

COOLER

A play in two acts

By Craig Houk

PERUSAL

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Synopsis

Aging Oscar-winner Jack Dunn emerges from years of self-imposed exile in Alaska to reconnect with his oldest friend – and fiercest rival – Wade Henry, a Tony-winning stage actor weathering his own uncertain season in a well-appointed Connecticut home. What begins as a late-night poker game fueled by expensive whiskey and shared history gradually exposes old resentments, professional jealousy, and the lingering shadow of a woman who once stood between them. As talk turns to a highly anticipated new play that could redefine (or quietly diminish) a legacy, the evening slips from nostalgic to volatile. With egos bruised and memories distorted, Jack and Wade find themselves trapped in a dangerous game where performance and reality blur, alliances shift, and the stakes extend far beyond the cards on the table.

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)

Character Notes

Jack and Wade are actors from a different era; they've been professional artists nearly their entire lives. And, as with many if not all actors, they're always performing.

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.

ACT ONE

Mid-September. After midnight. There is thunder in the distance and occasional flashes of lightning before lights come up slowly on the den. The room is a tad messy after an evening of poker: empty drinking glasses, beer bottles, liquor bottles, plates, snacks, etc. Jack is alone and is finishing a drink as he looks at a lineup of awards on a shelf or mantel.

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! And don't just dump him on his front lawn; make sure you get him into the house this time! I mean it! Okay, are we all sorted now? Good! Get home safe, fellas!

(We hear two or more cars pull away, tires squealing. A quiet moment passes before Wade enters the den.)

That was some shitshow, let me tell you.

(The phone rings.)

And what do you know? There she is, right on cue.

(Wade picks up the receiver.)

Hello...? Ah, Mrs. Sabatini, and what can I do for you at this late hour...? Uh-huh. Yeah, well, technically, those bushes are on my property, so... I'm sorry, what...? Oh, shit. I see. And, uh, how much fencing do you think you'll need to replace...? 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...? Alright, so I'll make it a blank check but don't crazy, you hear me...? Right... Yeah, well don't worry about the noise; everyone's gone home for the night... Yeah, yeah, of course. As silent as the grave, I promise... Thank you. Good night, Mrs. Sabatini.

(Wade replaces the receiver.)

We'd better keep it down, Jack.

JACK

I suppose we'd better.

WADE

Otherwise, we're just asking for trouble.

JACK

Well, that's the last thing we need.

WADE

Ain't that the truth. Oh, hey, I, uh... I put your bags in the guest room. Top of the stairs and to your right at the end of the hall. There's fresh bedding and towels, of course. And it's got its own bath.

JACK

That's very nice. Thanks, Wade.

WADE

Otherwise, you know, if you're not too tired, I'd be happy to share a nightcap with you.

JACK

A nightcap?

WADE

Well, yeah. I mean, if you're up for it, that is.

JACK

I guess I'm still a little wound up, so what's one more drink? Okay, let's do it.

WADE

Excellent. I'll get the good whiskey.

JACK

What? No, no, no, you should save that for a special occasion, Wade.

WADE

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

JACK

Yeah, well, I mean it has, Wade, but—

WADE

No 'buts' about it. We're having the good stuff.

JACK

If you say so.

WADE

I do say so.

JACK

Okay then.

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

It really is good to see you, Wade.

WADE

Likewise.

JACK

And I appreciate you putting me up for the night.

WADE

I wouldn't have it any other way. Oh, and hey, I'm sorry about the, uh... impromptu poker game. Word got out you were visiting, and, well, anything short of a get-together would've likely caused 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, and then he goes out for a smoke, and when he gets back, he's all of sudden a different man. Barely a peep out of him after that.

JACK

He seemed a little spooked.

WADE

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

JACK

You and me included.

WADE

True enough. And anyway, now that they're gone, it'll give the two of us the chance to catch up on things.

JACK

Agreed.

(Wade brings a drink to Jack. Jack takes both drinks from Wade and sets them down. He opens his arms.)

WADE

What the hell are you doing?

JACK

Bring it in, my friend.

WADE

You're kidding me, right?

JACK

No, I'm not.

WADE

Okay, well, this is very unlike you, Jack.

JACK

So, what? So, maybe I'm getting a little soft in my old age. What do you know, hunh?

WADE

Maybe, but it just doesn't seem likely.

JACK

Right, right. So, listen. Do you want a hug or not? It's a very limited time offer.

WADE

Okay, sure. Why the hell not?

(They hug. Maybe it's a nice moment, maybe it's awkward.)

Alright, so now that we've got that weirdness out of the way, let's have a drink.

(They grab their drinks.)

Cheers.

JACK

Cheers.

(They drink.)

I was, uh... I was just taking a look at your trophies over here.

WADE

Oh, yeah?

JACK

I see you still got that Tony front and center.

WADE

Yeah, well, you've got more than your share, though, right?

JACK

Never won a Tony.

WADE

Maybe not, but you've got that Oscar, right?

JACK

I do.

WADE

And you don't see an Oscar here, do you?

JACK

I do not.

WADE

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

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

No one there knows who I am.

WADE

Oh, okay. And?

JACK

And nothing. I bought a cabin up there years ago.

