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Working with Michael Moran Ubuntu Theater Project
Gotanda Art Plant Berkeley Hills.

SKIN OF CIVILITY

By

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SKIN OF CIVILITY*

Players:

Scarlett Mori-Yang
Jackson B. Heller

Time: ~ 2015

Place: ~ There

Supertitles: Two years earlier. Boardroom.

Older MAN across the table from a young Man whose back is to us.

Jack: You got the votes? (looking around the table) The young bucks want to bring down the alpha dog. (considering) Okay. Then let's settle this the old-fashioned way.

Takes his coat off, loosens tie, rolls up his sleeves. The other man understands and follows suit. They square off. They throw a few punches. They grab each other. Jack knees him in the balls and the man buckles. Jack strikes him across the face and the man drops writhing on the floor in pain, his nose bleeding. Jack puts his foot on the young man's neck.

Jack: I say we do this by a show of hands. All those in favor of Jack?

Dim to darkness.

Step One: The Encounter --

The bar lounge area of a high-end uptown restaurant. Chatter and glasses clinking. A Woman *sings Mack The Knife*, accompanied by a pianist --

*Oh, the shark has pretty teeth, dear,
And he shows them pearly white
Just a jack-knife has Macheath, dear
And he keeps it out of sight --*

A well-dressed young Man stands at the Bar drinking. A pretty young Woman sipping a Pink Drink sits at the far end.

An older GENTLEMAN/MR. H. is seated at a small table off to the side and observes. He is imposing with an aura of impatience and winning.

A WOMAN enters. Strikingly attractive. Polished and self-assured. The older Gentleman immediately takes notice. The Woman stands for a moment looking around, then turns with a poised casualness and crosses to the opposite side of the bar area. All the males watch her --

The young Man from the Bar moves to her and begins to engage her in conversation. He's a bit drunk though not sloppy. The Woman seems to be assessing something about him, then decides she is not interested in the encounter. He is forward and not to be easily thwarted. The Woman uses a variety of evasive moves without losing her composure. But he is tenacious. The Woman gets a call on her *cell phone* and

using that opening deftly dismisses the Man to answer it. The Man relents and moves away.

The Pink Drink Woman at the end of the bar puts her cell phone away.

Song ends. Applause.

The Older Gentleman rises and approaches the Woman --

The two study each other --

Seeing this, the Pink Drink Woman exits --

Jack: I'm Jack Heller.

Scarlett: I am Scarlett Mori-Yang.

Jack: I was watching you.

Scarlett studies him.

Scarlett: Mrs. Green wants you to look at whom you are meeting. I am sure she assured you, you could walk away.

Jack: You make it sound like I'm shopping for a car.

Scarlett: If you decided to leave, how was I to know?

Jack: That young, good looking fellow over there? The one you blew off. That's Calvin Worth, my assistant. I call him Igor because he's so damn good-looking, keeps him from getting the fat head. He would've taken care of you. (Jack nods to him) He'll go back to work now.

Scarlett: At this hour?

Jack: If you work for me you work like me. What would you like to drink?

Beat --

Scarlett: What are you drinking?

Jack: Tap water. The City spends a fortune on filtering it, might as well put our mouths where our money is.

Scarlett: A Rombauer Chardonnay

Jack: (to the bartender) Rombauer Chardonnay.

-- Jack guides Scarlett to a table behind a screen. It's obvious this is to offer privacy for certain parties. Seats himself opposite her --

Scarlett: Did you pick the place?

Jack: Mrs. Green's territory, it's her call.

Scarlett: Interesting lady.

Jack: An extremely competent bitch. I'd hire her if she was 30 years younger.

Scarlett: Do you always converse like this?

Jack: What do you know about me?

Scarlett: I had no idea I was meeting you so I could not have prepared.

Jack: What do you know about me?

Scarlett: What I have read in the newspapers.

-- wine arrives. Jack takes it, hands it to Scarlett --

Scarlett: How is the tap water?

Jack: Good year. Would you like to try?

Scarlett: Is it really tap water?

Jack: City's finest, on the rocks.

Scarlett: You keep a pretty low profile. I imagine most of the patrons here do not recognize you although they would know your name immediately.

Jack: Did you recognize my name or my face?

Scarlett: Your name. Then I put the face with it.

Jack: What do you do?

Scarlett: I head a not-for-profit organization. Grow The Children. We raise monies to help the displaced children around the world.

Jack: Why do they need help?

Beat.

Scarlett: Is that a joke?

Jack: Nope.

Scarlett: You give us money.

Jack: Good. I want to know why I'm giving and what I'm getting.

Beat

Scarlett: Because when children are no longer cared for the world withers. And the old men responsible, wander streets begging for faith.

Jack: A joke?

Scarlett: Nope.

Jack: Did I deserve that?

Scarlett sips her wine. Jack watches her.

Jack: What's the endowment?

Scarlett: 45 million. When I started roughly 18 million. I've grown it to that in two years. It gives us roughly seven and a half million to work with annually, not nearly enough for our international work. It invariably involves areas of geographical conflict, refugee camps --

Jack: Non-profit. You don't look like someone who'd work in that sector.

Scarlett doesn't respond.

Jack: What do you do to relax?

Scarlett studies Jack.

Scarlett: I go to the theater, attend the symphony, I enjoy reading --

Jack: Anything outdoors?

Scarlett: I hike, bike on occasion, I fly fish --

Jack: Catch and release?

Scarlett: Yes.

Jack: Why not just eat 'em?

Beat

Scarlett: (hint of sarcasm) I like to watch them swim away. I am fairly athletic, I play golf, tennis -- I feel I should have brought a resume along with letters of recommendation. I thought this was a pleasant, 'Hi, getting to know you drink', not a grilling for one of Jack Heller's corporate job openings.

Silence. Jack looks up and nods to Calvin.

Jack: I'm not sure about this, *not-knowing-anything-about-the-person* business.

Scarlett: Who is?

Beat.

Scarlett: Which brings up a concern. I am happy to have drinks with you. But are you not in the midst of a divorce?

Jack: Everybody knows, huh?

-- A young WOMAN arrives holding a new bottle of wine and an unlabeled bottle of whiskey --

Jack: Desiree, my sommelier. Igor said the guy here lives off the teat of California wineries. If you liked the Rombauer, try this it's better.

Scarlett looks over and sees Calvin Worth orchestrating things at the bar. He waves --

Scarlett: I thought he had to go back to work.

Jack: He has. (to the pourer) Go ahead. (to Scarlett) Taste it. Desiree's very good with *sakes*, speaks Japanese like a native -- where'd you go to school?

Desiree: *Kokusai Kiristo Kyo Daigaku* in *Mittaka*.

Scarlett: I will be frank - *arigatoo* - I was looking for someone who is interested in a serious relationship. Not a transitional one. I am really quite surprised with Mrs. Green. She led me to believe her introductions were thoroughly vetted.

Jack: Abby and I have been separated for the last 15 years - separate houses, separate friends, separate bank accounts. It's only a formality.

Scarlett: Divorce is never *only* a formality.

Jack: Am I wasting your time?

Scarlett: Are you?

Jack: How do you like the wine –

Scarlett: Are you?

Jack pours himself another shot.

Jack: I never waste time. Mine or anyone else's.

Beat.

Scarlett: You switched to whiskey.

Jack: There are limits to my civic duty.

Scarlett: (noting) No label.

Jack: Bidwell. It's my drink. Only my drink.

Scarlett inhales, sips her wine --

Scarlett: Too much nose.

Jack studies Scarlett.

Jack: Where are you from?

Scarlett: My mother's womb.

Jack: Ahh...

Beat --

Scarlett: Are you from your mother's womb, too, Mr. Heller?

