

COOLER

A play in two acts

By Craig Houk

SAMPLE

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Synopsis

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

Characters

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

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

WOMAN

Plays DELIA SABATINI (Age 90s, Italian American)

Plays JUDITH (Age 30s, most likely Caucasian)

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 a relatively well-to-do Connecticut neighborhood. A nicely furnished den with a large window. A Tony Award is on display among other theatrical and film awards. There are shelves filled with playscripts and screenplays. The den does not have doors but rather a large archway which opens to a hallway that leads off both left and right.

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 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...? All right, 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

Oh, yeah?

WADE

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

JACK

I suppose I'm still a little wound up, so why not?

WADE

Happy to hear it. 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, 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 impromptu poker game. The fellas caught wind of your visit and, well, anything less than a get-together would've undoubtedly 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, 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. It's a nice moment.)

All right, so now that we've got that weirdness out of the way, let's have a drink, hunh?

(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

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 the 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. All right, why the hell not?

JACK

Good. Have a seat. You deal.

(They move to the table and sit.)

WADE

Okay. So, what'll it be?

JACK

Five Card Draw.

WADE

Easy enough.

(Wade reaches for a deck.)

JACK

You got a fresh deck?

WADE

Uh, yeah, 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 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. It all makes sense now, and here I am playing against the apple.

JACK

I'll take one.

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

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.

(He lays his hand on the table.)

I've got a flush here.

WADE

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

JACK

Read 'em and weep, as they say.

WADE

(Quietly frustrated.)

Goddamit. Okay, 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

All right, 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

All right 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.)

I'll take three.

(Jack discards three cards and Wade deals three cards to Jack from the deck.)

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 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

You know, 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

We have?

WADE

We have, yeah.

JACK

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

WADE

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

JACK

She sounds like a hard-ass.

WADE

She's in her nineties, except you wouldn't guess it. And she doesn't like anyone in this neighborhood, though she does maintain a special level of hatred for me. Oh, and she fancies herself a medium. Just the other day, she warned me about "a mysterious visitor, someone no longer of this world, 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

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 nearly 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, I couldn’t sleep... And, oh, man, the guilt–

JACK

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

WADE

And there it is. You know, I 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 goddamn posturing we do. And for what? We're already idiots by virtue of being male. So, hey, why not let's bottle everything up then, hunh? Just fucking cram all that anger, and frustration, and disappointment into every 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? Goddamn it!

(He tosses his phone, and it breaks.)

Oh, fuck.

(He lowers his head, clenching his fists and breathing heavily. Wade enters.)

WADE

I don't know what's going on. 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 goddamn idea what I was supposed to do or say. Seemed like forever before I could pull myself together. But I did. Eventually. And then we moved on. We got through it. And then the next night: Same shit happens but at a different spot, later in the show. And then the third night: Same as the first, except this time I... I 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, who was dealing 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. End of Act One.)

SAMPLE