WADE

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

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

WADE

Right. 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.

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. I mean, when you're our age, you take whatever comes your way.

WADE

Fair enough. 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.

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 what? 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? Jack, I'm sorry. Are we good?

JACK

Yeah, we're good. But you know, I was thinking about ways to kill you while I was up there. I'm kidding.

WADE

You're an asshole.

JACK

I'd argue that 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 himself and Jack another drink.)

Hey, so, how's Kate doing?

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

That it is.

JACK

I thought she was gonna take a break from directing.

WADE

Yeah, well, she talked about taking a break. And then of course she took one. And then she spent a few months with me. And then she went back to work. I 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

Yeah, 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 winks or cracks a smile.)

WADE

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

JACK

Oh, now come on, Wade. What is it, your third marriage? I mean, Jesus, it's not like I'm wishing you bad luck. It's just that – I don't know – I guess I'm just thinking 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.

JACK

I think maybe I deserved that.

WADE

No. No, you most certainly did not. And I'm sorry, Jack. I crossed a line.

JACK

No, I'm the one who should be sorry.

WADE

You know what? Fuck it. Let's not waste our time with apologies, okay? You're my friend, and I appreciate the honesty.

JACK

Likewise.

WADE

We need to keep each other in check.

JACK

Agreed.

WADE

So, why'd you come back then, hunh? You got some work lined up?

JACK

Pfft. No. God, I wish.

WADE

So, what then? You really here for just a visit? Or maybe you're planning on moving back? I mean, there's plenty of folks around here who'd appreciate seeing you more.

JACK

And there's plenty who would not.

WADE

Well, we all have enemies, Jack. Comes with the territory, right?

JACK

I suppose it does.

WADE

Okay. So, you're here. What's next?

JACK

I don't know yet. I mean, I do miss acting. Which is crazy because it wasn't that long ago, I couldn't wait to get away from it...

WADE

I've been there myself.

JACK

...So, yeah, this is just a visit. For now.

WADE

Right.

JACK

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

WADE

Oh 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 worth mentioning I suppose.

JACK

Oh, yeah?

WADE

Yeah. Well, I try to stay optimistic but who the hell knows? I mean, 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 mean that's all anyone can do at this point, right?

JACK

Except who's to say what the rest of your life is gonna look like. Unless of course you have a plan in place. Well, what I mean is, unless you're willing to do something about it.

WADE

Mm hm. And are we talking about me or are we talking about you, Jack?

JACK

I'm just talking in general.

WADE

I see.

JACK

So, uh... So, what do you think? You want to play another hand?

WADE

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

JACK

Well, I happen to be the one who just suggested it.

WADE

True. Alright, 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, as a matter of fact I do. 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 certainly don't mind opening a new deck; I got plenty. Just seems odd, I guess. I mean, I'm the guy who lost his shirt tonight. So, I'm thinking maybe the one we've already been using ought to bring you better luck.

JACK

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

WADE

Well, that's very generous, Jack. And if it gives me a chance to win some money back, I'm all for it.

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

JACK

What's the ante?

WADE

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

JACK

I think I can swing 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.

(They continue to review their hands.)

JACK

My Dad taught me how to play.

WADE

Oh, yeah?

JACK

Yeah. And he was a master at it, let me tell you. Always raking it in at the casinos.

WADE

Well, shit. Of course, he was. And now here I am playing against the goddam apple.

JACK

I'll take one.

(Jack discards one card. Wade burns a card and then deals the next card to Jack.)

WADE

Two for me.

(Wade discards two cards and then deals himself two cards. They review their hands.)

JACK

I was just fourteen when he passed.

WADE

Oh, Jesus. I'm sorry, Jack.

JACK

It was a very long time ago.

WADE

You never mentioned it.

JACK

Yeah, well, it's not the best of recollections for me.

WADE

That must've been rough.

JACK

Just barely a hair on my chin, and then all of a sudden, there I was, the man of the house. And I remember thinking to myself, you know, this is bullshit. Of course, I loved my Dad – we were close, and I was fucking devastated – but I was also a little pissed off that he left me in charge, you know? I mean, what the hell did I know about taking care of my Mom. She was a mess – rightfully so – and I was the last thing on her mind. Forced to eat whatever the neighbors or

family dropped off – a lot of it crap and most of it just rotted away on the kitchen counter because she needed time to grieve. Everything else had to wait. And I gotta say, Wade, if one more person came up to me and said to me that my Dad was in a better place, I was gonna grab something real sharp and force it through their fucking skull. A better place for him would've been still with us, not in the ground.

(Referring to his cards.)

Check.

WADE

Check.

JACK

(He lays his hand on the table.)

I've got a flush here.

WADE

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

JACK

Hey, at least I didn't go all in. You know, because I happen to be a nice guy.

WADE

(Quietly frustrated.)

Goddamit. Okay, okay, so, uh... so, one more hand, and then that's it, Jack. I'm done after that, I mean it. Double or nothing, as they say.

JACK

You're a masochist, Wade.

WADE

Piss off.

JACK

Alright, fine. We'll play one more.

WADE

(Offering the deck to Jack.)

Here you go.

JACK

No, no. You deal again.

WADE

You sure?