Jack: I'm from outside of Sheridan, Wyoming. Dad was a bit of a religious nut, we think he was hiding out from a group like the Branch Davidians. Grew up hunting - Deer, elk, black horn sheep. Could still dress a ten point buck in under two hours, had to 'cause the Grizzlies get to you, amazing noses. The meat's gamey by most folks standards, especially the elk, but it's the healthiest steak on earth - no hormones, no hybridized feed, meat the way god intended.

Scarlett: Your house had a stack of antlers on the side that dwarfed the house --

Jack: Come on, you saw that on a postcard --

Scarlett: There is a writer's colony in the area, we had a board retreat there.

Jack: I'll cook us steaks some time. I soak it in wine and then freeze it like that, wine and all. Breaks down the meat, makes it tender and gets more of the gaminess out - your cholesterol will drop by half. What else do you want to know about me?

Scarlett: What about your mother?

Jack: What about her?

Pause.

Scarlett: I was on the verge of leaving.

Jack: Yeah?

Scarlett: You did not notice?

Jack: People don't get up and leave my table.

Scarlett: I would and I do.

-- Desiree re-appears with a new bottle and glass for Scarlett.
Scarlett sips and gives a slight nod. Desiree puts fresh ice into
Jack's drink and pours --

Jack: This is new Korean stuff, the ice.

Scarlett: From glaciers?

Jack: No, it's hexagonal water. This scientist over in Seoul developed a way of rearranging the alignment of water molecules so they're more harmonically in tune. You're supposed to live longer.

Scarlett: In tune with what?

Jack: I forgot to ask but he sent a crate over looking for investors. I had Igor bring a few containers here, thought it might be fun. He made up ice cubes for me. The Japanese are crazy about this stuff. Japanese – ethnocentric sons of bitches - found out their genotype originates in Korea. They come from Koreans, bugs the hell out of them --

Scarlett: Perhaps now is not the time to make sweeping generalizations about the Japanese. May I try the water?

Jack signals to Calvin --

Jack: Ethnocentric is a double-edged sword, it speaks to a national pride that inspires sacrifice. The Fukushima 50. Workers who go into the nuclear reactors knowing it's killing them. To prevent a meltdown, save face for country and company, save women,

children, babies. Hard ass, selfless heroes. Kamikazes, suicide mission, I ain't coming back mama-san. And unflappable, can't read their faces, Japanese. Not like Koreans – screaming and crying --

Scarlett: By the way, I am Japanese and Korean.

Jack: I say what I know not what you want to hear --

-- The Pink Drink Woman hurries up to Scarlett and in very serious tones whispers something in her ear. Scarlett gets up and they converse in whispered tones. Scarlett looks at Jack for a moment.

Scarlett: Have you done this before? A Mrs. Green Arrangement?

Jack: Yeah.

Scarlett: How many times?

Jack: My second.

Scarlett: How is the evening working out for you?

Jack: What do you mean?

Scarlett: Are you having a good time Jack?

Jack: I believe so, yeah.

Scarlett considers something, then nods at the young woman who leaves --

Scarlett: I am aware Japanese are ethnocentric, my mother is ethnic Korean, born and raised in Japan, she is *zainichi*, and has had to contend with her *chosun* citizenship. I am also aware Koreans are painted with a broad brush regarding their *emotional temperament*. But it must occur to you that if there might be the slightest possibility what you are saying is offensive to me, it would be in the best interests of good rapport to be more circumspect? Or is Jack the only one who matters when Jack is speaking to Scarlett?

-- Desiree brings a glass of hexagonal water --

Jack: Was there an emergency?

Scarlett: That was my assistant. At exactly 15 minutes past the hour she was instructed to approach us as if there were a dire emergency – she is studying to be an actress – so in case I was not satisfied with this encounter, I could excuse myself without anyone losing face.

Scarlet picks up the hexagonal water and takes a sip --

Scarlett: I am not sure whether I am having a good time or not. I can not even say whether I like you Jack. I can say it is not boring. Are you having the same evening I am?

Jack: You made sure you had an out, too, took the initiative to level the playing field, I applaud that --

Scarlett: Do you know what you just did? I asked you a question and you ignored it. Just blew it off, totally discounting my question and me. Do you know how that makes me feel as a woman? Do you know how that makes me feel about the person doing that to me? I let it go earlier but since we are trying to get to know each other in what I sense is an increasingly shorter time period, if I ask you something please do not ignore it. It shows such a lack of respect for me and I do not like it.

-- Silence. Scarlett sips her water. Jack sips his whiskey --

Jack: I'm not sure either. Whether I'm having a good time or not.

Scarlett: That is good to know.

Silence --

Scarlett: Shall we continue our drink? Or call it a night and each go our own way --

Scarlett getting up to leave --

Jack: I'm not bored. If we both agree that's the criterion for indicating forward movement, I say we stay the course.

Scarlett, standing, looks at Jack. Studies him.

Scarlett: Jack is an older white male. Scarlett is a younger Asian female.

Jack: We've been circling this since I asked you where you came from. 'Mother's womb' - I get it. Do I have a fetish for Asian women? Of course, I do. Hell, what white guy my age doesn't? It works for me if it works for you.

Silence. They watch each other. Scarlett seats herself.

Jack: This Mrs. Green thing. You done it before?

Scarlett: No.

Beat.

Jack: You seeing anyone?

Beat.

Scarlett: Not currently.

Jack: Who were you seeing?

Scarlett: That is personal.

Jack: You know I was getting a divorce. You know a helluva lot more about my private life.

Scarlett: A football player.

Jack: What team?

Scarlett: You can have your research team do that one.

Jack: You like athletes.

Scarlett: I like successful people, Jack. People who are good at what they do. Who want something and are not afraid to go after it.

Jack: And win.

Scarlett: I am not complicated in what I like and what I want. Why do you think I visited Mrs. Green? You know what is going on here. Why get a divorce now?

Jack: I just turned 70. I want to cut loose the dead weight in my life.

Scarlett: What would Mrs. Heller say to that comment?

Jack: That she's cutting dead weight loose, too.

Scarlett: Your share holders are not going to be happy.

Jack: We'll keep everything important in tact. We're practical, the lawyers are greedy. Are you interested in me?

Scarlett: "Interested"? Yes.

Jack: But you're not sure you like me?

Scarlett: Yes.

Jack: Why are you interested in me?

Scarlett: You are successful at what you do. At the top of your game, at the top of your field. You move in a rarified atmosphere of people, power and decision-making that directly influences the world. I am interested in that kind of person.

Jack: What if he's an ass-hole?

Scarlett: Extraordinary people can be intolerable human beings. I am well aware of that, I am a fund raiser. I am surprised we have not met at an event.

Jack: Avoid them like the plague, got in a fist fight the last one I went to.

Scarlett: I believe you make allowances for such behavior because of who they are and what they do. Within reason. I can take care of myself Jack. Tell me about your mother.

Jack: Dad and I came home from hunting and she was hanging from the jerk line. I cut her down and that was that.

Beat.

Scarlett: I am sorry.

Silence. They sip.

Jack: Let me ask you something straight out. You think I'm too old?

Scarlett: Initially I did. You are in good shape for 70 years old. I would have thought you were younger.

Jack: How old are you?

Scarlett: 33.

Jack sips --

Jack: Everyone in the place watched you come in. Quite an entrance. Perfect as a matter of fact.

Scarlett: If that was a compliment, I am not entirely immune to them.

Scarlett raises her glass to Jack and sips --

Jack: I like a woman in high heels.

Scarlett: You were doing so well - do you date strippers, Jack?

