. (*Judith enters carrying a cooler of beer. She sets it down. Moves to Jack. He turns to her, speaking directly.*) I love you. And I want to believe you. But I don't think I can. I can't shake it. The two of you. You were mine. And that was reason enough for Wade—

WADE. Jack—

JACK. And it hurts. It fucking hurts. So maybe it's time we put an end to it, huh? Because I need closure.

WADE. What'd you do, Jack? Look at me. (*Jack looks at Wade.*) What'd you do?

JACK. I... I laid on top of her. Put my head on her chest. Then I covered her mouth and nose with my hands. And just stayed there. Listening to her heart. Until it stopped. (*Directly to Wade.*) I'm so goddam tired. Of you. Of this endless, epic fucking kick in the teeth.

COOLER

WADE. Yeah. Well, the feeling's mutual. You know, I used to be one of those people who believed in fate. That it didn't matter what we did or didn't do: what path we took, who we met, how we lived, what we achieved... we'd end up exactly where we were meant to be. No choice in it. You want to go right, you go right. Maybe you change your mind – or think you have – and decide to go left instead, so you go left. Christ, you could do that all day. But eventually, there's only one direction you can go. You spend hours bouncing between left and right like an idiot, but you still end up over here and not over there, because you can't be in two places at once. You think you're in control. You think you've made a choice. But you haven't. That's fate. But in this case... in this completely fucked up case, I have to believe what's been done can be undone

JACK. We're being punished.

WADE. Of course we are. Question is... how do we stop it?

JACK. Maybe we don't. Maybe we can't.

WADE. Maybe. But as long as I'm conscious and breathing – or at least conscious, breathing's debatable – I'm gonna keep trying. One thing I do know: Godot's not coming. It's just you and me. And, of course, the lovely Mrs. Sabatini... who, I'll have you know, nearly took me down this time.

JACK. And now Judith.

WADE. And now Judith. *(Jack's eyes are fixed on Judith.)* Alright. Listen to me. *(He snaps his fingers.)* Jack. *(Jack looks at Wade.)* We're grabbing this thing by the balls. And we don't let go until it does. But for that to work, we need to be honest. We stay grounded. We stay sharp. And maybe – just maybe – we try being a little kinder to each other. And if we're lucky, we come out of this better men. If that's even possible.

JACK. And if not?

WADE. There's always the booze and the coke to look forward to. *(They share a laugh.)*

COOLER

JACK. I'd like to think that if my dad was here – and I mean, why the hell not, now's as good a time as any for him to show up, right? I'd like to think he'd sort all of this out in no time. Just grab me by the hand and pull me the hell out of here. Put me in the back seat of the Pontiac GTO and take us to the drive-in – mom and me – same as he used to on summer weekends all those years ago. That's where I fell in love with movies. First one I remember was *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. Great film. I was more of a James Stewart fan than a John Wayne one, but I kept that shit to myself because my dad wouldn't have it. And, you know, I never minded the static over the speaker, or that I didn't get to pick which movie to see. I was just happy to be there – popcorn, cherry cola, the three of us – watching what felt like pure magic. Yeah. So, anyway... If he was here.

WADE. Right. Well, until your dad shows up, we're just gonna have to hunker down. Make the most of it. Because right now, that's all we've got.

JACK. Fair enough. So... what do you think? Wanna play another hand?

WADE. Another hand? I don't know... it's late. You sure?

JACK. I'm the one who suggested it.

WADE. Fair enough. Alright. Why not?

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

WADE. So, what'll it be?

JACK. Five Card Draw. No, wait. Blackjack.

WADE. Blackjack it is.

JACK. You got a fresh deck?

WADE. Yeah. Right over here. *(Wade starts for the drawer, but Judith is already there. She pulls out a fresh deck and hands it to him. Jack grabs two beers from the cooler. Sets them down. Reaches for an opener*

COOLER

but Judith already has it. He takes it from her without a word. Wade returns to the table with the deck. Sits. Jack follows.) Alright. Here we go. Again. *(Wade unwraps the cards. Jack opens the beers.)*

JACK. Hey, Wade...

WADE. Yeah, Jack?

JACK. I think I deal this time.

WADE. Works for me. *(Jack hands Wade a beer. Wade passes him the deck.)* What do you say we throw in a wild card?

JACK. A wild card?

WADE. Yeah.

JACK. That's not exactly standard blackjack.

WADE. Oh. Right. Well... I mean, none of this is exactly standard, is it?

JACK. Fair point. Alright. Wild card it is. What do you suggest? *(Judith steps forward. Reveals a card: the Queen of Hearts. Places it on the table between them. Thunder cracks. Lightning flashes. Lights snap to black.)*

WADE. *(In the darkness.)* Hey, Charlie! Take it easy! Watch where you're going there! Holy Christ and down he goes! *(End of play.)*