JACK

No, I'm not sure. And as a matter of fact, I've lost track. But go ahead anyway.

WADE

Alright then.

(Wade begins to shuffle the deck again. He then offers the deck to Jack who cuts it this time. Wade then 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

I'll take three.

(Jack discards three cards. Wade burns a card and then deals the next three cards to Jack.)

WADE

Two for me.

(Wade discards two cards and then deals himself two cards. They review their hands.)

JACK

Patrick McKinney.

WADE

What's that?

JACK

Patrick McKinney. The 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. Not sure how far along it is to be honest with you.

WADE

Mm hm.

JACK

And I understand there might be a role in it for, uh... A mature actor, a male actor around our age. 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? Wade?

(Wade looks up from his cards to Jack.)

WADE

You have something in particular you want to discuss with me, Jack?

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?

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.

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.

WADE

I see. Okay, well, I think it's time for you to go to bed. What do you say?

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

Oh, come on. Contracts get broken every day, Wade. Now, listen. You... You've had a good career. A great career. I mean, 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

Unbelievable. You want to 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.

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 standoff.)

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 over 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 ain't worth much.

WADE

You said whatever I wanted, Jack.

JACK

Yeah, okay, I did say that but–

WADE

But nothing. If you really want to do this – if you really want to settle this with a poker hand – then you're gonna have to wager that property.

JACK

I won't do it.

WADE

Oh, is that so? You care to tell me why?

JACK

You know why.

WADE

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

JACK

Fuck you.

WADE

Okay, good. And fuck you, too. So, does that mean we're done with this nonsense? I mean, because I don't want to hear another word about that play, Jack. You're not gonna screw things up for me, you hear me? And let me just say right now, I will not have anyone telling me when and how I finish out my career, okay? Not anyone. And certainly not you.

(The phone rings. Wade picks up the receiver.)

Hello?

(Quietly, aside.)

Jesus Christ.

(Into the phone.)

Mrs. Sabatini! What can I help you with, my dear...? I did say that the fellas went home, yes... I'm sorry, you can see what...?

(Quietly, 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. He picks up the receiver.)

I've just closed the curtains, so, I'm thinking maybe you should put your fancy little opera glasses back in their fancy little case, go back to bed and mind your own damn business... Yeah, well maybe I'm over here waving my arms into the abyss, 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.)

JACK

We agreed: no apologies.

WADE

I wasn't planning on offering one.

JACK

Cheers.

WADE

Cheers.

(They drink.)

JACK

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

WADE

/ We've already covered that, Jack.

JACK

What?

WADE

We've already done that bit.

JACK

We have?

WADE

We have, yeah.

JACK

Right, right. So, where are we? Oh, yeah. So, uh... shit, yeah. So, uh, so what's the deal with the, uh... What's the deal with the zesty tomato next door, hunh?

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, a somber spirit on its way here but not of its own volition". Swear to God, those were her exact words. 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

Damn. It's mostly industry folks around here, though, right?

WADE

Yeah, mostly. Why do you ask?

JACK

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

WADE

Oh, yeah no. The, uh... The Sabatini'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 them to eat those weeds. And of course, they generate their own fertilizer. So, between those two things and the goat milk, the Sabatini'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. Well, the upside is, she'll be dead soon.

WADE

That's not very nice, Jack. I mean, it's an appealing thought but maybe we should keep those sentiments to ourselves, don't you think? Hey, listen, I gotta take a piss. I'll be right back.

JACK

Take your time.

(Wade exits the den. Jack pours himself and Wade another drink. He takes his drink, goes to the window, pulls back the curtains a little, and peers out. He closes the curtains and then 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. A quiet moment passes before Wade enters the den.)

I poured you another.

WADE

Thanks.

(He takes his drink and moves to Jack. Looking over his shoulder at the photo.)

Wow. I almost forgot how red her hair was. And boy did she have a lot of it. She was a beautiful woman, Jack.

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

That 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

Are you serious? 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. 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.

WADE

You must've done something to convince her.

JACK

Yeah, maybe. Except she wouldn't go through with it. 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.

WADE

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

JACK

Oh, for fuck's sake, Wade. You make it sound like she took off with another guy.

WADE

Maybe she did. I mean, who the hell knows, 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 out of 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.

WADE

Well, if I did, I misspoke. 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. Because 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 my 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, 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 half 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 goddam 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 crevice 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?

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 know. 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. Over in Beijing. I think this was taken on set.

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. Boosted both of our careers.

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. They turn to it, surprised.)

What the hell’s that woman up to now?

JACK

Jesus. 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. I'm just gonna take a quick look outside, see what the hell's going on.

JACK

Go get 'em, tiger.

(Wade exits. Jack sips his drink. He then takes out his cell phone and taps it.)

Lorraine, it's Jack... 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. 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, Lorraine, can you please just give me a break here...? Listen, please. You're the best fucking agent in New York, okay? And I ain't just blowing smoke, 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 promise you 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.

(Deep breath.)

Okay, so listen. Patrick McKinney has this play that he's— Hello? Goddam 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. Delia's nowhere in sight. You okay, Jack? You look like you're about to ready to go off.

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. 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 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 night? Same as the first, except this time I... I 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. 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 or call it a panic attack. Whatever it was, it nearly knocked my ass into retirement.