Jack: You're wearing high heels. Stiletto fuck-me ones, too --

Scarlett: I am not, these are incredibly expensive Christian Louboutins and would you please not talk to me like that, Jack, I find it highly offensive --

Jack: Okay, sorry about the, 'fuck me', part. I tell the truth. What's so goddamn awful about that? You want another piece of shocking truth? Every man gets turned on by a nice looking woman in high heels. The priest, your insurance broker, your best guy friend, your dentist – they all do. If they say otherwise, they're lying. And you want to hear something even more disgusting about men. All men. And I mean ALL heterosexual men, no matter who they are, what they do, no matter what they appear to be talking about or pretending to do - if they're over the age of 10? They want to fuck you.

Scarlett: Puts a different perspective on things when you look back on the day.

Jack: Doesn't it.

Scarlett: This is a most – *interesting* conversation. I really can not believe I am having it with someone I just met but then I have never met Jackson B. Heller before.

Jack: Still leaning towards not liking?

Scarlett: More than ever.

Jack: You swim?

Scarlett: Like a fish.

Jack: Bet I can hold my breath longer than you.

-- Scarlett is not sure how to respond --

Jack: Chicken?

Scarlett: No. Befuddled. Profoundly.

Pause.

Scarlett: So you enjoy a good bet?

Jack: I can hold my breath longer than you can.

Scarlett: Count to 4. Count to 4. Out loud.

Jack: (counting) 1-2-3-4.

Scarlett: (Scarlett repeats his counting, more deliberate, considering something) 1---2---3---4. All right. My Fund is behind this year in its capitol campaign. I bet you I can keep my hand over a match flame for 4 seconds –

Jack: I know G. Gordon Liddy.

Scarlett: -- If I can, you donate 250 thousand and help us catch up.

Jack: Make it 5 seconds

Scarlett: 4 seconds.

Jack: 6 and that's my last offer.

Scarlett: 6 seconds? That is a long time. It might leave a scar.

She considers, they watch each other --

Scarlett: Light the match.

Jack: If you can't what do I get?

Scarlett: You can ask me any question and I will have to answer it.
Any question.

Jack considers it. Lights a match and holds it out to Scarlett.
Scarlett puts her hand out over the flame --

Jack: One – two – three -- four – five – six --

-- Scarlett removes her hand. Jack lights another match and
puts his hand over it and jerks it away.

Jack: How'd you do that?

Scarlett: A gentleman never asks.

Jack: I feel I've been hustled.

Scarlett: For a good cause and you can write it off.

Jack laughs roundly, he's enjoying this --

Jack: And I had my question all ready.

Jack pulls out a pouch of *tobacco, paper* and proceeds to roll a
cigarette --

Scarlett regards him rolling, looks around at the restaurant.
Jack lights it and puffs --

Scarlett: Because you can.

Jack: You're not still trying to find yourself, are you?

Scarlett: A luxury. I could never afford it.

Jack: I used to roll my own when I was younger. Drum. Always
liked cowboys. The Good, Bad and the Ugly - Eli Wallach, that Jew
plays a damn good Mexican. I started up again when my doctor had
me cut back on my cigars. This is a special leaf. Try one.

Scarlett: Bad for your health.

Jack: So are baby-back-ribs, not giving them up. When you're young, that's what you do, find yourself. My two kids went through that. My youngest, Sophie, she's still going through it. When you're my age, you found it and now you're sick of it. I want a stunningly, beautiful woman. This time around, yeah, I do. Does that bother you?

Scarlett: I want a stunningly wealthy man. Does that bother you?

Beat.

Jack: Your frankness borders on erotic.

Scarlett: Every man wants to marry a beautiful wife – you Jack - and that is acceptable. In fact, when you see a man with a stunning wife, you do not think, 'Oh, what a shallow, gauche man for wanting a wife based on something as superficial as her looks'. But rather: 'He must be somebody', it is applauded. And yet if a woman wants to marry a rich husband? She is a bimbo, not a shrewd financial strategist. She is a notch above high class prostitute, not, 'She did her due diligence and decided to go with blue chips instead of penny stocks'. At least rich is a matter of personal accomplishment, speaks to something other than the length of a leg, the curvature of a buttock, the height of a heel. Money. Lots of it. I am not so naïve to think money buys happiness but it makes a difference. It can feed, it can educate and it can liberate. And wealth of your denomination is transformative. I am more than the curve of my ass, Jack.

Jack studies her --

Jack: I swear I'm aroused.

Thinking --

Jack: Take off your shoe. (Scarlett hesitates) Come on, I played along with you, you gotta play along with me. Take off a shoe. I just need one.

Scarlett: (taking it off) You are not going to do anything funny with it.

Jack: Come on, what do you think I am?

Scarlett: I still do not know, that is what worries me.

Jack: You hold it, only the other way. Like that. I'm into your organization for 250 bucks, right? I get a chance to get it back. If I lose to you your prize winnings go to 300 thousand.

Scarlett is not sure what to do. Jack puts his hands, palms down on the table.

Jack: You try and hit one of my hands. With the heel. The high heel --

-- she slams the heel down and Jack just barely gets his hand away.

Jack: You little cheat you --

Scarlett: That did not count.

Jack: Yes it did.

Scarlett: I was practicing, you have the advantage, I have never done this before. Two out of three, come on Jack, two out of three.

Jack: All's fair in War and Non-Profit. Bring it on.

Jack places his hands on the table. She slams the heel down and clips his hand.

Scarlett: We are even. Rubber match.

Head fakes and jukes. She slams and misses his hand. Jack pumps his fist into the air.

Jack: Yeah!

Scarlett: How about 3 out of 5? Come on, I get a chance to win it back for my foundation. Jack? For the kids?

-- Jack is silent, puffing on his cigarette enjoying his victory. Scarlett puts her shoe back on. Igor brings over an *espresso* for Jack. He downs it, gives the cup back --

Igor: (to Scarlett) Espresso?

Scarlett shakes her, Igor exits

Jack: You like cheeses?

Scarlett: Yes.

Jack: Really smelly cheeses?

Scarlett: I like all kinds of stinky food, I'm half Japanese and half Korean.

Jack: I know a cheese master around the corner who's making some things that will blow your mind --

Calls Igor over --

Scarlett: Riemans? They are not open at this hour.

Jack: They are for me --

-- says something to Igor who then exits --

Jack: The cheese-master practically lives there and I have majority ownership in the publishing company that did his most recent book. There is this one cheese that's created in the caves of the Alsace

Lorraine region by an order of cloistered monks. They're known for making highly specialized cheeses that they age in particular caves. Each cave has its own micro climate depending on its depth and closeness to underground culverts. The cheeses sit in a liquid that gets all scummy after a few weeks and you have to keep scooping it out. The scum? That's the secret cheese.

Scarlett: Oh, come on, you are so full of it.

Jack smiles --

Scarlett: (watching him) Stinky, huh?

-- She takes out her *I-Phone* and begins texting --

Jack: What are you doing?

Scarlett: The water you were drinking when I first came in. It really was tap water?

Jack: I pay my taxes, I want my money's worth. Can you tell any goddamn difference between that and this harmonically tuned crap?

Scarlett puts her I-phone away.

Jack: What was that?

Scarlett smiles.

Jack: (calling to Igor) Another tulip --

-- Jack downs his whiskey, then pours himself another shot --

Jack: I make this scotch myself, it's a single malt. I want you to try it --

-- Desiree brings a tulip glass over. Jack pours Scarlett a shot. Puts ice into his glass --

-- After my first round I like ice – some folks say you chill your taste buds, dilutes it - fuck ‘em, I like it. This is incredibly smooth and aged to peaty perfection, the way I like it, zero attack, just mellow. Taste the oakiness, the hint of chocolate. I follow the Lowland tradition and triple distill the whiskey. Special barley dried over fires stoked with the choicest peat. Oak casks are cherry picked from distilleries all through the highlands – no sherry casks, I like cognac - the most perfectly aged, flavorful, historied oak casks, cost an arm and a leg but it’s worth it.