WADE

That's rough, Jack. I'm sorry to hear.

JACK

You want to know why I became an actor, Wade?

WADE

Because your ego outweighs your fear of rejection.

JACK

Yeah, well that may have had something to do with it. But I guess, 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 already done that, Jack.

JACK

Have I?

WADE

No doubt about it. We've both done that. But just like me, it's never gonna be enough for you, is it?

JACK

Wade...

WADE

Yeah, Jack?

JACK

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

WADE

/ Okay, okay, I figured that's where all this was / going.

JACK

/ Don't patronize / me.

WADE

/ Yeah, so listen. I think it's time for you to get out of here. 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 the fuck are you gonna do about it anyway, hunh?

JACK

I'm gonna kick your ass is what I'm gonna do.

WADE

Oh, yeah? Will that settle things for you then?

JACK

No, Wade, it won't settle things for me but it sure as hell's gonna bring me a great deal of satisfaction to do it, that's for sure. And you know, I just can't let things end like this.

WADE

End like what, Jack?

JACK

With you stealing my thunder. Taking from me what's rightfully mine, what I've earned through years of hard work and dedication to my craft.

WADE

Dedication to your craft? Oh, Jesus. You're a fucking idiot. 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 kick my ass? You think that'll clear a path for you, big guy? I mean, 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 – 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

/ Don't be so dramatic, Jack. You're embarrassing yourself. And put the fucking Tony down.

(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 out of your fucking mind. 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 cord 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. In the darkness...)

Oh, for fuck's sake.

(End of Act One.)

ACT TWO

Continuous from Act One. A crack of thunder and a flash of lightning. Lights flicker and then come up full. Wade is 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 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?

JACK

So, what are you gonna do then? 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 another phone in the house, right?

WADE

That's right.

JACK

Well, I won't stop you if that's what you want to 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?

WADE

Start over?

JACK

Yeah.

WADE

From where, Jack? From where exactly should we start over, hunh? I mean, because I'm not even sure how this all began. It's like we've been moving around on some fucked up carousel, and we've just been jumping off and then right back on again in random spots.

JACK

Yeah, well, it's called "life", Wade.

WADE

Maybe so but it's no way to live.

(We hear a doorbell.)

Oh, Jesus. Let's put a pin in this, okay? I'll be right back.

(Wade exits. As soon as he's clear, we hear a knocking at the window. Jack moves to the window and peers out. No one is there. We hear 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 want to 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? Oh, no! 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 out of my / way!

WADE

(Off.)

/ Delia, stop!

(We hear a thud – a body hitting the floor. Silence. The lights in the den 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 himself and Wade another drink. A quiet moment passes before Wade enters the den. Jack hands him a drink. They both drink quietly for a moment.)

JACK

What happ—?

WADE

She fell.

JACK

Right. And she's—?

WADE

She's dead, yes.

JACK

Mm hm. And what'd 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 time to think. Okay? And maybe a little time to calm down if that's alright with you. I mean, Jesus Christ, I just killed a woman. And, you know, it's a little hard to unwind something like that. I mean, for fuck's sake. She's been gone all of one minute and you're gonna ask me what I'm gonna do? It's not like I have experience in these matters. So, you know if you have any suggestions, I'm all ears.

JACK

Right, right. Well, you know, 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 stink. Leave the AC on and that might buy you an extra day, possibly more.

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 that episode of Murder She Wrote awhile back.

WADE

Uh-huh.

JACK

You think the neighbors heard?

WADE

How the fuck do I know?

JACK

Sorry I asked.

WADE

No. No, I'm just... Well, I mean, it's a dead-end road, so there's no one on that side. The Bennetts live across the way, but I think they're out of town. So, maybe I just – fuck, I don't know – maybe I just 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

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. You can't outsmart science. No body, no crime. So, like I said, make it disappear. And then you, you know, 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 help you with the body.

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, Wade?

WADE

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

JACK

I don't find that especially amusing.

WADE

Do you see me laughing, Jack?

(They're both anxious.)

JACK

Hang on a second.

(Jack picks up the script.)

This... 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 the hell are you talking about? 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 fuck else-?

WADE

We've got a deceased nonagenarian lying on the floor in my office and you want to know how much money they're spending on this goddam fucking play?

JACK

That's right.

WADE

And you think I know?

JACK

I do.

WADE

Six point five million. Last I heard.

JACK

That's a lot.

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 goddam moron.

JACK

Why?

WADE

Just do what I said. 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 page there.

JACK

Here it is.

(Reading.)

Martin...

WADE

That's the one.

JACK

...Age, mid-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 stubborn...

(He looks up at Wade.)

Oh, shit.

WADE

You anxious to get your meat hooks on that role now? 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. 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 get me wrong 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.

JACK

Wow. That's uh... That's—

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.

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.

WADE

Wait, wait, wait. Hold on a second. Get where? Where are we going?

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

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, hunh?

WADE

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

JACK

That depends. What do you have in mind?

WADE

Well, when I was grabbing that deck of cards earlier, I noticed that one of the fellas left a little gift in the drawer.

(He heads for the drawer.)

JACK

Oh, yeah? And what's that?

(Wade pulls out a bag filled with a white substance.)

WADE

Oh, just a small bag of blow.

JACK

Holy / shit.

WADE

/ From Charlie, I suspect.

JACK

I see. Well, I got to say, Wade, it's been a while for me.

WADE

Yeah, for me too. But I'm thinking maybe it'll get us through the rest of the night. You agree?

JACK

Oh, geez.

(He thinks about it.)

Yeah. Yeah, okay, fuck it, let's do it. But you know, let's also be sensible about it, Wade.

WADE

Of course. I mean, I can't think of anything more sensible than snorting a few lines of coke before hauling a deceased Italian lady off to Goshen.

JACK

What I mean is, we need to pace ourselves, right?

(Wade will deftly set up lines to snort during the following.)

WADE

It's gonna be fine, Jack. Just a little something for energy. Because what're we looking at here, hunh? I mean, what's the plan? We gotta get Delia into the car, right? Oh, shit. Whose car are we taking?

JACK

My car.

WADE

Good. Okay, so we gotta get Delia into your car... Oh, man, and we're gonna need shovels, right? What else?

JACK

Everything we need is at the cottage, Wade.

WADE

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

JACK

About two hours round trip. And we're gonna need to make a little room in the trunk.

WADE

How do you mean?

JACK

What I mean is, we're gonna have to shift things around a bit. It's gonna be tight.

WADE

Well, why don't we just leave what we don't need here? We can keep it in the garage until we get back.

JACK

Because what's presently in the trunk we're gonna need to take with us.

WADE

Okay, so let's put whatever it is in the back seat then.

JACK

It'll have to stay in the trunk, Wade.

WADE

I don't / understand.

JACK

/ It stays in the trunk.

WADE

Alright, fine. You're in charge.

(Wade continues to set up lines. Jack reaches for the "For Fear of Nightmares" script.)

JACK

(Holding up the script.)

I'll never understand how this took off.

WADE

We took a mediocre script, and we acted the shit out of it, that's how.

(He snorts a few lines. Thunder in the distance and a flash of lightning. The lights flicker.)

Whoa! This is pretty good stuff. Here, Jack. Give it a go.

JACK

Don't mind if I do.

(Jack sets down the “For Fear of Nightmares” script and goes to snort a line. Wade grabs the script, opens it and thumbs through it.)

WADE

And there it is.

JACK

There’s what?

WADE

Our scene. Our one and only scene with just the two of us. We nailed this in the first take.

JACK

I remember.

WADE

And you know, maybe I oughtta thank you.

JACK

Oh, yeah? For what?

WADE

You really have no idea, do you?

JACK

What’re you going on about now, Wade?

WADE

My first Oscar nomination. In a film that never should’ve seen the light of day. And it’s because of you.

JACK

Get the fuck outta here.

(He snorts a line.)

WADE

I’m serious, Jack. I looked up to you. I’ve always looked up to you. That director was shit; he was a total hack. And you knew that.

JACK

What’s your point, Wade?

WADE

You coached me through this scene, Jack. I mean, Christ, with everything you had going on, you fucking took the time to work with me on one scene out of what? A hundred? Maybe more? I didn't know what the hell I was doing. You know, I honestly believe that most decent people will never really appreciate how – by just showing up for someone, by being there, by being present in the moment, by giving them your time and your talents – how that might impact their life in incalculable ways. You did that for me, Jack. And I will never forget it.

JACK

I helped you out to cover my own ass. And you know, to this day I'll never understand why you got that nomination. By the skin of your teeth, my friend.

WADE

Yeah, well you won that year, so 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

(He points to the script.)

Something's not right.

JACK

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

WADE

Sure, you do. Come on. It'll be fun. We'll share the script.

JACK

I said, no. And even if I did want to do it – which I definitely do not – you can rest assured I remember every fucking line from that scene. It's been burned into what's left of my brain.

(We hear a knocking at the window. They both freeze.)

Okay, well, we know that's not Delia, right?

WADE

Right.

JACK

So, then who's–?

WADE

No idea.

(Wade approaches the window cautiously. He takes a deep breath and then pulls open the curtains. Judith is standing on the other side, her beautiful mane of bright red hair resting on her shoulders. Thunder and a flash of lightning. Wade quickly closes the curtains and turns to Jack. A shift of lights.)

Something's not right.

JACK

(Compelled to perform, he rises.)

What do you know from right? Holed up in this broken-down shack. All by yourself and for... I mean, Jesus, how long have you been here, man?

WADE

I don't know. Anyway, it's not safe out there.

JACK

So, what're you gonna do then, hunh? You gonna keep yourself hidden away?

WADE

It's all I know. Everything outside of these walls... Everything... Out there... It's not real.

JACK

Oh, it's real alright. I'll admit it's not what it used to be but it's most definitely real.

WADE

No. No, I think maybe I fell asleep one night and then I never woke up. I don't even think you're real. This is all just some goddam dream, a goddam nightmare that's never gonna end. I've had visions of others showing up here. Not fully formed, though. More like apparitions hiding in the corners of the room or peeking out from behind a chair or from under a table, peering in through the windows... Then you show up at my doorstep. And you seem real. And I want to believe that you are. But like I said, something's not right.