Scarlett: (sipping) Very good, Jack... (considering) Very.

Jack sips and savors --

Jack: One of the great pleasures in my life.

-- they toast.

Jack: What gives you pleasure, Scarlett Mori-Yang?

Scarlett mulls this over --

Jack: Giving it serious thought, I like this.

Scarlett: A good tomato. Just picked, vine ripened, no pesticides, at the peak of its sugar content – pluck it off the vine, rub the dust off, and just chomp into it, still warm from the sun. I like to sprinkle sea salt on it.

Jack: Interesting. Unexpected.

Scarlett: Open the wrapping, be amazed. You?

Jack: A good Dominican cigar. Fuck Castro. He’s over-rated and so is his tobacco.

Scarlett: Not unexpected, the cigar, but the Dominican part a surprise, I would have thought Cohiba. (beat) Okay, this is mundane. Sleeping in. Sleeping. In. Set the alarm so when it goes

off I have the unadulterated pleasure of shutting it off, rolling over and going back to sleep.

Jack: The Dow breaks 20,000 and stays there. And stays there.

Scarlett: A home-cooked meal that can be savored and eaten without rushing or worry about who might see me using my hands – as much MSG and raw garlic as my body can take.

Jack: You cook?

Scarlett: French, Japanese, Korean. I'm excellent with left-overs. Just like my mother.

Jack: Such a domestic streak, I wouldn't have guessed. (beat) I buy the New York Times, lock stock and barrel and put a topless girl on page three. Two can play the game Rupert. And another shot of this fine, fine, Bidwell.

-- Jack savors his drink --

Scarlett: I have friends who would kill for a sip of this.

Jack: Send them over, I could use them.

Scarlet looks at Jack, shakes her head and smiles –

-- The CHEESE MASTER (rock star-like) enters carrying a tray with a damp cloth over it. Desiree enters with a selection of new wines --

Cheese Master: Hey, Mr. Heller!

Jack: Mac, you brought it? Ahh, good, good. This is Scarlett Mori-Yang. Scarlett, Mac the Cheese Master.

Mac: Hello Miss Mori-Yang.

Scarlett: Hello Mac the Cheese Master.

Desiree: I don't know these cheeses, these wines might go well with them.

Mac: I'd open that one first.

Scarlett: Whew, it smells wildly awful. An Asian rule of thumb. 'It's okay if it sinks. As long as it stinks good'.

Jack: Umm, I love this stuff. Like gold.

Evelyn rushes in with a paper bag and hands it to Scarlett --

Evelyn: -- I could smell that from way over there. Did something die?

Scarlett: My assistant, Evelyn Lanier, (to Evelyn) Jack Heller - Wait till you smell this. Mrs. Kim-Garfinkel's home-made *kim chee* --

-- she takes a *jar* out of the bag and opens it --

Jack: Christ - that hurts. Does it need to go with anything?

Mac: Hot rice -- it's excellent. Umm, this one is quite spicy.

Scarlett: (to Evelyn) Have some hot rice sent over. Talk to Igor by the bar -- the hunk. (to Jack) Hiro's?

Jack: Tell him to have it sent over from Hiro's.

Scarlett: If they have monk fish liver snag me some?

Mac: These wines won't work with kim chee.

Desiree: (calling to Evelyn) Ask them to send over some *sojus*. The ichi-ban stuff. And if they don't have it, try the sushi bar down the street, it's run by Korean friends and they have their own liquors in the back.

Mac called away --

Scarlett: I attended one of Mrs. Kim-Garfinkel's cooking seminars and got to know her. This is her own private stock of kim chee. She makes it right there in her apartment, converted her wine room into a kim chee cavern. She lives on the Upper East Side, the association wants to kick her and her kim chee out but the husband is a killer lawyer. She keeps her door open when she makes it.

Jack: Stinky. (tasting) Not bad.

Mac returns --

Mac: I just talked to the manager, we worked together at Watercress. He asks Mr. Heller – with all due respect - if there might be a way to temper the smell of our delicacies. He's afraid to come over here.

Jack thinks for a bit. Climbs up on his chair --

Jack: Hey, everybody! Hey! Listen up! I'm Jackson Heller and I'm eating some goddamn stinky cheese and goddamn stinkier kim chee. I know it's a terrible imposition. But how about this? If you don't mind we'll keep on stinking up the joint. But in return everything you drink and eat tonight is on the house! Dom Perignon, Beluga – what do all the rappers like – Crystal -- Kobe steak, everything!

Gets down --

Jack: That should shut them up. (to Mac) And tell your friend a forty percent tip for the house.

Scarlett and Jack look at each other.

Jack: You bored yet?

Scarlett: That's not the word I was thinking.

Dim to darkness.

Super Titles: 3 years earlier. A foreign land.

A NUN is standing with her back to us. The nun holds a *baby*. From upstage, an attractive, well appointed WOMAN approaches the Nun. This is Scarlett.

Scarlett: They come from across the border? What happened to the mothers?

The nun offers the baby for Scarlett to hold. Scarlett demurs.

Scarlett: There are many like her?

Scarlett listens to the woman's explanation, studying the baby.

Step Two: After The Stinky Food...

Lights up. Later. Table is littered with a variety of picked on foods: cheeses with bread, *kim chee* and rice, wines, *sojus*, *sakes*, *sushi* --

Scarlett notices a couple walking by --

Scarlett: It's a first date.

Jack: What?

Scarlett: That couple – it's a first date.

Jack: With a dog? I don't think so.

Scarlett: Hmm, unsure.

Jack: He's unsure?

Scarlett: No, she is.

Jack: So he brings the dog?

Scarlett: He's giving her a chance. This is a first date but it's really about the second date.

Jack: I don't get it.

Scarlett: He knows she's intimidated by him.

Jack: She doesn't look intimidated to me --

Scarlett: -- So he brings the dog -- albeit an unconventional move - to provide the buffer, a neutral third party, not a person - he's good.

Jack: They've been out 3 or 4 times at a minimum so it's no big deal to include the dog - he couldn't get a dog sitter and it suffers from separation anxiety.

Scarlett: Some men like being on top but not too on top, a fine balance. She's worth it.

Jack: If she's worth it, it's 'cause she's got a great body. That ass could launch a thousand ships.

Scarlett: She dressed to impress, he dressed down for her. He won't do that next time. It's all about the second date.

Jack: What about race?

Scarlett: What about it?

Jack: Oh, don't tell me it doesn't matter, we have offices in the deep South.

Scarlett: At this point it doesn't. It is more a superficial enticement – especially if they haven't dated out before.

Jack: If she's nervous, it's because he's Black.

Scarlett: Oh, Jack.

Jack: Race is a factor, Scarlett, it's well and alive –

Scarlett: He doesn't look like Morehouse stock – Harvard, maybe Yale; She looks more Wellesley. She wants to play liberal and he was raised believing he could trust a liberal. But if it gets serious, then race matters. Education, class, these things allow overlooking, accepting, or even using race for its mutual exoticism. In the beginning. But when they have to go home to visit the parents, have a baby, then it matters. Right now, no consequences, all titillation.

Jack: So bullshit reigns? They both just want to get laid. The dog's thrown in as a bonus. And whatever turn-on the race issue adds, more power to them.

Scarlett: You think sex answers everything.

Jack: It's driving the engine 9 times out of 10.

Scarlett: It's given way too much attention in this culture. Especially now the Boomers are aging, - Jesus, if I have to see another advertisement about penile enhancement, sexual prolongation or Viagra, I'm going to scream. Why is it so goddamn important, Jack?

Jack: So you don't like fucking?

Scarlett: Please, do you have to be crass? I do like sex but it's not that important. Maybe when you're 16 but when you're 30? 40? Some of my women friends... It's like they have the complete box sets of Sex in the City and they're patterning their lives after the characters. There are more important considerations.