JACK

There are others.

WADE

Where?

JACK

About a half mile in that direction. There's a small clearing in the woods. We've set up camp there.

WADE

How many?

JACK

There's nine of us.

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

Yeah, well, if none of this is real then what difference would that make to you?

WADE

You're right.

JACK

Okay, so, listen. If you want to pack up a few things – whatever you're able to carry – I'd be happy to wait outside and, whenever you're ready, I'll take you out to the campsite.

WADE

I can't. I mean, I appreciate the offer, I do. But I just... I just can't.

JACK

Understood. If you change your mind, though, we'll be heading out first thing in the morning.

WADE

I've lost track of how many mornings have passed. I'm guessing somewhere between one and one trillion, maybe more. Now, I'm not a religious man but every night I pray – to whatever's in charge of this inexplicable mess – that morning doesn't come. At least not for me. Safe travels to you and to your friends.

(The windows jolt open, and a large gust of wind blows into the den. Lights flicker or shift. The phone rings.)

And what do you know? There she is, right on cue.

(Wade moves to the phone and 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 to Jack.)

Give me the phone.

(Wade hands the phone – with its obviously torn cord – to Jack. Jack sets it down away from Wade.)

Sit down.

(Wade sits.)

You comfortable?

WADE

As a matter of fact, no.

JACK

Good. Now, there's a question that I need to ask you. But before I do, I'm gonna give you the opportunity to not have to answer it.

WADE

Oh, yeah? And how's that gonna work?

JACK

We've got an unfinished hand of Five Card Draw over at the table there, right?

WADE

That's right.

JACK

So, what I'd like to propose is: If you have the winning hand, I won't ask you my question. We'll just take care of what we need to take care of over in Goshen, we'll come back here, and then I'll get out of your hair, and I'll never bother you again. Simple as that...

WADE

Jack...

JACK

...But if I have the winning hand, you're gonna have to answer my question. And you're gonna have to answer it truthfully.

WADE

And if I don't agree to it?

JACK

I'm just gonna ask the question anyway.

WADE

I'll take my chances with the cards then, slim as they are.

JACK

Good choice.

(Jack crosses to the table and picks up his hand.)

What the fuck is this?

WADE

What?

JACK

You having a good time, Wade?

WADE

A good time?

JACK

You've been messing with me all night.

WADE

What're you talking about? I haven't been messing with you.

JACK

Then maybe you can tell me what the hell this is.

WADE

I don't even know what the fuck you're looking at, Jack.

JACK

This.

(Jack turns over one of the cards and shows it to Wade.)

WADE

What is that? 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 turns over another card and shows it to Wade.)

JACK

And this is a joker.

(Again, he flicks the card at Wade.)

WADE

Cut it out, Jack.

JACK

And this one.

(Flicks card.)

And this one.

(Flicks card.)

And this one.

(Flicks card. He then turns Wade's hand over and the rest of the cards, spreads and then pushes them off the table.)

Every last goddam one of them. A joker!

WADE

Alright, Jack, just calm down, okay? I had nothing to do with that.

JACK

Bullshit. If not you then who?

WADE

Maybe you, 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 suddenly moves in tight on Wade.)

Whoa, whoa, whoa. What're you gonna do, hunh? What's this, round two?

JACK

Yeah. Except this time, one of us is going down and they're not gonna get up.

WADE

Bring it on then.

(A standoff. Both men are seething but neither moves. Eventually Jack relents and sits.)

So, listen, Jack. I'm gonna go ahead and answer your question. And then maybe we can just put all of this to rest. Judith and I never slept together. Okay?

JACK

That's not what I was gonna ask you.

WADE

No?

JACK

No. My question isn't "if", Wade. My question is "why"?

WADE

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

JACK

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

WADE

I am a very many awful things, Jack. But one thing I am not is a rat bastard. I mean, I do have, at minimum, an ounce of self-respect. More importantly, though, you're my friend, and that is something you never do to a friend.

JACK

Bullshit.

WADE

Okay then. You go ahead and believe what you want to believe, that's on you. But you know, your first mistake was to give credence to those goddam tabloids all those years ago. The reason I never responded to any of that nonsense is because I didn't have to. I knew the truth and that's all that mattered. So, if you had doubts – if you thought for an instant that I was capable of betraying my closest friend – then you should've just asked me straight out. I mean, that's a long time to just let something like that fester, my friend.

JACK

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

WADE

Yeah, well, that's just fucked up.

JACK

The two of you spent a lot of time together in Beijing.

WADE

So, what's your point, Jack? I mean, you were on set for hours on end, and Judith and I had a lot of free time on our hands. What the hell else were we gonna do?

JACK

There were photos...

WADE

Yeah, no shit.

JACK

...Lots of them. Of the two of you. And you looked pretty damned cozy.

WADE

Oh, come on, Jack. So, what? We were having a nice time.

JACK

Fuck you, you were having a nice time.

WADE

Nothing happened!

(Softer tone.)

Jesus Christ, Jack. I don't know how I can make that any clearer to you. I mean, what do you want me to say? Would it actually make you feel better if I told you that Judith and I were fucking our brains out while you were busting your nuts trying to spin straw into gold?

JACK

It might, yeah.