Jack: Like what?

Scarlett: Can you sit down with your partner, not talk about anything and be fulfilled? And when you do talk with your partner do you *really* listen to what she is saying?

Jack: Sex is very important, Scarlett. It was important when I was sixteen, it's important to me now.

Scarlett: You're 70 Jack --

Jack: Who the hell cares how old I am, I like to fuck, I should be entitled to fuck, it's my right as an American to fuck. I resent you insinuating I use Viagra.

Scarlett: I didn't insinuate --

Jack: It's about the only way adult human beings have to be intimate these days --

Scarlett: Jack can't be intimate with another man then?

Jack: Why do you think men have to sit around in a circle pounding drums. Watch football games together? When you have sex you cut away all the bullshit and it's just you – raw, unadulterated you, all laid out there --

Scarlett: That's being an animal --

Jack: That's what we are Scarlett - You work out there in the real world, little fish get eaten by bigger fish and the biggest, loudest cock rules the hen house, it's pretty goddamn basic.

Scarlett: I refuse to believe we're just animals.

Jack: When someone's inside of you, when you're having sex, doesn't it mean something to you?

Scarlett: It does, of course it does. But it's so much more than just having something inserted into your body. It's all so focused on the act, on the position, on the body parts. We have the capacity to elevate ourselves above the pig and the horse, to make love-making into a formidable action of psychic, physical, intellectual – yes, intellectual – congress...

Silence.

Jack: You think about this a lot, do you?

Scarlett: I read it --

Jack: Vogue --

Scarlett: In a book. About *ideas*, Jack. Not everything is, '*gut instinct*'.

Jack looks at the couple they've been watching.

Jack: You say it's the first date. I say it's not. Wanna bet? Three hundred K or I get my question.

Downs his drink, gets up and runs off before she can say anything.

Scarlett sips her drink. She looks at the palm of her hand where the flame had touched. Rubs it.

Jack returns --

Scarlett: Well?

Jack sits and sips --

Scarlett: What did they say?

Jack: 'You're drunk, get away from us.'

Scarlett: Come on. What'd they say?

Jack: 'You're Jack Heller, you're drunk get away from us.'

Scarlett: Jack.

Jack: How did you know?

Scarlett: I'm good Jack. I'm very good.

Pours herself some Bidwell --

Scarlett: And you're out three hundred *and fifty thousand*.

Scarlett holds out her palm --

Scarlett: For the band aids.

Jack looks at Scarlett's palm.

Jack gets up and invites Scarlett to stand. She's unsure what he's doing --

Scarlett: (standing) Are we going to dance? Tai-chi? Zumba?

Jack: (inviting) Ms. Mori-Yang, walk please.

Scarlett: This a Miss America fetish, isn't it?

Unsure whether she's disgusted or amused. Beat. She walks.

Jack: Five feet, five and...three quarters of an inch without heels.

Jack considering --

Jack: One hundred... one hundred and seventeen... eighteen...
You are one hundred and nineteen pounds.

Scarlett: One hundred and eighteen pounds --

Jack: After this meal one hundred and nineteen pounds. Would you
—

Jack motions for her to move again. Scarlett assessing
whether to --

Scarlett: (walking) Because you like stinky food.

Jack watches her gait intently --

Jack: I did see it. Left leg... Your left leg is an eighth of an inch
shorter than your right leg. You cover it well. There is no
appearance of flaw. You don't use an insert, you're too proud.

Pause.

Scarlett: You have access to my medical records.

Jack: No.

Scarlett: Mrs. Green told you.

Jack: No.

Scarlett studies Jack who smugly sips his drink.

Jack: I'm good Scarlett, I'm very good.

Scarlett: Okay Jack. Okay. Go ahead. Ask me the question.

Jack: I'm feeling magnanimous. You first. Anything and we have
to answer. Honor system.

Scarlett considers.

Scarlett: Have you ever killed someone?

Pause.

Jack: Yes.

Scarlett: Like in War?

Jack: One question, remember? Okay my turn. You ever had sex with another woman?

Scarlett: Come on, Jack, please. Remember who you are? Act your station and age.

Jack: Hey, you have to answer, Scarlett. Maybe in college, to experiment --

Scarlett: No. It's prurient and beneath you. You killed someone?

Jack doesn't respond. Looks at some people walking by.

Jack: These guys?

Scarlett: What?

Jack: Suits and ties, the skin of civility - I bet one of them has.

Scarlett: Literally, not figuratively?

Jack: Walking down the street you pass people who've killed another human being all the time. Survival of the fittest. Animals.

Scarlett is silent.

Scarlett: Yes, I have.

Beat.

Jack: What?

Scarlett: What you asked me.

Beat.

Jack: Really?

Scarlett: Yes, Jack.

Jack? Really? Goddamn, goddamn.

They drink --

Scarlett: What do you want from me?

Pause. Jack watches her --

Jack: (considering) Your company. (beat) What do you want from me?

Scarlett: Your professional respect.

Jack: Your freshness.

Scarlett: Your definitive confidence.

Jack: Really? Your vitality.

Scarlett: Your arrogance.

Jack: Your beauty. And your beauty.

Scarlett: No high heels? Your market acumen. Your strategic corporate ruthlessness.

Jack: Really?

Scarlett: That is what they say.

Jack: Your legs. And the high heels that hold them up.

Scarlett: Really?

Jack: I'm an old dog, new tricks? Fuck 'em.

Scarlett: The eighth of an inch?

Jack: What eight of an inch?

Beat.

Scarlett: Your ability to engender a mixture of respect and fear in your competitors. And win.

Jack: Your masterfully couched indefatigable, relentless ambition. To try to win.

Scarlett studies him --

Scarlett: Some of Scarlett's rules.

Jack: Okay, shoot.

Scarlett: I don't sleep with anyone so don't take it personal. And I won't accept gifts from anyone, either. Until I am married. That is if this thing continues.

Jack: Does that include blow jobs?

Scarlett: That is not a joke is it?

Jack: Not after three of these Bidwells. I like blow jobs. Doesn't every man?

Scarlett: This is like your high heels observation. Yes, Jack, that includes oral sex. I can't believe I'm talking to you like this. I'm in high school again and Tommy Combs is trying to get into my pants.

Jack: Did he?

Scarlett: You see a ring?

Jack watches her, sips --

Jack: -- At one of our recent board meetings, a group of west coast hotshots were giving me a hard time. A regional power play. Quite serious, actually. They did their homework, had their ducks lined up, may have had the votes. I got fed up with their insinuations I was out of step with the times, too old. Told the leader if he thought I was old, let's find out the old way: Put up or shut up. Son-of-a-gun young turk took me up on it. We moved the board table aside, pushed all the chairs against the wall. Took off our coats and ties, rolled up our sleeves and squared off. He must have been 25, 30 years my junior and in good shape. (takes a long sip) I whooped his ass. Not only did I whoop his ass, I put my foot on his head and made him listen to a tongue lashing likes of which he never heard in all his Harvard preppy days. Humiliated him. Had to, he openly challenged me in front of everyone. He resigned, the others got into line.

Scarlett: Why are you telling me this Jack?

Jack: That the world hasn't changed much in a thousand years – the fruits belong to the strong. You're 33, I'm 70. When you're 43 I'll be 80. When you're 53, I'll be 90. I can still hold my own. But at the top of my game? 5 to 10 years, beyond that I don't know. That gonna be enough for someone 33 years old?

Scarlett: I told Mrs. Green that older gentlemen were acceptable.

Jack: Jack was thirty seven years old when Scarlett was born. Did Scarlett mean that old?