WADE

You know, it must be really dark and lonely in there, inside your head.

JACK

I confronted Judith... About all that.

WADE

Of course, you did. And how did that go?

JACK

Not good. I mean, I really went at her, Wade. Just fucking raging and throwing shit around like a goddam tornado. And she just stood there. Scared, I expect, but also steadfast. And she just let me go on and on until I got so hoarse, I couldn't squeak out another word. And then when she got the sense that I might be finished with my little tantrum, she said to me: "I'm here, Jack. I love you. There's nothing to worry about." And then she smiled. A beautiful, soft smile. A smile that might – under other circumstances – put out a fire. She was being honest. And kind. Because that's who she was. But by then, I guess it was just too late. I had gone to a very dark place, and I wasn't coming back any time soon.

WADE

You can't blame her for leaving you, Jack.

JACK

She didn't leave me, Wade.

WADE

No?

JACK

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

WADE

McGrath? What do you mean?

JACK

What I mean is, that's where I've kept her.

WADE

Kept her?

(Jack goes silent.)

Oh, come on, Jack. Every goddam time we get to this point, you clam the fuck up. So, I need you to push through, you hear me? You've kept her where? Where, Jack?

JACK

In an icebox under the back porch.

(A crack of thunder and a flash of lightning. The lights flicker.)

WADE

(Quietly.)

Jesus.

JACK

And just a few months ago, I thought to myself, you know, I guess it's time I brought her home. To Goshen. To our cottage where she belongs.

WADE

I see. And is that where she is now? Please, Jack, tell me that's where she is now.

(Jack looks to Wade but does not say anything.)

Yeah, I don't know why I asked. Of course, she's in the trunk of your car. I guess it was just stupid of me to think that maybe you'd handle your business on your own before you'd show up here and get me involved.

JACK

I showed up 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 shame. And to lay blame. And to bury your problems – literally, I might add. And you assumed – wrongly of course – that I was just gonna feel sorry for you. Hunh? And that I was gonna hand over that role in McKinney's play. And that maybe, just maybe, I might be gullible enough to go with you to Goshen where I suspect you were gonna dispose of me and then dump me alongside a woman who was way too good for you. Am I right?

JACK

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

WADE

Okay, well, I don't need to hear / this, Jack.

JACK

/ Up Noir Hill.

WADE

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

JACK

/ There was some bad weather coming / through.

WADE

/ And, lucky for you, I've got my own business to attend to / in Goshen now, right?

JACK

/ But she insisted. Said it would be good / for us.

WADE

/ So, we're in this together / whether we like it or not.

JACK

/ The fresh air, the views...

WADE

And I'll be keeping an eye on you, / make no mistake about it.

JACK

/ She said we wouldn't be out for very / long.

WADE

/ That's to say, if we get out / of here, of course.

JACK

/ But it gets dark early that time / of year.

WADE

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

JACK

/ And the ground was slick.

WADE

Jack, please...

JACK

It was an accident, Wade.

(Wade relents.)

I was – I don't know – maybe a few feet in front of her when she lost her footing. She grabbed at my coat sleeve and jerked me sideways, but she wasn't able to get a good grip, so she just went over the edge, down a steep ravine. I fell too but I was able to get my hands on a tree root on the way down. I kicked my feet until I could find a ledge to steady myself. Took me a minute to get myself turned around. When I finally did, I looked down, and there she was. There was a puddle of blood behind her head, but I could see she was breathing. Her legs were all twisted. I called out to her. She turned her head a little and opened her eyes. And I swear to you, Wade... I swear to you she smiled at me, like she was happy to see me, happy to see that I was okay. I don't think she had any idea how hurt she was until she tried to move. And when she realized how bad it was, I could see the panic in her face. I, uh... I didn't know what to do. I couldn't just leave her there and go for help; there wasn't time. It would've been easier for me to climb back up but when I looked to my left, I could see that it was maybe a mile, mile and a half before the ravine sloped up toward the path. It might've taken me a half hour, possibly more, before I could get there and back to her. I mean, she could be dead by then, you know? And the snow had just started falling. So, the quickest way for me to get to her was to go down. So, that's what I did. I let go of the root and I pushed my feet forward off the ledge... And I just fucking slid down, grabbing for anything I could get my hands on to try and slow my fall. I hit the ground pretty hard. But I was okay. The snow was coming in strong, and the ground was wet and soft from the

river. And as I moved to Judith, I could see she was – oh, man – I could see she was partly underwater. I didn't want to move her, but I had to. I needed to get her to somewhere dry, somewhere where I could get her warm. So, I put my arms under her as carefully as I could. And Jesus, Wade, the blood, and her legs... I had no goddam idea how I was gonna be able to move her without making it worse. But what the hell else could I do, right? So, I picked her up, and – Oh, Christ – I had never in my entire life – ever, ever – heard a human make the noises she made. It was fucking awful. Anyway, so we, uh... We made it maybe ten feet before I – Jesus – before I tripped and fell forward on top of her. She went quiet. I boosted myself up, my legs and arms on either side of her, straddling her, my face close to hers. And I whispered to her, “Judith... Judith, look at me.” Her mouth opened, she took a deep breath, and then she opened her eyes.

(Judith enters. She carries a cooler of beer and places it somewhere convenient for the two men. She moves to Jack. He speaks directly to her.)

I love you. And I want to believe you. But I don't think I can. And I'm sorry but I just can't shake these thoughts of the two of you doing what you did. 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 this, hunh? Because I need closure.

WADE

What'd you do, Jack? Jack, look at me.

(Jack looks at Wade.)

What'd you do?

JACK

I, uh... I put my body on top of hers. And I placed my head on her chest. Then I reached up with both hands and covered her mouth and nose with them. And then I just lay there, listening to her heart until it stopped beating.

(To Wade.)

I'm so goddam tired. Of you. Of this endless, epic fucking kick in the teeth.

WADE

Yeah, well the feeling's mutual, my friend. You know, I used to be one of those people who believed in fate. And that it didn't matter what we did or didn't do in life: what path we took, who we met, how we lived, what we achieved... We would just end up exactly where we were

meant to be. No choice in the matter. You want to take a right; you take a right. And so maybe you change your mind – or at least you think you’ve changed your mind – and you decide you want to go left instead, so you go left. And I mean Jesus, you could do that all day long. But eventually, you can really only go one direction. So, yeah, maybe you spend hours going back and forth between left or right like an idiot but eventually you end up over here and not over there because you can’t be in two places at once. You think you’re in control. And you think you’ve made a choice. But you haven’t. And that’s fate. But in this case... In this totally fucked up case, I have to believe that what’s been done can be undone.

JACK

We’re being punished, Wade.

WADE

Yeah, well, of course we are, Jack. But the question we need to ask ourselves is, how do we stop it?

JACK

Maybe we don’t. Maybe we can’t.

WADE

Maybe not. But here’s what I’m getting at: You see, as long as I’m conscious and breathing – or at least conscious, the breathing part is questionable – I’m gonna keep trying. One thing I know for certain: Godot is not coming, my friend. It’s just you and me. And of course, the lovely Mrs. Sabatini, who – I’ll have you know – nearly overpowered me this time around.

JACK

And now Judith.

WADE

And now Judith.

(Jack’s eyes are fixed on Judith.)

Okay, so listen, Jack.

(He snaps his fingers to get Jack’s attention.)

Jack, I need you to look at me, okay?

(Jack looks at Wade.)

So, we’re gonna grab this thing by the balls. You understand? And we’re gonna keep tugging until whatever this is cries uncle. And in order to do that, we’re gonna need to be honest with each other. Okay? And we’re gonna need to stay grounded and aligned and alert. And maybe just a little bit kinder to each other. And God willing, somewhere along the line, we’re gonna come out of this better humans. If that’s even possible.

JACK

And if not?

WADE

Well, there's always the booze and the coke to look forward to.

(They share a laugh.)

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 might get this all sorted out in short order. And that he'd just grab me by the hand and pull me the fuck out of here. Put me in the back seat of our Pontiac GTO and head off to the drive-in theater with my Mom. That's where he'd take us on weekends in the summertime. And that's where I fell in love with movies. First one I remember seeing was *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. Great film. And you know, I wasn't so much a John Wayne fan as a James Stewart fan, but I kept that shit to myself because my Dad would undoubtedly disagree. And I never minded that the dialogue was always staticky over the radio or that I didn't get a choice in what movie we watched. I was just happy to be sitting there, eating popcorn, drinking cherry colas, the three of us together, watching what felt like pure magic. Yeah, so anyway... If he was here...

WADE

Right. Well, until your Dad swings by, we're just gonna have to tuck in tight. Okay? And we're gonna have to make the most of it. Because at this point, that's all we can do.

JACK

Fair enough. So, uh... So, what now? You want to play another hand?

WADE

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

JACK

Well, I happen to be the one who suggested it.

WADE

True. Alright. Why the hell not?

JACK

Good. Have a seat.

(They move to the table and sit.)

WADE

So, what'll it be?

JACK

Five Card Draw. No, no, no, wait. Uh... blackjack.

WADE

Blackjack it is.

JACK

You got a fresh deck?

WADE

Uh, yeah. Right over here.

(Wade starts for the drawer, but Judith has already pulled a fresh deck of cards from it. She hands the deck to Wade. Jack grabs two beers from the cooler and sets them on the table. He then goes for a bottle opener which Judith already has available in her hands. He takes the opener from her. Wade moves to the table with the pack of cards and sits. Jack follows and sits.)

Okay. So, here we go. Again.

(Wade unwraps the cards. Jack opens the beers.)

JACK

Hey, Wade...

WADE

Yeah, Jack?

JACK

I'm thinking maybe this time I deal. What do you say?

WADE

Alright.

(Jack hands Wade a beer. Wade hands Jack the deck of cards.)

So, what do you think about a wild card this time?

JACK

A wild card?

WADE

Yeah.

JACK

That isn't standard in blackjack, Wade.

WADE

Oh. Right, right. Well, I mean none of this is standard, though, is it?

JACK

Fair point. Okay, so, let's do it... A wild card. What do you suggest?

(Judith reveals a playing card: the Queen of Hearts. She places the card on the table between the two men. A crack of thunder and a flash of lightning as lights go 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.)