Scarlett: -- I was a young girl. My father took my baby brother out on a boat with no life jackets. It tipped over and my baby brother drowned. My father was a young man and stupid the way young men can be. And then he had the unmitigated gall to kill himself because it hurt *him* too much. Leaving my mother and me to fend for ourselves. Young men don't know themselves yet. They think they

already are what they hope to be. That gap makes them do stupid things. I have no room in life for stupid, young men, Jack.

Jack: The football player? Was he stupid?

Scarlett: No. But I had to do his portfolio and then he fucked the cheerleader. It's all a crapshoot. All we can do is be brutally honest about what we want and can we make it work. And if we can. "Do we want to?"

Jack: Do I want to?

Scarlett studies Jack --

Scarlett: Your suit is cut wrong for your body. It makes your shoulders look weak and your legs short. I noticed that right off when you approached me. Your color palette doesn't work for your skin tone, you look ruddy and you need a facial. And the haircut. Well, it's just cheap looking.

Jack: My soon to be ex-wife was in charge of how I looked.

Scarlett: Seeing as how you two have been living separate lives for 15 years, the suit is holding up pretty well. When you walk into a room, everything should rightfully stop. You are Jackson B. Heller. All eyes should turn to you and stay on you for a good five count. You should carry that kind of visual impact. My eye for presentation is impeccable.

Scarlett extends her glass out and Jack pours her another shot

--

Scarlett: And if you walk into any room with *me* on your arm, trust me, everyone will turn to look. All the men will want to be you, Jack. All the women will wonder what he has that keeps her satisfied.

Jack studies her --

Jack: What if I fuck the cheerleader?

Scarlett: I *am* the cheerleader, Jack.

Silence.

They study each other.

-- A commotion. A MAN approaches Jack and Scarlett's table. A WOMAN trails him. Igor immediately steps in. The man stares at Jack. The woman is nervous --

Man: You're Jack Heller.

Jack waves Igor back.

Jack: That would be me.

Man: I'm the person who complained about you smelling up the place.

Woman: Paul, let's go --

Man: I only addressed what everyone in here is thinking. This is a man who thinks he can buy off the world.

Jack: You are aware I'm covering everyone's tab. Yours too, I assume.

Man: I pay my own way.

Woman: Paul, come on, let's not disturb them -- my husband's been drinking a little too much --

Man: You think because you have billions you can do anything. Make everyone like you. You throw a few crumbs our way we'll kiss your feet.

Scarlett: Perhaps we should call someone --

Woman: Paul, please --

Man: Yeah, Jack, hide behind the girl's skirts. What? You date your friends' daughters now?

Igor: Sir, would you like me to handle this?

Jack: Something else is going on here. You're well-dressed, your shoes aren't scuffed, you have a smart wife, so I'm assuming it's more than distaste for the haves.

Man: Elliot Stein. He was my father.

Jack thinks.

Jack: Don't know him.

Man: See, you don't even remember when you steal someone's livelihood, ruin his life. The least you can do is remember a man's name when you destroy him.

Jack: I'm a businessman and I bottom line. I can be ruthless, I admit that. But you're looking for evil and I'm not it. Your father and 500 others lose their jobs – odds are the business was dying if not already dead. I retool the factory, restructure the business plan and give 2000 people new jobs. Some don't make the cut, that's business --

Man: -- (overlapping) How dare you --

Jack: -- If you're looking for evil go find the rest of Bin Laden's buddies. If you're looking for someone to blame, look at your own father for lacking the skills --

-- Man spits in Jack's face. Igor steps in but Jack motions for him to stay back --

Woman: Paul --

Scarlett: (to Igor) Do something! Call --

Igor: Sir --

Scarlett: -- the police --

Paul: He killed himself.

Silence.

Jack: Is that it? 'Cause if it is, you've done what you came to do now get the hell out of here so we can eat in peace.

Woman: Paul please, please let's go home.

Paul doesn't move. Jack and the man watch each other.

Jack: Okay. Now you're on my time. You ever fought a duel? All you had to do was slap someone or defame someone's character in public. You've done worse. Well, duels are for equals. I think you're a coward so it'll be one-sided. But I'm offering you a free chance to bottom line this. Igor!

Igor comes over --

Jack: Give me your gun.

Igor pulls *it* out from a shoulder holster and hands it to Jack.

Jack: (to the man) Pull up a chair.

The Man doesn't move.

Jack: (with a dark edge) Pull up a chair and have a seat.

Wife starts to intercede --

Woman: Paul, Paul --

Jack: (to wife) No. Too late. (to man) Unless you're chicken.

Man sits down.

Jack: I want this over and done with right here, right now. I don't want to have you turning up and ruining another dinner of ours --

-- Takes all the bullets out of the chamber --

Jack: 'I do not hold you legally or civilly responsible in any shape or form for what happens or doesn't happen in the next few minutes.' Everyone's heard that, I said it out loud --

-- Puts one bullet in the chamber and spins it --

Jack: And now since it's a game of chance, it's not a crime either. Here. Take it. Take it!

The Man takes the gun --

Jack: In a duel, the one who shoots first usually has the advantage. Advantage to Elliot Stein's son --

Jack directs the barrel to his own forehead --

Scarlett: Jack...

Man does not do anything. Finally Jack takes the gun from him. Puts the barrel to his own head and pulls the trigger --

Gun: Click!

-- Jack puts in another bullet and spins the chamber. Gives it back to the man and directs the barrel at his own forehead again --

Scarlett: Igor?

Igor shakes his head, indicating this is Jack's show --

Jack: Anyone destroyed my father, I would cut off his balls and hand it to him on a silver platter. If you really believe that. Pull the trigger.

--

Silence. The man stands and looks at Jack. Then at Scarlett and everybody else --

Man: What kind of game are you playing?

Jack: This is not a game, boy. This is the way you do business.

-- Man looks at Jack and the others. Puts the gun down and he and his wife exit. Igor comes over and Jack hands him the gun and remaining bullets.

Jack is in physical discomfort. Igor attends to him.

Scarlett watches Jack being helped by Igor.

Dim to darkness.

Step Three: Wanna Come Up And See My...

Later. A spacious room off the main floor of Jack's Office Building. Empty but for a lone chair that faces an upstage area covered by a drawn curtain. Next to the chair a small table. A single *bottle of Bidwell* and a lone *tulip glass*.

Jack and Scarlett. Jack pours himself a shot. He looks visibly strained. Scarlett looks around the room --

Scarlett: Why'd you bring me here?

No response.

Scarlett: What if he'd pulled the trigger?

Beat.

Jack: The bottom line. Nobody, I mean nobody, takes me down publicly. One person or a thousand – I'll crush you.

Scarlett: You're not a nice person

Jack: Why not-for-profit, it's for pussies.

Scarlett: For-profit is for dicks?

Beat.

Jack: It's not for nice people.

Pause.

Jack: I built my coffin. With my own hands. Do you believe in God?

Scarlett: I pray so I must.

Jack: Wanting to have faith is not having faith.

Scarlett: If he's there he's there, if he isn't he isn't, he seems to do what he pleases. My mother is quite the Christian. You can take a Korean out of Korea but God comes with them.

Jack shows Scarlett his hands.

Jack: Touch them. Like a baby's ass. What I do, how I live is so detached from my body. This one thing I wanted to do with my *own* hands. I made it, no disconnect between the thing and me. You

smell the wood, you pound the nails, you bleed if you miss. You think about death? Wait till you're 70.

Scarlett: Do you believe in God?

Jack watches Scarlett for a beat, takes her hand and puts something in it.

Scarlett: What are these?

Jack: The two shells everyone thought I loaded the gun with.

Scarlett looks at the *bullets*.

Jack: I'm in pain. All the time. Seen every specialist in the world - acupuncture, nerve desensitizer implants, ice baths - morphine up to a point. Feels like my skin being pulled away from my body with pliers. Tiny, tiny razor blades slicing the insides of my nerve sheaths. What do I do? I focus my attention. All of my attention. On right here, right now. Moment to moment, that's how I live or the pain will take from me whatever I left of my life and I refuse to let it do that. Refuse. Here. Now.

Jack studies her.

Goes to the back curtain --

Jack: I've never shown it to anyone. Not my wife. Not my children. I don't even let Igor in here.

Jack pulls back the curtain. The *coffin*. Set of small stairs in front of it.

Jack: When I can't take the pain I get in. Close the lid and scream till my eyeballs bleed. Then I ask myself, 'Is dead better than this?'

Scarlett studies the situation.

Scarlett: You get in. You close the lid. You lie in it.

Jack is silent. Scarlett considering.

Scarlett: I want to lie in it.

Jack studies Scarlett.

Scarlett moves to the front of the coffin. Jack follows her and lifts the lid. Scarlett climbs the small stairs, steps into the coffin and seats herself.

Jack and Scarlett watch each other. Scarlett lowers herself, disappearing from sight. Jack leans over and looks down at Scarlett. Begins to close the top --

Scarlett's hand shoots up to stop it. Jack looks at her. Scarlett's hand releases. Jack slowly closes the lid and closes the latch.

Silence.

Jack rolls himself a cigarette. Lights it, takes a deep draw. Pours himself another drink. Sips. Smokes.

On a *video screen*, we observe Scarlett's Face. She is enclosed in the coffin. Close up on her Face.

We watch Jack. We watch Scarlett's Face.

Silence.

Jack gets up, the video screen of Scarlett's Face fades --

Jack puts out his cigarette, finishes his drink. Goes to the coffin, unlatches it and lifts the lid.

Scarlett rises and steps down from the coffin. Jack assists her, then closes the lid.

Scarlett studies Jack.

Scarlett: This some kind of sick Jackson B. Heller game?

Jack: Do you want it to be a game?

Scarlett: Only if it is an even playing field.

Jack: No such thing.

Scarlett: Then why should I play?

Jack: Why did you get in?

Beat.

Scarlett grabs her things, moving to the door --

Scarlett: I ask a direct question I expect a direct answer Mr. Heller – I believe we have been over this - not another question --

Jack: What if the door is locked Ms. Scarlett Mori-Chang? What if your cell phone doesn't work in here? What if your assistant's not waiting for you as you planned?

Scarlett turns and studies Jack.

She sets her things down and walks back to him.

Scarlett: I would like that smoke now.

Jack watches her for a beat. Takes out the tobacco and paper and begins to roll a cigarette.

Scarlett picks up the bottle of Bidwell, pours a healthy dose into Jack's glass and takes a full drink, savoring the flavors.

Scarlett watches Jack finishing the rolling. He licks the edges and seals the cigarette.

Jack offers the cigarette to Scarlett who takes it and waits.
Jack realizes she expects him to light it. He lights it. Scarlett
takes an experienced draw and watches him.

Scarlett: My baby brother drowned. My father killed himself. Just my
mother and me to run the cleaners, she couldn't speak English. I
was 12. I was a girl. No one would pay attention to me. I made
them pay attention. You said my entrance was perfect? It started
then and I have been working on it ever since.

Scarlett drops the cigarette on the floor and crushes it with her
foot.

Scarlett takes off her *high heels*.

Approaches Jack.

Scarlett: (close to Jack's face) I took care of myself then –

-- Slams the shoe's heel into the wall next to Jack's face.
Sticks.

Scarlett: – I can take care of myself now --

Taps the other shoe's heel against the center of Jack's
forehead --

Then slams the high heel into the wall on the other side of his
face.

Scarlett: I feel better now, do you? Where were we ? Oh - 'Why? '

So the world does not wither. Old men do not have to wander
streets begging for faith. For the children, Jack.

I have a fear of being in confined spaces. An extreme fear.

Who did you kill?

Jack: I changed my mind. I don't want to marry you.

Scarlett: That is what is wrong with young people today. They give up on marriage too easily. They want to have sex like gerbils and take none of the responsibility that comes with it.

Jack: If I married you you'd kill me.

Scarlett: Is that a proposal?

Jack: Would you?

Scarlett is silent.

Jack: The second guy I killed? We were two hotshots at an up and coming company. Young, hungry. The boss wanted to see who was the better so he sent us both to one of our North Africa territories to see if we could straighten out some trouble with mining interests there. The locals were beginning to make demands and were holding up production. We were flying over the coast in one of those small helicopters, open sides. I had set up a meeting with the village heads, offer them a decent program of incentives. Jared had gotten there before me and hired local thugs to take care of things. I could see the village burning. He was bragging how he had saved the company a ton of money in local bribes, negotiation fees, government pay offs. How I might as well pack my bags and start looking for a new job. I told the pilot to turn the chopper around and head back to base camp. Jared had unbuckled his safety belt to take some maps out of his briefcase. We were starting to bank. I pushed him out. Jack Heller, the new vice president, his career on its way.

Scarlett: The for-profit sector? It would take way too long – a young woman with no pedigree. But. A high profile, well-positioned not-for-profit? With my skill set I step in and right off I am the big fish in – albeit - a small pond. Yet. Who immediately gets to swim with marlin in their ocean doing business on an oddly equal playing field. I, without experience even answering phones at a Fortune 500, am running with, getting to know, mixing it up with, the bull elephants of

free enterprise. No indignities of having to serve coffee, spending years clawing my way to the top only to be passed over by the CEO's spoiled, ineffectual scion, and no having to get on my knees and suck the CEO's cock, I use not-for-profit as my platform for a lateral move into the for-profit sector –

Jack: Where sharks eat other sharks.

Beat.

Scarlett: Yes.

Jack: Suits and ties, the skin of civility.

Scarlett: Yes.

Jack: Scarlett is not a nice person.

Scarlett: Perhaps she is not so different than Jack is.

Jack: Who did you kill?

Scarlett looks at Jack.

Scarlett: He wouldn't move, he wouldn't talk, he wouldn't eat. He was sitting in his own filth. He just sat there. I went up to him. 'You still have me, Daddy.' He hit me so hard I flew across the room. That night I went to check on him. I found him in the bathroom leaning against the toilet. He was in a pool of blood, he had cut his wrists. He looked up at me, he was begging for help. (beat) I turned out the lights and I went to bed.

Silence. Jack is having another attack. The pain is excruciating. Scarlett begins to notice.

Scarlett: Jack? Jack? Are you all right?

Jack: (through the pain) She wanted to pray, my father said, 'No, no'. He had no faith so she couldn't have any either. Mama begged

and begged him... That's why she killed herself. Missy-Anne Bidwell. She was just hanging there next to the sides of curing meat. 'Cut her down', he said, 'We don't want to spoil the venison'. (beat) Is dead better, Scarlett?

Jack takes a *small case* out of his inside coat pocket and fumbles to hold it --

Jack: (hurried whisper) Open it. Open it. Take out the needle – Take it out. Hurry up. Do it.

Scarlett: What do I do? Jack, what do I --

Jack: Hurry up, hurry up Scarlett –

Fumbling, Scarlett takes the needle and jabs it into Jack's arm. Jack folds inwards.

Scarlett watches Jack mumbling to himself.

Jack: -- what time is it now where am I here what time is it now where am I here what time is it now where am I? Here. What time is it? Now. Where am I? Here. What time is it? Now. Where am I? Here. What time is it? Now. Here. Now. Here. Now...

Jack begins to enunciate the words as he gains more control --

Scarlett: Shall I get Igor?

Jack shakes his head.

Jack gestures for Scarlett to help him. Scarlett assists him to the chair.

Jack collects himself.

Jack: Transformative. I believe that's what you called my kind of wealth. I have a proposition.

Scarlett: I take it this is not about marriage.

Jack: You said, 'Some of my friends would kill for a sip'.

Scarlett: I would not.

Jack: I'm asking you to help me die. Not kill me.

Scarlett: Why me, Jack? Why not one of your family?

Jack: Why spend my last night on earth with those ass-holes –

Scarlett: One of the bimbos you get to warm your cockles --

Jack: They'd fuck me, they'd marry me –

Scarlett: Your lawyers --

Jack: They'd fuck me, they'd marry me --

Scarlett: Well then, Igor --

Jack: The first one? We were going hunting. I forgot the antlers – you rattle them together, the sound attracts the male elk. I got them and was coming back. He was a good two hundred yards away, leaning against the blind. He was sipping his wild turkey, staring into space. I started rattling the antlers and the son of a bitch looked up. I sighted him. Not sure why, just to do it. I pulled the trigger. It marks you. A festering. A kind of human perfume.

Jack takes Scarlett's hand and examines her palm.

Jack: Your skin is blistering. You got in. There are no tricks to your tricks. You have the scent, I can smell it all over you.

Long silence.

Scarlett: Do you like me?

Long pause.

Jack: No. (beat) Do you like me?

Long pause.

Scarlett: No.

The mood changes. Business.

Scarlett: Mr. Heller? What kind of transformational wealth are we talking about?

Jack: Thirty-five million is a good figure to start transforming.

Scarlett: Seventy million is a good place to start.

Jack: Fifty million. It presents difficulties in transferring --

Scarlett: One hundred million.

Jack: Eighty Million --

Scarlett: One hundred fifty million.

Jack watches Scarlett.

Jack: One hundred fifty million. I'd say that is a very good figure with which to start transforming.

Scarlett: We are in agreement.

Jack nods.

Scarlett: Good, good.

Scarlett looks around --

Scarlett: How do we go about doing this business transaction Mr. Heller?

Jack opens the hypodermic kit and takes out a small *vial* with a blue liquid in it.

Jack: A special cocktail. I had it brewed up by my lab. 'Is dead better?' With eyes open. No wings. Over the lips, though the gums, I hurl my faithless, used up body out over the abyss.

Scarlett: What do I do? I just watch?

Jack: I don't want to do this alone. My mother died alone. I will not.

Scarlett: Girls drink potions, take pills. They run a warm bath, they light candles. It's pretty. A pretty little death. You built your own coffin with your bare hands. You didn't build a hot tub. You have to bleed.

Jack: So what do you have in mind?

Scarlett: Let's keep with the theme of the night. A game of russian roulette. We've already been through a dress rehearsal. Let's make it the real thing. No palming, no sleight of hand, no more lies. Opening and closing night in one fell swoop. And not some off-off-off storefront but a space located in the city's highest rent district. A Russian author no less, given an American interpretation. A one man show starring Jackson Bidwell Heller.

Jack: What do you do?

Scarlett: I will take the bullet. I will put it in. I will spin the chamber. And I will hand you the loaded weapon with as much presence as I am capable. You will not be alone.

Jack watches Scarlett.

Jack: Maybe you should do a bit more than offer your presence. Maybe you need to do something in consideration for the one hundred fifty million you will receive to make this a bona fide contract. Just handing me the gun will not pass the legal threshold to constitute a consideration. It has to be a reasonably equitable exchange for what I'm doing or it's not a binding legal contract. What might be of equal cost to you? If I'm shooting myself perhaps you should be shooting something, too?

Scarlett: You're committing suicide, Jack, how can I do something comparable --

Jack: Your foot.

Pause.

Jack: Yes. Let's do a foot. With the Loubatians on. After all, it's opening and closing night.

Silence.

Jack: You have to be willing to pay the price. It has to mark us both. Bleed, didn't you say?

Pause.

Jack: One hundred fifty million... Transformative.

Jack watches her. He takes the gun out and lays out the bullets on the table.

Jack: But which foot, which foot... That one --

Scarlett: -- No. This one.

Jack defers.

Jack: At that figure questions will be asked. There is a limit we can publicly do given the circumstances of my death. We'll have to

siphon from several off-shore accounts, use tertiary businesses to deliver the outstanding amount in a series of smaller donations. Igor? One hundred fifty million. Break it up. As we discussed earlier. If you hit the jackpot first, you will leave and I continue. Igor will make sure you receive immediate medical attention, I have a team of doctors on call. The A-Team, Igor, even if you have to get Patel out of bed, I goddamn pay him enough. And my wife's plastic surgeon, that guy in LA, have him do the follow up work. After all, it is a beautiful foot.

Igor: (over speakers) You can have her use the second gun.

Jack: Thanks Calvin. It's been a good ride. Shut off the sound for now.

Jack walks to the coffin, opens it and reaches in to a side compartment. Jack takes out a *gun* wrapped in cloth. Then takes out a small *bottle*.

Jack: (handing Scarlett the gun) There will be no trace of you being here. We met for a nice dinner –

Scarlett: -- You were impressed with me and the work of my foundation and gifted a very large sum to us and that was that.

Scarlett unwraps the gun from the cloth.

Jack: Yes. That was that.

Jack: (referring to the bottle) The very first batch. It is not the most refined. But it has the deepest flavors.

Pours and they toast --

Jack: To how you do good business, Scarlett Mori-Yang.

Scarlett: To how you do very good business, Jackson Bidwell Heller.

They down their glasses.

They both take their guns and bullets and prep --

Each puts one *bullet* in. Jack makes a point of showing that he is not palming anything.

They are ready.

Jack spins the cylinder. Puts the gun to his head –

Jack: Where am I? Here. What time is it?

Pulls the trigger -- Click!

Attention now is on Scarlett.

Scarlett spins the cylinder, points the barrel at her foot.

Jack reaches in and stops her.

Jack: A foot Scarlett? A foot, really? What did you say? 'Little girls drink potions, take pills'? A foot?

They watch each other. Scarlett moves the gun to her head.

Scarlett: Fuck you Jack. I'm stronger than you could ever imagine.

Scarlett pulls the trigger - Bang!

Scarlett is thrown back by the force of the bullet and falls to the floor.

Jack stares at Scarlett's body. Long silence.

Takes the white cloth used to wrap the gun and drapes it over her face.

Positions himself.

Jack: Is dead better than this? I believe I'm about to find out.

He spins the chamber and puts the gun barrel to his head.

Jack: Where am I? Here. What time is it? Now. Where am I? --

Black out.

Jack's Voice: (OS) -- Here. What time is it? --

A gun shot – Bang!

Light gradually come up. Jack's body lays on the ground next to Scarlett's body.

Silence. Two bodies sprawled out side by side.

Scarlett moves. She struggles to get up. Scarlett holds the bloodied towel to her face. She looks down at Jack's body.

Dim to darkness.

Super Titles -

One year later.

We begin to hear the tinny strains of 'Mack the Knife' coming through head phones.

Lights gradually come up.

The Nun is standing up stage facing down. She holds a *baby* and has on headphones listening to the song.

Scarlett enters slowly and moves upstage to the Nun. There is a pronounced limp. She is partially paralyzed.

We only see the back of Scarlett. Scarlett wears expensive red high heel shoes.

Scarlett moves to the Nun and hands her an envelope. The Nun hands Scarlett the baby and leaves.

Scarlett holds the baby. We begin to hear the *sounds* of young children playing. Scarlett slowly brings her head up and looks out --

Fade to black.

End of Play.

Additional Players:

Calvin Worth (Igor)

Pink Lady-Assistant

Mac, the Cheese Master

Paul Stein

Wife of Paul Stein

Man in the board room.

Desiree, the Sommelier

Nun.

Singer.

Actors can double and triple-up with these characters.

* An earlier version of this work was produced at San Jose Repertory directed by Rick Lombardo under the title of Love In American Times. It has been reconceived, rewritten, and renamed, Skin of Civility.
PKG.

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